ThunderCats

Bio-Booster Armor Guyver

One Last War to Fight

Episode Eighteen: Escape

By Knight Writer

"Both mother and child are well," Analee said as she exited the hut into the dew-soaked morning. The newborn Wollo was currently nursing at his mother's breast as the pair lay on a hastily-made bed of furs and blankets. The birth itself had gone smoothly and without incident, despite the unusual circumstances of her having been brought here. "I understand you brought her here?" she asked of the Bolkin who stood flanked by two Maidens.

"I did," Bundan replied. "She was saying some strange things as I was bringing her."

"Such as?" Analee asked with a raised eyebrow.

"I am not familiar with the Wollo language," Bundan explained, "beyond a few words and phrases."

"If you don't mind?"

"Not at all." Bundan took a deep breath, recalling all he could from Rosa's ramblings. "El Diablo... That means the demon.. and something about the ground swallowing people. I apologize, but that is all I can decipher."

"Thank you," Analee said quietly. "It is enough." Dyme, she thought. "Kayla!"

"Yes?"
"Send word to the ThunderCats. Tell them to meet us at Salvador's village this afternoon. Bundan, will you remain?"

"I have little choice," the Bolkin replied. "Until sunrise, travel is just too dangerous."

"Very well."

Breakfast had gone well. As for the council session, he had no idea. The lessons concerning the Code of Thundera had been skipped.

Pain, however, was quite demanding as a kick from Panthro landed against his ribs and sent him sprawling.

"Owww...." Sho groaned as he regained his feet.

"Say, you sure about this?" Panthro asked, a look of concern on his face. "You don't look so hot."

"I'm... sure..." Sho gasped as he rose once more. "Gotta be ready... for Lisker."

At this rate, the only thing you'll be ready for is another stay in the infirmary, Panthro didn't say. The rising sun had begun beating down on the desert in which the Tower of Omens stood, and the temperature would only climb as the day wore on.

The kid had drive, Panthro had to give him that, and a little potential. But, Thunderian martial arts had been created with Thunderians in mind. Humans had little chance of surviving the harsh training required.

Maybe, Panthro thought, that's where I'm going wrong? It made sense. Sho was - armor notwithstanding - a human. Without the Guyver to protect him, he was extremely vulnerable.

"I'm ready," Sho said, panting heavily. "One more time."

"No," Panthro replied. "I think you've had enough."

"I can go another round."

"And you can end up back under Pumyra's care," Panthro replied as he reached for a pair of towels which rested on a handy rock. One he draped about his massive shoulders, the other he threw to Sho. He caught it in his left hand and began to wipe away the sweat. "I gotta reassess this whole training thing."

"You mean I don't have a chance, right?" Sho asked sharply.

"Not that. It's just that you're not Thunderian. I have to tailor the training to something you can handle without that armor." Panthro was willing to let the tone of Sho's voice slide. This once, anyway.

"Oh...yeah, didn't think about that. Sorry."

"Don't worry about it." Panthro recalled the details of his dream which Cheetara had shared with him just after breakfast. Sho needed to learn how to fight, and fast, if he was to have any chance of winning another fight against Lisker. Guyver Two, he thought. So where's Guyver Three?

"I take it that training's going well," Tygra said as he apprroached the two sparring partners.

"About as well as can be expected," Panthro said as he toweled off.

"In other words," Sho added, "I'm getting my butt kicked."

"No offense, but I expected as much," Tygra said with a laugh.

"I can see why," Sho said. "Same time tomorrow?"

"You sure like pain, kid."

"Call me a masochist," Sho repled.

"Sho, I'd like you to come with me."

"What's up?" Sho and Panthro asked at once.

"I just got word from the Warrior Maidens," Tygra explained. "It seems that a nearby Wollo village has been attacked. Dyme appears to be the culprit."

"How bad?" Panthro asked.

"From what I've been told, the Wollos have been taken rather than killed."

"Taken?" Sho asked. "For what?"

