Gaining Perspective

By Lyngard

Interim

Author's Chapter Notes:
Gives the perspectives of Lynx-O, Bengali, Snarf and Even Mumm-Ra. Enjoy.

Secondary Observers

Lynx-O

My ears began tingling a few moments before I caught the sound of the main control room door sliding open. I needed less than two steps to identify the owner of the feet entering the room. “You’re late,” I noted, a good-natured growl burbling in my throat. “And, what in Thundera are you carrying?”

The feet staccato stepped and paused before continuing into the room. “You know,” came a voice I had been expecting, the guttural baritone giving me positive identification, “No matter how long I have lived with you; you never cease to surprise me.”

I turned away from the monitor I had been leaning against, listening to, and grinned in triumph. “The day I stop amazing you, Bengali, will be the day I retire to the island, voluntarily this time,” I added.

Bengali’s answering grunt reminded me of a smirk. So, I placed that look on the mental image of his face I had conjured the moment he had entered the control room. “Here it is,” he announced, the sound of arms moving outward and a slight current of air indicated that he was holding something for me to observe.

I changed Bengali’s facial representation to mirror the accomplishment that was taking primary residence in his tone. Without pause or change in direction, I reached my hands to take a long board from him. “Is it complete?” I asked, Bengali’s excitement reflecting in my own voice.

“Well, it’s a start, “ he hedged.

“It’s more than a start,” I confirmed, tracing the contours of a board with various keys embedded with barely raised indentations. “This is more than I expected and so quickly.”

This time pride sounded roundly in his voice when he spoke. “Tygra and I have been working on it around the clock since yesterday. We just completed it.”

“I guess, I can forgive your tardiness then. Is it ready for testing?”

“No time like the present,” Bengali agreed. As he reclaimed the board, I felt him plug an interfacing cord into a port near the station that I had been sound monitoring. “Would you like the honors?”

I nodded in agreement and placed my fingers on the keys. In seconds, I had all of the inner Lair monitors online and visually broadcasting. The view screens were for Bengali’s benefit. “All’s quiet,” I murmured, expecting no less with the early hour. “Wait,” I paused and focused on the main door. A call had gone through the Lair’s main computer to queue it open. “We have activity, friendly, hard to pinpoint. Is it Cheetara?” I asked Bengali to corroborate.

“It appears to be,” Bengali answered, with a little less certainty than normal. “I can’t get a visual, just a blur of shadows which now seem to be speeding across the moat bridge.”

“A little premature for her morning jog. But, then again, given today’s activities, perhaps she just needs an early start,” I commented and abandoned trying to get a fix on the object. With working eyes, it was almost impossible to target the cheetah; a beta-testing Braille Board would have even less success. “Let’s see what other activity we can measure.” I quietly tapped on the keyboard until I found another source of activity in the quiet Lair. “Okay, kitchen cooridor, what do you see?”

Bengali gave a snort of laughter. “It appears our resident panther has been caught by our resident puma. What’s this,” he grumbled, and I heard him move the controls to focus the lens. “Lynx-O, Snarf made candyfruit muffins!”

I felt my mouth begin to water at the mention of Snarf’s delicate pastries. While those with limited or regular senses could appreciate the taste of the pastry, those of us who had enhanced senses took the taste to a whole new level. If I could put it into words, it would be like getting a glimpse of the celestial fields of the afterlife on each and every bite. I sighed audibly.

Bengali seconded my sigh. “How much do you want to bet that there won’t be a crumb left for those of us who have to work this morning?”

I smiled at the distinct disappointment tinting his words. “I wouldn’t be so sure. I have it on good authority that Snarf is sequestering a few away from the prying fingers and mouths of a certain set of cunning twins. Of course, you’ll need the senses of a certain guide to find them.”

I felt Bengali’s eyes bore into me on my admission, but I refused to elaborate. “This,” I motioned to the board in front of me, turning the topic of our conversation away from coveted muffins to the prized electronics he and Tygra had worked so hard on making a reality, “is an amazing beginning. The interface with the Lair computers, logs, and cameras, is almost seamless. But, there is still too much reliance on sight.”

“Explain,” Bengali growled, distraction highlighting his tone indicating that his thoughts were still apparently on the muffins that might have gotten away.

