ThunderCats

Bio-Booster Armor Guyver

One Last War to Fight

Episode Seventeen: Recovery

By Knight Writer

Tygra blew a sigh of great relief at the sight of the ThunderTank rumbling toward the Tower of Omens with all three ThunderCats aboard. Stacked on the trailer behind were several wildebeest and deer carcasses which needed dressing and butchering. A haul like that would ensure that they would have food well into yet another of Third Earth's long winters. In the desert in which the Tower had been built, the temperatures would not reach the extreme lows the grasslands in which Cat's Lair had stood, but game animals would be scarce in the lands which were in range of their vehicles. In a desperate attempt, Panthro had even suggested using the Feliner to hunt the unknown regions of Third Earth near the planet's equator for game despite the spacecraft's horrendous usage of Thundrillium while in planetary atmosphere.

Regardless, Tygra thought, Cheetara's been busy to bag that many kills. She'd been serious about playing catch-up. Tygra idly wondered if WlyKit had managed to bring down any kills of her own. Likely not, he mused. The first hunt for a female often went scarcely rewarded for the young's tendency to smash through the vegetation in pursuit of meat which was used to being prey and wanted to live just a little longer. Though Tygra hated the thought of having to kill to eat, he knew it was a necessity.

Another thing goes right, yet something else goes wrong, Tygra thought as he recalled Sho resting in the infirmary next to Lion-O. Pumyra had inspected Sho top to bottom, and had found no trace of any injury to his person. Rest, she'd said, was all he needed.

If only Lion-O could recover so quickly, Tygra thought as he fingered the hilt of the Sword of Omens at his hip. She seemed excited over the samples she had taken from his wounds as the armor healed him, and he had to admit to a certain sense of anticipation at the thought of what those samples could bring. Once Lion-O could resume his duties as Lord of the ThunderCats, Tygra would gladly assist her in whatever research would be needed to crack the secrets of the Guyver's regenerative abilities.

Until then, he thought when Panthro came up beside him in the slowly waning sunlight with a blade from Snarf's selection in each hand, there were other matters about the armor which needed to be addressed.

"Thinking the deep thoughts?" Panthro asked as Tygra took a knife from him. Cheetara turned the ThunderTank in a wide arc, pointing the trailer toward them before slowly reversing.

"The Tuskas will have to scale back their garrison when winter comes. It's the prime season for raiders in their lands."

"Mutant and otherwise."

"Any clues as to where they're hiding?"

"None. It's like the bastards went underground."

"At this point, I wouldn't rule that out," Tygra said. The two walked over to where Cheetara had parked the ThunderTank. The kittens bounced out just before the weary Cheetah.

"Is he okay?" WilyKit asked, nervous.

"He just needs rest," Tygra replied. "So, bag anything?"

"Just one," she said with a grin. "You try keeping up with Cheetara when she's in a rush sometime."

"I'll pass, thanks," Tygra chuckled "So, Kat, I take it watching the children went well."

"When he wasn't checking out Kala, he did fine," his sister said before he could open his mouth.

"For the last time, I wasn't checking anyone out!" WilyKat cried in exasperation.

"Okay, okay, kits. Snarf's got some knives ready for you. Go get them, and be careful!"

"Got it," they said in unison before running into the Tower.

"He was really eyeing a Warrior Maiden?" Panthro asked with a smile.

"They're both growing up," she said in reply. "They'll need the facts of life explained to them before long."

"First things first," Tygra said, "we need to get these dressed and frozen."

The days since their arrival on this Third Earth place blurred into the past, freedom seeming as distant as lost Thundera. The sun rose, they were worked at a brutal pace, and when they were finally allowed rest it was all too brief before another hellish day began. Myrlha looked over to the shackled creature which had identified himself as a Wollo named Salvador as he labored to level the earth within the stadium-like structure in preparation for digging dungeons which

would rest in the catacombs Mutant scouts had reported. Ten minutes after he and the other Wollos had arrived, they had all been chained and placed to work. If one thing could be said about Mutants, they wasted no time in exploiting the backs of others.

Salvador felt lost in the merciless tides of terror and confusion which had battered his mind since the monster Dyme had attacked and abducted what seemed to be the entire population of his village. In an attempt to make sense of things, he had introduced himself to the obviously Thunderian woman and had found out immediately that conversation between anyone in chains was forbidden when a Jackal's whip left a trail of hell across his back.