"Slave labor," Panthro snarled.

"Slaves? Wollos? From what I've seen..."

"Mutants don't care who they exploit," Tygra said by way of explanation.

"Got it. Ready when you are, Tygra."

"Good. Let's go."

Kayla shook her head in amazed horror at the remains of the Wollo village which rested at the edge of the Unicorn Forest. Though she had visited this particular Wollo settlement only a few times in her youth, the architecture had stuck in her memory with its walls and graceful archways.

"Damn..."

The muttered curse from Sho - who stood to her right along with the ThunderCat Tygra - summed up her feelings precisely. Homes were upturned in the ruined earth, their foundations

exposed to sunlight as though the firm dirt beneath her bare feet had been made into churning liquid.

"They're building another Castle Plun-Darr, aren't they?" Kayla asked.

"It would seem so. Have any other settlements been attacked?"

"No, Tygra. At least, none that we know of."

"Hmm... Indeed troubling."

Sho gasped slightly as an idea - or perhaps a fragement of memory- came to him.

"Tygra. Kayla. Look about for any strange footprints."

"Strange footprints?" Kayla asked.

"Anything that doesn't look human," Sho explained hurriedly as he locked his eyes on the ground. Vague though they were, memories were coming back from this disaster.

"Why?" Tygra asked.

"Dyme didn't work alone," Sho explained as he searched between two overturned houses. "He had two friends, name of Somlum and Aptom." After a half hour, Tygra and Kayla reported no signs of what he had searched for.

"So, this means that Dyme is working alone after all?"

"Sure looks that way," Sho replied, dubious. "Maybe I was wrong. But, why would Mumm-Ra only bring one back?"

"With him," Tygra began as he drew up beside Kayla and Sho, "there's really no telling. Thank you, Kayla, for bringing this to our attention." Tygra's voice barely hid the weariness that tried to drag him to the dirt.

"No problem, Tygra." With that, she turned and bolted into the woods as though the devil himself was lurking in the ruined Wollo village. Sho gazed about the destruction with a shiver racing up his own spine. Though he had never before set foot in Salvador's hometown, the image of hundreds of lives being swept away in an instant imparted a creeping horror all its own.

"Looks like we need to explore a bit more of our new world," Tygra said distractedly.

"Huh?"

"Oh! Nothing, Sho. Let's head back," Tygra said just as Snarfer's shrill, extatic voice blared over the ThunderClaw's comm system.

"Tygra! Come in! Come in!"

What now? he thought as the two charged the waiting aircraft. Tygra slammed the transmit button as he leapt into the pilot seat. "Tygra here. What is it, Snarfer?"

"GREAT NEWS! YEP! BEST YET!"

"Well, what is it?" Tygra asked, annoyed and more than a little hopeful.

"It's Lion-O!" With those two words, Tygra felt an immense weight leave his shoulders and the shadow retreat from his heart. "He's awake!"

"Hell yeah!" Sho hooted, pumping his fist into the air.

Thank Jaga, Tygra thought. "Wonderful news, Snarfer! We'll return immediately. Tygra out."

"I'd say things are looking up, after all," Sho said, a smile beaming from his face. Despite the horrid sight of the Wollo settlement, he couldn't help but be relieved.

"I agree," Tygra replied with a grin of his own. "Now, how about I show you how fast this thing really goes?"

"Strapped in and ready, boss."

Oh, yeah, Sho thought as the ThunderClaw reached altitude and shot off in the direction of the Tower of Omens at near-sickening speed, I *definitely* prefer my method of flying...

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"And how are we feeling?"

"I can't vouch for you," Lion-O croaked weakly, "but I feel like crap."

"Then that's an improvement," Pumyra said in reply.

"Heh. Bedside manner."

"What about it?"

"Get one, would you?" Hearty laughter filled the room at his quip, and even Pumyra gave a chuckle, he noticed. "How long have I been out?"

"About two days," Panthro said, relief beaming from his eyes.

