ThunderCats

Bio-Booster Armor Guyver

One Last War to Fight

Episode Twelve: Backfire

By Knight Writer

Sho screamed into the gag as he beheld the strange people which surrounded him. To his right was a young boy bound as he was, fear shining in his cornflower eyes.

"You can't win," said the tall one as the emerald sphere atop his club settled over Sho's head. "You don't stand a chance..."

Sho felt his willpower fail as the words echoed in his head incessantly. His muted screams for the Guyver faded as apathy stole over him.

He's hypnotizing me, Sho thought as lethargy overwhelmed him. Damned if he...isn't

"You don't stand a chance..."

"Mm Mmnt Mtd MM Mmse."

"I'm sorry, what was that?" Sho couldn't move as the hypnotic suggesion took deep root. The gag was removed. Sho couldn't care.

"I don't stand a chance."

"Good job, Alluro!" Luna screeched. "Back to Skytomb!"

"Yeah," Chilla said. "For once you did something right!"

"Hmmm..." Alluro shook his head.

"All is ready," Lynx-O said as Lion-O charged over to the main part of the ThunderStrike. He kept his face a stone mask, hiding as best as he was able the unease that fluttered in his stomach. He knew exactly what he was leading this group of ThunderCats into, and didn't like it one bit. If anything went wrong with this hasty rescue mission, Alluro wouldn't hesitate to have a fully-entranced Sho rip them limb from limb.

"What's the plan?" Bengali asked as he turned to face Lion-O. That his fingers brushed with Pumyra's went unnoticed as the aircraft lifted from the hangar floor and raced to the still-open door.

"The Lunattaks likely won't have Sho change until they bring him to kick in our front door," Lion-O replied, "If we can knock him out while he's still human, we'll break Alluro's hold over him." The ThunderStrike cleared the hangar and roared skyward toward Darkside.

"And if we can't?" Pumyra asked evenly.

"Then Jaga help us all," Lion-O said gravely.

Bengali stared directly ahead as the vista of Third Earth streaked by. What he had feared had come true. Could they stand up to Sho's firepower, especially with the Lunattaks backing him? Bengali didn't look down when he felt Pumyra's fingers intwine with his own, he just returned the comforting grip.

No matter what, he thought, I will protect you, my love.

Pumyra drew strength from the feel of Bengali's hand locked in her own. She knew what she was following the Lord of the ThunderCats into, and despite herself was afraid. She knew how powerful the boy Sho was, and knew that they could all be racing toward their deaths. Pumyra didn't glance at Bengali as she drank in the love that radiated from his touch. She would defend him, no matter what.

Lynx-O focused on flying the ThunderStrike as the chasm which was the only safe passage into Darkside drew rapidly closer. He didn't allow himself to feel any fear, he had experienced far too much to let it get to him. Either they would succeed, or they would fail. The creed of the Lynx clan of Thundera was that simple. He had the utmost faith in his friends, Lion-O, and the Eye of Thundera, but if fate decided against them, then that was that.

None of the other ThunderCats noticed as he programmed the TunderStrike to record the fight and, if worse came to worst, return to the Tower of Omens on autopilot. If nothing else, the others would have at least some warning.

Lion-O stood stock still as scenarios, mostly horrible, ran through his mind. Sho in the hands of a group of the most dangerous enemies the ThunderCats had ever faced. A superweapon was now in the Lunattaks' control, waiting to be turned on the remnants of Thundera.

Sho is a friend, Lion-O thought. I'll do all I can for him. He didn't allow himself to feel any fear. As Lord of the ThunderCats, he could never have that luxury. The entrance to Darkside passed by in a blur as he steadied himself against the back of Lynx-O's seat. The point of no return had been passed. For better or worse, he had to make this work.

"This is just so damn odd," Alluro said as he circled the docile Sho. "It's just not right."

"What's not right?" TugMug asked. "He seems pretty under to me."

"The link's not there," Alluro replied, troubled.

