Gaining Perspective

By Lyngard

Lion-O

Throwing another balled up piece of paper to the floor already littered with crumpled used papers, I leaned back in my chair and groaned. There was no way I would be able to find the right words. I had been up the entire night trying to come up with an eloquence I simply did not possess. I should just delegate the task to Tygra. He's my second in command and certainly has the years and statesmanship experience to handle these affairs.

Almost immediately, my face heated at my thoughts. What kind of leader shirks from duty and a pleasant duty at that? One that hasn't slept in twenty-four hours my conscience replied even sounding grouchy and tired with the thoughts. I glanced around the room almost expecting to see a shimmering field and the image of my mentor Jaga appearing to scold me with advice that in my heart I already knew. Perhaps, that is why I remained alone.

Enough already. Leaving a blank piece of paper on the desk, I pushed myself from the rolling chair and looked out my window at the gray expanse just starting to define itself into recognizable shapes from the darkness. I rolled my shoulders and then my neck attempting to loosen the strain from sitting in one position for far too long. Although it was mostly a formality, especially since the Star of Thundera had destroyed MummRa, watch duty was taking its toll on the rest of us. I had volunteered to take a double shift yesterday mainly to give myself the opportunity to plan my speech last night but also to help pick up the slack caused by Panthro's forced medical leave. Of course, that didn't stop the panther from sneaking up to the control room for an update at the crack of dawn.

Cheetara had given him the lecture, and Panthro's face had fallen at her reprimand. He certainly knew how to take the sting out of her words. She had immediately placated him and allowed him to stay and observe until the shift change was over. Panthro had sent me a secretive victory smile as he had made himself comfortable in one of the control room chairs.

A subtle play of light in the clouds followed by a distant rumbling brought my focus back to the present. There was a storm brewing on the horizon. I hoped that the rain wouldn't interfere with the plans for tonight's ceremony. There were many preparations to be made before the Lair would be ready to accept guests and demonstrate that the Order of the ThunderCats was still viable and growing.

A growl of frustration crept from the back of my throat as I looked at the desk where the paper wasn't writing itself but staring blankly back at me. This isn't the way it is supposed to be. The words should simply flow rather than be forced into existence by a struggling leader. And, I was struggling. I felt the words, but their transition to pen and paper were impossible. A soft knock on my door interrupted my thoughts, and I bid entry glad for a distraction.

“Brrr, good morning, Lion-O,” Snarf greeted, pulling a cart of food with him into my room. “Did you sleep well?”

“Snarf,” I acknowledged and looked guiltily at the mess of paper strewn across my floor.

Snarf followed my gaze and began to tidy up the mess.

“Leave that,” I implored. “I made the mess; I can clean it up.”

“I know that, Lion-O,” he replied, opening one of the pieces of paper and reading my scrawled attempt at a speech. “You know,” he continued, re-balling up the paper and shooting it expertly into the wastebasket that too was overflowing. “You’re trying too hard.”

“I’m not sure I’m trying hard enough,” I admitted and sunk down to sit on the mattress of my bed that hadn’t seen my form since sometime yesterday morning. Snarf ignored me and the made bed even though he knew full well I hadn’t slept. I guess he decided today was not a day to ruminate on the virtues of a good night’s sleep. I was grateful for that omission.

“You are trying too hard,” he repeated, as he set out this morning’s bounty of cereals, fruits, and pastries. “You should try to write like yourself. Use your own words, not the words you think Claudus, Jaga, or even Tygra would use.”

I was caught. Snarf had pinpointed my attempts just by reading a few lines of my ramblings. I was trying to sound like a great leader. I wanted my father, Jaga, and everyone else to be proud of me, see the leader I was becoming, had become. And, I was failing miserably.

“I don’t have the words,” I admitted, so softly that I wasn’t sure that even Snarf’s keen hearing could pick up. I was mistaken.

“Sure you do,” he countered, adding milk and fruit juice to the breakfast tray. “You were the one who found them in the first place. You were the one who was persistent enough to seek answers. The rest of us, we simply believed it had been the end. We were the last.” I could hear the regret echo in his words as he suddenly went silent and adjusted the plates that he had already set with precision.

