ThunderCats

Bio-Booster Armor Guyver

One Last War to Fight

Episode Eleven: Captured

By Knight Writer

The atmosphere was solemn, filled with worry and doubt as the Thundercats held council. With the exception of Cheetara, Wilykit, and Wilykat, the Thunderians gathered to decide a key issue.

What to do about Guyver?

The power he had displayed in the remote desert shocked all who had seen it. Each and every Thundercat knew that Sho had been holding back when he had finally responded to Mumm-Rana's attacks.

Tygra went first.

"Upon reviewing all available data," he began, "one thing becomes clear. Lynx-O?"

"Certainly."

The main viewscreen showed an enlarged map of the territory surrounding the Tower.

"I have taken testimony from Lynx-O, the crew manning the Thunderstrike, and from Sho," he began, "and this is what I have surmised." The screen focused on one point, merely two miles from the Tower. "Sho paused here, by his word, on his way to check on Cat's Lair. From here," another screen, this one bearing a map of Third Earth, lit to show a massive gridwork in which the White Pyramid's coordnates were highlighted, "Mumm-Rana left to engage Sho," the map screen focused on the coordinates of their meeting, both views corresponding, "here. At this point, the Thunderstrike..."

"Get to the heart of it," Panthro said, annoyed. "There's no need for all the technicalities."

"Very well," Tygra said. "At this point," The visual and the optical images changed, "Mumm-Rana and Sho met. The two relocated here," the image changed to a lonely stretch of desert well outside of Mumm-Ra's influence. "At this point, they began to fight."

"So, here's the question," Bengali said. "Who was right?"

"From the limited information I have, " Lynx-O said, "both. And neither."

"Care to phrase that so it makes sense?" Lion-O asked, mildly annoyed.

"Mumm-Rana believed she was right to attack him, and Sho felt entirely in his rights to defend himself."

"Shnarf, I'd say he did more than that!" Snarf chirped. "Did any of you see what happened to her?"

"We all did, Snarf," Lion-O said. "A few of us got front row seats."

"It is my judgment," Lynx-O began, "that Sho bears no fault in this at all."

"How?" Lion-O asked, though he anticipated the answer.

"Sho tried to avoid this confrontation," Lynx-O began, "even going so far as to lead Mumm-Rana to an area of Third Earth he knew to be desolate."

"In that place," Panthro said, "There would be no innocent bystanders."

"Precisely," Lynx-O said. "He knew that no one lived out there, and if worse came to worse, he could fight vigorously without fear of undue casualties."

Damn it, Sho thought as he lay back on the bed. The soft mattress offered no comfort to either his weary muscles or his exhausted mind. The last rays of the sun shone red along the far wall, the color uncomfortably close to the blood he had recently worn like a shroud.

More than her blood on my hands...

The more he brooded on those words, the more plausible they seemed. From one dark and fractured angle of his mind, he could assume the blame for all those dead since his awakening.

No matter which way he looked at it, a lot of Mutants died at his hands. He had killed them - if not gleefully - with no remorse. They were the enemy. They were the ones who had - quite gleefully in their case - killed and maimed innocent beings with abandon.

Zoanoids... they reminded him of Zoanoids.

"What the fuck is a Zoanoid?" he muttered. The door chime sounded, preventing Sho from taking his thoughts about monsters and blood one step further.

Wilykat entered the room at Sho's invitation. He looked directly into the human's eyes, his own betraying no fear. Or so he had thought when Sho averted his gaze in shame.

"Hi," Sho said lamely as Wilykat fully entered the room.

"Yeah." The boy stood there for a stretch of seconds, trying to assemble the words he wanted to say.

"I'm sorry about all this."

"It's not your fault," Wilykat replied, glad he hadn't had to make the first move. He ambled toward the dresser across from the bed, finally confident that he could ask.

"Sho?"

"Yeah?"

"What's it like? Y'know, when you..."

"Change?"

"Yeah."

Sho let out a long breath through his teeth as he leaned back against his arms. His eyes closed, and nearly a minute passed before he answered.

"It's kinda hard to put into words," he began, "like all of a sudden I'm filled with energy. So much it seems like I'm gonna explode."

"That's gotta be a rush," Wilykat said, intrigued. "Kinda like you can do anything?"

"Oh, yeah. And that scares the crap out of me."

"Why?" Wilykat asked, stunned. "If you've got so much power, what've YOU got to be afraid of?"

"What it is," Sho began, "why I have it, things like that."

"So, if you remembered your past, you wouldn't be scared of it?"

"I don't know," Sho said at length. "This armor, it does a hell of a lot more than protect me..."

"You got THAT right...," Wilykat cringed at the look on Sho's face. "Sorry, I..."

"It's okay. I deserved that. Anyway," Sho said quickly, "this Guyver thing, it's a weapon. It turns ME into a weapon. Weapons have only one use, Kat, and you know it."

"I don't think you're a weapon," Wilykat replied. "A weapon wouldn't have done what you just did."

"You mean with that Mumm-Rana wacko, right?"

"Yeah. I saw you vanish with her, and I saw all that power at the White Pyramid. On the viewscreen," he hurriedly explained. "You saved her."

"I guess I did. But, I'm the one who wounded her so badly in the first place."

"He did so only when he thought Lion-O, Tygra, and myself were in danger," Pumyra said. "Before her spell trapped the Thunderstrike, all he did was dodge around her."

"And, as soon as she had you," Panthro said, "he used that head beam of his to shear her arm right off. Was that really necessary?"

"If you ask that," Bengali said, surprised to be defending Sho, "You might as well ask if it had been necessary to use that gravity bomb on Mumm-Ra."

"Or the particle beam in his chest to ensure our escape from Castle Plun-Darr," Tygra offered.

"That's different, and you know it," Panthro replied. "The Mutants and Mumm-Ra are our enemies. Mumm-Rana isn't!"

"And how was the boy to know that?" Lynx-O asked. "Had anyone told him?"

