



Courtesy of Cartoon Network

An updated version of the 1980s cartoon "ThunderCats" premieres at 8 p.m. Friday, July 29, on Cartoon Network.

Cartoon Network unleashes new, updated version of 'ThunderCats'

Thunder, thunder, ThunderCats, ho!

Yes, ThunderCats are once again on the loose as Cartoon Network unleashes its updated version of the 1980s cartoon.

I was a huge fan of the original, so I wasn't all that crazy about an update. But after seeing the hour-long premiere, I believe "ThunderCats" is an idea whose time has come again.

As in the original, the young ThunderCat Lion-O is struggling to take his place as a leader. But in this more mature version, we actually see the world of Thundera as the ThunderCats race and the lizard species are locked in a perpetual battle. Lion-O, the future king, and his brother, Tygra, argue over the right way to handle things, causing their father, King Claudus, to question whether Lion-O can actually lead. Adding to Claudus' doubts is Lion-O's obsession with technology—something of which the ThunderCats have no understanding.

By the time the hour ends, you'll be reeling from the numerous possibilities that lie ahead for Lion-O and his comrades. But even with the strong premiere, there will no doubt still be skeptics among diehard '80s "ThunderCats" fans. It's a situ-



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ation with which Will Friedle, who gives voice to Lion-O, is more than familiar since he experienced the same type of thing when he helped update Batman in "Batman Beyond." He told me he's really hoping that fans of the original give this new spin a try.

"We understand there are going to be some purists, and you can't possibly please everybody, but I think we've really tried," Friedle said. "And I do believe that as a fan of the (original) show, I could watch (this) show even if I wasn't involved and go, 'Hey, wow, this is pretty darn good.'"

Of course, the highlight of the episode is when Lion-O finally grabs the Sword of Omens and yells that familiar battle cry for the first time. It's a moment Friedle wasn't sure he could even make happen.

"The very first time I did it was during rehearsal and I stopped before I did it," Friedle

said. "I was looking down at the bottom (of the page) and I realized it was coming and I started getting nervous. And by the time I was there, I stopped and the whole room was quiet and I looked up at Andrea (Romano, the director) and I said, 'I don't know if I can do it,'" he said.

"And then Kevin Michael Richardson who plays Panthro grabbed me and started shaking me back and forth yelling, 'I want to hear it. I want to hear it.' So I'm shaking back and forth the first time that I actually did it," Friedle said. "When we actually got a chance to record I was a little more relaxed, and I was able to give it a little more voice. I think I had a smile just etched on my face for the next day and a half knowing that I had an opportunity to do that."

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For more of my totally geeky conversation with Friedle, including his interview of me, be sure to visit my blog.

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