Whoever she was, she represented a link to the ThunderCats. To Rosa...

Oh, God... he thought, barely repressing the urge to cross himself and kept digging. Rosa...

He had not seen his daughter among the slaves, but that knowledge brought little comfort. If Dyme had managed to miss her, all that meant was that she was very near labor and all alone. Her skills in the basic language of Third Earth were limited, and the native tongue of the Wollos was not widely spoken among the other races.

Please, O Lord, he prayed, keep my Rosa safe.

"Master Mumm-Ra!" Grune snorted at Dyme, briefly wondering how the freak could stand having his head so far up that mummy's ass before noticing the golden-armored figure which had appeared next to him. Grune's heart nearly leapt into his neck at the sight of what was undoubtedly a Guyver, yet his tension eased as he realized that it wasn't the black-armored monster which had made sport of and dismembered him so long ago.

"And who's this?" he asked with a sneer, letting his anger blot out the moment of fear.

"This," the Guyver said, "is Oswald Lisker. Otherwise known as Guyver Two."

"Inspector Lisker?!" The disbelief in Dyme's voice was palpable as his black eyes widened and his jaw grew slack. "How?! You..."

"I was dead. I got better. So, Lost Number, what's *your* story?"

"The same... sir."

"So, you two know each other?" Mumm-Ra asked, a little surprised.

"In passing," Lisker said with a dismissive shrug. "Dyme and his two friends were rather impressive Lost Numbers. It's what kept them alive, at least." Mumm-Ra noticed how Dyme bristled at Lisker's offhanded way of referring to him. If any trouble flared between them, the victor would be obvious. Nothing to worry about.

If trouble occurred between *anyone* and Lisker, the outcome would not be in doubt, he thought.

"He shall aid you in the war against the ThunderCats," Mumm-Ra said.

"Then, he will be under my command," Grune pronounced.

"Whatever," Lisker replied. "My only enemies are Sho and that Cheetah bitch. You can have the rest."

"Very well," Grune said with a curt nod. Mumm-Ra noted the narrowing of Grune's eyes. Again, nothing to worry about. When it came to Guyvers, the Thunderian knew his chances. He wouldn't do anything stupid.

Myrlha chanced a glance up at the dessicated form of that Mumm-Ra creature and barely hid a shiver of horror. His, and Dyme's, rather effective demonstration of who was now in charge left no doubt to what would happen to any who dared challenge him. And who was that golden figure?

"Another Guyver," she heard Salvador whisper just before the supersonic crack of a whip split the air and another section of his light tan coat.

"NO TALKING, YOU LITTLE SHIT!" roared the Simian which patrolled their work detail. "How many times do I have to hit you before you fucking get it!"

Guyver... Salvador knew what it was. And there was more than one.

Be strong, Salvador, she thought as she kept digging. We'll have a chance to talk once the work is over for today.

Damn Tabbots, the Bolkin named Bundan thought to himself as he guided the burro yoked to his now-empty cart through the darkening forest. An entire harvest of grain, and Pinchpenny had paid only three-quarters of what he had the previous year. If there were any way of screwing someone, trust a Tabbot to find it. Bundan couldn't help that the land had not given quite the bounty it had before. The rainy season had been a tad shorter, and as such the land gave less. What the greedy hog had paid was just barely enough to buy foodstuffs from the fishermen in the human villages along the western coast. The thought of buying any meatfruits or any other fruits had died with the Berbil groves in that savage Mutant attack. Berbils were typically generous with their wares, which had helped support his kind for decades. With their stores nearly depleted, many stomachs would rumble in hunger during the winter.

It's already growing colder, he mused as he drew the hooded tunic tighter about his wooly frame. Despite their own natural coats, the winters in this part of Third Earth could, and did, claim them in death. And with the ThunderCats in such a tight spot, again thanks to those damn Mutants, his

own folk could not ask them for help. They would give all they could, true, but as the main defense for the common people, they needed all they could get.

"Ay Dios mio," Rosa managed between gasping breaths. She huddled herself against the cold, hidden in the brush as the immense cramping finally faded.

I'm going into labor, she thought. Oh, God, my child will be born in the wild. She fought back the hysteria as best she was able as she pushed through the forest growth. The pain, that immense agony, left her unable to focus on anything more than putting one foot before the other. As such, she did not notice the burro-drawn cart which approached before it came to a sudden halt.

