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Dying on Mars, Sunburst finds herself reliving her less than glorious past.

Enemy of the Cause took a rather long time for me to finish writing. I had actually intended it to be completed in 2005 but, for some reason, that didn't happen. Anyway, I am finished it now and I feel that it has turned out how I wanted it to be. I hope you enjoy this Seeker of Vengeance character fic. I may do others in future.

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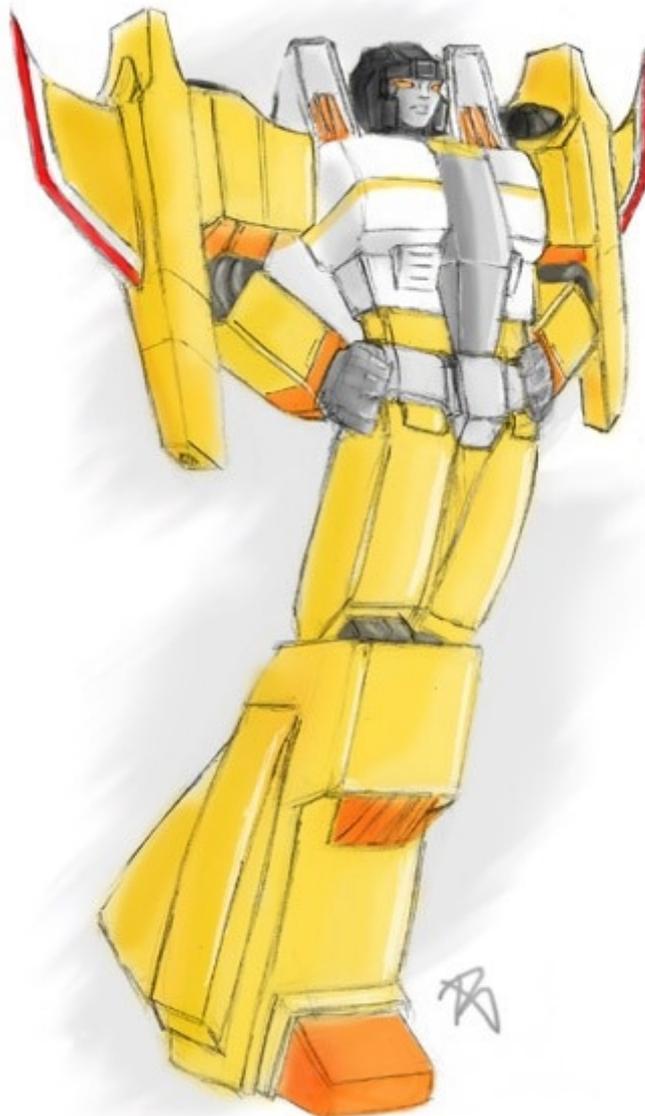
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Dirty Work

Scheol, Monicus.

Earth date: *August 12 1989*

She had travelled from planet to planetoid to asteroid in search of employment. Work had been scarce during the past few years and competition for what was available had been very high.

The road ahead of her was strewn with litter, and the occasional dead animal. A large rat-like creature scurried out of her way as she made her way down the middle of the street. She was headed toward the arena in the middle of the city.

Scheol was known as a very unpleasant place, dark people lived and worked here. Drifters, thieves, mercenaries, low lives and other louts thrived in the streets and frequented the establishments.

Gambling houses opened onto the road; their bright signs blinking in promise of grand winnings. Bars and pubs squished between each of the huge casinos. They were filled with chatter; people who had won and were drinking in celebration.

Other more dubious establishments, with bright marquees displaying images of dancing females opened their doors onto the street. Aliens from many worlds gathered to watch lithe females dancing suggestively to sleazy music. She could hear the shouts of lewd comments and the whistles of males laughing at the alien women.

She cringed outwardly, organic creatures had such disgusting displays, habits and methods of obtaining companionship. Behind these, places she knew, were houses of ill repute; who catered to the needs of the patrons of Scheol. Quickly she walked on ignoring the comments and stares of the flesh and mechanical creatures around her.

She carried on past street vendors who were selling items at very low prices. Many tried to entice her into parting with her few credit chips on worthless items what were guaranteed to break down minutes after purchase. One of the other big businesses that she noticed in this dark district were pawn shops, they all displayed signs reading: "Best prices in Scheol for all your goods."

A forlorn voice cried out from one of the dark allies, a voice of one who had lost everything. The loud sob was quickly followed by a gunshot report that reached her audios. She chose not to investigate nor did she even turn her head toward the sound; she remained cold and impassive. Suicides were a commonplace occurrence within this type of city.

She glanced down at the business card that she had poking between her fingers. "Come to Monicus, where your dreams come true." She laughed coldly shaking her head with a dark sort of amusement, thinking about the person who lay dead or dying in the ally she had passed. Was it in his dreams to die in such a manner? She flipped the card over with her thumb and read the scrawled note on the back.

"You'll find a man offering a job down Gyconi road, at the end of an alleyway between Solid Gold Tavern and Darkrock Castle Casino."

She scowled as she glanced around the street. People crossed the road, chattering boisterously amongst themselves. A loud shout caught her attention just off her right. She turned her head to witness a large alien throwing two very drunk patrons into the street. They shouted curses at the burly bouncer and then they turned on each other and began to fight. A small crowd gathered to watch the combatants, betting amongst themselves on who would come out alive.

At the end of the street was Lord Gyconi's Pit of Destruction. She could hear the drone of many voices cheering on the combatants within. Gladiatorial sports did not interest her, she considered it barbaric and uninteresting.

The Seeker paused for a moment at a poorly lit alleyway between a casino and a noisy tavern clearly named Solid Gold. She looked closely at the Casino's sign. It had an image of a black castle sitting on a cliff face. The writing below it was in a language that was foreign to her. She glanced once more at the card in her hand, the alley was a dead end and it appeared in the poor light to have a door at the end.

She quickened her pace and walked to the end of the alley where she came to a huge battered, corroded metal door with a closed metal window. The door hung on huge hinges that were a touch too ornate for the overall deteriorated appearance of the door itself. The area around the door handle was thick with a grimy build up.

She looked about at the broken crates and assorted rubble then back to the door. It was crud encrusted. Cringing in distaste, she knocked on the filthy door with her orange knuckles. There was silence for a moment before the window slid open, a laser pistol was poked through and a pair of eyes glistened in the darkness.

"What do you want?" a husky voice hissed at her through the window.

"I am looking for a job," she said to the alien, "I understand you are looking to hire a transformer?" she said in a low voice.

"Err, I am, but we don't need any more females," the voice gravelled and coughed a couple times, "we're all full up, try another time." The window started to close and Sunburst caught the corner of it before it shut completely.

"No wait! I hear you have a difficult job available, I am a bounty hunter," she responded disgusted in the suggestion of the filthy grizzled voice. She thrust the business card through the opening in the window.

A grimy, thick nailed thumb and forefinger plucked the card from her hand. She could hear the low mutter as the creature on the other end read the writing followed by some noisy throat clearing.

"Ah, yes, that I do. I'm sorry to offend," the creature apologised in a harsh tone, "please come in, we can talk business." The metal window shut with the sound of bolts being unlatched. With a creak the door swung open and filth from the top rained down on the

ground. Insects scurried up the wall into dark crevices.

The Seeker stepped into the raunchy room, It appeared to be an office or a home or perhaps both. The man seemed to be somewhat of a hermit, filthy cooking pots were piled in an area that could be described as the nastiest kitchen she had ever seen. A pair of green glowing eyes peered at her through a partially opened cupboard then disappeared. The corners of the room were thick with cobwebs.

Her attention was drawn back to the creature who had let her in by his fit of coughing. He abruptly made a horrible growling noise as he turned his head and spat into a stinking pot on the floor. It did not surprise her at all that he seemed very unhealthy, judging by his living conditions.

She wondered for a moment if it would be better to leave than to stick around and find out what this poor excuse for a life form had to offer. He surely had no method to pay her for doing the job but she herself was in desperate need for work and he seemed to be the only one willing to talk to her.

The alien creature lit a couple lamps on the desk as he sat down. He dug through a pile of papers and datapads that were scattered across his desk, muttering a long string of curses in a foreign language as he dug through drawers until he found what he was looking for. He opened up a green folder and started to read quietly to himself.

She wished he had not illuminated the space, it only made the place look more foreboding. The alien's features were even more noticeable now with the light. The alien was short and quite fat, his face was dark brown, she was unsure whether or not this was natural colouration or from the filth of his habitation.

His long black hair was surprisingly well brushed, although it was very greasy and slicked back and tied at the neck, giving his round, highly wrinkled face a stern expression. He looked at her through narrow black-brown eyes that were almost hidden by the thick eyebrows.

His ragged, red woollen clothing hung down to his feet making him seem even more squat.

The creature made more ghastly noises as he cleared his throat, turning his head once again to spit into the pot on the floor. "I'm Mugabe," he said smiling, displaying a mouth full of blackened teeth, "might I ask you who you are?"

The pale gold Seeker tried not to outwardly display her feeling of revulsion. There was no excuse for any life form to allow himself to become like this. She allowed herself to focus on the bright green folder that rested on his desk, it was the only thing that appeared to be new and "clean" save the greasy fingerprints that were now left on the clean white sheets of paper. "I'd rather not reveal my name at this point in time," she replied coolly, "do you have employment for me or not?"

"And yes, I have a job, in the Sol system two light years away from here," the alien was overcome by wracking coughs, "I can't give you all the details that you need so you'll have to speak to the mech who is ordering this particular hit. I am permitted to say it is

someone of high rank and power." He looked her up and down taking into consideration her weapons and stance. "What are your qualifications, then, Seeker?" he asked straightening up in his chair, folding his hands on the top of his desk.

Her optics flashed bright for a split second. "I've been working as a bounty hunter/mercenary for over fifty millennia all over the galaxy. I am competent in my job and I am very successful. I will get my target or targets," she replied.

"That was not my question, I am referring to special abilities, weapons, skills, schooling. Those will determine to me whether or not I'll give you the file," the dark creature snarled.

She glanced around the filthy room nervously, this place did not put her at ease to answer prying questions, she exhaled windily. "I wear two plasma/laser rifles on my arms I am equipped with a secondary plasma pistol and in my alter-mode I have cluster bombs, guided missiles and I can carry nuclear tipped warheads on those missiles. As for back up defensive weapons, I have what they call the sunburst and chaff. They are used for eliminating heat and radar guided weaponry. As for special abilities, I am capable of stealth; I can suppress radar scans and my infrared emissions and for schooling; I graduated from the Cybertron War Academy about nine million years ago."

"Decepticon warrior, then, you were? Interesting, how is it that you are no longer in the service?" he inquired pointing out her lack of insignia with a grubby finger.

"Why I'm no longer with the Decepticon force is my business and not yours. Now I've told what you've asked for, will you give me the job?" she asked with a demanding edge.

"Hmm," The grizzled man muttered thoughtfully, "How fast can you fly?" he inquired, "It is a Seeker that is preferred for the job," he said looking her up and down.

"I'm fast enough," she said sharply, "I take flight would be a potential part of my employment?"

Mugabe glanced over his papers, snorted and spat an unwholesome wad into his spittoon. "Ah, yes, it's a possibility but not necessarily," he shrugged glancing at one of the pages. "One last question before I decide, what is your price to do business?"