"Don't think you can just charge out of bed," Pumyra admonished. "You're still on the mend."

"I know," Lion-O replied, albeit reluctantly. "Has anything happened?"

"What did I just tell you?" Pumyra said, staring directly into his eyes.

"I'm still Lord of the..."

"Not at the moment," Pumyra replied primly. She knew this would happen. "Tygra is doing a fine job in your stead."

"I'm," a pause, a twinge of discomfort crossing his face, "sure he is. Still..."

"Still nothing," Pumyra said, her tone brooking no argument. "You are still recovering. Like it or not, this bed is home until I say otherwise."

"She's right," Cheetara added. Lion-O looked up at her and drank in the love radiating from her beatiful face. "In terms of the king's health, only the Court Physician can boss around the Lord of the ThunderCats."

"And I *will* do so," Pumyra added with a glare that didn't hide the joy she felt. "Get used to this bed, Lion-O, because it'll be home for awhile yet."

"Can I at least get something to read?" He noticed the surprised looks on the other ThunderCat's faces.

"I can definitely arrange that," Pumyra replied, satisfied that her patient had been well and truly cowed. "All your vital signs are reading improvement." Her face softened considerably. "With your strength, a little care, and some rest, you'll be back on your feet in no time."

"I never had a doubt," Lion-O said with a smile as the infirmary door slid open. "We were pretty far away from the Tower, though. How'd you get me back so fast, anyway?"

"You have this young man to thank for that," Tygra's voice said. Lion-O looked to the opposite side of the infirmary as his friends parted to see Tygra and a very embarrassed-looking Sho enter.

"Ah, geez..." he said, face glowing like an ember. "All I did was bring you here. Pumyra and Tygra did the real work..."

"Modest to a fault," Panthro muttered with an amused shake of his head. For a moment, he wondered if the human knew the first thing about pride. "Don't sell yourself too short, kid."

"I'm glad you're gonna be okay," Sho said with a genuine smile.

"You and me both," Lion-O quipped, and the infirmary was filled with laughter for several moments. "If you all don't mind, I'd like a word with Tygra." Various words of assent were uttered as the other ThunderCats and Sho took their leave.

"You're certainly looking better," Tygra said as he slid a chair to Lion-O's bedside and slid into it.

"How're you holding up?" Lion-O asked after casting a quick glance at the Sword on Tygra's hip.

"Rather well. The Tower is still in one piece, as you can see."

"Heh... ow... What's happened since the ambush? Any clues to the Mutant Army's hideaway?"

"You should really worry about recuperating..."

"I also need to worry about the ThunderCats. Mumm-Ra's not going to wait around for me to get back in fighting form, and I can't afford to spend too much time playing catch-up once I do."

Tygra closed his eyes in consideration. Lion-O had a valid point, and he couldn't find any credible arguement against it. That thought, in itself, was practically mindblowing. Lion-O had never been the debative type, and here he was all of a sudden maneuvering him into a corner. How you've grown, Lion-O, he thought with as much of a swell of pride as he'd allow.

"The past two days have been... eventful," Tygra replied at lenght.

"Eventful?" Lion-O said with a raised eyebrow. Tygra began his account with the Western Berbils arriving with various foodstuffs, current status of the HoverCat, restored stocks of medicines, and ended with an abridged version Cheetara and WilyKit's hunt with the Warrior Maidens. "So," he said when Tygra's report concluded, "how was any of that 'Eventful'?"

"Before the hunt began," Tygra started, dreading what he was about to tell Lion-O, "The party we sent to the Warrior Maidens encountered a new enemy."

"Another one? They seem to be coming out of the woodwork these days. What can you tell me?"

"Perhaps this should wait until you've gotten some more rest."

"Tygra, I have to know. Please."

"Very well. His name is Oswald Lisker, a human."

"That doesn't sound so..."

"He also possesses a Guyver."

