***Signal in the Sky* Prologue**
An intro to the Third Earth Adventures, First Era
First Chapter written in July of 2001

An omen: an ominous telling of things to come, perhaps. I have been the bearer of such omens, an oracle of sorts for the universe for untold ages. Anyone who could brave the treacherous mountain that was my home and stare into my fiery eye would be granted in depth knowledge or aid of my impressive power; whatever it is they might ask.

There came a day when a curious manner of being, unlike any I had yet seen on my largely uninhabited planet, presented to me a jewel that appeared strikingly like the fiery eye that is my own tangible incarnation. It was the Eye of Thundera, stolen from my great collection of treasures and then falling into the hands of Mumm-Ra the Everliving. The gem was useless to him, as it only called to those pure of heart.

I thought it lost forever until this man stood before me, gem in hand. He was a lion of a man and I suspected he'd wandered far and long to stand before me. Wasting no time, he boldly thrust the jewel into my flame, demanding that I forge it into the hilt of a magical blade. The Eye's power, when mingled with my own, became a magical weapon to be reckoned with.

Pulling his scorched arm away, he clutched the newly formed blade and dubbed it the Sword of Omens. Taking pity on the man and his burned arm, I formed a feline-looking sheath for it that would serve as both a defensive shield and protection for his damaged limb.

Finally, this bravest of men used the newly forged blade and the magical emblem within it to take me from my mountain perch and stow me away into a golden tome that has been my home since. It was for the better good, he believed, as he himself saw omens – dark omens – through the second sight he possessed through the eye-like jewel. Dark forces were conspiring to take my power for themselves and that, he believed, would be enough to overcome the power he gained from the jewel.

So impressed was I with the man for his determination and bravery that from then on I made a pact with his people, yet it was not one born of blind faith. A key he had brought with him, one that had a replica of jewel he so treasured carved into it, was what anyone who dared seek council with me needed or else become seared to a crisp on the spot. Using a contrived code language only those close to him knew, he started what generations after him would continue – to write down the history, knowledge and secrets of his people inside the Book's pages by using the Sword like an elegant etching tool. A guide, if you will, to the great power he took full responsibility for when jewel met sword.

Through the millennia since, there have been many handlers of both Sword and Book of Omens. The greater the individual's connection with either item, the mightier a weapon it would become. Controlling their powers would come more naturally to the chosen few. Until finally there came a day where we all lost our home with the death of beloved Thundera. That day, two cubs had a heavy burden put on them, forcing them to grow up quickly – both physically and emotionally – to take on the new challenges and threats ahead of them. What follows is their unique story, unlike anything I, the Guardian of the Book, have ever seen recorded in their

history. Together with a strong and loyal group of friends, they fought to survive against their old enemies, as well as new ones. But most of all it is tale of a bond between this group of Thunderians that was so unlike any other, it saw them through the worst of times. This bond between friends combined with their young leader's particularly keen connection to the ancient Eye of Thundera was the strength that would allow them to resist almost certain extinction.

Signal in the sky-oh
That's when you know that you have to fly-oh
Signal in the sky
Power super, super power
Let's go! You know you have a lot do
Let's go! And everything depends on you

-- *Signal in the Sky, The Apples in Stereo*

Chapter 1 of *Signal in the Sky*

Scarred But Smarter
By Purrsia Kat

Lion-O ventured farther into the depths of the lush jungle.

"Those distress signals came from around here somewhere," he thought desperately.

He felt panic sink in. Nearly an hour had passed since that harrowing call was dispatched to the Lair during his shift on watch. It was a frantic, broken transmission from WilyKit and WilyKat. The signal had been so distant the kittens were barely audible, but there was no mistaking the terror in their voices. It had been evident to Lion-O that what had started out as a routine search for more Thundrillium had gone horribly awry. He had traced their location and hastily made for an area of Third Earth that had yet to be thoroughly explored by the ThunderCats. He knew there would be no time to signal the others back to the Lair. He even left without informing his loyal friend, Snarf, of his mission.

Now, as he used the mystic Sword of Omens like a machete to swath a path through the increasingly thick foliage, he wished he had waited for the others.

"If I had just waited, the ThunderTank could've made short work of this," he scolded himself. "I'm wasting more time than--"

Lion-O stopped cold. He was sure he had heard someone cry out at that moment. Not a single muscle on the lion's lean frame twitched as he stood perfectly still. He listened intensely for the

cries among the jungle sounds.