“I’d hardly call reliving a nightmare night after night a quest.”

Snarf’s ears shot upright and he turned to me with a look in his eyes I could not decipher. “What did finding them mean to you, Lion-O?”

I stopped surprised by the question. Then without a second thought, I answered. “Hope. Knowledge that we may have been tossed across the galaxy, but we could find our way back to each other, to rebuild.” My words shocked me more than they appeared to faze Snarf.

“There you go,” he smiled. “Now where did I put those breadfruit muffins with the candyfruit chips, snarf, snarf?”

Laying my pen down, I looked at the full page that I had written. While not a work worthy of a trained Thunderian laureate, I was pleased. I had taken Snarf's advice and written from my heart. The words I had chosen were my own, not some inflection of a statesman I had wished to emulate. It seemed silly now that I had had so much trouble in the first place. Once again, the simple answer of "just be yourself" had taken on a new significance. Still, even though I was fairly certain of my speech, I felt the need to seek someone on whom to practice.

Quickly, I finished the remains of the juice Snarf had left for breakfast and glanced at the empty tray. I didn't remember eating any of the breakfast that he had prepared, but apparently, I had. I looked at the chronometer and sighed heavily. Snarf had not returned with the missing candyfruit muffins and given the hour he probably would not. I'm sure that some task for today's events had prevented him from returning from the kitchen, but I was still disappointed. Snarf's candyfruit muffins were legendary. Wily Kat had been known to volunteer for latrine duty if the muffins were offered as a reward.

Already feeling the lateness of the hour, I ran through my morning toiletry, and grabbing the sheet of paper, I headed out of my room. Peeking my head in the kitchen, I caught sight of Snarf directing the Kittens in the vast intricacies of hors d'oeuvre making. Afraid that I might be invited to rescue, *uh join* them, I quietly placed the empty tray on a counter already overflowing with various foodstuffs and backed out of the kitchen.

My journey brought me to the control room. Hoping I might find Tygra inside, I entered the computer room to find both Bengali and Lynx-O pouring over a keyboard that before today I had never seen.

"What's this?" I asked, walking closer to take a look at the apparatus.

"Lord Lion-O," Bengali greeted, suddenly standing at attention.

Okay, this had to change. Every time I found myself in the presence of the young tiger, he became all stiff and formal. The way he addressed me left me feeling awkward, and I had to stifle my reflex to look behind me to see if a royal procession had followed me into the room.

I understood that he had grown up in the outskirts of Thundera and had only visited the palace once. The fact that he still held such esteem for the establishment was indeed an honor. But, he was one of us now, or about to be, and the need for titles on Third Earth seemed silly and redundant. It's not like there were any other Leos traversing the halls of the Cat's Lair after all.

"It's just, Lion-O," I reminded the white tiger, offering a reassuring smile which widened slightly when he relaxed somewhat in his stance.

“Indeed, Lion-O,” he replied, his natural baritone making the words sound rougher than intended. That was something else I would have to get used to as well.

“Lynx-O,” I continued looking up to the lynx, who had remained silent not even jumping when I had entered the room. If I weren’t mistaken, he seemed to be amused by my exchange with Bengali. “I trust that you are settling in. Is there anything you need?”

“No, Lion-O, you and the other ThunderCats have been very hospitable. We want for nothing. Come, let me show you the prototype that Tygra has developed. He’s calling it the Braille Board.”

“Braille Board?” I repeated dumbly, as I looked at a contraption that appeared to be not much more than an ordinary keyboard.

“Yes, since it would be almost impossible for me to see the schematics of a computer designed specifically for me, Tygra, with Bengali’s assistance, created a three dimensional model on which to base the final product. We are working on my sensitivities and helping to design the keyboard so that I might assist with the daily operations at the Lair.”

I watched as Lynx-O gave me a brief tutorial on the machine and marveled at the way in which Tygra had anticipated his needs. If the prototype were any indication, this new equipment would indeed prove to be state of the art. It was obvious that Lynx-O and Bengali were taking great pride in the design, as well they should.