"What's this?" Bundan squinted slightly as the Wollo woman staggered in front of his cart. "Say, there, are you all right?"

"Please to be helping me..." she managed. Bundan stood on the buckboard of his cart in order to get a better look at...

"Oh, my..." She was quite pregnant, and from her flushed and gasping face, was close to giving birth! Bundan hopped down and ran as fast as his short legs would carry him to her side. "Come, dear. Ride with me."

"Pain... AAGH!"

Definitely labor, Bundan thought as he steered her to the rear of his cart. Gingerly, he helped her onto the thin layer of straw which lined the wagon. Once the Wollo was settled, yet still gasping shallowly, Bundan reached into the small space behind the buckboard for the small blanket he kept handy and covered her with it.

"The Warrior Maidens have a camp not far from here," Bundan said as he climbed back behind the reigns and spurred the animal. "Hang on!" To think she had made this far on her own, and in her condition! He just hoped she would last until he could get her to help.

Ignorant of the other events of the day, a freshly showered Cheetara entered the infirmary. Her eyes passed over the deeply sleeping Sho to the comatose form of Lion-O which occupied the gurney to his right. Her heart wrenched at the sight of the man she loved clinging to life. So strong, so vital, and so near death. The thought nearly brought her to her knees.

No. I will be resolute.

"Still no change?" she asked. Pumyra, for her part, was seated at her desk in the south corner of the infirmary and poring over some of the medical texts Tygra had given her after the Tower's construction.

"None, I'm afraid." Pumyra failed to completely hide the weariness in her voice, the slight slurring of her words bearing evidence of her current state. Not for the first time, Cheetara found herself wishing that others of their number had medical experience beyond Pumyra and Tygra. Critical patients required round-the-clock care, and his basic skills would be a plus, but with Tygra having to step up as temporary leader he had more than enough on his own plate. "Still," Pumyra went on, "at this point no news is still good news."

"Pumyra." She looked up as Cheetara's shadow fell across her desk. "You really should get some sleep."

"I manage a nap here and there." The yawn which followed gave lie to those words. "The medicines have been processed, and Sho's no cause for worry, so at least I can devote my full attention to Lion-O."

"Why don't you let Snarf look over him for tonight?"

"I though you wanted me to get some rest?" Pumyra retorted with a weak smile.

"Good point." Cheetara couldn't help but grin. Snarf was high-strung enough as it was. "How about if I take over?"

"I thought you had watch duty tonight?"

"Lynx-O volunteered to pull a double watch," Cheetara replied. "He's getting a nap of his own right now."

"In other words..." a mighty yawn cut Pumyra short, "...it's already been set up."

"Tygra arranged it before we all had to make that trip to the desert."

"Clever one, isn't he?"

"As he'd say, he has his moments." Both women chuckled at that.

"Okay, okay, you win. But, call..."

"If Lion-O needs you, I'll call you. Just get some sleep."

"Right. Thank you, Cheetara."

"Don't mention it. Now, off to bed with you." Cheetara looked on as Pumyra rose from behind the desk and made her way out. The poor woman had been run ragged lately. A good, deep sleep would do her wonders.

Come back to me, she thought as she placed a chair beside Lion-O's bed. Don't let me lose you, too.

"Rider approachng," Lei whispered to Belix. The two women crouched on the thick limb upon which they had been standing watch as the distant figure drew steadily nearer. "Who do you think it is?"

"A target, if this one thinks to make even more trouble for us," Belix asnwered as she drew her bow.

"It was a close call this morning," Lei agreed. "I wonder how that Sho fared?"

"I don't know. I'm just glad those two monsters didn't fight it out here. Hmmm..." Belix squinted her eyes in the fading light. "Looks rather small all around. Wollo, maybe?"

"Could be a Bolkin," Lei replied. "It's time for their annual trek to the Tabbot lands to sell what grain they have left over."

"Then they must enjoy getting ripped off. Wait... yes, it's a Bolkin. Probably Bundan."

A thin wail of pain reached their ears from the Bolkin's cart.

"Is he injured?"

"He is riding awful quickly. I knew bandits would become a problem again with the ThunderCats in their current state." Another cry of torment, and the two recognized it as a woman's voice. Belix and Lei leapt down to the thick carpet of the forest floor, still green yet not for much longer, just as the Bolkin drew his panting burro to a halt.

"The Wollo," he said, pointing to the rear of his cart. "She's in labor!"

