

THE
SEEKER OF VENGEANCE

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The Seeker of Vengeance was started in late 2003 and was finished in early 2004. Going insane from isolation from his own kind, Starscream, revived from the dead, must face the daunting task of returning to Cybertron and facing his deadly enemy: Galvatron.

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PART 1: GUANDONNALAND



He was planning on trading his home world for life.

The planet of Cybertron was dark and dismal looking. Unicron's head hung gloomily in the sky like an evil, horned moon. It had eyes again, and that was disturbing to the Autobots. Trypticon slowly pushed the head towards the planet as Dirge and Thrust, inside, sabotaged part of the brain.

Starscream attempted to make the connection, but Trypticon had malfunctioned and he was forced to leave. Starscream let his possession of Trypticon go and glided down to the planet. He stood on the surface of Cybertron, looking up at Unicron.

"Unicron! If you want the connection made, you'd better give me a new body now," the ghost shouted desperately. He was worried that he would not get anything out of their bargain..

"You shall have it." Unicron blasted Starscream with an energy beam from his eyes, making the spectral Seekers body solid and alive again.

"I LIVE AGAIN!" screamed Starscream in delight. He threw his arms into the air. He could feel the solid ground beneath his feet, the warmth and smell of the Cybertron air. He was reveling in the newfound experience. He breathed deep.

"Now do my bidding. Complete the connection." Unicron rumbled interrupting Starscream's private celebration.

Starscream picked up the cables, and looked at them for a moment. "Do it yourself!" Starscream laughed as he tossed the cables to the ground. He looked around. What would his plan be now? Seek and destroy Galvatron? That would be lots of fun!

There was an explosion, cutting Starscream's personal party short. The Autobots, unseen, had planted and detonated an explosive energon charge under Unicron's head, sending Unicron back into orbit, and sending Starscream hurtling through space.

He fell past Galvatron and his troops and as a reflex Galvatron fired a couple of blasts at him. They hit and Starscream screamed as he tumbled head over heels, his body smoking slightly. Faintly he could hear Cyclonus mutter "Wait a minute, since when do ghosts tumble out of control through space?" The Decepticons faded into the distance and consciousness was lost.

Hours, days, months, or could it have been years, had past before he awakened. 'Where am I' he had thought. He felt dizzy from spinning like a mad top. He was still tumbling, but now at a slower speed. The star system that Cybertron was near had faded into the distance till it was but a tiny blue spark of light. He transformed into jet form and fired a brief blast from his jets to stabilize his movement. He was alive. He could feel the biting cold of the vacuum of space.

The word was alive. The glory in it!. But that would not last long if he did not find energy to

sustain him. He decided he would find a planet. He remained in jet form and kept his circuits on minimum power and used his present momentum to move him towards a distant yellow sun. Another distant world he and Skyfire had searched eons before. One that had very primitive plants and animals on. One that was not Earth.

Like a derelict ship, Starscream glided silently through space, sleeping, awakening only when he came near a moon or large object. He would use that object's gravity well to sling him faster towards his goal, saving his energy for arrival at the planet. But even at this rate, it was taking him years.

Time was starting to drag on. He could feel its annoying length, between Cybertron and the primitive star system with no way to speed his journey. He was feeling impatient. It bugged him. He could see the star that was his destination but it was still too far away. A good space ship and he would have been there in about a week or two.

He felt weak and wondered if not turning back was such a good idea. Now it was too late for second guesses. Perhaps being murdered by Galvatron a second time might have been nicer than slowly starving to death, due to a lack of energy.

It was a bad time to worry, he decided, and figured he should save his reserves by going into hibernation. A few more months, maybe a year. He was close now.

His guidance system awakened him when the star that was his destination was getting nearer. Silently he rejoiced. He hoped it was not too late. Energy levels thirty one percent of full capacity. The Seeker winced. He hoped he would be strong enough to hunt for fuel.

It took the last reserves of his energy to reach the star's third planet. It was Earth-like in many ways. There were huge oceans and two large land masses separated by a small sea. There were lots of shallow lakes, swamps and bogs in the area he chose to crash land. Starscream's engines sputtered and died as he entered the atmosphere. 'Not good', he thought.

He took a visual check of where he was heading. Closing his eyes, he plunged blindly down and made a low scream. The air around him heated as he plummeted from the sky. His speed was too fast for him in his present condition. He opened his eyes and noticed a lake below him, two hundred kilometres long. He thought that if he could attempt for a crash landing there, he might survive the almost uncontrolled descent.

Fighting with his systems, he managed to guide himself to the lake. He got his nose up, an effort that drained him of most of his scant energy. With a sonic boom and a shrill scream, his belly hit the lake sending huge waves of water up into the air.

He skipped into the air again, fighting to maintain control. He was thrown several more kilometres. His speed had slowed enough for him to try to guide his crash landing away from the edge of the lake. Again he hit the water, skipping into the air for another kilometre. His final plunge landed him in the water of a tropical swamp. He transformed and sank partially into the mud.

Starscream lay unconscious, in the stinking mud, unmoving for several days. The pressure of his crash landing had blacked out his mind causing him to enter a type of coma.

It was bright, sunny, and very humid when he regained consciousness. The smell from the swamp was near intolerable. It reeked of rotten eggs and of something else, the sickly sweet stench of death. His eyes blinked on. He groaned, confused, as the smell assaulted his olfactory sensors. He felt ill. It took time for him to ignore that particular noisome odour. Not far from where he lay was a rotting corpse of a huge animal. It was far too decomposed for anyone to have recognized what it was, but it had a odd resemblance to a whale or a plesiosaur.

The sound of strange birds and the creaking of foreign insects rang in his audio sensors.

He looked around from his vantage point, which was very low. Mud almost completely covered him in a thick, warm, slimy blanket. It was sticky and a brown-green colour. Algae covered the surface like a thick green slime. Small creatures and worms wriggled through the mush. Only his upper chest and face were completely out of the swamp.

He did a quick scan of his internal and external conditions. From a stroke of luck, he was in near perfect condition. His decade of outer space drifting had drained him of most of his energy. He was very weakened and could barely move. He was somewhat glad he had hit the water of the long lake instead of land. If he had hit the land he surely would have been obliterated. Mind you, at least that would have been quick, and in his blacked out state, he

most likely would have not even felt it.

His reserves of energy were nigh exhausted. He knew that if he did not think of some way to get energon it would not matter. He would perish regardless of how good he looked. 'I need to fire my travel agent', he thought. He had not planned for this camping trip, therefore he had not packed any energon wafers. So there he lay, stuck in the mud, without an ounce of energy, watching the sun dance across the sky. Clouds drifted overhead as they gathered for a rainstorm. The sky slowly darkened and in the distance thunder boomed. Starscream had hoped a strike of lightning would hit the swamp he was in. The charge from such a strike might give him a bit of a power boost, but a direct strike would fry his circuits for sure.

One drop, two drops, lots of drops. It had started to rain. He blinked as the rain fell on his mud covered face. The droplets of water were cool and cleansing. He noticed the water he was in was rising. It came up to his head. He started to feel fear, he was going to be covered. The storm was blowing in debris and the mud was covering him further. He looked around, gasping as sludge and water slopped into his mouth. He spat disgustedly, as he struggled to move his hands, to find some purchase to help pull himself out of the marsh. He was splashing the murky water up into his face as he fought to drag his weakened body out.

Drained, he panted as he lay on his back on marginally higher ground. He watched as the storm lessened and drifted on. Without his realizing it he fell into a doze. When he awoke, strange star patterns glimmered overhead through broken patches of cloud. A cool breeze wafted over him and again he calmly went into a sleep.

The next day the sky was a dull grey, the humidity was almost thick enough to swim in. The air was heavy with the stench of that rotting animal. He sighed in disappointment. There had been no local strikes of lightning. He exhaled, his body felt like lead. He wanted to move but he did not have the strength or will power to even try.

He was not even sure he gave a cyber rats rear about what happened to him now. It was done. He had no strength. To collect energon you need to move to find it. On this uncharted backwater planet where would he even start to look for it?

The Seeker lifted his head to watch a dragonfly dart back and forth. Laying eggs in the water. Flying around his head it returned to its egg laying activity. Suddenly a large fish like creature opened its mouth and swallowed the insect. Strangely he felt for a moment a sense of pity for the pretty flying insect.

Starscream felt a pang of regret to have not been able to do anything to even prevent his pending end. He dropped his head back into the mud hardly moving. He closed his eyes. It was not even his choice. No warning, and bam! into space he was drifting. If he had even wanted to come here he would have gathered some supplies. Enough energon to get him to the planet in a speedy manner. And certainly enough to keep him going until he could track and tap a useable supply. As he had once said before 'no energy, no life.'

He grunted as he tried to move. His energy had drifted to a meager two percent. His mind kept blanking as he tried to think of a plan to save his sorry, soggy ass. He was unable to think of anything useful. With a whine he resigned himself to the inevitable. So low on

energy he decided that he, Starscream, the fastest jet in the sky, would be the coward every one thought he was and go into that final sleep from which there was no return. He did not think anyone would find him where he lay.

He was almost literally dead in a swamp. Plants would soon grow over him and hide his body in a matter of a few months. No one would know where he was even if they cared. No one even knew he lived. Revived from death by Unicron only to perish in some swamp on a distant primitive world. Starscream felt sorry for himself. He really did not want to die here. Such a loss all Decepticons it was going to be. Perhaps he thought Skyfire would find him as he had found once Skyfire.

One more moment he waited. Death was almost here. The last ebbs of his strength slipped. His mind started to drift into the oblivion.

Bloop! A loud sound came near his right side. His mind drifted to consciousness as a second and larger bubble erupted from the swamp. The warm humid air was causing material in the swamp to rapidly rot. Starscream's olfactory senses told him he had discovered methane gas. He turned his head to look at the spot. There was barely enough energy in him to hold his head in that position.

He fought with his mind to keep it clear. Methane could be converted into energon. He thought if he had a workable energon cube he could harness it and live. He knew, if he did not harness the methane immediately, he would expire in only a few short moments.

His survival instincts kicked in. He really did not want to die again. He drew his hands together and concentrated and a very small energon cube appeared between his hands. The drain almost exhausted him and his thoughts scattered into incoherence. He fought to gain control of his mental processes. With success he took the tiny cube and held it over a bursting bubble. His hands shook with the strain of the effort but he managed to hold it over the bubbling spot. Murky energon shot from the bubble and partially filled the cube.

With violently trembling hands he lifted the cube to his lips, it smelled vile but he drank deeply nonetheless. The energon was barely pink, more of a muddy red. It was thick and almost oily tasting as it slipped into his mouth and down to his internal fuel storage compartment. A tiny trickle of the energon ran down his chin.

He leaned back into the sticky mud feeling the minor charge of energy running through his system. Hardly pushing the imminence of his death back. He attempted to sit up and with an effort, sat up shakily. He brought his hands together a second time to make another cube the same size as the first. He leaned back, exhausted. But he was resolved to attempt to collect more of the off coloured energon.

After several attempts he had enough energon to let his energy starved body rest for a short moment and absorb the fresh fuel. He looked at the sun and the blue sky and sighed, then he closed his eyes and slept for what seemed a few hours. He awakened, frightened that if he remained asleep he would not wake again.

The swamp still stank. He watched the mud of the swamp bulge. He held an unused cube over and it filled as the surface of the bubble broke. He drank again. His energy was still very low, barely five percent, but it was higher than it had been an hour or two ago.

He looked around himself and decided that laying in the swamp was no longer a pleasant idea, not that he had ever considered it a nice place to lay in. He had heard that mud was great for the complexion but decided that the odor of the great "plesiosaur" was a good enough reason to get out.

He heaved himself over onto his chest. His hands trembled as he pulled himself to the edge of the swamp. Coated in the dark brown and green mucky slime, his beautiful red and white body barely showed its true colours. His face was dirty except for a couple of spots where energon had run down and left a sticky trail. He laid face down, sprawled on the bank.

He lifted himself to his hands and knees then slumped into a sitting position. He created a couple of more cubes which he filled and drank. Life energy started to fill him again although the swampy tasting energon was starting to make him feel ill.

He sat on the ground and looked over his muddy body. He was still weak with the low energy but revived enough that he now had more than a fighting chance. He was in fine condition with a couple of minor scratches and a dent or two. It had been a certain miracle that he was not more severely damaged. An unplanned entrance into a thick planetary atmosphere, skipping like a stone across a lake and landing smack dab in a marsh and all he had was a couple of scratches. Not all things were turning out badly, hey, Screamer?

The foul smelling energon gave him the energy boost he needed to stand up. He looked around and took in his surroundings with more than just curiosity. He walked to the huge plesiosaur corpse and the smell made him almost retch. The last thing he needed was to spill that precious energon.

He walked around the swamp looking for some other form of fuel he could use to make into cubes. There was none. He was all alone stranded, surviving off swamp gases. He sagged to his knees in the soft ground. With a sound that resembled a sob, he lifted his head to the sky in the direction of Cybertron. "You will pay for this, Galvatron! You will pay!" he screamed in anger, then crumpled into a heap.

He was very glad there were no Autobots or even other Decepticons around to see him in this condition. They would surely laugh. "Hey, Screamer", Skywarp would tease. "How was the mud bath?" Thundercracker would banter back as well, "How is it? I mean, drinking unfiltered swamp energon? Geez, Starscream, you are looking a little green around the face"

He sighed. Another regret wormed its way to the surface. Skywarp and Thundercracker were like brothers to him. He would not admit it to any one, but he cared for them. He knew he could never truly show it. Although he seemed dispassionate to their plight. He had felt guilty about dumping them into space.

He made it seem that he did not give a damn for either of them. But did he really give a damn, after all? He wondered. He shoved them off Astrotrain that day along with Megatron and the Insecticons.

He really did not want to shove Thundercracker or Skywarp out but it was the plan with Astrotrain. It did pain him when they begged him not to do it, but they needed an excuse

to ditch Megatron. It was all or nothing. So out they went too. He did send Astro out a day or so later to find them but they were gone. He said all there was left was debris.

That should have been his first warning that all was not right. Where was Megatron? He should have asked rather than assume that Megs had somehow gotten himself out of it. He knew it was most likely the final straw but he was confident that Megatron would have quickly died. He had streams of energon leaking. He would have bled to death in a very short time.

When he had realized that Skywarp and Thundercracker had really disappeared, for all he knew at the time they were truly dead, he had a team go to the crypt and set up a couple of markers in their honour. And he silently mourned.

Perhaps he should have shown a little more than the indifferent face to the ones he had cared for. But he had thought that if he showed them that they would be lost like Skyfire was lost. They were lost regardless of what emotion he showed them. The two Decepticons had been important to his team, and had always been there from day one. Now he had to stand alone. Utterly alone on a distant planet billions upon billions of kilometres from Cybertron.

He cursed to himself as he had finally gotten himself out of the swamp and survival at the moment was assured. With that he was relieved, but he still very frustrated. Like Megatron had years ago ditched him on a deserted island, he was stuck on this rock. However he could get off the deserted island, where as here he most likely could not. What was he thinking when he went this route? It was quite lovely, but it was not Cybertron.

Oh, he really wanted to be back on Cybertron. If he could get there he could hide in one of the old ruined cities. He was certain he would not be found. He was pretty sure the Autobots had not the population to police the entire planet. It was huge world. Then again, any time a Decepticon invader would go near the world, his presence was automatically detected. The Autobots would be warned by their computer, Teletran Two, whose monitor would light up like the proverbial Christmas tree.

'Oh, Christmas,' he thought. He was never sure of what it really meant nor did he actually care. He would often watch as the humans rushed around towards December. What they were doing was a complete puzzle to him. The music that hit the airwaves around that time, when he decided to tune in, was terrible and it seemed like the same six songs done in slightly different manners. Sometimes he would hear the Decepticons humming the odd Christmas tune. He liked human music -- some of it could be quite interesting -- but Christmas music was very hard to stomach..

What he secretly loved with Christmas was the lights. The humans hung lights everywhere: up trees, around their houses, in the shops. Flying over human towns on a calm, clear night, just after a fresh snow had fallen, he had seen nothing more beautiful. The coloured lights were amplified by the snow and they look like jewels in a rich white velvet robe.

It also appeared that humans loved snow as well as hated it. He had watched the fleshling brats build something they called a snowman. It looked nothing like a man in any respect other than the simple face or hat it was given. Three balls of snow in diminishing sizes

were piled one on top of the other. Starscream had taken to this idea and went to a mountain top where he made a snow Starscream and a good one. He smiled fondly at the memory.

The Humans who hated it, shoveled it. They would often lose control of their vehicles, ending up in ditches. When the weather really rolled in there were some serious accidents. The snow would come down so heavily that it even grounded him on occasion. What he did not like was the searing cold. Mind you it was warmer than in outer space. He did not like that cold either.

* * *

This world, although older than it was when he first arrived with Skyfire, was still quite primitive. The atmosphere had a thick layer of carbon dioxide that kept the planet in a very, very warm state. It also appeared to rain quite a bit. The humidity in the air was almost as wet as the ground. Thinking of wet... He decided he was going to take a bath and remove all the mud.

Peering down at himself, he thought he looked like a swamp monster. Green slime glistened over brown muck. He also smelled like the swamp. Not that any one would have cared. There was no one else here but great primitive beasts. Starscream always had to look his best. Once he looked better he figured he would feel better. So he walked over to the lake. His feet kept sinking into the soft ground and when he lifted them they made rude slurping sounds. A few more steps to the lake and the ground was more solid and sandy.

The water was refreshingly cool. He rinsed the filth from his body and the clear water around him went brown. He knelt into the water and splashed it into his face. He waded out to deeper water and dove under. He surfaced and his face glistened in the warm sun. Then he returned to the shore. He sat on the ground between the lake and swamp in a relatively dry area and took another look around.

Large frond trees stood by the swamps and mangrove type trees in the swamps. Ferns and cycads grew in abundance. Mosses grew in clumps and clusters on the rocks and trees. Huge primitive flowers bloomed everywhere. Orchids and air plants, hidden in amongst the moss, hung from the branches of some of the mangrove trees. Bromeliads grew in abundance their bright leaves adding a splash of red or pink to the verdant green growth. It was, for lack of a better word, beautiful.

The swamps had plants that looked like bulrushes from old Earth, and lily pads and flowers covered the swamp. Huge mats of what resembled water hyacinths and water lettuce covered large areas of the swamp. A small stream ran from the swamp to the lake. The water that came from it was reasonably clear.

Huge insectivorous plants grew around the marshy edges. Venus flytraps with leaves the size of dinner plates lay in wait for the large flying insects that buzzed around. Sundew plants with huge, red, sweet smelling, sticky filaments glistened in the sun. A couple of them had victims snared in their sticky nets. Pitcher plants were the most massive of all; they grew four feet tall with a huge sheltering leaf covering the open mouth to the bowl of the plant. The inside was brightly coloured and a sweet aroma wafted from it. Its leaves

trailed into the water of the swamp and insects were flying all around.

"Interesting," he said aloud. 'It's a different place when you are not stuck in the middle of it, dying,' he thought back to himself.

Amphibious and reptilian creatures basked or hunted around the edges and in the waters. Lungfish laboured through the swamps outlet into the lake. They looked a lot like the pictures of ancient earth creatures that he had looked up when he was still on Earth.

One of the few real signs of civilization the humans showed was the Internet, so much information at their fingertips. Most of the Decepticons had a look every so often but most did not find it overly exciting. Rumble had a knack for it, Soundwave had insisted that he and Frenzy hack it. They caused discreet havoc, from viruses to denial of service attacks. Starscream researched much that the Decepticons could use scientifically or tactically.

He watched a creature similar to a Dimetrodon. He wondered if it was as similar that it could evolve into mammals or even worse, humanoids. A fleeting thought ran across his mind to kill the creature. It was not doing any actual harm so he left it alone. By the time it evolves into a human, if that's its path Starscream should be long gone from this world.

He wondered if there were coal or tar deposits anywhere nearby. A shame he did not have a computer to tell him everything he wanted to know. So with determination to find a better fuel than swamp gas he set off to have a look around locally. He spent a better part of the day walking north and all he saw was thick lush vegetation, snakes, reptiles and more plants.

The sky was clouding over and the rains were about to resume. It rained almost every night. He turned around and walked back to the swamp. This was "home" for now, he thought, depressed. There was no luck in finding anything but more plants, swamps or streams. Deciding that ill tasting energon was better than none, he resumed collecting energon from the bubbles, hoarding it till he had enough for a few days so he could hike further away.

Night fell, and the thunder and lightning flashed. Starscream huddled by the lake feeling miserable about getting pissed on by the rain. He held his precious supply under him and used his wings to shelter them. He allowed himself only one of the cubes, which were far larger than he had started with a day or so earlier.

He was certain he was starting to feel damp inside. It could be psychological, with the constant lying in the swamp and humidity, topped off with the evening rains. He could be thinking he was soaked to the "bone". He needed better than this. He needed to find or build a shelter of some kind. If not to keep him dry, to keep his cubes dry.

The sun rose like a large blood red eye in the early morning sky. The whips of clouds were coloured bright pink and glowed like lava. The swamp was shrouded in a mist. The night had gotten quite cool and Starscream had wished he had been able to go into a sleep cycle. The dawn was beautiful and he marveled at the numbers of colours the sky changed to before the bright sun heated the damp earth and set up for another very humid day. He almost thought moss was going to start growing on his wings.

He covered his cubes with a couple of leaves. He was not sure what he was hiding them from but he had a distinct feeling he was being watched. It was far too wet in the evenings to start a fire but he felt that he did not have the spare energy to use force should he have to defend himself against potentially dangerous animals.