“Wait a minute,” I interrupted Lynx-O as another thought dawned on me. “Does this mean that you might actually be able to drive the equipment, the Thundertank and Feliner?”

Lynx-O’s beaming smile was answer enough. “Not only that,” Bengali excitedly continued, “By making some additional modifications to the computers here, Lynx-O would be able to monitor the Lair.”

“Oh, another victim of watch duty,” I laughed.

“Or a satellite lair,” Bengali agreed.

“Satellite lair?”

“It seems my young companion has let the cat out of the bag,” Lynx-O answered my obvious confusion. “We have been talking to Tygra about creating an additional watch tower for the outer perimeter. Given the topography of Third Earth, it would be good to have eyes and ears in the areas in which the sensors of Cat’s Lair have difficulty penetrating.”

“Does that mean that you will be leaving us?” I asked. *Grow up, Lion-O. It’s not like you’re a cub for Jaga’s sake,* I growled mentally to myself as I cursed the sudden forlorn sound to my voiced question.

As if Lynx-O could sense my thoughts, he reached out and clasped a firm hand on my shoulder. It still startled me how well the lynx could see with out eyesight. “We will never leave the ThunderCats, Lion-O. It took us too long to find each other. We may not be under the same roof at times, but we will always be together.”

While Lynx-O’s words mollified me, as Lord of ThunderCats, it would have been good to be informed if not outright consulted about this possible turn of events. “Speaking of ThunderCats, have either of you seen Tygra.” Originally using such a phrase would have me feeling foolish around the lynx, but in my short time with the new trio, I had found that although Lynx-O is blind, sometimes he is the only one who truly sees.

“I believe that he said something about going to storage for items for this evening’s ceremony,” Lynx-O answered.

“Well then, I’ll let you two get back to your work.”

Those parting words were all that the white tiger and lynx needed. By the time I had reached the door, I could just make out a conversation relating to the tempering of the pitch of a targeting beam.

Slowly, I walked down the corridor of the subbasement level of the Lair. There were several storage rooms on this level, and I wasn’t quite sure in which I would find Tygra. It had been quite some time since I had been down here. The last time, I had been transported by the time capsule back to Thundera right before it died.

My footsteps faltered for a moment as the memories of my father’s last days filled my mind. How I wished that I had had the opportunity to know him as Tygra had. Unshed tears of longing blurred my vision for a moment, and I pushed myself against the wall of the hallway to take a breath and wait for the sudden pain associated with the memory to drift back to a subtle ache. While the others sometimes thought that I was too young to remember Thundera, I did. I remembered it with a clarity that they probably did not, could not. Even if my body jumped from a kitten to a full-grown Thunderian, my memories were nowhere as separated.

Finally regaining my composure and pushing my thoughts on the dangerous topic of my father, whom I had had the pleasure to lose not once but twice, I continued down the passageway and forced my thoughts to happier times. The irony of my journey was not lost on me. Last time I came down here to learn more of my destroyed home; today I was on my way to welcoming lost countrymen to where we were rebuilding.

Peaking through an open doorway, in which I thought that I had heard voices, I caught a glimpse

of Tygra and Cheetara. They looked like they were in the middle of a pretty intense conversation, and I was about to duck back out when Tygra called out.

“Ah, Lion-O!”

“Tygra,” I returned, slowly walking into the room still unsure if I were interrupting something. “Am I glad to find you.”

“Seems that I’ve been lost by several of you in the past few hours,” Tygra smiled and glanced at Cheetara. I looked at her too. She was wearing a strange expression on her face that I could not read. Tygra turned back to me and continued, “Can we talk on the way over? I’ve got to help Panthro with the sound system.”

“Uh, well, sure, I guess.” I answered still watching the cheetah, whose face had fallen at Tygra’s apparent dismissal of their conversation. Apparently, Tygra didn’t notice. “I just wanted to go over my toast with someone,” I continued, trying to put as much of an apology in my tone as possible and aiming it at Cheetara.

