ThunderCats

Bio-Booster Armor Guyver

One Last War To Fight

Episode One: Awake

By Knight Writer

The brackish waters in the ancient couldron roiled and frothed as Mumm-Ra stood before it. His ancient, decrepit hands lashed out over the raging pool as the magic calmed the fluid enough to see.

The devil priest saw the raging storm outside the walls of the Black Pyramid, torrents of rain beating mercilessly down on the Korath Mountains, an area that had been dead since the fall of Second Earth over two thousand years past. It had once been the site of a wondrous city during the Golden Age of Man, laid to waste in its final war. A war only Mumm-Ra remembered.

"Can it be?" he muttered into the chill air of the tomb chamber. His ashen fingers gestured over the pool, commanding a closer image. All he saw was strange energy.

"Hm. Even now, the powers once unleashed there cloud my sight." Mumm-Ra dismissed the image, calling up instead a view of Cat's Lair. The home of his hated enemies, the ThunderCats, stood majestic in the middle of Nature's wrath.

For the first time in his thousands of years of un-life, Mumm-Ra was puzzled. What had made the Ancient Spirits of Evil rouse him from his rest? Nothing that lived could venture into those cursed peaks without themselves succumbing to a most horrible death. What in all the hells...

An idea came to him. An idea that was as terrible as it was unthinkable. It was simply impossible.

"Bah," he said. "Am I not proof that nothing is impossible?"

That clinched it. Something had survived that titanic clash of powers two millennia ago, remained in stasis. Now, it had awakened. Mumm-Ra searched the depths of his memory, dredging up the two combatants whose battle had nearly blighted Second Earth, and whose children haunted the world ever since.

"Alkanphel," he said at length. Now THERE was someone who had shown promise! Mumm-Ra had felt a certain kinship with that one. Both beings of astounding power, but only for a while at a time. The other... the other... The name escaped him, but the weapon did not.

"Guyver..." Mumm-Ra turned and shuffled to his sarcophagus, mulling over what it could mean. If such a terrifying weapon had survived, and was again within his reach... "Geh, heh heh heh... I will wait, and I will see. Time means nothing to the Ever Living..."

Lion-O had never been the type to brood, but that didn't stop him this time. He was alone in the empty control chamber, seated before the main console. The evening watch shift, which he had drawn this week, was almost over. Judging from the smells wafting from the kitchen, Snarf was doing his level best to out-cook his usually good stuff. If nothing else, Lion-O's former nursemaid was one hell of a chef.

For once, he wasn't all that hungry.

"Run scan on all sectors," he said while inputting the proper commands with his fingers, "full intensity."

One more scan before setting the system to auto...

"Lord Lion-O?"

"GAH!" The Lord of the ThunderCats whirled about in his seat, only to find Lynx-O standing in the open doorway.

"I am sorry if I startled you," the eldest ThunderCat said as he drew nearer.

"No, no. That's okay."

"Is something bothering you?

"Not really..."

"No disrespect, Lord Lion-O," the old Thunderian said, "but being blind does not mean I cannot see. You are obviously troubled."

"You're right," Lion-O conceeded. Sometimes the lynx's insight was downright eerie. "The Mutants haven't bothered us for some time, now."

"Nearly three weeks," Lynx-O replied. "This has you worried."

"Not that I'm complaining or anything," Lion-O added hastily, "but it does have me a little concerned. They've never gone this long without harrassing us."

"Have you told this to the others?" the lynx asked, his sightless eyes locked on the younger's.

"No, not yet. I guess I should."

"Ah. Will you do so over dinner? Your shift ended ten minutes ago."

"Yeah. I'll be there in a minute."

"Very well, Lord Lion-O."

The young lion watched as Lynx-O walked away, and listened to the nearly subliminal humming of the control room's myraid of equipment and sensor arrays. The recent inactivity of the Mutants did have him concerned, but it wasn't the whole problem.