Not that he had seen any "live" ones, yet he knew they had to exist because of the rotten plesiosaur. He could not afford to take any damage to his body. He had no tools or alloys that he could use to repair himself. He would have to find some resources soon so he could start building something. What would he use to dig it out? Stone tools? He hissed at himself. 'You will figure it out when the time comes, you always do'

He decided to make a rough lean-to. He gathered fallen logs and bound them together with vines that grew in endless supply around his swamp. He gathered fronds from some of the palm trees and layered them in a thick water resistant mat over the primitive shelter to keep the rain at least off his cubes. He collected several more cubes and some vaguely dry, rotten wood. He decided he was going to call it a day.

The sun moved overhead and then set in the west. Another day was done. It was the first night he spent not lying in the swamp or sitting in the rain. This night it did not rain. The night was warm and still very humid. The air was thick with the scent from the pitcher plant nearby. It appeared the smell got stronger as the sky went to dusk.

He sat on a large log and looked up into the sky. The stars twinkled, and he spent ages looking and wondering where the star that Cybertron orbited was. He thought he saw it glowing bright, and blue. He was feeling homesick. A smaller, not so bright, yellow star twinkled and it disappeared behind a distant cloud. He figured that one was earth's sun. It was annoying to him that he felt like he missed both worlds, and yet both worlds were strongly occupied by the Autobots.

The night world was filled with far stranger sounds than during the day. This night there was no thunder to drown out the loud bellowing calls and thundering crashes of large unseen animals in combat. The thought unnerved him that he still did not have a good energy reserve should he have to fire his rifles in defense. Although his personal energy was at twenty - five percent, his physical supply of energon was not enough to warrant use of his weapons. Without putting him back into possible dire straights.

The night call of frogs and insects stopped. The swamp fell silent. Very silent. The water of the lake almost seemed like it stopped lapping at the shore. Starscream stopped dead still. He glanced at his energon. He needed to take it with him if he decided to go further than a half a day out. 'You can't use it all now.' he thought to himself. 'Anyway what will it charge you to? Thirty thirty five percent? Then what? Wait, be patient, get yourself at least two full charges worth before you do something overly energetic.'

He flicked his optics to night vision, starlight enhanced. He almost yelled out as he was suddenly able to see a large, winged beast lumbering by. The beast stopped and uttered a weird cry that made Starscream's circuits quiver. The cry was answered in the distance. The huge animal, resembled an ancient earth sauropod, around twenty five metres in length. It plodded at the edge of the lake. It carried on for a good five or six hundred metres before it stuck its long necked head into the water. Bubbles erupted to the surface. It stopped and watched.

From the lake, a huge plesiosaur reared its neck. A mouth full of teeth grabbed at the big winged monster's back. The monster flapped in a rather futile way and it managed to lift off the ground and move a couple of metres. It was quite obvious that this creature was either just evolving to flight or losing that ability. Its body was too huge or its wings were too small.

The winged creature whipped its head around at the plesiosaur and spat at it. The gob landed on the plesiosaur's head. Starscream thought this was amusing until he saw what was happening to the great lake creature. It thrashed around and the head emitted steam. Starscream watched in disgust as the flesh melted back exposing the brain and the plesiosaur fell to the water, dead. The giant winged creature hauled the corpse to the shore and spat on it a couple more times and then walked away. It cried out again and the answering cry was very, very close.

What was most disturbing to Starscream was that the venom touched the rocks and some of them started to sizzle into nothingness. 'What would that substance do to me?', he wondered. That explained the corpse in the swamp where he had lain.

He figured the best measure was to keep at a distance from the creature. It cried out again and the calls of the others were far closer. He watched silently as a slightly smaller creature than the hunting one emerged from the jungle. Two more, very small ones flew in, their body to wing ratio was more proportioned for flight so they could fly as babies it seemed. The wings must be a defensive mechanism for the creatures when they are younger. The two adults greeted each other in an affectionate manner. The babies ran to the plesiosaur and started to feed. The adults joined in, with their wings overlapping, sheltering the young.

The creatures ate on and off for a couple of hours and then they lumbered into the jungle. The babies flew alongside. Nothing came near the corpse. Starscream waited for a couple of minutes and sprinted to the fallen animal. He looked at the venom and sniffed at it. Off to the side was a bubbly substance. Starscream dipped his finger into it and sniffed it. Soap? How could this be? Then he figured it out.

The venom was lye and it had reacted with the fat of the fallen beast. The venom was alkaline. His fears were legitimate. If the stuff hit him it would damage him seriously. What intrigued him more was how in the world a creature could evolve to spit such a caustic substance and not do itself any damage.

Starscream returned to his encampment. He was worried that something else would intrude on his much needed rest. He was also worried whether or not fire would attract or scare away any creatures like the beasts he had just seen. He would hate to wake up in the middle of the night with no legs or worse. With a spit as caustic as lye, he decided he would watch those creatures in future.

He removed the dank wood from his lean to and bit the bullet. 'Most creatures fear fire,' he decided, and built the small pile of wood into a little teepee. He found dry leaves to lay around the base of the small wood cone and lit it with a spark from his index finger. The leaves ignited. The fire burned with quite a lot of smoke, and he ended up coughing and moving to the other side. As he moved, the wind shifted, and so did the smoke, still in his direction.

He sighed, snickered. 'I will allow myself one cube then.' He sat on the log by the fire holding the cube up to the sky. "A toast," he said, "to survival of the fittest!" He laughed and downed the cube. "Whee!" He reached for another and faintly wondered if he was going mad. The two energon cubes he rapidly drank, being quite impure, caused him to become very drowsy and very drunk. He tossed a stick onto the crackling fire and then dissolved into a deep slumber, sprawled by the flames.

Night creatures watched him where he lay. His fire burned down to glowing embers. A few of the smaller reptilian creatures came close to take a sniff but they found he was not anything that would be appetizing, so they left him alone. Hidden in some bushes not far from the simple encampment was another creature. It watched for some time. Its eyes blinked and then it was gone.

It was mid afternoon when he awoke. He probably would have slept longer if something hard had not hit him with a hollow thunk. He looked around. His head swam and throbbed. He felt like he was going to retch.

His eyes were out of focus and he could not see what had hit him. Another thunk in the chest and that one stung him a bit. He reached down, straining to focus his eyes and found a wooden shaft with a broken stone tip beside his torso. 'A spear?' he thought. 'Is there actually sentient life here?' He looked around and saw nothing. "A bush rustled behind him, and there was another thunk. He looked in that direction. Another spear was thrown at him. Each time he looked to see where it had come from, the attack came from a new direction. He screamed in his annoyance slamming a fist into the bushes beside him. A figure darted out of the way of the falling hand. There was another movement.

With a sudden motion he leaped to his feet. His head spun and throbbed. His hand shot out and he captured a creature that looked like a large humanoid Iguana. The creature struggled to get out of his grasp, speaking in a strange tongue that consisted of hissing, clicking and rambling.

The other creatures resumed their attack with even more vigor than before. Starscream paid little heed to their pointless attack and looked intently at the creature. Its face resembled an iguana's almost exactly, large amber eyes, thick scales around the mouth, huge ones closer to its jaw. The skin around its neck was loose and formed a dewlap. There were long spiky scales running down the center of its back. In all appearance, it was an iguana of astounding size. The only difference from an Earth iguana was that this one spoke an obvious language.. It stood on two back feet, wore a simple loin cloth made of skins and used stone tools. Its feet were heavily clawed and the toes were quite long. The fingers on its hands were very slender but had sharp claws at the tips of each one. It was heavily muscled and its skin was covered in tough scales. He noticed that it was lashing its long, tapered tail as if trying to whip him.

The creature rambled again and then leaned down and bit Starscream's hand. Its mouth was filled with razor sharp teeth, but they had no effect on Starscream. It looked up in surprise and uttered more sounds. The spears stopped being thrown. Starscream held the creature and studied it for one more short moment and then placed it on the ground. The creature ran a few meters away, hissed to the others and they all took off towards the west. 'Lovely,' Starscream thought. This world was inhabited by a primitive intelligence.... and he was marooned with them.

He looked down at his chest where the one spear had been thrown. It had scratched a small hole in his armour. The broken tip of the spear remained in the hole. He looked up in the direction they had fled. 'When I get enough energon,' he thought cheerfully 'it will be west I go.' His head renewed its angry throbbing and Starscream sat back down. He held his aching head in his hands and moaned. "There has to be something better than this sludge, really. There has to be."

He brought his scanning program online and checked the energon. It was very impure. The energy contained within a single cube was only a fraction of what he had expected. He was going to have to find something better soon. He looked at the shelter. It contained seven murky looking energon cubes. He scanned them to see if they were any better. There seemed to be a minor instability with them. He glanced at the flimsy frame that stood over them and decided that he would have to move.

He checked the local terrain on foot. His energy stores were too low for him to consider flight. He missed flying intensely. It made short work of laborious walking through thick jungle growth. Shooting down the vegetation would only drain him further. He did not like feeling anything less than fifty five percent charged. It was uncomfortable. The less charged he was the more chances he had at making dangerous mistakes, or so he thought. He knew that less than thirty percent power his weapons would not fire as his body would start taking power from non-essential parts of him. His life support systems were far more important than the ability to fire a laser.

Not too far from his camp he came to a small hill. It was quite rocky and it had a small opening. With his hands he made the hole larger. Inside was quite dry and he had found a new energy source. Further back in the cave was a pool of slick, black oil that bubbled to the surface. Starscream cried out in triumph. His survival was assured!

He quickly made a stack of empty energon cubes. He ignited a patch of oil with his laser rifle and the cubes started to fill. The colour was bright pink and very pure. The cavern was soon lit with the brilliant colour of stored energon. All over the walls were crystals. Tiny glistening points that looked like jewels in the reflected light.

When the stack was filled, he compressed them into bales and moved them to a wall just in from the entrance. He spent the day filling hundreds of cubes, delighting that his larder was very full with barely any room for himself.

After days of filling and recharging he decided to go off searching for the creatures that had attacked him at his previous camp. They had not bothered much with him since then, although he thought he could sense them lurking nearby occasionally. He hoped that they would not enter the cave, but even if they did, he doubted that they would understand what the pretty pink stuff was. He was fully charged and confident that he could transform into his alter-mode. It had been a while since he had felt this good, a long while. His stockpile of energon was something that Megatron would have been envious of.

He wandered west then he remembered that he no longer had to walk. With a cheerful yell he leapt into the air and transformed. He fired his jets and sped across the sky. He did a barrel roll but then halted mid-roll. He flew for half a kilometer on his back before righting himself. Yes, he had spotted something. He flew up to a massive height where he could hardly be spotted from the ground. Using long range vision he spotted a small village. Actually there were several of them about fifteen kilometres from his home swamp. The houses were made of skins and simple fabrics made from plant fibers.

The houses looked temporary, like they could be removed at a moments notice and rebuilt somewhere else. There people of all sizes walked from home to home. Some were cooking over fires and others were practicing spear drill. He turned on his microphone and hoped he could listen in on them. Their language was a complex blend of vocal sounds that sounded a notch like some of the languages spoken by Africans back on earth. Starscream had learned several different languages when he was on earth but he preferred English which was very similar to his native Cybertron tongue.

He focused in on the one who was commanding the spear drill. It was repetitive and fascinating. They had made a huge grass ball in the center of a field. They broke the troop into several groups. One would yell a number and the group would rush in. "One in, throw and out, Three in, throw and out, Two in, throw and out, Five in, throw and out, Four in, throw and out." Within each group a name was called and that individual would rush in and throw the spear at the bale and rush out.

They each carried several long shafts and this way their attack was constantly changing direction and changing the person who did the attack. It kept them fresh and it kept the foe confused. It was the same tactic that they used when Starscream was under attack.

One word they kept using was Wyvern, which seemed to be the name of the pile in the middle, the object of their attack. Starscream was not sure if that was the name of the grass material they were hitting, or the name of the beast it was supposed to represent. He was also curious about what that beast might be.

He circled overhead and decided he would return after nightfall to watch them in their village up close. He landed at his cavern and brought out some energon. He needed to find an alternative way to re-fuel without having to physically drink the fluid. It caused him to get quite plastered and sent him into a deep sleep, although his sleep times were far shorter than before due to the fact he never let himself get below sixty percent of charge.

The Seeker sat down at the mouth of the cave, leaned his back against the wall and held

up the cube to the mid afternoon sun. "A toast to the freedom of the air." He held the cube to his lips and sipped, savoring the flavor of fresh energon and the scent of a good grade. He watched the sun drift overhead and he fell asleep.

A wind caught up and the clouds rolled in. The leaves in the trees rustled like the whispering of ten thousand voices. Thunder crashed and a tree fell across the entrance of the cave. Starscream awoke startled as a branch hit him across the head. He rubbed the sore spot and crept further into the cave. He looked at the cubes wondering if they would be safe.

It had not stormed in a few days and he had almost forgotten the ferocity of the local weather. Rain blasted from the sky drenching everything in seconds. Streams of water ran down gullies into the swamp not far away. These storms would not do to fly in for any amount of time. If the rain did not send him spiraling into the ground the wind surely would. The fierce storms usually did not last for more than an hour or two, so his plans did not need to be scrapped yet.

It was quite late when the storm passed. He looked at the wet clearing and decided that if he was going to see any of the reptiles he would have to leave immediately. He looked into the sky, then leapt and transformed. He flew at low speed and high altitude. The less noise he made the easier it would be for him to observe unnoticed. At high altitude he transformed and slowly made his descent. Silently he landed outside what seemed to be the main village. It was the one with the huge creature clearing. In the bushes he listened to their talk.

He did this for a couple of months attempting to learn their language. He was quite successful, he thought. He knew most of the words and he learned the word they called themselves: "Guana". He thought it was appropriate. They were a fascinating people. He learned much about their culture from eavesdropping, but he wanted more. He wanted to speak with someone.

He had had only himself for company for a few months and he was talking to himself more and more as of late. He feared this was a sign of him going slowly insane. It took him nearly ten years to glide silently through space in an state of deep hibernation. It was that hibernation that he needed. If he had not had any he would surely have cracked ages earlier.

The Guanas were intelligent on the extreme level. The only reason why they had not advanced themselves was that they seemed wholly content in their present way of life. They had a whole routine of hunting and preserving their foods. They could plan and execute intricate strategies. The elderly in their clans and tribes were regarded with reverence as they held the keys to their wisdom. They had complex maths, and a simple, yet interesting, written language that was more of a hieroglyphic style. Most of their histories were passed down, generation to generation, by rote it seemed. They had very good memories.

They were intensely patient. They spent hours on end planning their hunts. Practicing their skills and tracking their prey, and when they finally faced their quarry, they attacked fiercely. Their speed was amazing. In hunts with smaller animals they could run alongside of them and thrust their stone headed spears deep into the bodies of their prey.

Sometimes they even used their claws to rake into the animal's thick hides and bite into the soft throat, ripping the jugular open. Whichever method they used they were quick although not always clean.

As the aggressive and sometimes bloodthirsty hunters they were, they also were very nurturing to their young. He noticed that the female Guanans were a force to be reckoned with if they got pissed off. The females, although they did not hunt, seemed to be in a higher status than the men folk, with only two exceptions the Village leader and the Village shaman.

* * *

It was another season. He figured it was winter. It rained nearly all the time. Rivers were swollen and clouds covered most of the planet. He found that the Guana people had another gift. They had gills as a secondary breathing apparatus, so they could survive underwater for a long time.

He left the Guanans to follow the trail of the Wyvern the huge winged Sauropod he had seen shortly after he had extracted himself from his almost swampy demise. He learned from overhearing the Guanans speaking that they respected this beast. The great monster was very important to their way of life. It was also a way for juvenile Guana males to prove themselves worthy of a mate if they helped in bringing one of these deadly creatures down.

He traced the family that he had seen at his swamp months earlier. The babies were almost fully grown and they had almost lost the ability to fly. 'Why need to fly if you spit lye' rhymed the warrior Starscream in his head. He had found himself thinking as a scientist as of late and his warrior side vied for some room.

Starscream hated this. "You're an idiot. You are starting to sound like Rumble," he whispered to himself in the language of the Guanans, thinking that this was going to have to stop soon. If he ever met any other Transformers they were going to lock him up in a rubber room. If this carried on he was certainly going to go batty.

'Bats in your belfry and wind in your roof. Starscream you are becoming quite the goof. When do you think you are ever going to meet up with another Decepticon. Face it, fly boy, you're here for good. It's too late. You're already batty,' snarled the suppressed warrior.

"What ever good will it be for me if you keep putting down my hope? And I did not say Decepticon, I said Transformer," he muttered, ignoring the fact that he had already suggested that he had gone insane.

'Who cares what you said. Anyway, hope for what? Melting down Galvatron? Come on he's slagged us once what makes you think he won't slag us again? If given a chance.'

He sighed. He had been practicing the Guana language, but now he realized he was speaking in one and answering himself in another. His angry, resentful warrior self responded in English, degrading both his current endeavor and his Cybertronian origin.

That half of him seemed to have no self esteem whatsoever.

The Guana-speaking half was an older Starscream, the old self that he had forgotten was there millions of years ago. The self he had abandoned when Skyfire disappeared. The two thought processes had somewhat separated, and he hoped to reunite them to be once again a whole being. The schism had scared him shitless. "Coward," he told himself. "You must not be frightened."

'Frightened? Is that what you think I am?' he thought back. 'If it weren't for me you would never had gotten out of the swamp'

"That was me who did that. You were ready to give up, to let our spark go out. Let our good fortune of getting a second chance at life, our new body, go to waste." He wished this would end. Two minds were only better than one when they occupied separate bodies. He thought grimly of his possession of Scourge... how uncooperative he was.

'You wish it would end now do you? Um.... I had thought it might be a good idea in the swamp until you stopped me'

"Will you shut, ARGH!, up." There was no word in Guana language strong enough to emphasize his frustration. "I am not feeling comfortable with two personalities in me so either you bury yourself in my brain somewhere or you rejoin me, since I can't actually destroy you and I would prefer it if you would help me. I can't survive without your exceptional fighting skills." He was feeling frustrated at the moment and thought that buttering his warrior self up would be a good idea.

'I heard that. And my answer is: I'll think about it. Face it, I am the main personality, and it is you that shall join me,' hissed his thought at him and his mind suddenly felt whole.

Starscream had to revert to his scientist mode and overcome the urge to want to squish the creatures whenever he crossed paths with them, which was not very often. He wanted to explore the planet further and learn what it could offer him. No one knew he was here and he felt very safe. He liked the Guanans and he wanted to watch them hunt the Wyvern. It appeared it was the ruler of the land and had only one enemy as an adult; the Guanans.

He located a lone male. Not the one of the family he had found months earlier. Starscream had been observing the giant reptile as group of hunters arrived. He had not seen them hunt one before. The only hunt he had experienced was the one in which he had been the prey He backed to the edge of the glade, deep within the bushes The animal was busy eating a creature it had spat out of the sky. It was not very young but it had scars across its hide where it had been hunted before. It appeared they were unsuccessful recently.

A stream gurgled not far behind him. The birds and insects in the area quieted. The Wyvern lifted its bloody face and looked around. Everything was still. The wind blew and the gurgle of the stream was all that could be heard. Starscream dared not move as if he did, the Guanans or the beast would see him and that would spoil the hunt. The venom was pure lye; anything it hit was in immediate danger, and he had no wish to expose the Guanans to needless risk. It was not good for research.

The hunters closed in silently with their stone headed spears poised to throw. One group at the front, and another group came in from behind and a third group came in at the flank. They worked in a pattern of spearing the beast from one side making the animal turn his head to look at the irritating lizard as the next group closed in. They did this in a pattern so they could have time to run from the head as it swung around to meet them . The tactic was amazing and very well thought out. It kept the beast distracted as the next group attempted to make the fatal thrust. They continued like this for an hour and the beast looked like a favorite pin cushion.

The leader of the first group ran in close, perhaps too close. He chucked the spear and it sank into the flesh above the shoulder of the animal. It snapped its head around and opened its mouth. The Guana ran but tripped over a fallen tree. Another Guana ran in to help their leader up. A jet of venom shot out and landed on the downed hunter and splashed the second hunter in the face. The fallen attacker died as the venom ate into his flesh which was not quite instantly. The other lizard held his face screaming as the fluid burned out his eyes ate through his skull and exposed his brain. The venom sank in and the lizard stopped and fell to the ground dead with a gurgling cry.

The hunt carried on despite the tragic loss of two hunters. It carried on with renewed force. In, throw and back away. In, throw and back away. Each group taking a turn. The Wyvern was soon starting to tire from loss of blood and pain. The animal was enraged. It frequently turned his head to spit at the group. It faced where Starscream was hiding. He was too distracted with the Guanans and their continued energy and before he knew it the animal had spat a huge ball of gooey venom. The Guanans nearby leapt left and right to get out of the way and it flew unhindered at Starscream.

He howled in pain as the venom touched his body. He stood fully upright, aimed his weapon at the giant reptile and fired. The huge animal fell to the ground with a thud. It twitched and then died. The Guanans stopped and cheered.

Starscream wailed. The venom had rapidly burned through his upper left hip and midriff. He ran for the stream and started to wash the horrible stuff off. Water entered his open wound and several circuits crackled. He shrieked and cursed as the water triggered his internal pain sensors. There were a couple of other spots that the venom had splattered and a couple of tiny holes appeared in his left leg and arm. He washed at the lye until he was sure it was all gone. Something pink coloured the water. Energon. Starscream groaned. He was not too far from his cavern, that was a positive. The negative was that he had no idea how he was going to stem the flow.

'Cauterize it, you idiot. You're the scientist.', he thought to himself in frustration.

Starscream did not like the idea of expending energy on a small laser burn in his hip but decided it was better than bleeding. He pointed his index finger at the oozing energon conduits and fired a small laser. He bit his lip against the anguish, his hand shook and he severed a transformation circuit.

'You idiot. You twit. What the hell did you do that for? How are we going to fly if you go cutting out your transformation circuit.' he thought to himself angrily.

"It would help if you did your job and suppressed the pain for me" he whispered back.