"My price? Two-hundred energon cubes is my standard cost, it covers, fuel, equipment, lodging if required and not a cube less." She nodded her head at the filthy creature who sat at the desk.

He made a little frown, "Two hundred energon cubes is quite the price, however, I don't think you will be displeased with what the set payment is," he thumbed to the last page, "eight hundred energon cubes. As I have said, it's a big job."

She looked at the short grizzled creature her optics flashing in surprise; what a payment. "Eight hundred? Who the slag is my hit? Primus himself?" she asked rhetorically.

"Primus? I don't know his name." He paused to look at her for a moment, "I like you Seeker, you seem feisty and strong willed, I'll give you the papers for the job." He picked

a grimy pen off his table and wrote down something on the paper smearing it with his hand in the process. After which he gathered up the file and folded it shut.

"This contains all necessary information about where you are to meet the employer, he wishes to remain anonymous at this time, like you. You are to be there in two weeks, exact date and time and location are outlined in this file, only then will you be informed whether or not you have the job and only then you'll get the of the name of your target." He handed the green file over to the Seeker, "be there on time, he does not like being kept waiting." Mugabe stood up from his desk and shuffled noisily to the door, he pushed it open and allowed the Seeker out.

She quickly walked away from the hovel, not looking back. She had never been anywhere so unsanitary as that place. The Seeker quickly glanced down at the file in her hand, cringing in disgust at what sort of filth it had come in contact with, she shuddered as her circuits crawled with what she had hoped were imagined pests.

Murphy's law

Tharis Plateau, Mars

Earth date: *August 27th 1989*

"Entering the Sol system." came the soft voice in the dimness of the room.

The Seeker brought her optics on-line and sat up eagerly. She had been waiting for those words for two days. "It's about fragging time you piece of scrap," The yellow Seeker cursed at the computer as she stumbled out of her recharge chamber and into the pilots seat.

"Powering down sub-light engines and activating manoeuvring thrusters," said the computer's voice. The ship slowed as the forward thrusters fired to break their momentum. She glanced out the port windows to see the huge gas planet.

In the distance the small red dot grew until it filled her entire field of view. The red planet, as it was often called, rotated lazily in space. She streaked past the pair of irregular shaped moons as she entered the atmosphere of the red hued globe. The serenity of the world was shattered as the guidance monitors abruptly blanked out and the control panel lit up with several red warning beacons.

The Seeker held her hands up to her head to cover her audio's as the shrill scream of the warning siren activated. "Don't you..." she started.

"Warning guidance system failure: Entering atmosphere at present rate of speed could result in shuttle disintegration," the computer informed in a pleasant voice, "manual override is recommended."

The Computer's voice often soothed and calmed her when she travelled long distances between star systems, giving her a feeling that she was not completely alone or confined in a tiny ship in the black velvet of space. It never yelled it's warnings, it never insulted her, sometimes it's comments resembled back talk. But she knew it was doing as it was designed to do; to give immediate, accurate responses and advice to conditions, questions and situations and nothing more.

The voice was smooth and neutral, but she thought of it as female. However now she thought the calmness of the ship's tone felt surreal in the situation that she knew wasn't going to be good.

The Seeker shot a heated glare at the blackened monitor. "Slag don't do this to me now!" she cursed as she turned the auto pilot off and struggled to hang onto the steering column. The Seeker's battered shuttle shook as it destabilised upon entering the Martian atmosphere.

"Come on you old beast, land me safely—please!" she urged the craft on while trying to remedy the guidance system problems and maintain control of the rapidly dropping ship. Several of the panel's lights turned orange and the siren ceased it's irritating blare. "Yes, yes! That's it! You can do it!" she crowed.

She glanced down at the guidance system monitor that had just come back on-line. It had traced her trajectory from where it had shut down. If her aim was correct, she was going to land in the Tharis Plateau.

She stared ahead out the window. Thin pinkish clouds sped past her craft at a high rate of speed. The Seeker poked at the two remaining red buttons that controlled her braking systems and landing systems, they refused to come back on-line.

"You, bot fragging son of a...", she cursed as the shuttle jerked abruptly and a new set of beacons informed her that all was not well.

"Starboard engine failure: Compensating with aft thrusters." The computer informed as the right engine ceased to function. She cast a worried look over her right shoulder at what she could see of the shuttle's wing.

Smoke issued from what appeared to her as a plasma fire. The wing that the engine was attached to would now need intensive repair.

The engine failure shifted her slightly off course and she understood that she would end up stopping a several kilometres off her targeted landing site. Snarling in frustration she guided the ancient craft down with it's nose up in order to slow the speed without the antigravity buffers.

"Shields up!" she shouted at the control panel hitting one of the few green glowing buttons left. Safety straps automatically snaked out from her seat and strapped her in. She shuddered at the feeling of being restrained.

"Shuttle shields are at maximum power," the onboard computer replied to her relief. Despite that, she did not want to keep her hopes up too high. The Seeker did not want to think about the possibilities of it's failure. She knew the one out come: Death. If the generators failed as her craft collided with the with the ground. She and her ship would be thrown across the planet and ripped to shreds.

The ground closed in quickly and as she made adjustments for the lack of engine and landing gear. She held her breath, pressing herself as far back into the seat as she could get. Her hands were clamped tight to the control column, a reaction to fear and impending doom. The shuttle hit the ground with a screech of rocks against metal. The Seeker off-lined her optics.

The Shuttled rocked violently, jerking her in her seat. The restraining straps locked and held her fast.

"Shields are holding at seventy five percent power," the computer informed in a calm voice.

She cringed and tensed up further as the squealing shuttle gouged out a path fifty kilometres long in the Martian surface.

"Shields are holding at thirty-three percent power."

The Seeker quickly glanced at the monitors. "Yes, I can see that!" she said with a shriek as the ship bounced off a jutting rock causing it to spin as it surged forward.

"imminent shield generator failure in ten seconds. Nine. Eight. Seven," the computer counted almost cheerfully.

The words chilled her fuel lines. The Seeker wondered for a split second if the ship was exacting its revenge on her for all the aeons of insults and neglect. 'I'm going down and there's nothing you can do to stop me; enjoy the ride.'

"Oh, Primus, no! Come on you can do it!" she urged, glancing at now completely red panel.

The ship ignored her and continued with the countdown. "Six. Five. Four..."

The ship vibrated violently in huge bounces and shudders as it scraped along the ground.

"Three. Two. One. The shield generator is now off-line."

The Seeker thought that the computer was almost smug in that announcement as the shields collapsed. And she half expected the words, 'have a good day,' to follow. She cried out as the unprotected ship screamed and groaned with the scrape of metal against rock while huge chunks of plating tore free of the hull.

"Brace for impact," she warned herself as curled into a crash position.

It continued on screeching its route until it finally came to rest in an open rocky plain.

The silence was almost deafening for a few moments until the echoing groan and clank of something fell free of the shuttle and hit the ground. The computer quietly buzzed and red beacons flashed.

"Hooo," she exhaled windily, "we made it." She listened to a new sound, a faint rapid hammering. It took her a few moments to realise that it was her own fuel pump working on overdrive in reaction to the whole ordeal.

She sat in silence feeling more than shaky about the rough landing. "Computer, damage report," the Seeker demanded.

"Shields absorbed eighty-five percent of impact, damage is minimal to underside of shuttle craft, breached cargo area. Starboard engines are off-line, antigravity buffers are off-line, shield generators are off-line..." The computer displayed a schematic of the ship highlighting all the damaged areas as it pointed out new areas of concern.

"I'm never going to get off this rock," the Seeker groaned as she sat back in her chair head shaking in dismay. She flicked the monitor off and hoped that she had enough supplies surviving, in her cargo hold, to attempt repairs. She punched up the rear display and viewed the gouged out ground and scattered chunks of twisted with mute admiration and disgust.

"It could've been a lot worse," she said to herself, knowing that she could have died if the shields had given out any earlier. "A lot worse."

She quickly turned her attention to the guidance display. She was four kilometres out from her preferred landing site, which was not bad. She knew she would have to walk or fly to where she was to meet her client.

"Wonderful," she sighed standing up, "Computer activate the global positioning system beacon."

The shuttle fired a small rocket into the atmosphere, the rocket split apart and ejected a tiny satellite into geosynchronous orbit with Mars. The satellite rotated and sent a signal back to the ship where it was processed by the central computer.

Her satellite would not help her much on the other side of the planet but for now all she needed was the local area.

It then made a quick radar sweep of the visible surface and sent the information back and compared it to her guidance system. The original trajectory shifted and she discovered she was twelve kilometres off course.

She rapped the console sharply with her knuckles in irritation and turned quickly to her recharge chamber in the middle of the shuttle.

The room was small with no windows and lots of shelves that were void of her possessions. Her optics fell to the floor as something brittle crunched underfoot. The Seeker sighed as she nudged her things out of her way with the tip of her foot.

The Seeker opened a grey metal door that lined the forward wall and removed her weapons, the file that Mugabe had given her in Scheol and the G.P.S. signal receiver. She would be packing light and did not have a whole lot of time to prepare.

She turned and stepped a few metres from her cramped quarters to the shuttle door. "Computer power down all non essential systems, I'll be back to repair you soon," she said as she patted the wall of the craft affectionately. The interior of the ship darkened leaving a few red emergency lights here and there on and a flashing blue beacon of her G.P.S.

Walking around her shuttle she realised that she should have fixed it on Monicus. The failures would not have happened then. It was still repairable, but it was going to cause a major setback, both financially and with time. The Seeker hoped there would be no time constraint on when she had to do her job.

Without further ado she began her trek west.

Phobos and Deimos

Tharis Plateau, Mars

Earth date: *August 27th 1989*

The Seeker mercenary walked over the rugged Martian terrain, in the Tharsis region, the massive bulk of Olympus Mons towered in the distance. Not far from her right she spotted a cliff that had several large boulders scattered around the base. She looked down at her Global Positioning System co-ordinates on her hand scanner. The resultant information informed her that she would find the person she was looking for over by those rocks.

Only two weeks earlier she had taken the job from a very sleazy man in Scheol, from there she had spent some time downloading Decepticon archives from Cybertron and discovered that Mars was in the same star system that the Elite Decepticon force had crash landed on four million years earlier.

What information she could gather stated that only five years before, contact had been re-established, by Shockwave, with Megatron and his troops on Earth.

She was posted on the other side of the galaxy when the news that Megatron and a portion of his battle force went down on a remote planet and were presumed dead. The reports also suggested that the Autobots had taken a crippling blow by also losing their leader. There was hope that the war was going to end easily, but it still continued on with out losing steam.

She had attempted to further her research, but she was unable to locate more detailed information as to who else was 'lost' along with Megatron on that distant world. With little luck in digging up recent information she scanned for radio waves as she had approached the inner orbits of planets. She had learned that the Earth was an inhabited world by a primitive specie of Primate Mammal that had mastered technology that was capable of sending information via radio. All she had learned from the simple transmissions was that the ongoing battle between the Decepticons and Autobots had stagnated.

She had to wonder if this job had something to do with the group of Decepticons, the Earth world, and the stalemate that had become of their war. She wondered why the Decepticons remained on that world, there had to be something valuable that they wanted, if they were so loathe to leave it.

