Spellbound
by Cheezey
(Revised Edition, December 2008)

Chapter Six

The Thundercats of the Tower of Omens had been thrilled, although puzzled, to spot Tygra in the mixed company of Celeste, Damien, Chilla, and the Mutants. They had no idea what the Mutants were doing there at all, and were doubly confused to find Chilla there. It struck them as very strange that she and Tygra would willingly be in one another's company. They landed quickly, intent on finding out as soon as they could exactly what was going on, and the three of them ran to the spot where their missing Thundercat, Chilla, and the two mysterious humanoids faced off with the Mutants.

"Tygra!" Pumyra called as they approached. "There you are! We've so been worried about you!"

"You don't need to be concerned for me," Tygra replied flatly, with a faraway look in his eyes. He did not even acknowledge the presence of Bengali or Lynx-O, and Pumyra had the feeling that he would not have addressed her had she not spoken directly to him.

Celeste drew Tygra close to her and snaked an arm around his waist. "No need to worry, Thundercats, I'm taking good care of him."

Bengali growled, instinctively distrusting the woman. He knew Tygra well enough to see that he was not himself at all, and he was certain that she was the reason for it. Reaching for his hammer, he said, "Is that so?"

Lynx-O, far more diplomatic than his younger companion, addressed the four of them directly. "Are the Mutants giving you trouble?"

Damien glared at the Mutants hatefully. "It's nothing we can't handle ourselves, noble Thundercats."

The situation complicated itself further when WilyKit, WilyKat, and Jackalman ran through the archway and joined the fray in the now rather crowded courtyard. "Over here!" WilyKit shouted to the other Thundercats. They turned to face the kittens, who were both waving as they breathlessly joined them. They did not have time to question their company of Jackalman, as they had not yet gotten a chance to even ask Tygra why Chilla was there.

"Thunderkittens!" Bengali exclaimed. "What are you—?"

“Kill them!” an angry shout from Jackalman to the Mutants interrupted. The Thundercats’ attention turned his way instantly, but it was clear that the Mutant meant Damien and Celeste and not them, that time at least. “They’re some kind of demons! They’ve had me locked me up in their dungeon and nearly tore me to pieces just for watching him,” he gestured to Damien, “sweet-talk Chilla!”

“It’s true!” WilyKit cried out, much to the surprise of both her fellow Thundercats and the Mutants. “Damien locked us up too! He’s some kind of monster!”

With that revelation Celeste shot Damien an angry look and he could hear her voice echo in his mind. *Look at what your foolish impulsiveness has done,* she berated him telepathically. Outwardly, she turned toward the newly arrived Thundercats. “Surely you don’t believe their maniacal ravings? To think that we would harm anyone for something as trivial as eavesdropping, much less terrorize innocent children?”

“You’re a liar,” WilyKat shouted, his young voice ringing high with accusation. “We know what you and your brother are!”

“No, WilyKat!” exclaimed Tygra, horrified that anyone, much less one of his fellow Thundercats, could think of his sweet Celeste as such a thing. “She’s not evil at all. She saved Cheetara’s life! Why would she have been so kind and generous to us only to hurt you?”

“Dear children, you know that *I* did nothing to you,” Celeste added, flashing them a wounded look.

“Not us,” WilyKat argued, “but you did hurt Jackalman with his help.” He pointed to Damien.

“The jackal is a liar,” Damien sneered. “You and your kind know what a treacherous sort the Mutants are.”

“You’re a liar too,” WilyKit accused back. “You did so hurt us, and Jackalman had no reason to lie to us. He may be a Mutant, but he’s telling the truth about you and what you are!”

Tygra shook his head. He did not understand what was going on. While he could almost believe that Damien had done something given that he had seen him be a bit of a hothead when the Mutants had first arrived, he refused believe that Celeste could have been possibly involved. “WilyKat, Celeste is *not* evil. Do you think I’d be here with her if she was?”

