

Exodus

By Tan C

Chapter 1: The Last of Their Kind

EXODUS: THE LAST OF THEIR KIND

Explosions often occur in space. Suns burn out, planets break apart, things die, it is just the way of the universe. Most often go unnoticed by the life forms that inhabit them, but to a race of beings on one, its fate was inevitable. Its people, unable to prevent its coming destruction, only had one option left for them. Flee; find somewhere else to carry on their ancient lineage. So great ships were quickly built, a huge fleet of colony vessels which would enable them to continue to search for a new home.

But to leave their world was still a heart wrenching experience. Thundera was a place of great beauty, from the domed city of the Kings, the glass crystalline maze city of tigers, the sleek and long stretched halls of the cheetahs' domains, to the miles and miles of grassy plains, jungles and mountains that filled entire continents. But their home was not as what it once was.

The grasses were burnt, the forests destroyed; cities were in ruins and now only molten rock and burning smoke occupied the dying planet. Everything needed to seed a new home was taken with the fleet, but as the ancient noble, known only as Jaga, rushed through the main airlock door, he could not look away from the erupting lands around him. The lord's city was breaking down; explosions of volcanic magma spewed down the mountains and gushed into the deserted streets. Nothing would survive here. This was the end.

Jaga was a tall, but very elderly man. Descended from an ancient lion clan, his long mane was now grey and brittle, his beard just as white as the snow that had once covered the mountains. He was the leader on the flag ship and he had to get the rest of the nobles off the dying planet. He walked with long quick strides through the corridors, briefly acknowledging the many families and council members with a courteous nod.

"We must leave now, Jaga." said Charcheen, a tall elderly but sleek woman and the leader of the Cheetah clan. "All the other ships of the fleet are now in orbit."

"It is being done as I speak." replied the elderly lion man. He continued on towards the bridge, with Charcheen and a number of her own council following closely behind. Jaga paused for a moment, seeing a lone lion family, the mother and father comforting their two twin children. The small brother and sister looked scared, tears streaming from their wide eyes. Jaga rested a hand on the young girl's shoulder and gave her and her sibling a reassuring smile. They needed that comfort and coming from one so well known as him, it was a lot more.

A few minutes later, he and the others reached the bridge. This was the enormous and gleaming command post, crowded with many stations and allowing all the different sects of Thundera's people a position of importance. It also showed the devastating view of their boiling world.

The leaders circled around him as the ship took off and broke through the dense smog and burning ozone. Then the flag ship joined the rest of the fleet, positioned itself ahead of the group and at a safe distance held still so they could all witness the last moments of Thundera.

There was an awful silence as they watched their home. Jaga could feel the sadness and strife from the others and he felt it all himself. The loss was unbearable, so many years of history was ending and it all felt so empty.

"Bring Lion-o to the bridge." demanded Jaga once the silence became no longer bearable.

"He is sleeping." said Targren, a tall Tiger noble. "And he is but a boy. Must he see the destruction of his home?"

"He will be the lord of the Thunder Cats." replied Jaga, matter of factly. "He must see this. He must learn to take the bad with the good. Quickly now!"

"I will go." Jaga heard a soft female voice behind him and he saw a young cheetah woman rushing off the bridge. If there was need of haste, only one of her clan could get the young lord to the bridge quickly.

The others, a combination of over twenty different clan leaders now stood with Jaga. Targren approached the old man. He was middle aged, but his orange red hair was smattered with white of old age.

"But what of his father?" came the Tiger's deep gruff voice. "Has he made it off home, safely?"

"He waited behind." said Jaga. "He will make it out if he can. Though I don't hold much hope for his escape. It was his decision. That is why his son must come here."

The door opened and a long crack of light spilled into the darkness. The woman's shadow cast across the walls and immediately the creature beside the bed recoiled at this disturbance. It was a small beast, with a bush of fur edging its scrunchy face; long furry ears rose above its head and a long fat stumpy tail whipped around erratically. It moved towards the woman and began to make little sniffing snarling sounds. This was the young lord's protector, a Snarf. Cat like beings that had also inhabited Thundera but they had been domesticated by the higher human-noid feline forms. They were fiercely loyal and more intelligent than most cared to admit. This one was appointed the young boy's guardian, but its bravery and courage had not yet been put to the test.

The cheetah smiled as the Snarf continued to make disliking hissing sounds. The woman, her body covered in soft sleek yellow fur with black spots, ignored the creature and walked to the bed where the boy slept.

“Lord. You must wake.” Her claw hand gently shook the shoulder of the boy, who eventually stirred from his sleep. Snarf jumped onto the bed, moving between her and his protectee and he began to make even more displeasing noises. “Lion-o. Jaga wants you to come to the bridge.”

The boy was only twelve years old, tall for his age, but there was no mistaking the son of the Kings. His long fiery mane spilled around his shoulders, his teeth were sharpened and long and his eyes were red and golden, just like his father’s. He had been brought aboard the ship long ago and he had fallen into a deep sleep, with his loyal Snarf watching over him.

“Who? What? What’s going on?” he groaned in a drowsy tone.

“Come with me now.” said the woman. The Snarf made even more loud sounds and if understanding its hisses and snivelling noises, the woman waved a dismissive hand. “He can sleep later, Snarf. Right now...he needs to be on the bridge. Jaga wants him to be there.”

Lion-o climbed out of his bed, playfully rubbed his hand through the Snarf’s thick bushy mass of hair and dutifully followed the Cheetah woman from his room. He walked behind her attentively and his eyes just couldn’t help but connect with the others who had joined on the ship. As he passed them, they had all stopped, bowing their heads. So many families were here, soft purrs of sadness wafted from their quivering lips and only as he carried on following the woman, did he hear their murmurs and low drones, whispers and words of their feline tongue. He felt a horrid emptiness and a feeling of uselessness. It drained him even more, when he and the woman emerged on the bridge. All the noble leaders were looking at him, but only Jaga held a smile for the young lord.

“Come here, Lion-o.” said the old man, holding out a frail and withered claw. “See the end of Thundera. See the beginning of your destiny.”

Lion-o moved next to his father’s old friend, his tearful eyes fixed on the view screen, on the burning and flaming ball of rock that had once been his home. He couldn’t look away and he couldn’t stop the tears from flowing down his cheeks.

“I don’t understand, Jaga.” said the young boy. “Why are you letting me see this?”

“To learn.” replied Jaga, as his hand wrapped around Lion-o’s. “For our people to start anew, we must remember this moment. You, as the heir to the throne of Thundera, even more so. For the future will depend on you and how you will rule our people. Watch, Lion-o. Watch the death of Thundera and the birth of a new life.”

He couldn’t breathe. A horrible pain was tearing at his insides as Lion-o watched the planet be consumed in fire and flame, before exploding into molten rocks and meteors. All around him, he heard the cries of the nobles; he felt the anguish and pain from all who were on the ship and Lion-o felt his strength drain from him. He staggered, wanting to drop to the floor, but Jaga’s hands held him on his feet. He howled, the others keened and wailed, and Lion-o felt the stinging tears burning down his cheeks.

“Why?” he suddenly cried, his hands instinctly grabbing onto Jaga’s body. “Why?! WHY?”

“Lion-o! Control yourself!” Jaga’s voice was harsh and loud, a tone that he had rarely heard from this frail Thunder cat. “You are now the lord of the Thundercats! You must be strong! Mourn for our old home, but you will be the leader of the new colonies!”

“You expect ME to do this?” Lion-o shook his head, his mass of red mane flayed around his saddened face. “I cannot! My father may still be alive, he still...!”

“Listen to me, young Cub!” shouted Jaga. His deep booming voice swept a silence across the bridge. Everyone was stopped in the midst of their mourning, torn by this commanding man’s voice and his power. “Your father entrusted me with your life! I will not fail him! I will guide you; teach you all you need to know! But my dear cub...” His voice softened, full of woe. “The king of the jungles of Thundera may not have escaped as he planned. We must assume this and I must teach you further. You are now the owner and wielder of the Sword of Omens. The power of the Thundercats!”

“The sword of Omens is my father’s!” cried Lion-o. “It is his to wield!”