"What link?" Chilla asked as she ran a hand across Sho's abdomen. "You're about as psychic as my left boot!"

"If you could keep your lecherous urges in check," Alluro replied, "I mean that the psychic hook my psych club gives me isn't there!"

"You mean you don't have this boy under control?" Luna shrieked in a voice that was nearly enough to make Alluro's ears bleed.

"On the contrary," Alluro said, insulted, "Sho, stand on one foot." The boy immediately lifted his left leg into the air and stood on only his right. "My hypnotic suggestion is firmly in place, but..."

"But nothing!" Luna screeched. She didn't look at the human boy they had kidnapped as he cringed in TugMug's grip. "We have a weapon that can take the Sword of Omens, then turn around and kick it up Lion-O's self-righteous ass sideways!"

"Looks like we have a chance to do that!" Red Eye shouted as he examined one of SkyTomb's control panels. "The ThunderStrike is coming!"

"I knew it," Luna groused. "Oh, well, a dry run can't hurt. Everyone outside! Time the ThunderCats got a taste of our new power!"

Lion-O charged to where the Lunattaks were waiting, knowing that the element of surprise was already lost. He came up short when he saw them all staring at him with undisguised malice. Amok stood to Sho's right with Luna on the beast's shoulders. To his left were Chilla, Red Eye, and Alluro. TugMug stood just behind a frightened Kora.

"Don't even think of touching that sword," Luna screeched before Lion-O could reach for it. He spied TugMug off to his right, a gleaming knife held close the the throat of the trembling boy.

"Do it," the Lunattak urged. "I'll give this kid a huge grin." The knife slid softly across Kora's exposed throat. "Ear-to-ear." The boy's eyes squeezed shut in terror, a muffled whimper sounding through the cruel gag.

"Bastards," Lion-O cursed. He heard Kora's muted screams, and his heart tried to rip itself in half. Lion-O eased his hand away from the hilt of the Sword of Omens. Sho stood stock still in the midst of sworn enemies, uncaring about what his blank eyes saw.

"Lion-O," Bengali whipsered in his ear. "We must handle Sho first."

"I know," Lion-O whispered back. He locked eyes with each Lunattak in turn, seeing only smugness and cruelty.

"Screw this," Luna said, safely atop Amok. "Alluro, DO IT!"

"Sho," Alluro commanded, "transform!"

"Guyver!" Sho cried. The energy field enveloped Sho as the armor appeared and merged with the human. Sho, fully transformed, stood before the ThunderCats and Lunattaks. He did not move as the Control Medal glowed brilliantly.

"Draw your weapons, if you want," Chilla said with a malicious rictus twisting her face. "It won't do you any good, but it should be entertaining!"

Obey... obey... obey...

The words repeated in Sho's brain, a mantra that he could not resist. He looked at the group of ThunderCats, seeing them as only a Guyver could. Around each Sho saw an aura of brightly glowing energy; heat, bioelecticity, strength, all in a rapidly shifting patina of colors.

Obey...

Why should I? he asked himself as the hypnotic command rapidly lost its strength. He swam up from the depths of his mind as the control medal beckoned to him. The repeated suggestion faded into nothingness as Sho looked closely at the ThunderCats. Their gazes were locked on him, determined yet... uncertain? Yes, that was it.

"Now, Sho," he heard a familiar, arrogant voice command, "kill them all!"

Lion-O drew the Sword of Omens in a flash, braced against Sho's first attack. The Guyver merely stood in place, shaking his head as if to clear it.

"Didn't you hear me?!" Alluro shrieked. "I said kill them!" Sho took a hesitant step forward as the medallion on his head glowed brighter. Twin jets of gas escaped the vents on his faceplate as the brilliant light faded.

"Lion-O?" The Lord of the ThunderCats relaxed a little at that. "Where the hell are we? And why am I wearing this thing?!" A grin settled on Lion-O's face as Sho studied his armor in obvious confusion. "What's going on?"

