The Songs of Distant Earth

By Song-of_Fete

Chapter 1

She honestly couldn't remember ever being so scared. The last thing she could remember had been going to bed as normal, and the next was opening her eyes here. Her first thought was that it was a nightmare and she was still asleep, for the sight that assailed her eyes was certainly nothing that existed in her waking world. A squat, reptilian humanoid, seeming got have spawned from the vilest swamp on earth hunkered down to her left, a satisfied grimace on its blunt features, and the creature with the hyaena-like laugh just out of her line of vision made her flesh creep without her ever needing to see it.

Not that she dared to look round, though. To do so would be to turn her back on the hideous creature that now addressed her, and even in dreams she rarely took such foolish risks. If she had tried to guess, she might have said it vaguely resembled some obscure ancient god, yet mummified, resurrected and empowered by dark forces beyond her imagining. The voice was unearthly, and would have been frightening even if it hadn't echoed around the hollow chamber.

“I have brought you here through the veils of time to complete the cycle that was begun many aeons ago. As you die within this circle created by my dark power I will be truly immortal, no longer chained to my sarcophagus but free to rule all of Third Earth. Finally I shall destroy the accursed thundercats!”

It burst out laughing, a manic howl that seemed to echo off the stone wall of the (tomb? cave? cellar?), a sound made more horrendous by the jubilant hissing of the reptile-creature and the excitable cackling of the unknown one behind her. Yet at the edges of her vision, somewhere over to her right another figure capered, one that chilled her heard more than any other for ironically it appeared closest to her own humanity. At the sight of the ape-thing hooting and dancing with delight she dropped to her knees, accepting for the first time that this was no dream.

“Almighty Bastet, Great Mother, Protect Me...”

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“Something's wrong out there Lion-O, I just know it!” Panthro looked up from the controls in the hub of Cats Lair, a frown on his face.

“What do you see?” the Lord of the Thundercats came to stand behind the older cat as he expertly operated the controls

“Nothing. Its entirely too quiet out there, and that's just what I don't like. There hasn't been a sign of a mutant for days. It's as if they've vanished off the face of Third Earth.”

“If they did precisely that I'd be happy” Lion-O responded with a laugh “But now I come to think of it, you're right. They have been awfully quiet recently, and that can only mean one thing. They're up to no good.”

“What say you to checking out castle Plun-Darr?” the panther began, but already Lion-O had the sword unsheathed. Raising the scabbard to eye level, he spoke the familiar words

“Sword of Omens, give me sight beyond sight”

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The young woman knelt on the stone floor within a crude circle, surrounded by the mutants...and Mumm-Ra. She was a stranger, dressed in a style with which Lion-O was completely unfamiliar but it was immediately obvious that she was in trouble. What was also obvious was her location.

“You're right. Mumm-Ra has a prisoner. We have to rescue her right away” Lion-O cried, already racing for the Thundertank. On their way, the two adults were joined by two small figures, as ever keen to be included.

“You kids stay here and guard cats' lair” Panthro told them in a tone that brooked no argument “We'll call you if we need you” Putting aside the inevitable complaints from WilyKit and Kat the adults were at the Thundertank moments later.

“Should we call Tygra and Cheetara?” Panthro suggested

“Not now. Once we get the Mumm-Ra's pyramid we'll call them then. But I think we can handle the mutants without too much trouble!” If Panthro though otherwise, he didn't say so, and seconds later they were out of Cats Lair and racing across the rugged terrain towards where Mumm-Ra's victim was in danger.

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One thundercat was already far closer than they imagined. Early that morning Cheetara and Tygra had left on a planned visit to the Wollo village, but they had separated on route. While they normally avoided Mumm-Ra's pyramid Cheetara was convinced that something was wrong, so Tygra had agreed to go and check it out while she went on ahead. Cheetara had argued that she was faster, but speed wasn 't always of the essense when it came to dealing with mutants. Tygra had the gift of invisibility and would be able to check it out without being seen. If nothing was wrong, he would join her later in the day, and if it was, Lion-O was sure to know and summon her.

Although it had gone unspoken between them, the thundercats were all thinking along similar lines. Being used to almost constant attacks by the mutants, they all felt the same thing – this quietness was disconcerting. At the edge of the dark plain upon which the pyramid stood a figure

crouched, staring in the direction from which danger was most likely to come. Bolowhip grasped loosely in one hand, Tygra waited.

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The evil being was chanting now, words in some ancient language the woman didn't recognise. Almost entirely consumed by terror, she almost missed the gentle, female voice that seemed to come from out of nowhere.

“Get up. Walk out of here.”

Deciding she had gone mad, the young woman did nothing, continuing her frantic prayer for deliverance

“Get up. Walk out of here.”

The voice was more insistent this time, and while she couldn't quite make herself obey, she allowed herself to consider it. She was going to die; that much was obvious now. The only choice that was left to her was whether to go like this, cowering on a cold floor, or whether to go out fighting. Which would hurt more? That seemed like the most important consideration. She had always been a physical coward.

“Get up. Walk out of here.”

The third option. Try to escape. Pathetic, but somehow the appeal of even the most futile gesture was growing. Cautiously, legs trembling, she stood, eves fixed on the evil creature whose arms were now raised, its voice still more penetrating and vile.

“Walk out of here.”

She took a step backwards, then another. Hesitated, then turned, took another step. None of her captors reacted. It was as if they couldn't even see her.

“Walk out of here.”

Now she was facing the final member of the unholy party, a canine-like biped who stared right through her. All the while certain they were merely toying with her she obeyed the voice, sidestepping the jackalman and concentrating all her will on putting one foot in front of the other. The light changed, and she realised she had been looking through some kind of mist. Had she stepped outside of the circle then? No time to think of that, only to walk.

She might have walked for hours, or it might have been only minutes. The eerie darkness of the underground tomb seemed made worse by the echoing voices that were growing gradually more distant, and the fact that her feet made no sound on the stone floor.

“I've died. My body's still back there somewhere, but my soul escaped.”

That seemed a reasonable explanation but for the fact she was still walking, occasionally stumbling over a loose stone in the floor she could barely see. Weren't spirits supposed to fly? She thought about this while continuing to walk, all the while firmly denying the possibility that something very real but entirely beyond her comprehension was happening to her.

And she stepped outside, blinking in the unfamiliar weak light.

Chapter End Notes:
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