"There it is again! And it sounds like Kit!" he thought, his ears ringing with the sound of the familiar voice.

"Kit! Where are you?" He bellowed, hoping he had succeeded in subduing the fear in his voice.

"Over here, Lion-O," came her faint reply. "Hurry! WilyKat is hurt....bad!"

Lion-O leapt forward toward the sound of WilyKit's voice, only to get ensnared in a thicket of thorny vines. Roaring in frustration, he plunged his arm into the claw shield at his side. He directed his sheathed arm at the treetops and ejected its claw line. The sturdy line hit home near the top of a distant tree and it immediately began to hoist him above the jungle undergrowth. The branch the claw line was buried in snapped mid-swing, sending the young lord unceremoniously back to the earth. He tumbled and rolled through more vines and brambles. When his momentum finally expired, he called to WilyKit again. This time her reply came clear and strong.

"A Clearing!" he thought. Lion-O turned in the direction from whence her cries came. "That must be where they are."

Lion-O tackled his way through the last fifty yards of brush, paying no heed to the cuts and bruises doled out by the merciless jungle foliage. The scene that greeted him when he crashed into the clearing was worse than he had anticipated. Lion-O knew he had to do his best to hide his apprehension about the situation for the sake of the pale, frightened Thunderkitten cradling her dying brother. He could hardly bear to look into her glistening eyes, for they seemed to hold hope amid obvious sorrow. Most of all, Lion-O feared the look in his own eyes would dash that bit of hope.

"What happened here?" He tried to sound matter-of-fact as possible.

WilyKit choked back a sob as she began to explain. "We were out looking for Thundrillium and we...we got into a space board race and--" She paused to rub her nose with her arm, "--and we just were having so m-m-much fun that we didn't notice how far from the Lair we had gotten.. Next thing we knew, we were over this jungle. We were all turned around and couldn't decide how to get back home. So, we found this clearing and thought maybe someone might be down here who could help us....oh, Lion-O, that's when it happened!" She broke into sobs and seemed as though she wouldn't be able to finish her tale.

"Please, Kit, you must tell me what happened so I can help him," Lion-O gently urged.

WilyKit struggled a moment for her composure before she continued. "We crash landed not far from here. We could hear a river nearby and started down this trail toward it...when some kind of wild animal came out of nowhere and attacked us! I-I've never seen anything like this creature on Third Earth. It wasn't very big, but it was so vicious. Look!"

She set her brother gently on the ground and proceeded to peel back his bloody tunic, revealing the row of bite marks on his side. Lion-O bit his lip in an effort to hold back the gasp that threatened to erupt. Instead, he knelt next to WilyKit and inspected her brother's wounds.

"It's bad alright," he mused to himself. "He's lost a lot of blood already. I don't think we can get him back to the Lair in time. But....we have to try."

"Where are your space boards, Kit?"

"Just up the path a ways....but, uh, they kinda got a little messed up when we landed..." She added sheepishly.

"We'll have to try to fix them. They 're our only chance of getting Kat out of here."

As he watched her disappear up the shadowy trail, he heard the rustle of leaves behind him.

"Mutants!" Lion-O sprang into full battle alertness. As he suspected, Slithe, Jackalman, and

Monkian materialized from the dark jungle.

"We intercepted that little distressss call and hoped you'd be foolish enough to attempt the rescue alone..." Slithe taunted.

"Your friends will never get here in time to save you now," snickered Jackalman.

"Well, I've taken care of you Mutants before, and I have reason to dispose of you now more than ever!" Lion-O growled.

With that, the Mutants charged. Monkian swung his mace with deadly intent. Lion-O easily deflected it with the Sword of Omens. Jackalman's studded club came at the ThunderCat at nearly the same instant. Lion-O skillfully grabbed the club with his claw-shielded hand, successfully wresting it away from its cowardly owner. As Lion-O tossed the club into the jungle. As he watched the sniveling Jackalman run in fear, he detected the whooshing sound of the air being sliced. Instinctively, he knew Slithe was taking a swipe at him with his ax. The nimble cat leapt back to avoid the lethal blade. But he wasn't quite fast enough. Lion-O quickly assessed the damage to his mid-section and was pleased.

"Hmmmph...only a flesh wound."

And that was the last coherent thing he remembered.



"What happened, Slithe?" Monkian watched in amazement as the mighty Lord of the ThunderCats crumpled to the ground. "You barely got him with your ax, hoo hoo HOO."

