Gift from the Stars

By Azmom

Chapter 5

Over the next year, Bengali and Linda experienced the joys, and dilemmas, of child raising. At first, Linda was afraid that the Adoption Agency Department would take Jonalia away from them now that she was an orphan, but with Tygra's testimony of Sabina's last request and the fact that Bengali was the child's biological uncle, the Department granted the adoption. She also wondered if they should have Jonalia call them Mom and Dad or Aunt and Uncle. Bengali suggested that they call themselves Momma and Daddy, and that when she grew older, Jonalia could choose for herself.

Linda found that raising a baby was hard work; there were the late night and early morning feedings with burping and spit ups, the constant diaper changes, the crying that almost never stopped, and the constant worry that she was doing something wrong. Over time though, she learned the tricks to help her through. Pumyra, Cheetara, and Lady Kylynne, who had also given birth to a girl a month after the crash, were a big help with their advice, but her biggest support had come from Snarf. He was amazing with children.

When Jonalia was 2 months old, she developed colic and Linda and Bengali had been at their wits end trying to comfort the poor suffering child. When Snarf had heard of this from his nephew, he rushed to the Tower, took the baby and gave her a bottle that he had made at Cats Lair. Within minutes the baby had downed the bottle, let out a huge burp, then immediately fell asleep.

"Soda and sugar in warm water," he informed the weary parents, "does the trick every time, snarf, snarf." He then sent the two tired adults to bed and took care of Jonalia for the rest of the day.

Linda's favorite time with Jonalia was at bed time. After the baby had her bath, a bottle, and a good burp, she would fall asleep in Linda's arms while she rocked her, humming a lullaby. She would gaze at the sweet sleeping face and wonder at it all. Linda told Bengali that the baby looked a lot like him. Bengali didn't see it, but he smiled anyway.

Soon Jonalia was rolling over and lifting her head, then she began to sit up on her own, and then she started crawling and reaching for things. That was an interesting time for everyone. One minute she would be playing with her Thunder Blocks, the next she was reaching for Lynx-o's braille board, or Pumyra's medical equipment, and once, even Panthro's tools when he had come to do yearly maintainable.

"That kid is quick," Panthro said as he rescued a gyro spanner from Jonalia's small hands. "Did her mother have any cheetah blood in her?" Everyone laughed at this, including the baby who was quickly crawling away with Panthro's Nun chunks.

About the time that Jonalia was learning to crawl, the reason for the crash was finally known. Like the Royal Flag Ship, the Taurean had come under Mutant attack, and like the Flag ship, the residents of the Taurean had decided to head to Third Earth in space capsules. 10 of the members choose to stay awake to pilot the ship, including Jonal, Bengali's brother. Two years out of Third Earth the ship was once again come under enemy bombardment. The ship took heavy damage and 7 of the 10 pilots laid dead. Jonal and the two other surviving pilots, Sakal and Joran, coaxed the ship the remaining way to their destination. Because their radio was gone, they could not call out for help or even receive any messages.

They had used the remaining fuel and power to get to Third Earth and could not slow the ship, so they had hoped to glide the ship in as best they could. However, they were unprepared for the rocky terrain of the Desert of the Sinking Sands. When the ship had skimmed the sharp rocks, it had thrown the remaining pilots around the control room, killing one instantly of a broken neck and paralyzing another. Jonal had tried to regain altitude, but had been electrocuted in the process, allowing the ship to careen out of control.

Everyone agreed that the pilots had done right and that there hadn't been anything else they could have done. The survivors of the Taurean called the pilots heroes. If they had not been determined to reach Third Earth and risk their lives to land the ship, then no one would have lived. That year, many male babies were named in honor of these brave men.

Lion-o was concerned that other ships could be in the same danger and contacted Mandora, New Thundera, and several of the allied worlds. Together, they started a Universal Defense System, protecting ships from enemy attacks and guiding damaged ships to newly formed space ports for repairs. No one wanted another tragedy like the Taurean to happen again. Unfortunately, Third Earth was too far away from the other Allied worlds for proper face-to-face contact, as it took 5 days to go between New Thundera and Third Earth. So in order for the UDS to be run properly it was agreed that Lion-o, as the head of the Universal Defense System, should move to New Thundera.