Tygra, for a moment, thought Lion-O's eyes would surely burst from their sockets. Before the wounded ThunderCat could interrupt, Tygra gave a brief overview of the fight from what he had seen and Cheetara had told him.

"She *did* that?" Lion-O asked in stunned amazement. "Cheetara doesn't lack for courage, that's for sure. But, Sho doesn't look banged-up at all."

"The Guyver seems able to heal its wearer rather rapidly," Tygra explained. "Sho was fully healed and asleep by the time the ThunderStrike returned here. Pumyra took samples of the substance his armor secreted."

"Does she think she can replicate its healing ability?"

"She hasn't begun her analysis yet, but that's what I'm thinking." And if she could, the possibilities were staggering!

"I hate to interrupt," Pumyra's voice called as she entered the infirmary with a stack of books. "Lion-O wanted something to read, so I raided your collection here. I hope you don't mind, Tygra."

"Not at all," he responded, an eyebrow raised at the title printed on the spine of the top book. "Thunderian Law and History" was its title.

"Wow," Lion-O said when she placed the books in the chair Tygra just vacated. "How long am I gonna be in here again?"

"Not long enough to read all this," Pumyra answered. "But I figured you could use a little variety."

The sounds of picks and hammers were muted here, lights which had been hastily strung by the other slaves just barely reaching them. He'd said the fissure was difficult to find, that they'd know they were near when the air became a little fresher. None of them had spoken more than a few words about it since that night. The plan had been made, and now they would hopefully pull it off.

Myrlha kept her paces short to accomodate the much smaller Salvador as they slinked through the now-inky blackness. They were travelling by feel, now, even her cat-like eyes unable to make out any shapes. While Thunderians, by and large, had excellent vision even at night, the utter lack of any light in the deepening cave would have defeated any unaided eye.

Myrlha grimly ignored the muted wail of agony far behind as a Mutant employed a whip. Silently, she swore that she would succeed, and none of them would ever be beaten again.

She paused, sniffing the dank air and finding a trace of freshness to it. Her heartbeat quickened with excitement as she realized they were getting close. She readjusted the small bundle of supplies the others had saved up, stolen, or granted... favors... to their captors for and had managed to hide in the caverns. It wasn't much, and it was mostly water and some scraps of food, but its weight was a comfort. Included was a light which Laheela had managed to nick from the

chambers of one of the Mutant captains, and Myrlha didn't want to consider what she'd had to do to obtain it. She'd heard of what Primor used to do to her.

"Do you smell that?" Salvador asked, his voice barely enough for a whisper.

"Yes. We're getting close." She held the flashlight ready, yet dared not use it. She followed the scent further into the dark, creeping now, hands searching the craggy and jagged surface. She let out an involuntary gasp of surprise when her hands suddenly encountered open space. With a trembling grasp, she switched on the light and had to squint at the sudden glare.

"That's rather small," Salvador whispered as he stared into the opening. The light shone through the fissure and onto a wall at the far end. "Finding this was a one in a million discovery."

"Let's hope our luck holds," Myrlha replied as she stepped into the narrow gap. Gently, she sidled through into the empty chamber beyond and nearly fell flat when she reached the edge. Shining the light again, she saw the floor of the cavern was only a few feet down and the jump was easily made. She turned and gave word to Salvador and a few moments later helped the Wollo onto the floor.

"So far, so good," he said while Myrlha examined the walls with the light. The stone, she saw, was actually blocks mortared together. Along the floor was a deep recess, and various tunnel entrances dotted the walls.

"No way this was made by nature," she opined. "Wonder who built it?"

"Humans had many cities," Salvador said amid the clinking of his manacles. "Legends say they even had towers that touched the very sky."

"These humans, are any around now?"

"Oh, yes, but their knowledge is long gone. No one knows what happened so many centuries ago. I need your hands for a moment."

"Huh?" Myrlha turned to see Salvador with his manacles in one hand and a pick with an angled point in the other. She set the light on the floor between them and reached toward him. "You do this often?" she asked as he set to work freeing her.

