ThunderCats

Bio-Booster Armor Guyver

One Last War To Fight

Episode Two: Fear and Desert

By Knight Writer

In the last episode:

The Ancient Spirits of Evil roused Mumm-Ra, showing him the Korath Mountains. The Mountains were the site of Second Earth's final downfall, where nothing living can go and Mumm-Ra's sight cannot penetrate. Early the next morning, Willa of the Warrior Maidens rescues a strange boy from a lethal Mandroga Flower and brings him to the old healer, Analee.

WilyKit and Wilykat, on their way to check out a Thundrillium deposit, are ambushed and captured by the Mutants and their new Thundrainium generator. They find themselves bound and gagged in the middle of the Desert of Sinking Sands, weakened by the new weapon and with explosives strapped to their bodies.

He watched from on high, staring down at the endless wasteland of desert that, at one time, had covered nearly the entire planet after the last battle. He knew he should move on, that the scene below held no concern for him, yet could not help but be transfixed.

He knew of the Mutants; Slythe, Monkian, Jackalman, and Vultureman, and had for some time. He also

knew of the ThunderCats, aliens from a world that had been destroyed who had crashed on Third Earth. From time to time he had even watched the two battle it out, but had never interfered. What would have been the point?

So why the hell was he thinking of doing just that right now?

Even from his altitude he could hear the muffled cries of the two below. They were terrified - not that they didn't have good reason - and their struggles were growing ever weaker. How long before the others of their kind got here? He looked in the direction of their Cat's Lair, and saw no rescue forthcoming. Those ThunderCats likely didn't know yet.

How long have they been down there? he thought as he looked back to the two children. He could see the sweat running off of them in rivulets, dehydrating them at a dangerous pace. He focused even closer, and could register their body heat rising quickly. Those two were on the fast track to heat stroke.

"That's the least of their worries," he muttered on looking at the bombs the two wore.

"Slythe to Vultureman," he heard a reptilian voice say, "turn off the generator."

"Caaawwww! What?"

"You heard me! The heat has them weak enough! We want the Thunderbrats ALIVE when the Catsss show up, yesss!"

He had trouble deciding which voice was the most annoying.

"Caaw. We can always re-activate it when the BlunderCats get here."

Not very good with insults, either, he thought.

He knew he should leave. The ThunderCats would be here soon - one of their airborne vehicles was already approaching, his extra sensors told him - and he didn't want to hang around in Mumm-Ra's territory any longer than he had to.

".... mmmmmph.....mmmhmmm..."

He looked down at them again. One of them, the female, was shedding tears of impotent fury, losing

even more of her body's rapidly dwindling fluids. He felt something pull at him, then, deep in his heart. The decision was made.

He would at least make sure those damn bombs were no longer a factor.

"Caaaw! They're coming!" Vultureman shrieked as he spotted the ThunderClaw streaking across the deep blue sky, far away from the Black Pyramid. "Lion-O and Tygra are aboard!"

"Good, yesss," Slythe replied over the radio. "Remember the plan! Once they land, turn the Thundrainium generator back to full!"

"Hoo-HOO! And... And when we get the Sword of Omens, blast them into chunks!"

"I KNOW the plan, Monkian! I..."

"They're almost here!" Jackalman shouted.

Vultureman watched as the ThunderClaw came to rest on the hard clay surface, kicking up clouds of loose sand and grit while Slythe stepped out in the open.

"RELEASE THEM!" he heard Lion-O roar. The Sword of Omens was in his hand in a flash.

"Bombs!" the tiger exclaimed. His furious, burning eyes fixed on the squat reptillian. "This time you've..."

With an insane cackle, Vultureman triggered the Thundrainium generator. His cackle grew into gales of laughter when at once Lion-O and Tygra staggered as if phsyically struck. Oh, this was too good to be...

"Placing explosives on children," a low voice snarled from behind. "You are one sick motherfucker."

"CAAAW!" Vultureman spun in fright, seeing only empty desert. Where had that...

