ThunderCats

Bio-Booster Armor Guyver

One Last War to Fight

Episode Nineteen: Subterrain

By Knight Writer

"So," Sho said around a yawn as the dawn broke over the horizon, "what does Thundrillium look like, anyway?"

"It's kinda gold colored," Panthro said as he placed the last of the portable equipment into the rear of the ThunderTank. "The ore will be sticking out of walls, floors, anywhere. Once we mine enough, we'll bring it back here for processing."

"How does it power your machines?" Sho leapt into the rear of the ThunderTank while Bengali took the passenger seat.

"Once processed," Panthro began, "the metal can then be used in our Thundrillium reactor. The energy released is what powers the Tower and our vehicles."

"This place is nuclear?" Sho asked, startled, as the tank's engine caught with a roar.

"Nuclear?" Bengali repeated, incredulous. "Who would be dumb enough to use nuclear material for power? It's crazy!"

"Apparently," Sho replied, "my people did."

Explains a lot, Panthro thought, altering course to the nearby mine entrance. "More memories comin' back, kid?"

"A little. I just wish I could remember something important. Something that could help us."

"Right now, you need to concentrate on what's ahead of us today," Panthro said in response. "Mining Thundrillium isn't exactly easy."

"It isn't complicated," Bengali explained, "but the work can be pretty rough."

"A little hard work never killed anyone," Sho replied.

"How about a lot of hard work?" asked Panthro.

"I'm pretty sure I'll survive. I lived through your training yesterday, remember?"

Panthro and Bengali both laughed as the ThunderTank rumbled on.

==========

Lion-O woke to the scent of Snarf's meatfruit omelletes and coffee and opened his eyes to the sight of Cheetara approaching his bed with a tray of steaming dishes in her hands and a smile that could melt Hook Mountain in an instant.

"Breakfast in bed?" he asked around a yawn and gently sliding to a more upright position. "What's the occasion?"

"You not being able to come to the table," Cheetara replied, her smile not losing a bit of its wattage.

"Okay, you got me." he closed the book which rested on his chest and eyed his breakfast. "Looks like Snarf went all out."

"Lion-O need his nutrition," Cheetara began in a screeching imitation of Snarf's voice. "I don't care what Pumyra says about it, I've practically raised that boy and I know what's best!"

"HAHAHAHAHOWHAHAHAOWOWOW...." Lion-O took several deep breaths to calm the laughing fit. "That... that was really good! Spot on! I didn't know you could do impressions!"

"It's one of my many hidden talents," Cheetara said, chuckling. Silence reigned as Lion-O ate. Quickly. "You'll choke like that."

"I haven't eaten real food for two days." Lion-O finished the meal, his good arm working overtime. "Ahhh... I needed that. Thank you."

"Any time." Cheetara took the tray, placing it on the bedstand before easing herself lithely onto the available space. She took Lion-O's good hand in hers and breathed deep his scent as she kissed it. "I'm so happy you'll be all right."

"I love you. Have I told you that recently?"

"No, but being in a coma gets you off the hook."

"Good thing. Once I get out of here, I'm gonna make up for lost time."

"Ooh, I can't wait," Cheetara said in a husky whisper. Her fingers laced with his, and they stared into each other's eyes in silence for a time. She'd waited so long for this feeling, for him, and to have nearly lost him... it made seeing him in an infirmary bed seem far better. She decided to switch topics. No sense in getting revved up for something Lion-O was in no shape for. "I heard you talking to Jaga last night."

"Did you?"

"Unless you've begun talking to yourself."

"If I start answering myself, then we have a problem." Cheetara laughed out loud at that.

"I didn't stay to eavesdrop, though."

"Then you missed a lot," Lion-O said, gently squeezing her hand. "Jaga was pretty conversant last night."

"What about?"

"Well," Lion-O began gently pulling her forward. Cheetara didn't resist, resting her torso on the mountains of muscle which comprised his with a satisfied purr. "I asked him about our new enemies." Cheetara relaxed into his arms, ignoring the cast on his broken arm while his other hand stroked her hair. "For once, Jaga didn't know anything."

"That's a first," she said languidly. They were alone, and would be for some time from the promise Pumyra had given, and Cheetara planned to make the most of it. She ignored the more urgent of her drives, knowing that the urge to bear children would come again later. Being here with him like this, at the height of her reproductive cycle, was hard enough in his condition.