WilyKat tried to reason with the tiger. “Tygra, please believe us. You know we wouldn’t lie about something like this. Look at these bruises. Do you think we did this to ourselves?”

Pumyra looked from Tygra to the kittens, unsure of what to think. She was inclined to believe the Thunderkittens, especially in light of Tygra’s odd behavior, but she could not believe that Tygra would willingly defend a villainous creature, either.

Bengali interrupted the debate with an announcement that the Thundertank was arriving. To everyone's shock, the mighty vehicle crashed through the surrounding brush on the one side of the courtyard not surrounded by palace wall, and skidded across the cobblestone patio. Lion-O and Cheetara both leapt out and raced to join their friends.

"Tygra!" Cheetara exclaimed. "You're here!"

Lion-O was relieved to see the Thunderkittens also present, and the Thundercats from the Tower of Omens, who he had not been able to get in contact with directly earlier. He had left a message with Snarfer, but they had landed before it had gone through, apparently, because they seemed just as surprised to see him and Cheetara was he was to see them. He faced Damien angrily. "I know how you treated the Thunderkittens, you bullying monster, and I'm here to stop you from doing further harm!"

"Lion-O, what's going on?" Tygra demanded. "Celeste and Damien did nothing to the kittens!"

"Why won't you believe us, Tygra? What's wrong with you?" The strain of the situation showed in the plaintive note in WilyKit's voice.

"The Thunderkittens are telling the truth, Tygra. The Sword of Omens showed me an image of him, calling himself Lord Damien, and attacking the Thunderkittens. I know you want to believe what they've told you, but these people aren't who they claim to be, Tygra."

"The Sword might have shown a false image," Tygra countered. "Couldn't Mumm-Ra have disguised himself? It wouldn't be the first time."

Cheetara went to Tygra's side. "It wasn't Mumm-Ra, Tygra. We would've known his magic. I would've sensed it. It *is* them. I can sense *that*." She shot a wary, and angry, look at Celeste and Damien.

"If it's any of them it's just Damien," he argued desperately. "Not Celeste!"

Lion-O shook his head. "I'm sorry that she's deceived you, Tygra, but it's true. Cheetara and I put together what we know and what the Sword of Omens showed us with what we learned from the Lunatacs and—"

At the mention of her own kind, the previously quiet Chilla spoke up. "What are you talking about, Thundercat? No Lunatac would ever have anything to do with you or the cheetah," she snarled.

As if on cue, the storage bay of the Thundertank burst open from an electrical blast. RedEye, TugMug, and Alluro had spent the time since the Thundertank had been stopped readying themselves to make their escape, and once they had their way out, they wasted no time getting out and joining the angry crowd.

Chilla regarded the trio of approaching Lunatacs incredulously for a moment, and then glowered at Lion-O. "You locked them up?" she hissed contemptuously. "How dare you treat a Lunatac with such disrespect?"

"Respect is earned and you've earned none," Cheetara snapped at Chilla. "Your friends were stealing *our* Thundrillium."

Damien decided he had heard enough of the entire exchange, and stepped between Chilla and the other Lunatacs. "Don't worry about *them*, dear Chilla. I'll take care of it for you. I'll see to it personally that they will never trouble you—or me—again."

"Don't listen to him, Chilla," Alluro called to her. The psi hoped fervently that she would listen to him, although he had his doubts. In the short time that he had been there, he could already see how changed she was, how taken in she seemed, by the stranger. The sight riled him deeply, and not only because he was concerned for her as a member of his team.

"Chilla, get away from him!" TugMug shouted. "He's not what you think he is!"

The icewalker narrowed her eyes at the other Lunatacs. "I've had enough of your judgments! Damien has treated me far better than any of you ever did. He wouldn't lie to me, but you—" her gaze stopped on Alluro.

