Gaining Perspective

By Lyngard

Panthro

The smell of lubricant, thundrillium exhaust fumes, and solvents greeted my nose as I slid through the half-opened door to the vehicle bay. I had been itching all night to get into the bay and thoroughly go over the ThunderTank, but preparations for today's inaugurations and watch duty had kept me from her.

This was the first chance I had had to see her since the battle. That dang-blasted mutant, RatarO, had done a number on my baby. I swallowed additional curses before vocalizing them as my hand slid along the deep scratches and dents along her side. My work of art, of beauty, desperately needed some personal attention. Not only cosmetically but her guts of wire and mechanical systems had been severely damaged, fried in places, as well. It would take some time to fix her up.

I walked to the wall of my shop and pulled a cart already laden with tools to help with the system repairs. I would have to take care of that trauma before I could clean her up and make her beautiful again. My eye caught the corner of some schematic drawings that Tygra must have laid out some time yesterday. He had mentioned that he had had an inspiration for a second Lair, a tower, which could handle the long-range sectors that were almost impossible to monitor from here. I flipped through the pages and found an interesting contraption with specifications drawn obviously to help Lynx-O. In the details section, Tygra had written *"Braille Board"*. Although intrigued, I slid the drawings to a nearby table and pulled my cart to the side of the ThunderTank.

Glancing at the rays of sunlight just starting to lighten the pre-dawn sky, I shrugged off my shoulder spikes and winced slightly as my cracked ribs reminded me that I was still healing. Pulling out a rolling backboard and grabbing a shop light and a few wrenches and wire cutters, I gingerly slid myself, still mindful of the ache from my chest, under the carriage of the tank.

I'm not sure how much time had passed when I noticed a subtle shift in the scents of the hangar, a faint female pheromone mingling with the air. I also heard a soft clink of metal on metal and the footfalls of someone much smaller than I moving objects in my garage. I debated a few moments whether to shove myself from my task and greet my uninvited guest or to pretend that I didn't notice her presence and hope that she would take note and be on her way. A not so restrained ache in my side made the decision for me; I needed a break anyway.

Sliding out from under the tank, I glanced out the bay and noticed the sun was very high in the sky. A slight rumble in my stomach reminded me that the bread fruit muffin I had pilfered off the tray Snarf was setting up for Lion-O's breakfast could not stave off hunger any longer. A grating of metal being pulled across more metal turned my attention back to my visitor. In a darkened corner of the vehicle bay, Cheetara was struggling to move a case of unpurified thundrillium ore off of another container.

I saw the precarious shift in weight as the heavy thundrillium receptacle move too far off its fulcrum and began to lean dangerously into the cheetah. I moved. A second later I had pushed Cheetara to the side of relative safety and carried the whole weight of the container on my left shoulder. I grunted with effort and pain from the load pressing on damaged bone. Shoving hard and with Cheetara's hands guiding the carton, I righted the load and pushed it off the bin that she had been trying to free.

"Panthro, are you all right?" Cheetara's voice held a note of concern for me. Obviously, I must have looked less than stellar and the arm I brought to cushion my side had given away some of my discomfort.

"What the blazes are you doing?" I heard myself roar using the anger to mask my aggravated injury.

"I needed to get into this carton," she replied indicating the bin beneath where the thundrillium had originally lain.

I recognized the markings on the container and grimaced with irritation. She had risked herself and me, for that matter, for this? The container that held the impurities that ran off from the thundrillium after it had been processed. Gold, again, I should have known. What the cheetah saw in this low conducting junk was beyond my comprehension. As far as I could tell, it held no mechanical value. Sure, it had come in handy to pay off the Enflamer, a mercenary it turned out, to re-forge the Sword of Omens, but its value had been in a commodity that was incongruous to its properties.

"And, what are you planning on doing with it this time?" I asked curiously as I massaged the ache to a manageable twinge. If Pumyra saw me, she would drag me back to sickbay.

"A special project."

"Special, huh?" I noticed a look of unhappiness cross her face before she looked back at me.