"So, I asked him about Grune. Jaga told me plenty." Lion-O explained, in brief, what Jaga had told him.

"I was still a cub then," Cheetara said, rubbing her head against his chest. "My parents never told me much about Grune. I see why, now."

"I wanted to understand him a bit more," Lion-O said, fingers intwined in her hair. "I think I do now. If I ever lost you..."

"You won't be rid of me easily, I promise you that."

"On that note..." He cupped her chin in his good hand, raising her eyes to his. "Tygra told me about how you jumped between Sho and that Lisker."

"I had to," she replied, a defiant light beginning to glimmer in her eyes.

"That took some serious guts," Lion-O replied. "And I love you all the more for it. But, please be careful." The defiance faded, and warmth replaced it.

He's still new at relationships, Cheetara reminded herself. He won't always know how to put his feelings into words. The fact that he tried just now was yet another sign of his rapid maturing. Smiling within, Cheetara decided to reward him by pressing her lips to his. As their kiss ended,

she resolved not to tell him about the images Sho had received from Lisker's mind and the dream that developed from them. Lion-O had enough to deal with.

"You've spent the most time with him," Lion-O said, meaning Sho. "What's he like, really?"

"Well," she began, snaking an arm behind his neck, "I can't get any kind of psychic read on him. Whatever his armor is, it protects his mind whether he wears it or not."

"You're not sure of him?"

"On the contrary. He practically wears his heart on his sleeve. He's shy, even bashful, easily embarrassed. I had to stop teasing him about walking in on me naked that once."

"He did now?" Lion-O asked with a smirk. "Do I need to be jealous?"

"Heheh... No. He charged out of here so fast it made *me* blink."

"Coming from you, that's saying a lot."

"He couldn't even look at me for the rest of the day. He's very kind, rather polite as well. Makes me wonder what Second Earth humans were like. Sho's also a quick study. He even wants to offically embrace the Code of Thundera."

"Wow. I like him already."

"You're thinking about what Mumm-Rana said. That he's something called the Destroyer."

"He could be," Lion-O replied. "He has amnesia, after all. When he regains his memories..."

"He's gotten some of them back," Cheetara interjected. "He told us about monsters he called Zoanoids, and how that Dyme creature is one of them. From what I've seen and learned of him, Sho isn't some monster that'll destroy Third Earth. Mumm-Rana is wrong about him."

"I should spend some time with him, myself," Lion-O said, planting a chaste kiss on her cheek. He could feel himself stirring, and he tried desperately to ward it off. Now wasn't the time. If only he could convince his body of that... "I haven't really passed words with him since the council session after his fight with her."

"Fighting," Cheetara said, "is something he's trying to learn." She told him of the human's training with Panthro.

"Ouch," Lion-O said, wrapping his arms about her. "He must love pain. *I* had trouble keeping up with Panthro. Did that Lisker really beat him so badly?"

"If I hadn't intervened," Cheetara explain, "Sho would be dead now. Lisker will try for him again. Sho just wants to be ready."

"To defend you."

"What?"

"From what I've heard of Lisker," Lion-O said, "he likely has a grudge against you for what you did."

Damn, she thought. "Yes, you could say that." Cheetara explained, in detail, the dream Sho had involving her, himself, and Lisker. "This came from images Sho received from him via the psychic link only Guyvers have."

"He won't succeed," Lion-O said, darkly. "I'll make sure of it."

"So will Sho," Cheetara added, planting a kiss on Lion-O's unshaven cheek. She loved him, in many ways more than she had loved Cougrix. Cheetara couldn't help but feel that Lion-O was the one she was fated for.

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"Your turn," Myrlha said as she yawned toward the brightening sky. Their trek had so far carried them over blasted and craggy rock with some scrub managing to cling to life in sparse patches. With the rising of the sun came rising temperatures which Salvador had advised resting through as best they were able. Having labored under the glare of Third Earth's sun, Myrlha had readily agreed to waiting the heat of the day out.

Salvador, for his part, rose from the dusty hardpack and stretched his small frame which was clad only in his pants and undershirt. The coat he wore was bunched on the ground, which he offered to her as a pillow.

"We are still a long way from the lands of my home," he said as Myrlha lay in the shade of a jagged outcropping of rock. "I saw stars out here that I would not have this time of year."