He was powerless to move, even to think, as it appeared. Black armor over an orange fibrous material covered its huge frame - easily bigger than Monkian - and those pitiless white eyes beneath that strange medallion...

The cry for help died before it could form in Vultureman's throat when two long, curving blades grew from its left arm. He was almost mesmerized at the way they shimmered, as if vibrating far too fast to

be seen.

It was the last thing Vultureman ever saw.

Well, that was certainly a gruesome spectacle, he thought as he beheld what remained of the Mutant Vultureman. Not that he didn't have it coming, though.

"Been a long time since I last killed," he whispered while the lizard demanded something called the Sword of Omens. "Better be careful. I could get to like it. Again."

He re-cloaked - that little trick had taken a long time to learn - and saw the two Thundercats almost on their knees as the reptile mocked them. At his feet were two controls, one for that Thundrainium machine, the other a detonator.

He smashed the one with the more complex-looking displays and was rewarded with the sight of the lion and the tiger almost instantly regaining their strength.

"I guess my work's done here," he muttered as he rose back into the sky, unseen by those on the ground. Now to find Sho, and hope that Mumm-Ra had been taking a nap when he had de-cloaked.

"Thunder! Thunder! THUNDER!"

"Oh, shit," Jackalman cringed.

"THUNDERCATS! HOOOOO!"

Slythe took a few involuntary steps backward as the ThunderCat signal roared into the sky. How close were the others? Who cared? If he wasn't going to get the Sword of Omens, then the cats wouldn't have it either!

"VULTUREMAN!" he cried over the radio! "DETONATE THE EXPLOSIVESSS!"

The world seemed to freeze on that instant. Lion-O's heart felt as if it had stopped dead in his chest. Tygra's jaw had dropped open, his face a mask of complete horror. The kittens each cringed in their bonds and squeezed their eyes shut against their coming doom.

It took fully ten seconds for everyone to realize that nothing had happened. Wilykit and Wilykat both slowly opened their eyes, unsure if they were indeed still alive.

"VULTUREMAN! SSSET OF THE DAMNED BOMBSSSS! NOW!!"

Still there was nothing.

"Looks like your plan hit a snag," Lion-O snarled. The Sword of Omens was levelled at Slythe's head, and the Thundrillium-melting glare on the ThunderCat's face burned into the Mutant's own.

Quick as a snake, Slythe turned and ran for his Nosediver. He could hear Lion-O in hot pursuit, driving the reptillian on even harder until he leapt aboard the idling machine and roared off toward Castle Plundarr. Doubtless Monkian and Jackalman had already bugged out. As for Vultureman, he'd deal with that incompetent bird-brain later!

"AAAAHHH, DAMN!" Lion-O screamed as Slythe made his getaway.

"Lion-O!" he heard Tygra shout. "Over here!" He trotted back over to where Kat and Kit were as Tygra removed the gag from the latter.

"Lion-O..." she croaked, "T-Tygra..." Her words were lost amid a fit of coughing while the tiger examined her and then her brother while Lion-O freed his jaw.

"By Jaga..." he growled. "They're dehydrated. Not far away from heatstroke, either! Lion-O!" he barked, turning toward him. "There's some water in the ThunderClaw's storage compartment! Get it here!"

Lion-O merely nodded before charging off to the dormant vehicle.

"They... waiting..." Wilykat managed.

"Sssh. Don't talk, Kat," Tygra replied in his most gentle voice. "You and Kit are going to be alright."

"Can you untie us?"

Tygra looked down at the packet of explosives strapped to Kat's chest. The only way to free him and Kit from those posts would be to remove the bombs. The yellow lights on their fronts were still blinking. The damn things were still armed. As weak as the two kittens looked, those ropes were about the only thing keeping them upright.

"As soon as I can," Tygra said to him. He would wait for Panthro to arrive and disarm the bombs first.

"At least..." a short spasm of coughing burst from his chest. Tygra placed his hands on the boy's shoulders until it passed. "At least cut Kit's arms free?"

"Sure thing." Tygra smiled and hoped it looked more genuine than it felt. He saw Lion-O approach with a flask of water and head for Kit.