"You are okay, aren't you?" a slight tinge of worry mixed with sadness tinted her voice.

"I'm fine," I assured her accepting the fact she was being evasive for her own reasons. "What about you, are you all right?"

Cheetara waved my concern off. "I'm not the one who got hit with a ton of ore."

"No," I agreed," but you do look like you are still shouldering that weight. What's wrong?"

She actually looked like she might answer my question for a moment. But, instead, she turned and opened the carton of gold. She pulled a few large chunks of the metallic rock and pushed the lid closed again. "I've got a lot to do before tonight. Might I borrow your smelting equipment?"

Tonight! I had almost forgotten. Tygra and I needed to finish the placement of the sound system. I had been so wrapped up with my repairs that time had gotten away from me. I glanced again at the sunlight dappled with clouds filtering into the bay; it was well past noon. I needed to wash up, grab some food, and finish the wiring and placement of the speakers. “The bay’s all yours.”

I was almost out the door, when I heard Cheetara call me. “Panthro?” I looked at her and saw the same sad look cross her face once again. I stopped and waited for her to continue not wanting to break the mood that apparently had inspired her to speak with me. She hesitated, and I walked back to her and placed a comforting hand on her shoulder to encourage her to look at me and to continue.

“Thanks,” she smiled at me choosing once again the path of silence as to what had been bothering her for several days now.

“Any time,” I answered with a slight squeeze of her shoulder to let her know that if she ever wanted to confide I was here. I headed out once again half expecting her to call me back again, but she didn’t.

A cooling breeze wafted across the short fur of my face as I stood with my comrades to honor and greet the newest members of our finally expanding family. I could feel the grin spreading on my face as I listened to Lion-O’s speech. We were surviving. Against all odds, we were surviving and now multiplying. The hope that my clan members still remained even in the deepest reaches of space brought such a sense of hope, I thought for a moment I might roar with triumph.

I glanced at my old friends. Tygra was sporting a smile that I’m sure mirrored my own. If Kit and Kat felt any more exuberance, I’m sure that they would be cartwheeling across the stage. As it were, they were so antsy they were fidgeting. I saw the proud grin of Snarf as he watched Lion-O deliver a message of hope and promise to our allies and friends. Cheetara stood quiet and beautiful as always. Her amber eyes were shining with pride mixed with another emotion and a neutral smile graced her face.

We all participated in the formalities of recognizing Pumyra, Bengali, and Lynx-O. The most awe inspiring moment was the creation of the ThunderCat symbol on the blank emblems that each of the initiates wore. Every time I saw the honor of being a ThunderCat bestowed upon another Thunderian, I was blown away. It had been a long time since I had seen the ceremony completed. The last time I had witnessed such a phenomenon had been Cheetara’s induction back on Thundera, a lifetime ago. She obviously was remembering the same event. I watched as she surreptitiously brushed a tear from her cheek. Lion-O’s voice took my attention back to the inauguration.

“Well, now that the formalities are over, let’s get this party started,” Lion-O cued the Robears to begin playing festive music. I watched Lion-O bow to Pumyra and lead her to the dance floor to bring the celebration into full swing.

The music reminded me of the fall harvest festival, and that mixed with a particularly strong gust of wind laden with the aroma of food caused my empty stomach to murmur in anticipation of sustenance. I was about to head to the buffet as Cheetara had done when Willa stopped me.

“What a grand day, Panthro. You and the rest of the ThunderCats must be so proud to have found more of your kind.”

The Queen of the Warrior Maidens was never one to mince words. I knew she had been skeptical of us when we had first barged onto her planet. I also knew her distrust had been mollified by our aid to her people and in particular by Tygra. Thinking of my striped friend, I found him already engaged in conversation with Nayda.

“We are indeed,” I replied to Willa carefully weighing her words. A quick smile came to her lips as she watched me in return. “What?” Willa’s smile widened, and I watched her incline her head in the direction of Tygra and Nayda.

Tygra must have sensed our gazes because he turned to me and said, “Panthro, why don’t you bring Willa, and we can introduce Lynx-O and Bengali to the Warrior Maidens.”