"About how long a walk do we have?" Myrlha asked as weariness caught up to her.

"At this rate..." Salvador stroked his snowy beard in contemplation. "At least a month. Maybe more."

"Great," she groused, balling the Wollo's coat into a somewhat comfortable shape. "Who knows how much the Mutants will have built by then?"

"There is some good news, however," Salvador said. "I'm beginning to smell forest not far from here. Once the sun starts to set, it will take only a few hours to reach the trees. Food should be abundant at least."

"Mmm-hmmm." Weariness was dragging her down fast, and thoughts of whatever meat scampered in the trees made her empty stomach growl in anticipation. Myrlha drifted into sleep

to waiting dreams of dinner on the hoof and having a full belly for the first time in what seemed like forever.

==========

SWING

THACK

SWING

THACK

Sho allowed the rhythm of the pickeaxe to guide his mind into numb unawareness as the muscles in his shoulders ached and burned from exertion. Clumps of dirt and rock fell away from the golden-hued lump of Thundrillium ore he was laboring to free from its earthen bonds, each swing bringing him closer to pulling it loose. He worked as hard as he was able, and had already harvested several lumps of ore that were roughly the size of his head. Panthro had commented on them, saying with a smile that his efforts were appreciated, even though the two ThunderCats were leaving him in the dust.

So what if I'm not built like Panthro or Bengali, Sho thought as he brought the pick to bear again. I'll do everything I can even if I can't keep up with them. Yet again, Sho considered summoning the Guyver in order to merely rip the ore from the shaft's walls despite Panthro's admonishment that he not use it.

"You can't depend on that armor for everything," he'd said as Sho had selected his tools. "Working with your hands builds character. It builds strength, too, so think of this as more training."

Images of his nightmare returned unbidden, causing a shiver of horror to race up his spine. He banished them with some difficulty, the thoughts of what Likser had been doing to Cheetara's prone and helpless form making his stomach churn. With grim determination, he swung again and again, imagining a different face with each strike of the pickaxe.

THACK

Lisker, leering down at his victim.

THACK

Mumm-Ra, cackling as the Berbil village was laid to ruin.

THACK

Dyme, roiling the earth beneath.

THACK

Lisker again, looming before him with megasmasher primed and ready.

THACK

An abomination, ten feet tall and constructed of bulging muscle beneath scaled green skin. Lines of spikes on each side of its gargantuan head with twin tendrils hanging to its back. Sickly yellow eyes glared from beneath a single horn, above a mouth lined with razor-sharp fangs.

(Gregol)

THACK

Cold, calculating eyes above a sharp nose and a waterfall of facial hair. The scalp was bald, distorted by a glimmering red organic crystal in the forehead.

(Valkus)

THACK

Willa, Nayda, both dead, the armor is why, Mumm-Ra wants it he can't have it, and he kills and kills while I fight in vain, why did they have to die...

THACK

Cheetara, oh, why her, chained and beaten and bloody, dragging breath through nose caked with dried blood and agonized whimpers escaping the strap tied across her mouth, Lisker howling with laughter and demented glee, chained to the wall, I can't transform, why won't...

"SHO!"

"GYAH!" Sho jerked back from Panthro's hand on his shoulder, pickaxe clattering to the floor of the mineshaft. Reality reasserted itself, showing the lump of ore he had extracted from the wall and the gouges his wild strikes had left in the wall surrounding the gaping hole. His arms and torso were on fire from his constant swinging, breath coming in great gasps. "Oh... Sorry. Kinda... lost myself."

"Lost yourself?" Panthro asked with a look of confusion on his face. "Looked like you wanted to kill something."

"Guess I just got into it a little too much," Sho replied meekly, humiliated at his loss of control. "I kept imagining Mumm-Ra's face each time I swung."

"Good motivator," Panthro said, "but don't go overboard." He paused for a moment as Sho hefted the chunk of Thundrillium into the wooden railcart. "Picturing Lisker, too?"

"Yeah." His pile larger by one, Sho reclaimed his pick and selected another.

"Cheetara told me about that dream you had." Sho's arms froze in the act of raising the pick. "Sounded rough."

"It was. It's not gonna come true, either. I promise you that."

THACK

"So," Panthro began, swinging his own, larger, pick with enough force to shatter the wallspace around his chunk of Thundrillium, "who's Gregol?"