“It is on this ship, Lion-o.” Jaga said plainly. Lion-o thought he saw the old man’s shoulders hunch in sadness. “It is here for you to hold. Do you remember the old stories?”

“Of the Eye of Thundera.”

“It was forged with great power, millennia ago. It is fused with the basis of our code. Justice, truth and loyalty! Come!”

Lion-o turned and followed Jaga to the far end of the bridge. A long downward winding corridor lead away from the huge domed room and at the end of this was a large door. It was circular, pulsing red and bearing the black feline head of Thundera. Jaga pressed a shaking claw against the door and with a low deep hum, it opened up. Lion-o immediately held his arm up over his eyes, expecting to be blinded by streams of light. But there was only darkness, save for a lone single light at the back of the room.

Cautiously, Lion-o stepped forward and his pawed feet felt a warm metal. The entire chamber was oval in shape, warmth ebbed from everywhere, but it was the pedestal at the far end that caught his attention. It was of the same silvery metal as the rest of the room, but two prongs bore out from the top and resting on them was a sword. His father’s sword. The gentle white light bathed the weapon in a shining glow, its beauty and majesty dazzled the young lord as he stepped up to it. The sword had a short blade and a large silver hilt, the two ends of which were slightly curved, but it was the red gem imbedded on the base of the blade that Lion-o gazed at in wonder.

“The eye of Thundera.” Jaga said his voice soft but it still echoed in the chamber. “Your birthright and heritage from all of your forefathers before you. It is the essence of what we all are

and what we live for and with this you will be able to rule your people wisely and to the code of Thundera.”

Lion-o swallowed a hard fear that had been lurking in his throat and tentatively he wrapped his hand round the handle of the sword. As soon as his fingers closed around it, he felt a raw and ancient power coarse through his entire body. An unknown strength from within lifted the sword off its resting place and as soon as this happened, Lion-o saw the red gem flare and a single black line flicked across it. It widened and opened like an eye, drowning the room in a red glare. The blade pulsed and throbbed in his hand and then began to grow. It shot out at great length, stopping almost as suddenly as it had started. The sword, now nearly as tall as him, was too heavy. Lion-o held it down below his waist, and gripped the handle with both of his hands. Even now, as the eye still pulsed brightly, Lion-o could feel the power still running through him. But it was more than just power, he could feel something else. Emotions and feelings swamped him and Lion-o knew they weren't his.

“Jaga!” he cried, “The sword! It feels alive!!”

“The eye gives the sword its powers, Lion-o!” Jaga explained, reaching out and helping the youth to place the sword back on the pedestal. It was a struggle at first, for Lion-o did not want to let go of it, but once out of his hands, the red light faded and the blade shortened back to its original size. .

“Its alive.” he breathed.

“No.” Jaga shook his head. “The Eye is however infused with the life forces of those before you. They imprinted themselves on this eye building its already awesome power and ensuring that the code is adhered to. The sword of Omens will not and cannot be used for evil deeds, Lion-o, remember this. But it will give you the sight to see beyond all others, it will give you the strength you need and be an aid to call for help when times are desperate and dire. This sword now belongs to you and in time when you grow, so too will the sword.”

“Jaga...if the eye has the souls of my ancestors...will my...?”

“Young cub...your father did not imprint his life force on the sword. There was no time for him to do so. I am sorry.”

Lion-o had hoped too much, hearing those words from Jaga made the despair and loss even more painful. He felt the tears suddenly seep from his eyes, so he turned away from Jaga, not wanting to show the old man. Even with him here, and the others, Lion-o never felt so lost and alone in his life. Years ago, when he was only a kitten, his mother had died and now he had to leave his father to die. Bitter anger swelled inside him, anger at his father for remaining behind and to himself for acting so stupid and weak. Why had all this happened? How had everything gone so wrong?

He didn't know how long he had stood there in silence, his head bowed and his fists clenched; his claws digging into his palms. Jaga was still behind him, respecting this moment, allowing the young lord his time of grief. But even that wasn't allowed to last.

There came a deep snarl, not from Lion-o or Jaga, but looking up, Lion-o saw the sword glinting even more brightly in the darkened chamber. The eye and the black pupil were pulsing; the deep animal growl was coming from the sword.

"Quickly! Pick up the sword again, use the sight!"

Lion-o quickly grabbed up the Omens sword again, feeling the powers ebb through his hands. As he did so, the ends of the hilt curled round into two eye holes. Holding it up to his face, Lion-o peered through the holes and instead of seeing the room; he saw the depths of space.

The remnants of Thundera soared through the darkness, but in amongst them, something else was moving. Ships, dark and foreboding just like the endless nothing in which they soared. They were coming towards the fleet, fast and primed for attack.

"Mutants!" cried Lion-o.

It wasn't long before the blaring sounds of the alert sirens screamed through the corridors, followed by an almighty explosion that nearly knocked him off his feet. Jaga was already out of the room and sprinting with such speed that Lion-o had difficulty keeping up. They ran onto the bridge and everything was in chaos. All the stations were manned and everyone was busy with the defences. Jaga immediately ran to the front console, where a bulky heavy set grey furred man from the panther clan was situated. He was barking orders to the rest of the fleet and Lion-o could see his clawed fingers were a blur rushing over the controls. The ship was pounded by weapons fire, again and again, explosions sounded from all over the ship and distress calls screamed over the speakers.

"There's too many of them!" shouted the panther. "The defences aren't holding up!"

"Evasive action, Panthro!" ordered Jaga, "Keep the ship moving!"

"NOO!" A scream from one of the lionesses ran out above all the other noises and when Lion-o looked up at the view screen, there was a blinding explosion. One of the other fleet ships had been utterly destroyed. Thousands of lives had been completely wiped out.

"Keep moving!" bellowed Jaga, forcing the crew members not to dwell on the destruction of the other ship.

From then on, everything was a blur. Lion-o had felt strong hands pull him away to the back of the bridge. He didn't see who it was, but he knew a firm grip was holding him in place. All he recalled from then on, were voices screaming as more of the fleet was destroyed, the continual swarm of mutant ships' weapons fire pounding against the hull and that his heart was beating so hard, he thought it would break out of his chest.

“They’re preparing to board us!” reported Panthro, “They’re attaching on to all the air locks!”

“Protect the children!” Jaga replied. “Keep them secure and away! Those able to fight will fight! These mutants have not destroyed us because the Eye of Thundera is in our keep!”

“They want the Eye?” asked Panthro. “Why?!”

“Just keep a guard on the sword chamber!” Jaga looked towards Lion-o, but he was not looking at him, instead his eyes were focused on someone behind him. “We must prevent the mutants from ever reaching it!”

Lion-o turned round, but seeing no one there behind him, he looked back, just as Jaga lead some of the nobles and crew off the bridge, preparing for battle against the mutants. It took him a few seconds to summon up his own courage and start off after him. With so much screaming inside his head, he ran down the corridors, oblivious to the dangers and certainly to the small creature that came pelting towards him in the opposite direction. The Snarf screamed at him and jumped heavily onto his chest.

“Not now!!” yelled Lion-o fumbling as the Snarf darted around his shoulders. “Snarf get off me! I have to help!”

The little Snarf hissed and howled at him, snorting a long babble of other phrases of its language. It scrambled frantically in the young boy’s arms before Lion-o finally realised what he should be doing. Snarf dropped down to the floor and it scurried back towards the bridge, leading his charge to where he should be.

When he got there, there were only a few of the crew manning the stations, but no one was guarding the way to the chamber. Despite the fact that Jaga had ordered the sacred room to be protected, there was no one there to prevent him from going in. The door to the sword chamber opened at Lion-o’s request and he ran up to take the sword. This was going to be his first test at being a leader, everyone else would be depending on him and the Omens sword. It was still heavy in his grasp, so with both hands, keeping the blade down and below his waist, he turned round and headed back to help the others. Snarf was protesting as much as it could, but Lion-o never listened. None of the crew saw him leave; too busy with directing the battles. The announcements on the speakers confirmed that swarms of mutants had gotten on board the ship.