"Here you go," the lion said. Wilykit stared in anticipation at the cool water as if it were the absolute finest thing she would ever experience.

"How cold is it?"

"Pretty chilly, Tygra."

"Don't give her too much. Two sips, and then for Wilykat."

"Why?"

Tygra bit back a sharp remark. This wasn't the time. "Lion-O, their temperatures are dangerously high. Too much cold water in their systems at once could send them into complete shock."

"I understand." he tipped the flask to Kit's lips and let her drink exactly two sips before taking it away.

"How do you feel, Kit?"

"Like hell..." An embarassed look crossed her face at the slip. "Um... sorry."

"Hey, I didn't hear it," Lion-O said with a grin.

"I'll take care of WilyKat," Tygra said, taking the flask from Lion-O. "Kit, we're going to cut your arms

free, but you have to promise not to touch the bomb. Okay?"

"Sure. No problem."

Lion-O shrank the Sword of Omens to its normal size and walked around behind the post. He nearly cursed at the amount of rough rope and brutal hitches and knots that nearly had her elbows together. Oh, he would make Slythe pay for this...

The sword easily sliced through the bonds and Wilykit's arms flopped to her sides. He immediately set to undoing the coils that still remained, massaging her arms as he went to get the blood flowing through them again. Several angry red marks remained from where the hemp had been, many changing color into bruises. Lion-O forced his anger down as he finished. Barely.

"They're not going to get away with this," he said to no one in particular just as the roar of the ThunderTank's engine filled the air. Panthro and Cheetara leapt out, the former with a curse, before sprinting over to the kittens.

"Jaga be DAMNED! What happened?"

"We weren't playing around," Wilykat said. His voice was weaker now, almost dreamy.

"The Mutants ambushed them," Lion-O explained. "Right now, we need to get these bombs off of them and fast!"

"I'm on it," Panthro replied, fury burning in his eyes as he went back to the tank. "ALWAYS those damn Mutants!"

"Cheetara, is that tarp still in the back of the ThunderTank?"

"Yes, Tygra," she said, wiping sweat off her brow. It had to be at least one hundred-twenty degrees.

"Get it and anything we can use to hold it up. We need to keep the sun off of them!"

Cheetara wasted no time in following Tygra's instructions as he poured a little water in his hand and let it rain on Kat's forehead. He did the same for Kit just as the ThunderStrike came into view.

Lion-O watched all of this happening when it hit him. Only three Mutants had escaped, and Vultureman

had not been among them. Vultureman was the one with the detonator. Oh, no...

"WAIT!" he bellowed, startling everyone.

"What is it?" Cheetara asked, eyes wide.

"Vultureman didn't escape with the others!"

"And?" Panthro growled as he laid out his tools.

"He has the detonator!"

Everyone froze as the same conclusion hit them at once. They might have just played into the Mutant's hands!

"Get back!" Panthro yelled. "I'll get to work on these bombs!"

"Bombs?"

"What the..."

Lion-O ignored Bengali and Pumyra's startled inquiries, instead bringing the Sword of Omens to his face. He had to act fast!

"Sword of Omens, give me sight beyond sight!" And please tell me he's not about to push that button! Lion-O silently ammended.

The Eye of Thundera became his own, showing him a shallow trench dug into the cracked surface of this part of the desert. The detonator was there, but where was Vultureman?

"Half a mile, due east!"

"I'm there!" The words were barely out of Cheetara's mouth before a cloud of dust was all that signalled she had gone.

The cheetah sprinted, pushing the hyper-strong muscles in her legs as the desert went past in a blur. Please, she prayed to any kind-hearted diety that was listening, let me be fast enough to stop this!

She slowed just enough to get a good bead on the top of the trench before letting her staff fly like a

javelin. She arrived at the edge just as it hit blood-soaked clay and let out a startled yelp.

"This is Cheetara," her voice said from the ThunderTank. "I'm at the trench. Vultureman's in no shape to set off the bombs."