"Huh?"

"You said that name out loud when you were going ape on the wall," Panthro explained. "You said somehting like 'Barcas', too."

"Valkus," Sho replied, the haze around his memories clearing slightly. "He was a..."

"Zoanoid?"

"No. He was something else. A... " It came to him, briefly, like a flare exploding in his skull. "Zoalord."

"Zoalord? Sounds nasty."

"It is. I can't recall much about them, but they controlled Zoanoids."

"Jaga's cape, how many of them were there?"

"Twelve... I think."

"And how many Zoanoids were there?" Panthro asked as he bent to lift the Thundrillium he'd liberated.

"Hundreds..."

"Oh."

"...of thousands," Sho finished.

"You have got to be yanking my chain, here. How could twelve Zoathingies control that many of anything?"

"They were powerful," Sho replied, head throbbing as fragments of memory began to surface. "Zoanoids... couldn't resist orders from a Zoalord... Bred to be unable to..."

"Easy there, kid," Panthro said as he placed a steadying hand on Sho's trembling shoulder. "Just how powerful were these Zoalords, anyway?"

"I... Even with the Guyver, I couldn't take one alone."

Panthro stared down at him in stunned silence. From what he'd seen of the Guyver's power, he didn't want to consider anything that could take *him* down!

"You still won, it seems," Panthro said once he was sure his voice wouldn't betray him.

"There's some way," Sho began, the images already being sucked back into the abyss of his damaged memory, "to make the Guyver stronger. I... damnit I just can't remember!"

Make the Guyver stronger? Panthro thought, amazed. How in Jaga's name was that possible? And is it actually a good thing?

"Gottaburrowgottaburrowdigdigdig..."

"What the hell was that?" Sho asked, startled at the jumbled words from above his head.

"Mole People," Panthro replied, nunchaku in his hands and ready. "I don't get it, why are they out here?

"Panthro!" Bengali shotued as he ran to join them. "what's going on? I thought those mole guys didn't dig out here!"'

"Times change, I guess," Panthro said as the rapidly spoken words increased in cadence and volume. "Either way, it's not safe down here. Who knows what those digging idiots have done to..." His words were drowned out by the rumble of shifting rock and tumbling dirt, the floor shuddering violently as the ceiling rushed down to join it.

==========

I guess I'd better get used to this smell, Lisker thought as he stepped into the glare of the morning sun. All around him, Mutants were herding slaves (all of them completely alien to him) to assigned work areas to further the construction of whatever fortress they were building. He snorted in derision at his supposed new allies as they grunted and bellowed, little more than brutes with some advanced technology. They didn't even bother with hygene, which he had discovered much to his dismay that morning when he found his quarters rather lacking in showering facilities.

He allowed his mind to drift back to his previous battle, and to the feline woman who had foiled him. Lisker saw every curve of her clearly, each detail committed to memory. How had she followed them to that gorge, anyway? How had she been fast enough to stop him? He had underestimated her, that was certain, and she'd taken advantage of it. Looked at in that context, could he really hold her at fault?

Of course you can! cried a mad, sadistic voice which he had dealt with since adolescence. She got in the way! Lisker tuned out that voice, as he had ever since he had emabarked on the journey to manhood. The simple truth was that she had done what - if their positions had been reversed - he would have.

Cheetara, he thought, letting her name echo in the confines of his skull. He wasn't sure if he hated her or admired her.

"GET UP!" The outraged roar snapped him from his fugue state and drew his eyes to a sight that made his ire rise. A monkey-like man was towering above a small female... what did they call themselves?... Wollos, that's it. Lisker's feet were moving even as the monkey swung the whip again, cracking the tip between her thin shoulders and bringing a cry of torment from her strangely human-yet-rodent-like face. "GET UP! THERE'S FUCKING WORK TO BE DONE HERE! GET YOUR ASS OFF THAT GROUND OR I'LL SPLIT YOU UP THE MIDDLE YOU..."

"That's enough," Lisker said, his voice cold as ice as he caught the ape's wrist in mid-swing. The Wollo and the ape-man looked at him with undisguised disbelief as he held the offending appendage at bay.

"You stay out of this." The primate's words were subdued, eyes shining with rage and more than a little fear.

