Omens

By NoWhere_Man

Prologue: Lion-O

King Claudus stands on the north wall of Castle Thundera in deep thought. A cool evening breeze stirred through the air, whipping through the tails of his rich crimson cloak, sending it dancing behind him like a serpent. The same wind blew again, crashing against the massive form of the great lion King, but he hardly took notice. Instead his dark brown eyes narrowed, his powerful forearms crossed in front of him as his stare continued off the veranda watching the evening lights of his kingdom, his mind continually turning in reflective contemplation.

Many of nights he stood in this very same spot deliberating over the numerous ordeals plaguing his people. From the multitude of trade disputes that always seem to arise towards the winter months, to the more recent peacekeeping discussions with the Lizards clans which have been slowly deteriorating. There was an honest fear among his advisers that the current civil negotiations between both parties could cease all together, which could then leave ground to hostilities against his kingdom.

Although Claudus had no real evidence support it, the King was certain that there had to have been another element manipulating events from secret. In the past whenever he believed his emissaries were making strides towards bringing an amicable end to the disputes, one of the Lizards' leaders would suddenly come up with some sort of bizarre or outlandish demand that would completely dissolve all the agreements initially made, which would then force all parties to start the process again.

Claudus believed there was someone with a different agenda, who wanted the talks to continue to fail, someone that was pressing both sides towards open war. The lion King had brought his concerns to the members of his inner circle which ended with mixed results. His great war general Panthro thought he was chasing shadows, merely seeing phantoms where there was none. The Panther believed that if there was someone moving behind the scenes, he would have revealed himself already. But many years of being an insightful and prudent ruler have taught Claudus when it was necessary to trust his instincts. And in this he did. Grune, surprisingly strongly supported the idea, even going so far as to volunteer to investigate the claims should he decide to act.

Claudus sighed while his fingers stroked the thick crimson strands of his beard. It was nights like these where he felt the thirty winters of wear upon his body, because it was neither the disputes with the Lizards, nor the thought of shadowy conspiracies, or the threat of War, which had brought the great King to the north wall this eve. His thoughts were colored by the only other notion in this world that he valued above his station as King, his family.

OoOoOo

The subtle sound of a throat clearing drew the King back from his brooding. Claudus' bronze colored eyes glanced over to its source; his sights falling on a graying old jaguar draped in the robes of a High Cleric from the esteemed Guardians of the Throne. "You're Highness," Jaga implored, gaining the King's full attention.

In that brief moment a well of apprehension swelled up in Claudus' chest as he continued to gaze at the Old Jaguar. Claudus' hands slowly dropped to the rim of his belt, a small gesture to calm the nervousness in his heart. "Well?" the King asked in earnest.

The older cat closed his eyes and simply nodded. A gentle smile crossed his weathered lips, "It's a boy," he congratulated the ruler.

The hundred pound boulder of dread that wedged itself onto Claudus' chest dissolved in an instant as a haughty whoop of cheer escaped from the King's lips. The expelling sound seemed to take decades off of his life. Forgetting everything instilled to him by years of proper action and station, the King smothered Jaga's thin frame in a massive embrace before racing inside to the inner sanctum of his bedchamber to see his wife and to greet his new born son.

Momentarily stunned, but not displeased, Jaga looked after the retreating towering form of his King as he ventured back inside the Castle. Even the old Jaguar's famed Cleric's composure wasn't impervious to the overwhelming tides of the great lion King's joy. Jaga allowed himself a brief moment to be simply content for his ruler. The old Cleric knew how badly the King and Queen had desired a child. Jaga also knew of the painful lengths the two had gone for the blessing.

Jaga's deliberation continued till suddenly an image flashed to the Old Jaguar's mind as he recalled his brief look at the newborn Prince. The Cleric then closed his eyes and whispered a silent prayer. Things were about to change, he had known ever since news of the Queen's expecting pregnancy was received. A storm was slowly approaching, which was shaping events to come and he could only pray that the Ancients would aid them to endure.

OoOoOo

Most of the chambermaids had begun to clear out by the time Claudus had approached the doorway to his bedroom's inner sanctum. For him, the shuffling sounds of the servants at work were instantly drowned out by the shrill bubbling cries of a baby's laughter.

Seeing his arrival, the remaining maidservants promptly finished the remainder of their cleaning and then quickly exited room. Many of them spared their King a small smile in congratulations before leaving. A small few gave him some questioning looks, which he was puzzled by but then he instantly dismissed, he had more pressing concerns.

Within moments, the door was promptly locked behind him and the royal family was left all alone. The velvet curtain of the four post bed was drawn back, allowing Claudus a lovely sight of his Nemia. Her rich flowing auburn mane cascaded along most of the bed. Her heart shaped face was still matted with sweat, but the Lioness never looked more beautiful to Claudus than in all

the time they had been together. She was small in stature, even compared to other Thunderian women. That combined with his larger than normal frame meant they often drew quite the jeers amongst their friends.

She looked tired, Claudus noted. More tired than all the years he had ever seen her. For but a moment he had to remind himself to press down his fears. The Ancients had blessed them this night; he'd not spoil the moment by remembering the sacrifice that was paid for it.

Her honey-brown eyes lazily looked up, fixing onto him for a second. A wealth of merriment was contained in her smile and in those bright but weary hazel eyes. She held his gaze for a few breaths more before she drew back to the little bundle cradled in her arms and proceeded to have the most involved one-sided conversation ever. A part of Claudus was at ease. Automatically he knew regardless of whatever happened in the future, there was no regret in his wife's heart.

"Well," Claudus stated while crossing the room and taking seat carefully by her side of the bed, "Let me see him, let me see my new Prince."