"It's very sssimple, Monkian," Slithe explained. "I gave him a taste of the 'fruit of the earth'." The reptilian's sinister cackle echoed through the jungle.

Monkian scratched the clump of white fur on the back of his neck, clearly still trying to figure out how the Mutants could have claimed victory so easily. "Wh-what do you mean?"

"I bathed my blade in the juice of the deadly and potent managona berry. All I needed was to wound him for its poison to work its wonders."

"Let's finish him off now, Slithe. I want to bash his head in, hoo hoo HOO! And the Thunderbrat, too."

"Just grab the Sword and let's get out of here!" ordered Slithe. "Both of them will be dead within the hour. Besides, the poison in Lion-O's system won't provide him with a painless death. I want him to suffer!"

"I'd still love to bash them both to a bloody pulp." The hulking ape raised his mace menacingly.

"Put that down, fool!" Slithe seethed. "We need to round up the other Mutants and plan our attack on Cats Lair. With Lion-O out of the way, the other ThunderCats don't stand a chance."

Monkian bent to grab the Sword of Omens from where it lay next to its motionless master. "Shouldn't we find the girl Thunderbrat and finish her off too?"

"Even if she were able to get back to the others they would never be able to help in time. Besssides, whatever attacked her meddling brother will probably get her before the day's end....let's get out of here!" Slithe added, a bit nervously.



WilyKit struggled down the path with the space boards. A chill shot through her body as she observed the scene looming before her. She dashed behind some jungle greenery, hoping the villainous Mutants hadn't seen her.

"I should go out there and fight!" she chided herself. She helplessly watched Monkian take the Sword. "But what can I do against them alone? They've ...they've hurt Lion-O...maybe even killed him! No, it's best I wait for them to leave and then try to summon help on my communicator."

Finally, the Mutants left. WilyKit cautiously stepped from her hiding spot, when two new figures emerged from the jungle darkness. Startled, she doubled back on her steps, tripping over one of the space boards. She sprang back to her feet and peered fearfully around the bush to see what new horrors awaited her and her injured friends.

"They don't appear to have noticed me," she thought with measurable relief.

One of the figures was clearly a woman, but WilyKit couldn't make out any of her features due to the gauzy cloak the woman donned. The stranger's companion looked to be some kind of elfin creature. She was a female, short in stature. her straight white hair contrasted starkly against her blue-gray complexion, and hung down past the twine belt of her robe. Despite all that hair, a pair of thin, pointed ears poked through. WilyKit had never seen a being quite like this before. She looked on as the pair knelt over Lion-O and her brother.

"Maybe they are looters....but maybe they want to help. There's only one way to find out, so here goes--"

Taking a deep breath, WilyKit stepped from behind her cover.



As soon as the hideous ape and lizard creatures walked past, Felina and her Emite friend, Amenita, jumped from the jungle foliage and raced down the path to the ailing man and young boy.

"Those creatures looked like Mutants!" thought Felina with astonishment. "How on Third Earth did Mutants get here?"

Her amazement at the appearance of Mutants quickly faded as they approached the fallen pair.

"Amenita!" She gasped, "These two are...are...Thunderians!"

The Emite nodded in agreement. She cast a glance at her stunned friend and said dryly, "'ell, yare gonna be sayin' 'these two *were* Thunderians' if ya don't pick yare jaw up off'n the ground and help 'em."

“Yes, you’re right. The two of us can’t possibly carry them. We must find some way of getting them back to the village. Alderan may be able to--”

“Hold it right there!” They looked up to see WilyKit nearing cautiously. “Don’t touch them!”

WilyKit now stood before the strangers, pellets in hand and ready for attack. She stared at them fiercely. “Who are you?” She demanded.

“Yer a spunky little un, ain’t ya?” chuckled Amenita, regarding the kitten with amusement.

Felina shot the friend a scowl. “This is no time for teasing,” she whispered. She turned to the determined but obviously frightened cub and explained, “We heard cries as we were coming down the river and decided to investigate. Your friends need help. We have to find a way to get them back to our village.”

“Wh-why should I trust you?” asked WilyKit.

Felina slid back the hood of her cloak, revealing her long, sandy brown mane and sparkling jade cats’ eyes. “Because I, too, am a fellow Thunderian.”



“That boy is going to be the death of me, snarf snarf,” Snarf lamented as he worriedly paced. “I leave him for a minute and he goes running off without telling anyone where or why!”

The other ThunderCats had been paged to the Lair by Snarf when he realized Lion-O was missing. They were gathered in the council chamber working out a plan to locate their impetuous lord.