Silence filled the makeshift council chamber.

Wilykit listened outside the still-open door to Sho's room, committing every word to memory. The Guyver scares Sho? He DOESN'T want to fight, he just does because he's not been given a choice?

She could respect that. Given the choice, she'd much rather ride her spaceboard than deal with Mutants. And it wasn't like Sho hadn't given Mumm-Rana more than enough chances to end that fight peacefully.

Maybe, Wilykit thought, he's as much a victim as Willa and Nayda were. As much as we are.

Sho hadn't been able to save Willa or Nayda, but he had saved her and her brother. Cheetara and Snarf, as well. Without his firepower, that rescue would never have come off.

Through with eavesdropping, she knocked on the door, looking for all the world as if she had just arrived.

"Time, huh?" Sho asked, his voice subdued.

"Yeah. They just sent me to fetch you."

"Gotta face the music, I guess," Sho replied as he rose from the bed. His original clothing had been replaced with a pair of dark red pants, and a spare tunic of Wilykat's that had proven too large for her brother to wear. Thundercat insignia, of course, removed.

Sho followed the young Thunderian girl through the gently curving hallways of the Tower of Omens, her brother in step behind him. He knew it, this was it. They would demand, in as polite a manner as

possible, him to leave. He had finally freaked them the fuck out. Sho couldn't blame them. He was scaring the hell out of himself as well. With each new power the Guyver showed him, he became even more terrifying. Especially to himself.

I beat the hell out of Mumm-Rana, he thought, and then somehow teleported over two hundred fucking miles to her pyramid. I don't even know how I did that last bit!

And, he thought with disgust, I hadn't even been trying when I pummeled her. It was instinct.

"Here we are," Wilykit's alto voice said. Sho gazed upon the cobalt blue double doors. Within lay his fate with the Thundercats.

"Just so you know," Wilykat said softly. "I'm pulling for you."

"Same here," Wilykit added. "Good luck."

"Thanks." I'm gonna need it.

Sho entered the control chamber of the Tower of Omens. Subdued humming vibrated through the air as the myriad of machinery performed various functions vital to the fortress. Around a circular table sat all of the Thundercats, minus the kids, he had met. He felt every eye fixed on him as he approached.

"Sho," spoke Tygra as he neared the one clear spot at the table. "Lion-O is Lord of the Thundercats, though I am the head of our council."

"I understand." Just get the hell on with it, he thought.

"We have reviewed your actions against Mumm-Rana, who is one of our allies."

"Okay." Go ahead and tell me to leave, damn it!

"We are aware that you did all in your power to end the conflict peacefully, and that you only attacked when you thought three of our own were in mortal peril.

"We also are aware that we had not told you of Mumm-Rana's affilliation with the Thundercats. Given all the available evidence, we find that you acted in all truthfulness toward our defence."

"Yes." What the hell?

"We," Tygra said as he swept an arm around the table, "have reached a decision. Your lack of memories, combined with your abilities, makes you potentially dangerous. However, we Thundercats are not deterred by danger."

What the hell?

"We are well aware of the contributions you have made to our defense," Tygra said, "and we are grateful. However, if you are to live under our roof, you must learn to follow our laws and ways."

"Um... huh?"

"We're not naming you a Thundercat," Lion-O explained, "Nor do we wish you to be merely a weapon for us. But, it would seem our fates are intwined with yours."

"What Lion-O means," Tygra said before Sho could form a thought, "Is that we all need each other. As such, it is the decision of this council that - while you live with us - you learn our ways. We shall teach you of our laws, traditions, and technologies. Also, as Lion-O has promised, we shall do all we can to restore your lost memories."

"I... think I understand," Sho began. "But, if I just pounded one of your friends, why are you letting me stay?"

"We are still unclear of Mumm-Rana's intentions, but we know you tried to prevent yet another battle. And that you went out of your way to save her afterward."

Sho absorbed Tygra's words, awash with confusion. He could stay? He nearly killed one of their allies, and they were letting him stay?

"How'd you do that, anyway?" Panthro's voice broke him from his train of thought.

"Um... well, I don't know. I just kinda... did it."

"Just did it?" Lion-O asked with a raised eyebrow.

"It's hard to explain, but when you said 'White Pyramid' and told me where it was, I thought about it and next thing I knew I was there." Sho raised his hands almost defensevely. "I really don't know how it works. The armor sorta told me," he finished meekly.

"It's clear that a full inventory of your armor's powers is necessary," Tygra said. "We will catalogue them at our earliest opportunity. Sho, we will need you to use those weapons for detailed analysis."

"O... okay, sure." A feeling of dread washed over him then. Why?

"Have you anything to say?" Tygra asked. Sho paused for a moment. He didn't want to bring this up.

"Yes. When I awoke in the Treetop Kingdom, I heard a... voice. In my head."

"Was it the Guyver speaking?" Lynx-O asked. Every other set of eyes now held a deep concern.

"No. I do know this much, it came from somewhere - someone else."

"Like telepathy?" Pumyra inquired.

"Yeah. Yeah, that was it." Sho became more and more certain with each word. "For a while, if I focused right, I could almost feel where it was coming from."

"Has it spoken recently?"

"Not since the raid on that Plun-Darr place. I haven't even been able to feel it lately. It kept telling me to come, that it knew my past. You can see why I didn't trust it." I hope.

"Nor would we blame you," Tygra responded. "In conclusion, Sho, you will need to be awake at first light. Pumyra has informed us that Cheetara will be released from the infirmary tomorrow. During the rest of her recuperation, she will instruct you on the Code of Thundera."

"I understand."

"Very well. Council is adjourned."

"What," Primor began, his rage straining its bonds, "the blue HELL is all this?!"

He glared at the main monitor, normally recessed into the wall across from his bed, as if his eyes could drill through the screen and abolish the images. Upon it, in each quadrant, he beheld earthen likenesses of those damned statues, each standing nearly a quarter of a mile high.