Belix loped over to the flat bed of the cart and her eyes widened in shock at the scrunched face and swollen belly of the Wollo woman.

"Why is she not in her own village?" she demanded as she wiped sweat from the Wollo's furry brow.

"I found her not far from here," Bundan replied. "I have no idea how or even why she was in the forest!"

Belix nodded. Bolkins were known for their marked inability to lie convincingly, and she knew he wasn't.

"Lei, remain on watch. I shall accompany Bundan to the camp."

"Good luck," Lei said, mostly to the unnamed Wollo.

Lisker panted with exhaustion as he welded the sliding door to his quarters shut with the emerald laser from his forehead. He didn't trust the locking mechanism to be secure should that Grune freak decide he didn't want anyone around to usurp his command over those zoanoid-like Mutants. As if he would *want* to be in charge of such a brutish and likely stupid lot. Lisker knew his sleep would be deep indeed this night, and did not trust his own honed reflexes to wake him in case of an intruder. His use of the Guyver in the fight with that motherfucker Sho and the drain it had taken on him in healing the damage that weak and brief megasmasher blast inflicted had taken its toll. He had been ready to keel over in front of his supposed new allies, yet his own iron resolve allowed him to keep upright. Be *damned* if he'd let any of them see him weak. Besides, on awakening, all he had to do was torch through the edges of the door and select other vacant quarters on this strange ship. Once back in top form, he doubted any of the Mutants, or Grune, could sneak up on him. If a demonstration of what he could do was needed, then so be it. The Guyver disengaged, and the first thing to hit him was the rancid stink of wet fur.

"God*DAMN*!" he bellowed as the odors the armor had filtered out hit him full force and nearly banished the bone-deep weariness for a brief span of moments. For God's sake, didn't these Mutants know *anything* about hygene?!

The exhaustion reclaimed him, and Lisker collapsed onto the foul smelling bed. He would stink to the top of the world, but that no longer mattered. He fell into the world of dreams, where a helpless Cheetah woman awaited him and Sho could not intervene.

The heavy steel door to the slave pen slammed shut with a screeching squeal of hinges before the sound of the locks echoed in the silent and cramped quarters. Myrlha rubbed her nearly-raw wrists - the results of the sweat chafing the skin beneath the cuffs - after those shackles had been removed and inspected the shackles which now adorned her ankles. Who cared if their arms were free if they could take little more than cub steps? She took a deep breath of the air which was rank with sweat and sought out Salvador. Myrlha found him holding a shaking woman, another Wollo, and murmuring to her in a strange lyrical language. The trembling, crying female had to be his mate.

"Salvador," she said - quietly, for conversation even in the holding pens could draw whips - as she shuffled over to the strange pair.

Salvador looked up at the sound of his name to see the Thunderian woman he had tried to speak with earlier shuffling closer, her legs bound as his were. Every muscle in his body cried out in pain from both the work and the whips as he studied her. Her hair was a shade of brown born of heritage and long neglect. Her face and body were lean from both exhausting work and poor nutrition, yet her eyes shone bright from within the flat black markings around her eyes which curved back along her face and into her mane. Her thin, tawny body peeked through several rents in the ruined fabric of the clothing which at least still covered her full breasts and her sex.

"I'm Myrlha," she said in greeting. "She is your wife?"

"Yes," he said, quietly. "Her name is Ximena."

"I wish I could say I'm glad to meet you..."

"You are Thunderian, correct?"

His question caught her completely off guard, a great hope blooming in her chest. It was several seconds before she could manage to ask, "You... know of Thundera?"

"Yes," he replied. "A group of your folk landed here a few years ago. They call themselves ThunderCats."

"ThunderCats!" came an excited whisper as those of her countrymen held in this pen overheard, and the word spread. Myrlha held up her hands for silence. The Wollo couple gazed about, clearly perturbed.

"The Nobility, they still live?" she asked, her heart pounding frantically.

"They don't call themselves nobility, but they do live," Salvador explained. "They have helped the people of Third Earth so many times."

"That's them, alright," a male voice rasped.

"Hope! Hope lives!"

"Keep yer voice down, ya damn fool!"

"SILENCE IN THERE!" boomed a Simian's voice. "IF YOU SORRY LOT DON'T WANT A GOOD WHIPPING BEFORE BED!" The rising cacophony died instantly at the threat. Each and every slave knew the Mutants would be only too happy to spend a night inflicting pain upon them.