“Well,” I continued, zeroing in on activity at the kitchen entrance door. “I know that there are two feliniod signatures in the hallway and that they are now heading in the direction of the western lift. Once they board, I’ll be able to determine where the lift is going and by process of elimination, or in this case direction, I might be able to guess the occupants. But, this board, while intricate and operable by someone without sight, holds several limitations that all paradigmatic electronics possess for those of us who are blind.”

“Go on,” Bengali encouraged, his preoccupation dissolving to the topic at hand.

“Well, I still needed you to visually verify who was in the corridor, just as I needed confirmation at the main door. I need more information than I am receiving in order to make more than an educated guess. Like when you entered the room, I knew it was you. Not because I was expecting you but because I *knew* it was you.”

“All right, I’ll bite, how did you know it was me.”

“All of us have a certain energy about us. I use these projected fields to “see;” it is very similar to how clairvoyants perceive auras,” I broke off when Bengali chortled quietly.

“Now you sound like Pumyra.”

“Pumyra, isn’t as far off as you may think,” I continued, sending my best paternal glare to him, which for someone who doesn’t have the use of his eyes, is a hard task to accomplish. I felt Bengali grimace and stand straighter. The colors that I sensed around him changed as well, indicating my action had been successful. “All living things give off an élan vital. It is up to us to interpret this force. When you are sighted, sometimes *what* you see impedes *how* you see.”

“Forget Pumyra, you sound more like Elder Tani.” Bengali’s irreverence was hard to ignore.

“Bengali,” I said sharply and felt the young tiger stiffen with the reprimand in my voice. I softened my tone slightly at his involuntarily response. I did not wish to inspire mindless acceptance to what I said; I wished to create understanding. “It is easy to dismiss things you do not understand. When I was your age, I found such transcendental philosophy beyond my comprehension as well. But, do not equate the lack of understanding with fallacy.”

There was contrition in his voice when he spoke again after a lengthy pause. “You are right, Lynx-O. I do not utilize my other senses to the extent that you must in order to survive. I guess, that makes me a sight snob.”

I laughed heartily at his equation. “You by no means are a snob, my dear friend. You use your senses more than you realize. When you are working with a metal, what do you see?”

“Form, molecular adhesion, variance,” he rattled off quickly.

“When most of us look at metal, we only see its color, its durability, its reflectivity. You look past its obvious traits to its internal composition. I must do the same with my surroundings –

taste, touch, smell, sound must compensate for lack of sight. When I move, I use a form similar to echolocation so I might walk unerringly from point A to point B. I know who is in a room with me not only by their unique scents and sounds, but by an energy signature they create. While the signature varies based on mood or condition, much like scent, the core energy field remains true to whom it belongs."

"Okay, I follow you so far. So how do we capture a signature to be relayed electronically for you to see?"

"That is what we have to work out."

"Perhaps a database?" Bengali suggested.

"Yes, that may work," I turned my attention to a soft tone pinging on the external monitors. My fingers tapped flawlessly across the Braille Board as I relocated focus to the external terrain. "I'm picking up several severe cells of thunderstorm activity near the River of Despair. Some upper level rotation appears to be occurring as well."

I felt Bengali's presence on the monitor beside me and heard a flurry of key clicks as he brought up radar maps of the area. "Looks like a nasty one," he concurred. "I wouldn't want to be out in that."

The hackles on the back of my neck prickled as a thought slammed into me. "We need to alert Cheetara," I growled, already attempting to get a fix on her current location. I found the coordinates, but could not get an accurate read on her position. Sending that activity to Bengali's screen, I opened a comm channel to the cheetah.

On my second attempt, I heard a hoarse, static laden reply, "Cheetara, here."

She sounded off, but I couldn't be sure if it were due to the storm's interference on the comm or something else. "Cheetara, is everything all right?"

"Everything's fine here," came the reply, less static filled but still off.

Next to me, Bengali tapped a few commands into the computer. "It won't be for long," he muttered under his breath; then taking over the communication, he elaborated for the cheetah, "Expecting rough weather. We're picking up several severe cells of a thunderstorm in your vicinity; advise you to return to the Lair."

There was a brief pause as if she were looking in the distance, and then came the terse response. "Copy."

Bengali bristled next to me as the line terminated. In a falsetto voice, he mimicked a continued response, "Thank you, Bengali and Lynx-O. It is nice to know I can rely on you in times of trouble…"

“Bengali,” I warned, the tone of my voice expressing my disapproval.

“I know,” he replied, dropping his voice to its normal range. “But you have to admit, she hasn’t been the most friendly of late.”