She glanced about herself again. Mars was a strange planet it's thin carbon dioxide atmosphere was red tinged and full of dust causing the weak light, from the distant star, to appear very hazy. She walked with great easy strides; the gravity of the alien world was very weak. The thinness of the atmosphere coupled with the low gravity caused her problems landing. And times being what they were, she did not have the credits available to repair the planetary landing systems.

Again she cursed her shuttle and herself for not repairing it when the problems were much smaller.

Over head she could see the two Martian satellites Phobos and Deimos. They appeared to be more like a pair of captured asteroids than actual moons. Their surfaces were irregular and barely rounded in the manner that was standard for most planetary companions. She had pulled up a couple of files from the Decepticon database regarding the red world. It had appeared the Primates of Earth had named it after one of their ancient gods, Mars, the Bringer of war. The moons were each named after his assistants, Phobos, fear and Deimos, panic.

She frowned at the thought of the alien mythos, it was interesting but the other information she had gathered on Mars was more useful to her, atmospheric pressures, escape velocities, surface temperature extremes. At least she knew what to expect.

She walked on closing in on the boulders at the base of the cliff.

She paused to look behind her, the gently rolling rugged landscape scattered with yellowish-brown or red rocks. She could no longer see her shuttle craft; it was coated in a layer of red Martian soil causing it to blend in well with the local terrain. She gazed at some larger rock formations that jutted from the surface of the plateau. They were eroded by the constant blast of wind and fine sand.

She considered transformation and flying to rendezvous with her client but the amount of dust in the atmosphere reaffirmed her decision to remain in her mech mode. She feared clogging her own engines and stalling. Being in one crash was enough for a day.

The reddish-brown sand drifted and swirled across the surface, collecting in dunes behind rocks or out in the open. She glanced down to watch as the wind swept away her finely detailed foot prints erasing all evidence of her path toward the boulders.

She was on an alien planet that did not have any aliens, suddenly the Seeker felt alone, abandoned, fearful. She hated to be so alone, realising that she was on a world far removed from any real civilised portion of space The Decepticons were on Earth but that seemed like a world so far away. Why did the meeting have to be on this world? Why not Earth? She sighed heavily as she turned back to the cliff that loomed closer.

Her feet crunched nosily across the stoney ground the dust here was quite thin, most of it had gathered in a dune leaving the ground barren as she neared the rocky outcrop. There should be a cave three degrees west from where she stood. She thought as she stopped; glancing around at the dead planet once again.

She had her reservations about this hit and hoped that this job was worth the effort she put in getting here. Who was she kidding, she thought, it was promised that her usual charge of two hundred energon cubes per job would be quadrupled for this particular mission, eight hundred energon cubes in total. That was no small gain, the job would be worth it regardless. All she knew was that she was to kill someone who, when where and how still remained the question.

The how was easy, she preferred sniper style assassination jobs. They could be done at a distance and she could remain emotionally detached from the proceedings. Nothing was worse then becoming sympathetic to the victim. She had to remind herself on a few occasions that there had to be a valid reason for each of them to die. She did not think

that someone would go through the effort to locate, hire and pay for an assassin if the reason was petty. And if it were, she would still do it, energon was energon.

Eight hundred energon cubes, whoever it was had to have committed an unforgivable crime.

Other jobs she hired herself out for were more of information collecting, espionage, simple weapons trade, supplies and the occasional fuel run. She sold her services to whoever can afford her charge. It was not always energon she needed, she once had a sizeable stash hidden away, sometimes she needed weapons, parts, tools and other things necessary for solitary survival.

She had no place she called a permanent home. Her search for work constantly moved her from planet to planet, system to system. Her shuttle or rented rooms provided the simple accommodations that she needed. She had very few friends and everyone else was considered her enemy, Autobots, Decepticons and even Neutrals. All guilty until proven innocent.

Her red optics squinted in the strange reddish light as she attempted to make out the dark smudge in between a group of boulders at the base of a cliff. She paused to look down at her GPS yes this was the cave. she wondered who her hit would be it had to be someone big or perhaps dangerous; if they were to offer such an exorbitant payment for the job.

Into the Dark

Tharis Plateau, Mars

Earth date: *August 27th 1989*

She walked into the dark cave feeling slightly uneasy about the closeness of the rough rock wall. She paused for a moment before proceeding. She made her way along with cautious and deliberate steps as she was worried that there might be a sudden drop down into a pit. She cursed herself for not bringing along a lantern but she remembered faintly that the batteries had run out shortly after she left Monicus.

The Seeker contemplated flying but the tightness of the cavern would make that sort of activity dangerous. She walked on in silence for several meters, wings swept slightly back, brushing her hand against the wall, feeling for sudden changes in direction. Her feet moved slowly across the ground kicking stones ahead of her in an attempt to determine possible hazards. The cavern wound its way deep into the cliff and slightly down.

The further she went the darker it became. With the blackness came a very chill draft and the sounds of her tread echoed faintly. Her foot kicked a rock and it clattered noisily away, judging from the echo it made she determined she had entered a very large cavern. She glanced back the way she came. Blackness of the cavern surrounded her, strangling her. Tightness, enclosed, fear, escape, danger! Her mind wildly thought as she attempted to push back the feelings of anxiety that threatened to overwhelm her thoughts.

Her wings twitched anxiously as the wind howled noisily as it blew past the cave's mouth. She shivered with worry as she looked around in the blinding blackness. She clenched and unclenched her hands taking a deep breath in an attempt to calm herself. One question puzzled her mind, if the person wanted a Seeker, why was he asking them to meet in the deep dark underground of a cave on a remote planet? Don't they know that Seekers are inherently claustrophobic?

"Who is approaching?" asked a gravelly voice which sounded thin as it echoed off all the walls around her.

She cocked her head slightly to try to pinpoint the source of the vaguely familiar voice. Unable to do so, she nervously stepped forward into the black nothingness. "I am here for a job," she responded loudly. Her voice did not seem carry very far in the thin frigid air of the Martian cavern. She inhaled deeply and waited for a moment.

There was a long pause before the questioning voice responded. "A female Seeker?" he asked from the darkness. The tone of the voice was incredulous as if he could not believe what he had just heard. "Ask for a Seeker and I expected a Seeker but I did not realise it would be a female," the tone was of obvious disgust and the last word was pronounced as if it were a high insult. "I thought Mugabe was only joking," he half muttered to himself.

She felt a surge of hurt and fury flow through her fuel lines as she glared into the

darkness trying to see who she was talking too. Her optics flashed briefly and her wings flared up aggressively. The feeling of anger pushed the anxiety to the back of her mind where it resumed its growth. "I can do my job well enough or I would not have lasted this long in my field," she replied with a snap to the disembodied voice.

Work as a mercenary or bounty hunter was often wrought with difficulties. Along with the frequent and often long absences of work. There was strong competition for the work that was available. There were many bounty hunters, Decepticon, Autobot, Neutral. Those varied in skill from outstanding to mediocre. Her own skills were on the better side of good but that did not mean much to prospective clients. Many times she was turned down for a job due to various factors, some related to her technical specifications, others related to her alt-mode design being unsuitable to the task and some still to the presumed inability as a female.

The cavern echoed with a malicious laughter that continued for a few moments before dying down. "Now that's not the tone you would use to address me, Decepticon," the voice answered full of loathing and irritation.

She exhaled windily, "I am not a Decepticon," she replied in a tone of apology, feeling very uneasy about this employer. The voice rang a bell but she could not place it. It had a familiar grizzly softness about it.

"Are you an Autobot then? I don't like to make deals with Autobots," said the voice. The tone became suspicious and slightly prying.

The Seeker heard the whine of a weapon as it was being charged up in the darkness. "N-no, I'm neutral. I currently have no affiliation," her voice was slightly edged with fear. She realised that she was in a dark enclosed cavern and someone in the other end had a very large, and likely, very powerful weapon trained on her approximate position. She glanced behind herself and wondered where the entrance of the cavern was. Would she be able to find her way out or would she be lost in these dark depths forever. She inhaled deeply and took a step back.

"Interesting," returned the voice breaking again the long contemplative silence that followed her response. A dim blue light briefly glowed before it was turned off once more. "And yet you were in the War Academy and therefore you *were* a Decepticon. One fallen out of grace perhaps," he mused. "That happens a lot amongst your kind."

The Seeker made no response to what she thought was deliberate baiting. She could hear the sound of heavy feet moving against rough ground growing nearer. Red coals of glowing optics brightened in the darkness and she can see the dimly lit outline of a pale silver face. She was still unsure with who she was dealing with.

"I trust that you are competent in your work," the optics flashed. "However, you need to be better than competent, your target is tricky, quick, manipulative." The face with the burning red optics did not step closer. She could see a lavender glow from the muzzle of a very large weapon that hung near the mech's right hand.

She inhaled slowly before she chose her words. "Are you asking me to get close to this target?" she inquired with distaste. "You likely do not know but I prefer doing

assassinations at a distance," she said in a matter-of-fact manner. "You know the sort, go in, set up, shoot, remove head, leave and take payment." she said casually.

"I am not asking you to befriend the target, Seeker. Primus only knows what goes on in his thick head. He's given me plenty of trouble in recent years and I wish to be done with him." The purple glow swept in front of the dark mech as he gestured an abrupt dismissal with the right hand.

The voice, weapon and mannerisms were familiar, her mind attempted to put the pieces together, no it was not likely.

She peered intently at the ruby optics. "Why is it that you cannot take out the target yourself? You seem strong enough and who are you?" She was tiring of the shrouded conversation.

"I could take him out if I wanted to, but I would prefer him to die thinking that he was taken out by a lowly Autobot," the voice chuckled malevolently and she felt a prickly chill flow down her lines once more. "As for who am I, I suppose I can reveal myself to you," he paused for a moment. "But, before I do, will you take the job?" he asked teasingly.

"Yes, but I still want more information on my target, who is he that I am supposed to kill?" she asked crossing her arms tightly across her chest.

"In just a moment," the voice responded. A shuffling sound came from the dark followed by a creaking. Then there was a loud snap followed by a fizzling hiss then a flash of bright white light from a flare. Blinded for a moment she shrouded her optics with her hand, allowing them to adjust to the sudden brightness for a moment. Before her, in the red cavern, stood Megatron, the leader of the Decepticon force.

"Megatron!" she said in awe and slight fear. "I thought for a moment you were my target."

His face was illuminated by the brilliant white light. It stood out in the dark like a glowing light he smiled broadly and glanced at the flares. He paused for a brief moment before he threw the two halves of the flare into separate areas of the cave.

The cavern became unnaturally bright. Never in its existence has light so bright lit its interior. Every detail in the Martian rock was exposed. Lines of strata was evident. Once upon a time, long ago there had to be some form of life on this world, plant life if not animal. Small quartz crystals scintillated in the flicking glow of the flare. The Seeker glanced over her shoulder for a moment and fixed her position in relation to the exit.

The huge Decepticon leader's mouth turned into a sharp downward scowl. "It takes more than a lowly Seeker drone to kill me," he said somewhat bitterly. "No, your target is my Sub Commander," he stated with very little emotion.

"Who? Shockwave?" she asked puzzled. It couldn't be... she thought.

"You don't know? Are you stupid?" he asked in amazement. "You're a Seeker; I thought all Seekers knew who the Sub Commander of the Decepticon Battle fleet is." he shook his head in disbelief and muttered a few derogatory comments that she was unable to

understand

"I spend most of my time all over this galaxy for various jobs. It's been about fifty thousand years since I was even close to Cybertron and I've never been in this system before. So I am not quite up to date on the news in this sector. No, I am afraid I don't know who he is. Please stop toying me with guessing games and tell me who the heck it is I am to kill," she said harshly. Her wings flicked as she spoke. She wondered for a moment if she was, perhaps, a little too harsh for the mech who stood in front of her.