"Have you considered," Lisker began, aware of the crowd of Mutants gathering, "that they could work harder if you beat them less?"

"What do you know about it, human?!" the ape roared in defiance.

"Enough to know that people have trouble doing back-breaking work with someone whipping them into the ground at every opportunity," Lisker shot back, his ire turning into genuine anger. "You yell for her to get up while simultaneously beating her down. Tell me, how the fuck is *that* supposed to work?"

"Heh," the ape grunted, snatching his meaty hand out of Lisker's grasp. "You only talk so big 'cause of that Guyver thing. You wouldn't go five minutes with me without it."

"Oh?" I knew it... "Want to put that to the test, limp-dick?"

"You son of a bitch!" the apeman roared, bringing his whip to bear amid the shouts of his cohorts. Cries of "Kick his ass!" and "Mess that ugly face UP!" filled the air as Lisker squared off against his opponent.

He'll go with the whip, Lisker thought, correctly as it turned out when the ape swung the instrument of torture. He easily dodged beneath it, racing in close and delivering an elbow strike with all his available power behind it into the ape's chest just below the sternum. Rancid breath, forcibly exhaled, fouled Lisker's nostrils as he pressed the assault. His left hand shot upward to

catch the ape's lower jaw in its palm and snap it upward to the sound of breaking teeth. With his opponent reeling in surprised pain, Lisker stepped nimbly back just before spinning about and delivering a roundhouse kick to the other's unguarded temple. The apeman fell to the hard soil in an unconscious heap to the disappointed groans of the watching Mutants.

"So," he said, barely breathing hard as he stared down the Mutants. "Any other takers?"

"What is the meaning of this?!" The crowded Mutants parted to allow Grune to draw near unhindered with Dyme close behind.

"Merely a disagreement," Lisker replied as Grune eyed the conked-out ape and him in turn. "As you can see, I've resolved it."

"Truly?" Grune replied, a hint of respect in his tone. "And what was this disagreement?"

"I found his management style to be... lacking."

"Is that so... Very well. Back to work, the lot of you!"

"Learn from this example!" Lisker called to their retreating forms. He knelt down to the manacled Wollo who stared up at him with wide eyes. "Come on," Lisker said, gently taking her chained hands, "up you get." On regaining her feet, she regarded him with a strange mixture of gratitude and outright bewilderment. "Go," he said, and she turned about to rejoin her enslaved people.

"Rather solicitous of you, Lisker," Grune sneered. "Unseemly showing such compassion for a slave, don't you think? Or perhaps you find Wollo women attractive?"

"I don't much care for slavery," Lisker said in response. "And these Wollos aren't my type."

"They can be rather... submissive," Grune said.

"Don't knock it 'till you've tried it, eh?"

"They do have their charms," Grune replied, "but they're nothing like a good Thunderian woman."

"What you do when you're hard up for some ass isn't my problem," Lisker said, thinking of Cheetara and his plans for her. Potential plans, he ammended. He wasn't as certain he wanted her as his plaything as he'd been before. Such had happened more than once, and mostly he'd been able to keep his darker urges in check. But still...

He'd still punish her for humiliating him.

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"Breakfast was great. Thanks, Snarf."

"Rrrwll You need your strength, Lion-O," his former nursemaid replied, his voice fussy as always. "Folks say breakfast's the most important meal of the day for a reason, you know."

"I know, Snarf, I know," Lion-O said, humoring him. "But, don't put yourself out..."

"I'm not. I've been keeping everyone fed since we came to Third Earth. Whipping up your favorites from time to time is..."

Everyone's eyes snapped to the Sword of Omens on Tygra's hip as it growled without warning. Lion-O had to stop himself from reaching for it out of habit as Tygra brought it to his face.

"Sword of Omens, give me sight beyond sight!"

The Eye became as his own, and Tygra's heart skipped a beat at what it showed. Panthro and Bengali were digging themselves out of a pile of debris. How had the damn mine collapsed? He saw them extricate Sho...

"Oh, no..."

"What is it?" Cheetara asked, all business in an instant.

"The Thundrillium mine's caved in," Tygra replied.

"How are they?" Pumyra's voice was clipped, measured as though she were already treating injuries.

"Panthro and Bengali appear to be in good shape," he said, "but Sho looked badly wounded. His head was bleeding profusely."