"We've scanned the energy barrier numerous times," another Simian's voice reported. "Every attempt to break it down has failed." Primor barely noticed the quiver of fear in that voice.

"Mumm-Ra..." he snarled, his fists balled and shaking at his sides. Tiny droplets of blood fell from them to splatter on the floor. "Mumm-Ra..." He stalked over to the still-bound Laheela. Her eyes were shut, chest gently rising and falling with each breath.

"MUMM-RAAAAA!!!!!"

Laheela's eyes snapped open at his furious roar. He didn't see the flicker of fear in those orange windows to her soul, and would not have cared if he had. Rage pulsed within him as a second heartbeat that pulsed throughout his entire body, vision becoming red at the fringes.

He wanted to lash out, no, to beat the ever living shit out of anything, anything in his reach.

There was Laheela.

His hands neared her throat...

Rage...

He felt the pulse of her life beneath his calloused hands...

NO!

Primor jerked himself back as if recoiling from an electric shock. Laheela was too important. He had her broken just right. It would take months to break in another. The rest of the Thunderian meat aboard the ships were no good. Men, children, galley slaves and heavy lifters. The women were given to the captains beneath him, then their own first officers... no single family remained together among the slaves.

Primor pressed a small raised button on his gauntlet. Immediately, the shackles around Laheela's wrists released. He had not bothered to chain her legs.

Laheela charged out the door. She needed no prodding.

He stalked about his chambers, fuming. He needed calm. He needed to think.

"Oh, man," Sho muttered as he walked toward the infirmary directly after breakfast. "This first light thing blows!"

"I hear it's tough for humans at first," came a gravelly voice from behind. Sho spun to see Bengali approaching, a strange look on his face.

"Hey! Hi, Bengali." Do all Thundercats sneak up on people or what?

"Sho," he said, "I'd like a word."

"I'm supposed..."

"I know. We need to talk."

"Okay, sure. What's up?" he replied around a yawn.

Bengali looked into the sleep-addled eyes of the small human, considering his words with care.

"Sho," he said, "this entire situation is hard on everyone. Know that your actions will be watched closely."

"I kinda gathered that from last night," Sho replied, his blue eyes narrowing slightly. "I don't really need any warnings."

"No, Sho, you do..."

"You agree with Mumm-Rana, don't you? You think this is all because of me."

"Sho..."

"Wanna know something, Bengali? I've thought about it. In some way, I do shoulder some of the blame. If I hadn't come around, none of this would have happened. But it has. Nothing's gonna change that!"

"Kit and I went to check in on the Warrior Maidens," Bengali hissed. Anger seethed in his mind. "Only a handful of them are left. Wilykit lost two of her closest friends in that attack. When she heard Willa and Nayda were dead, she cried in my arms for an hour! She cried all the way back here!"

Bengali stopped himself short as he saw the pain explode in Sho's eyes. Blue, much like his own, he noticed as the tears began to well in their depths.

What have I done? he asked himself in horror. Did Sho know them as well?

"...fuck..." Sho said in a strangled gasp as his out-swung fist slammed against the wall. The human boy screwed his eyes shut as drops trickled down his face.

"Sho..." Bengali, mortified, placed a hand on Sho's trembling shoulder.

"Don't you fucking TOUCH me!" he shouted as he slapped the hand away. Bengali barely repressed the instincive response of reaching for his hammer. When the boy gazed up again, Bengali saw anger swimming in so much anguish. "I gotta go. Don't want to be late."

Bengali could only watch as Sho spun about and stormed away.

He wasn't acting, he thought. That pain was as real as Wilykit's.

Jaga's Beard...

Unaware of the altercation between her lover and Sho, Pumyra studied the rapidly fading scars which streaked about Cheetara's back and upper thighs. Each line discolored her tawny skin, some cutting swaths through her spots.

"How are the ribs?"

"Still a little sore," Cheetara replied, "but manageable."

"Well, I have to say," Pumyra said as she gently prodded the still-bandaged area, "your recuperation is excellent."

"Running isn't the only thing we Cheetahs do quickly," Cheetara said with a smirk.

"I can imagine!" Pumyra laughed, rising. "So, I think it's time for you to rejoin the world."

"I'd be glad to. The hospitality is nice, but I don't think I'll be coming back any time soon."

"Here's hoping, anyway. It's great to have you back on your feet. Speaking of which," Pumyra said as she fetched a new leotard for Cheetara, "stick to light jogging for the next week or so."

"Got it," Cheetara said with a grin and twinkle in her eyes.

"And when I say light, Cheetara," Pumyra's face took a stern expression, "I mean keep it UNDER the sound barrier."

"You're no fun," Cheetara said, sticking her tongue out.

"As a healer," Pumyra said imperiously, "it is my solemn duty to be a fun-hating grouch." Both women began to snicker, then laugh loudly.

"Ow, ow..."

"Easy on the ribs, Cheetara."

"I know, I know," she replied with a slight wheeze.

"Seriously, It's good to have you back."

"Good to BE back." Both women embraced gently.

"I have to go," Pumyra said. "Sho will be here soon."

"Oh, my new Code of Thundera pupil, eh?"

"Yes. He'll stick to you like glue until noon or so."

"Okay."

Pumyra left as Cheetara gathered her clothes, her spirits lighter than they had been in days. As a healer, nothing beat seeing a patient healed and ready to go. As Cheetara's friend and fellow Thundercat, the relief and joy was even greater.

The door opened and shut noiselessly as she entered the corridor and turned right. The smile on her face seemed as if it could become permanent just as Sho appeared.

Her greeting died when she saw his tortured eyes. He'd been crying?!

"Sho," she said when he drew nearer.

"Yeah?"

"Is everything okay?" The sadness in his voice was palpable. What happened?

"Yeah. Fine. I'm running a little late. Sorry." Sho brushed past without another word. Pumyra stared after him until he rounded the bend.

She thought back to the breakfast table, the last time she had seen him, and remembered the strange look on Bengali's face.