"I am very surprised in you, no matter," he waved his hand with a dismissive flick. "the target is..." Megatron shrugged then chuckled, his smile became broad and malicious, "...none other than the nuisance of an Air Commander, Starscream."

The yellow Seeker's optics widened in surprise at the announcement of the name. She knew that he could go far but to become the Air Commander? She was lost for words and she realised that she was grossly out of date on information. "Starscream?! He's still alive? He's in this star system?"

"So you *have* heard of him. Yes, he's alive, unfortunately, and with your help he will be out of the system for good." Megatron's tone was both eager and full of loathing.

She had known the Seeker, Starscream, aeons before in her academy days; she respected and admired him for his speed, skill and his charisma. She suddenly doubted that she could do this mission. She realised that she could not remain emotionally detached from this particular hit.

They when they went through battle training together. Although he never gave her the time of day, she adored Starscream. She had asked him repeatedly to go for a shared energon and he had repeatedly turned her down. It wasn't just her, he had turned other female Seekers down. It appeared he did not have time for anything else other than his studies or his ambitions.

Reality and the inside of the brilliantly lit cavern returned. Megatron stood before her watching her intently. She glanced around at a loss with the mixed, confusing emotions. "I—uh," She thought for a moment attempting to formulate a sentence. She should take the job and shoot him in the back and leave, but the thought pained her. This was Starscream's life she now held in her hands. Other targets in the past were unknown to her. This target brought back memories of the past.

She thought again of her own life, her caches of energon were dangerously low and a promise of eight hundred energon cubes to top it up, was very, very tempting. Eight hundred cubes would be about half a years wages for someone like Starscream and that was not including stuff that he would likely skim off the top or acquire on his own. Her two hundred would be about the equivalent for a regular soldier during that same time. 'Take the job, you stupid woman,' she thought to herself. 'what has Starscream ever done for you?' That was a good question. He had done nothing for her. Absolutely nothing.

Her mind drifted back to Starscream at the academy; he was the best. He out flew everyone else, agile, fast, accurate. She was not a top flyer but she still competed once

or twice against his flying skills in training games. Those games usually ended with her left in the wake of his vapour trails, her engines were flawed and he knew that. Her speed could not be maintained for very long periods. She could not forget his harsh, arrogant, laugh as he taunted her to follow him, if she could. Hurt and angry she stopped her active pursuit for his affection. She watched as Starscream slowly changed from shy and quiet, when he first arrived, to arrogant and proud from his success. Disgusted, she fell back into the shadows and then into the arms of another Seeker.

Eight hundred energon cubes, she thought again, that would be enough to pay for an upgrade to fix that design flaw. But what would the point be? If she killed Starscream and fixed that flaw she would have no one to fly against, to prove that it worked. That was the whole point of fixing it, wasn't it? To prove she was better than others had thought. But who was she trying to impress? Herself? Windraker? Hardly, he was dead aeons ago. No, Starscream. She wanted to prove to him that he missed out. But she would not be able to do that if he were dead. Then she knew she could not do the job. That was her choice.

"No, I'm sorry the deal's off," she said softly after a huge pause. "I am not going to assassinate Starscream for you. If you have a problem with him; do it yourself." She was kicking herself, insulting herself, cursing herself internally. Eight hundred energon cubes, that was no small payment. And she was turning it down. How could she? She felt disgusted with herself. Was she blind? How could she allow emotions from millions of years before to cloud her judgement? He was not likely the same person anymore.

Megatron's optics flashed angrily. "You dare turn me down? I will tack two hundred more cubes to your payment, I want that traitor slagged!" he ordered gesturing threateningly with his fusion cannon.

One thousand energon cubes, she mused, she wondered if she could get the anti upped a little bit more. Despite her emotions the thought of more energon dazzled her mind. If the price was right she would deal with her personal guilt later and slag Starscream. Something Megatron said bothered her, "traitor?" she asked, she did not believe those words. Starscream's whole heart and soul was into the Decepticon cause. Nothing would come between him and his desire for what the Decepticons were owed. That much was evident in the academy.

"He's a traitor, a threat to the Decepticon cause and a serious thorn in my side," Megatron said harshly he stepped closer and closed his hand into a fist that sparked with brilliant purple flashes.

She shook her head fervently, "I can't kill him, Megatron, I'm sorry."

"You can't or you won't?" he said dangerously. The fusion cannon's muzzle glow brightened.

She knew she had lost her mind but her optics were transfixed on the muzzle the words defied her mouth and continued to dump her into very hot water. "There is no way I can possibly kill Starscream."

The flare started to sputter as one died and the cavern was partly darkened. "I am sorry

to hear you say that, Seeker, this hit is highly classified you either do it or you die." Megatron said flatly. He raised his fusion cannon. The purple glow at the end brightened to a brilliant lavender white as the room blackened from the death of the second flare.

The Seeker inhaled sharply and shook with fright as she backed away from Megatron. She spun on her heel and quickly ran toward where she had sighted the opening to the cavern. She stumbled along the cavern chased by Megatron's fearful laughter. He followed her along and fired off a blast from his fusion cannon. She was sent spiralling, with a shrill cry of pain, out of the cave and lay still on the rocky ground, unconscious.

Megatron followed her out and looked down at his handiwork. Huge hole smoked in her lower back almost severing her in two at the waist. He nudged her with his foot. Satisfied he spoke, "useless lot you Seekers are, all alike, all disobedient." Megatron jumped into the thin red atmosphere and flew upward to Phobos where Astrotrain was waiting for him.

Utter Chaos

Tharis Plateau, Mars

Earth date: *August 27th 1989*

The wounded yellow Seeker moaned softly as she dragged herself over the rocky ground. Her legs would not respond to her mental commands. She found it quite alarming to find that she could not even feel her legs or anything below her waist. She weakly cried out for help but knew it was futile. Her weak voice would barely carry in the thin air and the last time she looked, she was the only one on this world.

Her fuel pump hammered painfully and after a few minutes of trying to crawl out of the shelter of the rocks she lay down too weak to continue forward. Her face was pressed into the cold, dry Martian dust. Her fingers dug into the loose soil as she exhaled gustily. 'Starscream lives,' she thought, 'he made it through the aeons to Decepticon Sub Commander.' The Seeker tried to pull herself forward again, not willing to let go as the oblivion started to take hold.

She was not sure, but thought she could hear the sound of someone or something approaching but the Seeker no longer cared. Her vision was blurry as she watched, in a detached manner, the dust blow about her fingers. Then slowly she fell into unconsciousness, rather than the blackness that she expected, it became a brilliant painful blinding white and very cold.



Silver plains, Elora

Earth date: *48k B.C.*

The planet below was small and covered with thick a layer of ice and snow, a glacier. Rough mountain peaks poked high into the sky. Thick silver- grey clouds shrouded part of the horizon with a threat of an intense snow squall.

This world was almost a solid frozen ball, almost all organic life had perished on it aeons before as the sun that it orbited ceased to give off enough light energy to keep it warm. But not too far under the surface of crusted ice, were the abundant resources of coal, oil, gas, metals and a rumoured source of the green quartz-like Cybertronium. The only animals that existed now were those that lived near deep underwater volcanic vents where the water was warm enough to sustain life for a while.

Only fifty million years before, this planet was thriving with tropical forests from pole to pole with deep, rich oceans that thrived with marine animals. Then over time the energy output from the planet's sun weakened and the rain forests died, being replaced by temperate forests with small ice caps that grew in size over the continents and most of the oceans. It had been thought that mining of the resources would cause a greenhouse effect and protect the planet from the coming ice age. However, that idea failed and the world froze to death.

The Autobots claimed ownership of the frozen world and were trying to mine it. But the

Decepticons wanted the world for themselves and sent in a mission to attack the Autobot city of New Iacon and destroy their governor.

Seven Seekers flew out of the silver clouds in a loose arrowhead formation.

"So far so good, the enemy has not sighted us," observed Windraker, "but that weather system up ahead looks dodgy."

The sky near the city was growing black and angry, a grey haze obscured some of the buildings in what looked like a very, very heavy blizzard. Below the fliers were black tarmac roads with traffic heading toward the city. Huge ploughs were being brought out of cone shaped shelters, gritters and salters were being loaded in readiness. They were busy with preparations that they failed to see the oncoming Seekers.

"Stay tight in formation and keep Windraker surrounded. He is the most important one of us on this mission all the rest are expendable," the yellow Seeker ordered the others as she took the very front of the formation. The Seekers organised themselves into circle around the dark grey Seeker.

"Is this necessary?" inquired Ionstorm. Heatwave and Rainmaker took the rear with Thermal and Nebula flying the left and right flank.

"We must protect Windraker at all cost," she replied, "we must be able to get him to the designated area. Then he and I will use our stealth to get to the bunker, drop our bombs and get the slag out." She shivered as she was buffeted by a chill wind that almost froze her fuel lines.

"Well if you are going to be doing a secret mission, is it not a little obvious that there is something afoot with seven Seekers flying in?" inquired Thermal with sarcasm from her right.

The lead Seeker scanned the ground below with radar and visuals she could see no indication that there was anyone with knowledge of their presence and so far her radar and infrared suppression was helping to some degree. "You know your jobs, you are to provide a diversion," she responded darkly. There was some angry muttering around her.

"Why did they place you on the same team as Windraker?" questioned Nebula, "I thought they were against placing those who have emotional or spark bonds on the same team. It could cloud your judgement, cause errors and you know...screw us all over."

"I requested to lead this mission, I am stealth capable," she responded hotly.

"You requested and they granted? This mission is a particularly dangerous one. You should not be leading it, after all, you've recently achieved a black mark on your permanent record." replied Heatwave sounding both sarcastic and surprised.

The yellow Seeker winced at the reminder. She had been trying to forget that she had been reprimanded and this was likely her final chance at proving her abilities. She had to convince Cypherwing that this mission would succeed only under her leadership. He

decided to give her the benefit of the doubt and she assured him that he had made the right choice.

"That's enough out of all of you," Windraker interjected. "They have their reasons for pairing us in this mission. You don't have to like it, however you are to follow her orders...what the?!" Windraker was cut off short when a hail of laser fire shot up from the ground.

To her dismay they had been spotted. Their argument distracted them from the situation at hand and they had flown a bit too low. Their engines were noticed above the roar of the wind. "Windraker, Heatwave and Thermal, break formation and follow me," she ordered as she glanced at the flack blasts as they exploded all around her small formation. "We're going in. The rest of you, take out those guns." The team split into the two groups.

She watched on her radar as the other three Seekers laying down diversionary fire. Strafing the ground in an attempt to take out the machines that were responsible for the fire and shrapnel filled sky. Without warning a blast from the flack weapons exploded under Thermal. With a cry the silver and black Seeker spun out of control and hit the ground. The Seeker exploded in a huge, orange yellow fireball that sent smoke billowing high into the sky like a beacon to enemy that trouble was here. In the distance air raid klaxons sounded, warning the Autobots of the attack.