"Even minor head wounds tend to bleed a lot," Pumyra opined. "He was unconscious?"

"Yes."

"Well, I won't know the extent of the damage until we get them out of there."

"Tygra."

"What is it, Lion-O?"

"Let Pumyra see through the Sword. Will it to show her what it showed you."

"I... I'm not sure I can..."

"Do it," Cheetara said. "If she knows what kind of wounds to expect, she'll be able to set up treatment faster."

"Very well." Turning to Pumyra, who nodded her assent, Tygra placed the crossbars of the Sword to her face and focused on showing her what he'd seen. The bars curved as the Eye linked with her, her own eyes glowing amber.

"Oh, no..." At the gloom in her voice, Tygra felt his own hopes fading. "It shouldn't bleed *that* much. Definite concussion, possible brain swelling. He needs treatment fast!"

"Everyone to the vehicles, now!" Tygra snapped as he replaced the Sword of Omens.

"Tygra."

"Yes?"

"Just focus what you want on the Eye," Lion-O said. "It will handle the rest." Tygra nodded once before charging out of the infirmary.

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"That should do it," Bengali said as he finished applying the bandage to Sho's head. The human lay unmoving, breath coming in shallow takes and eyes closed as though asleep. Blood still seeped into the white gauze, staining it red in a growing splotch.

"Good job," Panthro said with a nod.

"My mate is a healer," Bengali replied. "You don't fall in love with a healer without learning a thing or two about the trade."

"Mate?" Panthro asked with a raised brow. "Congratulations, Bengali! Why haven't either of you said anything?"

"We wanted to wait until this lunacy with the Mutants was over." Bengali rose from his crouch, sniffing the air as he did.

"There's no fresh air coming in," Panthro said, confirming what Bengali's nose had told him. "We'd better get out of here."

"We're not gonna tunnel to the surface with just these." Bengali raised his pickaxe in emphasis. "Maybe the collapse opened another way topside."

"Whatever we do, we better do it quick." Panthro hefted Sho into his arms, careful not to stick him with the spikes on his suspenders. "If those Mole Men are out this far, then Mole Master can't be far away."

"Isn't he the one who's obsessed with that gold crap?" Bengali asked as they began their search for an escape route.

"Obsesssed is putting it mildly. You'd think he gets off on the stuff." As if on cue, a snarling cry echoed from the depths of the shaft:

"Where's my gold?! Where have they hidden it?!"

Panthro and Bengali traded a knowing look. Someone had told Mole Master there was gold out here and that the ThunderCats may have taken it for themselves, despite the rather well-known fact that they had no use or desire for it other than as currency when trade wasn't an option.

"Oh, hell," Bengali opined. Panthro agreed.

Their search for a means of escape was so far proving futile. Even Mole Men needed air, and as such they had to have burrowed vents to allow it into the subterrainian mazes they dug for what appeared to be the pure hell of it.

"Gottaburrowdigdigdig..."

"Do they ever stop with that?" Bengali asked in consternation as a pair of them scuttled across their path. Panthro didn't reply, saving his breath in the thinning oxygen. Mole Master's outraged roar reached them again, and he gritted his teeth at having to keep ahead of the gold-mongering freak. Avoiding fights went completely against the grain for the powerful warrior, but he knew that Sho would be a hindrance if they had to face the master of the Mole Men. They couldn't deal with that and protect the unconscious human at the same time with what breathable air remained.

If we don't find an air vent soon, Panthro thought, Asphyxiation'll snuff us before any mole does.

"They've got Mole Master on their tails," Tygra said after lowering the Sword. "They're keeping ahead of him, but none of the Mole Men have dug additional air ducts."

"Isn't that one of the first things they do?" Cheetara asked.

"I don't know what they're up to, but it'll take days to clear out all this rubble." Tygra let free a frustrated breath, the hilt of the Sword of Omens heavy in his right hand.

The Sword!

Tygra raised it skyward, focusing every ounce of his will into the Eye of Thundera. He felt it respond, power great and ancient flowing through his arm, into his heart and mind, and the words burst forth from his lips.

"Thunder... Thunder... THUNDER! THUNDERCATS, HOO!!" The beacon burst forth from the Eye, yet into the congested mine entrance rather than the sky. Tons of soil and rock were shoved away as the signal bored a path that would end with...