Soon the residents Cats Lair and the Tower of Omens were preparing for the move to New Thundera. Linda and Bengali had agreed to stay on Third Earth along with Lynx-o, Panthro, the ThunderKittens, and several other Thundarians to maintain the posts found there. Linda was going to miss all her friends, including Snarf and Snarfer, who were going with the Thundercats to help take care of the children. She had come to depend on the lovable creatures when she had problems with Jonalia and hoped that nothing major would happen. She was pleasantly surprised when Snarf came to her and asked her if it would be alright if a bonded couple could stay with them.

Snarfs Oswald and Olena had fallen in love with Third Earth and wanted to stay. They also wanted to stay close to the Thudarians and had offered their services to the Thundercats remaining on the planet. Linda agreed to the request, but with the stipulation that the Snarfs would let her give them time off for themselves. It was agreed upon and Linda felt much better.

Far away rose the eerie sight of Castle Plundarr, the home of the Mutants. They weren't happy with the new Universal Defense System, it was causing them havoc. Every time that they tried to loot an undefended ship, they were chased off by the new Defenders and came away with nothing. On more than one occasion, they returned with less vessels than when they had started out. Slythe was particularly pissed about it and was trying to think of ways in which to do their looting without the UDS knowing and showing up. Every scenario came away with disastrous results. It looked hopeless.

Then Monkian came with news of the Thundercats move to New Thundera and Slythe came up with a sinister plan. They would kidnap the royal children and hold them ransom until Lord Lion-o agreed to disband the UDS. Because Lion-o was such a moral and honor bound man who loved his children, he would agree to it and would have to hold up his part of the bargain, allowing the Mutants to roam the galaxy, terrorizing and stealing to their hearts content. If he refused, the Royal brats would pay the price.

"It's perfect, yesss?" He addressed the other Mutants.

"Nyah ha ha, how do you intend to even get close to those brats? Cats Lair is well guarded." Jackalman pointed out.

"We must wait until the very last moment, when things are confusing." Slythe explained. "With so many people coming and going, they won't be paying attention to who is there."

"Hoo, hoo, I think that even with them that busy, they would noticed a Mutant in their midst." said Monkian.

Slythe grinned evilly. "Not if one of us is disguised as a Thundarian. Vultureman!"

"Haak, yes Slythe?" asked the bird like Mutant.

"Is your latest invention ready?"

"Yes, in fact, I have it here, per your request." He went to a near by table and brought back a strange looking pendant on a silver chain. "This is my Holographic Disguiser. It uses a holographic projection to make one of us look like one of those miserable Thundarians."

Jackalman looked at the pendant with grudging respect. "This might actually work, Nyah, but who will be the one to grab the kids?"

"Why, you are, Jackalman, yesss?" said the Mutant leader.

"What, me?! Nyah ha ha, no way! I'm not going anywhere near the Lair. If they find me with those children, my life won't be worth 2 Plundarr dollars!"

Slythe grabbed the front of Jackalman's uniform, grabbing some skin and fur in the process, and lifted him up into the air. "You'll go and get those brats or the Thundercats will be the least of your problems, yesss?"

Jackalman groan, knowing that he had no choice. "Yes Slythe, as you wish."

"Good," said Slythe as he dropped the Mutant. "Now we need to figure out where we'll stash the brats until their father complies. We are also going to need someone to care for them once we have them."

"Hoo, hoo, what about that old monkian slave woman we captured?" asked Monkian.

"That's a good idea. But does she know anything about taking care of children?" Slythe turned and motioned to one of the guards. "Find the slave and bring her here, and make it quick!" The guard bowed and scurried away.

Within a few minutes, the guard returned, interrupting the Mutants finalizing their plans.