"No. I'm just an old Wollo who's worn chains a time or two in his life. I never took to it."

"Not that I blame you," Myrlha chuckled as her right, then left, wrists were freed

"We should take these with us," Salvador said as he placed the shackles in a coat pocket. "If the Mutants find that fissure, we don't want them knowing we used it to escape."

"Good thinking." Myrlha was really coming to like the Wollo. The two of them gathered their things and followed the air currents to what was hoped to be a viable exit.

"We'll have to travel at night for awhile, until we're beyond range of any Mutant search parties."

"I agree. We should sleep in shifts, too." Myrlha and Salvador tavelled on in silence for several moments through what would have shocked the two of them if they'd known it was once a sewer. Past corners and through long stretches of near-silent concrete tunnels, their trek seemed interminable. Finally, after an hour, she could stand the silence no longer. "The ThunderCats, who leads them? Does Jaga still hold that title?"

"I know Lion-O sometimes speaks with a spirit he calls that name, but I've never seen him."

"Lion-O?" Myrlha asked, incredulous. "King Claudus' son?"

"He does," Salvador said. "A rather fine man, I say."

"I'm sure he is." Lion-O was a boy when Thundera was destroyed, she thought. Well, it's been some years since then. As they walked and spoke, the air became cleaner and cleaner until the light of day beckoned at the far end of another tunnel they'd chosen. The ceiling had collapsed, allowing the sun to peek into its depths.

"No noise," Salvador noted as they warily approached.

"None," Myrlha agreed. She eased upward, testing each hold on the ruined mass before moving to the next. Her head crested the rim of the hole, eyes sharply examining every detail. Far into the distance, but not far enough for her liking, she could see the gathered Mutant ships. No sound of voices or machines reached her. "It's clear," she said as she clambered down, "but I can still see the ships. Looks like we're not going anywhere just yet."

"Then, we wait," Salvador agreed, sitting down to the sound of his knees popping. "I'm not as young as I used to be, anyway. I could use a rest."

"You kept up pretty well."

"I'd do far better on a burro. Or any mount for that matter."

"I wonder how far from the ThunderCats we are?"

"A good ways, I'd say. Even so, we can't leave here until nightfall. I don't know about you, but I could use a nap."

"Rest, friend," Myrlha said. "I'll wake you in a few hours."

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Lion-O closed the book of laws and history, feeling nauseatingly well informed. He'd just finished the chapter regarding the history of Vanguards, non-Thunderians who had done great

deeds for Thundera and her people, and noticed that the sky outside his window was pitch dark. Despite the hour and his own weariness, he could not close his eyes long enough to sleep.

He knew he was in no condition to leave his bed, let alone resume leadership of the ThunderCats. He also knew that Tygra was doing well in his place. He should, therefore, have nothing to worry about.

Yet his mind, unheeding of that little fact, kept dredging up things to worry about. Things which had once seemed trivial were now smacking of vital importance. Every detail of daily life looked as though life and death depended on his decision. He had even tried defying Pumyra by getting out of bed. His one attempt didn't even get him as far as the floor.

"You seem very troubled." Jaga's voice preceded his appearence, accompanied by the usual flare of blue light which coalesced into his ephemeral image. "You have many reasons to be."

"Everything's happening so fast," Lion-O replied. "It seems like a new enemy is showing up every other day." He gazed at the spirit of his mentor and friend and an idea came to him. Jaga hadn't been called "The Wise" for nothing. "Can you tell me about them? If I know where Mumm-Ra's pulling them from, maybe I can stop him from reviving more."

"Unfortunately," Jaga began, lancing Lion-O's hopes with that one word, "I know very little of Second Earth and Sho's old adversaries. The only one who can tell you about them is him, and he has yet to regain his memories."

"I see." Time for a different approach. "Can you tell me about Grune? Why did he turn?" Lion-O studied Jaga's face as it fell.

"I can tell you volumes about him," Jaga replied at length.