'Oh blame me now, why don't you.' he snapped back in his head. 'You're the one in control and it was your bright idea to get this close to the Wyvern. You knew what it was capable of.'

"Will you shut up and let me cauterize the rest of the bleeds and lend a hand to suppress the pain?"

'I'm sorry,' he thought back. His mind quiet, he finished the rest of the cauterizing with very little pain.

The Guanas had gathered at the edge of the stream. Several minutes passed before Starscream realized he was being watched. He stopped his self surgery, and stared in amazement. The creatures had all dropped to their knees. One alone stood and said something in their tongue. He understood it partially:

"Thank you. Lord of the sky, for helping us with this hunt"

Starscream the warrior liked this development and he took complete control to the surprise of the scientist. Thinking quickly, he replied, "I shall help you take this Rock to your home, as a gesture of my bad odour to you," in halting Guana.

The scientist in him whispered, 'You should let me do the talking. You screwed up the words.' Starscream ignored the thought.

The Lizard cocked his head and replied "Rock? Bad odour?"

Starscream laughed and shrugged. The lizard shaman replied with the correct words.

The creatures delighted in the offer of the red and white God.

Decepticon nature is to squelch all that is in the way of their plans. However with the sudden change in the local fauna's wish to worship him as a God, he decided that squishing this group might be best placed on the back burner. He did not like little flesh creatures but these appealed to his ego. He thought it over for a few minutes and decided he would take this creature under his wing and teach him everything he knew that would help him get off this marshy rock. He helped them bind the monster to a huge pole and they dragged it back to the village.

The Scientist and Warrior personalities merged together. They agreed that one mind was better than two. Most of the time. The Guana's name was Santor, and they chatted on the route to his home.

"I must return to my home" He pointed to the southeast "I need to get "food" that I can use to replenish my reserves. I lost a lot in the attack." It was obvious to the Guanas that Starscream could be hurt, and he could bleed, but he was also so big and powerful and unique that he must be a god.

"Please, O great one, let me join you?"

"Um, that might not be a good idea. It's not safe there" Starscream did not want the

shaman to see his cavern.

"Are you ashamed that you live in such a humble abode as that cave near the swamps? We could do you better"

'Rats' he thought, the shaman knew about his cave. "I would rather go alone. This is my wish, so be it."

"As you will, my lord" The shaman made a deep bow and Starscream turned and headed home. It was a long trek on foot and took a couple of hours. The sky was turning dark for night and the storms were heading in. He really did not want to be caught in the storm and with a small amount of effort he managed to run the rest of the way home.

The cave loomed up. The pink glow of energon emanated from it. He was glad to be back. He sat on the worn log at the mouth of the cave and watched as the rain poured forth. He was tired and sore. His side was bothering him but there was nothing he could do to fix it. He just had to keep it clean. He went to the middle of the cave where he had his "sleeping" area which consisted of a couple of long logs that were flattened on one side and bound together with vines and covered with large fresh leaves. Not that he needed to have a "bed" he just preferred not to have to rest on the grubby ground.

He took an energon cube from the pile and sat on his couch. He refueled, enjoying the flavor of the energon and the warmth it gave him as it entered his somewhat diminished internal reserves. He looked at his gaping wound. He was kicking himself for letting his more curious side get too close.

He whimpered. He felt aggrieved by sudden loss of aerial freedom. If only he could have suppressed the pain or kept a steadier hand. It was the fear of the moment, he knew. That he had taken a direct hit from a creature he knew could be deadly even to him. It was lucky for him it was low. If he had taken a hit to his head or face, it would have been fatal -- no ifs, ands, or buts about it!

It was because of one of his old fears, getting attacked by a Wyvern in the night, that he chose to move into the cavern. He thought however that if he could see it he could get out the way but he had been far more interested in what the flesh creatures were up to.

"You thought wrong, scientist," he murmured in between sips.

'Chalk it up as experience.' the scientist suggested cheerfully. 'Not to worry, I have a plan and if you listen and help we can get through this alive.' The scientist had ceased speaking in Guana since he was reduced to secondary personality.

"What sort of plan do you have?" asked Starscream aloud.

'Well we need each other, we are literally part of a whole, you and I. But I have the brains and you are the brawn', the scientist said coolly.

"Did you absolutely have to say Brawn" muttered Starscream as he tossed the empty energon cube aside. He pulled his feet up onto the couch and crossed them at the ankles. He tucked his hands behind his head and looked blankly at the ceiling "You know I hated

that stupid Autobot"

'I didn't mean him, silly. I was referring to your tactical skill. You are a good fighter. Yes? You have strengths that I don't possess. I will tell you one thing that you don't have and won't if you don't acknowledge me at all. I have a skill, logical thinking. Tune me out and you will just be Starscream the loser, as you always have been. I have a skill. I can help you become a better leader, if that is what you wish.'

Starscream was shocked with himself. "You think I am a loser?"

'And a traitor, someone who can't be trusted. Even by me.' he retorted.

"This is unhealthy," he replied shakily, "when I can't even trust myself."

'Very unhealthy,' his scientist replied gently, 'but trust me and you will trust yourself. It will be a boost to your overall morale.'

"What is it that you need me to do?"

'Well it's something you would love to do. Act like a god.'

"Astrotrain tried that once....."

'You are alone here what you say goes.... I first need you to learn more about this culture...'

* * *

The Seeker became very fluent in Guana. The shaman had helped in honing his sentence structure. Starscream in return had taught him his own language and English. He insisted that the shaman use only the language of the gods to him when he was in the presence of other Guanas. This was a good idea as it seemed more important as a ritual tool if the Guana shaman could translate Starscream's words to the others. The shaman readily agreed.

Strange he thought. That he would become friends with a flesh creature. He decided he was going somewhat soft being away from his own kind for so many years. Then again he decided that this flesh creature was better than being one hundred percent alone. At least he had some slaves to do his bidding when he wanted it done with no questions asked. 'Now, now, great shining one' the scientist chided 'You're not going soft. You are learning what you should have learned. I've had millions of suppressed years to think things over.'

Starscream groaned. Whenever he had an off moment the scientist emerged. He regretted that he could not boot him out of his head. There were times he was far too logical and cool and in some ways dispassionate.

'Then again, you are not one hundred percent alone. You have me!' he thought brightly. 'And you should not think of the people as slaves. They are your subjects' Let me remind you that I will force myself to dominance if the topic requires a more scientific mind. Yours is good, mine is more understanding. Not that I am trying to imply anything, Screamer. I

would rather that you co-operate and just give me room to do my job.'

Starscream almost yelled back at that remark but he held his tongue and let the scientist come forth.

The shaman knew much about the plants and animals that lived on the planet and taught Starscream the various properties and uses for the local fauna and flora. The information that he gave Starscream had amazed the Decepticon. He found out that when the Wyvern was killed the contents of the stomach was carefully poured into a pot of melted fat and the women made a primitive soap. Starscream taught him how to remove lye from wood ashes, it would be safer than taking out a dangerous animal. He also taught them how to make soap in a safer way, using specific lye- fat ratios. 'Where the hell did you learn to make lye and soap?' asked the warrior. The scientist muttered very very quietly "primitive human technology from the internet, ages ago. You were asleep. Keep quiet."

The Shaman it appeared was a sort of simple scientist as well as a religious leader in his village. Starscream learned when someone was ill it was up to the shaman to help heal the sick. So Starscream taught him some basic information on microorganisms. This allowed him to explain how diseases were passed from one organism to another. His only personal experience with disease was with the strange metallic eating plague Cosmic Rust, the concept was the same. Also using the herbal information the shaman had given him, Starscream improved medicine made of the local herbs to make them more effective. The sick were healing faster.

When hunting was poor it was up to the shaman to call the Gods to help with the hunt. It appeared that the hunting had been very poor and their losses were high with previous hunts. It was the hunt that Starscream had been hurt in the shaman was called to witness and all was looking lost until Starscream had accidentally intervened, so it appeared the shaman's call to the god had been heard.

The Guanas from other villages now regarded Starscream as a god. This pleased the warrior in him very much. He reveled in the glory that being bestowed he felt the Decepticons should have been more like this.

'They might have, if you had allowed me to co-pilot,' the scientist whispered in his head, late one night in the cave he called home.

"If I had known you were there," replied Starscream, "I might have sought your advice, but I was still grieving for Skyfire's loss."

Starscream as a whole felt a pang of regret. He hated thinking of the loss. Skyfire was the closest thing he had ever had to a father or friend. He felt a loss again when Skyfire defected and joined the Autobots.

"You are not perfect, Scientist. Or you would have chalked that one up as experience. Instead you left me alone and you buried yourself in the back and I guess I forgot you were there"

'You buried me and then ignored me. I objected when you forgot me. You got that irritating self loathing. You hated yourself and what you had become. You wanted that father figure,

so you sought out your hero, Megatron. What good has he done for you? Belittle you, humiliate you, insult you and if that was not enough, he would even beat you till you were blubbing at his feet and he would threaten to kill you. Some hero. I hated what he had done to you. But you were too powerful a personality to break free from. Your self-esteem is dismal. We were both frightened. That I will admit. But I would never have become what you were if I was left in control. I would have pulled the trigger when that moment came up and killed the bastard.' his thought rambled on.

"I guess I am not perfect." he sighed. And laid on his side drawing his fingers through the dirt.

'If you had me in at least the co-pilots seat, my dear friend, I am sure I could have also snagged that chick in the war academy. What was her name again'

"Sunburst" he breathed, remembering the lovely young female Decepticon. A warmth beat at his face. "Do you have any recollection as to what happened to her?" he asked himself.

'If you don't know then I really can't tell you.'

"Why the hell not?" he snapped at himself.

'Because I don't know. But I saw how she looked at you during your training sessions'

"What was her alternative mode again?" he asked.

'Seeker dummy. She was a Seeker like you. You could have flown missions with her if you showed but an ounce of interest. If any of the Decepticons ever knew you are still a virgin after all these years I would even be humiliated beyond all reason. You loved the Decepticon cause more than anything else in the world and look where it got you. Dead.'

"WHY YOU!..... ARRGH! You had to bring that up" Starscream hissed in anger and embarrassment "Shut up and go away, you are REALLY pissing me off to the point I could blow my head off."

'You could not do that. I would take over, but as you wish. Good night and sweet dreams' the scientist in him shut up.

The coming weeks were to be stressful for the Seeker as his two inner selves bickered with each other. He was severely frightened of what had become of him. There seemed no way to just shut one of the personalities out, to ignore them and carry on with his life or the plan. It was simple, he needed that older self to help him out of his mess.

He stood looking into the water of the lake. The sun was just rising. He did not get rest, he was thinking of Sunburst. He regretted the missed opportunity. He could see her in his mind. She was a lovely, golden, Earth sun yellow. With very long legs. Her alter-mode was a variation of his own. She was very, very fast. Nowhere near as quick as himself, but she came very close. She was one of the very few female Seekers created, so she had the pick of the males.

She had initially chosen him. She had made a good choice. Starscream was handsome,

but he was more interested in learning his lectures. Whenever she spoke to him he would just stammer and look like an idiot to the point of embarrassment.

'I guess she just gave up' his insides whispered to him. 'Do you know who she ended up with? Windraker.'

"Windraker?" he gasped. "He was a very depressing Decepticon to be around, almost as bad as Dirge."

Starscream watched as the sky changed from orange pink to lavender then blue. The sun rose overhead and the humidity started to increase. He tossed a rock into the lake turned and headed out to the village.

It was nearly noon when he arrived. He was cursing and grumbling as he had fallen and gotten leaves and other crap in his open wound. He was gingerly pulling them out as it hurt like hell. It hurt like hell almost constantly in fact and it was a frequent question of the shaman.

"Why does it not heal?"

"It will only heal if I can get the same metals as I am made from. My body can repair most minor stuff. This was a little more than minor, so I have to bear it."

"Does this hurt you?"

Starscream hesitated before he answered, "Like hell"

The shaman nodded and he whistled shrilly. Several females came out of the village. They were holding something heavy between them. It was dyed a brilliant purple. The shaman held it to Starscream.

"It's a robe made of the skin of the Wyvern you slew. One property of the Wyvern is that its own spit does not hurt it. You are protected and that horrible gouge is now hidden from view of the others." He offered it to the Seeker who could only admire the thoughtfulness of the people. He picked the skin up expecting it to be tough and hard but it felt extremely soft to his touch sensors. He arranged it around his body so it slung over his left shoulder in the manner of a toga and he buckled it over the right hip. It covered his damaged hip and midriff. The skin was very soft and he looked at the delicate bead work: in lavender amethyst was the Decepticon insignia.

"Curious," Starscream said. "If this is immune to the venom, why is it that you don't protect yourselves with it?"

"We have never thought of that." The shaman sat in silent reflection. "Is it your will that we use it to protect ourselves?"

"If you have more skins around, I insist," he said in a deeper authoritative tone.

The shaman laughed. "You shall have it." He slapped Starscream's thigh and he told the women to make everyone garments with the skins in supply.

Later that day while they were sitting talking on a boulder by a large river, Starscream described his plummet from the sky. He threw a rock into the water to describe the skipping motion of his almost fatal crash landing. The shaman watched fascinated. He took a stone and threw it and it sank when it hit water. Again the Seeker took a stone that was very flat and smooth and in a slow motion, he threw it and it skipped a couple of times and sank. The shaman tried again with success.

The shaman had seen the plummet of the huge booming fireball to the south. He had ordered some hunters to go investigate. They had seen a huge body in the mud but it did

not move so they thought it was dead so they left. He ordered them back a few days later and that was after Starscream had managed to free himself of his life and death struggle for useable energy.

"There is a ancient myth," the shaman said, "so ancient that it matches the age of some of the rocks. It has been handed to us by mouth for ages. Each generation shaman learns it and passes it on. Although memory and time leaves things out or adds things in the whole tale is incredible. It goes on for a day or so." The shaman looked up

" I will tell you a shortened version. Long before our ancestors discovered the use of fire and the stone tool was an unobtainable object, a very strange thing happened. It was a bright day, the story says, when two bright streaks of light shot in from behind the sun from the north. As the fires faded, there flew in the sky unusual birds. Not natural shapes, one was a very small pyramid shape and the other seemed more like a giant bird. They flew to the ground and changed into giant Guana but without the tails. One was far larger than the other and they looked at everything, as if they were inspecting the planet. They were there for a few days and they left the same way they came in, just without the fire." The shaman bowed.

Starscream was stunned beyond belief. 'How is that possible?' he thought. 'That was millions of years ago? There were no people here, the life was very, very, very primitive.'

"How could that be remembered? There was no one here and that was at least eight or nine million years ago."

The shaman looked worried. "Have I offended you?", the shaman asked with concern. Starscream was looking troubled.

"Hell, no. It's just unheard of." He was lost for words. 'I think you are frightening the shaman' "What I will say you must not tell anyone, but never had a history from an organic based life form, such as yourself, been kept through spoken word over such a length of time without losing true form. What you have told me, Shaman, is true. We recorded no significant life here and we only visited once. To tell me your primitive ancestors could pass the information onto the next generation for countless years is amazing. It was not long after I was um... "born" that I came here With my teacher and friend."

"Then you were one of the ancient visitors?"

"Yes", he breathed.

"Then there is one more thing. It was heralded that the visitors would return. It was unclear however what he meant to do."

Starscream was even unsure of what he was to do. He wanted to leave this rock. 'You have it within you to appear as an ideal god', he thought to himself. 'Your warrior side is dangerous, unforgiving, quick to anger. You know yourself as well as I do.' He looked down at the reptilian shaman before him. 'Your scientist side, that's me, is benign, benevolent, kind, forgiving. Now I think about it, it's not surprising that you forgot about me. Megatron would have killed you long ago. Anyway, I digress. You can act like a good, well meaning god but make them remember that you are stronger than they are and you

could make their little lives miserable.'

"Ick", Starscream muttered. "But deception is my game," he said in a barest whisper.

'Then I shall defer to you, my dear powerful, all knowing lord Starscream'

"I require some help," Starscream said in a haughty tone. "As I have said I have fallen from the sky. I was ejected by other evil gods for unjust reasons," he lied. "I need to build a chariot to guide me to the place where the evil gods live." Starscream paused for a moment, looking at the shaman.

"I also require a temple to live in. I would prefer it to be underground. I can teach you the techniques that you don't have, to help me to obtain your goal. This would benefit your race for certain and you could join me in the stars," Starscream suggested. "I can also make sure your standard of living is superior, improve your houses." His hands waved at the tattered skin tents. "Better health." he said, although he had helped to improve it so far, he could greatly enhance their medicines and technology.

"All I require is your devotion to me, and an offering of energon. Only the finest, brought to me every day," he said with a smooth tone. "Not doing this," his tone went icy and sinister, "could result in some bad things happening to your hunts and to your little villages." He let the last word hang with a hint of foreboding as promising as his words were. He believed that when all was said and done, he would merrily vaporize the creatures and their worthless and useless world and piss on the scientist. 'That's not nice!' Starscream ignored the last thought.

The shaman looked up at Starscream. He appeared somewhat disturbed by the threat. Starscream had never once threatened him before, why start now? Then again who knows the true motives of a god. It would be a good thing to do as he said. After all, he had helped the sick heal very fast. "Never anger the gods," his predecessor had once said

'especially one who can take down a Wyvern in one shot, as well as get hit with a full blast of venom and still survive'. Thought the shaman "Tell me, almighty one, what is it that you need and how can we make it. Your every wish shall be my command," he said.

"Good" Starscream said, beaming and he stood up. "We've got a lot of work to do."

Starscream taught the shaman metallurgy and geology. He helped them cut stone with his laser and constructed a smelter. He showed them how to make Cybertronian alloys. He had them casting sheets of the metal and making wires and capacitors. With time the metals they worked was up to his standards and he was able to fix his damaged hip and circuitry and again he was able to transform and fly.

He removed his soft leather robe and laid it carefully on the worn log bench that had been his "bed" in his cavern. It had become home to him for three long years and he loathed to leave it. He was going to be sending the Guanans here to make more energon.

He had walked home after he had fixed himself. He was holding off on his first flight for a

time longer. He had waited three years and he had learned that patience was indeed a virtue. What was almost better than his impending flight, what truly could be better than flying, was the fact that his hip and midriff were no longer hurting like hell all the time. He was to gather the last of the energon cubes he had stored there and take off to his new home. He slipped the robe on the pile and clutched them close.

He stood outside. In the brilliant sun the heat of the day was intense, but he had gotten used to it. He breathed deeply, allowing the scent of the damp earth to tickle his senses.. He looked down towards the lake where the giant plesiosaurs swam. Their long necks peeked above the water. He would miss the quiet stillness of this glade. Where his new headquarters was located was noisy with the constant presence of the Guana people. Yes it was certain that he would miss this place, but it was time to go home.

The shaman had told him earlier that the people had finished constructing his huge headquarters underground and they were filling it in. He had overseen the construction, and he had made them re-do part because he wanted them to know he needed perfection. Nothing would be worse than getting a ship that fell apart on liftoff. Yes, that was the next task, the ship.

He leapt into the air and transformed, tucking the energon and robe into him. He fired his jets and into the deep blue sky he flew. How wonderful was the sensation of flight once again. Where he was going was but a moments hop away but he had waited far too long to allow his first flight be just one minute.

He felt the need to have an energy wasting session. Although it was not critical anymore to conserve, it had become a habit. He decided he could risk going into very low power percentage. He had extra cubes inside his cockpit. He pushed himself to his limit in speed for a moment. The booming thunder he made caused the Guana people to look up. They waved. He flew high into the air and dove down. He did a barrel roll, then a couple of loops. He nosed up again and flew back towards the clearing where the new base was buried .

The ground looked disturbed where the base was hidden. All that remained above the surface was a long flat cover stone. He flew to a halt just before the stone and transformed. He held the pile of cubes and the robe to him. He held his hand over that stone and it shifted aside. The passageway down was brightly lit and the stairs were large and smooth. The light was not painfully bright but soft and warm. The walls were made from metals that were a pleasant green. There were several Guanans present in his headquarters, but they were technicians working on assignments. They greeted Starscream with a bow of the head.

He entered the monitoring chamber. A small computer was on an ornate desk with a large monitor mounted on the wall. Starscream admired the desk, it was very smooth and finely crafted.

"Welcome to your home, my lord," the shaman said as Starscream turned around. He took a long sweeping bow.

Starscream smiled broadly at the reptile, who was wearing fine skins and beautiful jewelry and a very bright feathered headdress. "You have done well, very well in fact. I am

pleased. You take your work seriously," said Starscream praising the Guana shaman.

"The people have been delighted with their improved homes and they hope that if they work harder that you would be very happy with them."

"I am indeed. I've never seen anyone work so hard before. Where I came from it is very hard to find good help." He stood up tall and proud. "Give your people all a day off, and have a party."

"The people will appreciate that. Now, my lord, can I show you your personal abode. Your private chambers, that are meant for your privacy so you can contemplate your next task." He gestured to a door on the back wall.

The shaman put his hand to the plate and the door slid open. The room was large and comfortable. The colours were reds and burgundy. The floors had a thick covering of a hand knotted rug dyed in a deep blue that was almost black. Rich fabrics hung from the walls and at the end was an large, rich looking, couch. The people had learned how to make fine fabrics from plants and they improved their dye techniques so they achieved very rich, vibrant colours. In the corner was an alcove that looked along the lines of a earth humans shower stall. The Guana lead him to it.

"A recharging station!" Starscream was pleased. Now he did not have to worry about mornings with hangovers, or incomplete charges.

"As you had asked for. Is this to your liking?"

"Do I like it? It's fantastic."

"Then may I take my leave of you so you may get familiarized?"

"Of course, thank you, Santor."

The shaman left the room and the door closed behind him.

This was much to his liking. The room was more than he had expected. He had only had a schematic of a simple room with the resting couch at one end and the recharge station on the wall. He was used to the room he had had back on earth which resembled something like a minimum security prison cell. The only difference between his old home and a prison was that he could leave whenever he wanted. Well almost. When Megatron did not seal him in and post guards outside. This place was fit for a king. Well now, not a king but a god. He laughed.

