Trials

Chapter 2

By Aria Moonsinger

Lion-O looked at her and his heart swelled with pride; then he pulled her towards him and held her in his embrace. “I thought I couldn't love you more than I do right now; I seem to fall in love with you more and more, you truly understand how I feel about my people and what I want for them.” then he kissed her on the lips. Jolene wrapped her arms around his neck; after the kiss, she said “I just wish there was someway I could stop doubting myself.” “There is; but you may not like it.” Lion-O said. “What way won't I like?” Jolene asked. “You could go through your own set of annointment trials to become a thundercat. Before you get too excited; you'll be facing each thundercat that you've been training with, including me.” explained Lion-O.

Jolene's face grew a little pale as she said, “I would have to go up against Panthro, Cheetara and Pumyra, Lynx-O, Tygra and you? Sparing is one thing; but this would be for keeps. If I fail just one trial; there wouldn't be any point in continuing. This is the best that you could come up with?” Jolene then stood up and started to pace the floor. 'How can I go up against them? I'd have to fight my friends; people I respect and admire, plus the man I love.' Jolene stopped and looked at Lion-O; she saw love and respect in his eyes and knew that was for her, plus she knew he would go with any decision she made. 'How can I say 'no' to this. How many people even get asked to join their ranks and stand with them against those who would threaten their way of life and beliefs, not many. I wouldn't want to dishonor them or their Code of Thundera.' She sighed and said, “Okay; I'll do it, I won't like it but I'll do it.” Lion-O smiled at her; then he stood up and walked towards her, when he was in front of her he placed his hands on her shoulders and said, “I know how you feel Jolene; when I had my annointment trials, I wasn't thrilled about it either.” “I guess I won't mind going up against the others; but to go up against you, that's a different story.” she replied. “Oh why?” he asked. “Because to me; it would feel like I'm challenging you for leadership.” she answered. “That's part of becoming a Thundercat, Jolene.” said Lion-O. “I know; but that doesn't mean I have to like it.” she replied. Lion-O pulled her towards him and held her; then kissed the top of her head, he said, “You know; you could just say 'yes' to being annointed and we can forget the trials altogether.” Jolene smiled and looked up at him, “Nice try Red; so when do these trials start?” she said.

Lion-O sighed and said, “It was worth it; next week, by then we'll have the route planned out for you to take and whom you'll start off with.”
The days that followed; Jolene physically and mentally prepared herself for the coming week.
The first day of her trials arrived and Jolene was up before anyone else. She sat in the Council Chamber; waiting to see who would give her the map of her trial route and let her know who she would face off with. Finally Snarf entered the room. “Good morning Jolene, snarf snarf.

You're up awfully early.” said Snarf. “I was up before anyone left this morning; I had a difficult time falling asleep.” Jolene replied. “Well I hope you got enough rest; because your first trial is with Panthro. You'll have to best him in hand to hand combat; when or if you get past him, you'll need to reach the check point before sundown. When you get there; you'll be told with whom you'll have the next trial with.” Snarf said with concern. “I know I'll have to face Lion-O last; all the others will seem like a walk in the park compared to the trial I'll have with him.” Jolene said. “Did he tell you that you won't know what type of trial you'll have with him until you face him?” asked Snarf. “No, he didn't mention it.” Jolene said. “Prr you do know that if you fail to get past just one of the thundercats; there won't be any point in going on.” Snarf inquired. “Yeah and I have to do all of the trials unarmed.” Jolene finished.

“Here is the map that has the route you'll take to reach each thundercat; when you complete and win, each thundercat will give you their insignia to let the next one know you past.” instructed Snarf. “I might as well get started then.” Jolene said. “One other thing Jolene, you'll have to reach Panthro before noon; otherwise, you'll both be battling the high heat as well as each other.” added Snarf. Jolene nodded and took off.
Outside the palace gates; “Snarf has probably told her all she needs to know.” said Lion-O. “You're worried about her chances aren't you?” asked Cheetara. “It shows that much, huh?” he asked. “She'll be fine Lion-O; we've all trained her....” said Tygra and Panthro added, “She's a lot tougher than she looks.” “Besides; Jolene knows what is at stake should she fail or succeed.” said Pumyra. “Still if she succeeds, we'll have a new thundercat...” said Wilykit, “Not to mention a new Lady of the Thundercats after her and Lion-O get married.” finished Wilykat. “Don't you two mean 'when' she succeeds?” asked Panthro. “When she completes the trials this week, she will be a great asset to the thundercats.” said Lynx-O. “Let's not forget there will be a wedding to plan.” said Lion-O. “I best get moving; she'll have to face me first.” said Panthro and took off towards the region once known as the Mountains of the Moon.