"You know I wouldn't, my love," Damien interjected smoothly, and stepped in front of Alluro to block him from her line of sight. He needed Chilla to see him, and only him, to keep her firmly in his influence.

Something in her tone and the way Chilla looked at him stung Alluro more deeply than he ever would have admitted, to himself, her, or any of the other Lunatacs. He took a step forward and addressed her, calling over Damien. "I don't know what he's told you, Chilla, but you're wrong. He's a demonic creature, a mage like Mumm-Ra with a prettier façade. If you won't believe me, that Thundercat Lion-O saw it as well in that damned sword of his after he and Cheetara got the better of us at the excavation site. Do you think that the felines would lie as well, following that ridiculous code of theirs? That man beside you cares nothing for you, Chilla, only for what he can get from you."

"No," Chilla spat back defiantly at him. "I don't believe you."

"I wouldn't believe him either, Chilla, but he's telling the truth, at least about Damien," WilyKit shouted to her. It occurred to her that it was odd to want to say anything to help Chilla, but she supposed it was the right thing to do and that was why.

WilyKat nodded and defended his sister's words. "Damien caught WilyKit and I watching the four of you on the patio and knocked us out, and then he threw us in the dungeon to keep us quiet. Jackalman was already there when we woke up. You have to believe us!" He looked at Tygra, who watched the scene with an unreadable expression. "You believe us, don't you

Tygra? You know we wouldn't lie to you about something like this. You're the one who taught us the Code of Thundera."

"Truth, justice, honor, and loyalty," WilyKit added. "We are telling the truth and we're loyal to you Tygra, because we care."

Tygra did not have time to answer before Celeste spoke for him. She was beginning to feel the hold on her own rage slip, and she narrowed her eyes in displeasure as she addressed the Thunderkittens. "You children are delusional. You've concocted a fantastical account of some attack and kidnapping, and seem to have even convinced yourselves that it's true because you can't handle the *real* truth—that Tygra would rather be with me than any of you," she asserted coldly. "That's what is really going on here, isn't it?" She passed her gaze across each Thundercat's face before speaking again, as if daring them to challenge her. When none did, and when Tygra did not disagree, she spoke again, that time in a menacing and threatening manner. "I suggest you leave my village *immediately*. All of you. You can see that Tygra and Chilla are fine, and perfectly happy. You Mutants have your missing Jackalman and you felines your kitten twins. Go on peacefully before you start something I promise you'll regret."

Lion-O stood his ground and held up the Sword of Omens. "I won't be swayed by your lies, Celeste. The Eye of Thundera knows and shows to me the truth of all things, and none of your powers can persuade me to believe that the Eye of Thundera would be wrong. It'll take more than telling us what we want to hear to get rid of the Thundercats, especially when the life of someone we love is at stake. You've tricked and entrapped Tygra and hurt WilyKit and WilyKat. For those crimes, you must be punished." He raised his sword high. "Sword of Omens, strike for truth, justice, honor, and loyalty, and destroy this evil with divine power!"

Celeste glanced quickly at Tygra, meeting his eyes and magically projecting her will into him. The dazed tiger felt her command, her presence, and her influence fill him completely, and it willed him to stop Lion-O at all costs. The energy within the Thundercat Lord's sword built to a maximum around the eye of Thundera and pulsed through the gleaming metal blade, aiming for Celeste. The desperate tiger then shouted "No!" and lunged at Lion-O with a feral growl as he pointed the mystic sword at his lover. "I love her and you won't harm her, no matter what! She's everything to me, and I won't let you destroy her!"

Everyone gasped as the formerly docile Tygra barreled into Lion-O with adrenaline strength and knocked him over, caught completely off-guard as he never would have expected one of his own Thundercats to attack him in such a way. The enraged tiger kicked the Sword of Omens from the lion's grasp, sending it skittering across the cobblestones. Tygra wasted no time and struck him hard on the head while Lion-O sought to defend himself from the attack without harming Tygra in the process, knowing even as he savagely attacked him that he was not in his right mind.