He placed the cubes on a table and folded the robe into a dresser and strode over to the re-charge chamber and sat down. Energy flowed through his body. He unplugged and sat on the bed he flopped back and fell into a pleasant sleep.

* * *

Days drew on to weeks and weeks slid into months. The Guana people were well settled. They had built stone houses to replace the hide tents that they lived in. He had a couple of

factories built in a few villages large enough to support the size of the workload he had given them, but in the capital village of Atanole he set up the base for building his Ship.

Starscream handed out instructions to the people. They looked over it. The shaman studied it further and made a few orders and winked at Starscream. "I will get our smelters to make a few more arc welding devices. Our glass blowers will design a type of glass you suggest here. I think we can improve the strengths of both metal and glass."

They walked over to the site where the ship was to be built. They grinned at each other and Starscream pointed out the general layout and ordered the Guanas to step to it. The shaman whistled and from all directions a huge group of the people arrived. Starscream counted five hundred. They chanted and cheered and they started work immediately

The production of energon cubes from his old cave home was at full capacity. Starscream designed and made a cube generator that ran on the power of two energon cubes a month. He had to make more storage chambers in his headquarters for the seemingly endless supply of power. He often stood at the door to the room enjoying the view of pure clean energon that glowed pinkly at him. He knew if Megatron had been able to see this, he would have drooled.

The shaman had insisted on having a solar temple built directly over the spot that the headquarters was to provide a place for offerings to be deposited and worship to be practiced. Starscream readily agreed to this as it suited his vanity.

Starscream suggested that it would please him much if they would carve a stone statue in his image, as well as a couple of stones in the likeness of his insignia. The shaman agreed that this was a very good idea and saw to it that his workforce carved the effigy in the finest granite stone. They used red granite, a fine white granite that looked like marble and lapis lazuli. A black granite was carved for the head in which garnets were set for the eyes. When the Guana people unveiled this statue of him. Starscream was stunned and very flattered at how handsome the image was and amazed at the fine detailing. The Guanans were fine artisans.

A strange feeling it was when he realized something actually cared for him. He however felt a bit guilty. He got what he wanted from lies and deceit. He smooth talked the shaman into doing what he wanted and the shaman did them. Before this, in order for him to get what he wanted, he had to twist his words and then turn around and occasionally murder the one who provided the gifts.

The new statue did appeal to his vanity. It was his spitting image. He could not keep his eyes off it. It was a shame the Guanans were not on Cybertron as this would have been a marvelous marker for his tomb. He chuckled to himself. If only Astrotrain was here to see him. He had not done very well as a god on the Saturn moon, Titan. At least Starscream had kept the title longer.

The Guanans heaved in large stones quarried from the nearby cliffs. They were polished and smooth. Starscream helped them with the placement of stones that were meant for the ring. He had suggested to make a henge similar to the one that was on the planet earth, set with scientifically accurate stones to predict the coming of summer, winter and the great rains that occurred in the Spring and autumn.

He had gone to the earth's Stonehenge alone at night when no others could see him. He was curious that humans could create such an accurate time clock in such a primitive prehistorical place with tools and weapons made of stone or very soft untempered metals.

The main difference with this henge was that the statue of Starscream was set at the back of the inner ring before the altar stone. This was decided so he did not have to be present 100 percent of the time when they wanted to place offerings of energon or interesting items that they thought he might be pleased in. The Decepticon emblem was artfully

carved on the front of the altar stone.

* * *

He sat inside the large computer room, designing new plans. He was working on some satellites that he wanted to throw into orbit. All he needed was some components the Guana people were making.

The people had laboured almost night and day to get the bits and bobs he needed to create his home and all the technical advances of the time he had left. The glass blowers had adapted his teachings and were improving the mix and blend of glass to the point they had a version that was quite similar to the flexibility of earth plastic but with the strength of tempered glass.

The village of Tanadon was creating better computer parts. They were working with silicon and gold. And the capacitors the other factories had pumped out. The city of Winsalo had a huge copper mine and the people there were working making hundreds of meters of wire for his electrical projects.

In a private workshop off his resting chamber he sat. It was late and he had a spot lamp shining brightly on the component he was fiddling with. He rubbed his eye with a hand and placed the screw driver down. He was tired. He had been working for several days with out a rest cycle and he felt beat. The last satellite was ready and he flicked a switch. It hummed to life.

The pad on desk scanned the device. It proved to be in fully functioning order. He rubbed his hands in delight. He was personally creating several satellites that he intended to place in orbit around the planet. He also had a couple hundred simple cameras created and set in simple objects like rocks and trees. He placed these around the villages he had setups in so he could monitor Guana activities. He wanted to be the all knowing god.

He returned to his chamber and sat down and popped his feet on an ornate table a woodworker had given to him. It was decorated with gems and gold, with designs of dragons interwoven with the Decepticon insignia. He had never thought of the insignia as such a beautiful emblem in art. Beautiful stoppered glass bottles filled with very pure energon sat at one end along with a large jeweled goblet.

He laughed, sat up and took a fine goblet and filled it with energon from the decanter. From his experience near death by starvation in the swamps, years ago, to living the high life that even Galvatron would never experience. He held his glass to the sky. "If only you knew, Galvatron. You're so dead!" He tossed his head back and drained the glass.

'That was revitalizing,' he thought.

"Go away, I am celebrating alone. Anyway it would be better if I recharge properly" he whispered back as he walked wearily to the bed.

'How about one more drink?' the scientist insisted. 'I deserve it. I've been working all week on those satellites.'

"How about you let me sleep. I am tired beyond all measure." he responded harshly.

'OK, OK. You win.' the scientist sighed. 'Just don't let the bed bugs bite. Sweet dreams' the thought said evilly.

Starscream settled down on his bed. He fingered the soft fabrics that were covering it and reached for a pillow and closed his optics. All thoughts sank into a blur. From the fog came a memory.

* * *

He was standing on the dais, the Decepticons were trumpeting to his triumph. He wore the crown that Astrotrain had placed on his head.

"As your new leader, I....." He stopped in mid sentence as a unfamiliar ship arrived. His Optics narrowed as he looked at the intruder. A large, purple Decepticon emerged. "Who disrupts my coronation?" he asked, looking at the foreigner." There was something vaguely familiar about him.... he almost looked like Megatron, only meaner.

"Your coronation, Starscream? This is bad comedy." the other replied.

"Megatron, is that you?" he asked. It was his momentary confusion that cost him his life.

The intruding robot transformed into a cannon. "Here's a hint!"

Before Starscream could react he was blinded by a bright flash. It all happened too fast. He stood transfixed, caught by surprise. He looked forwards and wondered where everyone went. The light burned hot around him. He cried out. How hot, how painful was this light. He cried out again but no sound came from his mouth.

He struggled to focus his optics and he could barely make out the shape of the Decepticons standing around in front of him. Their mouths opened in surprised horror. He wondered what they had seen to have surprised them so much.

The heat intensified. Oh, how he wanted to be away from this terrible heat. The burning pain tore at his mind and soul and he leaped rapidly from the heat and pain. He drifted to the top of the dais. An odd sensation of floating, not flying. The heat and pain was gone. 'Good riddance.'

He looked around. There was talking below him and a chant went up. "Long live Galvatron! Long live Galvatron." Odd, they should be chanting 'Long live Starscream'. It was then that Starscream looked down at the platform directly below and realized what had happened. He was dead.

He could not believe it. He was disgusted at himself for not being more cautious. He knew there were others that opposed his declaration that he should be emperor of the Decepticons. He figured that there would be assassination attempts. But on his coronation day?

What seemed swift to the others seemed like a lifetime to him. He hovered at the top of

the dais, watching in dismay. There was no mourning. No one cared that he was obliterated. He plunged from the ceiling and lay in the crumbled pile that was his body, he sobbed. He wished it was not true.

The robot named Galvatron came up to the platform and kicked his ashes. Starscream turned and tried to pound him with his fists, but his hands only went through him. Something else happened: he caught a thought. Starscream hesitated and then overlapped himself with Galvatron.

To his horror and disgust, he found that his murderer was once Megatron. Although his thought patterns and personality were slightly different, the Megatron personality was there. They were the same person. The horror of it struck him. Galvatron enjoyed it far more than any sane Decepticon should have. The satisfaction at seeing Starscream crumble to dust gave the purple Decepticon a pleasant energy blip. What disturbed Starscream was the sadistic desire to do that over and over again. Starscream broke off his overlap. This guy hated Starscream intensely.

He screamed his frustration.

Galvatron looked down at the ash pile at his feet, then ordered "Scourge, you and the sweeps get rid of this disagreeable filth."

One of the sweeps swept it up into a canister and was about to throw it into a smelting receptacle.

Scourge held up a clawed hand and prevented the canister from dropping. "It would be more honorable to place him in the crypt," he said.

The sweep looked around and replied, "He was a traitor sir, it would be dishonorable to the ancestors to give him a burial of a hero."

"It would be more dishonorable if we disposed of him as common litter. He was good at his job and that was enough," Scourge replied. "Anyway who said he was going to receive a hero's funeral?"

The sweeps muttered in agreement. They turned and walked to the crypt.

Starscream was curious about that last statement. 'How would they know how well I did my job?' He followed behind, drifting as a near invisible sparkle, he watched as they interred him without so much as another word. He was bitter, and angry. He swore then that he was going to dispose of Galvatron even if it meant returning from the dead to do so.

Again he was curious. If Galvatron was Megatron, who were these others? He overlapped Scourge. He staggered out of the overlap. Unicron, it seemed, gave them all new lives. Scourge was his former comrade Skywarp.

He regretted now leaving the others for dead in space because it came back full circle. Now he was dead. The humans had a cute saying: "What goes around comes around." But if Unicron could reshape them, perhaps he could give Starscream a new body and

return him to life! He laughed a sickening laugh. It was a shrill cackle mingled with hatred of what had been done. It was a penetrating laugh that echoed in the vaulted crypt.

The sweeps huddled together frightened. They thought they heard the haunting laugh of Starscream. They told Scourge that they thought the crypt might be haunted, that they thought they had heard Starscream. Scourge told them they were cowards and there was nothing left of the traitor but ash and dust, but inwardly he too had felt a presence.

He placed Starscream's feet neatly on the top of the pillar. He looked around and whispered "Happy haunting Screamer." It sounded faintly like Skywarp. Then left.

What they did not realize is they also left Starscream's ghost there. It took him a while to figure out how to completely appear, although he was somewhat transparent. He had time to think and he knew that in his desire to get away from the torture, heat and pain of his violent death, his laser core had managed to leap out of danger before his body had been completely destroyed.

He looked around the crypt for days, calling, looking and found out one significant thing. He, Starscream, was alone. The first and perhaps the last ghost. No Decepticons or Autobots had managed to escape total destruction, and no one living could see him. He faded out as he walked alone in the empty halls of Cybertron. And became a formless spark.

The dream swirled and Galvatron's face filled his mind. Laughing at him. Haunting him. Mocking him. Telling him he was going to die again and again and again. This time there was no sparing his soul. He would be executed, his body melted down into slag.

The Seeker's mind screamed in terror. He awakened. His head throbbed and he found himself entwined in his couch coverings. A nightmare. No. It was memory of his death and his "afterlife".

'One can learn so much by peeking into forgotten memories,' his scientist thought.

"Was it you who dredged up that one? I had not forgotten it." snarled Starscream. His hands were shaking.

'Yes,' the thought admitted. 'I just wanted to find out what made you tick.'

"What ticks me off is more like it. You do that for fun don't you? You want to beat me down with my failings." Starscream felt dismal and sick. He would rather not have re-lived his death again and had that reminder that one of his old teammates was his undertaker.

'Well it's a fact. If you had not tossed your brothers out... They begged you not to and you did not have to. Don't you remember? You cold-bloodedly left those who were possibly closest to you to die. If you had not been so callous, you would most likely have been alive. You know Thundercracker and Skywarp were the closest thing you had to a family. They might have not really liked your pompous attitude, but they did respect your judgement. You betrayed them. Although you went back for them, you had already betrayed them.' This made Starscream clearly upset.

"Astrotrain was too burdened," he attempted to justify the murders.

'That's a lie and you know it. You and Astro' conspired to ditch Megatron. It's buried in the back of your brain here. Would you like me to dredge that memory up?'

"No. I do remember. I had forgotten. I had remembered it was there that day in the swamp." he said weakly.

'You traded the lives of your friends for power. All you ever have done is seek power in some form or another at the cost of others. If it were not that I was you, I would have said good riddance.'

Starscream said nothing as his thoughts slammed him. It was the first time he saw himself for what he was.... nothing.

'All that you ever loved, you traded in for power. It's no wonder that no one shed so much as a tear for you. You are incorrigible"

"I had the right to that leadership. It was long owed to me for my dedicated service to the Decepticons. I risked my life and limb for the "cause"." He was seething with anger.

'YOU IMPUDENT BASTARD.' his thoughts screamed at him. 'How many others have risked life and limb? They are in it for the "cause", you are in it for power. I can dredge up some other interesting memories that would make my point'

"NO! Don't. Let the memories be. Leave them where they are. Your point is made."

'Your lust for power has cost you your life and the lives of others,' his thoughts said gently. 'Be careful of what you wish of these people.' With that the thought faded. He looked around the room and disentangled himself from the couch.

It was not a pleasant memory that he had re-lived, although he had learned by that mistake that if he overlapped a machine he could make it operate. So, to his delight, when Octane hid in the crypt he took over another Decepticon's body. The feeling of having a body, although not his own, led him to seek out Unicron.

He left his personal chamber, deciding that resting was not a pleasant option at the moment and he went to continue working on his projects. He had only, at best, half an hour of down time.

Several hours later he had the satellites packed and readied. He loaded them carefully into his arms and went outside. He inhaled deeply as he looked up to the west.

The sky was clouding over, cumulonimbus of a thunder head was building up in the distance; the anvil of cirrus clouds was starting to form.

Birds and animals fell silent. They were preparing for the worst. Distant echoes of thunder broke the still air. The horizon was shrouded in a silver haze as the storm front advanced. Bright lavender flashes of lightening lit the approaching storm cloud.

Starscream watched for a moment, fascinated. In the distance there was a rumble that resembled jet engines. He knew that sound, he had heard it when he was back on earth: there was a tornado approaching.

"This is going to be one fierce storm." He murmured with appreciation of the destruction that a tornado can wreak.

'It's best we launch now, before it fully reaches us,' Said a thought from inside.

"Indeed" he said softly.

He looked up once more at the angry, grey, swirling sky as the wind front slammed into him. He was surprised at the power of the gusts. He held the satellites close to him as he walked to the outer ring of stones.

Guanas were setting up for a ritual. Starscream admired their courage; humans would have started running for cover at the first sign of a tornado or storm. Starscream, however, was not inclined to hang around with a twister approaching.

Starscream called to a couple of the Guanans that were setting up. They immediately ran to his side as he explained what he wanted. He rarely used the Guana language. Quickly they walked to the outer ring of the huge stone circle. There he transformed into his sleek jet form.

He ordered them to place the satellites in his cockpit. The wind roared from the west, and the thunder boomed. He closed the cockpit as the last satellite was carefully nestled.

He turned to face the runway, taxied, and then took off. He reached speeds of Mach 2.7. He left the area with a deafening sonic boom. The boom echoed off the hills and the distant mountains, the shock wave of his supersonic atmospheric exit.

The ground shot away at an astounding speed as he flew up. He exited the stratosphere and flew into space. Although he was not designed as a space vehicle, he still managed to cope quite well outside an atmosphere. It sometimes bothered him on his entrances. His outer armour heated up and the feeling was intolerable. If he did not re-enter carefully he'd pass out on his way back in. This is not a good thing when you are trying to not crash

land. The force of his descent sometimes siphoned energon from his brain, causing momentary blackouts.

He felt the release of the planet's gravity so he turned off his engines. He used them in minor bursts to allow him to maneuver the satellites into position. They were to settle into a geosynchronous orbit. He hooked them up with little solar panels to produce energy for their running, and he aimed their dish towards locations on the planet where he had placed signal receivers. He set up fifteen, evenly spaced around the globe. He planned on making a couple more that he would send up to track deep space signals.

He flew around the planet enjoying this freedom. He had not been in space for over eight years. He found the zero G. a nice change from the gravity of Guandonnaland; although the lizard people's world had only slightly less gravity than Earth.

He looked down at the planet. He could see that it was a very beautiful place floating serenely in a velvet black of outer space. The oceans were bright blue, darkening to deep purple at their deepest areas. Huge splotches of green that were the continents and a couple of faint yellow outlines that were very small deserts within them. The mountains were very young and too low to have snow covered peaks.

What he found odd was that there was no moon. Every world he had set foot on had a moon that orbited it or a planet it orbited. The planet therefore had no tides. The only thing that affected it was the other planets in the system.

There were four planets in total. Sulor was the smallest and the closest to the sun. It would be considered Mercury's counterpart. It had a rocky crust, a warm iron core and no atmosphere to speak of. Delva, as large as Mars and about the same colour, had a thick, hot atmosphere. Guandonnaland was slightly smaller than Earth hence the lower gravity. It was in a similar age to the Permian period of Earth. Tanos, a brilliant purple gas giant, was about the size of Neptune. The last planet was in an orbit similar to Jupiter. The star that the planets orbited was a very young G5 class, only about four and a quarter billion years old.

He glided and looped all over the sky, feeling delighted in the lack of air resistance. But he also felt distressingly alone. All he really had on this pathetic world was he and his thoughts for company, and that was not enough. Dejectedly, he stopped goofing off and finished his work in space.

He double checked that all of the satellites were set correctly and working. With a final jaunt around the world, he planned his re-entry. Years before he did not have the energy to provide him with a more accurate or safe landing. He thought that another stone skipping entrance like the last time would be very undesirable. Anyway, that sort of uncontrolled speed made him black out.

He checked the trajectory and glided in. He did not need to employ his jets as the gravity would soon help him pick up momentum. He had to have a gradual enough entrance to avoid being burned up completely (a devastating loss if that should happen), but not too shallow that he should skip off the atmosphere and shoot into space. (Not disastrous but inconvenient and embarrassing to say the least).

He nosed down and entered. The air heated up and began to glow orange. He started to pick up speed as he glided down. Flames of hot air licked around him and his wings heated. He adjusted his entrance angle a bit more so his downward spiral allowed him additional time to slow himself. He glided down, his body encased in a yellow orange ball of burning air. He felt himself on the verge of blackout. Suddenly, the superheated air dissipated and he was gliding towards the ground at incredible speeds.

He whooped, boy, did he love this speed. He headed straight for the storm clouds that covered his new home land. It was such a shame, he thought, that he could not reach those speeds by his own power. He shot towards his landing site.

A huge boom that was far louder than any thunder sounded, and from the clouds soared the lone F-15 jet. He swooped down towards the soaking ground where the large rock ring stood. He transformed into his handsome robot mode, his mission accomplished. He took a deep breath. He battled the storm to get to the altar stone and stopped. He looked around at the clearing that was almost shrouded in the heavy rainfall. He missed being with his own kind.

The sky was clouded over and the winds were violently tossing up leaves and dust. A wide path had been ripped through the jungle, narrowly missing the stone circle. Trees and debris were strewn around. One of the huge megaliths, from the ring, was lying on its side. Lightning continued to flash; rain fell in heavy blinding sheets.

He looked up at the statue that stood before the altar and sighed, at least some things were not all that bad. Alas if it were not for Galvatron...

His circuits crackled in the pent up fury as he waved his hand over the stone altar. The altar glowed then moved aside with a rumble.

The entrance opened up and Starscream descended into the hall. He turned left into a small computer chamber and took a seat in front of a monitor. Reptilian creatures wandered back and forth taking readings and writing notes. Then, he started his computations. "Eight years on this world", he thought. Although that was not very long in Starscream's entire life, it was long enough. His desire to leave was greater than before. He wanted to see another of his own kind, Autobot or Decepticon. Moreover, he wanted his revenge. Nothing burned more than his lust for Galvatron's life. He hated no one more than Galvatron. He wanted to pull his optics out and squish them like stuffed olives. He sought revenge so dreadfully he could taste it.

* * *

Starscream finished typing code lines. With a flourish, he hit enter on the keypad and a schematic of another satellite flashed on the screen.

"Santor," Starscream called in his high-pitched whining voice. "Come here, now!" The Guana shaman strode up. On his head he wore a colourful headdress of bright plumes. Attached at his shoulders, with an amber pin, was a long cape of blue. He wore brightly coloured feathers around his ankles and around his neck he wore a Decepticon emblem made in fine gold. The shaman was a figure to behold. He walked with an air of power and

wisdom.

He raised his hands to Starscream. "My lord", the reptile spoke in a soft voice, his head bowed. "How may I be of service?"

"Take these plans and get a crew working on them. I want this finished in three days." Starscream ordered the reptile. He handed the Shaman the printed papers.

The shaman looked over them for a moment and winked at Starscream. Then with a few whistles and chirps the reptile had amassed a crew who were looking over the plans chattering excitedly. "We can manage to build this in two. It's not that difficult. Will this be to your liking, Almighty one?" the shaman bowed deeply.

Starscream nodded wishing the creature would just leave and stop groveling. With another bow the Guana turned, with his troop following they left the chamber. He had enjoyed the groveling at first, but after some time, it grew annoying.

"Pathetic flesh creatures," Starscream muttered under his breath. However, he had to admit they were far more interesting than the humans back on old Earth. The reptiles did not run in the face of danger, they turned and faced it. They also took new challenges in the same manner. They were far sturdier than humans, a thick skin made them almost as tough as iron.

'You are a pathetic metal creature' whispered his mind.

Starscream groaned audibly. He had been wondering when his do-gooding alter-ego would rear its ugly head.