"I've got all night."

"Very well." Jaga paused for a moment, as though gathering himself. "As you know, there are many clans of Thunderians. Before the ThunderCats were established and the Nobility chosen as the governing body, we were fragmented and violent. Wars between clans were common, and fought over the most trivial things."

Lion-O nodded his understanding, recalling history lessons from Tygra.

"After the Time of Union, there were some clans who refused to align with the new society. The Sabre clan was chief among them."

"That was Grune's clan?"

"Quite right. The Sabres were extremely proud, nearly to the point of arrogance. They valued strength above all else, and saw joining a united people and being subject to government as an

insult. As such, they held to their own ways and lands and had little to do with the rest of Thundera."

"So, they just kept to themselves?" Lion-O asked. "They didn't try to conquer the other clans?"

"The Sabres knew they had no chance against a united front," Jaga explained, "and while our technologies advanced, theirs grew stagnant. The Sabre clan were still using tools of stone and bronze while the rest of our world was developing newer medicines and sciences. This was so for thousands of years."

"Okay, so how did Grune come to join the ThunderCats?"

"It was in the waning days of your grandfather's reign," Jaga said, "and your father had been recently annointed Lord of the ThunderCats. I served as his second, and head of Council. On the day I first encountered Grune, I was heading a search party trying to find a suspected landing site for a Mutant strike force. We were ambushed, and were taking heavy losses when he appeared."

"Grune saved you?" Lion-O asked. "I don't believe it!"

"Oh, he did at that. Grune saved many of us that day. Grune had a fighting instinct that was unmatched by many on Thundera. Beneath his brute strength, I later discovered, was a fierce intelligence. Most importantly, however, Grune showed interest in the lands beyond those of his clan. He wanted more for himself, and his people, than they did."

"So, he just joined up?"

"No, Lion-O. It took some time to coax him into entering our society. I made it my mission to bring Grune into the fold, as it were. That," Jaga sighed, "may have been one of the worst mistakes of my life."

"You gave him a chance," Lion-O replied. "That's not a mistake."

"I brought Grune into a society that mistrusted his kind, and held them in contempt from their ignorance. He had to prove himself day in and day out, enduring frustration and humiliation, taunts and challenges. I stood by him as his friend and mentor as he adjusted to our way of life. Eventually, I convinced him to enlist in our military, thus giving him the rank of ThunderCat."

"So, Grune never held power on Thundera, then."

"Exactly. Given his great strength and fighting prowess, he soon made a great name for himself among soldiers. I saw this and thought that Grune had finally come into his own. With this, he would truly be part of Thunderian society. Grune rose through the ranks as your father attained the throne and wedded your mother. He and Claudis actually began to become friends as the years went by. Then he met Karra." Lion-O did a double-take at that.

"Grune... actually fell in love?!"

"Do not lump Grune into the caste of the archetypal villian," Jaga admonished. "Even though he turned, he was still a man. Karra was of the Ocelot clan, and her people had been reluctant to join. They had, however, as had all except the Sabres. She was a sort of kindred spirit for Grune, and every bit as dedicated and brave a warrior as he. Their courtship was rather... intense."

"Oh." There was nothing else to say about it.

"Karra, however, had another suitor. An Ocelot named Krynn. She had been promised to him by her family. By this time in our history, arranged marriages had been nearly abolished for their propensity to fail, yet no law had been drafted to eliminate the practice."

"And Karra never loved Krynn at all," Lion-O added.

"Correct. She had been selected for a scouting mission, and her remains were all that came back," Jaga explained. "The mission was to seek out new places for Thundrillium mining in the outlying mountains."

"An accident."

"It was believed so. Grune, on the other hand," Jaga said, closing his eyes and sighing, "was not convinced. He thought Krynn had her murdered for her love of him."

"That's insane!"

"It was then that I learned another fact concerning Grune. As one of the Sabre clan, he was prone to fits of incredible rage. In those times, he could become irrational, even paranoid. As such, he came to think her death had been caused by Krynn."