I made no comment to the young bengal. It was not my place to pass judgment, but one would have to be extremely shortsighted to not perceive the turbulence radiating from the young cheetah. Bengali had taken Cheetara’s aloofness as a sign of disapproval. His history with his clan gave him little chance of reacting any other way. I, on the other hand, had no such preconceptions. I would seek Cheetara out later and in my own way see what assistance I might offer. “Well,” I continued, “since we’ve got the outside scanners on line, how about a trial run out there as well?”

Bengali – part A

Lynx-O and I worked well into the late morning. Until today, I never questioned how he functioned without the aid of sight. He seemed so flawless among us that I guess I had taken for granted how his other senses compensated for his blindness. He always pulled his weight on the island, even when the Berserkers captured us and took us to Fire Rock Mountain.

I shook my head to remove the image of the creature called Mumm-Ra from my thoughts and focused back on the data storage idea I was hoping to create. Although Tygra would need to engineer the architecture for the data and Panthro would need to work on properly calibrating the information into the form of touch, sound, and whatever aural representations Lynx-O could decipher, it looked as if the Braille Board was going to be a success.

I was so engrossed in my thoughts that I did not hear the main control room door slide open. Even as Lynx-O looked up, I continued on my interfacing map. It wasn’t until I heard, “What’s this?” that I realized we were not alone.

“Lord Lion-O,” I started, standing up straight. Why hadn’t I noticed the Lord of the ThunderCat’s presence? Maybe I should take my cue from Lynx-O and develop my other senses so I would not be taken unaware again. Lord Lion-O looked at me and smiled.

“It’s just, Lion-O,” he replied.

“Indeed, Lion-O,” I amended, forcing myself to appear relaxed and pleased that my voice didn’t betray my discomfiture.

“Lynx-O,” Lion-O addressed my companion. I too looked at the elder lynx and was slightly annoyed at the look of amusement that he sported on his face. If it were anyone else, I would simply dismiss the look as an anomaly, accident, but Lynx-O was so in control of mind and body that I knew he truly was entertained by my interaction with Lord Lion-O,*just Lion-O,* and he obviously did not see the need to hide his enjoyment either. “I trust that you are settling in. Is there anything you need?” the lion continued.

“No, Lion-O, you and the other ThunderCats have been very hospitable. We want for nothing.” I admired the way in which Lynx-O addressed Lord Lion-O, *just Lion-O, Bengali,* I growled under my breath. I wish I could feel so relaxed in the presence of royalty. “Come, let me show you the prototype that Tygra has developed. He’s calling it the Braille Board.” Lynx-O’s direction to the device we had been testing was a welcome distraction from my fixation on the ThunderCat leader.

“Braille Board?” Lord Lion-O spoke as if he tasted the word. I guess, he was unaware that the prototype was already beyond the conceptual phase.

“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.”

In a few moments, Lynx-O brought up the activity that we had been monitoring for the past few hours. I saw the lion’s face brighten with amazement at what our device could do. Then, a sudden light entered his eyes and he spoke, “Wait a minute, does this mean that you might actually be able to drive the equipment, the Thundertank and Feliner?”

Lynx-O’s face shined with a smile at Lord Lion-O’s, *just…aw forget it,* understanding of how the Braille Board might be enabled. Unable to stop myself from doing so, I jumped in, “Not only that, by making some additional modifications to the computers here, Lynx-O would be able to monitor the Lair.”

“Oh, another victim of watch duty.”

Lord Lion-O’s please laugh gave me the courage to add, “Or a satellite lair.”

“Satellite lair?” the confusion on Lord Lion-O’s face made me stumble for an explanation. *They hadn’t had a Council meeting about this, yet,* I realized belatedly.

Lynx-O came to my rescue. “It seems my young companion has let the cat out of the bag.” I tried hard not to squirm at the lynx’s reproachful tone directed solely at me. Turning to Lord Lion-O, he continued, “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?” Was it my imagination or did the Lord of the ThunderCats sound…disappointed, lost?

Lynx-O reached out and clasped Lord Lion-O’s shoulder firmly. Again, I was amazed at my companion’s ability to read others and offer whatever they needed. “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.”

Lord Lion-O seemed comforted by Lynx-O, and the little lost cub look in his eyes melted away. Perhaps the Lord of the ThunderCats and I had more things in common than I realized. I didn't have time to ponder any further as he asked, "Speaking of ThunderCats, have either of you seen Tygra?"