"Bengali, you didn't..." she whispered, her smile now gone.

Cheetara didn't immediately dress. She walked about the small infirmary, eyes lingering for a moment on the twin metal racks between which she had been suspended, before arriving in front of a full-length mirror.

She studied her taut and trim form, turning one way and the other, noting the off-color scar that ran just below her full breasts. With a shudder, she could almost hear Slythe's hissing voice and the crack of his hideous whip.

The scarring hadn't been as bad as it could have been, she noticed. Pumyra's skills had seen to that. Though she never mentioned it to any of the other Thundercats, Cheetara took pride in her shapely figure. The Code of Thundera didn't say one solitary thing about knowing you look good.

Lion-O notices, too, she thought with a blush. She locked that thought away with the other such ideas and notions. There wasn't time for them, now.

Sho walked into the doorway to the infirmary, lost in his own horror and pain. Willa. Nayda. Dead. Because of him. A small part of Sho's mind argued that their deaths were not his fault, that none of this was. Such thoughts were unreasonable.

Reason hadn't been winning many battles in his head, lately.

Sho didn't pay attention to his surroundings, nearly walking into a loose privacy screen. He stepped around it...

And stopped dead in his tracks.

It was only for an instant, completely unintentional as he took in Cheetara's nude form, as his eyes met hers.

"JEEZ!" He shouted, embarrassed and blushing furiously as he spun smartly about on his heels. "SORRY! SO SORRY! I... didn't naked you were know in here... Oh, JEEZ!"

"It's fine," he heard Cheetara say with a chuckle.

"Umumumum...." Isn't this the part where one of us screams? "I'll... I'lljustgiveyouaminnitBYE!"

Sho was outside of the infirmary before he even knew it and, though he tried to banish it, the image of her body stayed firmly in the front of his mind.

"Ahhhh...." Mumm-Ra sighed as he watched Mumm-Rana get what had been coming to her since First Earth. "I could almost come to like that boy!" The images in the scrying pool vanished as the orb which contained the Ooze rose from the bubbling sludge.

Mumm-Ra eyed the now-irridescent sphere critically. The magical energies were, he determined after a span of minutes, at the proper levels. All that remained was a catalyst. With little more than a lazy wave of his right hand, the floor behind him opened. The scraping of stone on stone echoed in the dark tomb chamber as the man-sized gap appeared. From its depths rose an obsidian slab bearing a mummified human body.

Despite his claims to those foolish enough to find themselves captured in his pyramid, Mumm-Ra never kept prisoners for eternity. Most died, silently screaming as the mystic bandages held them immobile in the twisting labrynth below. Others, by far more unfortunate, found themselves used as subjects of magical experimentation.

The least fortunate were used as sacrificial objects for dark spells such as this.

With a tap on the head, the bandages instantly rotted away to reveal the man beneath. Mumm-Ra did not know his name, nor did he recall how he had caught this one. It didn't matter one way or the other.

The ancient demon priest's spell levitated the still and silent man to hover upright above the orb. The eyes opened, confused and frightened.

With an evil leer, Mumm-Ra lowered the human. When the feet made contact with the orb, the flesh began to melt into it. He rejoiced in the agonized howls of the human as the orb sucked him in and liquified him to the very bone.

"Soon, Dyme, you will be reborn," Mumm-Ra cackled as the sacrifice's remaining arm flexed weakly before joining the rest of the body within.

"Sho, really," Cheetara said as they sat in the open air. "You got a good eyeful earlier, I think you can handle the leotard."

"Sorry," Sho replied, still embarrassed.

"And for Jaga's sake, stop apologizing!" Cheetara gave him a light tap on the arm. "Does seeing a nude woman really bother you so much?"

"Well, as far as I know, you're the first I've seen. It was... um... striking..." Sho trailed off as Cheetara began to tremble, hand over her mouth to choke laughter into snickering. Sho felt his face flush at the

recurring image of her lithe body. Quickly changing subjects, he asked, "So, who's this Jaga you keep referring to? He sounds important." Cheetara's raised hand was her only response for several moments as she brought her hilarity back under control.

"On, Thundera," she said in a mostly level tone, "Jaga was the most trusted advisor to Lord Claudis, Lion-O's father."

"Sounds like a wise man."

"Wise," Cheetara said, "is certainly right. When Lord Claudis was blinded in one of the worst battles against the Mutants Thundera had ever seen, Jaga assumed many of his duties as Lord of the ThunderCats, including guarding the Sword of Omens."

"That sounds like a lot of responsibility."

"Oh, yes. As our convoy of ships left Thundera, the Mutants attacked us en masse." Sho could hear the sadness and rage underscoring Cheetara's words. "Our flagship was the only one to survive. With our engines and navigation disabled, the only planet in range was this one, but it was at the extreme edge of what our ship could handle. As such, we all had to get into suspension capsules to make the trip." Cheetara paused, taking a deep, steadying breath. "Jaga piloted the ship as far as he could before his death. From there, the auto pilot guided our ship down. It gave out just before touchdown, and our ship crashed."

"I'm..."

"Say it, and I'll kick you," Cheetara said with a mock glare. Sho swallowed the rest of his apology. "Jaga hasn't left us. His spirit appears to Lion-O whenever his guidance is needed."

"So that's why they were all so calm when I mentioned that voice in my head," Sho said.

"Pretty much," Cheetara replied, having been brought up to speed at first light. "We ThunderCats have seen a lot here on Third Earth."

"Do you, um, like it here?"

"Third Earth is our home, now," Cheetara replied. "It's nothing like Thundera, but there is a lot of beauty to be seen." The two stared wistfully into the pale blue sky for several moments before Sho spoke.

"So, do you think there are other Thunderians out there?"

"Yes, I do, and I believe that one day, we will all come together again."

"Truth, Justice, Honor, Loyalty," Sho mused. "Sounds like something I could believe in."