Panthro's eyes lit with the Sword's glow as the signal hammered through the ceiling and took up the entire space before them. The enormous insignia of the ThunderCats faded from view to leave a tunnel of smoothed rock in its wake. Already, Panthro could hear the roar from the ThunderTank as it charged toward them. Tygra, it seemed, was getting a good handle on the Sword of Omens.

"Here," he said, "take Sho up to the tank."

"What about you?"

"I need to have words with a certain mole about screwing up our mineshafts."

"Be careful," Bengali replied as he took Sho and bolted toward the approaching vehicle. Within moments of the other's departure, the soil churned and the powerful form of Mole Master emerged.

"Where's my gold, ThunderCat?!" he roared, bullwhip leaving a trail of fire where it struck the wall.

"There's none of that here," Panthro said as he readied his nunchaku. "Didn't your mother ever tell you not to mess with things that don't belong to you? Like our Thundrillium mines, for instance?"

"I was told you might have taken it! The gold is MINE!"

"Know what? To hell with this."

Cheetara eased the ThunderTank to a halt when a running Bengali appeared in the slice of darkness the headlamps illuminated.

"Where's Panthro?" Tygra asked as Bengali handed Sho to Pumyra, who immediately began trioge.

"He stayed behind. He wanted to have it out with that mole guy about wrecking the mine."

"He might need help. Bengali, get in the tank. Cheetara, get Sho back to the Tower, fast as the ThunderClaw can go. I'll head down and give Panthro a hand."

"Got it," Cheetara replied, throwing it in reverse as Tygra leapt clear and sheathed the Sword of Omens. From within the Claw he produced his whip, which felt far more comfortable in his hand, and raced onward.

"Where is it?!" Panthro dodged yet another strike from that whip, becoming more and more annoyed with each bellowed question about non-existent gold.

"Maybe it's up your ass somewhere, ever think of that?!" Snarling after his verbal barb, Panthro somersaulted forward over a strike from Mole Master's whip to land within easy striking distance of several pressure points on his larger opponent. Panthro wasted no time in taking advantage of them, delivering blow after blow that brought Mole Master to his knees in groaning defeat. Man, Panthro thought, did that ever feel *good*!

"Well." Tygra's voice brought Panthro spinning about, smiling. "And here I thought you'd need a hand."

"Against this punk?" Panthro jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the moaning Mole Master. "Nah. I appreciate the concern, though."

"The mineshaft is wrecked," Tygra observed. "It'll take months to dig another."

"At least we got a fair harvest before all this," Panthro replied. "Not as much as I wanted, but it'll do until we tap into one of the other sites." The two began traversing the gentle slope which led to the surface. "Getting pretty handy with that thing, Tygra," Panthro said, pointing to the Sword.

"Using it is... an experience."

"Has anyone ever told you that you're a master of understatement?"

"One or two, perhaps."

"Riiight." As they neared the shaft of sunlight at the end of the tunnel, Bengali called down that the others had since departed for the Tower.

"Let's load up what we *did* get," Panthro said as glorious sun bathed his skin. He'd been down there too damn long for his liking.

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Pain.

Excruciating pain.

That's what I'll inflict on him.

Oh, yes indeedy. Guyver One's gonna straight up fucking *HURT* before I kill him.

He rose from the bloodstained floor, breathing in the noxious fumes of the hellforge which would have made the stomachs of mortal beings empty themselves in outraged horror. They had remade him. They had searched the past, as Mumm-Ra had wanted, and had discovered the way to kill Guyver. Then, THEY had abandoned their original plan, and remade him into the instrument of Sho's demise.

"Hee hee hee hee..." his laughter, insane and arrogant all at once, rose from deep within his remade form. He doubted Mumm-Ra would recognize his faithful pooch. But, then again, he wasn't said pooch anymore.

The demon formerly known as Ma-Mutt had chosen a new name for himself. When the time came to kill the boy, he would reveal it. Until then, that moronic appellation would have to do.

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In the next episode of One Last War to Fight:

Sho awakens, and is confined to the infirmary until Pumyra is satisfied he has healed. Lion-O and Sho talk, one getting to know the other. Myrlha and Salvador continue their journey west, growing closer and closer to the ThunderCats. Meanwhile, what manner of creature have the Ancient Spirits of Evil made from the vile Ma-Mutt? All this and more in the next episode of One Last War to Fight.