Lynx-O beat me to the answer. "I believe that he said something about going to storage for items for this evening's ceremony."

"Well then, I'll let you two get back to your work."

Lynx-O and I needed no more prompting. As soon as Lord Lion-O moved toward the door, Lynx-O turned to me. "I noticed that the klaxon pitch of the targeting system seemed off. If it rings too shrilly, it will impede the other information I am gathering from my other senses."

"We'll need to modify the beam then," I continued down the same track. "If we modulate this range here, then you should be able to pinpoint targets more effectively. Is that better?"

Lynx-O nodded, and we continued the rest of the shift keeping watch and doing further beta testing on the Braille Board model.

Snarf:

"Do you really think she'll like them?" Wily Kit asked me for the third time in as many as thirty, Third Earth minutes.

"Yow!" I yelped, stepping back from the hot stove. Kit had been constantly questioning her skills as a seamstress since we had snuck into Pumyra's bedchamber late yesterday evening to add to the puma's wardrobe. I knew that Kit wanted Pumyra to be pleased, but at the moment, her continual worrying had caused me to burn half of my right paw pad. Nursing my burned flesh, I finally answered, "I've told you every time now, that she will, Wily Kit. Why won't you believe me?"

The youngest of the female ThunderCats lowered her head and muttered, "Sorry, Snarf."

Regretting my tone, I scooted over to Kit and checked on her progress with the spicy tuna sushi. "Beautiful," I murmured in approval.

I had learned to make the delicacy on my last trip to the Treetop Kingdom, and this morning I had passed the recipe and techniques on to Wily Kit and Kat. Kit had taken to the sushi like, well, a fish to water. I had only had to show her a few times before she had perfected it.

I glanced over at Wily Kat's progress and barely managed to suppress a groan. Kat on the other hand had taken to the hors d'oeuvre making tasks more like Tygra takes to swimming holes without his bolo. Leaning closely to Kit, I whispered, "Why don't you see if you can give your brother a hand, huh?"

Kit looked pleased with her tray and turned in the direction of her brother. As she opened her mouth to say something, I gently put a paw around her shoulder. She looked up startled out of speaking, and I shook my head. “Our secret,” I suggested. Kit nodded although I did see the glint in her eyes. I’m sure Wily Kat would hear about it later.

I turned back to the stove and began stirring additional spices into a large pot filled with fragrant liquid. In a few minutes, the stock would be just right to braise the variety of meats I had purchased at the Wollo market.

My eyes caught a glimpse of the chronometer on the wall, and feeling slightly annoyed, I fiddled with an apron string that had come undone, again. Cheetara had promised that she would assist me with today’s food preparations, but so far the cheetah had been a no show. If she didn’t show up soon, I wasn’t sure that I would be able to finish the other trays of food. Kit and Kat had already finished the decorations outside, so I guess I could have them handle the fruit and petit fours. But with the early morning rains, I wanted someone to make sure that the decorations were still up. And, let’s face it, Wily Kit would be busy trying to undo Wily Kat’s creations.

I turned back to the simmering pot and turned the flame down on the burner. The stock had reduced enough. As I moved two oversized skillets over and placed previously seared meats in them, my ears caught the sound of the kitchen door opening. I didn’t have time to turn around, but I knew by her movements that the errant cheetah had finally arrived. “Cheetara, about time, snarf, snarf. I could use your help on the fruit trays.” I still couldn’t turn around from what I was doing, so I waved her in the direction of several fruit bowls, knives, scoops, and trays occupying a large amount of counter space near the sink.

Cheetara didn’t acknowledge me or offer any excuses. She simply washed her hands and got to the tasks before her. I finished my preparations and set timers accordingly. Finally having the time, I turned and regarded my late arrival. I watched as she swiftly made work of the fruits, skinning and seeding those that needed skin or seeds removed and artfully cutting and arranging the pieces on the four trays I had set out. Although she gave no outward appearance of anything amiss, a snarf knows.

I moved to a seldom-used cupboard and pulled out a tin. Picking up the kettle simmering on the stove, I poured hot water into two mugs and added heaping spoonfuls of my special herbal tea blend, guaranteed to make you relax and feel better, no matter what ails you, snarf, snarf. As the mugs steeped, I moved to the large pantry unit and pulled out a drawer far in the back. I felt around and pulled out one more thing that could ease one’s troubles. Placing the candyfruit muffin on a plate, I sidled over to the cheetah and put it and the teacup next to her working space. She was so engrossed in her work that she didn’t register my actions until I had returned to the stove to check on the cooking pots.