"It's worked for us for thousands of years," Cheetara replied. "Every law the ThunderCat council passed had to adhere to the Code of Thundera." She paused, a pensive look on her face as she studied him.

"Something on my face?" Sho asked jokingly.

"Was it you I saw that night?"

"Huh? What night?"

"The night you and the ThunderCats rescued us. Tygra told me about how you smashed through all those floors to reach the dungeon. All I remember is a shadow in a dust cloud."

"Oh. Yeah," Sho replied sheepishly, "that was me."

"I'm also told you charged into a warzone to carry me to the ThunderTank."

"Yeah, that's true too." Sho's face grew red yet again.

"I never got to thank you for that."

"Hey, you were in pretty bad shape," Sho replied. "Besides, I didn't do it for thanks. I did it because it was right." A smile lit Cheetara's face at that.

"We'll make a Thunderian out of you yet," She said as the two rose.

"I didn't know Pumyra was a cosmetic surgeon," Panthro's basso voice said as he approached. "Didn't mean to eavesdrop, but Tygra has called a council session. Sho, you're invited."

"Okay," Sho said nervously.

"Don't worry," Panthro said with a chuckle. "You're not in any trouble. Only the kittens can manage that this early in the day."

Here we are again, Sho thought as the assembled ThunderCats took their seats at the round table. Sho stood off to the side, feeling as though he had no place among them. His eyes met Bengali's for a moment, then broke away before he could read the tiger's gaze. Their confrontation still angered him, though when he looked at WilyKit, who was chatting with her brother, a knife of guilt pierced his heart.

I really don't have a place here, he thought with no small measure of regret. As he glanced at each cat-like face, a sense of alienation stole over him. He didn't, *couldn't*, belong with the ThunderCats. His decision was made. As soon as their strength was restored, he would leave them. Mumm-Rana's last words echoed in Sho's mind as Tygra called the meeting to order.

Maybe, he thought, I don't belong on Third Earth at all...

"We have little time," Tygra began somberly. "We must retrieve our equipment from the remains of Cat's Lair. Ordinarily, I wouldn't opt for such drastic measures, but we have no clue as to the status of Mumm-Ra or the Mutant Army. Sho."

"Yeah?" An image of the ruins of Cat's Lair flickered to life on the main viewscreen. "Your task will be to clear the rubble from the hangars. From the data I have, your sonic weapon should be sufficient."

"I understand," Sho replied, his voice even.

"Lion-O and Panthro will accompany the two of us to the Lair. Panthro has informed me that the ThunderClaw is fully repaired."

"Our supply of Thundrillium modules is almost exhausted," Panthro added for the benefit of the Council. "We have enough for the ThunderClaw, and the two outrigger pods for the ThunderStrike. We'll use those to help lift the Lair's paws. I'm pretty sure the hand crank is too badly damaged."

"Everyone else is to remain and help the Tuskas finish digging in their forces," Lion-O said. "Jaga willing, we should return by nightfall at the latest with the equipment we need. From there, we can begin to hunt for food to replinish our dwindling supplies." The relief around the table was palpable.

"If there are no questions," Tygra said, "then Council is adjourned."

Sho watched the ThunderCats rise from their seats. Tygra, Lion-O, and Panthro strode over to Sho, each wearing a look of grim determination.

"I hope this works, Tygra," Panthro said.

"So do I. It's our only real chance."

"I'll meet you outside," Sho said as the three ThunderCats neared him. "I need room to change..."

"You're riding with me in the ThunderClaw," Lion-O said as the four exited the control room and turned for the hangar. Tygra cut him off when Sho opened his mouth to object.

"As I told you last night," the Tyger said, "you will learn our laws, customs, and technology. You can't depend of the Guyver for everything."

"I got it," Sho replied.

"But, don't think I'll be teaching you to drive the ThunderTank," Panthro said with a grin. "You're already a two-legged tank."

I know, Sho thought. Believe me, I know.

Mumm-Ra could scarcely hide his glee when the orb split along the middle and the runny slop slid out. The irridescent puddle gathered on the cold stone of the tomb chamber's floor and began to slowly rise from the epicenter. Arms split off from the rising goo as the form rapidly took shape with legs separating from the column which supported the upper half. Finally, the glowing slime faded to reveal a bald, portly

man. His head rose, deep black eyes staring into the red gaze of the ancient demon priest. Hands began to carress every inch of magically-restored flesh, pure delight glowing on his fleshy face.

"I... am restored!" Dyme howled joyously.

"Indeed you are," Mumm-Ra said with indulgence. "Now for some suitable attire. I do not wish to gaze upon your nakedness any longer than I have to." With a mere wave of his hand, Mumm-Ra caused a black leotard to materialize on Dyme's restored body. The shoulders were white, lines extending down his arms and legs.

"Just like what I wore while serving Kronos," Dyme gasped. He looked up at Mumm-Ra, his eyes worshipful. "My master," he said, "I give you my most enthusiastic obedience." Mumm-Ra roared with laughter for several moments as Dyme genuflected on the floor.

"Gyeh-hahhahahaha!" Mumm-Ra roared. "Do not think this is all, Dyme."

"Master?" Dyme asked.

"I shall craft another to help you serve me," Mumm-Ra explained as an altar bearing a large mummified body rose from the floor behind him.

"Another zoanoid?" The black abyss of Dyme's eyes grew wide in amazement.

"Zoanoid?"

"Of course, Master," Dyme explained. "The process I went through during Second Earth transformed me into a zoanoid. I am no more human than the ThunderCats, despite my being a Lost Number."

Mumm-Ra paused for a moment, sligtly confused. The Ancient Spirits of Evil hadn't told him anything about zoanoids or Kronos. A hideous grin quirked his cracked lips as the realization dawned on him. Here was a prime source of information about Second Earth, and the weapons that had been created during the Reign of Man.

"I see, Dyme," Mumm-Ra said at length. "You shall explain all of this to me in due time. For now, I have work to do."