Santor was the most intelligent Guana Starscream had encountered. He was as manipulative as Starscream was. He could get what he wanted done, when he wanted it done. The difference was he did not have to use deceit. He was also the largest Guana, aside from the chief of the local village whom was just plain fat; the Seeker had met, reaching a height of around one point eight two meters.

Santor wore more decorative clothing than the normal population. He saw to it that Starscream got whatever he needed and oversaw most of the projects that the lizard people had been ordered to work on.

In turn, Starscream made sure Santor got the best, even better than his chief. In actual fact, Santor was to be considered the leader of the Guanans or at least by Starscream's standards. He did not want to admit that the dedication of the shaman was so important. He believed that without him, he would not have succeeded.

* * *

He rewarded the shaman for his good service with the gold pendant. It made him stand out. Starscream personally made it and bestowed it publicly.

There was a ritual and Starscream happened to emerge from the stone at mid-rite. The Guanans bowed heavily. The Decepticon had planned on seeking out the shaman privately,

but the big lizard was there guiding the prayers. Starscream had not been aware that the rite was going on; otherwise he would not have interrupted.

"Is there something I can do for you, o' lord?" the shaman asked.

The others looked up from their positions. Whenever the Seeker appeared so did a new task. Some in the town were getting frustrated; it was disrupting traditional life, although those were the ones who enjoyed the conveniences of Starscream's gifts the most.

"As a matter of fact," the Seeker said, "I was looking for you, Santor. Please stand on the altar. I would prefer you more at my level."

The shaman had looked around and did as he was asked.

"Face me." said Starscream. The Guana complied. The others stood and watched wondering what was about to conspire.

"I, your lord Starscream, present to you, Santor, Shaman of the Guana People, the symbol of my favour." he said in Guana, something he rarely did in public. "This symbol assures you of my protection. Should anyone harm you or utter blasphemies in your presence, they will feel my more unforgiving side." He slipped the pendant around the lizard's neck.

It gleamed in the sun. The shaman stood proudly as the other Guanans cheered.

* * *

It was very late in the night as Starscream had finished installing the last camera into the final inconspicuous mundane object. He had several boxes of them lined against the wall. He had planned to install them in the major towns and around work sites, over a short period of time, so he could watch the goings on at his own leisure. It would also give him an upper hand in learning things before he was told about them. It would give him a greater air of omnipotence.

He quietly exited his home and crept silently through the night. Wild creatures called in the dark and domestic animals honked at him. Starscream glared at them. He did not want any one to notice him and their noise might awaken the herders. The animals in the pen looked like smaller versions of earth ancient duck billed dinosaurs. He dimmed his optics so their light would not be as noticeable in the dark. He paused by the pen and placed a cam carefully in a knot hole of one of the poles.

Very silently he wandered throughout the village. It appeared everyone was asleep. He grinned evilly as he hooked a cam to the roof overhang of the chief's house. He did not like the fat lump. He was grotesque. His flesh hung in huge folds like an Asian rhino. He had none of the agility or nimbleness of the normal Guana person as well as lacking the skills necessary for leadership. Starscream would have preferred to have taken the huge lizard out and drop him in the middle of the ocean, but he was afraid that would kill the plesiosaurs.

A warm breeze blew through the village and everything was silent. The last cam was

connected to its hiding spot. He surveyed his handiwork. He turned in silence and strode back to his base. It was very late; or was it very early? He figured it was approximately four in the morning.

He wearily walked down the stairs into the base. He was exhausted and did not realise he was extremely low on power until he did a diagnostic. Thirty eight percent. That hurt. He yawned and hooked himself up to the recharge station. He felt fuel fill his empty tanks. It would take most of the night for his reserves to return to full capacity. When he could re-fuel no more, he stepped over to his sleeping area, lay down and went straight into re-charge before his head hit the pillow.

When he awoke from the recharge cycle, it was near midday. He felt rather indolent. He had spent many nights working on his projects and he had been neglecting to rest for long enough. He was pleased that his mind did not play any more unpleasant memories as he knew he had loads of them.

He touched the wall where the light switch was and the room brightened. He had set up a com panel on a desk and sighed as he punched the buttons, then turned the dial. Static from the storm fuzzed the image. Starscream gently manipulated the knob till the image came in clearer.

Cybertron, his ancient home world, his place of creation and death and then rebirth. He tuned away from Cybertron and focused where he knew Charr was. It was a desolate planetoid of a few deserted cities where the Decepticons were pushed to during the final Great War that destroyed many of his companions as well as Autobots.

He inhaled then turned the knob to tune into a specific energy signature, Galvatron. A blip, then a fuzzy crackle. Starscream chuckled. He typed a few lines then entered the information. The fuzzy sound tuned into as clear as if he were there.

Contact. He had located Galvatron. Galvatron was talking to his troops, Cycolonus and Scourge. The conversation was of no interest. After years of silence he had found out one thing, he could still seek revenge as planned!

'You are obsessed. It's not healthy,' he thought.

Starscream dropped his head heavily to his desk. "Will you keep quiet?" he hissed.

'Slamming your head won't remove me. It will cause your memory banks to fail' said the thought pointedly.

"Well then, if I try hard enough perhaps I can remove you."

'Bad idea. That would cause you permanent brain damage. Irreversible, I might add. I think you would prefer death rather than making yourself a vegetable. So what has the almighty god, Starscream, found out?'

"Nothing much. I've set up the computer to track Galvatron. If I set it to record anything of interest, I am hoping to find out if he knows that Unicron had given me back my body. I wish to find out what he is up to or how the war has progressed. I am a bit out of touch

you see," Starscream responded to himself.

'Good. I suggest then you should try the cams and see what you dig up. Especially that fat chief.'

Starscream tapped his fingers on the table in thoughtfulness for a moment. Yes he should see what that big indolent creature was up to. Starscream shut down the program that was spying on Galvatron and opened up the spy cams he had set up around the village. He hit pay dirt.

It was raining quite heavily. Santor was in a heated discussion with Madba the chief, in the strange language the lizards spoke in. The chief was angry about traditions getting tossed aside.

"How do we know that this creature is what he says?" asked the chief.

"My noble lord Madba, he has been to this planet before. He knows the ancestors. Don't doubt him." said the shaman.

"What about the hunts? He has forbidden us to hunt the Wyvern! That was our major source of food."

"The lord Starscream has checked the Wyvern numbers. There are fewer and fewer of them. He says they are endangered, which is why we were taught to farm. Our animals are fatter than the wild caught ones and they are also healthier."

"BAH! There will always be enough...." started the chief as he was interrupted by the shaman.

"Noble lord Madba, I would not anger this god. He has been patient and fair, but I fear he could become quite nasty if he is pushed that way." the shaman said gently.

The chief shot him an angry look. "If the god is who he says he is, then let him bring me a Wyvern."

The chief stood outside his door and shouted in a booming voice... "If the lord Starscream can really hear this, bring me a wyvern, bring it to me today!"

Fifteen minutes later he looked at the shaman in an "I told you so" manner. But suddenly everyone stopped and looked. There was a whine of jet engines and a huge sonic boom that sent a number of Guanans to their backsides, as a white and red jet streaked overhead into the clouded sky.

The shaman looked at the chief and winked. "Your wish is my command." he bowed and left.

* * *

Starscream watched the monitor in the privacy of his own room. He had tuned into a heated discussion between the shaman and the chief. The chief openly doubted Starscream as a god. How impetuous of him.

The Seeker glanced one more time at the image of the over-indulgent lizard on the screen and flicked it off with a harsh tap of a key. He sat glaring at the screen with his head propped on his hand.

His mind was troubled with indecision; if he hunted down a Wyvern, he would be giving into their demands, however if he did not, he would be giving them proof that he was not a god. He enjoyed the attentions the creatures gave him, revelling in their literal worship of his skills and intelligence, of his strength and power, and more over, of his ability to fly.

'Then what's your problem? Go hunting. You need to release some of that tension that you have in you from fighting your natural instincts. Have fun, kill something and prove that you are indeed omnipotent.'

Starscream's eyes flashed brightly at that thought. He smirked at the screen as he pushed himself up out of the chair.

"Tradition. I'll show them tradition."

He strode across the room to the huge chest of drawers that the Guana people had built for him. He opened the drawer and looked at all the strange bits, bobs, and assorted junk he had accumulated over the years. The Guanans kept making and giving him things he really did not need. This drawer was a testimony to that effect.

"I know you are in here." he murmured to himself as he fished through the cluttered drawer. His hands groped blindly through the mess. His fingers touched something soft. "There you are." He pulled the still folded purple robe out from the drawer. A few things fell to the ground with a clatter. He stooped to pick them up and returned them to the chest and slid the drawer shut.

He had once suggested that the Guanans use the hide of a Wyvern as armour to protect themselves during their hunts. The suggestion was cheerfully accepted but there was a drawback; Wyvern skin, although very tough, was also very heavy. He showed them to make a variation of the armour he had once seen on Earth, when he had been thrown back into Earth's past.

The armour that the skin made was beautiful, solid and sleek, but it lacked the freedom of movement that the Guanans were used to. They could not move well enough to throw, dodge the spit, or get out of the way when they fell and got atomised under one of the massive flat feet; so, the armour idea was summarily dismissed. They fared better in a fight in their simple clothes with the knowledge that a hit equalled death.

"Now for weapons"

Starscream had decided he would take on his quarry with traditional style Guana hunting weapons; in other words, a spear. He stepped over to an ornate tapestry that hung on the wall and drew it back exposing a simple metal door that lead into the armoury.

The armoury contained most of the strange weapons he had put together, from small laser pistols to large rifles. He also had boxes of ammunition, charge clips and rockets.

His own null rifles hung neatly on a wall. He did not use them much anymore so he hung them up out of the way. There was no real point in keeping them on, save for instilling the odd bit of fear into the people.

His had several examples of primitive weaponry that his more curious side had insisted on constructing. Various sizes of bows; long, short and compound, arrows, that could be considered spears to the reptiles, spears made of wood and one made of titanium, a crossbow hung on the wall. To a human this would have been the size of a medieval ballista.

Sitting on a shelf all of its own was a simple slingshot. He had had one once before, back on Earth. Lying next to it in a bowl was a heap of unstable energon "marbles". He did not use the sling shot often but it still had a nostalgic appeal.

He selected the titanium spear. Its shaft glowed with sheen in the light. It was tipped with a heavy razor sharp carbide head seamlessly joined to the shaft. The weight of the head was balanced by the length of the spear. The spear was streamlined perfection, so smooth that air would barely slow it down.

He did not care much for the wooden spears with their stone tips. They were porous, uneven in weight; their stone tips were often too rough. His attempts at making stone tools were laughable. He had watched the Guana tool makers chipping rapidly away at a stone until they produced a beautiful sharp head. Starscream's results would have made a Neanderthal hominoid laugh.

* * *

Starscream stood by the altar as the stone slid across the entrance sealing it. His optics flashed in irritation of the rain and the fact that the loathsome chief compelled him to prove that he was indeed all powerful.

It was winter in the northern hemisphere of Guandonnaland, equated to unrelenting rain. It was a time of flooding, lakes would rise and swamps would be overflowing. However, it was a time of good fishing.

Although the odd Guana drowned in the floods, it was quite rare. Their gills allowed them to gather food supplies that are only found in the bottoms of lakes and rivers during this very miserable time of year. They could stay underwater for upwards of an hour. This ability was another bonus point for them when compared to a human. The humans died very easily when held underwater for more than a couple of minutes.

Their gills were located behind their jaw and neck join. They were sealed shut when they were not in use. Keeping them open to the air caused them to dry out and hurt them tremendously, or so the shaman had said when he inquired. Only when a Guana went underwater for longer than his lung capacity could handle, did the gills unseal themselves and start to extract useable oxygen from the water. About an hour after coming out of the water the gills re-sealed themselves.

He stepped away from the altar, his feet sinking into the very soft soggy ground each time he took a step. He strode to the outer ring of stones and transformed. He purposefully flew very low over the village at supersonic speed. He dipped his wing to the right and flew to the distant green mountains in the north.

'That should rattle them a bit.' He thought cheerfully.

The weather system was huge, the sky overcast as far as he could see. When he checked with his satellites, the cloud coverage was several thousand square kilometres. He flew just under the ceiling of grey clouds looking down at the misty hills, valleys and jungles. Lakes were noticeably larger and rivers brown with mud. Ahead, loomed the young mountains; between them was a valley with a small herd of Wyverns.

Wyverns were gregarious by nature. They roamed in herds ranging in size from ten to five hundred animals. However times being as they were, the largest herd on the planet was only made up of one hundred individuals. What he sought was to locate a solitary beast. In groups they were formidable adversaries. Guanans only hunted the loners, generally the young males who stood at the fringes of a herd's territory. They occasionally fought small territory skirmishes. If an animal from another herd strayed into a herd's grounds they would drive the intruder out. However come breeding season, the herds swapped their young members. It helped strengthen their bloodlines.

He had noticed a drastic decrease in the animals since he taught the Guanans how to make and use the bow and arrow and the crossbow. He decided he was not going to give the Guana peoples laser firearms until they understood the drawbacks.

He located the herd in the valley. Starscream circled over the area taking note of how many animals there were. He figured there were a few more males in that herd than females and there were also four very young beasts. Family units stayed close together in the centre of the herd. The unattached males wandered further out. There was a young adult male about three kilometres from the main herd. He made his selection.

His chosen prey had just shot a large flying reptile out of the air as Starscream made his approach. The large beast began to feed.

Starscream transformed holding his spear in his hand and with his robe tucked under his arm. He landed quietly behind a grove of tall cycads and fern trees. He propped his titanium spear against a tree as he unfolded the soft purple Wyvern skin robe. He pinned it around him awkwardly. He crouched and observed the animal.

The Wyvern was almost fully grown; about twenty meters in length from snout to tail tip and stood about four and a half meters tall at the hip. Its wings were folded neatly to its side. It had its face deep inside the carcass. It ate with a hideous slurping noise. Its teeth crunched noisily on lye brittle bones, snapping and popping with each movement of its jaws. He had witnessed them eating vegetative matter so they were by all definition omnivores, but they seemed to have a preference for flesh. Starscream had gathered that it had much to do with the fact they were warm blooded and needed food that could be quickly digested to maintain their internal body heat. They were not fast movers, but if they needed to they could run.

Starscream took a deep breath and silently moved forward. He clutched the spear tightly in his hands and did not take his optics off his prey. He was now the hunter again. The thrill of the upcoming challenge released electro-adrenaline into his energon ducts, as a result, his fuel pump began to work harder and his mind sharpened.

He took another step forward. A reverberating crack echoed through the clearing. He cringed and froze not daring to move.

The animal lifted its bloody head from the kill; its orange-red eyes glittered with suspicion. Huge gobs of torn bloody flesh hung from its mouth as it glanced around itself in mid chew. Seeing nothing immediately, it used its long tongue to suck the meat into its massive maw, it chewed and swallowed. Its eyes glowered in Starscream's direction. Its tongue made one last sweep of its mouth before it lowered its head back into its kill. However, it did not remove its gaze from Starscream's position.

Starscream stood frozen in fear. He knew that some animals did not attack if their prey did not move. Some however, attacked regardless if it moved or not. He hoped that the Wyvern would forget he was even there. Holding still was the best course of action at this present moment.

The creature resumed his feeding but he never looked away. He seemed to know that Starscream was there. Another disturbing revelation was its apparent lack of concern. He was going to have to try and distract it like the Guanas did when they hunt. He carefully groped around for a piece of rock or something. His hands found a piece of the broken log he had trodden on. His fingers slowly closed around it.

He waited and watched the animal eat. Slowly its eyes strayed back to its kill. Starscream chose that moment to throw the chunk across the clearing. The piece hit the ground with a thump followed by a few quieter thumps and a rustle as it disappeared into the bushes beyond.

The animal's head snapped up to the new sound. Its eyes opened wide and its nose sniffed the air. The animal became fully alert to the new sound. It suddenly opened its jaws and a huge gob of blood stained lye flew out and hit the landing site of the long with deadly accuracy.

Starscream chose that moment of distraction to leap from behind the trees and run forward towards the animal. The sound of his footsteps attracted the beast's attention. The ground in the glade was very wet and muddy from the rain. He slithered with each step until his foot found a hollow hidden by a puddle of water. He slipped backwards into the mud with a splash. In his reflex he dropped his titanium spear and let out a nervous shriek. He landed hard and lay there for a moment stunned.

'Get up fool!' A thought screamed at him.

The bloodied head of the Wyvern snapped around. Their eyes met for a moment and the great reptiles mouth opened and another volley of gore filled lye flew at the fallen Decepticon.

'Move faster!' The thought insisted.

Starscream twisted to his left bending his wing unnaturally underneath him for a moment. He managed to leap to his feet as he cried out in alarm as the gob splattered the ground where he had just lain. The robe covered most of his back and part of his wings. The spray from the lye peppered the robe and a few droplets fell against his exposed wing. He

cringed at the burning sensation but the sensation was minor, the damage was minimal. It was thankfully not a direct hit. He knew if it had hit, it would have undoubtedly killed him.

The animal reared and brought its forelegs high into the air. It beat its wings to help stabilise itself in the bipedal position. It snapped his head back and started to bring its feet down. Its eyes looked at Starscream as if he were a minor irritation: an insect. It bellowed a challenge.

Starscream's mouth dropped as he looked up in surprise. He had never seen a Wyvern rear before. Its wings beat the air and caused a massive down draft. The animal now towered above him by about twelve meters. He started to run back to the trees; there was going to be one phenomenal crash when the animal planted its massive flat feet back down on the ground.

As the animal's feet connected with the ground Starscream leapt into the air. His robe got caught in the spiny trees and he was yanked back down. The ground shuddered with a boom, trees shook and birds and flying reptiles took to the air. Starscream angrily yanked at the robe's amber pin and pulled the offending cape off.

He leapt again into the air. It was no wonder that the Guanas did not like to hunt wearing the armour. Even this cape was causing more harm than good, putting him in dangerous situations. Starscream spotted his spear lying on the ground where he had slipped. By luck it had not been smashed when the animal reared.

The enraged Wyvern opened his mouth and spat again. Starscream, being a master of the air, dodged the gore tainted slime easily. He shot down to the ground and ran to the spear stooping as he ran and grabbed it. He spun around and met the gaze of his quarry. They locked eyes.

Starscream stood still for a moment and the animal regarded him with a baleful stare. The stare was full of hate and malice. It wanted to crush this intruder once and for all. Its pupils narrowed and its sides heaved with its heavy breathing. The rank stench of its breath mingled with the odour of blood from its kill, mud from the ground and the rain. Its mouth opened but it did not fire. Starscream stood his ground.

Starscream started to run, tossing the spear into the air and catching it in a better position that would help enhance the power of his throw. As he ran the huge animal trumpeted a battle cry. It reared to full height its neck stretched right into the air. It bellowed again. Starscream's optics saw right in front of him the unprotected belly of the great beast. With his skills and speed he could not possibly miss. He drew his arm back and pitched forwards with all his strength. His fingers let go of the shaft and the titanium spear glittered in its strange gleaming colours as it penetrated deep into the Wyvern. Starscream yelled as he dove in the opposite direction to his attack away from the rearing animal. He hoped that the animal, when it came down, would miss him.

The animal let out a dying bellow. Starscream's carbide tip had penetrated the huge heart of the beast. The force of Starscream's plunge put the Wyvern off balance. The animal staggered backwards and fell. Its body hit the ground with a tremendous crash. The ground vibrated and Starscream fell to his back. The animal thrashed its neck and tail around as it experienced its death throws. Trees were smashed and the ground was torn

up. The clearing became a quagmire of blood and mud. Suddenly the animal gave one more dying spasm and stopped moving.

'One hit, one kill. Excellent.' He thought.

The hunt was not only nerve wracking but a heck of a thrill. He crouched for a moment allowing his energon pump to stop hammering. He admired his handiwork, but now came the problem of how to get it back to the village. It was too large for him to move on his own. He sighed inwardly. He was going to have to skin and butcher it himself. Not a task he thought he entirely wanted to do. He pulled an energy blade out of subspace and proceeded to work.

* * *

Starscream pulled the skin up off the animal and lay it down on the ground. He flicked the knife around in his blood covered hand smiling nastily. He had watched how the Guanans had skinned and butchered their animals. He had never participated in such a task. His attempts to reproduce their methods were satisfactory; it was very similar to dissection. He had peeled back the skin with out opening the gut; a skill indeed.

Eviscerating the creature was a bit more interesting. He slit the body open with his blade and the innards oozed out. They steamed in the slightly cool air. Organic workings were nowhere near as neat and efficient as robotics; although there were some similarities between the function of some of his systems and the function of this beast. He knew if part of his inner working were damaged they could be repaired or replaced. Not so easy on a flesh creature. Humans practised organ transplants. They removed the organs from a terminally injured human to put it into a human whose own inner workings were not so good.

He reached in and removed the liver and heart. He knew the Guanans loved these pieces. It was the reward of a successful hunt: very high in nutrients and energy that they needed to replace after expending so much. They often ate them right on the spot after a hunt while they were still warm and steaming. Rarely did the hunters bring any home. He dropped them into the skin.

He smiled, satisfied. Yes, this was much like a dissection, getting to look inside the great creature, to find out what made it work; however, a vivisection proved to be much more informative. Not only did you get to see what made a specimen work, but how it worked, as it worked.

Starscream looked down at himself again. His legs, chest and arms were coated in the blood of the animal and the mud of the field. He smiled grimly; part of him enjoyed this very much. He carried on removing off the huge carcass what the Guanans considered the choicest cuts of meat. He tossed them onto the skin and finally when he had enough to consider the load more than enough for one trip; he pulled up the corners of the skin and tied it shut with a length of intestine. He transformed. His jet alter-mode was also marred with the blood and mud stains. He figured most of it would be washed off in the driving rain as he shot through the sky towards the village.