“Snarf,” Cheetara started when she finally noticed my offering.

I simply made a dismissive motion with my hand and scooted back over to finish garnishing her trays with edible flowers and candied embellishments.

“Hey, how come she gets one? You told us that you were completely out.”

Wily Kat had immediately caught site of one of the last candyfruit muffins that I had given Cheetara. I know he is a growing boy, but six muffins in the space of fifteen minutes, yeesh. Rather than go down that road, I replied, “She hasn’t eaten all day. You can’t go an entire day without food.”

Wily Kit moved away from the tray that she had been helping Kat complete. “Why haven’t you eaten? Come to think of it, you weren’t at dinner last night either.” She came to a stop in front of Cheetara and looked closely at the cheetah.

I saw a strange look cross Cheetara’s face as she looked at Kit or rather beyond Kit. She masked it quickly by taking a sip of her too hot tea. If I weren’t mistaken, I saw moisture glistening in her eyes. I stepped in, “She’s been busy getting things ready and taking extra watch duties. Now, go along and see that the early morning rains haven’t damaged the decorations.”

The words had scarcely passed my lips before I was almost bowled over by Wily Kit and Kat racing out the door. “I guess, they had enough of kitchen duty,” I muttered good-naturedly as I readjusted my apron and fiddled again with the undone string.

Making sure that everything was settled on the stove for a few minutes, I dragged a stool over to where Cheetara was sitting and slid down to give my aching feet a break. I *am getting too old for these all day affairs*, I sighed to myself and took a tentative sip of my own steaming tea. The heat felt good on my throat, and I looked closely at the cheetah through the misting swirls still emanating from my cup.

After several minutes of sitting in silence, Cheetara halfheartedly broke off a small piece of the candyfruit muffin and placed it in her mouth. I was slightly saddened to not hear any murmur of delight. Usually, the muffins would break the ice even if it was just an ambiguous sound, but she remained silent. Something was decidedly wrong. “Cheetara,” I started not sure of how to proceed. Finally, I just decided to spit it out, after all none of the Thunderian nobles had ever accused me of being overly tactful. “Is there something wrong?”

“Just tired,” came an all to quick and pat reply. Her fingers sliding along the cup’s handle were a telling sign that there was much more that she wasn’t saying.

“No wonder since even in the few moments that you have been off-duty, you haven’t been sleeping, snarf, snarf.” I said it frankly, not pulling any punches.

Cheetara’s head snapped up, and she looked hard into my eyes. Apparently, I had not only hit a nerve, but I had also sent it zinging. “Things have been busy,” she evaded, using my own words as a shield for what was truly bothering her.

“Hmm,” I grunted, making sure she knew I wasn’t buying it for even a Plundarian nit.

Cheetara turned away from me and slid her cup back from the edge of the counter. She glanced at the food trays in front of her and then stood from her stool. Picking up two of the finished fruit platters, she walked over to my completed staging area and set them down. There seemed to be a forced leisure to her tone, when she said, “As soon as Lion-O finishes the anointments, I will help you with the catering.” She then paused to look directly at the chronometer above my head before making her way to the exit. “Now, I’m going to be late, if I don’t start getting ready for tonight.”

I had barely a chance to look at the time myself before the cheetah was gone. I harrumphed a barely audible sound and then looked at the disaster of my kitchen. I had a lot of work to do before the ceremony began as well. At least, Cheetara had completed the fruit trays. I would just finish the meat, and then I would have time for the pastries. My feet ached slightly as I returned them to the floor. “Tomorrow, I’m not going to set foot in this kitchen,” I resolved. “It will be leftovers or nothing, snarf, snarf.”

I moved to clear the dishes Cheetara and I had used and stopped suddenly when I found myself staring at the barely touched candyfruit muffin. That was a sight I had never seen before, and a bolt of anxiety rattled from the base of my spine to the tip of my tail. I sniffed the pastry cautiously. The scent was deliciously enticing. A quick taste test elicited my own grunt of approval. There was nothing wrong with the muffin, I decided and popped the remaining morsels in my mouth. I needed to keep my strength up for tonight after all.

I dumped the dregs of the now cold tea down the sink before it hit me. If there were nothing wrong with the muffin, then my intuition had been right about Cheetara.