Her optics widened in surprise and shock. "Thermal? Do you copy? Thermal!" There was only static. "Slag, Thermal's dead, leave him, we must continue," She ordered over the radio. Several huge flack explosions erupted all around her, "I said for you to take out those guns...gargh! I'll do it myself!" she screamed at the other Seekers who were attempting to take out ground to air weapons.

She was not impressed, the others seemed disorganised and were taking out all the wrong targets. 'Why?' she wondered, 'were they trying to throw the mission?' She suddenly banked to the left and her yellow-gold form streaked downward and fired her plasma cannons at the Autobots manning the defensive weapons on the ground. One down and then the other, she felt confident that she was doing the correct thing.

"What the slag? Are you crazy?!" exclaimed Heatwave. "You can't leave us like tha...argh!" The maroon and orange Seeker was cut off as an anti aircraft missile blew off his wingtip, he banked awkwardly in attempt to balance himself and hit Windraker broadside.

Windraker lost some altitude and took a flack blast that blew off his tail stabilisers. There was another explosion under Windraker, he screamed out in pain as his underside was peppered with deep cuts and gouges. He leaked fuel and energon copiously as he careened toward the ground.

Distracted with watching Windraker, she failed to notice the heat seeking missile coming on her six. It hit her and exploded, she fell out of the sky and transformed as she smashed into the ground. She glanced up and witnessed Heatwave bounce three times before he exploded.

She watched in mute horror as Windraker fought for control of what appeared to be a lost guidance system. He smashed, nose first, into a bunker. The pale gold Seeker offlined her optics. She knew she had failed massively. Another flubbed mission and one with severe casualties this time, if she lived she knew she would be severely reprimanded if not executed.

"Four of our wingmates are dead, mission failed return to base!" ordered Rainmaker over the radio. "This mission has been scrubbed." There was a long awkward pause as the Seekers flew up and disappeared into the black stormy sky.

"What about making sure?" inquired Nebula.

"Too dangerous, if they live they'll have to take their chances, leave them," replied Rainmaker. There was a murmur of agreement from Ionstorm and then the communications ceased.

She was unable to respond to tell them that she lived. The wind howled and snow fell around her body. She listened for a moment and could hear the soft footfalls of someone approaching in the new fallen snow. She did not look up to see who it was, instead she exhaled and fell into unconsciousness.

Scientific Research

Tharis Plateau, Mars

Earth date: *August 27th 1989*

Skyfire knelt down and scooped up a sample of the Martian soil into a test tube. He placed the tube and soil into a scanner and waited for the hum of analysis.

[Micro-organisms present: simple bacteria,] it informed him. The scanner continued it's analysis as it categorised and sorted out the bacterium.

Many humans strongly believed that Mars was a dead world: devoid of all life. He believed that there had been something here once, long ago. Just below the Martian surface he had discovered small traces of water. Organic life usually relied upon water. Most of the ice in the polar caps was created from carbon dioxide; commonly known as dry ice.

The human fantasies of six fingered aliens, green men, or thriving civilisations were far fetched. Life once flourished in a simpler form and died as the sources of water evaporated and were lost into space. But he also had suspected that the precious substance could be in a liquid form somewhere under the ground. Where there is water, life could possibly be found.

He had found twenty different extremophile micro-organisms in the area around the Olympus Mons volcano in the Theris Plateau. He came here to study Martian micro-organisms after he had discovered that he was not well suited to the ongoing war on Earth. He had lain asleep, frozen in ice, while this war waged. It was not his war, he did not choose to get involved: he was dragged in.

Skyfire leaned up against the bolder that he had taken his samples from. He glanced around the rugged landscape with a sigh. He somewhat regretted being found by Starscream four years earlier. The passage of time had changed the Seeker for the worse. He had become harsh and dangerous, forgetting his original purpose.

Where had the peaceful scientist gone? What brought the Seeker to his war loving path? Starscream was a scientist and a scholar, not a cold blooded killer. He learned from ancient civilisations; he did not seek to destroy them. Skyfire wondered what scientific endeavours the Seeker was up to with the Decepticons. Then he wondered if it was something he really wanted to know.

In the distance he heard a boom and a faint cry. Skyfire stood up, turning his head in the direction of the sound. He noticed a streak of silver shoot into the sky. It moved too fast for him to catch who it was but he figured, by the ability to fly, that it had to be a Decepticon. Starscream perhaps?

His curiosity tugged at his mind. Why would Decepticons be on the desolate planet of Mars? He walked toward the area where he had seen the silver streak. A gust of wind picked up and slammed him. Skyfire glanced over his shoulder and saw the start of a Martian dust storm. His fuel pump hammered slightly and Skyfire decided he'd better take cover.

The ferocious sand storms could last from minutes to months and he did not wish to be caught out in the open in one. He neared the distant outcrop of yellow and red rocks when he spotted a movement; the yellow rock moved from between two massive boulders and stopped.

Skyfire ran toward the yellow heap that lay amongst the rocks. As he came closer to the heap he recognised the form. Two triangular surfaces that sported white and red stripes, white tooth-like intakes and finely formed fingers. The Seeker form had all the delicate sleekness of a female. The body was covered in a fine dust that made the Seeker seem a little duller by the minute. Yet there was something strange about her.

He stepped closer and knelt down and cringed as he saw the still smoking, grit filled wound. The sand around her was sticky with leaking energon. He looked past her feet and saw the furrow and trail and realised that she had pulled herself along quite a distance before losing strength.

Her colour was fading quickly and Skyfire glanced over his shoulder. The red sandstorm was shrouding the meagre light of the sun. He looked back down at the inanimate form. 'The only good Decepticon was a dead one', he thought to himself as he stood up and turned away.

Skyfire paused and squinted. Just ahead of the Decepticon was a cave, a possible shelter from the storm, providing that it went deep enough. He moved to leave the Seeker where she lay in the rocks and stopped. Guiltily he glanced back at the approaching wall of red dust and back to the Decepticon laying on the hard dusty ground. A sudden gust of sand-filled wind hit Skyfire with intense force. It felt abrasive and painful as blasted at his surface. The sandstorm was almost here. He realised he would have to get under cover or he would find his outer hull scoured.

He moved a step towards the cave and hesitated again. He was warring with an internal battle of right and wrong. What if there was a chance? Perhaps she was only in a stasis. If she was, would he not be committing a crime against life by leaving her to die alone, untreated in the desert? The Seeker had not attacked him. Every life was precious, even an enemies life. He realised what was odd about this Seeker: her wings. There was no insignia on her wings. All Decepticon Seekers sported their insignia proudly on their wings.

Skyfire crouched down and pulled a scanner out of subspace. He glanced up cautiously at the approaching storm. He was about to activate his scanner to check for life force when he noticed the Seeker fingers move slightly. That was all the information he needed. There was still a faint spark of life within the greying hull.

Skyfire reached down and carefully collected the wounded flier and turned and ran for the cave as the storm hit.



Silver plains, Elora
Earth date: 48k B.C.

The sound of bleeping medical machines were what woke her up. She became aware of other machines and a very astringent smell. She groaned internally, it was a repair bay. The Decepticons did get her out and repaired her rather than shoot her and be done. Slowly her optics came on line. Her vision was blurry and she had to initiate a re-boot sequence in order to clear her optics of static.

"I'm Snowblade," the voice said cheerfully to her right. "This is Sandblaster and Roadwork." He gestured to the others.

Her vision flickered as she squinted at the speaker "Who?" she wondered out loud. She did not recognise the name or the voice. She focused on the chest as he leaned over her and tensed up. She felt a surge of panic as she recognised the brilliant red symbol on his torso as belonging to an Autobot and not to a Decepticon. She glanced about and had the grim realisation she was a prisoner of war.

Her machines buzzed, bleeped and blinked in response to her anxiety. Roadwork stepped around to her head to examine the readouts that the machine produced. She tipped her head slightly to watch what he was doing but she could see very little. He muttered softly to himself oblivious to the others.

"We found you in the snow, well...we ran over you with our ploughs first," Snowblade explained, bringing her attention back to him. "Sandblaster here spotted you as my blade turned you over. We were working clearing the road in tandem, you know." He used his hand to demonstrate the action of his blade flipping her into the path of the other. Sandblaster shook his head and chuckled. The memory seemed to hold amusement to them both. The yellow Seeker shuddered at the thought of being buried in ice and snow, never to be found again.

She studied the one who introduced himself as Snowblade and realised he was much too huge to fit his almost soft and gentle voice. He was orange and black in colour. His right arm sported a very large, worn looking blade that was connected to the shoulder, it looked as if it had been used as a shield. His right arm seemed oddly weaker, but she decided not to be deceived by this. Across his front he had another massive blade that appeared as if it could be moved. At his shoulders and down his legs he had six huge tires that had thick treads and chains that wrapped around them. The other two were similarly constructed, although they did not bear the Autobot insignia's on their chests.

"Where am I?" she inquired looking at the three massive transformers. The Seeker slowly sat up and glanced around the room more carefully. Her optics rested on the exit then back at her three massive captors. Again, she studied the plough blade that Snowblade had on his arm. Her optics admired the bottom edge as she realised that, although it looked worn, he could easily use it to cut her in two.

Attacking any of them would be nearly pointless, they were about twice her size and had much more armour than she did. She would have to wait until another time to make an escape. Escape to where? Base? Would she even be wanted back there? She knew she had no choice. She had to report to Cypherwing as soon as she could.

"You're at New Iacon's Silver plains hospital and storm shelter," Snowblade replied

cheerfully.

"The others you were with did not fare too well. We found remains of one scattered over at least a kilometre another who was a smouldering frame. The grey one that had smashed into the bunker will be put to rest soon," said Roadwork who was evidently a medical officer with bad bedside manners.

She was not all sure if he was making conversation, informing her of reality or attempting to intimidate her. "Windraker? He's here? He's alive?" she asked.

"He is alive, if you want to call it that," Roadwork said with a shrug. "He won't live long, he's a vegetable you see, all his databanks and data processors were shook up and smashed from the impact." He turned away and filled out some information on a clipboard. He turned to the others and gave them a grim nod. "Good she's ready for questioning. Let's take her away," he said disconnecting her from machines.

The other two helped her off the table and lead her away from the room. They passed through a hall that had several windows. She could see Autobots treating wounded on the inside. They passed a door that had two armed guards standing by. That could only be Windraker's room. Her spark sank and she felt a sense of fury.

Ice and Snow.

Tharis Plateau, Mars

Earth date: August 27th 1989

If the Decepticon's life could be saved Skyfire would at least give it a try. He glanced over his shoulder as he bolted into the cavern. With the rumble of a jet plane; the storm hit. The rocks of the cavern vibrated against the hurricane force winds.

Deep within the cavern, Skyfire lay the foreign Seeker out face down. What was the Seeker doing here? Why was she alone? And who was that silver flash of light in the late afternoon sky? There were many questions that he wanted to ask. Who was she? In the darkness of the cavern Skyfire could see a very dim red glow emanate from the Decepticon's optics, another sign that there was still life; but barely.

Realising he would have to act quickly, Skyfire stepped around the cavern plucking special battery powered lighting equipment from subspace. He set each one down and turned it on until the room glowed brightly.

"Who are you?" he asked out loud not expecting an answer. The roar of the wind and the eerie whistling of it through the eroded cracks in the rocks drowned out his question. The air was quite dusty as the wind forced it in through the mouth of the cavern. Plucking a couple of small microwelders from a subspace pocket Skyfire commenced the first aid repair.