"Good to have you back," Lion-O said as Sho drew closer.

"You may wish to turn around," Lynx-O said calmly.

"Huh?" Sho said as he faced back. The gathered Lunattaks all stared in shock at him, and Sho's mind fully righted itself at the sight of the one called Alluro.

"You," Sho snarled. Alluro recoiled in surprise before swinging his club and sending the orb at its tip toward him. The laser in his helmet fired before it could complete the trip, shattering it in a cloud of dust and tiny fragments.

"You son of a bitch!" Alluro cried as his psych club was rendered useless.

"You're one to talk!" Pumyra shouted.

"Hold, boy!" Luna screeched as she glared daggers at Sho. "Like it or not, you're still going to kill the ThunderCats for us!"

"I don't see how," Sho replied, his voice cold and hard.

"Then take a look over here!" Sho did so and felt his heart skip a beat. TugMug held the razor-keen steel to the young boy's throat, a tiny bead of blood swelling at its tip. "Either you skin us some cats, or this one dies!"

"HO!" Sho saw the burst of sapphire energy from the Sword of Omens strike TugMug's hand. The Lunattak jerked the offending appendage away, the knife spinning safely away. Sho wasted no time charging over and grabbing the trembling boy. The battle began in earnest as he raced to the ThunderStrike and dropped him within.

"Stay here!" Sho shouted as he ran to join his friends. He had no time to register any surprise at that notion.

Cheetara hated the feeling of helplessness that stole over her as she stared at the main viewscreen. Even though she was on the mend, she felt she should have gone with them into Darkside. Not knowing, not being able to at least see the battle, put her nerves on edge. The fact that they were going up against the Guyver made it exponentially worse.

I shouldn't worry, she told herself ineffectively. Lion-O has the Eye to protect him. The others, though relatively inexperienced as ThunderCats, are certainly no slouches in battle.

But what if...?

Ever since the Mutant Army arrived and had beaten them so soundly in that surprise attack, everything seemed skewed. Despite the horrors she had seen in her youth, and in her time as a ThunderCat on Thundera, she had faith that good would always win out in the end. But since the Guyver arrived...

No. None of this is Sho's fault. Without him, the Mutants would have already won. Lion-O will find a way to win. He always does.

Please, Jaga, she prayed, bring him back to me. Bring them all back safely.

"I'm nervous, too," WilyKit said, stopping at her side. Cheetara smiled and placed a hand on the girl's shoulder.

"They'll come back," WilyKat said as he came to her opposite side. His voice carried a small note of fear beneath the bravado. "Wait and see."

"They will," Cheetara said with more confidence than she felt.

Pumyra dodged a burst of freezing breath which left a coating of ice on the rocks where she had been standing. Her sling shot out, the burst ball narrowly missing Chilla's head.

"BITCH!" the Lunattak shouted as she lunged. The two women collided in a tangle of limbs on the rocky ground as each tried to gain the advantage. "I'll... tear your throat out!"

"Not on your *best* day!" Pumyra growled as she kicked Chilla off of her. With a graceful flip, she regained her feet in time to see Chilla racing toward her again.

Oh, no you don't, Pumyra thought as she ducked in low and landed a lunging punch in Chilla's stomach. The blue-skinned woman grunted in surprised pain before a right cross from the ThunderCat connected with her temple. Pumyra stepped back, shaking her now-sore hand.

"Me one, you zero," she said, satisfied as Chilla hit the ground in a limp heap.

Sho charged toward the battle between Lynx-O and the hulking Lunattak Red-Eye when one of his sensor medallions jerked backward too late to prevent Amok from slamming into his back. Immensely powerful arms encircled his torso and easily hoisted him off of the ground.

"Amok has you! Amok has you!" his idiot voice grumbled in simple-minded glee.