Willa and I met Tygra and Nayda on the platform where Bengali and Lynx-O still stood with a small group that Wily Kit and Wily Kat were introducing to them. As soon as the well-wishers moved through the semi-receiving line, Tygra introduced, “Lynx-O, Bengali, may I present you with Willa, Queen of the Warrior Maidens and her sister Nayda.”

“It is an honor to meet you.” Lynx-O said with a small bow taking the queen’s hand in the two of his. I watched Willa’s face expecting caution and perhaps aloofness

“The honor is ours. Today is indeed a great day for Third Earth,” replied the queen, much to my surprise, squeezing the lynx’s hand warmly in her own.

“Have you had the opportunity to visit the Treetop Kingdom?” I heard Nayda ask Bengali curiously.

“We’ve been rather limited in our treks on Third Earth,” answered the white tiger seeming slightly embarrassed by the attention he was receiving. Like Tygra, I noticed that Bengali wasn’t one who thrived in the limelight.

As Nayda and Willa engaged in a pleasant conversation with our new members, I leaned back and surveyed the crowd of friends and allies. Another stiff breeze carrying the scent of rich foods reached my nose and reminded me of my earlier mission. I turned to the buffet table and caught sight of the elusive Cheetara conversing with Lion-O and Pumyra at the beverage station.

Lion-O was handing his last glass of refreshment to Cheetara and preparing for a small toast. Not willing to intrude on the trio, I scanned the food station and caught site of Snarf having trouble placing another arrangement of various fruits at the end of the buffet. Excusing myself, I went to

offer the small creature a hand.

I had just steadied the tray from falling to the floor when I heard a vicious snarl. “She is not and never will be my sister!” Whirling around to face the owner of the growl, I saw Cheetara push past Tygra and flee into the Lair.

“What in the world has gotten into her?” Snarf bristled at my feet sounding as stunned as I felt at a scene that I knew Cheetara never would have made in public.

I looked back to those remaining at the site of the confrontation. Bengali had offered Pumyra a comforting shoulder on which to lean. Instead of embarrassment, I caught the look of concern on her face for her upset friend. One of her fingers grazed a golden band around her throat bringing clarity to me of Cheetara’s earlier strange behavior.

Suddenly, Lion-O was on the move. He was also obviously upset and angry. Tygra stepped in front of him to mediate. I was too far from them to overhear what they said. Then, excusing themselves, they followed Cheetara’s flight into the Lair.

“That can’t be good,” muttered Snarf only loud enough for me to hear. I found myself agreeing with him silently. Cornering Cheetara one-on-one was hard enough, but I didn’t envy them when they both found her. When it came to fight or flight tendencies where Cheetara was concerned, I knew from firsthand experiences, the woman would fight.

“Come on, Snarf, damage control time,” I reminded him and moved to the Robear band that had long since fallen silent.

“All right, guys and ma’am,” I amended to include Belle, “how about something festive?” As I heard what sounded like a mechanical murmur of agreement followed by the sound of music resuming, I continued to the rest of the ThunderCats still gathered in a small group.

“Pumyra,” I offered my hand, “I do believe they are playing our song.” The puma shyly took my hand in acceptance, and I pulled her to the dance floor relieved to see Bengali and Nayda and Willa and Lynx-O copy my lead. Soon all of the guests had resumed the party, the incident with Cheetara fading.

Moving into the second song with Pumyra, I finally asked her. “Are you all right?”

Pumyra looked at me fully in the face. She wore no expression of hurt feelings only concern. “You shouldn’t worry for me, Panthro, but for Cheetara.”

I slowed to almost a standstill with her. “Why do you say that?”

“It isn’t for me to say,” the puma replied as I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“May I cut in?” the rich almost growl of Bengali’s request sounded more like an order, but I was getting used to his brusqueness.

“Indeed,” I agreed and switched to Nayda. Nayda and I danced in companionable silence. If I were to hazard a guess our thoughts were probably very much in parallel, each of us wondering how Tygra and Lion-O were fairing.