"What do you mean?" Bengali asked, still puzzled and a little frightened from the surreal scene he had walked in on.

"Believe it or not, Vultureman has been bisected."

Panthro took all of this in as he finished defusing Wilykit's bomb and barely hid a smile. He immediately got to work on the second while Lion-O freed her and with Tygra carried her to the ThunderStrike which Lynx-O had insisted they use.

"You just hold on, son," Panthro said as he opened the bomb casing. "You and your sister are gonna be fine."

"Panthro, hurry!"

"What do you think I'm doing, Tygra?!" He focused on the jumble of wires in front of him, tuning out all distractions. This damn thing may not be set off remotely, but a mistake would prove just as fatal.

At the ThunderStrike, Tygra set Wilykit gently down into the seat of the left pod before checking her pulse. It was fast and thready, a sure sign of heat stroke. Her breathing was shallow, rapid, her eyes staring at things that weren't even there. The thundrainium generator - yet to be unearthed - had to have been the cause of such a rapid onset. He vaulted into the vehicle's main cockpit just as Lion-O closed the one on the left pod. With one hand he engaged the air conditioning in both pods while the other accessed the communications array and hailed Cat's Lair.

"Shneyarf, what's going on?"

"Listen, Snarf," Tygra barked. "Prepare the infirmary. Fill two of the canvas tubs with cold water, and load up as much ice in them as we have!"

"Sure thing, Tygra..." the rest of Snarf's reply was cut off as he watched Panthro defuse Wilykat's bomb. Pumyra was busily running water over his brow, actually up-ending the flask just as Panthro finished his work.

"Done!" he heard the panther shout before literally tearing Kat's ropes away with his claws.

Tygra immediately opened the right pod as he prepared the ThunderStrike for takeoff. The poor kittens were already suffering from the first stages of heatstroke, and if he didn't get them there fast...

"Loaded!" Panthro shouted as he slammed shut the lid on Wilykat's pod. "Get movin'!"

Mumm-ra watched all this from within the confines of his tomb chamber. He paid little heed to Ma-Mutt as the scrying pool showed him one of the Thunderian vehicles lifting off from the edge of the desert. HIS desert.

"Accursed Mutants," he said aloud. It had been a good plan, one almost worthy of him, but had failed. It could have succeeded, as well, if not for one small mishap. The Mutant with the kitten's lives in his hands had met an untimely and overly messy end.

Mumm-ra quickly reviewed what Slythe would say.

"We only did it for YOU, Mighty Mumm-Ra!"

"We felt your desert the perfect place."

"We should have consulted you..."

All merely lines of horseshit that were almost as old as the Ancient Spirits of Evil. They had wanted the Eye of Thundera for themselves, the ungrateful miscreants!

Under other, less strange, circumstances, Mumm-Ra would have merely disposed of them. However, this recent incident had brought something most interesting to light. To think that a Guyver had been

loose on Third Earth all along! Hiding himself from Mumm-Ra's sight was no small feat.

"I will allow them to live a while longer," he cackled. "After all, those Mutants make the perfect targets."

But, he would let them know of his displeasure...

Willa sat cross-legged on the floor of Analee's hut, barely a few feet from the still-sleeping boy. His breathing had become more regular, she had noted with some relief, and the color was beginning to return to his features. Even Analee - who had checked on him only a few minutes ago - had been a little surprised. She had figured the medicine would take a few days to really work, and only after two or three more doses. The boy was obviously stronger than either of the women had thought.

Willa once more thought of the weird things on his back, and what Analee had said about them. He may be a threat, or he may not be. The healer was not one who spoke in riddles, so why would she now? No, it was the truth. Neither woman had enough information to tell one way or the other. Willa had decided not to tell the other Warrior Maidens about it. There was no need to start a panic over something that might mean nothing.