* * *

He flew with his heavy burden clasped underneath his body by his grapples. He arrived at the village by mid afternoon. The people gathered as they watched the blood covered god lower his burden into the square. Once it touched the ground he released his hooks and transformed. He landed gracefully holding the titanium spear.

Mud and blood washed off him and coloured the puddles in the square. He leaned down and opened the skin tossing the tie aside. The people looked at him in awe. The shaman strode into the midst and looked Starscream in the optics. Starscream nodded and the shaman ordered the people to remove the gifts. Once the meat was removed from the skin Starscream reached down and held it up. He showed off the hole in the centre. Only one hole could be seen.

"The great one has answered the request of the chief." Santor cried out. "He has saved us the tedious task of hunting this great beast." The shaman bowed gracefully to Starscream. The others knelt for a moment, and then stood up.

"For such loyal service as you have given me, Santor, I shall bring you back the rest shortly." said Starscream in his own tongue. The shaman responded in Guana, elaborating some of the words.

"We offer our thanks and our praise Almighty one...." The shaman was cut off

"I don't," spoke up the deep booming voice of the chief. The people in the square fell suddenly silent.

Starscream's head whirled around to face the chief. His hand tightened on the spear and he turned and let the spear fly at the feet of the chief. The head sank deeply into the soft ground the shaft buried itself at least two meters into the ground. The Seekers optics blazed with fury. He had not just risked his existence, just so this bumbling oaf could insult him further. The chief showed a rare amount of Guana agility and leapt away from the spear.

"You will show respect to your god or you will die." Starscream shrieked as he reached down and captured the chief in a blood streaked blue hand. The chief looked mortified. Starscream was very tempted to crush the lizard to a pulp, he withheld for only one reason; fear. He could use the chief's fear as a weapon against him and others who would dare disobey his wishes. He decided he would appear merciful and give the indolent slob a warning. However the god's anger needed to be demonstrated. He had been far too nice up until this point and the people had grown used to his apparent benevolence.

He held the chief in his left hand and raised him above his head; with his right hand he wrenched the spear out of the ground. His eyes flashed in anger. "If I ever hear one more word of doubt from you again," he said looking at the chief, "any of you," he glanced at the crowd he returned his hateful glare at the chieftain, "I will hunt you down like the fat Wyvern you are. Understood?" His words came out sharply in the language of the Guanans. He tightened his fingers almost imperceptibly but it was enough to give the chief the hint he needed. Starscream could crush his life out of him any time he wished and

without hesitation.

The chief looked at Starscream; his face's skin colour was several shades lighter than normal. Fear was very evident.

Starscream shook his hand for a moment, his eyes flashing, "Do you understand?! Creature?" he asked again.

The chief blinked for a moment. "Yes... my lord, Starscream." He said hesitantly, yet clearly.

"Very well then," Starscream half placed, half dropped the chief to the ground. The lizard chief stood up shakily. "Does any one else have any doubts about my validity?" he asked. His voice held a dangerous quaver as if daring someone stupid enough to become his example. He looked over the crowd. "Let them speak now. Nobody? Good. I'll bring back the rest of the animal."

The people looked around slightly nervously. They looked at the chief. It was more than obvious that he was the one who stoked the ire in their lord. The chief bowed nervously. These people were very obedient. They looked from the Wyvern skin to Starscream and back to the shaman. They looked at the spear that Starscream wrenched from the ground. The animal had taken only one wound and that was one that led directly to the heart. Never had a hunt ended with only one spear finding its mark.

Starscream turned abruptly and shot into the sky. He transformed and flew out. He also had to gather the tattered remains of his cape.

The sky was the limit with these people. They did anything he had asked without question. His demonstration of his superior hunting skills: taking on the dreaded Wyvern single handedly and raining hell down on the Chief deterred most of them from any resentment, although much of it had to do with his very public display of anger. Word reverberated across the planet that the god would strike down those who stood in his way. The Chief still glowered at him if they crossed paths, but he did not speak of his displeasure in Starscream's rule publicly. The fat reptile was a coward.

The people worked dutifully. Most of them did not fear Starscream; they did what was asked of them. They knew that his anger was more aimed at one person and one person only but there were still some who appeared fairly nervous around the Seeker. Those were most likely his doubters; they were smart enough to keep to themselves.

* * *

Starscream flew through the crystal, azure sky. The air was as clear as spring water and the sun hung very high in the sky like a glowing yellow orange ball of flame. The air was stifling hot. He flew at subsonic speed slowly flying through the sky. He could feel the warmth of thermals on his sensitive wings and the stroke of air as it passed over his body.

Being the ruler of the sky had the wonderful benefit of complete freedom. He could fly where he wanted, when he wanted and how fast he wanted. There were no restrictions to Starscream, lord of the air, the tyrant of the firmament.

Today he thought it would be nice to slow the pace down, to enjoy life on the wing, to admire the beauty of the brilliant colours around him. He flew low over the jungle, trees shot away under him in a green blur. He nosed into the air again following a glittering blue green snake of a river. The river was joined by several smaller rivers they flowed into one massive body of water a kilometre across. The river joined the ocean. Its deep blue waters turned turquoise as it lapped the shore's brilliant white sand. He levelled off and flew back to land, the warm sun caressing his sleek white body.

He added more thrust to his engines picking up the pace a little bit. He flew towards the largest Guana habitation, the village of Atanole, the centre of his operations and the location of his underground base. It was hardly a village anymore it was more of a small town. Houses were being built rapidly as Guanans from outlying areas moved in to help with construction. Forests were being cleared to make room for buildings, training facilities or mines. Several large open pit mines peppered the area towards the mountains: coal, nickel, iron and several other elements. Great swaths of forest were being clear cut to provide room for agriculture. Compared with the rest of the world this was becoming unsightly. They were possibly going to ruin their planet like the humans mangled theirs. 'Oh well as long as they get the ship done they can try and repair the damage later.' he thought as he soared in towards the smelter.

He transformed and came in for a landing. His feet touched the ground softly. It had been his idea to have the ship built near the smelter and the major mines. It helped speed up the work of his slaves.

A group of Guanans raced out the smelter to greet him cheerfully. They chanted his name over and over and ran back to the building telling that he must see their progress. He watched as several labourers pushed huge carts of iron ore, coal and limestone into the smelter.

He followed them inside. It was a large room with several huge furnaces powered by energon. Creating the ship took loads of energy but he had plenty to spare. They loaded the coal into one of the large furnaces and heated it at incredible temperatures for around eighteen hours until it became coke, pure carbon for use in making steel. The process was fairly complex. He was surprised, at first, at how quickly the Guanans learned. They built the blast furnace: the huge tower that stood at the end of the room next to the ore crushers. Guanans had simple machines that crushed the ore into pieces. They were fed into a furnace that melted the metal from the rock and that got poured into the blast furnace along with the coke and limestone. It was in there that the coke burned causing the temperature in the furnace to reach 982°C melting both the ore and the lime. The lime removed the impurities and then the mixture was poured into a huge wheeled trough. The lime slag floated to the top and the Guanans darted around and skimmed it from the surface. Some of the molten metal was poured into ingot moulds, to be sent to another city, while the rest went into the basic oxygen furnace.

Again the metal was heated, this time in the basic oxygen furnace, to over 1600°C, the remaining impurities were burnt out of the iron and it turned into steel. The Guanans shovelled in the special blend of elements that would make the ordinary steel into a Cybertron-like alloy. There was a pained shriek from the other side of the basic furnace. A crowd of Guanans led a limping reptile out. He had a massive burn on his leg. As they were ladling the hot metal into the shaping machine, escaping gasses bubbled up and exploded, spraying hot metal in all directions. There were a few near misses. Starscream felt pity for the creature but there was nothing he could do. The shaper made rods and plates and anything else he could think of for his unending collection of projects.

Their ability to handle the heat that was in the smelter was unsurpassed, it hardly bothered them. They opened the windows and allowed the air to flow through. The air outside felt very cold when compared to the inside.

He was pleased with the results: all was going smoothly.

He stepped out the back door of the factory; there stood a large triangular structure. Surrounded by bamboo scaffolding, hundreds of lizards worked. The tink tink of many hammers echoed off the hills and buildings. Sparks of a few welders lit some of the dark shape. Unfinished as it was, the form was unmistakable; a ship. His ship. He smiled broadly.

The other times the Decepticon had worked on a ship he was with others of his own kind. They all had their strengths and working together they could finish the job in amazing speed. It was such a shame the ship was downed in the ocean but it still made a suitable site for building their undersea earth based headquarters. This ship, however, was being created by flesh creatures with the need to stop to sleep, or eat, or for other functions, so work was slow. He had them working three shifts. By night the ship was lit up by metal halide lights. The huge thousand watt lamps lit the area so it was almost as bright as day.

Judging by the amount of work that was left to do, he figured that there were several months left to go before his ultimate plan was to take place. The task to collect more energon was already underway. He had a massive stockpile in his headquarters. He rubbed his hands together 'Galvatron would not know who or what hit him! The demented re-incarnation of Megatron had no idea that his "old friend" was alive and well, re-born by the powers of Unicron.'

'Would he not get a surprise when he finds out the truth.' he gloated internally. This thought brought out a chuckle from Starscream. The Guanas looked at him. They seemed pleased that the god viewed their work with such cheer.

He decided to give the creatures a hand with their work. He shoed some of the Guanas aside that were trying to heft a huge metal plate into position he held it in place for them while he allowed several Guanas to clamber up him and start to weld or place rivets into position. He felt somewhat uncomfortable with them on him but they would not have done it if he had not suggested it. After they got it attached he moved on to help in other areas. He looked at their plans and suggested a few last minute changes. Things were looking very positive.

* * *

He leaned back against the wall of the building. He watched and observed. They worked so tirelessly to achieve his goals. He planned on taking only thirty of them to help him run the ship. None of them had space experience and none had flown any form of mechanical craft. He would be the one who would fly the ship.

They had built other buildings he had noticed. The shaman saw to it that they built institutions of learning to teach the new technologies. Starscream often went to teach them the finer points of flight. He went deep into thought of one of those first classes. When he started talking about the principals of flight.

"There are four forces that factor in flight. Thrust, lift, drag and weight. I'll start with Thrust. Thrust is the force that pushes me forwards so that lift can act upon my wings, my engines shoot, at high speed, hot exhaust from my tail. It is this that propels me forward through the air. Lift is caused when the air, caused by the thrust, flows over my wings. Some is deflected slowly down while the rest skims over the upper surface more quickly. This creates a high air pressure pocket under my wings, and a low pressure pocket above my wings, causing me to lift into the sky. Drag is the resistance I feel when I am being thrust forwards. Air is a fluid much like water, when I fly vortexes of churning air form from my wing tips. I am designed in a streamlined manner. This allows air to flow more smoothly across my body and wings reducing the vortexes and the effect on drag. Weight is the effect of the planets gravity on my body. Its the opposite of lift, it wants to keep me on the ground. Its the design of my wings and the power of the thrust of my engines, that counters the weight problem. I weight about 16.5 metric tonnes or half the weight of a fully grown male Wyvern, if you will. The Wyvern can't fly, as an adult, because its wings size is too small for its weight. As a fledgling this is entirely the opposite. It can fly and it flies well." He said his tone was informative.

"How is it then that you fly in your natural form?" asked a Guana. "If what you say is true, than you should not be able to fly, and you also occasionally hover while you are in bird

form, this too contradicts what you have told us."

Starscream thought for a moment. True this does contradict the laws of physics but there were far more complex systems of flight built into a Decepticons body, but he smiled as he replied "I am a god, I can do whatever I want."

The other Guanas looked at each other and laughed. Yes the Guana spawnlings were eager to learn the new teachings. They absorbed the information readily.

Even Guana hatch failing rates dropped. Better incubators were built that ensured that eggs hatched, and the populations had increased over the last two years. The Wyvern hunts had kept the populations at a manageable level before he had banned hunting, but with the sudden increase, the Guana population would soon take over like the humans did. It was going to be necessary to decree certain areas off limits to Guana intrusion. Parks or Nature reserves, and perhaps suggest birth control.

The Seeker icked at such thoughts. He was not an ecologist but his scientist side insisted that this needed to be done. The shaman walked by ordering the workers to halt for a break. Starscream straightened up and he called the shaman over to him. "Santor I need to show you something. It will allow you to better appreciate what I am going to do."

The shaman stepped forward; he wore a simple head band of glass beads and feathers and a long tan coloured robe. This gold emblem hung proudly on the front.

"Anything I can do. N'kosi."

"Good. I am going to transform. I want you to climb into my cockpit and I will show you the populations of Wyverns and your world." He transformed and opened his golden canopy.

The shaman was surprised. The great red and white being had never offered any one to fly with him. "Is there a price to pay for this offer?"

"Climb in and we shall discuss what I want you to do for me."

The shaman clambered into the cockpit. Starscream ordered him to buckle in. The red and white Seeker taxied away from the compound, fired his jets and took off. The shaman let out a yelp of surprise suddenly as he felt his stomach flip in surprise. He had never felt this heavy before.

"Don't defecate yourself." Said Starscream suddenly. "I would not be very pleased with you."

Down below leaving one of the schools, a young Guana female stopped, shielded her eyes from the sun and watched the flying god depart.

The shaman clamped his hands to the hand rests as the Seeker shot into the sky. Clouds rushed towards them as they flew fast into the heavens. They burst through a high cloud layer and the sky got darker and darker till they were in the blackness of space. Stars glimmered. Starscream levelled out and banked so the creature could look out the side of

the canopy without hindrance.

"Congratulations, Santor, you are now the first Guana in space." said Starscream dryly. "Look down at your world. I am showing you this because I cannot take you with me when I leave, regretfully. You have been," Starscream paused for a second, feeling uncomfortable about his next words. "A good friend to me and I want you to be the first to see your world as I have seen it. I hope to be back soon though. I will need thirty Guanas. I want the best in the class. They will join me on my voyage. I will give you a list of the types of skills that are required on this voyage. There will be no skimping either, I must have the best." Starscream's voice was insistent. "I am also showing you your world so you understand how fragile it is. The humans of the Earth world overran their planet and destroyed most of it. You must keep your populations in check. Also there are others like me out there, they, for whatever reason, might seek to come here and destroy you. Be prepared. I have given you the technologies that will help you. Your species is very bright, you can build upon this foundation I have placed at your feet." he said with a genuine tone of admiration.

The shaman could only marvel at the beauty of the planet as it hung like a brilliant jewel in space. He listened to the words of the Seeker intently.

Starscream banked towards the globe. "I am going to be entering the atmosphere. It will look pretty frightening to you. Not to worry, I've done this before. He entered, his angle corrected, he slipped through the sky. The canopy glowed from the flames of the sky as Santor felt the terrible pressure of many times his planet's gravity squeeze him into the seat.

Starscream uttered a weak "ooh" as he momentarily blacked out.

Then suddenly the flames abated and the view was clear. He saw the ground streaking towards him. Starscream used his wing breaks to slow his rapid decent down to a subsonic speed. They flew over streams, lakes, valleys and young mountains. Starscream flew just above the treetops. The shaman was speechless there were very few words he could use to describe what he was being entitled to see. The world from the point of view of a bird, of a god. The river looked like a bejewelled snake with glistening blue scales. He was in awe. His attention was brought back as Starscream spoke.

"Look down and you will see the largest herd of Wyverns that is left. One hundred individuals. That herd is mine. There are only one thousand individual Wyverns left on this world. There was a heck of a lot more when I first arrived. Its an effect from your improved hunting methods and is entirely my fault but the easier hunting has caused adults with young to be killed off, leaving the young without a provider. Those fledglings can't spit venom so they are unable to eat: they die. Again I must insist that they are not to be hunted. Their populations will rebound if care is taken and your hunting can resume. When that occurs then there will be seasons you can hunt. Seasons when they are not with young. You have your herds of domesticated animals, utilise them for your meat and clothing. When the populations of the Wyverns become too large in some areas, I, when I return, will see to it they are re-distributed." He said as they flew over herds. Heads of adult Wyvern whipped up and a few spat at Starscream, who kept himself flying just out of their reach. Primus only knows how he would move a thirty four metric tonne animal without getting killed, but if there is a will, there is a way.

"I am not usually big on this ecology sort of thing, but I do like your world and your people. If you wish the survival of your species you will do as I say or else your ambiguous prophecies of the past will be for the destruction of your species. Also, while you are at it, suggest to your people to try to control your population. If there are too many of you diseases and famine will strike, and if that does not take place then wars certainly will. I can speak from experience. I've been at war for millions of years. You really don't want your people to get that way. Its fairly pointless." Starscream's voice was without the usual screech, his scientist side had taken the literal pilots seat for this trip shoving the warrior aside to ick and moan in his head.

The shaman sat in silence as he listened to the flashing light on the panel in front of him.

"When we launch into space and go to Cybertron there is a remote possibility that I might not return with your people. As you well know my body is not immortal, my spark might be. As I had told you I've had a second chance. But..." He hesitated. He did not want to say that there was a strong possibility of him dying from his efforts, "I might not be able to get free if I get captured, for a long, long time."

"Then with you I shall send the best, almighty one." The shaman responded. "And I will pay heed to your words of wisdom. Our world is far too lovely to let it go to waste." Starscream was satisfied with the shaman's response. He banked again and turned to return to the shipyard.

They landed and the Shaman climbed out and quickly disappeared into a crowd of the lizards. Starscream transformed and sat down watching the workers slave away.

* * *

Nine months later: Mid spring, the end of the rainy season.

The sun was bright and the temperature was an uncommonly cool 25°C, as the shaman called together the population of the Guana people. His feathered head-dress was new and his cape made of the hide of the Wyvern that Starscream had slain many months before. Bright white teeth had been strung around his neck. His kilt and tunic were dyed in bright vegetable colours.

The other people were similarly dressed. All their clothes bright and fresh. Today was the day of judgement for them. Their tasks completed. Starscream stood off to the right. His body shining brilliantly in the sun. The Guana females took great pleasure in polishing him with a native plant wax. Starscream had revelled in the attention.

"I, Santor, present to you, Lord Starscream, your ship, The Blue Dragon." A loud cheer went up. The beat of primitive drums and the bellow of large seashells and the ship was unveiled. Starscream was impressed. The ship was perfect. It was not so large that it could not enter into planets atmospheres but it was not too small that he would find it crowded.

The ship was about four hundred meters long and around one hundred meters high and wide at the tail. It narrowed to about fifty meters at the point. It was triangular, similar to his early Cybertron shape. It was brilliant blue in colour. There were no insignia's that could

identify the ship as Decepticon built although its shape could be a tip off. That would be counter productive. It, however, had a name written in Guana font on the side which read The Blue Dragon.

Santor got the idea of the Blue Dragon from earth myths that Starscream had told him about: how the Wyvern reminded him of the ancient creatures he had once seen.

The ship had many small windows dotting the sides but the largest ones were up front. They were made of a special blend of glass and oxides that made them almost completely impervious to heat and cold, which was fortunate. Atmospheric re-entry would have heated the glass too rapidly and caused it to shatter thereby killing everyone on board as it plummeted to the ground.

The side hatch opened up and a group of Guanans waved. They tossed out a thick red carpet, their shell trumpets blasted their sound of triumph. It eerily reminded Starscream of his abortive coronation. He cringed inwardly at the thought. He wondered if it meant something foreboding. The group of Guanans led by Santor showed him into the new spacecraft.

Again he was taken aback. The handwork of the Guana people was astounding. They had plenty of time on their hands, so they went to town. This was the first time he had been allowed to enter the ship. They insisted that they would follow the plans but make it a place worthy of a god. They wanted some artistic freedom and Starscream had relented thinking that something here and a bit there. He did not realize that they were going to turn the entire ship into a work of Guana art.

Each piece was hand formed and polished. Knobs were intricate carvings. Door handles made of polished metals. Gems of various sizes and colours glittered from all manner of places. Normally he would not have thought much of such needless things but the Guana people went out on a limb. They lead him into the cockpit, the bridge of the ship.

He walked to the command centre and caressed the seat that was positioned at the console. It was made of a leather from one of the giant sea creatures that looked like plesiosaurs. The skin was iridescent. A feature, he understood, that took rare skill to preserve as those hides often became dull grey after the animals death. The size and shape of the chair was perfect to his specifications.

He sat down and rested his hands on the arms. He felt powerful. He looked to his left at helm control. He smiled as he dug his fingers into the soft leather of the arms. Oh, yes this was definitely a nice place to sit.

He looked forwards out the window. A Guana called his attention as he pressed a button and the window fogged and an image appeared on screen. It was a rear view image. It showed the smelter behind the ship and the crowds of people who waited happily outside. They managed to get the windows to be monitors as well. He was pleased with their skill at following orders and plans. He had wondered if they would get it right.

The bridge had all the latest computer components the creatures had managed to make. Many stations were located around the central command chair. Science stations, tactical stations etc. It was very functional as well as beautiful, an acceptable compromise.

The tour managed to coax him out of his command chair. They walked to a door in the wall of the bridge. There was a knobbed door and the Guanas asked him to open it. He pushed the door forwards and stepped in. It was a smaller room than the one he had in his headquarters but the function was the same. It was his living quarters. It contained all the comforts of home. A computer sat on a desk. A large resting couch against the wall was adorned with rich fabrics and plump pillows. The desk itself was covered in gold and platinum.

Again they choose the colours that best complimented him. Deep reds and black blues. They also had some rich materials that were gold and platinum shot. On the wall was painted the Decepticon insignia in a royal purple.

The chief or even the shaman did not go to this extent in richness or wealth but then again they valued other things that earth humans did not. Life and challenge were the two most valuable items and Starscream gave them a challenge.

The tour took him to another hallway where there were simpler quarters. Guana quarters. Although they were simple they were not Spartan. There were thirty rooms each with a lock panel that they could key in a personal code. They also had a galley and a recreation room. They had ensured that they also had all the comforts of home.