Adding further to the chaos, Skytomb descended from the sky above to the land behind the palace wall. "Luna's finally here," RedEye said with a frown as he glanced upward upon hearing the noise. "It's about damn time."

Using the distractions to his advantage, Alluro raised his psyche club and dislodged the crystal to float above Chilla's head. One way or another, he had decided, he would see Damien's hold on her broken, even if he had to thrall her himself to do it. "Chilla," he called to her loudly and forcefully. "You can not resist me. You will leave Damien and return with us. You *belong* with us. You will *not* stay with him."

The hypnotist's beam confused Chilla further, but for the moment, Alluro's will proved stronger. "I—I won't stay," the dazed icewalker stammered.

Having his plaything taken away from him was enough to fully incite Damien into a rage, and he faced Alluro with an expression of pure hatred and evil. "Oh no, you won't get her away from me that easily, Lunatac!" he snarled in a booming voice, as cold and sinister as death itself. Damien faced Chilla and thrust his psychic will into her at full force. "Chilla, resist him. He is not your friend. He doesn't care about you, not like *I* do. He wants only to control you, to make you his to use as he pleases, to take from you and hurt you. He is jealous of what we share, and wants you for himself. He is your enemy."

Damien's will flooded Chilla's consciousness, and not unlike the way Tygra had succumbed to Celeste's suggestion, she was overpowered by his presence within her despite Alluro's intervention. The psi's powers of hypnotic suggestion, strong as they were, could not compete with the supernatural will of a demon in possession of a willing body. "Enemy," Chilla then murmured, and turned to Alluro with a cold and contemptuous glare.

"He's using his weapons against you, using his mind powers to try and control your actions," Damien continued, gliding sibilantly to Chilla's side. "It's he that is your enemy, he and the rest of your kind. Get rid of him, Chilla. Get rid of them all."

Chilla met her master's eyes with blind obedience. "He's an enemy… I must get rid of him..."

Alluro's power over her was now completely nullified, and the light in the orb of his psyche club faded and the crystal returned to its holder. Damien let out a smug laugh at the hypnotist's defeat as Chilla faced Alluro with unbridled hatred burning in her eyes. "Damien's right," she snarled with angry frost on her breath. "You're trying to use me, trying to control me," she accused, and spat an icy blast of air at him.

"No, Chilla," RedEye interrupted, but his words fell on deaf ears.

Alluro ducked to the ground and rolled out of the way just as her breath iced the ground where he stood. "You really think I'm using you? And what exactly do you think he's doing to you, Chilla?" he countered. "From what I see, it's he that says 'jump' and you the one answering 'how high?' He's taken you away from your home and those who know you best just so he can easily have his way with you and have you in his power."

His words were met with another angry blast of ice, that one connecting with his ankle. The intense cold burned, but the psi winced and continued, hoping that some part of his reason would

get through to her. "Yes Chilla, he's the one manipulating you like a puppet, but you say *I'm* using you?"

TugMug and RedEye exchanged looks, and charged in to interrupt the scuffle. They intended to make Chilla listen to reason in a more practical way, with a blow to the head to calm her down. She saw the darkling and graviton approach and blew an arctic wind of fury at them, stunning them in a blanket of frost. They were not frozen solid, but it would take them time to recover, and that gave Chilla ample time to refocus her attention on Alluro.

"You're a liar, Alluro, and I hate you," she spat venomously. "I will kill you, all of you! But you'll be first!" The crazed ice warrior dived at the psi and lunged for his throat. No match for her in physical combat, Chilla knocked Alluro over easily and pinned him to the ground. He struggled beneath her, but Damien's power infused her with an unnatural strength that made it impossible for him to throw her off. She circled her cold fingers around Alluro's throat and tightened them.