But she would not leave this boy's side until she knew for certain, which was why she was searching through the things he carried in this folding contraption they had found in his pants. A few brightly colored pieces of paper were in the main pocket, their purpose Willa could only guess at. One pocket held images of other people. An older man who bore a strong resemblance to him, obviously his father. A large boy with strange spectacles over his eyes and a hearty grin. A young - rather attractive - girl whose smile was healthy and bright. The boy's own picture was in there as well, on a shiny card with strange symbols on it. Willa was literate as were all the other Warrior Maidens - just because they lived in trees did not make them savages and woe to anyone who thought so - but she had never seen a

language like this before.

"Are you going to be in here all day?" Nayda asked from the doorway, startling her older sister.

"How long have you been there?"

"Only a few moments," Nayda replied as she entered the hut. "You must be awfully worried about him."

"You could say that."

"Careful, Willa," Nayda said with a wink, "you might make Lion-O jealous."

"Nayda!"

"I'm only joking!"

"Well, it's not very funny."

"You must admit, he's handsome." Nayda continued.

"If you want him, feel free." Both women began to giggle then. Nayda always enjoyed ribbing her older sister about Lion-O, even though there was nothing romantic between them.

"Are those his clothes?" Nayda asked, pointing to the stack of garments on the floor by his feet.

"Yes. We'll likely burn them. They're too ruined to be of use to anyone."

"Well, we can't just let him walk about naked."

"Some of the men have spare clothing that should fit him." Most births in the Treetop Kingdom were girls, only one out of every four or five produced male offspring. At times, men from other human villages were brought in to wed a Warrior Maiden and bear children.

"Not very good for travelling, are they?"

"They've definitely seen better days. They appear as if he had been attacked, but there's not a mark on him."

"How odd."

The air was heavy with tension in the Council Chamber of Cat's Lair. The light of the waning sun shone weakly into the roughly oval-shaped room, lengthening shadows only adding to the undercurrents of rage and anxiety. They were all waiting for Tygra and Snarf to join them with news of the kittens' condition and, though they wouldn't openly say it, wishing for the Mutants' heads on a silver platter. After what had felt like an eternity of waiting, a very exhausted Tygra entered the council chamber with Snarf directly behind.

"They're recovering," Tygra said before the first question was asked. "They should be fine in a few days."

The pervading tension dissipated with a great collective sigh of relief as Tygra took his seat at Lion-O's right. On the table was the Thundrainium field generator, its smashed control directly beside it as well as the detonator for the bomb, on which were a few spots of blood. He didn't bother calling the council meeting to order.

"What did you see there?" he asked instead.

"Someone, or someTHING, sliced Vultreman in two. Lengthwise."

"Looked to be a single clean cut," Panthro added. "Went through that Mutant bastard like a hot knife through butter."

"The question is," Pumyra put in, "who did it? Were there any footprints, Cheetara?"

"None. No sign of our anonymous fan anywhere."

"How could he sneak up on that Mutant, kill him, and vanish without a trace?" Bengali asked. "And in the middle of the desert, no less?"

"I don't know, but when we find out who this guy is, I'll be first in line to shake his hand." His face was grim, but his eyes were livid. "Far as I'm concerned, beak-face had it coming."

"Be careful not to let your emotions cloud your judgment, Panthro," the old lynx advised. "The Mutants did go too far this time..."

"This time? This time! They went too damn far when they turned seven thousand defenseless Thunderian refugees into seven! They wen too far when they..."

"PANTHRO!" Everyone turned to face Lion-O, who was now standing and looking furious. "Look, this day has been hell on all of us. We're all strung out and angry over what the Mutants did. I move we call off this meeting until everyone's had a chance to cool down."

"Seconded," Cheetara offered.

"If there are no objections..." Tygra paused for a moment. There were none. "Then council will reconvene in three days. Adjourned."

"DAMN IT ALL!" Slythe roared as he threw his bowl of stew against the wall. "Were were thisss close!" He held his forefinger and thumb an inch apart. "THIS CLOSSSE!"

"Hoo-Hoo What was Vultureman doing? Taking a nap?"

"Whatever it was," Jackalman added, "it cost us the Eye of Thundera. Again!"

"What elsse can go wrong today?" As if in answer to Slythe's frustrated query, the air in the room grew chill and putrid.

"MUTANTS!"