You wanna bet? Sho thought as he reached up to where the arms linked across his chest. On grasping the fleshy appendages, Sho squeezed sharply and was rewarded with the sound of bone cracking and Amok's agonized scream in his ear. The huge Lunattak let go and fell back howling. Sho spun on the spot, grasping the front of Amok's outfit and twisting hard about. Amok's feet parted ways with the rocky soil as Sho flung him toward Lynx-O and Red-Eye's position.

The violent disturbances of air were all Lynx-O needed to dodge gracefully around Red-Eye's lumbering assaults as well as keep tabs on how the other ThunderCats were faring in their own battles.

"I see everything," Red-Eye's voice taunted as Lynx-O leapt over another of the Lunattak's spinning discs. "You see nothing!"

"I do not need eyes," Lynx-O replied sagely as he ducked a punch from Red-Eye, "in order to smell you."

"You think you're funny, do you?"

"Since you are so proud of your vision, here is something to get an eyeful of." With split-second timing, Lynx-O's light disc unfurled and sent a burst of illumination directly into his foe's bulging eyes.

"DAMN YOU!" Red-Eye screamed just before the sound of something slamming into his back hammered the air. Lynx-O grinned at the mental image of Amok and Red-Eye that his super-sharp senses generated.

"Now that sounded painful," Lynx-O quipped.

Alluro skulked around the edge of the battlefield as the ThunderCats were summarily beating the hell out of the other Lunattaks, glaring furiously at the armored boy as he tossed Amok like a toy ball.

You ruined my psych club, bastard! he thought as he neared the ThunderStrike. It'll take me *months* to build another!

Alluro spared a glance at the three-sided battle between Lion-O, Bengali, and TugMug. The grotesque Lunattak was bounding about the battlefield with abandon, taking potshots at the two ThunderCats with his gravity carbine all the while. As long as he could keep them busy...

Lion-O dodged another burst from TugMug before bringing the Sword to bear and firing another lance of energy. The blue bolt grazed TugMug's shoulder, but it was enough to throw off the Lunattak's trajectory. TugMug landed awkwardly, allowing Bengali time to fire an energy beam from his hammer which hit him square in the chest.

The Lord of the ThunderCats wasted no time, rushing in headlong and swinging the Sword of Omens in a glowing arc which severed the gravity carbine's barrel. A quick left with the claw shield slammed home in TugMug's hideous face and rendered him unconscious.

Alluro looked into the ThunderStrike to see the still-bound boy curled into a fetal position on the floor. With a smile that held no joy, Alluro reached in and snatched him off the floor. His scream of fear was muffled by the gag that was still in place as Alluro threw him onto the ground.

"At least something will go as planned today!" he roared as the tip of his club streaked toward the terrified boy's chest...

"Oh, Jaga, NO!" Pumyra screamed as Alluro's club began its descent. Her heart froze in her breast as she realized she was too far away, that...

Lion-O turned in the direction of Pumyra's horrified stare, unable to believe what he was seeing. He raised the Sword of Omens, knowing full well he would be too late, when something blurred past with enough force to blow his hair about his head.

Alluro's bloodcurdling scream split the heavens when the armored hand clenched around his wrist with enough force to stop it cold. Sho glared down at the Lunattak as he instantly and mercilessly crushed every bone in the wrist, the bludgeon falling to the ground with a clatter.

"Leave him alone, you son of a BITCH!" Sho snarled as he wrenched Alluro back away from the prone boy. He cocked his other arm back before swinging the fist into Alluro's stomach like a rocket. The Lunattak flew back over the ThunderCats' heads and came to a skidding stop twenty feet away, moaning piteously and vomiting blood.

"You deserved that," Bengali spat as he turned in disgust from Alluro's twitching and groaning form.

"Well, done, Sho," Lion-O said with a nod.

"Thanks," he replied before crouching down in front of Kora. "Hey, why don't I help you with that?" Kora, for his part, merely scuttled backward as best he was able with a terrified look on his face. Disappointed, Sho rose to his feet as Pumyra knelt behind Kora and began to undo the knot. "Guess I should get used to that," he said softly.