"My Lord, the slave you requested." He thrust forward an older monkian woman who was scarred and battered, having been recently beaten by her captors. She fell to her knees and waited for the Mutants to speak. Slythe regarded her for a moment then spoke.

"What is your name?" He barked. The woman flinched, but never took her eyes from off the floor.

"Maya, my lord." she answered quietly.

"Do you have any experience with taking care of children?"

"Yes, my lord, I was a nursemaid for many years before my masters were murdered."

Slythe nodded his head. "She'll do. Clean her up and assign her a room." He then leaned down and roughly grabbed the woman by the neck, bring her face to face with him. "Try to escape and I will personally cut your throat, understand?"

The slave nodded, then Slythe threw her down. "Get her out of here!"

The day of the Thundercats departure arrived and everyone showed up to help with the loading. Bengali and Linda showed up as well, not only to help, but to say good bye to their friends. They had brought Jonalia so that she could play with her friend, Nalene , Lion-o and Kylynne's baby girl. However they were informed that Nalene had caught a cold and was sleeping in her parents room. Snarf offered to look after Jonalia along with the other children in the nursery while Bengali and Linda helped the others. They agreed and Snarf whisked the baby into Cats Lair.

In the nearby forest, the Mutants watched, waiting for their opportunity to strike.

"Does everyone remember what they have to do?" Slythe asked. The Mutants nodded their heads.

"Good. Jackalman, time to put on the Holographic Disguise."

Jackalman sighed and slipped the pendant over his head. His image shimmered for a minute, then where Jackalman had been standing was now a tall, handsome Thundarian man. "So how do I look?" he asked, then jumped at the sound of his own voice. Instead of his regular hyena like cackle, he had heard a deep throated and strong voice coming from his own mouth.

"Hoo, hoo, Wow!" said Monkian. "Looks like Vultureman finally came up with a winner."

"Yesss, very convincing." the reptile agreed. "Remember, once you have the kids, call us. We'll attack the Thundercats so you can slip away in the confusion. Now get going, and don't come back without those brats!"

Jackalman's new form nodded and headed for the Lair. He entered the courtyard, expecting to be stopped and revealed at an minute, but no one really paid attention to him. He casually walked into the Lair and made his way upstairs to where the nursery was. He looked inside and found his targets. There inside were young Claudus and the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. He also spied Snarf and boldly walked up to him.

"Most honorable Snarf," he said, making a bow, "My Lord Lion-o has requested your presence for a most important duty."

"Snarf, snarf, as if I haven't enough to do. Where is that nephew of mine. He will have to watch the children."

"If you please, I will watch them until the Honorable Snarfer returns."

Snarf regarded the Thundarian man. He looked decent enough, so Snarf agreed, but in the back of his mind he had a strange feeling about this guy. Oh well, Snarf would figure it out later. Right now he had to get to Lion-o.

Once Snarf had left, Jackalman looked around for others. After the coast was clear, he removed a small capsule from his belt and threw it into the middle of the room and shut the door. After a few minutes, he opened the door and found all the children asleep. He grabbed Claudus up in a blanket and the sleeping baby and left, sneaking though Cats Lair until he was close to the entrance. He had to jump into an empty room when he saw a confused Snarf walk past. He then called Slythe on his communicator. Slythe, commence attack.

He then hid until he heard laser fire and explosions outside. Grabbing the children he slipped outside and crossed the bridge while the Thundercats were fighting off the Mutants. To many he just looked like a Thundarian with some luggage trying to get out of the way. He made it safely to the forest where Vultureman waited. He jumped into the vehicle with the children and they took off, their plan successful.

The Thundercats were fending off the Mutants when they broke off attack suddenly and left quickly.

"That's weird," said Lion-o. "I've never known the Mutants to give up so quickly."

"I wonder what they are up too?" asked Oro. "This isn't like them at all."

Suddenly, they heard Snarf yelling from the Lair. "Lion-o, Lion-o!"

