Stolen Hearts
Prologue: Reunion

By Knight Writer

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Thundercats: Stolen Hearts

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My name is Kayzin. I am not a writer by any means, and I do not mean to over-dramatize the events told within this journal. I do not seek to cash in on my involvement in the terrible events described within, nor do I wish any fame. I am writing this as a sort of mental therapy, to remove the poison of these memories.

Memories...

I remember, when I was a kitten on the old Thundera, my father sitting me on his knee and giving me these words of wisdom.

"Never raise more devils than you can lay down."

I believed those words. I lived by them as best I could. My dad, however, hadn't told me about devils that got back up.

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I remember the day it all began. I awoke at first light filled with anxious joy. Today was the day. I had showered first thing, having gotten off late from work the night before and being too tired to care about sleeping in my own sweat. I knew I would have to wash the sheets, but that could wait.

After a most relaxing cleansing, I studied my reflection in the bathroom mirror. Skin a pale orange, with black stripes at consistent intervals across my shoulders and down my arms. My body was rather lithe, lacking most of the bulk of Tygers. The mane of shoulder-length blonde hair peppered with black spots gave the most telling evidence of my Cheetah mother. In the genetic battle which decided my appearance, my mom and dad had fought a draw.

A good shave later, I judged myself presentable and left to find an outfit. New Thundera kept to the old ways for the most part, except where clothing was concerned. The scattering of our race had taught us one universal truth. People can get rather distracted when dealing with those who are naked and supremely unconcerned about it. Aside from that, New Thundera enjoyed a nice tourist trade, and nudity was definitely not for the kiddies.

Tourism. Sorry to go off-topic, but I don't know when this will be read, so I have to. Our world's architecture and art had seen exposure while our people were separated. When the homeworld was restored, countless beings from across the galaxy wanted to see it.

Hey, we needed the money.

New Thundera wasn't a resort planet, but everyone was welcome to see it. Trade and technology also brought enormous boons to our economy. Our race had never rode higher.

Anyway...

I had opened my small closet in search of some decent clothes. Most Thunderians wore tight, revealing outfits and I had my share of those. This day, however, demanded something a little different.

The synthetic fabrics almost tingled against my skin as I slid them on. Boxers first, natch. Then the charcoal slacks with a flat black belt. A white button down adorned my torso, followed with a dark silk necktie. I glanced up at the box which held other personal effects. No, I decided, I wouldn't need all that. My attire would draw enough stares. After one last glance in the mirror, I settled down to decide what in my modest fridge I'd have for breakfast.

Coffee. There's a drink few on New Thundera could get right. Some shops did make an honest effort, I will say that, but most just made black sludge that was only fit as an industrial solvent. Mine, and I am not boasting, was pretty good, at least by my standards. Leftover meatfruit from the northern Berbil colonies whipped into a two-egg ommelette and toasted bread made for a decent breakfast. The newspaper - I eschewed the televised reports - told of climbing revenues and progress being made in synthetic Thundrillium research. The Nobility realized that our main source of energy could not be infinite, and was already researching alternatives before the supply ran low. Credit for that went to Sir Panthro, head of technologies and engineering. Of course, such funding had to be approved by Lord Lion-O, who had done so without a second thought. Very forward thinking of him.

I checked the time. I had finished the paper, and had disposed of the tabloid rag that some unkind soul had subscribed me to for a little cash, just before noon. Time to get off my lazy ass and hit the markets.

I have to go off-topic again here, but I think it's necessary to describe where I lived. The topography will be important.

I called the south side of New Thundera City home. The NTC, as most residents called it, was the capital city of New Thundera. At its heart resided a radically redisigned Cat's Lair, around which were the Royal Gardens. From the Central District, the city was divided into four quadrants.

There was the political North District, where lawmakers would hammer out new legislations to be presented to Lord Lion-O, or to the other Nobles who catered to those not high enough on the political food chain to gain an audience with the king.

To the east was the heavy industrial Easter District, from which the ores mined from the planet's surface were processed into the raw materials needed for our technologies and basic comforts.

The Western District was the main tourist trap. Most of the specialty shops (and by specialty, I mean expensive) were located there. New Thunderian fashions were always on sale, museums of art and architecture were open to one and all, and the highest-priced restaurants anywhere on the planet called that place home.

The South District contained all the heavy industry and R&D labs. The south district also held the spaceports for visitors and destinations for the air and sea vehicles from other parts of the planet.