"Do they know of us?" Myrlha asked.

"I don't think so," Salvador whispered back. "We must get word to them."

"I think I know a way," breathed a young Lynx from her left. "The Mutants sent me down into the catacombs in their place."

"Please, tell us," Myrlha pleaded. Could this be it? Could their freedom truly be close at hand? It was almost too much to hope for.

"Deep within the caves is a small fissure. It leads to some sort of underground tunnel. If any of us are to escape, then it must be through there."

"Why did you not take it?" a Lion-esque male, an arm about his wife's shoulders, asked.

"I could not leave you all, Torr."

"Did you tell them?" asked a Panther female.

"No, of course not."

"Then, if we are to have any chance," said an aged Tyger, "then only one of us must go. Whom shall it be?" The silence was deafening. With families having been restored, however inadvertantly, by the demand for labor in the building of a new Mutant fortress, few were eager to leave their loved ones.

"I'll do it," Myrlha said. Loyalty to her countrymen was all she had, the remnants of her family having met their deaths in Thundera's final days. "I'll need a guide, though."

"Husband," the Wollo named Ximena said.

"No, love, I cannot leave you here!"

"You have travelled far in your trade, Salvador," she said, tears welling in her eyes. "Surely you could lead this Thunderian back to the ThunderCats."

"But..." Salvador's protest died when his wife's lips found his.

"If the two of you do not escape," she said in her thick accent once their kiss had ended, "then none of us will know freedom again. I know our daughter is not among us, praise be unto God, and at least one of us should be with her. Go, my husband."

"I... shall," he relented.

"We need a plan," the old Tyger said.

"Any ideas, Siberias?"

"Not as yet. Be patient, my friends and countrymen. Our time will come."

Myrlha retreated to her thin cot, elation having replaced exhaution. The day of their freedom was at last drawing near. She sent a prayer to any kind-hearted dieties who were listening that she and Salvador could pull this off.

"Another slow night," the Jackal Grothis said to Apelar, the Simian on his right.

"Wanna take a few of the women?" Apelar asked, his eyes gleaming in the hastily-strung security lights. "I fancied a couple of those short ones Dyme just brought in. Oughtta squeal *real* nice."

"Nah," Grothis said. "Don't wanna screw on guard duty."

"Come on. That's never stopped ya before. Hey, you want one of the workers?" Apelar said with a sneer. "One of the cats who didn't rate as concubines? Hear they still got their maidenhoods."

"Apelar..." Grothis began in annoyance.

"You want one of the concubines. Ah, they got some skills..."

"That's enough!" Grothis snarled, causing the other Simian to cringe. "Do you really want to piss off Grune?"

"Hmph. Never thought it of you," Apelar grunted. "Cowed by a Thunderian."

"Watch your bastard tongue," Grothis snarled. "You saw what that Dyme monster did to Primor."

"Don't tell me you felt loyal to that son of a bitch."

"No," Grothis replied, "but at least Primor was a proper Mutant. With him, you knew where ya stood. Those two freaks flankin' Grune..."

"Gotcha," Apelar said. "I was in that Berbil place when that other Guyver thing first showed. Damn lucky to get out with my skin."

"I know the feeling," came a cunning voice from the shadows. Grothis and Apelar readied their laser pistols as the lanky shadow came into the pool of light which bathed the area of the door to Slave Pen One. "I was there as well."

"Jackalman," Grothis said with a sneer. "What the hell do *you* want?"

"Hmm... What do I want?" Jackalman began to pace slowly in front of them, feigning to be lost in thought. "A castle in the countryside. A mate. Maybe a pup or two. And Mumm-Ra's head mounted over my fireplace," he finished with a cruel grin.

"Really?" Apelar snorted. "And just how do plan to get that?"

"Merely by playing my cards right," Jackalman said. "Think about it, will you? The Mutant Army is led by three people of exceptional power, and staggering egos."

"And?"

"Oh, come on, Grothis. Do I have to spell it out?" Silence was his only reply. "Fine. By themselves, none of them are powerful enough to take Mumm-Ra. We merely convince them that they could do so together."

"So? I fail to see how we could profit from this!"

"That's because your brain is as small as your balls."

"Wha... WHAT?!"

"If you would care to look at the big picture, you would understand!" Jackalman shouted. "We merely have to persuade Grune and his entourage that they possess the power to topple Mumm-Ra if they act together."