They showed Starscream the brig. A room with metal bars that could be charged with energon. It was big enough to hold a couple of Transformers or the entire compliment of Guana crew if need be. Yes that was to his approval. They even left the brig relatively undecorated.

The engine room was the next stop. The huge turbine reactors were ready to be fuelled with the massive supply of energon he had had the people hoard. It was necessary to take on a greater than needed supply in case they somehow got marooned somewhere else... 'Primus forbid!' The engine room was in the tail end of the great ship. It had huge vaulting ceilings where lights hung to illuminate the turbines. Metal catwalks hung overhead so the people could look into the energon feeds. The energon rooms were stacked full with millions of cubes. More energy then Megatron had ever acquired. 'Oh yes' he thought 'Galvatron was in for it.'

The Guana tour and Starscream returned to the throng. They waited in silence. Starscream nodded and smiled and the crowd erupted into an uproar. Starscream revelled in the experience. He looked over the crazed population as they leapt up and down. They were delighted that their god had approved of their hard work. Almost all of them had a turn in the construction of the ship.

That evening the party took place. Great platters of cooked meats and seafood were served. Baskets of fruit and vegetables lined tables and a large table was filled with energon goodies as well as a fine keg of filtered energon ale. After they had eaten, the Guanas partied.

Starscream had never seen the like. They started by eating and drinking. Their chatter was noisy. The music stepped up in tempo and a few of the reptiles would leap into the square in front of the dais. They would grab one another and spin and leap wildly to the music. Their voices would chant and sing as well. They had a great time. The sky slowly

darkened to night and it became very dark. The Guanas lit huge torches and posted them around the party area. Shortly after that the dancing and music got wilder. They shouted and pranced. Starscream even found his foot tapping in time to their primitive beat.

More food was brought out and the hoards stopped dancing and dug on in. They laughed as they ate. The best drink of the night was brought in, Marula. It was a very potent drink that they drank only at very special occasions. It packed a powerful punch and was slightly narcotic. The flavour was very sweet: it only wetted their appetites for more. After drinking that, the Guanas ended up in a super frenzied state. They gyrated and writhed in ecstasy. Slowly one by one the Guanas passed out from drink and fatigue. They lay in all sorts of places happy and full.

Starscream enjoyed the party although part of him was made sick to admit it. He was enjoying these creatures, but they were not like whiny humans. He suddenly felt like he was home. This was home! Almost nine years since he crashed in the swamp. The scientist in Starscream had re-awakened as the warrior ways got put aside. No, the thoughts of squishing the shaman and blasting the village where he had his shops set up was not in the plans anymore.

This was Starscream's world and he was king of it. This is what he wanted. He could still seek vengeance as it was his right. But here he was god. Let the Autobots and the Decepticons destroy themselves in a fruitless war. Starscream had already tasted death. That was not an enjoyable experience. Luckily for him his spark was spared, so he could get into all sorts of fun mischief. But being a ghost was lonely, and travelling through space for years was also lonely. Starscream looked to the sky. The bright blue star. Cybertron's star. Not at all far away with a good ship, was his own kind. He finished off his mug of ale then poured himself another...

He found himself getting fuzzy vision. He chugged back some more of the energon ale. He hiccupped. He looked at the mug as if he had never seen it before in his life, giggled and passed out. His face planted itself heavily on the table. No one noticed. Every one else was gone for the count.

Morning arrived. The sun shone through big, white, puffy clouds. A cool breeze awakened Starscream. The Guanas also awakened, their Marula drinks knocked most senseless. They were picking themselves off the ground and brushing themselves sheepishly of leaves or dirt. Most of the food on the table had been eaten. Everyone still looked happy although some were showing definite signs of hangovers. The little spawnlings ran around noisily, catching early morning flying insects as snacks. They leapt and darted. Insects, it seemed, were a favourite amongst the children. Santor explained it was because they were more insectivorous in the child state.

His head spun and his optics kept giving him double vision. He felt nauseated. Too much energon ale. It was an unusual energon formula that a Guana scientist had concocted it was supposed to have similar effects as the Marula drink. The hangover was incredible. He stood up and reeled backwards. His head pounded and he placed his hands to shield his optics from the bright morning sun as he gingerly walked to the stone encircled glade where his underground headquarters were hidden.

He had not ingested a lot of energon by mouth in a while. He had sips of high grade now

and again, but that did not leave him feeling like a Guardian robot had stepped on his head. He placed a hand on the altar stone and it slid open. He winced as the stone made a loud grinding noise. The hall was brilliant, almost too bright for his present condition. With a hand on the wall he slowly walked down.

There was loud chattering of voices. The Seeker looked around. Uniformed Guanas stood in groups looking over the last launch plans. He staggered as his head throbbed again. He let out a moan of displeasure and the Guanas stopped and looked at him. He waved at them in a gesture of I'm OK, get lost, go back to work.

Guanas were already there working away at satellite readings. Starscream had insisted on a uniform for those who were chosen to accompany him on his journey. The women sewed jump-suits with many pockets and made padded protective footwear so the Guanas did not hurt their toes. Thirty Guanas in total would join him on his jaunt to Cybertron.

He opened the door to his personal chamber. He looked at the familiar, comfortable surroundings. He would have to do something about his hangover. He sighed. Watch first rest later. He turned the computer into Galvatron's direction and listened in.

Very rarely did his name ever come up in conversation. When it did it was used in a form of insult or a bad joke. Cyclonus and Scourge were often the butt of jokes as they were unfortunate enough to be host to the ghost. Then the topic would turn to some other matters.

Rodimus Prime was a common topic. The fact that Cybertron was a thriving planet once more with Autobots returning from all over the galaxy. Even sometimes he would tune into the others when Galvatron was not around, Cyclonus and Scourge would talk about Galvatron's insanity. They thought he was not fit to lead anymore and his decisions were often bad. Unicron, it appeared, had placed a torture circuit in his head and at some point in time, it got permanently fused on driving the present Decepticon leader to lunacy.

Starscream flipped the switch to on and tuned in on Galvatron. Another battle had gone bad. Casualties were low, but they had lost Thrust. Starscream felt a pang of regret. Fewer and fewer of the Decepticons he knew were left alive. Thrust, Skywarp & Thundercracker all gone. Those that were still around had either forgotten him or didn't care either way. Starscream had been humiliated that day.

Other than the hunting trip he had done for the Guanas, he had not engaged in warfare in almost twenty years. He had studied most of the planet. Examined the large oceans and the seas and lakes. He had categorised animals and other creatures, rocks and plant life. For a warrior he was doing Autobot-like activities and this disgusted him.

'The activities of science. To further learning about other forms of life. It's not disgusting, it's needed.'

Starscream ignored the thought. Very soon he would be on his way home, hopefully to put ends right.

The Ship stood silhouetted against the setting sky; its huge triangular bulk filled the launch area. Lights were on in many of the windows and fuelling was almost complete. Supplies and foodstuffs were being loaded into the cargo bays and the last wagon loads of energon were brought in from Starscream's base. The final preparations were almost complete and all system checks were performed and finished. The Blue Dragon was ready for her first flight.

The Guanas were trying to finish their tasks efficiently yet quickly. There was going to be a huge going away party outside the launch area and no one wanted to miss it.

Starscream overlooked the removal of the energon from his home. He kept a small amount back for up keep. Santor stood beside him barking orders at the workers. He stepped towards his quarters, "Santor come along I need to speak with you in private." Starscream held the door open for the reptile and closed it quickly behind him. Starscream regarded the regal looking lizard for a moment. He stood before the Seeker clasping his hands behind his back standing proud.

"I want you to maintain my home for me," Said Starscream looking around the large room that had been his abode for the past seven years. He was going to leave it as it was. As soon as he manages to take over the Decepticons, he would return, and use this place as his personal retreat.

"Whatever you desire, M'lord."

"I want it ready for my return. It could be in a couple of weeks or even years. I hope, however, to be back in less than a year. If I can't make it back immediately I will send your people home. I will return soon thereafter."

"As you order, great one."

"Also, fuelling my ship has depleted my energon reserves. I would like you to have your people multiply their energon output. You are not building a ship any more so you can spare the labour." Starscream handed the lizard a slip of paper from his desk. "These are locations of prime energy sources. See to it your people locate them and tap them." The Guana nodded. The Seeker hesitantly handed the Guana another wad of papers. "These are ground to air weapons. Build them to defend yourselves against others like me. They are not for hunting." Starscream had thought long about handing the lizards plans for weapons that could easily take out a Transformer. He did not relish the idea of suddenly becoming a test subject for some radical group who would disagree with his plans and ideas. "And they are not to be used against me when I return."

The shaman looked at Starscream in surprise. Who on this world would think of that? He nodded in acquiescence.

"Well then shaman, we have festivities to attend to; mustn't keep the populace waiting."

* * *

Decoration for the launch party had started a few days before lift off date. Huge torches were erected through out the town. Tables were set up around the perimeter of the launch area. Huge kegs of Guana ale and Marula were rolled into fringes of the party area and a massive dais was built at end opposite the huge spacecraft. The morning of the party, animals were slaughtered and prepared for roasting over fires. Small electric motors where designed to turn the huge spits. Fruits from the jungles were freshly picked and grain foods were baked.

Many people from the more distant towns were still arriving. Primitive style nomadic tents were being set up in fields not far away. Chieftains from other towns chatted in groups; they had been accompanied by their shamans who had dispersed through out the crowd practicing their strange magic. A group danced around the great ship blessing it with all manner of strange things. Entering it and hanging odd objects on doorways and covering the command chair in gifts and offerings.

As soon as the sun set the torches were lit and the huge platters of food were brought to the tables. The kegs were breached and the ale flowed freely and copiously. The Marula kegs remained sealed until the hour grew late. Starscream sat, seated, on his Dais overlooking the crowd, his carafe of energon glowed brightly in the darkness. Fire light flickered all over the launch area and music began to play.

Guanas did love to party and socialize. They enjoyed working together in large groups as they were not solitary animals at all. The shamans were fairly reclusive but they interacted when they were called upon to banish bad spirits, to bless lands or dangerous hunts. Starscream pulled the glass stopper off the carafe and poured out a glowing glass of his energon. He sniffed at it suspiciously; the chemist kept deviating from his personal formula in an attempt to make it more pleasing. This seemed normal enough.

Santor arrived carrying a simple wooden staff. "Almighty Starscream, I wish to conduct the ceremony. May I proceed?"

"You may."

The Guana stepped up to the table and climbed on top in front of Starscream. He held his staff high and brought it down to thump on the solid wooden surface. The sound rang loud and clear across the square.

"People of Guandonnaland, today is the day we have all worked hard for- for tomorrow the great and powerful Lord Starscream, flies into the heavens with a selected few, to regain his place as the ruler of all the gods. May we thank him for the many gifts he has bestowed upon us and may our many prayers go out to him and our companions who are worthy enough to be chosen to ride with him on his conquest. For there is no greater gift than to fly with N'kosi and see our world as he sees it." The shamans voice carried across the crowd the people had fallen silent and they turned to view the shaman who stood in front of Starscream. He turned around to face Starscream but his voice still rang clear in the hot humid evening. "I present to you—your thirty crew members who shall help guide your ship," The shaman started to announce the names and the towns the Guanans were

from.

Starscream groaned inwardly, the formalities the boring speeches, introductions, life histories and the thank you's. He wished the shaman would get it over with. His attention was brought back to fore when the shaman was being confronted by Madba, The gluttonous chief of Atanole.

"My daughter will not be part of this—this voyage." said the chief looking at Starscream warily. "I will not allow her to fly with this god. Santor, choose your own daughter, send her with the almighty one, but he will not have my only offspring."

"Lord Madba, this is a great honour," Said the shaman soothingly.

"I will not permit her to go. This—god," he said snidely, "I don't believe that this god ever means to return. You will never see your family members again!" The large lizard boomed.

"You had months before to object why now?" The shaman inquired.

"Chief Madba! Hold your foul reptilian tongue," said Starscream harshly. "Santor, I must have the best, you must choose. I need thirty on that vessel," Said Starscream warningly. He gave the chief a baleful stare. He did not intend to take action against the chief, not tonight.

"Yes, M'lord, Teris of Atanole, my daughter, shall join you," The shaman continued calling out the names of the last six lizards as Starscream's mind returned to its wandering. Every so often he would mutter a word or a nod at the appropriate places and not soon enough the speeches were done and the eating commenced. Starscream was bored, he watched as the Guanans cheerfully gorged themselves on food and drink. He sighed silently and poured himself another glass of energon.

The music from several different bands kicked in and the launch area became a cacophony of primitive music. The Marula kegs were breached and the wildness really started. From the corner of his optics Starscream noticed three Guanans standing on a huge keg rolling across the square towards him. He looked over and noticed it was the chemist. Starscream stood up as the keg rolled next to his dais. The three Guanans leapt off.

"My lord," he said brightly with an eccentric sweeping bow, "I bring you the energon I promised you!"

Starscream had been dreading this energon. The chemist was a bit mad and it was he who came up with the energon ale that toasted Starscream at the unveiling party.

"This is cleaner than the last formula; however the chemical similarity to Marula will be striking. Even more so than my last attempt," said the chemist as he breached the keg. He motioned for Starscream to hold his glass under the spout and a brilliant blue wave of energon flowed out. Starscream was startled by the colour. Energon by nature was pink, lavender or occasionally red. How had he managed to design a blue energon?

Starscream held it to the firelight. It was not opaque, semi-translucent and very iridescent.

It cast a blue glow over his hand. He raised it to his olfactory sensors, it smelled very much like energon but it had uniqueness. He shot a glance at the chemist and hoped he was not about to be poisoned. It would not do for their god to die by accidentally getting poisoned. Some energon just did not work well with different types of mechanoids, which was why he had insisted on his formula. He gingerly lifted the glass to his lips and allowed some of the blue fluid to flow across his taste receptors. He did a quick chemical analysis of it. Safe enough. He sipped a bit more. This stuff was pretty nice. He felt himself getting a surge of energy; his mind started to swirl with pleasant thoughts, bright colours. He nodded to the chemist with a smile. "Good stuff." Starscream's analysis suddenly warned him. Trace elements of rare, slightly unstable energy making the drink, for lack of a better term, mildly narcotic. But at this point Starscream could not care he was having a very good time.

The following morning, he awoke in his chamber in the underground headquarters. He could not remember the rest of party, what he had done or even more alarmingly, how he had returned here. He felt mildly distressed as his head hammered; it was obvious he had too much of whatever it was he had consumed.

He sat up from his couch, pushed his feet into the floor and stood up. He swayed for a moment. This was no ordinary morning after drinking excessive energon feeling. He did not feel over charged. He stepped towards the wall hanging that hid his personal armoury. He needed to take his weapons with him. He rifles and a few of the small laser pistols he had created for his thirty reptilian shipmates. The Seeker slipped the wall hanging aside and pushed his hand against the door to afford him balance. He pulled the heavy vault door open. He stepped in and gathered the pistols into a metal box. He collected his Null rifles, off the wall, and hooked them to his arms, looked one last time at the slingshot. He was sorely tempted to take it with him. 'No,' he thought, 'not this time.' he turned slowly and closed the door behind him.

* * *

The Shaman ordered the crowd back from the edges of the Launch area; he spoke quickly in his natural language. "We must not be so close; Lord Starscream says it will cook us." He used his wooden staff to guide the people further away from ship.

The crowd resignedly backed away slowly step by step, they were chattering excitedly. A cheer went up as they watched the chosen crew board followed by Starscream who stood for a moment at the door; he waved to them and sealed the hatch behind him.

The voices of the Guanans became loud as they waited in anticipation for the launch. They were not sure of what to expect. They had seen the great one fly, but this craft was of an altogether different design to him. As Wyverns can only fly as babies, some of the people could not quite see how this large oddly shaped bird would ever manage get itself off the ground. They watched getting restless, chattering incessantly. There was a very long moment of inactivity before the ground started to vibrate with a very low rumble; everyone took another step away from The Blue Dragon. The vibration turned into a roar as jets of smoke and flame formed underneath the great hulk. The ground shook as the rumble became deafening, many of the lizards held their hands over their ear holes, as the ship started to rise into the air slowly at first. A blast of hot air issued forth from under the ship along with huge gouts of smoke billowing to the outer edges of the square; shrouding the

blue ship in an almost impenetrable white haze as thick as fog. An acrid odour filled the air as the smoke passed over the gathering many of the Guanas coughed.

Santor was taken in by the marvel of it all. Starscream had told him of what to expect but it had not prepared him for the reality of it. He took a step forward still looking to the ship as it rose above the jungles tree tops. He raised his staff above his head and chanted in a loud booming voice, "Bayeti N'kosi – Hail great one."

The others took up the chant, their voices being drowned out by the sound of the engines. The deafening rumble changed to a sound that resembled constant thunder, as the thrusters fired from the wide tail end of the craft. The ship suddenly picked up speed and shot into the sky with a boom so loud that it made Starscream's supersonic exits sound like a mild pop. The space craft dwindled rapidly till there nothing but a dark speck and white smokey contrail that faded into the deep blue of the heavens taking with them Starscream and their comrades.

The Mist from the lift off still hung in the humid air. The world was unnaturally silent. Wild creatures slowly started to make sound, insects started to creak and the Guanas slowly started to whisper to one another. "What now," They asked of one another they were so used to Starscream's presence that suddenly being without him made them feel uneasy.

Santor felt a pang or regret in seeing the Decepticon leave, he looked over at the chief who alone was smiling broadly, sharp white teeth exposed. He alone was pleased that Starscream was gone. The shaman turned to face the populace.

"Don't despair! For the great one shall return to us, we must prepare for his return immediately. He has left us many tasks unfilled." His voice carried across the crowd.

"Don't bother, the Lord Starscream-" He made the name an insult, "Won't be coming back! And you will never see your friends and children again!" Shouted the chief.

"Stop noble father." shouted a soft voice from behind Santor. "If it was not for your blasphemous ways, I would be up on that ship." her voice tinged with challenge. "I would be flying with N'kosi. You have brought great shame upon our family and I can not bear this shame anymore."

"Natanja, you've been corrupted," Said the chief firmly.

The female lizard held up a spear and pointed the tip at the chest of the chief. "No, noble lord Madba—you have been corrupted by your greed for power, abdicate or face the spear. By the traditions of our forefathers and mothers, I am of age. I can issue the challenge and if I had gone on that ship I would not have been here to challenge your leadership," her voice was even, her tone was authoritative.

Madba looked from his spear wielding daughter to the Shaman and back to the rest of the crowd. He knew he would not stand a chance against his daughter; she was lithe and nimble with the spear occasionally hunting the Wyvern with the men folk. He bowed hesitantly to his daughter. "Yes, Lady Natanja, chief of Atanole. The old chief turned and quietly walked away to the town leaving her and the shaman to make plans.

Santor looked up into the sky again at the dissipating vapour trail. "May you find your glory," he whispered to himself.

* * *

Every one had gathered at the ship's launch area, the tables and dais from the previous night's party were removed leaving the area cleared for take off. Starscream told Santor to ensure everyone was well back from the edges of the square. There was cheering as the chosen thirty boarded. Starscream stood watching until the last one had entered. He waved out the hatch and pulled it shut. Air hissed as it sealed. He cheerfully barked a few quick orders telling every one to take their positions. He strode proudly to the bridge where he would take his ships command and pilot it off the planet. He looked at his seat. It was covered in the oddest assortment of things. He ordered the objects to be removed to his chambers where he would enjoy them in private. He hoped silently there would be a drawer big enough to put them in.

Everyone was belted in and Starscream pressed the launch button. The Seeker let out a whoop of joy as the ship lifted from the surface of the planet. He looked at the other people in the room and watched as their eyes widened in the rare fear as the ship shook free of the gravity of Guandonnaland. Starscream sat in his command chair fearless, proud and smiling fiercely.

The ground receded rapidly. Lakes and oceans shrank. The darkness of outer space enveloped them. Starscream signaled for the Guanas to unlatch themselves and they looked surprised as they floated gently from their seats. Laughing, he flicked the switch and Guandonnaland normal gravity turned on. The Guanas tumbled to the ground muttering curses under their breath, realizing the giant Decepticon had a laugh at their expense.

He watched as the people gathered to their stations and he wandered throughout the ship to ensure everyone was working, everything was operational. He informed them that he would seek their reports after their dinner, every day and only then; as well as not to bother him unless it was an emergency. With that done he returned to the bridge.

The Guana people worked at their stations, chattering quietly amongst themselves as Starscream receded into his personal chambers. They were quite used to his silence. He spoke rarely, but he laughed often. Sometimes his laugh had a frightening quality to it or even a frightened quaver; very rarely did it have a true feeling of happiness. Sometimes it was a bone chilling maniacal laugh. Whatever his laugh was, it had become forced and eerie.

They knew they were hunting a false god, one who had somehow hurt their master in some way. They had heard a rumour that he had once died and was reborn. They knew the shaman knew a lot about the one named Starscream. This is perhaps why Starscream had not chosen him to join the hunt. There was also a very quiet rumour that Starscream was a false god, started by the chief Madba. Most chose not to voice this as even if it turned out he was not a god, he could kill them by simply crushing them to death. Even if he were to turn out as a false god he had given them great gifts.

On a tactical station, one Guana female stood. She was watching the early warning

scanner searching for anything that might hamper the movement of the Blue Dragon. She was very young, barely out of her juvenile colours. Her skin was bright and her face was just showing the blue green markings of a mature female.

Her eyes glittered as she watched the Decepticon enter his chamber. She often wondered what he did in his private quarters for such long periods of time. Back on the planet, he used to join them in their daily lives, speak words of encouragement and sometimes bring them back prey he had hunted as payment for their good services.

As a god he seemed benevolent, kind and wishing the best for his subjects. She knew that this had not always been the case. She had seen him that day after he had hunted the Wyvern. It looked as though he was going to kill the chief, his eyes were filled with evil, hatred, malice and loathing. She had seen that look again, a few days earlier when they had entered space and he only set the gravity after they floated free of their restraints and the day before the launch when the chief challenged the crew roster. It appeared part of him hated the Guanas.