Meanwhile; Jolene had just past the settlement and was making her way to the Valley of Youth. She took out her map; “Lion-O told me this place makes people young. I'll have to skirt around it otherwise, I'll end up facing Panthro as a kid.” On the map; the trail was marked, she followed it until she reached a large patch of forest. Looking at her map; “This is labled 'The Iron Glade', hmm doesn't seem too bad now. I'm supposed to go through it to reach the Mountains of the Moon. Better get to it then.” Jolene looked at the postion of the sun and estimated that she had an hour to reach Panthro. When she entered the glade; she felt a strange, but familiar pull towards the center.

“Odd...I can't bother with that now.” she said to herself and followed the path marked on her map. The pull got stronger the deeper she went. “I've felt this before; but where, I can't seem to concentrate....”she said to herself. She turned to follow the strange pull; but couldn't make her feet obey her to actually leave the path she was on. Jolene stood there for thrity minutes; trying to either get her feet to move, or to try and remember where she had felt this sinsation before. She would have stood there longer; but a pinecone dropped on her head. “Ouch. Ooh that smarts.” she said rubbing her head. She looked up and saw the sun had moved. “Damn; I have to get moving.” she said as she took off at a run to get through the glade and reach Panthro. Due to the delay the strange pull had caused; Jolene ended up reaching Panthro right at noon. Jolene looked up and saw Panthro on a plateau. “Jolene Ho!” he called. “Panthro Ho!” she called back then climbed up the rock face to where he was. “You were supposed to be here before high heat.” he said to her. “Sorry Panthro; I got somewhat sidetracked in the Iron Glade.” Jolene replied. “If we wait an hour you'll be behind schedule and be late getting to the checkpoint.” said Panthro.

“Even though it's high heat; we still need to do this.” Jolene said. Panthro knew that high heat was bad enough on a full thunderian; he could tell by looking at Jolene that it was much worse for her. “Okay so if we're gonna do it; let's do it.” he said and started with a few punches with which she was able to dodge; then she threw a few kicks, landing one square in his chest. This threw him off balance which she took the chance and swept his feet out from under him; but he managed to do a back flip and regain his footing. “That was pretty good Jolene.” he said. “You're a good teacher, Panthro.” she replied as she caught him by the wrist and tossed him over her shoulder. He did a handspring and was ready for another attack from her. “You're holding back Jolene.” Panthro said. 'She's not using her empathic ability on me.' he thought. Jolene was starting to get overheated, “Not....holding....back....too hot...”

Jolene panted. “I told you you should have gotten here before now.” Panthro said as he launched himself at her; she managed to dodge him, but neither realized they were near the edge.

“AHH!!!” “PANTHRO!” Jolene ran to grab him; but missed, he caught the ledge with his left hand.
“Panthro hold on; give me your other hand and I'll try to pull you up.” Jolene instructed.
He reached and grabbed her outstreched hand with his right; Jolene started to pull with every ounce of strength she had, sweat poured down her face as she helped the panther back onto the plateau.
“Panthro are you alright?” she asked. “Yeah, I thought I was a goner.” he said then he noticed; “Hey you're not panting anymore; you faked me out!” “Yeah sorry about that.” Jolene said as she helped him stand; when he tried to put his full weight on his right leg, he felt a stab of pain. “Dang blast it!” he yelled. “I thought you said you were alright” Jolene scolded. “I thought I was too; until I stood up.” he answered. “How are you going to get down if you have a bum leg?” she asked. “Good question; I'd have to wait until the trials were over.” he replied. “Oh no; there isn't any shelter from the elements up here, I'll help you down.” she said. “What?! No that isn't part of the trial. You had to beat me in hand to hand combat.” He answered.