Orders never ceased, emphasising on defence to key areas and the safe guarding of the children. Defending the key areas. Lion-o snorted a disgusted grunt. No one was protecting the Omens sword and the eye. No one but him. But could he do it?

With each step Lion-o took, the fear swelled up inside him, even with the power of the eye flowing through him, he knew now he was not ready. The sword seemed to agree with him, so did Snarf.

“Sssh!” Lion-o hissed to his guardian. “They could be anywhere!”

Wherever Lion-o walked, the corridors were empty; a soft red pulsing from the emergency lights cast shadows. The distant battles and screams echoed through the walls, but no one was around here.

This was not being useful, Lion-o thought. He had to find the mutants. Keeping close to the walls, Lion-o attuned his hearing to the rest of the sounds on the ship. It wasn't difficult to make out the horrid screeching from the mutants but hearing them didn't make the young boy feel any better. The fear inside him was turning into a sickly dread. He wasn't ready. He wasn't ready for any of this. Yet he still cautiously walked on. He was afraid, but he was going to fight, Lion-o wanted to do this.

It wasn't long before he heard them coming. Drooling burbling hisses came from their leader, combined with the heavy thud thud thud of their feet and boots. Lion-o pushed himself flat against the corner and he gave Snarf a little shove with his own foot, to keep the creature back. He held the sword up, with difficulty, and he waited.

He had never seen mutants before, not in real life, but he knew enough about them. They were a race that had hideously altered themselves, trying to give themselves abilities and powers that the Thunder Cats had evolved and grown with. Jaga had told him, that mutants were often thought to be thoughtless and bumbling creatures, often underestimated in battle. But despite the deformed bodies they now had, some of their experiments had worked, improving their weaponry and technology. Lion-o wasn't going to underestimate these things. The rest of the fleet had been destroyed and they had gotten on to this vessel. These mutants weren't stupid.

He could make out more than fifteen mutants thomping down the corridor. His stomach churned, threatening to spew up the rest of his dread. The leader was still drooling on and the sight of him was far from pretty. Pus, ooze and slime covered his green and blotchy skin; spines ran along the top of his hairless head and all the way down his back. His three fingered clawed hands bore nails sharp and encrusted with blood, dirt and slime. But it was his piercing yellow eyes that showed the menace and evil inside him. Lion-o didn't like looking at him and instead focused on the kind of weaponry he and his companions were holding. The guns were big and just as ugly as their owners, but he couldn't see what they were powered with and he didn't know the weapon's ranges.

The other mutants had their own characteristic deformations, some wolf like, some even had traits of birds or monkeys, a couple; Lion-o wasn't entirely sure what they were. But the closer they got, he knew that he had to act and quickly.

"By the Eye of Thundera!!" He screamed and jumped out from the corner of the wall.

The mutants were only momentarily startled at the sight of this young boy brandishing his sword. The leader grinned a horrid yellow fanged smile and pointed his long black bulking weapon directly at Lion-o. He laughed, or it seemed like a laugh to Lion-o. It gurgled and glittered, spit and slime dribbling from its mouth.

"A mere kitten." he snorted. "You are no match for us, boy!"

“You will turn around now and go back to your ship!” Lion-o almost seemed surprised at the authority in his voice. “Before the Eye of Thundera destroys you all!”

They all suddenly focused on the sword in Lion-o’s claws. It appeared that he held what they were so desperately wanting. They would just simply slay this cat and take the sword and eye for themselves. One of the mutants armed his rifle, but the leader held up a hand to keep him back.

“You think you can fight us?!” he sneered. “Do you have the time to waste whilst the rest of your puny felines are being slaughtered? You have no strength boy!”

The words cut deeply into Lion-o. The other nobles and crew were being attacked, but he had to assume they were fighting back. The distracted thoughts cost the young lord. The leader of the mutants suddenly soared down the corridor and landed a cracking blow to Lion-o’s jaw with the butt of his weapon. Lion-o fell to the floor, blood spurting from his mouth and the Sword of Omens falling from his grip. He skidded across the floor, halted only by crashing hard into the wall. Lion-o was dazed, his head was spinning and he couldn’t focus. He saw a brief blur as, he could only guess, Snarf came out from his own hiding place to protect the new lord.

“Kill it!!”

Weapons fire rang out, but as Lion-o frantically scrambled to his feet, he could see Snarf darting in and out of the laser shots. He had never seen this creature act so bravely, but he knew that in its own mind, Snarf was defending him and giving him the chance to get the sword and start the fight again.

His claws found the sword but they fumbled against the metal handle as he felt another crushing blow from the mutant leader. His boot impacted with Lion-o’s stomach and he cried out once more. Something went crack inside him and he tasted more blood as it spewed from his mouth. Everything was going hazy once again, he just couldn’t focus through the pain. What had happened to the sword? To Snarf?

“You are so weak...” Three long and slimy fingers grabbed hold of Lion-o by the neck and lifted him up off the floor. The mutant leader slammed him against the wall, his grasp tightening around his neck. “Weak and so pathetic. Why did you have this sword?”

Lion-o became more frantic, through his hazy vision; he saw the mutant leader holding the sword of omens in its other sickening hand. There was no hope left now; he had so easily allowed these vile creatures to take Thundera’s power and jewel. As the breath slowly drained from his body, Lion-o stopped struggling. He had failed them all.

Before death even had a chance to consume him, the air was suddenly swathed in a scorching heat. Fire erupted and swam down the length of the corridor. The mutant leader dropped Lion-o back to the floor and he and the rest of his group tried to get past the soaring flames. Their screeches were awful, but Lion-o could not tell where this fire had come from. It certainly gave him the opportunity to strike back. With a deep growl, Lion-o slashed at the leader’s arm which still held the sword. He felt the putrid stench of it’s blood as it splattered his face, but the sword

fell back into his hands. He was no longer weak; the power of the eye was once more sweeping through him.

Then through the fire, he could see a whip flying from nothingness, cracking a scorching blaze to one of the mutants. The mutant was screaming as it burned, screaming in pain and crying for help. It received none. The others were firing their weapons at the nothing, panicking and furied by anger.

Lion-o began to swing the sword, not concerned by its sudden lightness in his grasp, as he took on the mutant leader. The creature blocked the blow with his gun and then he spun round and threw another punch towards Lion-o. Lion-o ducked, just to see one of the other sickening beasts being grabbed from behind by something. The mutant bird's neck was snapped by its invisible attacker and it slumped to the floor next to the burnt body of its comrade.

The leader was not pleased that his plans were being ruined; that this young whelp had some other protector other than the feeble Snarf. The fight continued. Lion-o only ducked and dodged the attacks, seeing now that this creature was not as agile as he had first seemed. His invisible guard was dispatching some of the others, Lion-o only glimpsing the fiery whip and the occasional sights of the mutants being punched by thin air.

“Slithe!” Two mutants, who obviously not wanting to confront this ghost taking out their comrades, came to join their leader. It was now three against one, not what Lion-o wanted, but with a much more boosted confidence he made good work. Any blows, scratches or cuts he received from them, Lion-o managed to cut them back. The strength wasn't there to dig deeply, but he was holding out well. Some other mutants tried to join in on the attack, but they only got slashed open by his protector, becoming bloodied heaps on the floor.

When it seemed that this invisible force would finish the rest of the mutants off, the hairy jackal mutant got off a lucky hit of his own. Spinning to avoid Lion-o's sword, the creature stuck out his claw and swiped the thin air. Lion-o heard the sound of tearing flesh and a cry of restrained pain.

The invisible veil was lifted. Dropping to the floor, his chest bleeding from the mutant's claws was a Thunder Cat. He was a young man of the Tiger clan, worn by battle and in his hand was a long bolo whip. Lion-o finally realised that this man must have been protecting the sword chamber and to whom Jaga had addressed before.

“Where are the rest of you?” snarled the Jackal, stomping a foot down on the bolo whip. “Dead or dying! Like you will be!”

“No!!” Lion-o cried as the Jackal creature opened its drooling fangs and lunged for the man's neck. With the sword in both hands, he held it up straight and out, calling for power from the eye, anything to prevent this man from dying.