"And that leave us... where? Wait, I know," Grothis replied sardonically. "It leaves us as fucking *cannon fodder* between them and Mumm-Ra!"

"Again, you don't know how arrogant they can be," Jackalman said as if he were speaking to a slow child. "They'll be so confident in their power, they won't think to even send us against Mumm-Ra first."

"Go on," Apelar said with a smirk, nudging Grothis and gesturing with his eyes. Grothis nodded slightly.

"Mumm-Ra will kill them, but he'll use up a lot of his power in the process," Jackalman explained, wringing his hands and snickering to himself with a slightly mad spark in his eyes. "That's when we move in with all of our might!" The plan was brilliant, so far as he was concerned. The fact that having dug himself out of the wreckage of Castle Plun-Darr and marching on foot to catch up with the last of Primor's forces with the faces of all the dead and the Guyver's horrible weapons running across his mind had tilted the scales of his mind toward insanity didn't register. All he saw was his chance, his last desperate chance, to be on top for once in his pathetic life. "We can wipe Mumm-Ra off the face of Third Earth forever!"

"Can you believe this Jackal?!" Apelar said to Grothis. Jackalman's face flushed with heat until he was certain his fur would spark.

"Quite a bastard, this one," Grothis said with a chuckle which further infuriated him. "But, not too bright. No, not at all."

"Listen! I tell you, we can rule this world together!"

"And what of Grune?" Apelar asked.

"Weren't you listening to me?"

"We were," Grothis said, "and so was he."

"My furry ass, he was!"

"Oh, it's your furry ass, alright," Grune snarled as he stepped fully into the pool of light in which the three Mutants stood. His spiked club twirled idly in his hand as Jackalman cringed mightily and turned slowly about.

"G...Grune! What a..."

"Don't bother," Grune said as he languidly closed the distance between himself and Jackalman. "I knew I'd have to keep an eye on you. I wonder if Primor even noticed you'd slunk into his fold."

"It was those two!" Jackalman howled, pointing a quaking finger at Grothis and Apelar as shivers of terror visibly shook him. "They suggested it to me!"

"Did you?" Grune asked the pair of guards.

"Nope."

"Not us."

"I'm more inclined to believe *them* than *you*, coward." Grune stalked closer to the cowering Mutant. He would make this quick. Brutality sometimes proved more effective than extended cruelty, after all. He watched as Jackalman scampered backward. Pathetic Mutant. "I won't tolerate thoughts of rebellion. Besides, a spineless wimp like you could never rule over a planet." With that, Grune lunged forward and sent his spiked club down in a sharp swing which landed it in the center of Jackalman's head with a sick crunch. The lights of life and madness faded at once as the last of the original Mutant leaders on Third Earth went to join his comrades in whatever hell had been reserved for them.

"Leave this pile of shit where it lies," Grune said before turning back to where the Ravager rested.

"Yes, sir," Apelar said. Even if Grune was a Thunderian, the Simian had to admire how he dealt with traitors.

Rage.

Horror.

Tears flowing hot down his cheeks.

Muted howls of agony and shame.

Blood.

Sho strained against the cuffs whose chains terminated in black iron loops in the wall behind him, screaming for Lisker to stop as he...

"Please, stop it!" He shouted at the top of his ragged lungs. "She's no threat to you!" Sho's plea went ignored. Lisker landed another punch against her jaw as he thrust again and again. Sho's heart rent itself in two as the gag rendered her mute as he... Oh, God, as he...

"GUYVER!" he roared for what felt like the thousandth time, and was yet again unrewarded by the power. Why wouldn't it come? WHY!?

He saw it then, standing just to the opposite side of Lisker. It remained frozen in place, arms crossed severely across the chest and the pitiless whites of the eyes seeming to stare into his soul.

"Why, damn you?!" he screamed. "Why won't you help me!? Help her?! WHY!?"

It remained silent, merely continuing to stare. Sho saw the fish-eye reflection of his panicked face on the curved surface of the control medal, wild eyes mad with rage and horror.

Because you are weak, the Guyver's -*his* Guyver's! - posture and indifference seemed to say. This power is wasted on you.

"Help me stop this!" Sho pleaded, his screams echoing in the claustrophobic gloom of what he now recognized as the dungeon of the former Castle Plun-Darr. Were he not chained, he would have dropped to his knees and outright begged.