Lion-O didn't even know what the whole problem was, for the matter. Just a feeling of dread that grew from his stomach and stretched into his entire body. That was what he couldn't explain. Maybe Cheetara could...

No. Her trance visions were far too hard on her for him to request one over merely a bad feeling, and all the Eye of Thundera had shown him were four gloriously drunken Mutants.

"Lynx-O's right," he muttered, rising from his seat. "I should tell the others about it."

Dinner passed as it often did in Cat's Lair. The other ThunderCats talked of the day's events, the harvest of Thundrillium, the kid's time with the Berbils or on their space boards, the condition of the ThunderTank...

Lion-O paid little attention while he ate. Sooner or later, he would have to bring this up.

"Lion-O," Snarf said from the left, "you've hardly touched your food. Something wrong, shnarf shnarf?"

He suddenly felt everyone's eyes upon him, and realized it was now or never.

"Something has been bothering you lately," Tygra said.

"What's up?" added Panthro.

"The Mutants have been way too quiet lately," Lion-O replied, looking up to the faces of the ThunderCats. "I'm a bit worried about that."

"It's been refreshing," Cheetara said with a grin, "but you may have a point."

"It's too much to hope they finally gave up," WilyKat said after swallowing a mouthful of grilled squash.

"Wouldn't it be nice, though?" his sister added.

"Surely they realize," Pumyra said from the opposite end of the table, "that they can't win?"

"We may have them outnumbered," Tygra replied, "but they also have that demon Mumm-Ra on their side."

"Shnaaaarf..."

"Have you looked through the sword?"

"Yes, Panthro. All I saw were Slythe and his cronies staggering around completely blitzed." Lion-O shook his head. "Maybe I'm just being paranoid."

"Where Mumm-Ra is concerned," Cheetara said grimly, "one almost can't help it."

"I don't mean to be rude," WilyKit interjected, "but can we steer the conversation away from this?"

"Yeah, it's gettin' us all down."

"You're right, kids," Lion-O replied with a grin. "If the Mutants and Mumm-Ra try anything, we'll be ready for it."

Dinner resumed its pleasant cadence after a few moments, and Lion-O's appetite returned gradually. However, his eyes found themselves wandering down to the Sword of Omens at his hip as if waiting for the Eye within to growl.

The storm had abated early that morning, leaving the sky a brilliant shade of blue and the earth under a blanket of evaporating rainwater. Willa stepped out onto one of the enormous branches from her hut and breathed deeply. There were few things better than the smell of rain-drenched leaves and grass after a ferocious storm, and the queen of the Warrior Maidens fully intended to enjoy it.

Her bare feet found purchase on the smooth bark with ease born of experience while she trod the thick branch. Moisture glistened over every surface, dripping from the gargantuan leaves of the jungle canopy above the Treetop Kingdom. A stray drop landed on her nose and Willa wiped it off absently before glancing down to the grass below.

"Looks like a Mandroga Flower found its breakfast," she muttered, crouching down on the limb. The carnivorous bloom's pastel pink petals were spread out, its three tentacles speared into the brush ahead and pulling in its latest meal. What few travellers that came through here knew to give the Mandrogas a wide berth, but the lethal blooms still managed to ensnare the occaisional deer or even unicorn.

The form emerged from the underbrush, and Willa gasped. It was no animal. The clothes were torn, even charred in spots, hanging loosely on the boy's thin frame. He offered no resistance as the Mandroga drew him nearer. Even if he had been conscious, he could never have broken free, as weak as he appeared.

The vine was in her hand before she could even think about it. Willa swung down to the slick grass, her free hand groping for her knife. If she could sever the flower's tentacles in time, she could get the boy to safety.

She hit the forest floor at almost a run, gleaming blade ready to cut the strange boy loose. At a closer look, Willa saw he was not merely thin, but practically emaciated. His flesh was pale white in stark contrast to his mop of black hair. A fine layer of stubble covered his chin, as if he were barely old enough for a beard.