His answer came in the form of an awesome explosion of bright red light and a crackling roar. From the Eye sprung forth a huge black panther head, howling a cry so terrible and with a breath

so intense, it whipped the mutants off the ground and carried them away wailing in fear. It never seemed to stop, the force was so strong, that Lion-o was struggling to keep on his own feet, struggling to hold the Omens sword up. Through the breath of wind as it whirled around him, extinguishing the fires in its path, he saw the injured Tiger get to his feet. The older man was directly in the path of the force and was walking towards him as if this gale was nothing. His striped mane was whipping around his face, but his eyes were wide and glowing yellow.

“You can stop now.” said the man, his voice deep and soothing.

“No.” gasped Lion-o. “Not until they’re all off the ship! Not until they leave us alone!”

The man reached out a claw, bloodied though it was, and rested it on Lion-o’s shoulder. A few seconds later, the corridor became calm and the sword was now bowed yet still firmly grasped in Lion-o’s hands.

Before he could even catch his breath, he saw Jaga and a large group of Thunder Cats running up towards them. They all looked just as beaten and injured as he was and despite this victory there was great sadness in their eyes.

“Lion-o...well done.” said Jaga, bowing his head gently. “Although this was not as I hoped. The mutants have fled, but it will not be long before they come back and we have been greatly weakened. Tygra, thank you for protecting both the boy and the sword, Lion-o certainly has proved himself. Will you please go and use your healing skills on the wounded?”

“Of course, Jaga.”

“Don’t forget your own.”

Tygra nodded and with a courteous bow to all the nobles still round him, he walked away. Lion-o was dumbstruck, he had wanted to say thank you to the man called Tygra and he had wanted to say and ask so much of Jaga. But looking into the old man’s eyes, he knew that now was not the time.

A rush of relief suddenly turned to joy when he felt something brushing up against his legs.

He looked down and there was Snarf, curling itself around his feet. The creature’s fur looked singed and Lion-o thought he even saw a nasty wound on its tail. A small pang of guilt came over the boy, realising that during the fight, he had forgotten about his guardian. Snarf seemed to sense his worry, but instead purred and jumped into his arms. The sword was dropped, Jaga quickly picked it out of the air before it hit the floor.

“I’m glad you are okay.” said Lion-o hugging Snarf tightly to his chest. “Thank you for everything.”

“Lion-o...” Jaga spoke. “The council must meet to discuss our next course of action. You will go to the medical bay and see that your own wounds are treated. Tygra will then stay with you, once

he finishes his duties and he will stay until you are informed of our decision. Again I will say well done, young cub. You have done us all so proud.”

“Can I not come to the council meeting, Jaga?” asked Lion-o. “I feel fine. Honest.”

“Do as I say. You tapped into the Eye’s power without fully understanding it, you are weakened. Slithe and his men could easily have overrun us all, but next time, with more focus and training that will not be the case. Now go and see Tygra, or I’m sure that Snarf will drag you down there himself.”

The frail smile from the old man brightened Lion-o up and as soon as Snarf leapt from his arms, he slowly began to follow him away. He gazed back briefly to see Jaga quietly converse with the others before they too headed off, in the other direction. Snarf called out to him, the sounds that earned his species their name caused Lion-o to quicken his pace.

“Yes yes, Snarf! I’m coming! Don’t be such a fuss!”

The sight in the huge medical bay was not what Lion-o was expecting. When he normally came to places like this, the cavernous rooms were normally empty save only a few, but the medics here were being rushed off their feet. Every bed or any space that could be filled, was; with so many Thunder Cats all with different injuries and severity.

It was a long painful walk through the crowds, Lion-o couldn’t look away from all the blood, he couldn’t lock out the cries as someone lost a loved one. The mutants had been more vicious than Lion-o had ever thought, how much more pain and suffering could be placed upon them? Why had they not been strong enough to prevent all this?

Snarf gently pushed Lion-o aside as more bodies were brought past. Through the threat of tears, Lion-o heard Snarf whimper, mourning the loss just as much as anyone. Lion-o didn’t want to stay here, his cuts were nothing compared to what they had suffered. He was just about to turn and walk away when he saw his other protector walking towards him.

Tygra obviously hadn’t done anything to the slashes across his own chest except the very least that they needed, yet those wounds still looked deep and painful.

“Lion-o. Good, let me see those cuts.” he said. Lion-o frowned. Tygra had seemed so different when he was attacking the mutants, but now he appeared gentle, softer and in those eyes there was a strong sense of wisdom and understanding. Almost like Jaga. But Lion-o also sensed a shyness, hesitant and closed. This young man was not like the others of his clan. It didn’t take long for Tygra to treat the cuts on Lion-o’s body and when he had finished, he stood towering above him, gazing down at him with those intense orange eyes.

“Thank you.” said Lion-o. “For everything. I had no idea you were there. But you didn’t stop me from taking the sword.”

“It’s yours, why would I stop you?”

“You were invisible all that time, you could have.”

“It is an advantage, but not to use against our own kind. Not many of my clan can do what I do. Very few in fact. But let’s go. You needn’t stay here any more.”

“You can help the others. You can do something to your own cuts.”

“Too many are beyond our help. I’ve done all I can and as for my own injuries...well...the pain is nothing I can’t...manage.” Tygra seemed to be managing with his pain, but Lion-o saw a soft fleeting wince cross his face that told him otherwise. “Jaga has told me to stay with you. I will.”

“But I have Snarf. He and I will go back to my quarters and...”

“Jaga told me to stay with you. You don’t argue with him because the stubborn old man rarely listens. I should know, I’ve yelled at him enough times. Besides, my skills as a medic are limited and not my area of expertise.”

Lion-o opened his mouth to protest again, but just like with Jaga, he couldn’t bring himself to argue with this man. He closed his mouth and then proceeded to walk out of the medical bay. The sounds of the grieving still followed him all the way back to his room.

“You have lost someone?”

Not baring the silence any longer, Lion-o slipped off the edge of his bed and walked into the living area and to the window, where Tygra had been standing. It must have been for a couple of hours the Tiger had stood there, his arms folded across his broad chest, his eyes staring off into the depths of space, nothing sounding from his lips. Not even Snarf’s insistent sounds broke the man’s trance.

“We all have.” he eventually replied.

“But was it someone close?”

Tygra didn’t answer. Lion-o knew, for no matter what clan you belonged to, a single life from any family was a loss to all the Thunder Cats. Right now, everyone was feeling as horrid as he did. Tygra just wasn’t expressing it as much as others.

Finally the door opened, which not only excited Lion-o but brought Tygra out of his trance and fascination with the window’s view. As Lion-o had hoped, Jaga came into the room and he began to address the two.

“We have to leave this sector of space.” said Jaga, not even allowing time for Lion-o to start pelting him with questions. “The nearest planet that is habitable for us is far away. Many decades worth of travel.”

“The suspension capsules.” Tygra said. Jaga nodded.

“It is the only way. Everyone must go into suspended animation for the journey. However, the automatic pilot was damaged during the attack.”

“Someone will have to stay behind.” Tygra sighed. “I will do it.”

“No.” Jaga was quite stern with this statement, but his voice then softened and became full of woe. “Tygra...Targren was killed. He had no heir and as you are his nephew, the next male in line...you have to take his place as the leader of your people.”

“I cannot.” Tygra said, a small amount of fear sounded in his voice. “I am not a leader, I’m not a member of the council. There are still other families that can claim that position! I won’t do it! I can’t!”

“This is not up for discussion, Tygra. You will take lead of your clan and you will go into the suspension capsules along with the others. Now...I must entrust to you the safety of the lord of the Thunder Cats. You will train Lion-o and guide him to become the leader he must be.”

“But Jaga!” Lion-o piped up. “You said you were going to--!”

He stopped just as quickly as he had spoken up. It was all too clear to him. Jaga was going to be the one to pilot the ship, a task that would claim the last of this old man’s life. He was going to lose another close friend, of one so dear to him, that he couldn’t bare it. Anger, sadness, a mixture of so many different emotions were tearing this young child apart, he couldn’t keep control over them. He wanted to shout, cry and lash out all at once; the skin on his face was burning, his eyes were stinging and his fists were aching to punch something, anything.

