The New King

By NoWhere_Man

Chapter 4

Two or three summers before the events of 'The Sword of Omens'

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"Different"

A dark hood drapes over her flood of blonde hair as she continues her pursuit. Her small nimble feet quickly hastens her pace as she effortlessly blends within the flow of the crowd, always making sure to keep an eye on her quarry. Her prey was cunning and elusive, meaning she had to be on her guard, fore she was in foreign territory and the slightest mistake might unravel the whole nature of her mission.

A young Cheetara sighed if not the twelfth time that hour. *By the Ancients*; she hated the Upper Circle of Thundara, the grandest marketing center within the great Cat city. Here hundreds of merchants arrived daily to sell all sorts of wears, exotic foods, and spices in one of the largest shopping hubs in all of Third Earth.

Her quarry this day? …The two young Princes, Tygra and Lion-O.

The duo currently was prowling around the robust busy streets, surrounded by a small entourage of some of the other noble sons of Thundera's social elite. They were all dressed in the finest silks and garments imported from traders that travelled all over Third Earth.

With Tygra in the lead, the adopted Prince regaled the others with tales about his life in the castle, stories of the important Diplomats his father held audience for, the latest news on the growing hostilities with the Lizards, and he even slid in his recount of the tales of his latest escapades with some dignitary's daughter that he managed to woo.

The entire group seemed to hang off Prince Tygra's every word. Always agreeing with every decision he made, laughed all of his jokes. Every single one of the young cats seemed to be in complete awe of his very existence. All of them except the crown Prince, young Lion-O.

The young Lion, whose flame colored hair could be seen a mile away, held a dull bored look in his bright blue eyes. The Prince appeared as though he was almost ready to gnaw off his own arm rather than spend another moment in the nodding drones' presence. But instead of outright abandoning the troupe, Lion-O continued to follow his older brother and his 'groupies' as they travelled through the city streets.

Trailing behind the noble flock, the young cleric Cheetara could almost relate with her Prince's dilemma. She wasn't even apart of the group and she was ready to high-tail it and leave. And

when Tygra, due to the encouragement of his friends, went off to court some random noble maiden, Cheetara and Prince Lion-O both gave a collective eye roll.

Cheetara had to remind herself again, of the reason why she was keeping her vigil. Her sights were not set on the young proud Tiger leading the crowd but rather the scarlet mane young cub following in the background.

What was she doing here on this splendid spring morning followed the pampered the royal sons instead of attending to her duties as an honor bound member of the Guardians of the Throne? Well the 'What?' wasn't really important; the 'Why?' was really the reason. The Cleric believed she was supposed to witness something, 'What that something was?' she wasn't exactly sure. And she had a sneaking suspicion that she wouldn't be released from this duty until she did.

This whole confusing, frustration ordeal began a little over a month ago when she was first summoned to Jaga's personal mediation hall…

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The ceiling-high doors gave a low groan of protest as a figure in sandy beige robes eased them aside in order to enter.

Young Cheetara, dressed in her formal Cleric shroud, turned back giving the chamber doors a rueful look. She hated venturing this way, the large moan of those doors always made her feel like she was entering some lost forbidden tome. The low burning torches placed around the small darken corridor, which made her shadow dance menacingly across the walls, wasn't helping the atmosphere much either.

Drawing her resolved, the young Cleric continued down the hallway. Every so often, her thoughts would drift back through the past. She recalled a time, many years ago, when she first entered this hall.

Cheetara was barely a cub when the battle was fought that claimed both her parents' lives. The encounter was just one of many skirmishes fought that year against the Cats most formidable enemy the relentless tribes of the Lizards. And despite the Cat's constant victories, the orphans left alone on both sides of the battlefield were the true losers.

Drawing her thoughts back to the present, Cheetara observed as the long hallway opened up to a different chamber. Effervescent beams of silvery sunlight gleamed from an overhead opening as she approached the entrance to the doorway. The soothing sounds of a babbling brook of water could be heard echoing round this new chamber. An assortment of lush green, yellow, and blue plants littered the ground as their rich exotic fragrances filled the air.

Cheetara always felt so at peace whenever she entered this hall; the soft rippling waterfall, the dozens of blossoming plants and flowers with hundreds of different scents. She truly thought this was one of the grandest places in all of Third-Earth.

Drawing her crimson eyes away, Cheetara's gaze journeyed to the small platform that was within the center of the room. There she found the leader of her Order, Headmaster Jaga peacefully resting upon a meditation mat.

His eyes were closed but Cheetara knew that the Master Cleric wasn't dreaming. His breathing was soft and quiet. His body was not loose and yet it was not completely still. His thoughts were not erratic, but yet they weren't focused. His insight was on this plane, yet they weren't. It was drifting out, traveling across the cosmos, forever on his journey for greater enlightenment and understanding. He was an image of complete tranquility.