"You can't stop me," Lisker taunted as he took her again and again and...

"Damnit! GUYVER!!! AAAAAAAAHHHH!!!"

"Don't bother." The knife appeared in Lisker's hand. "You couldn't stop me anyway."

He's right, you know, the silent voice of the Guyver added. You're just a boy, after all. With that, the Guyver faded into nothingness as Lisker raised the dagger over her battered and violated body, aiming the gleaming tip between her breasts.

"NO! Lisker, please, do what you want to me, but..." The blade plunged... so much blood... he'd failed...

Cheetara awoke from her daze at the sound of covers rustling to her left. Sho thrashed in his sleep, pained whimpers escaping his lips. Whatever nightmare he was having...

"Cheetara..."

Dreaming of me, is he? The terror in his unconscious moan could only mean that it wasn't in a pleasant way.

"Lisker... no..."

"Oh," she said as she rose from her seat. Earlier at the gully, then. She couldn't begrudge Sho for having nightmares about that...

"Guyver..." Cheetara involuntarily leapt back at that word, tense as Sho began to thrash wildly. Her nerves eased somewhat as no explosion annihilated the immediate area around him. She approached cautiously, a hand ready to deliver a slap that would hopefully awaken him. Cheetara did not know if he could summon that armor in his sleep, and held no desires to find out one way or the other.

"Cheetara! NO!"

She jumped as those words burst from his lips and he shot up from his bed to land on his feet in an awkward crouch. What in the world... She remained silent as Sho whipped his head about in confusion for a few moments as whatever nightmare which plagued his sleep and involved her seemed to fade.

"I'm right here," she said. Sho spun about, finding her in the dimmed light of the infirmary and his eyes filled with tears of relief. She wondered how bad the nightmare had been as he struggled to gain some composure.

"Um... been up long?" he asked sheepishly, yet she detected an undercurrent of terror in his voice.

"No," she answered honestly as she stretched to quell the pains in her back and legs. "Nightmare?"

"Yeah," Sho replied as he sat back on the bed. He wouldn't look directly at her, she noticed. Why? "What time is it?"

"Four in the morning," Cheetara replied. "You've been asleep for nearly a day, now."

"Yeah." Silence streched between them thick with unasked questions. "I'll go grab some water. Thirsty?"

"I could use some," she said in reply. She glanced breifly at his lean and muscular back as Sho walked over to the main sink and filled two cups with cool water, and noticed the twin growths between his shoulders. What purpose did they serve? She accepted the cup as she delivered her question.

"Those things?" he replied. "They've got something to do with the Guyver. They tingle when I call it, and that's all I know."

"Sho," she began, "can you call it in your sleep?"

"Huh?" his exposed skin went ghostly pale at her question. "Um... Why would you ask that?"

"You called its name in your sleep as though you wanted it to appear."

"I... did?" The confusion in his words was tinged with fear and more than a little shame, she noticed. "Must've been some nightmare, then." Cheetara saw the lie in his forced smile, yet let the matter drop for the moment. He obviously didn't want to talk about that vivid dream. At least, not to her. Sho eased back into the bed, leaning his back against the headboard as he sipped the cool liduid. The tension slowly bled out of his frame with each breath, resting his free arm on his upturned knee.

"Sho, since we're both up, I'd like to ask you something." Cheetara sat on the empty side of the bed and looked directly into his eyes.

"No problem."

"What did Lisker say to you in the Warrior Maiden camp?" Cheetara took a small sip of water as Sho's eyes shut and a weary breath blew through his lips.

"I told him to shut his mouth, and I called him a stupid ass."

"Which he deserved, and which answered my second question." Another sip of water. "Now about my first one?"

"You really don't want to know."

"Sho, I'm an adult," Cheetara said, slipping just the right amount of patronizing in her voice. "You don't have to be embarrassed at telling me how he insulted you."

"He was talking to me, but you were the one he was..." Sho halted, blushing furiously.

"He insulted me?" she asked, her curiousity piqued. "Now I have to know."

"Lisker," Sho began, "was under the impression that we were... intimate."

"Really?" Cheetara said, puzzled. "Sho, you're not my type, but I don't see where the insult is, here."

"You want a direct translation," he said, resigned.

"I do."

"Okay. Lisker said that if I kept on sleeping with cats, I'd end up with fleas." Sho took a sip of water as though to wash the taste of those words from his tongue.