"He reacted."

"Yes. Grune was so convinced of Krynn's guilt that he killed Krynn with his own hands not much later."

"Krynn wasn't responsible, though."

"That... was never proven."

"What?"

"It is true. The circumstances behind the cave-in were suspicious, yet no evidence was ever found of foul play being involved. It if was a deliberate act, it had been done with cunning. Mutants would not have been so sublte, therefore the culprit would have to have been one of our own. But, again, no solid evidence was ever found."

"That didn't stop Grune, though."

"No. Grune was seen crushing the life out of Krinn with his own two hands. Naturally this led to Grune being stripped of his title as TunderCat. However, Grune managed to escape his guards. What I have to say from here is merely hearsay, but it may explain a thing or two."

"Go on..." Lion-O was beginning to see the pattern of Grune's fall from grace.

"We had alerted all soldiers to keep an eye out for Grune. Some managed to sight him, but none managed to apprehend him. From the pattern of sightings, we surmised he was returning to the lands of the Sabre Clan. Some weeks later, Grune had managed to sneak into a shipping facility. There he stole a transport and left Thundera."

"Why?"

"You must understand," Jaga began, "that until then I had no clue just how badly his experiences in Thunderian main society had affected him, just how unstable he truly was. He had lost everything, Lion-O. His love. His status. His friends that he had finally made. Even his own clan. On leaving them, they considered him unworthy of returning. Grune had absolutely nothing, when once he had everything. Rather than accept this as a consequence of his own actions, he chose to blame the society he had come to embrace, going so far as to renounce the Code of Thundera and betraying us all. Grune had departed months before he helped Ratar-O lead a devastating assault on our capital city. Grune still knew the security protocols, the access codes, the strengths and weaknessess of our military. His knowledge, coupled with Ratar-O's forces, nearly laid our capital to waste."

"But, you defeated him."

"Oh, yes. I challenged him personally. I felt at fault for all that had happened, both to him and to Thundera, and I sought to set it right. The battle was intense, and we lost many fine men and women, but in the end I managed to subdue him and our forces drove Ratar-O back. It was in this assault that your father had been blinded."

"That son of a..."

"There is no need for vitriol," Jaga said. "What is done cannot be undone. After the battle, Grune was convicted of treason. Therefore, he was sealed and banished to the depths of space to drift forevermore."

"So," Lion-O said, "how did Grune end up on Third Earth centuries ago?"

"That is a mystery that still plagues me," Jaga replied. "There are many things in the universe that defy explanation. Perhaps a wormhole, perhaps some other cosmic phenomena. It would be a fair guess that Mumm-Ra may have been responsible. I am afraid that there is just no way of knowing. From the path of destruction he left during his first life on Third Earth, and the devastation wreaked in his ghostly form not long ago, his mind is still unhinged. Grune is more dangerous now than he ever was before."

"Duncan told me a legend involving Grune," Lion-O said. "That he had been killed by a mightier warrior than himself. The legend indicated a Guyver."

"That may be so," Jaga admitted. Lion-O paused for a moment, another question which had been burning in his mind now rushing forth.

"Can you tell me one other thing?"

"Ask."

"Are there any other survivors?"

"Though we lost many of our kind in Thundera's destruction, yes. There are others. And you will encounter them, Lion-O, perhaps sooner than you think." With that, Jaga's ephemeral form faded into nothingness to leave Lion-O's heart racing and his mind reeling.

Other survivors? he thought. Where are they? What did he mean by that?

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Tygra stared into the viewscreen in the Tower's control room as though he could call up the information he wanted by force of will. Each day that passed brought them no closer to the location of the Mutant Army, and their enemies closer to entrenching themselves. He felt time slipping through his fingers like loose sand, moving in its own inexorable pace toward a final showdown in which their fates would be decided. He ran a hand down his face in consternation, blowing a frustrated sigh.