"Yes, Master."

Mumm-Ra trod to the new altar which had risen from the depths of the Black Pyramid. Yet another poor soul to have wandered into his labrynth lay bound and preserved in the mystic bandages which fell away at Mumm-Ra's touch. The brown eyes snapped open instantly, his muscular frame struggling against the magics that held him still.

"Ahh... Still fresh," Mumm-Ra quipped as his gnarled hands came to rest against the human's torso. He felt the man's soul as his spell slithered through the flesh, that quintessence struggling against the unnatural pull of evil magic. Soul sacrifices were trickier than simple rites of blood, but all the more rewarding for it.

"Come now to me," he whispered in a profane mantra as the soul struggled in his mystical grip. Its struggles were in vain, however, as Mumm-Ra pulled it from its mortal shell. At his whispered incantation, the soul rose to the central point of the four statues and faded away with a mournful scream.

"We are most pleased with your sacrifice," the Ancient Spirits of Evil spoke, "What favor do you seek from us, Mumm-Ra?"

"Retrieve for me the soul of the ThunderCat betrayer," Mumm-Ra said. "Bring me the soul of Grune the Destroyer!" The soul of the former ThunderCat appeared with little delay, translucent and immaterial.

"Why have you brought me here?" Grune's spirit asked.

"I have need of you, Grune," Mumm-Ra said. "It is my hope that you will be more useful to me in the flesh than in spirit. I have not forgotten your failure against the ghost of Jaga."

"Your point?"

"Curb your tongue, Thunderian," Mumm-Ra warned. "I can easily send you back to the hells to which your last failure condemned you."

"Very well," Grune replied.

"This soulless form you see," Mumm-Ra explained, indicating the still-breathing body on the altar, "is your new body."

"You expect me to inhabit that?" Grune asked, incredulous.

"I shall re-shape that body, complete with your freak immunity to Thundrainium."

"And for the purpose of slaughtering the ThunderCats, no doubt."

"You are indeed observant," Mumm-Ra cackled. "You and Dyme are to be my right and left hands, with which the ThunderCats will be crushed!"

"You mean that human?" Grune's ghost asked.

"Correct. Your main focus will be the ThunderCats. Dyme shall aid you, though his enemy is known as Sho."

"Sho?"

"You have met another of his kind. Another Guyver."

"The one in black armor," Grune mused. "That is the word he shouted. There is another?!"

"Indeed. The one who dismembered you is beyond my sight, but another is on Third Earth, and is aiding the ThunderCats."

"And what can that fat lump of shit do to aid me against him?"

"More than you think!" Dyme roared.

"Settle down," Mumm-Ra commanded. Dyme took a step back, but still glared at Grune. "Dyme has powers that can ensure that Guyver is not an obstacle for you. After all, do you want anyone else to split Lion-O's skull but you?"

"Very well," Grune said. "Do what you must."

The process went quickly. As Grune's soul entered the human body, Mumm-Ra's magic caused empty shell to conform to the spirit which now inhabited it. Within moments, Grune the Destroyer stood once more in the flesh. Mumm-Ra uttered a spell in a long-dead tongue, and a spiked club of pure Thundrainium appeared in Grune's right hand.

"Still missing a tooth," Grune muttered as he hefted his new club. "But, I can't complain."

"Good. Now, we must be off," Mumm-Ra said. "We have an army of Mutants to bring to heel."

"Bengali!" Pumyra shouted as the white Tyger neared the door to the hangar. Her lover turned about with a resigned look that confirmed Pumyra's suspicions. "Did you have it out with Sho?" A frustrated sigh blew between his teeth before he answered.

"That's what it became," Bengali said. "I wish I could say I didn't want that."

"What did you say to each other?" Pumyra asked with a hand on his shoulder.

"Sho... accepted blame for all of this," he began, "Somehow, that only made me angrier. I... told him about WilyKit's reaction when Analee told us about Willa and Nayda." Pumyra gasped at his statement.

"Bengali..."

"I asked around later," he said, "it turns out that, when Sho awoke in the Treetop Kingdom, Willa and Nayda, along with Analee, were the ones who nursed him back to health. He took it... pretty hard."

"Gee, I wonder why?" Pumyra asked sarcastically, a scowl on her face. "Bengali, how could you? None of this is Sho's fault, and here you go rubbing his nose in it!"

So THAT'S why Sho kept looking away from me, WilyKit thought as she listened to Bengali apologizing to Pumyra. She crouched around the far corner from where Pumyra was laying into Bengali and felt her own anger at him rise. From the way Pumyra was letting him have it, she decided that her own two cents weren't needed.

He knew them, too, she thought. Maybe not well, but enough for their deaths to hurt him.

"When they get back..."

"I know," Bengali said, chastened.

"I love you, you know that, but you can't let your temper get the best of you," Pumyra said as she slid her arms about his waist.

"This situation," Bengali said as he inhaled the scent of her, "it's just gotten everyone on edge." Neither of them noticed the shadow at the corner slip quietly away.

Lion-O's gaze hardened at the sight of Cat's Lair lying in ruin. Their home, their culture, what symbolized Thundera was left as little more than a pile of rubble. The sight of it was no easier to take than that first fateful day. He eased the ThunderClaw down as he brought his anger back under control.

"You remember what I told you?" Lion-O asked.

"Yeah," Sho replied. "See you on the ground!" With those words, Sho rose from the seat behind Lion-O. He eased himself over to the edge of the vehicle before leaping out into space. The Lord of the ThunderCats jerked the ThunderClaw sharply up, keeping his eyes on the rapidly falling Sho.

"GUYVER!!" At the boy's shout, the sound of violently displaced air and energy thundered and the armor quickly encased the falling boy. Fully transformed, Lion-O watched Sho right himself in time to land gently on the Lair's left paw.

"Nice landing," Panthro's voice said over the comm system. "I give it a ten."

"So far so good, Panthro," Tygra's voice replied. "Let's just hope the rest of this plan goes as smoothly."