Tygra, who represented the orange tiger clan among the ThunderCat nobles, grumbled, “I know he’s just twenty years old and only months out of the anointment trials, but he has got to learn not to rush off head long into danger! We should have heard from him by now.”

“We haven’t heard from the Thunderkittens either. And they didn’t answer your page, Snarf,” mused Panthro. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully and concluded, “Lion-O must have found out they were in trouble and gone to help.”

“That still doesn’t tell us *where* he went to help them,” observed Tygra.

“But we do know,” Cheetara added, “where the kittens were looking for Thundrillium. We can start by searching that area.”

“Then it’s settled,” Tygra announced, “We head out immediately for a search of sector three. What say you?”

Suddenly, the Lair shook violently. The sound of laser cannon fire reverberated throughout the fortress.

“Those blasted Mutants!” Panthro roared. “Now of all times!”

“Battle stations everyone,” ordered Tygra.



WilyKit and Felina hoisted WilyKat next to Lion-O onto one of the damaged space boards.

"This should help us carry them down to the river. Once we get them on the boat, the village is but a short distance." Felina tried to sound as reassuring as possible. She guessed that the elder of the befallen ThunderCats had been poisoned by the managona berry. The seizures and convulsions that were the hallmark of such misfortune was the basis of Felina's diagnosis. Seeing the ThunderCat suffer with those side effects had WilyKit visably shaken. Felina smiled slightly at the kitten and wished she could tell the cub that everything would be alright.

"Humph, 'ell time's a-wastin'," Amenita interjected. She and WilyKit lifted one end of the board while Felina took the other. They walked the path slowly and in silence. Time seemed to slow to an agonizing pace until finally the shore of the river came in sight. They sat the space board down near the river's edge. Felina searched frantically for the barge she had left moored to a tree.

"The boat! It's...it's gone!"

"How can that be?" Cried WilyKit.

Amenita was about to make her own assessment of this turn of events, when the reflection of an object caught her eye. The elf waddled to the edge of the path and dug the object out from beneath a thorny bush.

"Eh, worthless, wouldn't ya say?" She adjusted her brown robes and regarded the dagger with her pug nose wrinkled.

WilyKit's golden eyes widened. "That's the Sword of Omens! But I saw Monkian take it."

"Looks like th' damn fool dropped 'is toy. An' I bet he's the scoundrel who took th' boat."

"We may have some luck after all, girls," interrupted Felina. "Here comes another village barge!"



It was now dusk in the Emite village. Lion-O was resting comfortably. The village elder, Alderan, had confirmed Felina's suspicion of managona poisoning and administered the anitdote.

"Your lord will have a long recovery but he should survive, little one," Alderan assured WilyKit.

The Thunderkitten flashed Alderan a weary smile from her seat aside her twin brother. An IV delivering lifesaving blood traveled from her arm into that of WilyKat as he slept.

"An' ya kids need ta be more careful where ya crash land them spacey boards," Amenita teased. "Near th' roostin' Wakka ain't such a good idear."

WilyKit regarded her with a wry smile. "I'll keep that in mind."

"So this is the Lord of the ThunderCats," Felina mused as she watched the young man slumber. "When we left Thundera, he was but a child."

"You aged a bit yourself, Felina. You were even younger than Lion-O on Thundera. So tell me, how did you come to Third Earth?" asked the curious kitten.

"Kit, I'm not entirely sure," she began, "I was supposed to be on the same ship as the rest of

the ThunderCat nobles. But even at the age of ten I was very serious about my duty as keeper of the Book of Omens, and went back for it."

"Wow!" interrupted WilyKit, "Do you still have the Book of Omens?"

"Yes, it survived as I did. I managed to make it aboard one of the last ships leaving Thundera, just before the final explosion. We escaped the Mutant attack as we lagged behind the rest of the fleet -- only to be hit by a meteor shower later in our journey. We all went into suspension and the next thing I remember is waking up in this jungle, with no sign of our ship or other Thunderian survivors..."

Bela, Felina's loyal snarf companion, could sit silently no longer. "I still can't believe that Jaga left without you....his own daughter!"

"Not this again, Bela!" Felina rolled her eyes. "He did what he had to do for the sake of all involved."

"Well, it's a good thing I squeezed into your suspension capsule because I don't know what you'd do without me."

WilyKit giggled. "I see the snarf attitude is universal."