Damien laughed arrogantly as he sneered at the psi on the ground. "She's mine, Lunatac. She'll always be mine, and I'll enjoy taking every drop of that vital, icy fire in her and making *it* mine as well."

A blazing arrow of fire originating from a balcony above the courtyard lodged itself in Damien's shoulder as he finished his sneering victory speech. "This is the only fire you'll get, you selfish bastard!" Mirlana shouted hatefully, loading up her bow for another shot at him.

Damien whirled to face his assailant, and when he saw who it was, and wearing her old warrior maiden gear no less, his jaw dropped in astonishment, just for a moment. "You... *dare* to attack me? The one who gave you an eternal life in paradise?" he exclaimed in disbelief. "Do you have any idea how many years dead you would be now if I hadn't taken you as my own, you ungrateful little fool?"

"Shut up, Damien!" she hollered back. "I've lived with your ego and fantasy for far too many years now, and I won't anymore! It's over and I'm helping them end it. It may've taken me years to do the right thing, but I've finally had enough. I'll see you and Celeste burn and your evil wiped off the face of Third Earth once and for all!"

The angry former warrior maiden turned to the stunned crowd of Thundercats, Mutants, and Lunatacs gathered in the courtyard. "Don't let Damien and Celeste deceive you any longer! They're not the pleasing creatures they seem to be. They'll lie and connive and scheme to get you to trust them until you're so caught in their web of pleasure that you don't see what they're doing until it's too late." She eyed the enraged Tygra and the hateful Chilla operating under their masters' wills, and shouted to them directly.

"Tygra, Chilla, if you don't believe your friends, listen to me as one who's been in your shoes. Little by little Celeste and Damien will sap your life, feed on your vitality, and change you into a weak shell of a being that lives forever in this place, but only as their slave, doomed to die if you ever leave the borders of this village. Slowly they'll take away your free will and

energy until you have no choice but to be their slave, and then when they finally exhaust you of the last of your mortal fiber they'll discard you and find another, then another, then another, and it never stops! I know because I was one of Damien's victims a lifetime ago, and believe me I know and I've seen what they're capable of. The young ones and the jackal are telling the truth. Don't let this go on another night! Stop them now. Destroy them with whatever weapons you have and burn this unholy place to the ground. It's the source of their power. Free all the lost souls like me condemned to live in their pretty hell of lies. Do it now!" With that, she swung off the balcony onto the ground with the others.

As the ex-slave spoke, a look of horrified realization crossed the faces of all of the outsiders but Chilla, who was still choking Alluro, and Tygra, who was still fighting Lion-O. The Thundercat Lord was still trying to hold Tygra off without harming him, but it was becoming increasingly more difficult as while Tygra was formidable on his own, with magic fueling his insanity, he was even more fierce.

Damien howled in outrage. "You'll pay for this outrage with your life, you pitiful ingrate!" He threw his head back and growled inhumanly as he shifted fully into his demonic form. His features twisted into their exaggerated, evil visage while his body grew in size and strength. His immortal form was an imposing sight even to those who had seen it, and his entire being radiated with an intense hatred. He charged at Mirlana with his claws bared.

"Oh no you don't," Jackalman snarled, and while it was not the most noble or dashing attack, smashed a nearby wooden end table over the demon's back. Heroic stunts were hardly a part of his nature, but Mirlana had been an ally to him when he needed help, and he certainly had no love for Damien.

Jackalman's aggression spurred the other Mutants into action, as well as the remaining Lunatacs. Trusting in Mirlana's instructions, they grabbed the torches, candles, and braziers set around the courtyard and began setting fire to the bushes, palace walls, and other neighboring buildings in the village.

Tygra did not relent in his assault on Lion-O. "I don't want to hurt you, Tygra," Lion-O gasped as he grappled with the spellbound tiger. "I know this isn't you doing this to me. It's her, Tygra. She's evil. Do you really believe that someone with good intentions would urge you to destroy your fellow Thundercats?"