"He's quite the sexist, isn't he?" Cheetara realized she'd said the wrong thing when Sho winced. "Sho, your dream. I know it was about me."

"It wasn't... you know... about *us*..." His embarrassment was genuine, yet so was the fear beneath. Apparently he wasn't quite as innocent of sexual matters as she'd thought, yet that wasn't the root of the situation.

"I know you didn't win that fight, but you don't need to worry about me..."

"I do..." Sho immediately clammed up, mortified at his runaway mouth before she could add being a ThunderCat to the end of her reassuring statement. Cheetara took a deep breath, inwardly touched at Sho's concern. From the time they spent together as teacher and student of the Code of Thundera, she'd learned more about him than he likely realized. Cheetara knew he cared deeply for her (and was relieved to find that it was not in an amorous way), and for all the ThunderCats. They had all come to see Sho as a friend, as he had come to see them. Cheetara was more than willing to help him sort out whatever was plagueing him.

"I'm a ThunderCat..."

"That doesn't matter!" Sho yelped, again clamping his mouth shut too late.

"Sho, tell me," Cheetara said. "Tell me what you saw."

"I... I can't..."

"Tell me. Let it out." He was obviously disturbed by that dream. This had to be brought out into the open.

"Cheetara," Sho began, his voice beginning to shake, "You don't..."

"Yes, I do," she said, forcefully. "Tell me about your dream. I'm pretty good at interpreting them."

"Please, Cheetara, don't make me..."

"Enough, Sho," she admonished sternly. "Tell me."

"Okay," he replied after another deep breath. "I saw Lisker, and he was... he was... he was *raping* you!"

Cheetara remained silent at that. She was no stranger to people trying to force themselves on her. She stayed quiet, wanting to hear more of his dream. Tears began to fall from his eyes as he struggled to put words to what he had seen.

"I... I couldn't stop him," Sho whimpered. "I screamed and screamed, but he wouldn't stop." Sho's face glowed a bright red with humiliation. "The Guyver... it wouldn't come... It just... it just stood there, staring at me!" Cheetara slid over to him and placed her hands on his trembling shoulders. "When..." Sho took a deep, shaky breath. "When you busted the lenses of his megasmasher, I saw into his mind. Cheetara, he wants payback for what you did."

"Your dream was based around what you saw in his mind, then. Nothing more."

"He'll come for you," Sho said, his voice steady once more. "Maybe even before he takes another crack at me."

"Then we'll be ready. Look at me, Sho." He slowly raised his tear-reddened eyes to hers. "ThunderCats are used to danger and enemies holding violent grudges against us. And as for someone trying to force himself on me, I've had to fight men like that off before. Whatever sick desires he has for me won't be fulfilled. Count on it." Her voice betrayed none of the cold horror she felt at Sho't recounting.

"He was right about one thing," Sho said at length. "I'll never be able to win unless I learn how to fight. *Really* fight. Like Panthro."

"Sho, Panthro has years of experience."

"I know I can't be a match for him," without the Guyver, he didn't say, "but I need to learn. I won't let that nightmare become a reality."

"I know you won't," Cheetara replied, her voice gentle and reassuring. After a soft squeeze, she released his shoulders.

"Any change?" Sho asked, looking over at the still-comatose Lion-O.

"None," Cheetara said, her voice heavy with emotion. "He will recover, he just needs time." Neither spoke for several moments as they contemplated Lion-O's condition. Cheetara could still feel the terror of the thought of losing him. The Lord of the ThunderCats. The man she had come to love after the violent loss of Cougrix. The bearer of many of their hopes and dreams. She shook herself free of those dark thoughts. Dwelling on such would lead only to madness. "It's nearly first light," she said.

"I get the hint," Sho said with a smile. "I'll join you once I get some decent clothes on." The pair left the infirmary, hearts heavy with their own separate feelings of anxiety. Had they remained a few minutes more, the involuntary flexing of Lion-O's hand would have made a dramatic change to their emotional landscapes.

In the next episode:

The train carrying the ThunderCats, Mutants, and Guyvers One and Two gains momentum, barrelling along tracks that lead only to chaos. A new life begins, another rises again, and two more find freedom. Will Myrlha and Salvador survive the perilous journey across untamed terrain? Will the ThunderCats be able to free their fellow countrymen and people of Third Earth? All this and more in the next episode of One Last War to Fight.