"Snarf? What's wrong?" Lion-o felt the hairs on his neck prick up. Snarf looked scared.

Snarf panted, catching his breath, then shouted, "The children, the children are gone!" The other Thundercats gathered around Snarf, shocked by this announcement.

"What?! What do you mean the children are gone?" Lion-o was gripping Snarf by the arms, causing him pain. "Tell me what happened!"

Tygra gently pried Lion-o's hands off Snarf. "Lion-o. You're hurting him." Lion-o released his faithful friend and stepped back, regaining his composure.

Tygra spoke to the nurse maid. "Tell us what happened, Snarf. Leave nothing out."

"Snarf, snarf, I was upstairs with the children when this Thundarian man came and said that Lion-o wanted me. He offered to watch the children while I went to see what Lion-o needed. But when I came down here, Lion-o said he had never called for me, so I went back up stairs. I got to the nursery and found the man gone and all the children asleep. I went to check on the children and found that Claudus and Jonalia were missing. I searched everywhere, but they're no where to be found, Snarrrffff!"

Everyone began talking at once. They asked questions like, Who was the last to see them, who is this mystery man, had anyone else seen him, why would they take the children? Linda and Lady Kylynne ran to the Lair, frantic to find their children. They ran through all the rooms, screaming their children's' names, praying that they would find them, but knowing in their hearts that their attempts where in vain. Their mates had to stop them before they scared the remaining children.

"Where are they?" Wailed Kylynne, "Where is my son?! "Lion-o held her and tried to sooth her while Bengali fought with his own mate.

"Let GO of me!" Linda screamed, trying desperately to get out of her husband's grasp. "I have to find my baby, I have to find my baby!"

"Linda, calm down!" Bengali had to shout to get her attention. "This isn't helping at all. We're going to find her, but not with you acting like this!"

Linda stopped, shocked by her husband's tone of voice, then collapsed. "Why?" she sobbed, "Why would someone take them? Their only children."

"I don't know love, but we're going to find them, I promise."

Vultureman and Jackalman arrived at Fire rock Mountain, the rendezvous point. It was the sight of an ancient, active volcano surrounded by Thundranium, known to weaken Thundarians. They agreed that this would be the best place to keep the children , but they had to take them deep into the mountain so that the Thundranium would not harm the brats. Once inside, the Mutants hooted with laughter.

"Yesss, we will finally bring the Lord of the Thundercats to his knees. Let's take a look at his brats." Slythe unwrapped the boy and smiled in triumph. Claudus was still under the influence of the sleep capsule, so he was unaware of his predicament. Slythe laughed, "Your father had better play nice, boy, or I won't."

He then pulled back the baby's blanket and stared at the sleeping child for a minute, then let out a howl of rage. "Jackalman, you idiot!"

By this time, Jackalman had returned to his original form. He jumped when Slythe yelled. "Nyah ha ha, what?"

"I ordered you to retrieve the royal children, did I not?" asked the reptile.

Jackalman nodded. "Yes, and that's exactly what I did. So what's the problem?"

"Well," started Slythe, "Unless the Lady Kylynne has played her husband false, you grabbed the wrong child! "The blanket was pulled away, revealing a sleeping white tiger infant. Slythe began to advance on the jackal, a look of anger on his face.

"Nyah, Slythe wait! We have the boy, he is the future Lord of the Thundercats! Surely he is enough of a bargaining chip for our plans. And I'm sure the parents of the baby will demand that Lion-o do as we ask to secure the child's well being."

Slythe stopped. "Hm, you may have a point. Maya!" The monkian woman showed up quickly. "Take the brats away and make sure nothing happens to them. Your life depends on it!"

Maya bowed and collected the children, heading to a place as far away from the Thundranium as possible. When she was out of ear shot, she spoke quietly to the sleeping children, smiling at their innocent faces. "Don't worry my dears, your parents will find you and make those who took you pay. I'll protect you until then." She hoped that the children's parents would show up soon. She feared what Slythe might do if provoked.