As darkness descended on Cats Lair, all was still and eerily silent. Dust stirred about by the battle still hung in the air like a blanket, turning the setting sun from a warm orange to blood red in hue. No sign of the Mutants or the band of warrior cats was evident from outside the Lair. The Lair itself suffered extensive damage, marking the battle a fierce one.

"Damn it, this is going to take a lot of work to fix," muttered Panthro from the darkened control room. He tossed a broken piece of machinery in disgust. The metallic clang broke the ominous silence.

"Yes," sighed an exhausted Tygra, "but at least we held off those wretched Mutants. Their overconfidence worked in our favor once again."

"Fat lot of good that will do us," Panthro countered glumly. "My guess is they'll regroup and attack again in the dead of night..."

"We must do our best, Panthro. I fear the worst for Lion-O and the kittens. It seemed as though the Mutants knew they weren't here. That doesn't bode well for our friends I'm afraid." Tygra shook his head sadly.

"Well, let's go see how Cheetara is doing. She took a pretty nasty hit in the leg."

When the pair reached Cheetara's room, they were relieved to see the lithe cheetah walking, with only the slightest limp to indicate she had suffered any injury at all.

"Hello boys," she purred by way of greeting. "Don't look so shocked. It'll take a lot more than a grazing by a laser cannon to take me out."

Before either cat could reply, the ThunderCat signal blazed through the twilight, its familiar roar ringing in their ears and bathing them in its red light.

"Lion-O! Blazes, he's alive!" Tygra exclaimed, feeling renewed energy.

"To the Thunder Tank," Panthro ordered. "Let's move!"



The cool night breeze rustled Lion-O's thick mane as he leaned against a tree, waiting for his peers to arrive.

"I hated to use the Eye of Thundera to summon the others," he admitted to WilyKit and WilyKat, "but since your communicators don't seem to be working..." He trailed off, as the mere act of speaking seemed to deplete his energy.

"Gee, Lion-O....you don't look so good," noted WilyKit.

"I don't feel so good either," he confessed. "This feels like the worst hangover in the history of Third Earth!"

WilyKat managed a weak laugh. "Does it feel worse than the hangover ya had the day after your anointment ceremony?"

"All hail the porcelin god!" Teased WilyKit between giggles, as she reflected on the image of her youthful lord paying the price for his indulgence.

Lion-O grimaced. "Next time I'm leaving the two of you to fend for yourselves against the creatures of the jungle," his smile gave away his mock seriousness. Glancing at his abdomen, he continued, "As for this cut, it looks like it will leave a small scar, but I think I'm smarter for it."

At last the distant growl of the Thunder Tank's engine could be heard, marking its approach. Felina emerged from a nearby hut. She walked toward the group with a small package wrapped in brown paper.

"This is for you, my lord," she said, extending the package to Lion-O. "It's the remainder of your medication. Just take two pills once a day for the next few weeks and you should recover completely."

"Thank you...I really owe you one," he replied.

"Don't thank me, thank Alderan. He saved your life. I am but a student of his holistic teachings, with only a fraction of his wisdom I'm afraid."

"You're coming with us, aren't you Felina?" WilyKit asked suddenly.

"Yes," Lion-O agreed. "As a ThunderCat, your place is at Cats Lair."

"Well, I'd love to come visit, but--" Before she could finish, the ThunderTank skidded to a halt with Panthro, Tygra, and Cheetara skillfully jumping from it.

Panthro wasted no time berating his young leader. "Jaga be damned, Lion-O! We thought you had gotten yourself killed this time. How many times do I have to tell you to stop being so damned--" He paused when he noticed the slender lioness stranger among the group. "Who do we have here? And she wears the ThunderCat insignia on her chest?"

"I--I'm Felina," she stated timidly. Then a sudden spark of recognition came to her. "Why, you're Panthro! I'd recognize that sharp lecturing anywhere."

"Felina?" Tygra repeated. "That name sounds familiar..."

"Jaga's daughter," comfirmed Cheetara. "I don't believe it but you've got to be her."

"Yeah, that's right!" blurted WilyKit. "And she's coming to stay with us at the Lair!"

"Well-" Felina began, feeling a blush warm her cheeks.

"It's settled then," Tygra announced. "Now let's get back home and get a good night's rest."

Nobody said it would be fair
But in the end I think it is
Karma, justice, whatever you call it
It's really there, keep looking for it
Nobody said it would be fair
They warned you before you went out there
There's always a chance to get restarted
To a new world, new life
Scarred but smarter

---Scarred But Smarter, Drivin n Cryin