"Sho," Pumyra said when Kora's hands were freed and the gag was removed, "the armor? It may be a bit much for him."

"Oh, right." The Guyver left him, vanishing into wherever it went when not in use. "That better, little guy?" he tried with a disarming smile. Kora's only response was to climb into Pumyra's gentle arms and look back at him in fear.

"He's just had a rough day," Sho said as the other ThunderCats drew near, ashamed at the fear he saw in Kora's eyes.

"It hasn't been a picnic for the rest of us, either," Bengali said as the group headed toward the ThunderStrike. "Listen, Sho, about this morning..."

"Don't worry about it," Sho replied, embarrassed. "I was out of line, too."

"Let bygones be bygones, then," Bengali said with a smile and an extended hand.

"Water under the bridge," Sho said, accepting the larger hand and grinning. "You're pretty good with that hammer, y'know?" Bengali twirled the weapon in his hand before blowing across the barrel of the laser in its head and sheathing it at his hip. Sho doubled over in hysterics, drawing puzzled looks from the others as Bengali joined him.

"Sorry... sorry..." Sho gasped.

"Shnarrfer, they're coming back!" Snarfer cried as the Cat's Eye showed the main section of the ThunderStrike bursting from the chasm to Darkside.

"Did they do it?" Analee asked nervously as Cheetara hailed the aircraft.

"Tower of Omens to ThunderStrike," she said evenly, "please respond."

"Lynx-O here," his jubilant voice replied. "All is well. Both Sho and young Kora have been recovered unharmed."

Thank Jaga, she thought. "Understood. Tower out."

"Thank you, ThunderCats," Analee said gratefully. "You don't know how much this means to us Warrior Maidens."

"The sun's almost set," WilyKit offered, "why don't you stay here tonight?"

"Yes," Cheetara said. "Riding at night is rather dangerous, especially on a unicorn."

"Hmmm... That noble beast could use a good rest. Are you sure we wouldn't be putting you out?"

"Not at all!" WilyKit exclaimed.

"Always willing to help out a friend," her brother added.

"I thank you for your generosity, young ones." Her wizened face broke into a wide smile. "Yes, I believe Kora and myself will enjoy your hospitality for a night."

"Yeah!" WilyKit piped up, "They can share our room!"

"Yeah, I don't mind!"

Cheetara tuned out the kitten's discussion as the ThunderStrike drew nearer. She relished the heat that grew within her. It would be tonight. The fear she had felt at the prospect of losing him, and the relief at his return, had galvanized her. Cheetara knew he felt the same for her as she did for him, even if he didn't know how to act upon it.

Get ready, Lion-O, she thought with a sly grin. You've matured so much in the recent weeks, but tonight I'll make a man of you in other ways.

"Welcome back!" Panthro hooted as the ThunderCats and the two humans emerged from the ThunderStrike's central section.

"I take it everything went well?" Tygra asked, smiling.

"You should have *seen* it!" Lion-O exclaimed as he walked over. "Their plan backfired, and we had them on the run so fast..."

"If you'd like," Lynx-O said, "I set the ThunderStrike's sensors to record the battle."

"You did?" Bengali asked, surprised.

"In case of the worst," the old lynx explained, "it would have come back and given warning."

"Gee, thanks for the vote of confidence," Sho quipped with a smile. "It's cool, I understand."

"Analee!" Kora cried, releasing himself from Pumyra's arms to charge over to the aged human.

"It's so good to see you unharmed, young one," Analee said warmly.

"Well," Bengali chuckled, "he's feeling braver now."

"Given what that boy has seen," Lynx-O said, "he well should be."

"You know," Bengali said as Pumyra came near him, "You looked for all the galaxy as though holding a child in your arms was natural."

"Well, what do you expect?" Pumyra asked playfully. "I'm only a healer *and* a woman."

"A woman with one hell of a right cross," he joked.