Sho stared at the enormous slabs of stone which covered the rear of the hangar paws. This had to be done with exact precision, Tygra had made that abundantly clear.

Here's hoping I don't fuck this up, Sho thought as he engaged the sonic buster on his faceplate. He focused on the largest slab as the tightly focused sound waves hammered into the offending object. Finally, cracks shot through the stone a millisecond before it shattered.

Got the frequency, Sho thought, Now to clear this off.

"One is near you," TugMug's voice said over the comm link. "Do it!"

"Ooohhh... help me..." Chilla moaned as she lay in the tall grass. She ignored the uncomfortable temperature as best she was able as she cried out in feigned agony.

"Is someone there?" she heard a young boy ask.

"Over... here..." You stupid brat! "Ooohhh... my leg..."

"Hold on, I'm coming!"

"Hurts..." Chilla moaned. Oh, she would make Luna pay for having her lie in the grass! "Please help me..." The tall grasses of the Plains of Fertility rustled as the boy came nearer. Chilla looked up as the boy emerged. She made sure to look as pathetic as she could as the boy drew near her. "Oh, thank you," she said with a snarl. His blue eyes widened in shock just before TugMug burst forth to tackle him. Chilla bolted over to the struggling pair in time to wedge a length of cloth into his mouth and tie it behind his head while TugMug secured the hands. Silenced and trussed, the struggling boy mewled behind the gag as TugMug hoisted him over a shoulder.

"Head for the rendevouz point," TugMug said as he bounded up into the sky.

"That's fine, Sho," Tygra's voice said from the wrist communicator. The great chunks of stone had been reduced to mere gravel in the space of an hour, leaving the paws unencumbered. "Begin phase two."

"On it," Sho replied as he floated down to the front of the left paw. Chains clanked as they dropped from the hovering vehicles, each with a claw-shaped hook at the end. Sho dutifully hooked each chain to the lower part of the paw and, once secured, the chains grew taut.

Why don't I help things along? he thought as the sound of straining engines filled the air. The paw slowly inched upward as the three flying machines pulled for all they were worth. Sho seized a handhold beneath the raising paw and commanded the gravity controller to push him upward. As he did so, he forced his arms upward with every iota of strength the armor could give him.

"Come... on... you... bastard!" he grunted as the shriek of grinding metal filled his ears. Their combined efforts were rewarded with the hangar opening steadily until the paw stood at a forty-five degree angle. The chains grew slack again as Sho wrenched the claw hooks free of their moorings.

The opposite hangar moved with the same difficulty as the first. On freeing the grappling chains, Sho set down on the ruined courtyard of the Lair just as he spied the manual release for the bridge. The mechanism worked without a hitch, he was surprised to discover, as the bridge extended smoothly to the other side of the moat.

"Nicely done, Sho!" Tygra's cheer sounded from the wrist comm. "We're landing now."

"Standing by," Sho said as he willed the Guyver to leave him. The transition between the armor's enhanced senses and his own was jarring as the two pods of the ThunderStrike and the ThunderClaw landed at the opposite end of the bridge. Lion-O, Panthro, and Tygra all charged across the bridge as Sho neared the hangar bay to his left.

"Hellloooo BEAUTIFUL!" Panthro shouted as he ran his hands along the outer hull of the Feliner.

"If it isn't nailed down," Lion-O shouted, "grab it! If it is nailed down, rip it up! Let's move!"

Mumm-Ra stood at the edge of the scrying pool, Dyme and Grune on each side of his withered frame, as the images of the Lunattaks cycled within its depths.

"What are they up to?" Grune asked, intrigued.

"An ambush, you dolt," Dyme snapped. "Heh, they obviously haven't challenged a Guyver before."

"Hmph," was Grune's only reply.

"We all know how that can end," Mumm-Ra grumbled. "Still this should put the Lunattaks in their place. Nice of the boy to save me the trouble."

"The Mutant Army can wait," Grune said as the image shifted to the ThunderCats and Sho hurriedly stuffing the vehicles with everything they could. "Besides, this should be entertaining."

"That's everything!" Panthro shouted as Sho joined him in the Feliner's cockpit, the other aireal vehicles having been stuffed to capacity. "Lion-O, Tygra, take off!" Before we get ambushed, the panther added silently.

"Still has that new-vehicle smell," he mused as his fingers flew across the control panel. The engines hummed as each system flared to life. Various navigation and weapons control programs indicated that the Feliner was ready and raring to go.

"They're away," Sho said as the other three vehicles, the second pod of the ThunderStrike under autopilot, rose slowly skyward.

"And, so are we," Panthro replied as the hum of the engines grew to a low roar. "Right NOW!" The explosive thrust hammered the pair back into their seats as the Feliner rapidly gained momentum. Sweat beaded on Panthro's brow as the edge of the river which had once separated Cat's Lair from the rest of the land around raced closer.

"Come on... come on..." His hands tightened on the control yoke as he yanked it violently back. The Feliner's nose lurched up as its wheels abruptly parted company with the ground. "YYEEEAAAHHH!" Panthro roared in delight as the large aircraft gained altitude.

"Um... no offense, Panthro," Sho said, slightly green, "but I prefer my method of flying."

"Ah, where's your sense of adventure?" Panthro kidded, playfully smacking Sho on the shoulder.

"I think I left it with my stomach back there," Sho deadpanned, rubbing the spot where Panthro had tapped him.

"Well, the rest of the flight oughtta be smooth."

"Hope you didn't just jinx us."

Panthro remained silent, thinking the same.

"Someone's coming, rrwl," Snarf said as the monitor displayed the figure, mounted atop a unicorn, pounding desperately across the desert for the Tower of Omens.

"Checking," Cheetara said in a clipped voice as she enhanced the image. Bewilderment settled over her at the sight of an old human woman astride the charging beast. "What in Jaga's name is she doing, running that unicorn so hard?"