Staring at his peaceful visage the young Cleric for a just moment felt envious. Cheetara prayed for the hundredth time that one day she could have a tenth of his discipline, insight and wisdom.

Quietly, the young woman dropped to one knee to the foot of Jaga's mat and waited, desperately not wanting to disturb her Mentor's reverie. Another few moments pass before the Old Wizard's eyes open slowly, his gaze falling on his pupil crouched before him.

A whimsical smile came to his lips as he remembered many years ago, when the girl before him first entered the temple. She knelt before him, just as rigidly then as she did now. "Rise child," his warm rich voice greeted her, "You know there is no need for such formality when it's just the two of us."

A warm smile mirroring his own crossed her lips, "I always seemed to forget," the young Cleric replied while stepping forward to claim one of the spare mediation mats. "You summoned for me Jaga?" Cheetara asked, while taking a seat before him.

The old Wizard nodded, "Yes," he replied briefly before closing his eyes again. "Cheetara, how long have you known me?"

The young Cleric couldn't keep herself from smiling. For years after her parents' deaths she roamed the streets of Thundara. Begging, stealing, doing anything and everything to survive. She probably would still be on those streets today, had it not been her one dream.

One of the strongest memories she had of her parents was the tales the used to speak of Guardians of the Throne. There were very few cubs in Thundara who didn't know about their exploits. They often times seemed like heroes plucked straight out of a fairy tale, spiritual warriors that were so strong, disciplined and yet still so selfless. After her parents passing Cheetara vowed to herself that one day she too would join the ranks of the Clerics.

"Ever since I first stepped to the temple's door," the young woman answered, "You somehow made a stubborn little girl seem welcome in such a grand place."

The Old Wizard smiled again, as if memory just occurred yesterday. "Ah yes, it seems so long ago. You've since grown up to be a fine young women and an honor bound member of this order," he narrowed his eyes, his expression growing more serious, "Trust in these qualities fore I believe they will be needed in the days ahead."

The smile fell from Cheetara's lips as she considered her Teacher's words, "What have you seen?"

"I cannot say," he answered while shaking his head, "Merely fragments," he added abstractly. She nodded in return. It was her understanding that glimpses of the future however brief or profound were hard to pinpoint and never definite. Strands of a possible future can arise at a moment's notice. And once you view an outcome it's often a possibility that you witnessing it meant that strand of time was forever closed and a new one opened in its place. It was a divine gift, difficult to master, and it brought a weigh of responsibility to its owner.

"I feel dark times will be approaching on the horizon," he cryptically answered while his gaze turned to the blue skies out a nearby window. Jaga then returned his attention to Cheetara, "My dear, I was wondering if you would do a favor for me."

"Anything, Jaga," the young Cleric replied without hesitation. She then added with a smile, "You know that."

He nodded acknowledging the young woman's sincerity, but the Old Wizard then commented, "This will be unlike anything I've asked of you before."

"Never the less, I'm willing to serve," Cheetara firmly retorted.

The Jaguar closed his eyes, "Very well," he accepted. Jaga then paused for a few moments before saying, "I would like to ask you, what your feelings towards Thundera's royal family, more *specifically* the young Prince Lion-O?"

Cheetara's blonde eyebrows knitted in confusion in the seemingly random change in topics. The young Cleric didn't understand what exactly the crown Prince had to do with anything. Taking a low breath she then stated with no warmth, "The crown Prince is the newest heir from a long line of proud and noble rulers. I, like the other members of the kingdom, eagerly look forward to the day when he will finally be crowned King." It was the expected and *required*, answer everyone was to make when ever someone addressed the Royal family. Her duty was only to serve, not to criticize.

Jaga frowned. His staff echoed as he plunged it down into the floor, illustrating his displeasure. "Your honest opinion girl," he chided her, "Remember we both can speak freely here."

"Both the Princes are spoiled, prideful, and arrogant," Cheetara shot back, before she could get a lid on her own mouth.

Instead of being surprised, a stark mirthful laugh escaped from the Old Wizard, hardly not expected the flippant remark. *Still the same fire, still the same spirit*, Jaga felt even more confident about his selection. "Judge them harshly I think you do," he replied evenly while wiping away a tear, "They're still young," the old Jaguar remarked casually.

"Spoiled, arrogant *cubs* only grow to be spoiled arrogant *Cats*," Cheetara shot back tersely.

"Not both of them. Not Lion-O," Jaga persistently refuted, "He's..." the old Jaguar paused as to search for the proper word to describe the interesting young cub. Even now Jaga could recall the many hours he stood by young Lion-O's side, telling and retelling, his stories about the Old ways, the tales of Technology. Since the days of old, technology had been the things of legends, but to Lion-O, it seemed like a reality like you or me. Eventually Jaga smiled. "He's different."