Celeste laughed wickedly. "Oh give it up, Lord Lion-O. You lost your dear Tygra to me long ago."

Cheetara twirled her staff defiantly and swung at Celeste. "You haven't won anything yet," she snarled she brought down the end of her weapon on the demoness' head.

Celeste shrieked in fury and fell backwards, scowling. When she landed, she joined her brother and transformed into her own supernatural, evil form. She drew herself to her full, terrible height, and shot Cheetara with an intense beam of dark electrical magic, sending a painful shock through every fiber in her body. The cheetah let out a pained cry and dropped to her knees.

Lion-O rolled out of the way of yet another kick from Tygra. "Tygra, please, listen to us!"

"I won't let you harm her, Lion-O. I love her!" Tygra growled.

Desperate to bring his friend to his senses, Lion-O tried one final tactic. He scrambled away from the tiger's hold and called Sword of Omens back to his hand. "This is the only way left I know of to bring you back to us, Tygra." He raised the sword high and began the familiar chant. "Thunder—Thunder—Thundercats Ho!" The mystic Sword of Omens responded to its master's call and extended to full length. A mighty roar came from the Eye and it projected the Thundercat signal high into the sky.

An amber glow filled Tygra's eyes along with the eyes of each of the other Thundercats present. Their love and awareness of the truth about Celeste filled his mind and forced her wicked will out of him once and for all. "Great Jaga," Tygra murmured, stumbling back as he was overcome with a rush of emotion. "Wh—what came over me?" Terrible memories of Celeste's manipulations and his attack on Lion-O came back to him, and when he looked over at Celeste for confirmation, he saw the terrible sight of her in her true demonic form. "You... you did this to me! You said you loved me…"

Celeste pouted in mock contriteness. "Oh dear Tygra, don't tell me that you'll let a little thing like *this* come between us?" she sneered. "And to think I had such great plans for us!"

Mirlana held out his missing bolo-whip. "Tygra! I think you'll be needing this again," she shouted, and tossed it to him.

He caught it and lashed it into the air, his strength and power now fully restored by the Eye of Thundera. He stared at Celeste once again, a sad feeling of regret within him. "How could I have ever loved a creature as evil as you? You never loved me. You wanted only to destroy me."

"And one way or another, I will," she said viciously. "I don't lose my battles, striped warrior." She drew back and flung a beam of dark energy at him.

The tiger instinctively lashed his whip and deflected it away from him, and snapped it again in her direction. The demoness drew back, only to be met with a blast from Bengali's hammer and a few exploding marbles courtesy of Pumyra. Lion-O did not wait for her to recover and raised the Sword of Omens one more time. "Ho!" he shouted, and the obedient beam from his sword struck Celeste directly, knocking her backwards.

Several feet away, Chilla still had Alluro pinned to the ground in an icy grip of strangulation. Desperately he reached up and pushed at her as hard as he could, lessening her grip enough so that he could speak. "He's turned you into such a willing slave that you'll even kill for him now?" he choked in disgust.

"Shut up, Alluro," she snarled. "I'm not his slave. He loves me, and I won't let you or anyone else destroy that!"

"Loves you?" he rasped, getting enough air now that he could breathe and gain the strength to finally get out from underneath her. He rubbed his sore neck and scrambled to his feet. "You think he loves you, Chilla? Didn't you hear that warrior maiden say what he does? He doesn't love you. He wants your energy. He's a psychic vampire, turning you into a weak zombie and a slave and you're letting him do it. If that's love, Chilla, I'd like to see what he calls hatred."

"No," Chilla argued defiantly. "You're jealous, like he said! He's promised to spend the rest of our lives together, in paradise, happy. You just can't stand to see me happy, can you?"

Alluro narrowed his eyes, doing his best to brush off the sting in her words. "Look at him, Chilla," he retorted. "Does the thought of spending the rest of your life with *that* make you happy?" He pointed at Damien in his hideous demonic form, cornering Mirlana and Jackalman against a wall.