He looked down at the prone gold form "Why are you here?" he asked again only to be answered by the haunting howl of wind. He shook his head. This was not wind damage, it was a whole complex mess of melted circuits, fused fuel lines. The Seeker was strangely lucky, at close examination he figured the damage could have easily been fatal. The heat from the weapon cauterised some of the circuits as it damaged them. He settled down to what he knew was a sizeable and painstaking task.



Silver plains, Elora

Earthdate: 48k B.C.

She bolted across the glacier away from the rolled over prisoner convoy. She shrouded her thermal and radar signatures that she knew only too well would get her caught in this frigid environment. Anything warmer than an ice cube would be easily seen.

She slipped and slid as she ran through the snow, her foot falls making soft crunching noises as her weight broke the crust. Up ahead she could see large rocks or chunks of ice sticking up. Without looking behind her, she ran forward into their midst. They would provide her with cover if she could find somewhere to hide herself. The yellow female continued to pick her way quickly through the outcrop as they became thicker.

She inhaled a sharp breath as she glanced over her shoulder. The Seeker could hear shouts and orders from her guards. They had discovered that she was gone and were

starting to pursue her. There were more shouts and responding cries. Her tracks in the snow had been discovered.

Silently she cursed her bright yellow colour because it stood out so well against the blue-white crust. Purple would have been fine, particularly at night, dark blue or grey like Windraker. She felt a pang of regret; just days before she was to be transferred she had been informed of his demise. The hollow emptiness she had expected to feel after his death did not come, but perhaps the suffering of a lost bondmate was different from person to person. Regardless of the loss and what she felt, she knew she had to continue.

She picked her way past the jutting forms and crossed a clearing. As she stepped into the centre she felt the snow under her feet crunch in the most unusual manner. She bit her lip and froze on the spot the ice below her shattered with a sound that was similar to a shotgun blast at close range. The report echoed off the rocks bringing unwanted attention to the area. She fell through the opening and her hands grabbed at nothing but, as abruptly as she fell, she stopped.

The Seeker crouched shakily on the narrow ledge and gazed into the crevice: it was deep. The light turquoise blue deepened until it was almost black. Only about fifty metres below she could see another ledge that would be just wide enough to take her. She only hoped that it would be strong enough to take her weight. Carefully she crawled down into the opening and used her fingers and feet to cling to the extremely slippery surface.

She inhaled sharply as some of the ice splintered away and she fell into the blackness. The ice plinked and tinkled as it fell hitting jutting edges until it could be heard no more. The Seeker looked up at the mouth of the crevice and she could hear the voices drawing closer, nearer.

Quickly and carefully she climbed down until she pressed a foot against the rough icy ledge. She hung onto the wall as she pressed her weight down on to it experimentally. So far, so good. She exhaled a nervous sigh as she shimmied along a very thin ledge until she was well hidden under a thick canopy of ice.

It was frightfully cold in her hiding spot while bright spot lamps illuminated some of the darkness and she drew back into a vertical crack. The light reflected off a thousand triangular daggers of ice that hung way above her head. They had slowly formed over thousands of years. She hoped that no one would step onto that and break the crust. The huge icicles were large enough and perhaps strong enough to penetrate her armour and kill her.

Despite the thick layers of ice, Elora warmed up enough to thaw the toplayer. Water would cascade down into the crevices and form temporary brilliant blue lakes. This was a rare event and occurred every few hundred years when the planet's slightly elliptical orbit took it closer to the dying star. The flow of water would be slowly transformed into ice, similar to stone caverns forming stalactites.

The Seeker shivered from the intense chill. She wondered if there was an alternate way out. She feared that she would not have the energy to make it off the planet as well as maintain her body temperature. And in these environments it was necessary to keep the

fuel lines thawed. She glanced around in all directions and realised the only way out was the way she entered. Regretfully she hunkered down and waited.

Night fell and the sounds of search died away. She hoped that the Autobots had given up the hope of finding her alive, that they thought she died deep within the cavern. She shivered as she attempted to get her thickening fuel to move through her chilled body. Once she felt like she had warmed up enough, she moved forward on her hands and knees. There could still be time for that reality to occur, she shuddered.

Carefully she climbed the way she entered and pulled herself onto the ledge. She sat there for a while listening for sounds of voices but there were none. The only sound that came to her was the protesting gurgle of her near empty fuel tank. She decided that she would have to search for some energon and then make her escape from Elora.

She clambered out of the crevice and stood looking around. The sky was black-blue like a rich velvet sprinkled with glistening stars. In the distance there were the glowing lights of a small mining community. She decided to go there to get the energy she required.



Tharis Plateau, Mars

Earthdate: *August 28th 1989*

Twenty hours later the storm finally died down and the dust in the air settled. He knew he was going to have to carefully clean the Seeker of all the red Martian grit. It would not do to leave such things in the wound, but it had been impossible to keep the sand out. He looked down at the mess of a Decepticon. He used thin plastic hoses to reconnect some of the major energon feeds. Temporary measures until he could get to a more sanitary area.

Skyfire walked to the cavern mouth and checked his surroundings. He could see the hazy red hued sky and Phobos orbiting overhead. He had come to Mars to avoid Seekers, to do research to confirm or deny the existence of life on this alien world; it was a pet project.

He could see a brilliant blue star in the distance, and he bowed his head for a moment. "Why dwell in the past?" he asked himself quietly. A friendship, like the one with Starscream, was painful to lose, enough time had passed to change the surface of a planet, gouging out great canyons, oceans and seas formed and disappeared. That same time can etch and erode at a person; changing them. Even he would have slowly changed, had he not crashed and been buried under a million kilograms of ice, if he was allowed to live through all those missed aeons. He realised that it was very probable that his friendship would have ended earlier if he had not been buried. They had differing personalities and would likely have slowly drifted apart.

Skyfire shook his head as he watched the stars. He felt like he was a time traveller; plucked from his own time and plunged into an alien future with no viable method of return. The newness of modern technology threatened to overwhelm him. The rules of the game had changed and he realised he was better off on his own.

He walked back to the cavern and stood looking down upon the Seeker. She was stabilised for now, but that could easily deteriorate. Without further ado Skyfire gathered up the wounded Seeker, transformed and took off for Earth and the Decepticon space bridge to Cybertron.

Evasion

Customs outpost 2571-3, Elora

Earth date: 48k B.C.

Travel back through space to the Decepticon held moon of Thyurus was a challenge for her. Since her time as a prisoner on Elora, the Autobots had increased security on their side of the border. Frequent patrols, sensor arrays, hastily built battle stations; they were preparing for an assault.

She flew into an asteroid field dampening her radar and thermal signatures, hoping to avoid detection. It was a hazard she would have preferred to avoid but her observations of the current firepower and set up the Autobots had initiated told her that she could not simply pass through the front door without being noticed. Even with her ability to cloak her emissions and energy signature to sensor scans, she was unable to become physically invisible.

She picked her way through the drifting rocks and debris, wincing as small stones peppered her armour making her ache all over. She watched carefully for proximity or limpet mines. It had become a habit of the Decepticons, and some more radical Autobot groups to set out traps. The mines did not care what faction the target belonged to, once they detected a potential threat that was it.

The energy she had raided while on Elora was enough to get through this quadrant, but that was before all the sentries and outposts were set up. She brought up her personal diagnostic and frowned. It would be only a matter of time before she was drained.

She drifted through a densely packed section of the field and noticed something glinting slightly in starlight. Curious she made her way over. She could make out a shape, a shuttle that was partly buried on the asteroid. She glanced, transformed and landed and crept over with a weapon drawn, ready to defend herself as she neared it.

It seemed abandoned, slightly damaged. She looked around and debated about going closer. It could easily be a trap, placed to snare fugitives. Or it could be abandoned. She walked to the door and tapped it with her gun and flattened herself against the hull, waiting listening.

Silence.

She held the muzzle of her weapon to the locking mechanism and fired. The door hissed as it decompressed the cabin. Inside there was signs of damage, she could smell the scent of fried circuits and she looked around. Two bodies, a pilot and co-pilot sat slumped in their seats. The pilot's head was against the control panel and steering column. The co-pilot's arms hung limply at her side.

She used her weapon to lift the pilot's head.

"Hmm," she muttered as she studied the face of the corpse. She shoved the body out of the chair, sat down and looked at the console. It had marks that looked like scorching.

She cocked her head and pulled the panel open and studied the crystals and diodes.

"Fused relays, circuit board fried, wiring melted and a slow coolant leak...hmmm." she looked at the body of the co-pilot and ripped the plating off her chest. "Waste not, want not," she murmured as she removed the needed parts. "We'll get you running again," she reassured the silent craft.

She knelt with her head in access panels fixing and replacing parts with pieces from the two fembots until she had made the necessary repairs. It was not perfect but it would be sufficient.

The gold Seeker stood up and looked at the desecrated bodies and opened the door. She pulled each one out and buried them under rocks and dust as best as she could then set off to repair the external damage.

She sighed and looked up at the Autobot's insignia on the craft's hull. It would ease her problems in getting through the Autobots checkpoints, she would assume the identity of the dead pilot to do so, but entering Decepticon territory would be a different matter all together.

She sat in the shuttle's pilot seat and initiated the start up sequence. Her hand drifted across the console and flicked switches until the the shuttle hummed. She looked over the console and her optics looked at the one red warning beacon.

"Engine coolant level is at a critical level," said a disembodied voice.

The Seeker nearly leapt out of her seat before she realised that it was the ship. She looked around and exhaled heavily. "I'm aware, you rust bucket," she retorted to the control panel. Without any other word she pushed the ignition and the shuttle lifted unsteadily from its crash site and flew into space.

She had not gone more than a few thousand kilometres from the asteroid field when she noticed that she was being hailed.

"This is Elora customs outpost 2571-3, please state your name and destination."

The Seeker cringed and picked up a datapad off the co-pilots chair. She sat it in her lap as she fussed with the dials. She read the name at the top of the pad and hoped that it matched the designation, if not her cover would be blown.

"This is Rapidfire of the 334A7," she responded attempting to mask her Decepticon accent. "I'm currently heading for Autobot outpost on the border of the Cyberus System, A-39.889M," she said giving the details for a secret Autobot stronghold.

"Do you realise that you are currently entering a Decepticon held sector?"

"No, dumbslag, I don't. I'm stealth capable they'll never know I was here.."

"Hmmm," the voice pondered for a moment, "the 33417 class shuttle is not stealth capable," the voice said suspiciously. "Please meet the escort and dock at the customs

outpost for inspection."

"Slag," she muttered under her breath as she opened the console in front of her. She slipped an panel open on her canopy and pulled out a cable. She hooked the cable into the control panel. As she did she activated her own body's stealth system and dampened the emissions and the energy signature.

"That was one little...mistake," she murmured as she opened the throttle full and gunned the engines.

"Hey! Where'd she go?" the bemused voice asked.

She cut the communicators off and clenched her jaw as she jetted out of the asteroid field into what was called the neutral territory. She flew onward knowing that she could be destroyed unknowingly by her Decepticon comrades for simply using an Autobot craft.



Desert riverbed in Oregon, Earth

Earth date: August 29th 1989

The sky overhead was bright blue, dotted with light fluffy clouds. The noon day sun hung high in the sky, blinding and the heat was intense as it radiated off the barren rocks. On the riverbed was a large circular device with a control panel not far away and two Decepticons stood on guard.