Cheetara observed the reassured, even spirited expression on her Mentor's face, and shook her head. "Why are we talking about the Prince anyway?" she asked, desperately wanting to change the subject.

"Lion-O is exactly why I called you here. I believe…" he paused for a moment then began, "I'm *certain*," he corrected himself, "…that the Prince will be forced to endure many trials in the future. It's possible that events are shaping as we speak that might overwhelm him. He will need someone to guide him through this struggle and I would like for you to be that person."

"Jaga I'm honored that you that you feel so highly about my capabilities," a faint flush stained her cheeks, "but why me?"

A mischievous smile suddenly appeared that showed that the elderly Jaguar wasn't quite as old as the lines on his face spoke. "Just an Old Man's hunch…"

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And that's all she had to go on. Something that was a little bit more than a feeling. Granted Cheetara always did and always will, greatly value Jaga's wisdom, but she was still a bit reluctant to see how this posh and pampered Prince was any different than the others before him.

Eventually Jaga resolved to allow her a month to decide on the matter. Naturally, Cheetara believed her mind had already been set, but she decided to honor Jaga's agreement anyway. She figured to watch the young Prince for a time, till she was satisfied that her suspicions were correct.

Three weeks have passed since that fateful meeting one morning and since then; Cheetara had been Lion-O's shadow. She quietly observed him through the royal parties, stood by while he enjoyed his father's banquets, and cringed as he suffered through the brutal sparring matches with his brother.

Cheetara eventually came to the conclusion that she really didn't know much about her own Prince. It was always Tygra that was in the lime light. Always, the rags to riches adopted Prince that was everyone's favorite. He even held a bit of captivation in her own heart at one time. Tygra was undoubtedly handsome in a roguish sort of way. A flicker of danger, mixed with a mountain of self-confidence, the perfect combination that would melt any young girl's heart. But these few weeks of enduring his company cured her of any earlier infatuation she may have had.

But with Lion-o, she wasn't sure. She often thought she saw glimpses of something greater. A certain something that if nurtured might grow one day into something with promise. But his light

would often get eclipsed by the shadow of his talented adopted brother or his legendary father. In some ways she sympathized for the Lion cub.

"Hello, what do we have here?"

Cheetara immediately snaps back from her reminiscing. For a second she draws the hood of her cloak further down, thinking that she might have been discovered. But it only takes a second to notice that her cover hadn't been compromised, because the Princes' group held their attention on a different sight.

On the corner of the street, in the Upper City of Thundara, a frail elderly jackal woman stood by a small cart filled to the brim with dragonmelon fruits. Usually all of the other races that lived within Thundara occupied the poorer sections of the Cat ruled city. It was a hard thing to combat. With the separation of the races, things like equality and equal rights, wasn't exactly a standing practice. It was incredibly rare to see one outside, much less one of the Canine breeds.

The woman of the Jackal breed's figure was stooped due to age. Her fur coat, which still had faint traces of brown around the edges, was gray in color. A brightly embroidered sari was draped around her thin frame, bathing it in rich colors of golden and emerald.

The group of young cats circled around the elderly Canine woman like carrion birds over a fresh kill, all eager to get a glimpse of the interloper. "Hey these look good." A young leopard commented before snatching up one of the fruit from the cart. But the older woman was surprisingly quick. She rapped his hands with a swift slap before revealing the price to him if he was really interested in purchasing.

It then happened like that. Her action seemed prompted one the others to follow their friend. He snatched up one of the ripe friend and before she could direct her fierce gaze on him. He chucked it over to another friend, who then hefted it over to another, who then threw it to their ringleader Tygra.

For a brief second even the bold Tiger was at a lost for what to do. It was like for a brief second he was unsure of how to continue. But the moment quickly passes as the usual confident grin returns to his face as he returns the toss.

And suddenly Cheetara feels ice start to fill her veins. They all play a brief game of Monkian in the Middle, with the Jackal woman at the center of their tyranny. They're young. To them it's nothing more than just a game. But it's still cruel none the less.

The young Cleric stared out in the crowd. Not understanding why everyone was frozen in place, unwilling to step-in to stop such madness. But really could she blame them? Here were the sons of the some of the most influential Cats of Thundara. Getting in their way would only incur their wrath upon the foolish party.

But even still…

Through the sneering and jeering, ill-mannered young faces, an inferno of bright blue eyes ignited into a fiery blaze of hot triumphant anger. Cheetara witnessed the look of outrage, guilt, and shame evident on the young Prince's face. The earlier dull bored look in his blue eyes broke way to something completely different in midst of this scene.

But yet he said nothing…

Lion-O continued to look around to every one of his 'friends' as they continued their games. His hands balled into tight fists at his side, yet he still did nothing.

Cheetara didn't know what upset her the most; having to witness such a shameful act. Or knowing her Prince, the future *ruler* of her kingdom, could just stand by idle and let something like this happen.