“I am an old man, Lion-o.” said Jaga, taking hold of Lion-o’s hands and holding them tightly in his own. “I’ve already lived longer than is expected of our race. Defending this ship and the last of our people has weakened me more. I must do this.”

“WHAT? Leave me?! Abandon me like my father did?! Jaga, I won’t let you do this!!” Lion-o pulled his hands away from Jaga and kicked in frustration. His foot collided with a table and it was sent flying across the room where it splintered upon impact with the wall. “You’re a fool to think I could cope without your guidance! You are a great warrior of Thundera! You would cast me aside so easily??!!”

“NEVER!”

The booming voice was ferocious and Lion-o never thought it possible from this man. Jaga's face was red with flustered anger, vibrant in contrast to his snow white hair. He approached Lion-o, appearing more giant and frightening than the mutants. The mutants had been scary, but seeing Jaga like this was more so. That burst of anger from Jaga was regretted immediately. The old lion man staggered back, his withered claws trembling, his own eyes glazing over with bursting tears.

"Never." he repeated more softly. "I was your father's mentor, I guided him and you, my Lion-o, are like a grandson to me. Through my duties to the Kings I never had my own family. Having a family whilst in such servitude is not easily achieved."

Jaga sent a glance over to Tygra. The young man turned away suddenly and began to once again look out of the window at the stars.

"I would never discard you or abandon you."

"Yet you are doing so now!" sneered Lion-o, feeling a deep hatred, but not towards the old man.

"You are only twelve years old. You are still a cub, not yet a man. I have seen too much, received so many battle scars my body cannot cope with much more. Tygra is someone I trust, I have seen him grow from a cub and he is more than qualified to teach you. I cannot keep up with youth any more, Lion-o. If someone else were to do this task, their lives would be wasted; all they could achieve would be shattered. We have lost so much already. Confide in Tygra and the other nobles, they will give you what you need."

"You will not make it to this new world..." Lion-o felt his voice choke through his sorrow. "I will go into the capsule and I won't see you again...I won't..."

"Child...I will make every effort to make sure that I will. Even if it means that I must tie my fate, my soul to the sword. If I can...I won't be leaving you behind. Please understand why I am doing this, why I have made this choice."

"I..." The words would not come out. Jaga was wise beyond he could ever hope to be and he had to trust in this. Everything he was feeling was in conflict and he couldn't quite confront this. Lion-o turned away and walked off into his room. He did not want Jaga to follow him, he didn't want any more talk or lectures and the old man didn't even attempt to do so.

Jaga instead went to Tygra's side. The two adults stood together and looked out at the depths of space. The silence lingered on as much as it needed to, for Jaga knew that Tygra felt just the same as Lion-o.

"It's not going to be easy." Tygra finally said, his eyes firmly fixed to the stars. "I know how he feels. You've done so much for all of us...you...when you brought my father's body back home...."

“Tiernen was as much a friend to me as Lion-o’s father was.” said Jaga. “You have grown into a good man, Tygra. I know that you will teach Lion-o well, but promise me one thing.”

“What would you have me do?”

“Don’t end up like me. Don’t become a frail old man with no mate, no family or cubs of your own. Your work consumes you. I’ve seen it all throughout your youth. It is not life, young one. Your duties to the kings are one thing, but don’t neglect your own needs.”

“Having a family? Me?” Tygra allowed a small smirk to curl his lips. “I can’t see that happening.”

“You would prefer to be alone?”

“Honestly? Yes.”

“Then I grieve for you. For life without the pleasures of a mate is a great hollow. You won’t be able to pull yourself out. I know these regrets and they have always pained me. If there is nothing more I can do to convince you, then I will go. Preparations are already underway to make our way to this new home. Those able are going to the capsules now. You must too.”

Tygra didn’t reply. He continued to stand and watch the darkness, a darkness that Jaga already feared that would envelope him. Before Jaga walked out of the room, he paused and looked towards the boy. Lion-o was sitting on his bed, his legs pressed up against his chest and his head resting on his knees. Lion-o didn’t look up, not even Snarf’s comforting nuzzles at his feet caused him to stir. Jaga did not want to leave like this, for the two people he held so dear felt so alienated from him. It felt bitter in his heart, broken and sour.

“My sons...my boys...take care. Safe journey.”

Those were the last words he spoke to them in this life.

The suspension capsules occupied several decks. Huge chambers were filled with thousands of pods for all those left. Green comforting glows inside the capsules barely gave the pods much light. Lion-o, holding Snarf in his hands, walked by; seeing the older children being put into their individual cocoons, being comforted by their worrying parents. Warriors, crew, techs and nobles were all trying to get comfortable in their homes for the next few decades. Murmurs of Jaga’s fate reached Lion-o’s ears, worries of their safe trip, worries of what this new world was like.

“This way young lord.” The next highest lion noble after Lion-o, Liva, lead Lion-o through another corridor, to the section where children were settling. Tygra had mentioned that the children would be positioned in the most protective pods, Lion-o included.

One was set at the far end for Lion-o and standing before it, looking at the soft green glow on the padded cushions, he couldn't bring himself to step into it.

"It is perfectly safe." said Liva. "Once activated, you won't know the passage of time."

"But Jaga will."

"He has made his mind up. Don't dwell on it, my lord. Please."

"What about Snarf?"

At the mention of his name, the young lord's faithful companion hoisted himself up by balancing on the tip of his tail. He made purring noises and his small stubby paws scrambled at Lion-o's chest. Lion-o pulled him up and gave him a huge squeeze. He couldn't leave Snarf behind.

"Snarf will take the pod next to you." said Tygra. "It only seemed right."

That comfort did more for Lion-o than anyone could have thought. It allowed the young king to step into the pod. As the domed canopy closed around him, he watched Liva gently lift Snarf into the pod next to him. Lion-o saw Snarf looking back at him, a paw reaching out as if to wave. The creature wouldn't take its eyes off Lion-o and just seconds before the suspension was activated, Lion-o saw such deep feeling within those eyes. If people underestimated the mutants, they certainly did the same to the Snarfs. Although he couldn't speak, Snarf was dedicated, loyal and now one of the closest friends Lion-o had left. He smiled and lifted a hand to wave back to his guardian, before the timeless sleep took him over.

Years passed. So many long and lonely years. Jaga remained alone, his body weakening, his memory fading and his spirit waning. In the early years he had taken to walk amongst the pods of his people, touching the warm throbbing canopies, learning all their names and lineage, learning all he could. He had compiled data about the new home, collected anything that would help them when they woke. But his age, his frailty took over quickly and soon he was confined to walking short distances.

Death was upon him. No one had lived longer than he had, but he knew that all those younger had produced the families he had not. As the ancient old cat made his way to the Sword chamber, he found, of all his years of memories, he recollected those of the two who he had loved so much.

He saw the birth of Tygra, the child who grew up so different from his own kind, alone, secluded but exceptionally brilliant. He was a skilled architect, scientist artist and medic, everything he did in those fields outshone his elders and peers. He was a genius. From kitten to man, he grew to be a cat so handsome, tigresses would have gladly been his mate. Instead Jaga had watched the shy young man crawl away from such company, entomb himself in work and sciences, barely accepting the comfort of any around him .

Jaga had also trained him to fight, he brought out the extremely rare powers of invisibility and mind control not achieved by his older and wiser relatives. But Tygra never wanted much use of them. He didn't want to fight, he had always wanted to be alone. Jaga wept, for Tygra was too much like himself.

Then, Lion-o. At his birth, Jaga knew this young child would be a true lord he was so much like his father. A true, regal power flowed through this boy's blood with strength and passion. Lion-o was everything he was supposed to be: a great learner, confident and out going. Even after a few years, Jaga could see that he bore the good looks he would carry on to adolescence and manhood. He would carry on the great line of his family and he would do so with the loyalty and respect of all the others on Thundera. Through the years Jaga spent alone on the ship, he had cried so much for this young cub. The times and pressures of which Lion-o had to grow up with would certainly test him, but he had great potential. There was so much of Lion-o's life that he would not see, not the great man he would become, the respected leader, the father of his own children? Jaga regretted every day for taking this role to guide the ship.