Bengali: Part B

I walked down the hallway toward Pumyra’s room and felt a certain lightness to my step. I couldn’t help it. The new clothing that Snarf had dropped by my room was the finest I had ever possessed. The colors were more vibrant than my original gray and blue tunic, and their hues set off my white coat regally. I smiled widely; they were threads worthy of a Thunderian noble, of me. *If my clansman could see me now,* I scoffed silently in my head.

I was born to parents from two very different worlds. My mother was a chieftain’s daughter, bred from nobility; my father, on the other hand, was a lowly blacksmith born and bred in a village on the furthest outskirts of the Tigris Clan’s territory. Theirs was a tale familiar to most: female meets male, female and male fall in love, and so forth.

Unfortunately, those stories don’t tell the complete story. They neglected to mention that the female’s family disowned her for falling in love beneath her status. They neglected to mention that the offspring of the two lovers ended up being born without an ounce of the stately orange color that marked the Tigris Clan. They neglected to mention that a cub who was born white would be labeled an outcast, a living representation of the sin of following your heart and not your elders. They neglected to mention how the female died giving birth.

A familiar grief followed closely by the bitter taste of anger slid up the back of my throat. It was amazing how unpleasant memories resurfaced at the oddest times. They could not only hit unexpectedly, but they could also transport one back through time and space to relive events as if they were happening all over again.

Thundera is no more, I reminded myself. *Your life begins anew here, now, today.* As Pumyra would say, "Take the good and leave the rest." Sometimes, though, it is hard to find the good.

I stood in front of Pumyra's door and schooled my features to something more suitable before knocking. Today was not about my tainted lineage or the things that happened to any of us back on Thundera. Today was about new beginnings, of shaping what Thunderians would become.

Feeling calmer, I rapped a unique series of thumps, our private greeting, on Pumyra's door. Within a few seconds, the door opened, and Pumyra stood before me. She too had new clothing. I was secretly glad that her style remained mostly unchanged.

"Bengali," Pumyra greeted, turning her back to me and holding out a circular band. "I'm just about ready. In fact, I could use your help with this."

"This is new," I comment looking at a band of solid, glittering, yellow metal, made into some kind of necklace, I deduced as Pumyra lifted the hair off her neck so I could clasp the object unimpeded.

"Yes, Cheetara gave it to me."

"Cheetara?" My surprise at the cheetah's gift lifted my voice higher than its normal range.

"Yes," Pumyra answered and ushered me out the door toward the garden. "I found it in the lab when I returned from looking for herbs with Nayda. Cheetara made the necklace herself from some material that she called gold. I did some research and found out that on Third Earth, gold was used not only in jewelry and decoration of artifacts and weapons, but it also can be a source of mystical powers. It symbolizes inner power and strength and promotes prosperity and positive thinking."

I couldn't stop the snicker of incredulity before it passed through my lips. Pumyra glanced at me quickly and continued on with her research findings. "I know that you aren't a believer of the healing properties of crystals and metals. But, materials often harbor more than their physical structures. Plants can heal physical ailments. Why can't crystals heal emotional ones?"

I said nothing, choosing wisely the path of silence. Pumyra and I had a standing debate about supernatural versus empiric methods in practically all walks of life. However, what Pumyra wasn't aware of was that a lot of my dismissal of her unconventional science had more to do with my clan indoctrination than my personal beliefs. As we entered the gardens already teaming with a variety of guests, I pointed at the stage. "We're here."

As soon as Pumyra and I were stationed, the music that had been playing in the background grew louder and more ceremonial. Lord Lion-O began walking toward the center of the stage and paused briefly in front of Tygra. The tiger gave the Lord of the ThunderCats a red, velvet, drawstring bag. Lord Lion-O nodded solemnly to Tygra and placed his hand in the bag to withdraw three ruby-colored disks. These were to be the emblems that would announce us to all, friend or foe, as ThunderCats.

The lion approached me, and I could feel all eyes in the crowd watching in anticipation. Without a word, Lord Lion-O handed me a blank crest. Willing my hands not to betray my inner thoughts and feelings, I took the emblem and affixed it to my uniform. Pumyra and Lynx-O followed suit.

A round of glasses of candyfruit wine were dispersed, and Lord Lion-O began his speech. I listened to the words he spoke and found myself oddly drawn to them. This would be a new start, not just for the three of us, but for the ThunderCats and even Thundera herself. Even though Thundera had been a glorious society, discrimination among and within the clans still existed. Third Earth was a new beginning, a chance to build from the good of Thundera and leave the rest behind us.