I worked as a Cargoman at Thundera Spaceport. Basically, I made sure that freight from Starship A made its way to Destination B without incident. It was a modestly-paying job, and fairly anonymous. I liked the last part.

I'd had enough time in the limelight.

Back to it!

I walked the narrow streets of the southern district in a kind of daze, letting my feet find their way to the local package store. I needed something special, and I knew that place would have it. Vintage Thunderian Firewine. It was the Anniversary, so only the best.

Anniversary. No, it wasn't between me and some lucky woman. In fact, I'd never married then. I know, you're screaming, "MALE FEAR OF COMMITMENT!", but that's not the case. I didn't want these memories of mine, and the nightmares they caused, spoiling the love between me and a woman.

I said I would not over dramatize these events, and I will not. What I have written is true. I have many horrible memories. I have seen many things worse than the history texts of the Nobility's time on Third Earth. I have seen evil that would make the storied Mumm-Ra cringe.

But now is not the time to go into that. I will, much as I hate to, but not now!

I am as Thunderian as you (assuming, of course, that you are Thunderian). I am also as male as any being in the galaxy which bears a penis. Let's face it, I love the ladies. From time to time,

I've been known to hit the local drinking hole (In the south district, the place was named Shooters) in search of companionship. No, let's be honest. I'd strap on the beer goggles and see where the night would take me. More often than not, the night would lead me back to my apartment drunk and alone.

On a few occaisions, I would wake up with a second heartbeat pounding in my head and an unfamiliar weight on my arm. I would open my eyes and see a rather lovely female asleep on that appendage, thankful to have avoided a coyote morning yet again. Sometimes, these trysts would evolve into second or third dates. But, never farther than that.

I found myself before the package store and entered gladly. Along the right-hand wall of the small structure I found a bottle of three-year-old firewine, which I brought to the counter. Upon buying it, I set off to a local butcher for meatfruit and Thunderian lobster. This night had to be special.

It was dark when the knock came at the door. I didn't bother to ask who it was. I went across my modest apartment and, on opening the door, fond feelings went through me.

His hair was still a waxen blonde, stretching down to his shoulders. He had high cheekbones and large green eyes, his ears sticking out to tapered points paralell to his head. The blue jumpsuit showed all his angular features with the utmost flattery.

"What's up, Thunder Cop?" he asked with a rogue's grin.

"Same old shit," I had replied. This man was the only one in the galaxy who could call me Thunder Cop without a racist tone.

He was also the only one who could call me that at all without picking his teeth out of his shit.

"No news is good news, eh?" Kalsa Morgan said.

"Always," I replied as we began our ritual. Palm slap, backhand slap, fist pound, palm grasp, and quick hug, It was our signature from the old days.

Before I go any further, I should give a little background. Twenty years ago, just before the destruction of Old Thundera, I was a young stripling who enjoyed a position as a Royal Guard of the Court. Barely twenty, I was a buck sergeant when the order to hit the stars came.

By pure luck of the draw, I had been given a spot on the first convoy of ships destined for a new home somewhere out there. My convoy never made it. I now know that none of our ships made it to that promised land, or, if they did we have still had no word.

A freak meteor shower had hammered our small convoy just before we could enter hyperspace. It had left our engines damaged beyond hope of repair, our sheilds barely usable, and our weapons completely out of commission. For ten weeks we plodded through space, each day seeing hope dwindle and tensions rise.

Finally, we found the planet Thardus III.

Home to dozens of species from throughout the galaxy, Thardus III boasted an industrial society to rival Thundera. Our ships hadn't even been allowed to land, on account of them being too badly damaged to suvive atmospheric re-entry. On emergency transports, our convoy had been conveyed to the surface.

I won't go into detail regarding the aspects of the following weeks, partly because they're irrelevant to the events I'm writing about and largely because I don't recall the details. I was in pretty bad shape when we made planetfall. Long story short, we took the only option available to us. Six thousand homeless Thunderians found themselves integrated into the society of Thardus III.

All was not wine and roses. I will admit to that. By and large, we were accepted, but there were sects of society who rejected us outright.

Don't you just love blind racism?

Anyway, once recuperated, I found myself with a slight dilemma. Thardus III had a parliamentary government and, naturally, this meant no royalty in need of guarding. I needed work, my government issued assistance was drying up, and I finally found something I could sink my teeth into. I joined the capital's police force. I was the first, and only, Thunderian ever to join the thin blue line.

I started out as a beat cop, walking my assigned area of the city and reporting to various civil disturbances. Crime, it had seemed to me at the time, was far higher than on Thundera. I know better now, but then I missed the absolute authority of the monarchy.