Reality and present time came flooding back to the dying man. He hadn't known where he wondered, drifted in forgetfulness, the coldness seeping through his frail old bones. Only the dim light of the sword chamber showed his course. Doubt of his power to do this last task weighed heavily on his brittle shoulders, but his love of Lion-o forced him on. He took up the Sword of Omens and pressed it against his forehead. The red gem dug deep into his thin skin and Jaga began to whisper the words.

"Join with me. Take all I have left and embrace it. I give my life, my soul for the Eye. For the lord who so needs my guidance. Blend my power and life, take all I have left."

Was this dying? The last remnants of this ancient soul began to fade. He never felt his body die but only sensed a floating feeling connected to the warm metal of the sword. He had connected, but he could not see. All that the great cat, Jaga, could sense, was the blade to which he was bonded and the hurting soul of the young lord. Lion-o.

There was scratching. He didn't know where it was from, but the claws were scraping horribly against something. Nails, claws; frantic and desperate. Lion-o had a vague feeling, his hands reaching out and pressing up against the cold surface of his pod. There was a screeching, howling desperation which caused him to push. A gush of cold air rushed to his lungs as the pod opened and Lion-o felt the form of Snarf slithering all over him. From this sudden sensation, all he could feel was cramped, the pod was not as comfortable as he had first experienced. He staggered out, hearing Snarf's howling language.

"Help."

Snarf screamed this over and over again, not in the language Lion-o used, but he could interpret his guardian's frantic emotions. Something was horribly wrong. Disorientated, Lion-o moved away from his pod. Snarf began running round him, he seemed a lot smaller than Lion-o remembered, but it didn't take long for him to realise that it was he who was different.

"What? What's happened to me?"

Instead of his twelve year old body, Lion-o now appeared to be a tall well built man in his early twenties. His hair was round his shoulders, a much darker red but tatty. His voice was deeper, his hands larger, he had grown up. His body had any way. The mind of a twelve year old in a twenty two year old body was more than confusing. He was scared, he didn't know what to do. Snarf was more than frantic about this transformation, but something else was really bothering him.

"The children?" Lion-o understood only a few snorting phrases from the Snarf, he couldn't quite make out the rest of the babbling sounds. "What about the children? They're..."

Then as he walked over to the pods, he finally realised what Snarf was so upset about. The children's life support systems had been turned off. All of them were dead, suffocated and locked inside. Some of them still looked peaceful, as if they had fallen asleep, but others were not so serene. To Lion-o's horror, some of the older children had been awake when their murderers had deactivated the controls. They had pounded on the canopies, some scratches streaked down the transparent material and were smeared with blood.

"No!!! NO!" Lion-o smashed a clenched fist against the pod again and again, drawing blood from his own furred knuckles. Tears fell down his face and they wouldn't stop, his voice was hoarse from his screams and each breath he took hurt; a horrible deep stabbing pain. Why had this happened? Where were the other Thunder Cats? Why?! Why?!

Lion-o punched the pod again, this time clawing at the controls on the door lock. It opened and a young panther girl fell into his arms. She felt so cold, her eyes and her face was fixed in a look of horror. Lion-o sank to the floor still cradling the young girl, still crying and feeling so much and all at once.

Then there came another noise. Lion-o didn't hear it at first, but when his cries quietened he finally heard some faint thumps. He looked around and he saw that Snarf was already at a couple of pods. They were the two right before Snarf's pod and when Lion-o approached he saw to his relief that the occupants of both of them were alive and wanting to get out. Snarf opened the door for the girl, whilst Lion-o opened her twin brother's. Lion-o hugged them both tightly as they mewed and sobbed, hoping to comfort them. The two lion kittens were barely ten years old and Lion-o couldn't imagine what they had seen. They had to watch, so helpless, as intruders came along and turned off, one by one, the life supports. They had to watch them die.

"It was the mutants." sobbed the boy, sinking to his knees. "They were laughing and mocking us...it was all such a joke for them!"

“But then they stopped before reaching us.” added his sister. “They said something about finding the one. Finding the one? What does that mean?”

“They must have got to the other capsules.” said Lion-o. “We must go and see them. Can you get up? Can you walk?”

It didn't seem possible for a moment. The two lion kittens were so frail and upset, Lion-o didn't think they had the energy to. If he hadn't mysteriously grown in his own capsule, Lion-o doubted that he would have had the strength to do anything. But after a brief few seconds the twins got to their feet and waited for Lion-o to lead the way. He was expecting the two children to ask who he was, but if he told them right now, they wouldn't believe him. It was something they could deal with later.

“We must get some weapons.” he muttered to Snarf as they quickly headed off towards the door. Snarf agreed by making a confirming squeak.

Upon reaching the storage units, Lion-o was a little disappointed to see that most of those weapons had already been taken; all that remained were packets of what looked like pellets or pills. As he had been trained in combat at an early age (The other two children had as well.) Lion-o knew these pellets to be Multi-pellets. Throw them at an enemy and each would explode in various ways; some showering sleep powder, others oil slicks and even fog. Although these were not toys, some Thunder Cat kittens would use them as pranks and jokes, something which got Lion-o into trouble often enough. But now, as they carefully approached the entrance to the next chamber, Lion-o handed some to the two kittens. They had to stay quite well hidden, as there were lots of mutants swarming around. Lion-o had to control his anger as well, because to suddenly run in without getting an account of where they all were, it would have been foolish. For killing the other children, (Lion-o suspected that the same had happened to the adults) these mutants would pay. They would be punished.

“Someone is still alive!” whispered the young girl. “They've got him out! Over there!”

Her little claw pointed to where a group of mutants, including their leader Slithe, were standing in a circle, laughing and taking turns to kick and punch someone in the centre. Lion-o couldn't make the person out, but when the Jackal man reached down, there was the sound of a knife slicing. The girl and her brother looked away, burying their faces against Lion-o. He too thought that the mutant dog had killed another, but then the beast howled with laughter and lifted up long locks of orange red hair.

“Cry out kitten!” he growled. “Plead for mercy! Plead for a quick death!!”

The creature then began to pull up some more hair straight from the prisoner's head instead of using the knife. Lion-o heard restrained moans of pain, but he still couldn't make out who it was. The kicking and beating started up again, but still the Thunder Cat never cried out. He was taking it all.

“Can’t you make it stop?” pleaded the lion boy. “They’re going to kill him!”

“We have to do something!”

Just as Lion-o was about to make his move, the leader Slithe moved back away from the circle. In his hand was a weapon far too familiar to Lion-o. It was the long bolo whip that belonged to Tygra.

Sure enough, it was Tygra in the centre of the circle. He was on his knees, looking up at the others; his face was cut, bloodied and scrunched up in pain but there was so much defiance in his eyes. The Jackal had ripped and cut a lot of his hair for it no longer flowed around his shoulders. A lot lay in clumps on the bloodied floor around him and the hair he still had left was shorter and messed. His hands were tied behind his back, constricting his movements.

“So...tiger...” Slithe edged forward. “Where is that young whelp you helped all those years ago, when you so cowardly attacked my people?”

“Attacked your people?” Tygra laughed and then spat a mouthful of blood at Slithe’s feet. He received several kicks which sent him falling forward. The jackal man then grabbed hold of his hair and pulled him back onto his knees. “You destroyed our fleet, you’ve killed my race! Killed innocent children whilst they slept! Who are the cowards? The animals?!!”

Slithe grinned and then he unfolded Tygra’s whip. With force and menace, the mutant lashed the whip against the man; each hit shredding Tygra’s already broken skin. Lion-o never heard him cry out, never heard him plead for it to stop, but he would make it stop.

The two children were trembling, but each one of them already had their multi-pellets clasped in their hands. He gave them the signal and the two of them threw the pellets out towards the mutants. The tiny capsules exploded over head, filling the room with a thick black fog. Before it all enveloped the mutants, Lion-o saw Tygra grin. He never expected the fog to do much except to provide a cover whilst they released Tygra, but something quite unexpected did happen. The mutants began to scream hysterically and from their hiding places, Lion-o saw the monsters trying to flee. Because they could not see, they kept running into the walls and each other. The two children threw some more pellets, slicking the floor with oil. It was just at this moment, when Lion-o felt Snarf nudge him.