Tygra coughed slightly and looked quickly between both Cheetara and myself. Sliding by me, he continued on his way to find Panthro, “Then, I think, Cheetara is the perfect person to use as a sounding board.”

Cheetara and I stood looking at each other in an awkward silence. To say that things had been tense between us lately would be like saying S-S-Slithe had a lisp. I wasn’t sure what had transpired to bring us to this, but it had. Taking the lead that neither of us seemed to want, I began, “I’m sorry that I interrupted. It looked like you and Tygra were in the middle of something.”

“No, no, it was nothing,” Cheetara answered, but her words of reassurance were too quick and less than convincing.

Running a hand in frustration through my mane, I looked down at the cheetah and saw a flash of something that almost looked like fear. Even though I knew it was better to look before I leapt, especially with her, I threw that knowledge to the wind and leapt anyway. “Please tell me what is going on,” I implored.

Cheetara took a stunned step backward at my forwardness and stared at me with undecided eyes. “Nothing is going on, other than me being late to help in the kitchen,” she answered, pretending that the gulf between us didn’t exist.

Maybe she didn’t feel it, but I did, and I had had enough. I had been walking on eggshells around her since we learned that Lynx-O, Bengali, and Pumyra were alive. Well, since she found out that they were alive. Without thinking, I reached out and stopped her with a hand on her shoulder. I could feel her tense at my touch and a brief flicker of overwhelming grief flitted through my mind. *What in the gods of Thundera was that?* I wondered and dropped my hand as if scalded.

Cheetara turned and looked at me, a flash of something still hidden in her eyes. “Please,” she whispered so softly I wasn’t even sure that she had voiced it.

“Cheetara,” I began and then looked helplessly at her. I couldn’t do this on my own. I couldn’t do this and not know what was really going on.

“Not now,” she insisted and pushed past me. To deter me from following, she put on a burst of super speed and was gone in a fraction of a second leaving me wondering what she didn’t want to talk about and why.

“And so my friends, it is with great joy I welcome the newest members of the ThunderCat family. I know that the roads we have all traveled have not been kind, but I believe that as long as the Code lives, we will continue to reunite our people.” I concluded my speech, which I never had the opportunity to run by my companions. All was quiet for a moment, as my words appeared to be absorbed by the crowd, and for a split second, I worried that they had sounded foolish. But, the sudden murmur of agreement and the clinking of raised glasses put my mind at ease. Pride swelled in my heart as I looked at my long time friends’ faces. Tygra’s held a grin that was only overshadowed by the one on Panthro’s face, the Kittens were practically doing cartwheels, and even Cheetara’s face held a semblance of a true smile.

I turned to fully face the newest additions of our ranks. While I knew how the process worked, it was still a little humbling to feel the sword growl in acceptance of the newest members to the Code of Thundera. “ThunderCats, Ho!” I announced, and the sword pulsed unleashing the power, the heart of Thundera, into each new member. “As Lord of the ThunderCats and in Truth, Justice, Honor, and Loyalty, I name thee ThunderCat, Lynx-O, ThunderCat, Bengali, and ThunderCat, Pumyra.” As each name was spoken, the sword etched a black cougar head on the corresponding, red emblem.

The sword quieted, and a resounding response of “Ho!” voiced as one came from the trio. Almost immediately a cheer reverberated through the air as the crowd of Third Earth’s friends and allies welcomed the newest members to the ThunderCats.

A sense of relief washed through me as I surveyed the crowd. The formal part of the anointment was over, now we could truly celebrate. It wasn’t that I didn’t believe in pomp and circumstance. They certainly had their place, but I preferred being treated as an equal to my peers. While I was in title Lord of the ThunderCats, I felt that that role had changed just as our lives had changed. At first, I had expected ruling to be easy. What I deemed important would be so. I had quickly learned that a ruler is only as strong as his advisors. Now, as I looked back on those hard lessons learned, I recognized I would be a better leader because of them. In fact, we have survived more through democracy than dictatorship. Feeling several eyes on me, I realized that everyone was

looking to me to continue.

“Well,” I smiled, relishing the celebration to come, “now that the formalities are over, let’s get this party started.”