I rose through the ranks despite some misgivings about my heritage. I had to prove myself every day, and mostly I won the respect of my comrades. Finally, after three years, someone in the top brass had seen something in me that deserved serious recognition. I found myself promoted to Lieutenant, and given the title of Detective.

And that's where Kalsa Morgan comes into it. Originally from the planet Rinza, he had been assigned as my partner. Five years my elder on the force, he had been completely unlike any other officer I had met. As a Rinzian, he had also felt the sting of racial discrimination. Over the

years we served together, we closed countless cases and gained the respect of the brass and the beat cops below us.

We worked in Homicide.

There is more to our shared past, but I won't go into it now. It's not time yet. I will, however, say that in our years working together, we developed a tight bond. We came to know each other on an elemental level. It was deeper than friendship. Closer than brotherhood. When you can trust your life and sanity to the man next to you day in and day out while investigating such horrible crimes, and that trust is reciprocated, you'll know what I mean.

"Tell me you got it," I'd said when he entered my apartment. From within his small suitcase he produced two bottles of amber liquor.

"Tarkezian single malt," he said with a wicked grin, "twenty-one years old and looking to get drunk."

"Well, let's not keep them waiting," I said around a laugh as I shut the door. The scent of lobster and meatfruit stew hung lazily in the air as we made for the kitchen. I'm not an accomplished chef, and my best efforts wouldn't fetch crap in the glitzy restaurant district, but for a batchelor I do okay for dinner.

As we ate, accompanied by the Firewine I had procured earlier, our conversation touched on the usual topics.

"So, how's yer hammer hangin'?" Kalsa asked me with a wink.

"Short, shrivelled, and slightly to the right," I replied. Kalsa roared with laughter, having taken quite a few shots of Thunderian rotgut. "How 'bout you?" I was a sheet or two into the wind, myself. "Who's the playboy detective swingin' on his arm these days?"

"Ah, no one special." By which he meant no one at all. It was as close to his divorce as we ever came to discussing. "Nice place, by the way."

"It ain't much, but it's home. How long ya here?"

"'Bout a week. Thinkin' of callin' this place home."

"No shit?" I asked, stunned.

"Yep. Just cashed in my retirement from the force. I ain't bearin' the gold shield anymore."

"Get the fuck out?!" I couldn't believe it.

"Yeah," Kalsa said before taking another shot. "WHOO! Too much more of this, an' I won't make it!"

"You loved the grind!" I exclaimed, still shocked.

"Not any more," he said gravely. "Not after... you know."

"Yeah." I knew. By all that's holy, I knew.

The hours ticked by as we talked and drank. The Firewine was gone, and we were sticking to coffee for the time being. One bottle of the good stuff sat between us on a small round table, accompanied by two tumblers. We each sat in the overstuffed recliners I had managed to find for cheap when I first rented the apartment.

We spoke of old times, old cases, old loves. Not of the real reason we were sitting in my foyer. When it seemed the memories were drying up, we both looked at the clock on the western wall.

Two-fifty AM.

No further words were needed. In silence, I uncorked the bottle. Tarkezian single malt. Perfect. I filled both tumblers with the golden nectar and we each took one. This may be a touch of over dramatization, but I could swear that I could hear each tick of the old clock as the minutes counted down. Still, no words passed between us. The silence was pregnant with anticipation. Ten minutes had never before, or since, seemed so damned long.

Three AM.

"We got the son of a bitch," I said, raising my tumbler in a toast.

"We sure as fuck did," Kalsa replied, clinking his tumbler against mine. The booze slid down my throat like liquid velvet, smooth with a clean finish. If you ever lay hands on a bottle of Tarkezian single malt, especially a batch that old, make sure you savor it.

At that moment, I could have sworn I felt an old, weeping sore in my mind finally scab over. It had, at last, seemed real.

The son of a bitch in question was the worst case of our career. Before I give you a backstory on him, I should explain a few other things. I have already told you that Kalsa and myself were homicide detectives on Thardus III.

The first thing I should point out is that homicide, or more bluntly, murder was a crime that was nearly unheard of on Old Thundera. Despite countless attemtps at conquest by the Mutants of

Plun-Darr and the casualties inflicted by their raids, one Thunderian murdering another was always big news. It was one of those things that just Was Not Done.

On Thardus III, it was done. Often. And messily.

The history texts describe Mumm-Ra as the worst evil any Thunderian had ever faced. I know better. The worst, the purest, evil lived not in a pyramid.