Something in Chilla snapped when she saw Damien as he really was. "No," she murmured in stunned shock. "That's—that's Damien? It can't be."

"It *is* him!" Mirlana shouted when she saw Chilla looking at them. "That's what he is! Don't let him fool you any longer!"

Damien spun around and saw Chilla staring at him, the recognition of him and his lies apparent in her cold eyes. "Chilla, darling, I can explain..." he intoned in the soft, charming voice he had used in his humanoid illusion. Matched to his demonic face, it was jarringly incongruous.

The icewalker's shocked visage yielded to disgust, and then hatred as her own will came back to her and she saw his manipulations for what they were for the first time. The knowledge of his betrayal and the humiliation of him making a fool of her caused an icy fire of hatred to roil within the very depths of her soul. Alluro, standing beside her from where they had been fighting, watched her expression change with first relief and then smug satisfaction as her true nature re-emerged.

Chilla snarled, exhaling vaporous frost from her nostrils in rage, and faced her ex-lover. "You lied to me, Damien. You *used* me!" She inhaled sharply and spat an icy gale of wind at him. "No one treats me that way and lives to brag about it!"

Surprised and irritated that his hold on her had been broken so fully, Damien scowled, but still dodged her frosty breath with ease. "Well Chilla, it is indeed a shame that you've chosen your worthless friends over a life with me. Because now… you'll have to die right alongside them." The male demon then fired a powerful blast of magic from his palms directly at Chilla, and although she tried to move out of the way in time, she could not, and it struck her hard in the abdomen. Painful electricity coursed through her cold body and instantly she fell unconscious. Alluro reached for her, and caught her limp form in his arms before she fully hit the ground.

Damien's confrontation with Chilla provided enough of a distraction for Mirlana to load up another fire arrow and take careful aim at him. The demon saw what his former slave was doing

a second too late, and with a whoosh her blazing arrow plunged into his body, piercing his supernatural heart.

With a quick survey of the scene around him, Lion-O saw that he now had the opportunity to strike at both of the demons with pure magic that could negate their evil magic, the magic of the Sword of Omens. He knew it to be effective against Mumm-Ra and he hoped in the name of all of his ancestors that it would be equally effective against Celeste and Damien. He raised his sword high and called on the power within the Eye embedded in its hilt. "Sword of Omens, banish these evil creatures to a realm from which they can never harm anyone ever again!" he shouted, his voice full of the authority and command befitting the Lord of the Thundercats.

Obliging the wishes of its master, The Eye of Thundera pulsed with great energy, and a cluster of light formed around it. It grew into a brilliant ball of white fire, and polarized itself into a spectacular ray of light as it shot up the gleaming metal of the Sword of Omens. As it left the very tip of the magical sword it split into two beams. One struck Celeste, and the other Damien. Each howled in pain as the light magic penetrated their bodies and their dark souls, consuming them and tearing apart the very fabric of their being. There was a brilliant flash around them both, followed by an explosion as each demon burst into a hellish ball of flames with one last anguished scream, before they vanished out of existence entirely.

The demise of their masters caused the existence of the entire village, now half afire due to the actions of the Mutants and Lunatacs anyway, to begin to fade out of existence as well.

It was then that Mirlana lost all her strength and fell to the ground, shaking violently.

Jackalman reached for the warrior woman. "What's happening?"

She winced as her skin began to tug and wrinkle, while her bones and muscle within weakened and fell apart. "It's the end of me," she croaked out. "Their power, their evil power, was keeping me alive. Now that power is gone, so I will be too."

"Nyah, but you aren't one of them," he said, not fully understanding what she was talking about. "You helped us. You helped *me*," the jackal continued, doing his best to hold her up. He had grown to respect the warrior woman, and it did not sit well with him that she was falling apart, literally, before his eyes now.