"And how do you think I manged to turn down so many suitors on Thundera?" She asked impishly. "I saw you and Sho make up, by the way."

"Yeah. We've reached an understanding."

"I know. You two really hit it off."

"He's really not a bad guy. He really cares about the ThunderCats and Third Earth."

"Well," Pumyra said with a coy smile as the others walked up to the control chamber for the hastily-called council meeting, "I know one ThunderCat who cares for *you* more."

"Do you, now?"

"Oh, yes," Pumyra said as she eased away from him. "In fact, I have it on good authority that this particular ThunderCat will be waiting for you later tonight."

"Is that right?" Bengali asked.

"That is so right," Pumyra chuckled as she raced to catch up with the others.

Thank Jaga I've been taking my vitamins, Bengali thought as he ran up the spiral stairs.

The session of the ThunderCat Council was abuzz with excitement as Tygra called it to order. At the opposite edge of the table sat Analee, Turmagar, and Sho, invited as honored guests. WilyKit and WilyKat were absent, along with Snarf and Snarfer, busy teaching Kora how to play a rousing game of Snarfball. He noticed the quick glances being exchanged by Bengali and Pumyra with a barely repressed smile. Even more surprising were the looks between Cheetara and Lion-O.

Better wear the earplugs tonight, Tygra mused with a grin as he rose to speak.

"Lynx-O, in his wisdom," Tygra began, "recorded the battle which took place earlier today. On viewing this, we hope to gain valuable insights to our enemies' tactics, as well as more data on the capabilities of our new ally," He said, indicating Sho. It was all a load, Tygra knew. This was mainly to boost morale. And it needed some serious boosting. The recording began, showing Guyver shaking his head in confusion.

"Never knew anyone to come out of Alluro's trance on their own," Panthro said, looking at Sho. "How'd you do it?"

"When I changed, the armor snapped me out of it. Don't ask me how."

"I'm beginning to wonder if there's anything that armor of yours *can't* do," Lion-O said with a shake of his head.

"Far as I know," Sho began with a grin, "it can't cook."

"The Eye of Thundera has trouble with that, too." Laughter echoed around the council table for several moments, the tension and frustration of the past weeks fading as hilarity reigned. Such a victory had been desperately needed. As the recording progressed, cheers and congratulations were shared liberally.

"Quite a routing," Tygra said around a laugh. "I can't recall a time when we had the Lunattaks on the run so fast."

"Quite a suit of armor you posess, Sho," Turmagar said, clearly impressed.

"Uh... thanks," he replied lamely, his face burning with embarrassment.

"No need to be so self-conscious!" Turmagar exclaimed. "You should be proud!"

"I am, really. But I'm just glad we all got out of there okay."

"I second that," Cheetara said, placing a hand on Lion-O's. His fingers intwined with hers.

"Thank you again, ThunderCats. Sho, as well," Analee said brightly. "I can't tell you how grateful we Warrior Maidens are that Kora is back among us."

"Are you faring any better?" Lion-O asked.

"We are preparing to re-locate into the Unicorn Forest," Analee replied. "There, we hope to rebuild our people. Close by is a human farming village. We have a chance to live yet."

"We're glad to hear it," Pumyra said. "We hope your Maidens bear many strong sons."

"I echo that hope," Analee replied with a warm smile.

"And, on another good news front," Panthro said, "our operable vehicles have been fully re-fueled. All that's left is to repair the ThunderTank and bring the HoverCat in for repairs."

"After which," Lynx-O said, "we can begin to replenish our food stores."

"I spoke with the surviving Berbils as they were rebuilding their village," Analee said. "They have made contact with another Berbil settlement to the west. Food stores are being shipped for the Berbils here and for the ThunderCats and Warrior Maidens."

"Glad to hear it!" Lion-O exclaimed. "We'll ensure those shipments arrive at their intended destinations."

"I shall pass that word on," Analee said with a smile.