It lived within the hearts of all beings.

Again, this is not over dramatization. This is reality.

The two of us, over the ten year course of our career, had handled more murder cases than either of us could count. The typical murder was often the one most easily solved. For the most part, murder is a crime of passion, a jilted lover taking vengeance in the heat of the moment. Other times, it was a combination of too much stress, too much drink, and repressed bitterness that turned an ordinary person into a raving killer for a brief span of moments. One of the most disheartening cases I can recall involved a man who had killed his brother over a book.

Disgusting, I know. Ridiculous and disgusting.

These cases usually solved themselves, despite what popular entertainment depicts. The killer, mortified and penitent, more often than not confessed immediately and copped to whatever lesser charge the system could dole out. If I had a credit for every time I'd heard "I didn't mean to!" or "Why didn't he just back off a little?" I could open my own charter fishing business on the coast of the west district.

Some true idiots would actually try to hide their guilt, thinking that watching every episode of a forensic drama (and trust me, forensics is far from dramatic) enabled them to fool law enforcement. Among these were career criminals, who killed a victim they had tried to rob, or knocked off a rival sumbag. However, crooks liked to boast, and word would get to us one way or another. A criminal brags about a person he killed to another, the other one gets bagged for something and then coughs up the first asswipe in exchange for a lesser charge.

Can you see why our closure rate was so high?

But, there were others.

A few (more than the one about which I am writing) killed not out of passion or criminal gain. Some murdered others for the sheer thrill of it. They were clever, leaving no evidence at the scene of the crime. They stalked their victims like game animals, murdered them in the most brutal and ritualistic ways, and left them for us to find.

These killers enjoyed their sick game of (no pun intended) cat and mouse. They hid in plain sight, ordinary men (I never knew a woman to behave this way) leading ordinary lives on the

surface. They got off on their notoriety, often provided by the media free of charge, and lived not only for the chase and the kill, but on the fear of those around them.

Our last case together, and my last one period, had been known as the Thief of Hearts. We had other names for that motherfucker, and none of them were anywhere near as romantic. The news media of Thardus III, in their lust for ratings (and to hell with the fact that they were impeding our investigation by helping spread terror), gave him that monicker for reasons that were grossly obvious. Loathe as I am to delve into the sordid details, I will write them here. Better on the screen than in my head.

The Thief of Hearts stalked only young, lovely women. All such killers I know of have done the same. Upon abducting a poor soul, he would spend days raping and torturing them to his black hearts' content. He would then leave them in trash dumps in different parts of the Thardian capital.

With a gaping hole where the heart should have been.

The forensic scientists would always remark about the neatness and precision with which that organ was removed. Also, they would report much to our displeasure, that the operations were performed pre-mortem.

Our horror, and rage, were immesurable.

And, he would taunt us. On the backs of his victims he would carve cryptic warnings about future murders.

It took us a year, and a total of twenty victims, but we got him.

The chase for this assbag had taken so much. So many families destroyed, including Kalsa's. Our obsession for catching the Thief of Hearts had eroded his marriage. His wife had long since left him when our chase was done.

The top brass had offered me my retirement pension several decades early. I gladly took it. Over the course of the trial, I had reached my limit. I could no longer deal with such horrors.

But, I stayed on Thardus III. Understand that, by the time of the trial, our home planet had been restored. Out of the now seven thousand Thunderians on Thardus III, I was the only one who stayed. Even the dead had been taken to be interred in our home soil. All but two of them had been the Thief's victims. I'll touch on that later.

I had to see it through to the end. I had to see him die.

Which is why Kalsa Morgan was in my modest apartment in the south district at three AM that fateful morning. Five years to the day, the very minute, we had watched him be strapped into the chair and subjected to total disintegration. I swear I could smell his nuts cooking.

Now, if you are Thunderian, I am sure you are appalled at my words. A Thunderian wanting to see someone executed? I am also sure that you are wondering if I had forgotten the Code of Thundera.

Truth.

Justice.

Honor.

Loyalty.

I know. I love and honor the Code as much as you do. But, you weren't there. You never had to look into the eyes of parents or husbands as you broke the news that their daughter, or wife would never come home again. You never saw the devastation as their hearts were shattered as cruelly as a victim's had been removed.

You never saw the sons and daughters left behind, not even old enough to comprehend that Mommy was gone forever.

In that one span of my life, I decided "Fuck the Code." I wanted this monster dead.

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END PROLOGUE