In the creature’s mouth was the Sword of Omens. He had succeeded in fetching it from the chamber. Lion-o took it from Snarf’s teeth and now he could hold it up easily with just one hand. He knew what he had to do. He stepped out, just as the black fog was clearing. There was no sign of Tygra, but all the mutants were now muddling together coughing up breaths of smoke of which they had inhaled. They were covered in grease and to Lion-o they looked so miserable. He held no pity and he would have no mercy for them. He held the sword up and at arms length.

“You!!” Slithe sneered. “You made us do this! You forced us!”

“No.” Lion-o growled. “You are weak...YOU are pathetic! You are no match for the Sword of Omens and the power of the Eye! I am Lion-o! Lord of the Thundercats, your judge, your jury and your executioner! Pay the consequences for what you have done! MURDERERS!”

Tunnelling his anger and vengeance, Lion-o focused the power of the sword and directed it towards the mutants. Just like all those years ago, the power soared through Lion-o’s body, the sword roared and from the gem the same black panther head leaped out screaming its terrifying breath.

A hurricane swirled through the chamber, picking up the mutant killers and throwing them around like fragile leaves. Some of them cracked harshly into the metal walls, but as the panther flew in and around them, it played with them, its mystic jaws opening wide as if to consume the beasts.

As hard as Lion-o tried, the power failed to satisfy his anger. Instead of destroying the mutants, the roaring panther swept them away, out of the chamber and out of the ship.

“NO!” Lion-o screamed, tightening his grip on the sword and forcing more of his anger through the blade. He was so intent on pushing the force to its very limits, he didn’t see Tygra appear once again, in the centre of the still howling wind. His eyes were glowing yellow once again and he approached Lion-o, with the two lion cubs behind him. Their eyes were also glowing.

“Stop!” Tygra called. “It’s finished!”

“It’s not!!” Lion-o yelled back. “They still live! The sword is not working properly!”

“LION-O!”

The booming voice caused Lion-o to drop the sword to the floor. He looked around and to the surprise of all of them, floating in the air was a ghostly image of Jaga. He no longer looked frail and weak; the spirit sparkled with bright light and glimmered with an aura of strength.

“The sword would not allow it, Lion-o!” said Jaga. “You would use the power with such anger and hatred?”

“But they killed....they’ve killed everyone else! All of them!! How could they not go unpunished??!!”

“Justice! Truth! Loyalty! That is our way!” Jaga’s voice echoed. “To fight evil and protect all that is good! They have committed terrible atrocities to our people, but you must NEVER use your anger thinking it is some kind of justice! That would never be achieved and the sword, the souls who reside within it, won’t allow it!”

Lion-o sank to his knees, choking back his sobs and shaking cries.

“How can I not feel angry? Look what they did to Tygra! Those children have lost their parents! How could I not feel so mad about what they have done?”

Jaga’s spirit gently floated down to Lion-o’s level. The ghost reached out a transparent white hand, but it was pulled back slowly, remembering that touch was not possible now. He could only offer words of comfort to the lord.

“Grieve. Honour the souls of our people by acting in the manner that upholds all that is good in you. You would have only tarnished yourself by behaving in such a hateful way. Besides, you are not alone. Tygra is with you, the kittens, Snarf...and...”

He looked away and Lion-o and the others followed his gaze. One of the suspension capsule doors was suddenly kicked off its supports with a ferocious boom. From it stepped a bulky panther man. He was older than Tygra, medium in height and covered with soft grey fur. He seemed relieved to see the others, but didn’t seem surprised at Jaga’s ghostly form. He walked over to the group and bowed his head.

“Lord Jaga.”

“Panthro. It is good to see that you live. But I sense one other still breathes.”

“Only one?” Panthro shook his head in disbelief.

“Find that one. Then...I am sorry to say your next task is all too clear. Give the dead the sending they need. Let them finally find peace.” Jaga then looked and addressed both Lion-o and Tygra. “I need you to be strong, both of you. I understand your anger, Lion-o but remember my words for dealing with the mutants. Acting with those emotions will be the undoing of you. Tygra, he will need you more than ever. Though his malfunctioning pod allowed his body to grow, Lion-o is still but a boy. Teach him well. Also, be the family that the two kittens need, for they too will look to you for support. Don’t distance yourself, Tygra. You all are the last of our kind.”

“But Jaga--!” Lion-o never got the chance to say anything, for Jaga’s ghostly form vanished almost as quickly as it had appeared. He sagged to the floor and took the Omens sword in his hands. He had wanted to say how sorry he was, the last thing he wanted to do was disappoint Jaga or those who had so needlessly died. He wanted to make everything better, but how could anything from now on get better?

“You’re hurt...” said Panthro walking up to Tygra and for the first time seeing the extent of the younger man’s wounds. “They look really bad...”

“No. They’re nothing.” Tygra replied sternly. He then focused on the two youngest survivors. The two kitten twins also had slumped to the floor, the grief took over them and they were crying as if they would never stop. Tygra, trying hard to ignore his pain, knelt down and took hold of each of their hands. “What are your names?”

“Wilykit.” said the girl, squeezing hard on Tygra’s hand.

“Wilykat.” said her brother.

“This is going to be very hard, for all of us. We’ll get through it, the grief will pass and your parents will always stay in your memories. Everyone will.”

“I can’t see their faces...I’ve forgotten already!” wept Kit. “I can’t see their faces!”

Tygra wrapped his arms around both of the children and allowed them to cry. He didn’t know how long they had stayed like this, the force of their hold on him intensified the pain from his wounds, but he didn’t let go. Feeling the pain somehow felt right for him.

As Tygra stayed with the two children, Panthro encouraged Lion-o to his feet and the two of them started to search for the last Thunder Cat survivor. It was not a pleasant experience, seeing the bodies locked in the capsules, some; just like the children; had been awake and had some how tried to get out. Lion-o watched the older man and wondered how he had managed it. He gazed back at the door and he could make out huge dents from where the heavy set panther had kicked it.

“I don’t know why the internal release catches didn’t work.” said Panthro as if sensing Lion-o’s curiosity. “They should have gotten out....they should have been able to!!”

Lion-o almost missed her. He had walked past the pod and only at the corner of his eye did he see small movement. He turned back and saw a saddened but beautiful face. He knew her, Lion-o remembered this woman; the Cheetah female who had woken him from his sleep all those years ago. She too had been awake, but now she had given up; her eyes were closed but tears still seeped out from under the lids. Long golden yellow locks spotted with black fell past her shoulders and for a moment Lion-o was captivated by such beauty. He pressed his hand gently against the transparent door, waiting just for another sign of movement, lingering just to see if she was still breathing. Her chest was slowly rising and falling and Lion-o felt elated. She was still alive.

“Get her out of there!” Panthro had spotted Lion-o’s hesitation and was running over to them. Lion-o frantically worked at the release case, the sound of him doing so caused the woman to open her eyes. She had not been expecting to see the sight of Lion-o pulling open her pod and when he held out his hand, her own, trembling, grasped it hard. She stepped out of the pod and looked around with despair, yet she never let go of Lion-o’s hand.

“So few....” she gasped. “So few survived. So much death....so much pain!!”

The woman fell, but Lion-o grabbed her in his arms, using his strength to hold her shaking body and keeping her from completely collapsing to the ground. She began to cry, her body jerked and thrashed so hard that Lion-o tried to calm her and hold her still.

“They’re killing him!” she screamed. “There’s so much pain, why doesn’t he make it stop?!”

“Panthro?! What’s going on?!” cried Lion-o above the woman’s screams. “What’s happening to her?”

“By Thundera...she’s got the sight!” Panthro took a few steps back in astonishment. “Some female Cheetahs have the rare ability to read minds, to sense thoughts and emotions. She’s still feeling the deaths of the others!”

“Make it stop!! Please! Make it stop!!”