On cue, the Berbil symphony began to play a lively tune. I stepped up to the young puma and asked, “Pumyra, may I have this dance?”

She seemed to be taken aback at my request but hid her uncertainty in a formal curtsy, although I did notice the hint of pink highlighting her cheeks. As her small hand slid into my offered one, I led her to the flower cordoned area that the Kittens had decorated for dancing.

As we danced, I looked to the crowd joining us and enjoying the foodstuffs that Snarf and the Kittens had laboriously prepared. Thinking to the food preparation, I found myself looking for my spotted companion. I led Pumyra through the dance and turned us so that I was facing the buffet tables. There in a darkened corner I caught site of her placing another tray on the table. If I didn’t know better, I would swear the cheetah was trying to hide in plain sight. Realizing that I had been neglecting my dance partner, I turned back to Pumyra and asked, “Having fun?”

Pumyra was silent for a moment, and then smiled up at me. “Indeed, I don’t know what I expected.” She looked around me at the people and decorations before continuing, “But this was definitely more than I could have imagined.”

“Our lives have been busy fighting the mutants, MummRa and whatever other enemies come our way. It is nice to be able to take the time and reflect on new friends and Thundera as well,” I agreed and slowed to keep pace with the next song the symphony was playing.

Once again, we lapsed into a comfortable silence as the current song drifted into another one. I glanced to the buffet again in time to see Cheetara holding an empty glass and staring out into the dark beyond the courtyard walls. I turned to see what she was staring at but found only a distant gray expanse of clouds littering the horizon. She wasn’t having a good time, I realized. In fact, she looked like she would prefer to be just about anywhere but here. Perhaps, I could change her mind. “How about some refreshment?” I asked my dancing companion and led her out of the dance area.

As we made our way to the buffet, I saw a flash of purple/pink and orange/brown as Kit and Kat spun on the dance floor with a pair of Wollos. The quad moved as though they had been born dancing, and I couldn’t help but smile at their interpretation of the music. Passing the dais where the conferment had occurred, I noticed Bengali and Lynx-O standing with Tygra, Panthro, Nayda, and Willa. They all appeared in high spirits. So, that just left…“Cheetara, come join us,” I invited.

Cheetara stiffened as I called her name and looked at me like a unicorn caught in the Thundertank’s high beams. For a moment, I wasn’t sure that she would join. I saw her shoulders sag slightly in resignation, and she walked up to us. “I was just telling Pumyra how nice it is to focus our attention on the good things in life instead of the constant vigil we’ve had for danger,”

I smiled at her, removing her empty glass and replacing it with a full flute.

“Danger is never very far,” Cheetara warned, as she carefully took the glass from my hand. Was it my imagination or did her hand tremble slightly?

“True,” I allowed. “But at least, we have allies.” I held up my glass and waited for Pumyra and Cheetara to as well. “To family. May our bond of brotherhood and sisterhood never…”

The words had scarcely passed my lips before the cheetah’s whole demeanor changed, and she growled, “She is not and never will be my sister!”

Almost immediately, a look of horror flashed upon her face, and she tried to put her glass down. The result was the stemware fracturing, and the contents of the glass pouring onto the tabletop. Before I could get myself to move, Cheetara was in motion.

Tygra’s voice calling out unfroze me, and ignoring the silence of the crowd of onlookers, I started after the cheetah. This had gone too far. Now, she was going to tell me what in Thundera was going on!

Tygra was suddenly in my face. For a brief second, I almost pushed by the tiger. But, that was a scene that given the one Cheetara had just created would have been even more foolish.

“I’m going after her,” I hissed, quietly, trying my best to keep my thoughts from registering on my face.

“I think it would be for the best if I went,” Tygra reasoned.

“This concerns me too,” I continued, my tone brooking no argument.

Tygra appeared to think over my words for a moment before acquiescing, “Let’s go!”

I preferred to do this alone. But, there was the conversation that I had inadvertently walked in on in the storage room that kept playing in my mind. Perhaps, Tygra should be part of this. It appeared that Cheetara had sought him out at some point in time. Well regardless, we would get to the bottom of this tonight.