Those thoughts were pushed aside as her dagger whistled and the Mandroga's tentacles were cut. Willa jumped back on instinct, knowing that even what remained of those vine-like growths was enough to ensnare her and draw her within.

"Are you all right?" she asked while removing the tentacles that had once spelled his doom. The strange boy did not answer, merely shivered in the cool morning air. His clothes and skin were soaked and, as sick as he looked already, could be just as deadly as the Mandroga she had just saved him from.

"Willa!" shouted Sara, another Warrior Maiden, from the branch she herself had recently vacated.

"Sara! Summon the healer! This boy is deathly ill!" Willa shouted as she slung him over her shoulder. How light he was! His shoulders dangled over her breasts, and she saw his back through a rip in his shirt. Two unusual growths rested between his shoulderblades as if something had embedded itself beneath the skin.

"I shall ready a ladder!" Sara shouted before running toward the hut of old Analee. A coil of rope unfurled from the treetops as she passed, forming a ladder of rough hemp that dangled just over the grass.

"Hold on, stranger," Willa said as she ran toward the ladder. This boy was barely a man yet! What was he doing out here on his own?

Slythe watched impatiently as Vultreman and Jackalman set up the device amid the trees.

"Isss it ready yet?"

"In another moment, Slythe," Jackalman replied as he reached back into the exposed guts of the circular device.

"The thundrainium field generator is delicate!" Vultureman sqwawked as he adjusted another component. "We must be sure it is at peak operating efficency!"

"Those Thunderbrats will be here at any time!" Slythe barked.

"There!" Vultureman shouted as he shut one of the small side panels on the ring-shaped device. "It's ready!"

"Good, yesss!"

"Slythe!" Monkian shouted over the radio, "They're coming!"

"Hide! Our plan beginssss."

"Betcha can't catch me!" WilyKit shouted with a wink before pulling out ahead of her brother.

"This isn't a race!" WilyKat replied as he steered his spaceboard between a stand of trees. "We're checking out a Thundrillium deposit here, remember?"

"Aw, we're still over a mile away from that! Bet I can get there before you!"

"You're on!" WilyKat increased the power, his spaceboard rocketing off after his twin sister. She was a better rider, but WilyKat had been through here before and knew a few good... short...cutsssss....

"Wily....Kat..." he heard her say from just ahead.

"Kit...." Why did he feel so sick, so weak...

Thundrainium!

"Turrn... ohh...." The last thing WilyKat saw was WilyKit falling off her spaceboard seconds before him.

It isss done," Slythe said as he stepped out from his cover of bushes. "The Thunderkittens are down and out."

"I say we kill them now!" Jackalman cried, raising his club.

"No, idiot!" Slythe shouted. "We need them!"

"Slythe is right," Vultreman added as the Plundarrian Jackal lowered his weapon. "We will bind them for now."

"Do it quickly," Slythe said as he handed over the rough ropes. "The other catsss will know that their own are in danger." He watched as Vultureman and Jackalman bent the Thunderkitten's wrists behind them and began to wrap coils of rope around them. "Make sssure their bonds hurt, yesss?"

"Oh, we will!" Jackalman chuckled as he tied WilyKit's arms cruelly behind her back and Vultureman powered down the thundrainium field generator.

Willa stood by, watching the healer Analee as she tended to the frail-looking boy. His ruined clothing had been removed, showing a body that once looked to have decent muscle tone.

Analee, by far the oldest woman in the Treetop Kingdom, knelt by his head and placed her slender fingers on his temples. Her bright green eyes were narrowed in concentration, giving clear definition to the crow's feet at their corners. The simple blue robe she wore pooled on the floor where she knelt, concealing a body which had succumbed to the inevitablity of old age. Her mind, on the other hand, was still sharp as a good blade.

"Curious," she said. "Very curious."

"How is he, Analee?"

"This boy appears not to have any disease," she answered, "at least none that I am familiar with."

Analee rose, bracing her thin hands on her knees and grunting softly. "He is, however, suffering from exposure, not to mention malnutrition and dehydration."