I glanced discreetly at Pumyra. She had inspired those thoughts in me. I wondered briefly if I could tell her what she meant to me, how she had changed my life for the better. When it had been the three of us, timing never seemed right, but now, with the hope of a new life...

“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.” Lord Lion-O raised his glass as he completed his toast. A murmur soon flowed through the crowd, and the sound of glass touching glass in agreement with the young lord’s sentiments filled the air.

We placed our glasses on the table provided and turned to Lord Lion-O. Now was the actual time of anointment. As the Lord of the ThunderCats stretched out his hand and the Sword of Omens grew to its full length, a sense of fearful anticipation gripped me. By its own accord, my hand reached out and grasped Pumyra’s.

“ThunderCats Ho!”

A pool of light seemed to engulf us at Lord Lion-O’s command of the sword. I almost believed that I could reach out and touch the power, add it to myself. I barely heard, the lion call my name, but I certainly felt the raw power of the sword as it etched the ThunderCat symbol on the medallion on my chest. The breath I had been unwittingly holding exhaled from my lungs in relief. The sword had accepted me as worthy.

My hand shifted as Pumyra fell back a step when the unrestrained power of the sword coursed into her. I held my grip tighter keeping her on her feet. I wasn’t even aware of the panic that hit me until it faded with Pumyra’s quick squeeze response back. With the completion of Lynx-O’s indoctrination, all three of us responded to the sword’s summons with a reverberating, “Ho!”

On the heels of our acceptance into the ThunderCat fold, applause and whistles of appreciation rang through the observing crowd. Lynx-O, Pumyra, and I looked at each other, each of us sporting a grin of triumph and pride. Lord Lion-O returned the sword to its rightful place and turned to face the crowd, which quieted once more as the lion prepared to address them. “Well,” he smiled grandly, “now that the formalities are over, let’s get this party started.”

On cue, a Robear Berbil symphony began to play. As well wishers lined up to make our acquaintance, I heard the Lord of the ThunderCats ask, “Pumyra, may I have this dance?”

Pumyra moved forward and curtsied her acceptance. I saw the slight blush adorning her cheeks and had to suppress a growl of sudden possessiveness that passed through me. *That was the old Bengali*, I chastised myself. *ThunderCat Bengali isn’t nearly so insecure. Well, he shouldn’t be, anyway.* Even still, I kept the pair in my peripheral sight as I greeted Third Earth guests, so many I would never remember their names.

A small lull in the line allowed Cheetara to excuse herself to assist Snarf on the buffet. I watched the cheetah leave and wondered how out of line it would be for me to follow. While I knew it was important for me to be part of the camaraderie of allies, I was having a hard time with it. I had never really wanted to be in the limelight, too often that entailed the wrong kind of attention. *That’s in the past,* I reminded myself, *where it should stay.*

The welcome voice of my cousin brought me to the present. “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 bowed slightly before the Queen of the Warrior Maidens and gently accepted her hand.

“The honor is ours. Today is indeed a great day for Third Earth,” Willa smiled graciously.

“Have you had the opportunity to visit the Treetop Kingdom?” the attractive, brunette maiden asked.

“We’ve been rather limited in our treks on Third Earth,” I replied. As Nayda began to tell me about her home, I found myself finally starting to relax. The receiving line had dwindled considerably. Many of the guests had taken to the buffet or the dance floor. Mindful not to offend my conversation companion, I surreptitiously scanned the dance floor for my induction partner. She and Lord Lion-O were no longer there.

“She is not and never will be my sister!”

The sudden commotion brought my attention directly to Pumyra, who had taken the brunt of Cheetara’s outburst. A sudden hush fell over the crowd. Her glass crashing against the table in her haste, Cheetara spun away from both Lord Lion-O and Pumyra. The dumbstruck look occupying the puma’s face in the wake of the chaos made me move. In the amount of time it took Cheetara to bypass Tygra. I was at Pumyra’s side, my arm draping around her shoulder offering comfort and protection. I watched worriedly as the puma leaned into my embrace

fingering the necklace that the cheetah had given her. I felt my anger flare. *How dare she treat Pumyra like this!* Had Pumyra not needed or accepted my support, it would have been me, not Lord Lion-O, who went after the cheetah.

In the wake of the Lord of the ThunderCats departure, I heard Panthro suggest, “All right, guys and ma’am, how about something festive?”