'*Perhaps Jaga was mistaken,'* she could only wonder.

The games stopped as one of the more uncoordinated of the bunch makes a late catch that crashing his full weight against the cart, sending all of its contents to the dirt road. There is a brief pause that hits everyone present before a chorus of young laughter floods the streets. The group, all tease and jeer at their clumsy comrade, completely ignoring the old woman whose property they've ruined.

Seeing the games have ended, "Come on guys lets go," Tygra states rallying his troops off to find more sport. Within minutes every one of the young cats, all in good cheer, move off further down the street.

Even after all the young cats have clearly left the street no one still reacted, it was as if everyone was spellbound, rooted to their spots, each of them seemingly unable to process what happened and all of them unsure how to proceed. Even the young Cleric was caught in the spell of disbelief.

The moment quickly passes for her though, as what she is and what she stands for, returns to her. She makes a step towards the women, before her ears suddenly perk up as she hears, "Hey guys, I'll catch up with you in a second!" Then the vibrant red mane of Prince Lion-O returns from around the corner, automatically his bright blue eyes locks on the Jackal woman. The woman instantly cringes away from his mere gaze, fearing further abuses.

If this simple act, dismayed the young Prince he didn't show it, he just simply continued walking forward in a slow deliberate pace. Every eye on that city street fell onto the young adolescent Prince as he stood in front of the old woman.

A low rumbling growl echoed in the air. One that Cheetara hardly knew that she herself uttered. The Cleric Huntress feels her staff extend, driving itself to the floor. Her crimson eyes truly only seeing red. If that young cub came back to reticule that poor old woman again, Crown or no Crown, Cheetara deemed she would unleash all her fury on him.

Prince Lion-O's electric blue eyes stared down at the woman for a moment. An air of silence centers around him as his gaze continues to fall over the abused woman. He then moves bowing deep at the waist, "I'm so sorry…" he whispers softly to her, while the valkyrie Cheetah halts her righteous charge. “I'm sorry…" he says again. His fists were clenched so tightly by his sides that it almost appeared he was barely restraining the guilt from exploding within. "Not all cats are like…" the young Prince started to say, but he bit his lip. Not even he could possibly tell such a bold lie.

Instead his shoulders slum in defeat from his own helplessness of the situation. He briefly looks away before dropping to one knee. His words then carried out so everyone on the street could hear, "As a Prince of the Thundercats, I *humbly*," his voiced wavered with emotion for just a second, "I humbly would like to apologize to you."

The Old Woman at first feared that this was some other joke, but after a moment of seeing the pain and sincerity etched in the young cub's eyes. She spares a brief smile, while placing her small wrinkled hand on his mane.

The intensity of his eyes softens a little as he realizes that he forgiven. The first part of seeking his redemption is over. The young Lion then cups his hands into the dirt trying to dig the melons from out of the mud.

After watching him, the woman protests; saying he dirty his nice outfit. Lion-O heard her, but if mud stains on his imported clothes bothered the young Prince, he didn't say. Nor did he stop his actions, till the disorder of the woman's cart was set right.

His sudden action seemed to erode the spell that befallen the bystanders around them. With in minutes a young couple stood beside their prince aiding him in his task. A young feline that was staring from her linen shop door promptly came over as well. Within minutes half a dozen people put their effort to the task until it was complete.

But for Lion-O it didn't seem enough. He pondered long and hard while staring fiercely at the crate. Then suddenly episode passes as the electricity of his blue eyes brighten again, as he approached the old woman, speaking to her in hushed tones about his idea.

Cheetara frowned as she leaned forward straining to listen. Her eyes widen as she overhears the Prince mention the name Felis. Instantly the Cleric recognized the name from one of the head cooks of the royal palace. Lion-O then assured her, that one word from the Crown Prince would insure that the woman would get top dollar for every one of her dragonmelons. He continued to steer the women back towards the castle, he wanted to make sure the transaction went through smoothly.

Cheetara was beside herself, after all the events unfolded. If she ever had any doubts before on just how the boy prince would rule in the future, she believed she just saw glimpses of the man to be right there. Cheetara wouldn't know that instant, but this marked the last time Lion-O ever ventured with his brother to the market place. In fact this event would start young Lion-O onto the road of seeking to live outside of his brother's shadow, to become a Cat in his own right.

But she's not able to witness that part of his life, only this brief moment. Her mind wasn't completely convinced, but she did admit that the young Prince was interesting.

Cheetara never did return to Jaga to give her official reply, but at that point she didn't think she needed to. She was willing to admit that there was something about Lion-O that made him different.

A word from the Author:

My apologies to anything in here that was not supported by canon. The bulk of this chapter was created before episodes 12 & 13 were aired. So any inconsistencies you might find, I again am sorry.