"His clothes, or what was left of them, looked strange. I've never seen the like of them."

"Nor have I. He was unconscious when you found him?"

"Yes. A Mandroga almost made a meal out of him." Willa stooped down to pull the blanket up to his chin. "What do you make of those growths on his back?"

"All I know for certain is that they are not tumors," Analee said as she walked about the room. "His energy, however, was indeed peculiar..."

"How so?"

"It was normal until I inspected the growths." Analee stopped at a rack of colored bottles and herbs and chose a green vial before continuing. "Their energy was... alien, I guess you could say."

"Alien?" Willa immediately thought of the Mutants that had landed with the ThunderCats.

"The boy is human," Analee said as she shuffled back toward him. "But the other energy seemed to be reaching out to something, connected to a force I could not see."

"What do you mean, Analee?"

"I do not know for sure. My skills as a healer are formidable, but my gift for reading life energies is limited."

"Can you tell if he is a threat?"

"Perhaps he is, perhaps he isn't."

"In other words, no." Willa looked down at him again, this time with a healthy dose of mistrust.

"Now, now, young one," Analee chided gently. "I did not say that he's a danger. He is, on the other hand, an oddity."

"If he is..." Analee's look made Willa re-think her words. "If he MAY be a threat, I have to know. I cannot endager the other Warrior Maidens!"

"Right now, this boy is no danger to anyone."

"Even so, I will be watching him closely."

"As you wish. You may begin by giving him this." Analee handed over the vial. "He needs water and nutrients."

Willa tilted his head and gradually poured the blueish mixture into his mouth, wondering all the while if saving him from that Mandroga Flower had really been such a good idea.

Slythe grinned - a sight not for the faint of heart - as the Thunderbrats were lashed tightly to posts Monkian and Jackalman had hammered into the hard-packed floor of the desert earlier. The thundrainium field generator had been a stroke of genius, the fact that it worked a matter of sheer luck, and had performed admirably. Two of the cats were theirs, and the others would soon share that fate. Afterward... well... who said they had to turn them over to Mumm-Ra? Killing them would be by far safer than keeping them as prisoners. Yes, best to get rid of them once and for all.

"Mmmmm.... MmmmMPH!"

"Well said, Kitten hoo-HOO!" Monkian said as he strapped the packages of explosive around their chests.

"Wishing you had these, yesss?" Slythe said as he held their belts out toward them. Their slitted eyes glared daggers at him. "Fat lot of good they'll do you now!"

"It's ready," Vultureman said as he finished burying the device beneath some loose sand. "Once they try a rescue, they'll be helpless!"

"You just keep comfy," Jackalman teased, "and wait for the ThunderCats to meet their doom!"

"Let'sss get out of here, yess? The catsss will be here any minute! And the ssun is drying my ssskin!"

WilyKit fought past the constant pain in her shoulders from having her arms tied so closely together. She had to get free, she just had to! Whatever that weird Mutant machine was, it generated pure thundrainium. The others wouldn't have a chance!

"MMMMMMMM!"

The ropes refused to budge even an inch, merely digging tighter into her skin with each second spent struggling. If nothing else, those Mutants knew how to tie knots!

She glanced over at her brother and was dismayed to find that he was having as little luck against his bonds as she was against hers. They were trapped. Completey and hopelessly trapped.

Kit looked nervously down to the heavy grey box, secured on her torso by four thick straps that ran around behind the pole. A single yellow light began to blink on and off atop the strange device.

BOMB! she cried silently. She renewed her struggles, screaming into the damp cloth between her teeth all along until her strength fled her again. That thundrainium machine had been switched on, she realized.

Wilykit looked again at her brother, and they both exchanged terrified stares.

In The Next Episode:

Tygra and Lion-O face the Mutant's terrible trap to save the Thunderkitten's lives. Can they save Wilykit

and Wilykat before it's too late, or is this the end of the ThunderCat's two resident tricksters? All this and more in Episode Two of One Last War to Fight.