"On that note," Tygra said, "Council is adjourned."

Sho retired to his room, exhausted and glad for it. Sleep might just come easily tonight, he thought as he stripped himself of all but his pants before falling into bed.

I used the Guyver, and no one died, he thought as he closed his eyes. I like that....

Bengali had stripped his clothes, standing nude before Pumyra. He stared at her naked body, barely able to keep from pouncing before he could speak.

"Pumyra, come here," he said evenly as he held his own urges barely in check.

"Like you have to ask," she said as she drew closer in the darkness.

"I've been thinking, lately," He said as her arms encircled him.

"About what?" she asked as her claws left trails of irresistable fire along his back.

"If Sho hadn't come out of Alluro's trap," he began.

"Bengali, don't..."

"This time, I have to," he replied, marshalling his strength. "We're dealing with things no other ThunderCats have dealt with before."

"I know that," Pumyra said, embracing him with surprising strength.

"I wanted to wait until this madness was over," Bengali said, spurred by his love for Pumyra, "but Jaga help me, I don't think I can."

"Bengali?" she asked, hopeful and anxious.

"Pumyra," he began, kneeling before her and taking her hand in his, "Will you... become one with me?"

"I..."

"Whatever happens," Bengali began, "I want you at my side, as a fellow ThunderCat, and my wife." Her mouth found his and didn't let go until he was certain they would both pass out from lack of air.

"After all this time," she said with joyful tears welling in her eyes, "I was beginning to think you'd never ask. Yes, Bengali, I will take you as my husband." She eased back as he rose to his feet once more, an impish smile on her face.

"I wanted to ask you when we were stranded on that damned island..." Bengali managed before Pumyra pounced, forcing him onto the bed. No other words were uttered until the morning.

Lion-O swallowed past the nervous lump in his throat when he cast a sidelong glance at Cheetara as they walked toward the guest chamber he had been using as his own. He struggled to comprehend the strange desires and emotions which raged in his mind at the sight of her shapely body covered by the tight leotard and the heat which built inside at thoughts of what lay beneath it. Tygra had told him of the passions that came with adulthood soon after the Annointment Trials, but feeling them first hand left his elder's explanations hollow.

"So, here we are," he said weakly when they arrived at the door to his chamber.

"We are," Cheetara replied, gazing deep into his soul.

"Want to come in, or something?" Oh, *great* move! he berated himself.

"I'd love to," she replied with a smile he had never seen on her lovely face before.

Cheetara studied his muscular body as she followed Lion-O into his bedchamber. She knew she would have to take him by the hand this first time, and relished that thought.

"Lion-O," she purred as he turned and she embraced him. She felt his powerful arms gently encircle her and she pressed herself into the embrace.

"I can't afford to feel fear," he began as he tentatively stroked her black-spotted blonde mane, "but today, I was afraid I wouldn't see you again." His voice was shaky, nervous as he admitted his feelings.

"I know," she replied, carressing his back. "I felt the same. You are a man, now. One I am proud to call Lord of the ThunderCats. And..." Her lips closed on his. The kiss was tentative, uncertain until Lion-O let his emotions guide his response. "...one I wish to call my lover."

"I love you." Those three words warmed every inch of Cheetara's heart as she began to undo the clasps of Lion-O's tunic.

"I love you, too," she replied as the top of his outfit fell to the floor and exposed his hard torso.

"I'm... not sure what to do..."

"Don't worry," Cheetara replied with a smile. "It'll come naturally."

In the next episode:

Repairs of their vehicles completed, the ThunderCats prepare to escort the shipment of foodstuffs from the Western Berbil Village only to meet a restored Dyme and a vengeful Grune. Mumm-Ra brings Primor and his forces to heel and teleports them to an ancient ruin which will become a new Castle Plun-Darr, and also begins to plot a means to remove Guyver from the war. Will it succeed? Will Grune and Dyme destroy the ThunderCats? All this and more in the next episode of One Last War to Fight.