Mirlana fell against him and looked up at him with the weak smile of a pained old woman. "I'm glad I could. Take good care of yourself, my friend," she said weakly.

Lion-O came over to her, and he was shocked to see her hair now gray and her body weak and frail, covered with the spots and wear of age that he had only seen in one very old and wise warrior maiden that Willa had told him was unnaturally old for their tribe. Even as he stood there, he could sense her life force flooding away from her, and he could tell that she was feeling the pain of impending death. "You were very brave," he told her somberly. "The Thundercats will never forget how you helped us defeat them when our friends needed it, and when you knew it meant losing your own life. I admire your courage."

A spasm of pain exploded in her abdomen, and she doubled over in the throes of death. "Terrible as it is, dying's no worse than spending another lifetime with them," she whispered. "I hope the gods forgive me for all the things I've done… that they won't be too cruel in their judgment."

"I believe they will," Lion-O assured her. "May the gods be with you." He lowered his head in respect and sadness.

Mirlana could no longer speak, only grunt a response to him. She used the last of her energy to look at him, and then one final time at the jackal holding her. Her eyes held the silent message of "goodbye" before her vitality disappeared completely and she collapsed into an empty heap of ashen bone and clothing onto the forest floor.

Jackalman stared at her remains sadly, but was shaken out of his depressing thoughts when Slythe, Monkian, and Vultureman came up behind him.

"Hoo hoo, this place is burning fast. We have to leave before we burn with it," Monkian warned them.

"Yessss," Slythe agreed. "Let's get back to Castle Plundarr."

The Mutants exchanged nods and headed back to their vehicles, except for Jackalman, who remained long enough to gather what he could hold of Mirlana's remains—her clothing, her arrow and quiver, a few large bones, and her skull. Holding what he could, he climbed into the back of Vultureman's flying machine. Soon all four Mutants flew off into the night.

Chilla stirred back into consciousness in Alluro's arms. The hypnotist helped her to her feet as TugMug and RedEye joined them. "Where's Damien," she murmured. "Is he dead?"

"Lion-O blasted them with his damned sword. I don't think Damien will be chasing you again anytime soon," TugMug informed her.

RedEye motioned to the shadow of Skytomb looming in the distance. "Let's get back to Skytomb now, before that short little tyrant and her pet get tired of waiting and leave us behind. We've had enough of this nonsense and we got what we came for. Now let's leave before we burn up with this place."

"Right," Alluro agreed.

The exhausted Chilla leaned heavily on Alluro as the four Lunatacs made their way back to the fortress. Once they rejoined Luna and Amok inside, the dark mobile fortress roared to life and ascended into the night sky above, leaving only the Thundercats behind in the burning remains of the palace.

Tygra stared at the ground full of regret and shame. “I can not tell you all how sorry I am for all the trouble I’ve caused you. The way I acted—I didn’t deserve for you to save me, but you did anyway. And for that I am and will always be thankful.”

Cheetara offered him a smile. “You were in love with her, Tygra. It’s such a powerful emotion, it does funny things to you and everyone else it affects. What’s important is that you came through for us when we needed you, and that you’re back with us now.” She put a hand on his shoulder.

“And we’re very glad to have you back, my friend,” Lynx-O added.

“That’s right,” Lion-O agreed. “In your heart you are and will always be a Thundercat. You’re forever one of us, and even Celeste and all her wiles couldn’t defeat that. I’m still proud to call you one of us.”

“I just hope your taste in women improves before next time,” Bengali remarked with a teasing smirk.

WilyKat looked around at the wasted and burning village around them. “Come on, let’s get back to the Lair, okay? I’d like to put that awful dungeon and the rest of this place behind me.”

Tygra gave the boy a smile. “That’s the best suggestion I’ve heard all day.”

The Thundercats climbed into their vehicles and went home, leaving the remaining embers of the unnatural village to burn out of existence forever in the depths of the unicorn forest.