They paced back and forth across the dried cracked mud and tried to take shelter in what little shade that the high walled spacebridge provided. But that was barely any cooler than standing in the direct sun.

"My circuits are frying," Thundercracker muttered as he walked over to the cliff wall and looked up at the unforgiving ball of fire overhead. "Not only is this planet, too flat, too wet and too cold; its also too fraggin' hot." He kicked a stone toward the spacebridge and grumbled deeply.

Skywarp dodged as the rock barely missed him, 'Hey, watch where you kick that, Thundercracker.'" Skywarp paused for a moment and cocked his head as he strained to hear something.

"Yeah, well, Megatron should stand out here in the sun for eight hours. Let's see him not get pissed off," Thundercracker complained.

"Thundercracker, keep it down; do ya hear that?" inquired Skywarp looking Eastward. A distant sound attracted the dark Seeker's attention.

"Here what?" the other grumbled as he cocked his head in the same direction as Skywarp had his, "I don't hear anything...you must have sand in your audio's again," replied Thundercracker gruffly.

"No, I do hear something," Skywarp insisted as he shaded his optics with his purple hand. "Something's approaching and fast!" he pointed to a ball of flame as it streaked against the azure sky toward them.

The flaming speck grew larger until it flew overhead with a thunderous sonic boom. A hail of weapons fire sent spurts of dirt into the air. The two Seekers dove for what little cover they could find and returned fire.

The white and red jet banked and started to dive and fired directly at the Seekers. Skywarp and Thundercracker exchanged glances and dove out of the way exposing the mouth of the space bridge.

Thundercracker glanced at Skywarp who lay on the ground with a smoking wing. He fired at the larger jet, but Skyfire unleashed another volley before he transformed abruptly holding onto a female Seeker. He tapped the control panel and the bridge started to activate. The Autobot scientist darted into the activating ring.

Thundercracker optics widened for a moment as he saw the female's form. He lunged for the control panel but the door to the bridge had already closed and the portal opened up to receive the travellers. Thundercracker cursed as he watched them depart.

"Megatron's not gonna be happy," Skywarp grumbled as he picked himself painfully off the ground. "You'd better call him."

Thundercracker studied Skywarp for a moment, "Yeah, no slag he'll be pissed. Anyway you call him. I'm not chippin' barnacles off the docking tower for a week this time. It's your turn."

Skywarp snorted and looked at his still smoking wing. "I get off with injuries,"

Thundercracker only groaned as he made the dreaded call.

Dishonour

Neutral Territories.

Earth date: 48k B.C.

She raced through the neutral space while being pursued by the Autobots. This was a gross violation of the Neutral Territories Treaty Act. She looked down at her charts and groaned. She was a day away from the nearest planet and she was hours from the closest Decepticon warp gate. If only she had a trans-warp capable ship.

"Weapons lock detected," the ship warned.

"Oh, Primus love a Seeker," she moaned. Her shuttle was only an Autobot scout ship, its weapons at best were meagre and unfortunately, the armoury was empty.

"Interface with my thermal dampening systems," she ordered.

"Unable to comply; not enough systems power."

There was a huge explosion and the shuttle rocked violently. The Seeker was thrown forward but her seat restraints locked and slammed her securely into her chair. As this happened, the ship's warning alarms started to whine and the lights went from an orange to red.

"Warning, port engines damaged, port hull is breached in sections three and four." The ship started to go over the damage report while displaying an image with the damaged areas filled in with red.

"How about some good news?" the Seeker demanded, looking up from the display as she flew the ship manually to avoid more weapons fire.

"Shields are down to zero percent power," the ship's voice informed. "Shield regeneration cycle is starting in sixty seconds."

"I said good news!" she snapped. "You worthless, rust bucket." But, unfortunately, her worst worries were only just to be realised.

"Mayday, Mayday," she called as her radio started to hiss and splutter. Her control panel started to light up like a fireworks display and she disconnected her interface cable from the console. "This is Decepticon..."

"This is the space fleet commander, Stratonimbus," The reply immediately cut her communication off, "we are intercepting your ship. Stand away from the consoles and hold your hands up. Failure to comply will result in immediate termination." The radio transition ended as suddenly as she had received it.

"Fraggit all," she cursed as she cut power to the remaining engines. She fired her reverse and then the stabilising thrusters, the ship slowed down to a crawl. She stood up and stepped into the centre of the ship. The vessel rocked again as the Autobots attacked it,

but then they flew off in separate directions.

Her craft glided in an aimless manner as the small fleet of Decepticon patrol vessels warped in. Two smaller escort craft broke off from the main cruiser and drove the attacking Autobot vessels off. The Decepticon craft were not only far larger than her pursuers, but were also heavily armed and armoured.

She stood watching as the Decepticon cruiser came along her starboard side intercept her shuttle. It locked onto her small craft with a tractor beam and started to draw her into the open shuttle bay. She watched through the windows as the Escorts attacked the Autobot ships, they exploded and sent shock waves that rocked the space around her.

Her craft vibrated as it was drawn into the larger ship. The force field around the docking bay shimmered as the small craft was pulled through. She exhaled slowly as she saw Seekers as well as other Decepticons standing waiting with their weapons poised.

The craft stopped its momentum and the whole thing shuddered then went silent. Abruptly, there was a loud metallic clang as docking clamps latched onto the shuttle's hull.

Outside, the Decepticons took up positions weapons locked onto the shuttle's hatch. Another unit ran up and pressed the release switch and the door hissed open. They held their weapons ready, fingers twitching on the trigger.

"We've got a Seeker femcon," one of the warriors shouted back to his team mates. A few of the other Decepticons relaxed and lowered their weapons. A femcon Seeker was hardly a formidable threat.

"Hey," a green Seeker shouted, "where'd that shuttle come from?"

"The Elora system," another replied.

"Elora..." the Seeker barged forward and into the shuttle.

Inside she stood and waited as the Decepticons encircled her.

"Well, well, well..." said the Seeker as he stepped forward. He smiled and poked her with his rifle. "I know you..." he said, looking her up and down and grinning wickedly, "Hey," he called back to the crew waiting outside, "get Stratonimbus up here, I think we need to get this one to Cypherwing, immediately."

"Aye, sir," came a response and the sound of running feet and a door whooshing shut.

"Long time no see," he said touching her face. "Where's your bondmate, Windraker?" he demanded grabbing her chin roughly between his fingers. His ruby optics blazed angrily. "Did you abandon him to save your own yellow hide?"

She inhaled sharply and tried to pull away from his grasp. "Rainmaker, I can explain..." she started.

He tightened his fingers and she yelped in pain. "Explain it? You'd better explain it. Nebula and Ionstorm, would love to have an explanation. Boy were they pissed off with you..." He released her chin and slapped her hard across the helm. She glared at him angrily. "Lose the attitude, 'Burst. You are currently in no position for it." He used the muzzle of his weapon to nudge her toward the exit. "You're gonna wish you never came back," he hissed his voice dripping with foreboding and promise. Without another word, he pushed her out of the door. The other Decepticons had nothing to add as they followed Rainmaker out.

The other Decepticons circled the female prisoner, they jeered and made lewd comments. Until she was declared one of them, she was considered the enemy. Some eyed her in a manner that disturbed her severely.

Rainmaker checked her subspace pockets for weapons and retrieved what little she had. This activity generated more unwanted remarks and comments.

"ATTENTION!" the guard nearest to the shuttle bay doors called out in a booming voice. The doors opened wide to admit three Seekers. The previously rowdy group of Decepticons came smartly to attention as the vessel's captain entered. There was no sign of the malicious leers on their faces.

"Stand at ease," the captain said lightly.

The captain, a purple-grey Seeker who could only be described as having very ordinary, uninteresting, common Seekers colours, stepped up to Rainmaker and his prisoner. "I thought as much," he said as he placed his hand gently on the females chin and lifted her bowed head. "I'm surprised that this one managed to get out of the Autobot territories," he removed his hand and looked at her for a moment.

"I can explain..." she pleaded.

"I am sure you can. We're landing on Thyurus in two days. You can explain to Cypherwing then." He looked up at Rainmaker, "Take her to the brig," he ordered.

The female Seeker tensed. She figured that she would be sent there, but that was no place for a femcon. Rainmaker and gave her a light shove forward. He gestured to two of his leering comrades and they followed him out the shuttle bay.

She spent the two days in the brig where she had been questioned intensely by the ship's interrogator and finally Stratonimbus himself. She was given prisoner rations, which were meagre by most standards, but fuel was fuel and she consumed it greedily.



Decepticon spaceport, Thyurus

Earth date: 48k B.C. Several months later

She was escorted once again to the worn metal door that she had been brought before several months earlier. This time, like last time, her reasons for being there was not for idle chit chat. The Battalion Commander, Cypherwing had ordered it.

"Cypherwing? She's here," one of her escorts called.

There was a small thud and the sound of a latch letting go. "Hmmm, yes, let her enter," a voice responded.

The yellow Seeker walked in saluted and stood silently before the long neatly organised war table. There was a computer at one end with a stack of datapads piled carefully to the left. In the centre of the table held a holographic display of the sector of space that they were posted in, some planets marked in red and blue while others were marked in purple.

She quickly scanned the map, red were the Autobot held worlds while the blue were Decepticon held worlds. The purple worlds were ones that were under attack. The Decepticons were making a strong push in this sector and were controlling more and more planets and stars systems.

Her squadron and wing flew off to battle on one of those worlds while she was asked to remain behind. It was unusual for them to request a Seeker to remain off the flight, with the push they were making in the past few months, they needed every able body that could fly. Perhaps then, they borrowed a willing body from a unit that was ground training to fill her position.

The fierce maroon and dark grey Seeker sat at the war table scanning the three dimensional map. He acknowledged her as he stopped the holographic projection. The table surface darkened to a glossy black as the room brightened.

"Thank you for being punctual, Seeker," said Cypherwing as his black hand reached over and picked a datapad off the top of the pile. "Do you understand why you are here?" he asked, his red optics glowing brightly and his mouth held in a stern, thin line.

She felt a blast of chilled fear shoot through her system, yet she drew on some other strength and remained calm outwardly. "I suspect I know the reason, Cypherwing, sir," she responded in a low voice. "I'm being slated for discharge since you can't demote me any further..." She looked into the face of her Commander, she hoped she could read his intentions but his face remained devoid of emotion.

The Battalion Commander spoke clearly, his voice full of reprimand. "I am sorry to do this to you but, you are a liability." He held a datapad in his hand and read off a list. "Going in reverse order; over the past two hundred years you have been charged with misconduct, failure to follow the chain of command, failure to follow orders, failure to complete missions, failure to file mission logs and reports, failure in mission that resulted in the deaths of three valuable wingmates and you were warned against fraternisation and yet you persisted," he paused for a moment his optics glowed a lumen brighter and allowed his words to sink in.

The yellow Seeker stood silently, thoughts raced across her mind as each offence was read off. She could feel the burn of rage push the icy cold of fear back and away from her.

"You are unfit to command others due to frequent bad judgement calls. You had been

demoted to wingman from squadron leader as a direct result from that failed mission where you lost three of your wingmates. I am surprised you did not get slagged upon your return. Actually, I am surprised you did return. It has been said that you betrayed your team and lead them into a trap, then gave up valuable information about our war efforts, but we gave you the benefit of the doubt."