Nemia never once looked up from the wriggling kitten bundled in her arms. "Well, little one, I have someone for you to meet," the Lioness whispered, the honey her eyes lighting up as she met her husband, "This is your father."

Claudus starred down at the little life in Nemia's arms. His son balled up his little paw into a fist, rubbing his eyes lightly. He then let out a tiny mew of a yawn as he huddled back towards his mother's warmth. A little tuff of flame-colored mane curled on the infant Prince's brow, a signature of someone of his blood. He seemed so small, but Claudus knew his son most likely would be towering over him one day. The King continued his observation, noticing his boy attained his chin, but received his Mother's nose and a little bit of his brow.

Speaking of his nose, Nemia, with a mischievous glint in her eye, brushed her fingers back and forth over their Son's little button nose. A mirthful little laugh escaped from the Kit's mouth as he tried to use his small little paws to capture his mother's marauding digit. It was then the Prince turned, his eyes opened, as he gazed fell upon the face of his father for the very first time. But in that moment, that well of dread which previously left him, returned to Claudus in full-force, once he stared into the crystal blue eyes of his son.

Blue eyes, his son had bright blue eyes.

Claudus' gaze instantly returned to Nemia, pure panic obvious on his face. "Is he blind?" he managed to choke out in honest fear.

A perplex look came across Queen Nemia's face as she starred at her husband. "No," she protested, "Here bring the candle." Claudus did as he was told and brought the candle from the nightstand closer to them. He watched as his Son's irises contracted under the admittance of stronger light. Nemia then took her finger and waved it back and forth in front of his face. Claudus watched just as she did, while their son's eyes and paws followed her fingers, eagerly

enjoying this game of trying to capture it again. She smiled down at her little cub, pressing a kiss to his forehead, immensely pleased "See?" she declared proudly.

Claudus released a breath as at least one of his fears was put to rest. The King continued to stare at his son's indigo irises while the Kit's eyes continued to search around this strange new world. "But he has blue eyes, Nemi," Claudus started again, refusing to let the matter drop, "A cat with blue eyes? It's not natural..."

"He is your son," Nemia shot back strongly at her husband without the least bit of hesitation.

"No one will be willing to accept him," Claudus continued on without even listening to her. His mind was racing now. He played over a dozen scenarios in his head of all the encounters; he'll have in the future. His people might even question his rule. The fact his future heir, was deformed or handicapped. The Lion King started to get up. It might be wise to call for Panthro or even better Jaga, maybe they'd have an idea of what to do to soften this unexpected disaster.

At least that was the idea, till he felt the tightening grip of a small but firm fist clutch the ends of his beard and then yank him back down to the bed hard. He stared into the complete and total fury of his normally calm and serene wife's eyes. "He is *still* your son, *Claudus,*" Nemia managed to growl, remind, and threatened, all in the same instance.

The King mentally-winced. His wife was using *that* tone again. Her once radiant honey brown quickly turned to a more petrified mahogany. She held that fiery defiant look she always wore whenever he was starting to make a great big arse out of himself. She said again slowly, "Claudus, he is our son, that means he's going to be stronger than the both of us one day. That even means *stronger than you*," she added with extra emphasis. Her eyes then soften, "Blue eyes or not, he's still the best parts of us."

Claudus blinked back the moisture in his eyes, as he gazed at his wife. For twelve years they had been married and yet he still felt like a student of life and love to her. If their son did comprise of the best parts of both of them, Claudus hoped to all of the Ancients that his son received most of his gifts from her.

His eyes left his wife and returned to the indigo gaze of his son. Who at that moment, choose to crack the brightest toothless grin, both his paws having a fistful of Claudus' crimson beard. The Lion King let out a throaty rolling laugh, as he scooped his Son into his arms. "He's my son. He's my son!" he said again proudly. He twirled the infant cub around, who chortled at the spinning world around him. Claudus then gaze returned to his wife, her previous vivaciousness leaving her as her eyes lazily returned his stare but a firm grin was on her lips. "Have you decided on a name?" he asked her.

"I was thinking Lion-O," she answered simply.

"Lion-O," he repeated, trying on the name for size. After moment he nodded. It was a Kingly Name. One he knew would command respect and honor, one day. He then crept closer, his voice

so soft his wife could barely hear, "You might be a little different but you still are of my blood and my heart. Within you little Lion-O, hold all our hopes and dreams for the future."

Sixteen years later…

His breath is heavy and labored. He's drenched in sweat. The after effects of the dream keep the adrenaline still pumping in his body, making his senses extra alert. He observes the familiar shadowy shapes and objects and soon realizes that he's back in his bedroom.

Knock, Knock, Knock

His head snaps to the sharp knocks that echo from his door. "Lion-O, is everything all right?" A young woman's voice calls from out in the hallway.

With his frazzled state, it takes him a few moments to match the voice with a name. "Yes. Yes, Cheetara," he finally answers, "It…It was just a dream." His voice sounds haggard, weak.

Pregnant pause sounds for some time before she finally replies. "Okay, don't forget we have weapons training in an hour," the Cheetah reminds him, some more time passes before he can hear the echoing sounds of her departure.

Seeing he was alone again, Lion-O ran a weary hand through his wild flame colored hair. His electric blue eyes fell on Snarf, who happened to wonder over from his cot to sit at his master's side. Lion-O absentmindedly ran a hand over the pet's coat. He then narrows his eyes as he starts to recall.

It was the same dream he's been having for the past few weeks now. Just like those times before, he couldn't remember any poignant. Just fire. Everything he owned. Everyone he knew. Everything. The kingdom of Thunderia consumed in great flames, with two great eyes, the color of blood, watching over the devastation. The only other thing he could recall from the dream was a sound. The raspy cackling of mad laughter.

End Prologue: Lion-O