The music began playing, and Panthro walked over to us. “Pumyra, I do believe they are playing our song.”

As Pumyra began to dance with the panther, I was relieved to find Nayda at my side. The warrior maiden had an odd look on her face as she watched the back of Tygra disappear into the Lair. “He’ll be fine,” I found myself assuring her. She inclined her head and accepted the hand that I held out as an invitation to join the guests dancing around us.

Nayda and I danced in silence. She continued to stare at the door in which Tygra had departed, and I couldn’t help but watch Pumyra as she glided across the lawn. Finally, I could take no more, and I guided Nayda close enough so I might reach the panther and puma. “May I cut in?”

Panthro handed Pumyra off to me and danced away from us with Nayda. Still wishing to make sure what Cheetara had done held no lasting effects on her, I found myself pulling Pumyra into a tight embrace.

“Please,” the puma said, pitching her voice for only my ears. “Don’t. I’m not hurt nor am I upset.”

I was unable to stop the growl of disbelief from rising in my throat. I didn’t believe for an instant that the scene had not hurt Pumyra. For all of her bravado, she was a sensitive soul.

“Bengali.” I found myself staring into her eyes. They glittered like molten copper. Even though she had used my name, I knew she issued it as a warning to let the incident go.

Knowing her wish was impossible to grant, I sighed and closed my eyes to speak a half-truth, “As you wish.” Satisfied, Pumyra laid her head against my shoulder, and we resumed dancing together.

I would let it go, for now. But as soon as I had the chance, I would seek my own answers.

Mumm-Ra:

Incessant barking rang hollowly through the cold walls of my sarcophagus. Even my deepest regeneration slumber could not shut out the din caused by my accursedly, loyal companion. With the little strength I had left, I managed to push the heavy stone lid aside and grant just enough room for my overtaxed, decaying body to slide through.

“What is it, Ma-Mutt?” I queried, my normally powerful voice a mere hush in the tomb.

My presence immediately quieted my immortal companion. The beast, knowing I had no strength, forcibly dragged me to the quiet pool of liquid centered in a cauldron at the foot of my tomb. The dark waters lay dormant. “There is nothing here,” I shrieked, angry that my rest had been disrupted. When the Star of Thundera retracted its immense power, it took all of the powers given to me by the Ancients to remain in corporeal form. I had almost dispersed completely when Ma-Mutt found me. The insolent beast should know better than to pull me from my rest.

I turned to crawl back to my sarcophagus, but the miserable canine grabbed a strip of my fraying bandages and pulled me even closer to the still waters. “Enough,” I raged, tearing the fabric from the slobbering jaws. “You are a loyal companion, but I will not be pulled from regenerating to play with an overzealous mutt!”

Fragments of blue lightning blazed from each of the four obelisks of the malevolent gods surrounding the cauldron. I detected a bubbling sound from the dormant waters, and a red light filled the cavernous interior of my home. Ma-Mutt whined in anticipation. “What do you see, my pet?” I asked, peering into the depths of the dark, mystical pool.

The image wobbled and then came into focus. “Cats Lair,” I hissed; I could taste my defeat so recently handed to me by those feline invaders. I watched with deadened eyes as the whelp Lion-O anointed the three Thunderians that had escaped Fire Rock Mountain with the emblem of the ThunderCats. “Adding to your numbers,” I scoffed indignantly, “No matter, when I recover, I shall diminish your numbers to nothing.”

A subtle shift in the waters caused me pause. I watched as Lion-O split his attention between to the two females of the group. “Ah, Lion-O, working on your pride? Perhaps you wish to add even more to your numbers.”

The scene shifted once more; the she-cat Cheetara inexplicably lashed out at the pair and left the party in a rather violent way. My eyes flickered to the pool of red liquid on the table and the shattered glass covered in wine and blood. A cackle welled up in my desiccated throat and rolled up the walls of my abode. “Trouble in paradise,” I snickered through my glee. “It seems that you don’t need my assistance after all, little cub. You can cause your own problems all by yourself.”

Slowly my hand descended to stroke the boney head of my decrepit pet. “You did well, Ma-Mutt,” I muttered and staggered back to my tomb. “Soon we shall strike,” I promised as I pulled the lid back for my entrance.

“Soon,” I repeated, the word echoing throughout the myriad of passages hidden within my onyx pyramid as the lid of the stone sarcophagus closed tightly.