She wanted to scream at him, but instead she did nothing taking the reprimand with downcast optics. Betrayal? She was tired of that accusation, but it was her word against theirs.

He picked up another datapad and looked it over. He frowned as he glanced back at her. "You had potential. Your War Academy scores were very good and it's a shame to see such potential laid to waste," he placed the datapad down on the table and walked around to where she stood.

She winced. His disappointment was evident. She felt the same inside. Everything had gone totally wrong. She sighed and her wings lowered.

"As a commander, I must ensure that my units work well together. Cohesively. Compatible personalities are partnered in the triads. You have lost your edge, you are...incompatible with nearly everyone on base. You've become jaded to the war effort and you seem to not really give a flying frag about anything anymore." He exhaled and shook his head.

"But..Windraker, his death..." she started.

"It's not an excuse. I, personally have never had a bond, nor do I want one, because I have seen too many instances where the death of the bondmate has seriously affected the other. But that is...not the point." He crossed his arms and shook his head.

"You are to be dishonourably discharged from the ranks of the Decepticons. A black mark will be permanently placed on your record and in the Cybertron war veterans computer. Commander Shockwave has been informed of your disgrace and you will never be allowed to be part of this army again." Cypherwing handed her the datapad. "These are your Academy specs back, you'll be needing them. Good luck at making a new life for yourself, civilian," he said coldly. "Dismissed."

The yellow Seeker bowed her head in shame, clutching the datapad. There were no words she could utter without running the risk of saying some unforgivable things. She turned and palmed the door open.

"Oh, one more thing Seeker, I want you to get your belongings and remove yourself off this planet in two hours or an arrest warrant will be issued and you will be captured then thrown into the smelting pit," warned Cypherwing. "Take that shuttle you stole from the Autobots," he added in a gentler tone.

She paused, frowned, saluted and then quickly left the room. A traitor, they had actually considered her as a traitor. That was why she was demoted, they believed she had betrayed them while she was in neutral captivity. They had repaired her damage and she

had escaped while being transported to a higher security prison complex.

She wouldn't be deactivated if she could get away from this world, then what? What would she be able to do out in space alone? She would have to think of something fast in order to keep fuel in her tanks.

Grinding her jaw in frustration she walked down the hall clenching and unclenching her fists as the whirl of machinery grew around her and echo of her foot falls reverberated in her audios.

Escape

Darkmount gate room, Cybertron

Earth date: August 29th 1989

Skyfire was swirled through the subspace bridge that beamed him through the cosmos toward his home planet. It took some level of concentration to keep himself on the right path. Spacebridge travel had its complications and danger. The lack of concentration sometimes meant never coming out of the stream; being trapped forever.

Other times, as it had happened in the past, the beam could open up way off course: on an alien planet, on a distant moon, in the middle of nowhere or even inside a star. Anywhere, in the known or unknown universe, but the intended destination. Sometimes survival was possible, destination was usually very inconvenient, so it was theorised. For the most part, Decepticon technology had improved and bridge travel was much safer. Yet it only took test runs with the sacrifice of many Decepticon grunts to perfect, much to the Autobot's dismay.

He continued his dizzying travel past stars, through planets and nebulas. The subspace tunnel cut through all of it harmlessly. And then, abruptly, it stopped. He exhaled with relief as he felt solid ground underneath him, bridge travel was always made him feel a little queasy. He preferred travel through space under his own power. He was also never sure what he would find when he arrived at the other end. Decepticon greeting party, a booby trap. He exhaled as he held the gold Seeker against him in one arm and a weapon ready in the other. He would know in a few short moments what was waiting.



Entrance into Darkmount was extremely dangerous at even the best times. It was in the heart of the Decepticon held territory. It was also in Shockwave's command.

Shockwave was efficient, effective, very systematic. He worked tirelessly to ensure everything was running perfectly. A perfectionist of sorts, Shockwave was left in charge of Cybertron for very good reasons. He was nearly stoic, rarely showing emotion of any sort.

"As you command, Megatron," were his words as he turned away from blackened monitor. The Space bridge control panel lit up like a Christmas tree as it warned on incoming travellers. He expected this and there was no surprise. The Seeker guards on

Cybertron had informed Megatron who immediately gave him his orders. To capture or kill the Autobot trespasser.

He stood by the doorway, with his weapon charging up ready to destroy the intruder. He realised there would be some damage to his space bridge, but it was nothing that a few hours of repair could not manage. His repair drones were meticulous and thorough.

The bridge tower started to raise and Shockwave counted down from 3...2...1. The doors opened. His single optic glowed brightly as he identified the intruder, however one of them was not recognisable, a Seeker female was all he could tell; however, name, rank and serial number was not on his file. A renegade perhaps. "Stowaways! You shall not pass," Shockwave said immediately and emotionlessly, as he simultaneously fired a salvo of blasts at the Autobot.

Skyfire dodged and returned fire that sent the Guardian of Cybertron flying backward into the wall. He awkwardly clutched the wounded Seeker tightly to his chest as he belted forward as fast as he could run.

Shockwave was momentarily surprised, but he gathered his bearings and dismissed his moment of illogical emotion. "No matter, you cannot hope to escape" Shockwave said as he stood up watching the fleeing Autobot. He put his hand on the local communications panel. "Sentinels, Drones, Seekers, this is Shockwave; contain the Autobot fugitive and bring him to me," he commanded into the public address system.

The drones immediately departed from their holding rooms. A triad of Seekers ran out from an adjacent room in pursuit of the fugitive Autobot and the unknown Seeker in his arms. He turned back to the monitor and keyed in a different set of numbers. It was time to give his report back to Megatron.

"Commander Shockwave, to Megatron. Do you copy?" Shockwave inquired.

Megatron and the control room of the Decepticon undersea base came into view. "I copy Shockwave. You have good news I hope," asked the Decepticon commander. "Did you get the trespasser?"

"Unfortunately, the fugitive got away, but I shall have him prisoner shortly," Shockwave reassured.

"Ensure that you do," Megatron replied, his face frowning in definite irritation.

"If Shockwave was *half* the guardian you made him out to be, Megatron, this would not be occurring *half* as often," a shrill raspy voice snapped from somewhere off screen.

"Silence, Starscream. If those Seekers under your command would simply do their jobs..."

"They're aerial warriors, not spacebridge protositters," the Seeker interrupted angrily.

Shockwave stood and watched the argument impassively while he also watched the drones pursuing the fugitives on another monitor. Starscream's openly antagonistic ways

had been a subject of some interest in Shockwave in the past, but now it was a slight irritation as it was wasting valuable time.

"Starscream..." Megatron's voice trailed off dangerously.

"You can't expect them to stand in the blistering sun all day and not get a little bored or..."

"Starscream..." Megatron hissed as he swung his arm out and belted the Seeker across the side of his head, "I said SILENCE!"

The Seeker grunted as he staggered into view. He looked a bit startled or stunned; almost as if he was surprised at getting smacked. He opened his mouth to remark but closed it with a bitter scowl as he fumed in silence. He turned and stalked off the monitor with a small, but weak, insult.

Megatron shook his head in disgust at his sub commander. "Please ensure that the Autobot is captured, Shockwave."

"You shall not be disappointed," was the reply as the monitor changed to the Darkmount insignia.

Shockwave shook his head as he watched his drones get shot out of the sky by the Autobot. Megatron would be irritated at the delay in capture, but Shockwave knew that he would make the capture sooner or later. The Autobot could not run forever.



Darkmount was shrouded in the Cybertronian night. The temperatures were cool, but not uncomfortably cold. Several mindless drones flew in pursuit of Skyfire. He dodged and avoided their attacks. Being only programmed machines, they lacked the ability to anticipate and devise a plan. They were programmed only to do as they were ordered.

He ran into a ruined building, the drones followed him. He exhaled in frustration and carefully put the Seeker down and turned on his pursuers. He fired shots and blasted them out of the sky. They were not sentient machines so they did not feel pain when he destroyed them. He was a scientist, not a warrior, he did not wantonly seek to destroy others.

With some little time bought, Skyfire transformed and took his injured charge on board. He fired his thrusters and shot into the sky only to be flanked by three Seekers. They worked together attacking him with keen precision. Their movements were carefully calculated as if they had practised this battle a number of times. Seekers, unlike the drones he had destroyed were living beings who were more than capable of organising their attacks. They were a challenge as he flew, cat and mouse with them.

Skyfire was not nearly as fast as the Seekers and he found it difficult to shake them. He was larger than they were so wherever he went to hide, they could more than comfortably follow, well almost comfortably. Seekers had a weakness that, if one knew about it, could be easily taken advantage of.

The Autobot flier flew over a chasm and spotted a series of caverns and tunnels in the wall halfway down to the core. He abruptly dove down and the Seekers followed firing their weapons. Their efforts started to suffer as they went further and further toward the core. Skyfire banked suddenly and flew directly into a cavern. The Seekers transformed and landed at the mouth of the cavern. They looked inside at Skyfire as he ran into the darkness. The Seekers looked at one another shrugged and jumped back into the open air and broke off their pursuit. None of them would dare brave their claustrophobia for an Autobot. Even if it meant suffering the wrath of Megatron and the Scientific tortures of Shockwave. Instead they marked the area and called in for flying drones and sentinels to continue pursuit underground.

Skyfire continued to through the planet to an area where he felt they would be safe for the time being.



The pounding foot falls, she realised, was the pressure of her fuel against the lines inside her head. She inhaled deeply and the air tasted very different. It no longer had the metallic twang which she identified with Mars. She inhaled again, it smelled different too. Musty, and old. She realised the air was not bitterly cold, but warm and comfortable.

The Seeker brought her optics on line and she slowly looked around. She realised she was in a room, not a cavern. It was dark, but seemed to be someone's personal quarters. She felt nervous but realised she was not restrained. The lighting in the room was poor except for one area. There a bright light was on over a microscope. A large mech was sitting at the table furiously scribbling notes as he muttered under his breath.

She turned her optics as several old books that lined a shelf and she noticed a name on them; Starscream, the other name was smaller and faded. The Seeker pressed her hand to her head as the room suddenly started to spin. She laid back down and a whining groan slipped past her lips.

The Mech in the corner glanced up from his work and looked over at her. "You've awakened." He pushed himself out of his seat. "Excellent." He reached out for a mug and blended a few things into it and sat down on a chair near to her.

"Where am I?" She asked. "This is not Mars." She glanced up at the Mech's serene pale face and the brilliant blue optics. Her gaze settled down on the brilliant red Autobot insignia emblazoned on his chest. "Who are you? And why am I here?"

"I'm Skyfire," he said lightly. "I won't hurt you." He offered her the beverage. "This will help your recovery, drink it before it goes sour."

She muttered a weak thanks and sniffed the beverage before taking a sip. He seemed okay, for an Autobot and she seemed to be in fair shape.

"I found you on Mars," he continued nodding in approval as she drank. "You were in terrible shape, I couldn't leave you to die when I could easily help you. Unfortunately I did not have all the equipment necessary to do a full restore on Mars. That is why you are here," he explained.

The female Seeker nodded as she sipped the formula again. "Where is here, exactly"

"As for where you are," Skyfire resumed, "You are in my private lab on Cybertron. It's my lab and living quarters. "Now, may I ask your name?"

"My name is Sunburst," she replied with a weak smile. It was the first time in thousands of years she had spoken her own name.