Lion-o didn’t know how to, but he scooped up the woman and got to his feet. He had to get her to the medical bay. If it was still there. He looked towards Tygra, knowing that he at least might be able to help calm her. The tiger was standing there, looking straight at this woman. His eyes were wide with...horror? Fear? Lion-o didn’t know, but Tygra wasn’t moving.

“Kat! Kit! Go with Snarf for a moment!” Lion-o struggled still to hold the woman, she was becoming more than hysterical. “It will be all right! Go outside and see what the rest of the surroundings are like! Tygra! We’ve got to get her to the medical bay!”

Whilst the two frantic children followed Snarf out of the chamber, Lion-o began to head for the medical bay. But Tygra was still not moving. He couldn’t stop looking at the screaming woman, he was fixed to the spot and his face was no longer hiding the obvious pain he was in.

“Tygra!!” Panthro rushed up to him and shook him firmly to get him out of his trance. “She needs you! Hurry!!”

Finally Tygra nodded and at a running pace, both he and Lion-o rushed to the medical bay.

On their way, it wasn’t hard to see the fate of their ship. They had crashed. So much of ship was ripped apart, broken and burnt by fires. Even the medical bay was in chaos. Equipment and supplies were all over the floor, a putrid smoky air choked the room, so much so that it was difficult to find and get to a reasonably clean and unspoilt bed. The cheetah woman still wouldn’t stop her piercing cries and her body was thrashing so much that Lion-o had to pin her down to the bed. When Tygra didn’t go and get any medicines or anything, Lion-o felt once again a surge of anger building up.

“Do something!” he yelled. “Help her! Don’t just stand there!”

“I’m not just standing here, Lion-o!” Tygra snapped back just as harshly. “I’m concentrating! If you’re not quiet you can leave, so let me do what I must!”

“WHAT? Stare at her?!”

“Back off!!”

Tygra shoved Lion-o back and quickly laid his hands on the woman's shoulders. Lion-o was just about to retaliate, furious that this man was being so weak, when he stopped. Tygra had bowed his head, his eyes firmly closed shut. His lips were moving, saying something but Lion-o couldn't hear. He was more than confused, but curiosity caused him to watch on.

Lion-o noticed that, rather than pinning the woman down and trying to prevent her from fitting, Tygra's hands were simply resting, palms lightly touching her spotted shoulders. In a matter of seconds, she seemed to calm, doze softly in a deep sleep and become so still. Lion-o was about to ask what Tygra had done, when he saw that he too seemed to be sleeping. What was going on? He edged closer, hoping that he could get some kind of response from either of them. He touched them both, but they never woke.

"Tygra...what's happening?"

"Why did you endure it?"

Tygra saw the woman's eyes flutter open. Beautiful brown red eyes looked back at him and he was lost. She stood mere inches from him, her pale yellow face so angelic, so stunning. She was very beautiful, he couldn't deny that. Yet this woman was not of his clan, she was someone else entirely. Comparing this cheetah beauty with the tigresses of his past was incomprehensible. Never had he thought it possible to be attracted to someone so different from him. And he was attracted; the surging emotions and heat in his body was hard to describe as anything else.

Her gentle and lyrical voice asked the same question again, her delicate hands touched his skin, running softly along his wounds. He couldn't answer.

All around them, was white, a strange ethereal plain of nothingness. But there was a warm soft breeze comforting and soothing. Tygra was more than confused, for the very few times he had used his gift, this never happened. Minds were never this heavenly. As she touched him, he felt excited shivers run all over his body...his naked body. He tried to pull away, but she never let him.

"Why didn't you cry out?" she asked pressing her own soft furred body against his. "I felt what they did to you...the pain, the burning and tearing...everything. How could you have not screamed at such agony?"

"I try not to show what I feel" he stammered. He inhaled deeply and caught the perfumed smell of her hair.

"You keep all your emotions locked up inside, but they still screamed out to me."

“I wanted to help you. This gift you have...I thought only the priestesses of your kind could be so empathic.”

“Very few of your people can control other’s emotions, telepathically. But you still can’t control your own.”

Her hands rested on his back, forcing him to push closer to her. His own hands slipped to her waist, feeling the silky texture of her fur and the warmth of her body. It felt so good, it excited him. It elated him so much, he gasped with pleasure.

“Right now, we’re linked.” she whispered, “I was so overwhelmed by the deaths of the others. Hundreds, thousands of minds all cried out at the same time , I couldn’t shut them out. But your pain screamed much louder. Let me help you.”

“Who are you?”

She lifted her head and smiled one of the most beautiful smiles he had ever seen. Her lips were mere inches away from his, so full and lush that he wanted to kiss them..

“Don’t you know?”

Cheetara.

A sudden flash of memory came back to him. He had been only a child of six. There was a clear picture of a little girl accompanying her father to a royal celebration. A single look, a gaze and a touch of their hands, a few seconds of connection.

He bowed, his forehead resting on hers and he smiled. His hands reached up and his fingers ran through her soft hair, before he passionately kissed her lips.

Cheetara. How could he have forgotten her?

The horrible cold and hard forms of reality came back to Tygra like a huge punch to the stomach. He staggered back from the bed, gasping for air, choking. All around him, were the ruins of the med bay, twisted metal, broken computers and charred panels littered his vision and his senses. Even the sight of Lion-o seemed to distress him, but the young man had come over and steadied him with a helping hand. Tygra didn’t push him away, he managed to give Lion-o a weakened smile of thanks.

“What did you do?” asked Lion-o looking as Cheetara still slept. “What kind of power...?”

“I tried, but did nothing.” Tygra groaned. “It was all her. She was caught up in the memory of my beating...she had felt my pain...wanted to heal me I guess. She will come round shortly.”

“Panthro said she had the sight. She’s a telepath isn’t she?” asked Lion-o. “And...whoa! Look!”

Tygra looked down and instead of bleeding sores, lashes and cuts, there were only the faint traces of white scars in amongst his fur. Cheetara...she had done this? She was capable of something this powerful?

“She’s so beautiful.” Lion-o approached the sleeping woman and gently touched her silky golden hair. “She’s so soft...warm...”

“Lion-o...let her rest.” Tygra said suddenly. He wasn’t sure why he said it, but it could have been to the dislike of Lion-o touching her like that. Jealousy? Or real sincerity? He didn’t know. But now that she was calmer and more sedate (as was he) the more unpleasant tasks had to be dealt with. “We need to see where we have crashed. It might not be safe and so we must begin to plan for a lair. Go and see Panthro and I’ll be along with her in a moment.”

“What’s her name?” asked Lion-o still not taking his gaze off of her.

“Cheetara.”

The same memory sparked in Tygra’s head. That tentative handshake, her smile...he had watched her walk away with the flow of guests, never seeing her again. Until now.

“Cheetara.” Lion-o grinned and heaved a great and heavy sigh before he gave her hair another gentle stroke. Then, very reluctantly, he turned and walked out of the room.

Tygra feared that the young man was not the only one who was so suddenly infatuated. He feared that he had allowed himself to do so far too easily. Despite his recollection of her, despite the urges to nuzzle up close to her, Tygra forced a strong control over his raging feelings. All his life, through those few relationships he did have, never had one woman caught him off guard like she did. Never one so beautiful and mysterious.

“What have you done to me?” His mind reached out for hers, wondering if it was possible that she could have heard him. “Why am I like this?”

He never got an answer.

From the dark depths and deathly shadows of the broken colony ship, Lion-o emerged to see a much different view. The sun was shining brightly, heating the air around him with a welcomed warmth. It was not nearly as warm or humid as Thundera had been, but it was pleasant enough.

His gaze tracked the long line of destruction that the falling ship had caused. It had torn through part of a forest and all along a great rocky cliff face. The cliff towered above gigantic forests

which circled round it for many miles, yet directly before it, where the ship had lain to rest, were grassy plains very similar to Lion-o's home. They had landed far away, but stopped in such open view, it was no wonder to Lion-o that the mutants had found them. But had they? Had they been the ones who had caused the crash in the first place? Lion-o didn't doubt that. This was the place Jaga had chosen. Third Earth.