"Sssshit..."

An unnatural wind whipped at their bodies as Mumm-Ra, the Ever Living, appeared in the main chamber of Castle Plundarr. His baleful red eyes glowed like hellish cinders, decayed lips pulled back from wicked teeth. The giant demon priest stood before them, and he looked pissed.

"Oh, Mighty Mumm-Ra!" Slythe said in his best ass-kissing voice. "To what do we owe the honor of..."

"SILENCE!" Mumm-Ra's booming voice hammered their ears, driving terror into their brains. "You dare

to try and sieze the Eye of Thundera for yourselves? Ungrateful miscreants!"

"W-w-w-whatever d-do you mean, O Great One?" Jackalman sniveled.

"You attacked the ThunderCats without my knowledge or consent! You..."

"We... we would never try to take the Eye and not give it to you, Hoo-HOO!"

"Monkian iss right, Your Lordship," Slythe added. "How could we manage to fool you? Keeping the Eye of Thundera for ourselves would only bring your wrath..."

"Like so!" Mumm-Ra roared. His right hand lashed out, sending a crimson beam of energy that shattered the semi-circular table and sending the three Mutants flying into the wall behind. "You will never again act against the ThunderCats without first consulting me! UNDERSTAND?!"

"Y-yes, Mumm-Ra," Jackalman said, shivering in terror. "P-perfectly!"

"We would have had the Eye, if not for that worthlesss Vultureman!"

"See his fate for yourselves," Mumm-Ra said as he clapped his hands together at his chest. Evil green fog began to swirl between as he pulled them apart, slowly coalescing into a clear image. The three Mutants gasped in surprise at the sight. Vultureman lay in the trench they had dug for him to hide in, waiting to set off the bombs when it appeared.

The figure loomed over the prone Mutant. Plates of black, chitinous armor rested over thick coils of an orange material. A silver orb at its waist glinted dully in the intense light of the sun like a strange jewel. On each arrm was a pair of backward curving spikes, two of which instantly grew into shimmering blades. Twin jets of gas escaped from around downward-jutting spikes on its face. Above them were two tiny spheres which rested beneath a pair of pitiless eye-pieces. A medallion of sorts flickered on the forehead just under an emerald orb in a niche at the base of a long backward-curving fin at the top of its head. Twin rows of spikes lined the upper sides just above two more medallions on the sides.

In the image, Vultureman whirled on the strange figure just before the two blades came down. They passed through his body as if it were made of gas and not even a moment later, Vultureman fell apart

amid a shower of gore.

"By the Pitsss of Plundarr.." a wide-eyed Slythe managed to whisper as the strange thing stomped on the control unit of the Thundrainium field generator before vanishing into thin air.

"What was that thing, HOO HOO!"

"That," Mumm-Ra began, "was what can happen if you try anything like that again."

"You mean you sent it?" Slythe asked.

"I sent nothing," the ancient one replied. "I have forgotten more about this world than you will ever learn, Mutants. That creature is called a Guyver."

"Guyver?" Jackalman repeated.

"An ancient weapon of enormous power, wielded by a human."

"Are you assking usss to retrieve it..."

"No! Should you try to take him on face to face, you will die just as your comrade has."

"Then, what do you want us to do, hoo hoo?"

"Nothing, until I say otherwise." Mumm-Ra began to fade at that point, his last words lingering in the air.

"Beware, Mutants, and heed my words..."

"Well, Slythe," Monkian said as he rose from the floor. "What do we do?"

"Exactly what Mumm-Ra saysss, for now."

"For now?"

"You heard what Mumm-Ra ssaid, yesss? If we could find that Guyver, and take it..."

"I see," Jackalman replied. "But how will we do it? You saw what it did to Vultureman!"

"I do not know yet. Jussst be patient."

In the Next Episode:

Lion-O and Cheetara talk while watching over the recovering kittens. The unknown boy awakens in the Treetop Kingdom. The Mutants begin to plot while Mumm-Ra searches for the active Guyver. All this and more in the next episode of One Last War to Fight.