"Shnarrf, that's Analee!" Snarf exclaimed. "She's the Warrior Maiden's healer! Why's she coming here?"

"She looks desperate," Cheetara said as she rose from the controls. "I'd best see what's gotten her so worked up." She jogged out of the control chamber, slowly as she minded her still injured condition, and still made the grounds just as Analee brought the unicorn to a halt.

"Analee!" WilyKit cried in delight as she ran to the woman as she dismounted. "What's wrong?" she asked, suddenly very worried at the terrified look on her weathered face.

"Thunder... Cats..." she panted as two Tuskas tended to the exhausted animal. "Help, please!"

"Certainly," Cheetara said as the older woman grasped her arm with surprising strength.

"What's happening?" Bengali asked as he, Lynx-O, and Pumyra dropped what they had been doing and ran over to the gathering crowd.

"One of our scouts saw a Lunattak creature bounding away from our camp," she began, her voice tight. "He had one of our young captive!"

"Son of a bitch," Bengali cursed.

"Young Kora," Analee began, "he's in terrible danger!"

"Bengali, we met him..."

"I know," the white Tyger said, placing a comforting hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Snarrrfer, shnarrfer, come quick!" The gathered ThunderCats whirled in surprise as Snarfer bolted toward them. "The Lunattaks have ambushed the others!"

"Damn it all!" Panthro roared as another blast rocked the Feliner. The Ice Runner streaked past, Red Eye at its controls. "Tygra, Lion-O, status!"

"We're too weighed down!" Lion-O's voice replied instantly. "We can't out-maneuver Red Eye!"

"Can't out-run him, either!" Tygra's voice added. "We can't afford to lose these supplies!"

"Panthro," Sho said, staring at him meaningfully. Panthro briefly considered the options, then nodded curtly.

"Keep him off us! Move!" Sho said nothing as he released his safety harness and bolted to the rear of the Feliner.

Sho charged through the narrow walkway afforded by the stacks of equipment and tools toward the rear door of the Feliner. Another burst of laser fire shook the aircraft, causing the stacks to tremble violently. Sho pushed on as the rear door opened and flung himself out into space. Air roared in his ears as the ground spun in a dizzying spiral to meet him.

"GUYVAAAAAARRGH!" The bolt of energy caught him square in the back, sending him into unconsciousness.

A feral grin stretched TugMug's lips as he bounded upward to grab the falling boy. The weight was negligible as he reached the apogee of his leap in time for the Ice Runner to glide beneath him.

"Good catch!" Red Eye grunted as TugMug took his place in the rear seat.

"Take us up!" TugMug shouted. "I want to salute our enemies!" Red Eye obliged, bringing the Ice Runner level to the Feliner. "Eat us, shit kickers!" he roared in delight, the middle finger of his left hand fully extended. Red Eye followed suit, howling with mirth as they escaped with their unconscious captive.

"If he wakes up before we meet Alluro," Red Eye said, "whap him a good one!"

"Just shut up and fly!"

"DAMNIT!" Lion-O roared as the Lunattaks streaked into the distance. He forced his whirling thoughts to slow as he evaluated his options. "Damage report!"

"Light damage on all aircraft," Panthro said over the comm. "They weren't trying to shoot us down."

"Sho was their target," Tygra growled. "And now they have him."

"Can we catch them?" Lion-O roared. It was Panthro who answered.

"Loaded down like this? Not a chance in hell."

"Lion-O, your orders?" Tygra asked.

"If we can't catch them, there's no need to burn the Thundrillium. We'll head back to the Tower as planned. I'll signal ahead and tell them to get the main section of the ThunderStrike ready."

"We're going in for a rescue," Panthro said.

"Right. There's only one reason why the Lunattaks would want to kidnap Sho. Better we deal with this on Darkside than in front of the Tower."

"Got it," Panthro said.

"ThunderClaw to Tower of Omens, come in!"

"Lynx-O here. We are preparing..."

"Forget it," Lion-O replied over the comm. "Their objective was to kidnap Sho, and they succeeded."

"They got him, shnaarrf," Snarf said. "HOW!?"

"They blasted him as he left the Feliner to hold them off. He didn't have his armor on."

"Well, I'll give you three guesses why they wanted him," WilyKat said.

"Yeah, and the first two don't count!" his sister finished.

"What would you have us do?" Cheetara asked. She fought down the irrational surge of fear she felt at such news.

"We'll arrive in roughly ten minutes. Lynx-O will pilot the main section of the ThunderStrike through the chasm to Darkside. Bengali and Pumyra will join us."

"Understood," Lynx-O said, reaching for his portable Braille Board.

"Panthro and Tygra will remain at the Tower. Once the ThunderStrike is refueled, they will begin repairs on our other vehicles."

"It's a sure bet that Sho will meet Alluro," Cheetara said. "Are you sure you wouldn't want to face him here? The Tower's defenses are in place."

"And Sho could blast through them without any trouble," Lion-O's voice replied. "If we can rescue him before the Lunattaks use him to spearhead an attack, then we will. If we wait for them to bring him to us, the loss of life will be staggering."

You're really growing up, Lion-O, Cheetara thought.

"Okay. We'll be ready when you arrive. There is, however, one thing you should know."

"All ears, Cheetara."

"The Lunattaks have abducted a young boy from the Warrior Maiden's camp," Cheetara said. "Expect them to use him against you as well."

"A damn hostage," Panthro's voice spat. "They planned this one well."

"We'll have to deal with it," Lion-O's voice said. "Have everything ready. Lion-O out."

In the next episode:

Alluro hypnotizes Sho, yet has reservastions about the plan to use him against the ThunderCats. Lion-O, Bengali, Pumyra, and Lynx-O rush to Darkside to rescue Sho and Kora, only to find themselves forced to face the Guyver. Will they be able to snap Sho out of Alluro's trance, or will they have to do battle with the most powerful weapon Third Earth has ever seen? All this and more in the next episode of One Last War to Fight.