Wherever the Mutants were hiding, he mused, it was not in range of the Cat's Eye. Given it's range, they had to be well and truly far away. Beyond Darkside at the very least. However, a Wollo village not far from the Tower had been raided and its people captured. There had to be other places closer to wherever they were holed up, so why there?

Another strike, Tygra realized as he sipped coffee. A message. We can nail you no matter where we are.

"You're up late," he said as the doors slid open and Panthro emerged with a glass bottle in hand.

"Couldn't sleep. What's your excuse?"

"Same here," Tygra replied as Panthro crossed to the Braille Board and set the bottle of amber liquid on the console between them.

"You don't look drunk."

"I'm not. I save this for special occasions. Lion-O regaining consciousness seemed special enough." Panthro uncorked the bottle and poured three fingers into the tumbler which had been resting at the top. "You look like you could use a belt, yourself."

"Just a single," Tygra said, offering his half-empty cup. "That stuff gives me a hangover from hell."

"You never could handle your liquor." on spiking Tygra's coffee, Panthro re-corked the bottle and held his tumbler up in toast. "To the ThunderCats."

"And to Lion-O's quick recovery," Tygra offered, clinking cup to glass and downing a swig. Already he could feel the tension leaving him. "Mumm-Ra hasn't been as quiet lately as I thought."

"Yeah?"

"The ambush," Tygra began, "Lisker, the Wollos, he's been behind all of it."

"That's not exactly news."

"Think about it." Tygra took another sip. "The attacks on Lion-O and Sho were intended to take out our two most powerful fighters."

"And both failed," Panthro replied once the tumbler left his lips. "But Lion-O's gonna be out of commission for awhile. What about the Wollos, then?"

"To let us know that we're vulnerable. To rub our noses in it."

"We may not know where the Mutant Army is," Panthro said, waving his free hand toward the viewscreen, "but we know where they're not. Maybe we should take the Feliner to scout around."

"And if it gets spotted? It's not exactly a warship."

"No, but she's got loads of speed. Besides, from orbit, it should be a cinch to find them."

"Do we have the Thundrillium for that?"

"For one attempt," Panthro grunted. "We haven't had much time to mine more."

"Then we should do so. If our supply runs out, we're defenseless."

"I'll get together a mining party in the morning." Panthro finished his drink with a long sigh. "We might as well top off all the tanks. There's a rich vein of Thundrillium not far from here."

"We tapped it while building the Tower," Tygra recalled.

"Yeah. Still plenty of high grade stuff down there. Just need to fire up the equipment."

"Weren't you working on an alternative fuel source?"

"Yeah. My notes are all in what's left of the Lair."

"Oh. Sorry."

"No problem." Panthro gathered his bottle and tumbler before fixing Tygra with a serious look. "Get some sleep. Brooding all night isn't going to help things."

"I know. Thank you."

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"Looks like the shifts are over," Myrlha said as she peered over the rim one more time. Night had descended with alacrity, leaving pinpricks of starlight twinkling in the heavens above. The area near the Mutant ships was lit with electric lights rather than torches now. Their outlines in the sickly yellow glow loomed like dormant birds of prey, waiting for the hapless mouse to get careless.

Or Thunderian and Wollo escapees.

"I don't hear any skycutters," Salvador said from her left. "No nosedivers, either." Nor did they see any searchlights, or hear the sounds of a search party. "I don't think they've noticed we're gone."

"Let's hope it stays that way," Myrlha replied, hugging herself against the chill air. Her tattered clothing offered no protection against the drop in temperature, and clothing had been impossible to steal. "Time to put this hellhole behind us, friend."

"I couldn't agree more."

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In The Next Episode:

Myrlha and Salvador begin their long and perilous trek to find the ThunderCats. Panthro heads a party to mine more Thundrillium, only to find danger deep beneath the earth. Will the trapped ThunderCats escape Mole Master's cave-in? Will Myrlha and Salvador succeed in their own efforts? All this and more in the next episode of One Last War to Fight.