The shaman had told her that the one named Starscream, was one of many gods. She would know this: Santor was her father. The shaman lived alone but it did not prevent him from having relationships with the women of his village if they sought him out. It was just as well she did a good job at her courses; her grade was second only to the chief's daughter. She would make Santor proud. She was barely twelve seasons old when the god came to their village. She met with her father and they spoke about the new god. As Santor's oldest daughter she learned the methods of his strange Shamanistic ways. One day she was to succeed him when he grew too old.

But when the chief refused to let his daughter join the team at the last minute, Santor had to relent and allow her to join. Not that she did not mind, it was an honour, but she had hoped to start learning more of the shamanistic traditions.

Teris blinked her eyes at the door that the Seeker had walked through. She stood up and looked at its ornate surface. Two intertwined Wyverns snaked across the surface their eyes set in sapphires and emeralds. They breathed out tongues of gold flame filigree. They wove themselves around the door. They were mesmerizing as she tried to trace their paths.

Wondering why the god seemed far more stressed than he was earlier in the week. He was delighted in the successful launching of The Blue Dragon. Then suddenly he became reclusive and withdrew from the other crew, sending them away when he was working on his schematics and personal plans. She wondered if once in a while she detected fear in his eyes.

She plucked a pencil from her chest pocket and wrote down a few lines that appeared at her stations screen. There was an asteroid field that they had to go through and by the size of some of the rocks she feared they might do damage.

She had a lot to thank this distant god for. He had taught her people technology. How to create better hunting weapons that took prey down at a distance enabling many more to come home to enjoy the meal after a hunt. She stopped making notes and twirled her pencil, then drew a doodle on the corner of her sheet.

Was he really a god? Santor had mentioned to her that he was very, very old; older than many of the rocks on her world. Santor had mentioned that the god had been to many worlds and existed on one far away planet named Earth. He had pointed out a dim yellow star in the Axe constellation that was Sol, and the blue star that was the one the god's world of Cybertron was orbiting.

But something was eating him. Something very dangerous disturbed Starscream. He was good at trying to shield his thoughts and emotions but every so often his eyes would flash when something was seriously bothering him and his eyes would glow a brighter red for longer times. And sometimes, his attempts at shielding only made his emotions more readable. He was bothered. Something internal was driving him to the brink.

She stopped. She looked in surprise. She was standing outside the god's door. She looked around and noticed the other Guanas were not watching her. They were busy with computations and their own tasks. Her hand reached for the door handle. She had very little control. Her mind raced as she twisted it and the door silently unlatched. She opened the great door a bit and shimmied through. Holding her breath she stood still.

There he sat with his back to her looking silently into the screen. One elbow rested on the desk propping his head, while the other hand clattered at the keypad. The monitor pictured another god, smooth and rounded with a bright orange growth on his arm. The image rotated.

There was a sound that came from the speakers at the edge. It was a different voice to Starscream but an identical language as his. She could not speak the language of the god. She had begged Santor to give up its secrets. The voice sounded sinister. She focused at the reflection in the monitor and saw that Starscream's eyes were glowing flame red.

The door clicked behind her. She had forgotten to hold the door and close it quietly behind her. She froze and held her breath again. Her hide darkened a notch when she realized that N'kosi had heard. His head lifted. With a clack the screen went blank and all other sound ceased. He slowly swiveled his chair around and his face wore an irritated expression.

Teris had reached for the handle, but the latch was locked. She looked into his eyes. For a moment they flashed and then returned to their usual dim glow. He looked straight at her for a long moment. She could see a number of mixed emotions chase across his mouth. His mouth opened then closed. He was formulating something to say. Oddly one emotion that remained on his face was loneliness. It was in the eyes.

In her observations of him in the past something had told her that he might have actually been a lesser god or an outcast or someone being punished and what he was truly going to do is take out the higher god. This was quite the norm in Ancient Guana myths and even sometimes in her village leadership was challenged by a lesser Noble. For a shaman the position was most secure. Shamans were often thought insane.

She backed against the wall in fear as she saw that malice replaced the sad look. Starscream raised his arm and aimed his weapon at her. She gulped.

* * *

He had swiveled in his chair to face the intruding Guana. He was angry. He judged by her colours that she was very young, but that did not warrant her the right to walk into his personal chambers whenever she felt like it.

He looked closely at her and thought she looked like the Guana child that had often accompanied the shaman in his off hours. Teris, she was the one who replaced Madba's daughter the night before they left. Therefore she might know more than she should know. The options were quite simple. Make an example of her so that no other Guanas would consider bothering him in his off hours. After all, he was on his own ship and not back on the planet where hundreds of thousands of the little flesh creatures could overwhelm him. He could always claim that some unforeseen accident happened. He watched as she reached back for the door.

He tapped a button that latched the door. He waited, enjoying her discomfort. He thought of something to say but quelled it. It was much too un-god like. He watched her for a few minutes feeling frustration and loneliness but his decision was made. The image of an angered god would suffice. He raised his weapon and held it not far from her green scaly head.

"What is it that you want that you find it necessary to disturb my contemplation?" Starscream asked threateningly in Guana.

Teris quivered. She knew he would see through any lie she made. "I got.... Um... lost," she replied attempting to regain her composure.

"LOST?! You got lost in this little ship?!" He threw his head back and laughed. It was shrill and full of disbelief. "Do you take me for a fool?" Starscream's voice was angered. "And how long were you lost in here? Spying on me?" His voice sneered. He was angry that the creature had been in there in the first place. He was angered even more that she was lying. He could get satisfaction from pulping her little head in but he wanted to wait to see if she could come up with a decent answer first.

'Temper, temper Starscream,' Came a thought. 'Not necessary.'

"Errr no. Not spying N'kosi. I was taking notes and saw something interesting I was going to bring them to you later." she hesitated and handed Starscream the notepad. The paper resembled an earth postage stamp in his hand. 'The computer noticed there was a huge asteroid field over ten million km from here.'

Starscream looked at the paper. He had to magnify the writing so he could actually read it. The information there was worthless so he crumpled it. "It does not matter. The shield of this craft should hold up and break anything that is threatening to our safety." He sighed heavily as he tossed the paper into a basket in the corner.

He turned back to the young lizardwoman. His voice became thin. "Yet you did not knock or ask permission to enter my private quarters. Do you know what the penalty is for such intrusions?" He waited for her to answer.

Teris did not supply one. He knew his words had sunk in and his vocal tone implied enough.

He looked at her and his eyes flashed and maintained its violent red glow. Without physically saying another word, she knew he was thinking of destroying her. "But I see that I don't really need to punish you. You realize you are in more trouble than you had initially anticipated. Yet you still show little fear of what will befall you; so very unhuman of you. Earth people would have fallen into a quivering heap of fear begging to be spared." He laughed shrilly again. "You have guts and I really don't want them all over my chamber." He lowered his weapon.

In a more humane tone, "Why are you really here?" he asked. "It's not to warn me of asteroids. You know, as well as anyone does, the ship can take care of it. It's obvious you have seen the images on my screen as I could see you reflected in it as well." He pointed to black screen.

Teris lowered her head in shame, somewhat relieved that Starscream had spared her. "I was concerned about you. You've seemed tense in the past months. You were even starting distance yourself from Santor." She watched as the huge Seeker sat in silence thinking.

"You are concerned for me?" he said disbelievingly. A haunted look crossed his face. "I am partly worried that this trip would possibly cause harm to your species," Starscream lied. Half of him did not care if the planet blew up just this second. "If I were to fail in my mission the false god would come to destroy all that I accomplished on your world." This part could be true. He had taught the creatures in the Decepticon way and they trusted him. They showed less fear than most of the bravest Decepticons. "I was merely getting used to the feeling of solitude once again," Starscream whispered.

He thought a moment about telling her the story of his victory, his moment of achievement of becoming the leader of the Decepticons. He thought it might be a good idea to tell her and keep her here as a prisoner of sorts rather than having her spread dissension amongst the crew.

He had threatened her life. He would be in more trouble if the other Guanans knew this. "I will tell you more than you bargained for but there is one price you have to pay." His voice lowered to a hiss. "You will remain with me till I say otherwise."

Teris nodded. She had figured that much would happen.

"I will then tell you the story that I told Santor." Starscream stood up and walked to the couch along the back wall and eased himself down his hands under his head, staring at the ceiling. "You had best sit down, this might take a while."

* * *

He began to recount his past embellishing it here and there, changing some of the facts and making the Autobots sound rather bad.

"I was created Eons ago; time almost too long to count, too long for you to comprehend.

My body was brought before Vector Sigma and given a spark, my soul, my life and some of my personality. In my younger years I learned the sciences; biology, geology, metallurgy et cetera and with my once trusted friend, Skyfire, I visited many new worlds to learn about the life and resources there that the Decepticons could use to win the war against the Autobots. The battles between us and the 'Evil' Autobots had waged on for millions of your years," he paused looking at her, thinking about how he was going to word his next half truth.

"Skyfire and I even came to your home world, but intelligent life at that time was not apparent. I was very new to science and travel to this world was one of my first. On one similar mission I flew with Skyfire but lost him on a primitive world called Earth. That was my last science related mission."

Starscream started to twist the facts a round. The war between the Autobots and the Decepticons started sometime after he had lost Skyfire.

He looked at the woman in front of him. Her eyes were widened as she listened intently so he continued. "With no luck in finding him, I decided that I would join the War academy. I thought there would be something more useful than moping around dwelling in my own grief," said the Seeker sadly.

"There at the War Academy, I learned the art of warfare. I was very good at what I did almost forgetting the higher science. Then as millions of years had passed, I had progressed through the ranks of the Decepticons until we pursued the Autobots into space and followed them to Earth. I was, at that time, second in command of the Decepticons. For years we battled. The two forces were too equally matched and the war stagnated. We surprised the Autobots on a ship returning from Cybertron and the great battle at Autobot city brought us the Decepticons victory. It was there that Optimus Prime, leader of the Autobots, was destroyed and Megatron, leader of the Decepticons, died." he completely omitted the fact that it was he who killed Megatron, and murdered his wing mates, leaving them for dead in space.

He paused for a moment wondering how much he should really be telling this creature. "I became, by the right of succession, the leader of my kind. All others were lesser," he said. "But as I was officially being made supreme ruler in a complex ritual I was interrupted, and before I could find out who it was, I was floating in oblivion." He paused.

The Guana realized how special this was; when one of her kind died they never, ever came back.

"Somehow my spark survived." he continued. "I soon discovered that I could travel anywhere in any time in the universe with a simple thought. I could travel to the start of time or see the end of everything, but loneliness drove me to seek out what the Decepticons had so blithely taken from me." His optics glowed red with the anger at the memory of it all.

"I lured the Decepticon who was partially responsible for my demise into a trap. That was when I discovered that I could take over another's body. So, in the body of Cyclonus, I sought to destroy the one who destroyed me." He sighed. But a wry smile tugged at his mouth.

"Unfortunately plans, as they often do, went awry and I was forced to borrow another body. With that I went to Unicron. He had me do a couple of tasks and when they were almost completed he saw it fit to give me life again, but an accident occurred and he was destroyed and I was sent spiraling from Cybertron. It was from that point I came to your world." Starscream grimaced at the memory.

He knew full well who was responsible for the explosion that sent him on his path but he lied anyway. "Galvatron was behind the attack that destroyed Unicron and almost destroyed me a second time. For this he must be punished for his betrayal." The vehemence of his words stung Teris.

"Then you are not a god? You died, so your body is then mortal." said Teris in a matter of fact tone.

Starscream rolled over on his couch, the barrel of his weapon within a couple centimetres from her snout. "If you ever speak such again, there won't be much of you left to stain a toothpick! I am your god and that's all you truly need to know!" Starscream screamed his threat and again lowered his gun.

"All that matters now is that I destroy Galvatron before he realizes that I am alive and not a ghost. He has many weaknesses that have occurred. Since I last tried to slay him in another's body he has gone completely mental. His strength lies in Cyclonus and Scourge. If I can eliminate those two I can easily pick off Galvatron. Also I know his henchmen. I know how they think as I had once possessed their bodies and therefore their minds." Starscream tapped the side of his head with a bright blue finger.

'And you know who they are—I think you have said too much...' said the scientist in his head 'I think it might be best if you give her a mark of your favour so the others will leave her alone...' it was a cautious thought.

He looked at the lizard woman. She stood up proud and strong and very defiant "Don't be afraid though, I won't kill you, instead...."

He sat up and reached for a drawer in the table. Opening it he pulled out a gold pendant on a leather thong, the Decepticon emblem. "I will give this to you as a token of my favour." He dangled the insignia from his finger and offered it to the Guana. She reached out and took it.

She looked into the gold and rubbed it appreciatively. She looked up as Starscream spoke again. "And you had better hold your tongue lizard lady or I will see that it is cut out. You are dismissed," he said curtly.

Starscream punched a button on his table and the door unlatched. "If you so much as utter a syllable of what was said tonight you will be shoved out of the airlock."

Teris turned, tail swishing. She walked out the large door. All Guana eyes watched her exit the chamber. Obviously she was missed. One of her personal questions was answered. Starscream was not really a god but a creature that could live a very, very long time, if not forever but could still die. This was in a weird way comforting. And what was obvious his immense fear of the one called Galvatron.

'You are being hostile Starscream,' the thought returned.

"She was being intrusive," replied Starscream curtly.

'You did not have to threaten her,' his thought admonished.

"Who is in control here? It's my life." he retorted.

'Perhaps, I see you have not learned anything yet,' came an internal sigh.

"WHAT the hell is that supposed to mean?"

'Time will tell if you have alienated her or not. She might be a valuable ally,' the thought faded.

"Her? That's a riot."

But Starscream was left to wonder about what he had said and done. He lay and looked at the fabrics that hung at the wall and fell into a doze.

* * *

Memories played themselves across his mind again while he rested. They drew him back to the second day before his death.

"Did you find them?" Starscream asked of Astrotrain as the triple changer returned from his search in space.

"There was nothing left of any of them." said Astrotrain sadly. "A feeler from an Insecticon here, a wing tip there but nothing more than that."

Starscream felt miserable inside. Tossing Megatron out of Astrotrain the other day was one thing. Having to ditch his wing men was another. The Insecticons he could not care any less about. Thundercracker and Skywarp were now gone: Dead. Grief fought to break itself from deep inside of him.

"Nothing?" his voice sounded choked. "What of Megatron?"

"There was nothing left of him either."

"Explain to me the meaning of nothing! Did you see his body or not?" his voice half shrieked. He was very worried. This would be the last straw if Megatron came back.

"There was nothing left of any of them save bits and debris. It looks like they might have been atomized," Astrotrain placed his hand on Starscream's shoulder. "I'm sorry, but if you wanted them to live, you should have not had them ejected. I could have handled their weight. You know it was only a ruse, just to ditch Megatron like we had planned. Megs is gone, you are now the leader, Starscream; you have achieved your life's ambition. Enjoy it." Astrotrain smiled. "And I am going to enjoy being your second in command."

Starscream smiled weakly still feeling unnerved. "You're sure Megatron is dead? We don't exactly want any nasty surprises." He thought about the time that he had made the two Seekers swear to secrecy when they had inadvertently come across the conspiracy in his personal datapad some years back. Thundercracker had assured him that they would keep their secret, and his repayment for them to keep his secret held: pitching them overboard. He felt sick inside.

"I am sure of it; however why on Cybertron do you want this whole coronation thing. The others have agreed to your leadership claim."

"It's only to make the change more secure in their minds. I now rule the show. We shall win this war. The Autobots are now weak without their leader. Now help me with this," Said Starscream as he attempted to heft the cape to his shoulders. Astrotrain stepped around him and carefully set the regal looking clips over his shoulders and arranged the cape around the red and white Seeker. He placed the jeweled crown upon his head. A Custom fit. The Constructicons had worked hard making this beauty on such short notice. He looked at himself reflected in the mirror, posing to look at himself from various angles.

Astrotrain stood off the side shaking his head at Starscream's antics. The red Seeker always had fancied himself as the most handsome of the lot. His colours were bright and optic catchy. He prided himself on his choice in ally. Again he felt guilty. What had Thundercracker and Skywarp thought when he authorized their deaths? Betrayal. That's what it was. "Then do me a favour. Set up some markers for them in the crypt they must not go into death forgotten. I owe them that much at least." Starscream said his voice low fighting off the sob what wanted to creep out.

"Not to worry Starscream, Megatron is not coming back," Said Astrotrain reassuringly as he turned from the gaudily clad seeker.

He waited until Astrotrain was out of earshot before he turned with a scream of frustration and put an azure fist through the mirror. At the same time, a sob forced its way out of his throat. He suppressed the emotions down. He must forget about the past because he now had the coronation and his future to think of...

* * *

Starscream awoke with a start. He rubbed his head of the memory. As a guilty feeling surged up inside he looked to the stars darting past his portal. "I'm sorry Thundercracker and Skywarp," he whispered. His nightmares and flashbacks had become more frequent in recent weeks. He could hardly rest an entire recharge cycle without being awoken from it. The Scientist inside had assured him that he was not pulling the images out.

The computer flashed and a message written in Lizard hieroglyphics opened up. Starscream read the message. Power drain in the starboard reactor. He sighed and got up off the couch to wander to the engine room. There was a bit of a problem with an energon feed. He had to help divert power and seal off the leak. It reduced their travel by about a day. The engines had kicked in at full power and the ship shot forwards.

Starscream was then to the bridge. He left the engine room in annoyance. There was an obstacle ahead. Some of the Guanias looked uncomfortable as the first of the large rocks

came at them. Starscream stood over the young helmsman, watching him and helping him verbally as he maneuvered the ship through the asteroid field. Starscream's fingers twitched as he fought off the urge to take helm control. It was the same asteroid field that Teris had informed him about. The ship was working as it should deflecting rocks or destroying huge asteroids that proved to be a possible threat. Their shields held well as they cut a wide swath through the rocky space. About an hour later they had cleared the danger zone.

He requested that the course to be altered so it came within one hundred million kilometres from Charr. The Guana at the helm made the appropriate course adjustment and the ship changed trajectory.

He watched the stars speed past as they made rapidly for the system that contained Charr. The trek that had taken them so far several days took Starscream nearly six years to cover at a very very conservative rate.

The Guanans checked in to give him their status and information on the progress as Starscream made his own plan on his computer. He had ordered that Teris move into the chamber with him, her sleeping area was adjacent to his own. A place where he could keep an eye on her and a place where she could sleep at night and not let slip his words to her in her sleep. The others watched as she moved her few belongings into the chamber realizing the God had chosen his voice.

Teris' had no privacy, nor did Starscream. She could look into the Seekers chamber without any obstruction. She figured this was because he had no longer anything to hide from her, but she still thought he had not been entirely truthful. She also figured this was so Starscream could watch her when she was not working. Learning the shamanistic ways meant she needed to learn to be observant; so Starscream she observed.

She lay curled up under a thin blanket watching him as he lay on the couch. He did this often and for long periods of time. Although it appeared he did not need to sleep it seemed he was contemplating or conserving his energy. He lay with his arms under his head staring at the ceiling, his eyes flashing as his thoughts changed. Sometimes he would speak very softly to himself.

There were a few times when she thought he was really asleep and dreaming. Every so often he would cry out then awaken. Darting a glance at her "sleeping" in the corner he would then get up and resume some thing on his computer. The closer to Charr they got the more nervous he became.

They were still a day away from Charr when Starscream announced that he was going to be leaving the ship for short time.

He looked at the helmsman. "You're flying has been very good, you pick up things fast and I am sure you can fly this vessel without too much trouble. Just avoid those two asteroid fields on your way to Cybertron. I'll meet you on the way there." The helmsman merely nodded.

He looked around at the people on the bridge. "I will return in about a day perhaps two. If I am not there when you reach Cybertron you are to transmit a distress code." Starscream pointed to a button on the console. It's automated, someone should answer. PLEASE DO NOT speak my name. It could mean instant death for all of you—if it's a Decepticon who answers the hail." He was more worried that he would be intercepted if the Decepticons learned of his whereabouts. He knew that their language would be a problem for anyone if they called the mayday themselves. He had Santor record the messages, as his own voice was as much a tip off as his name would be. His name in Guana was the same as in English. He found it very interesting that they were referring him more and more as N'kosi: Great one.

The Seeker had charged well, and carried with him some extra highly condensed energon, the trip was lengthy and he did not wish to be over tired when he arrived. But a few million kilometres was nothing. It would take him about eight hours to fly to Charr. His mind was set on his plans he was ready to go. He looked around the bridge at the lizards who resumed their work.

He hoped that Decepticons would not intercept the Blue Dragon. He hoped that it would look like a simple freighter or cargo ship on the outside, something of no value. But if they were boarded they would notice that things were not quite what they seemed. He glanced at the faction symbols that were placed in almost every nook and cranny. He knew the Decepticons were hurting. Their leader was too ineffectual to lead them to a useable, viable power source that would help them overthrow their nemesis. And The Blue Dragon was loaded with viable energon.

Teris was thoughtfully chewing on a pencil. Sitting at her station, he pointed at her, "You're coming with me. Get yourself ready and meet me at the cargo bay in ten minutes." Teris darted from her terminal and disappeared. The other Guanans were not surprised at his choice in companion. He had once chosen Santor to fly with him.

The Seeker strode down the hall to an elevator that took him to a lower deck. The two cargo bays and storage areas were on this level, as well as the recreation room and further on towards the nose of the ship the brig. He came to a sealed door and coded in a personal password. The door opened and he stepped into a small storage room. Here were a few metal containers and things holding his belongings, he did not take much with him when he left Guandonnaland for he figured he would be back soon enough. He opened a box containing small laser weapons. He was still uncomfortable in handling the creatures weapons that were powerful enough to stun or damage a Transformer but he took one small pistol out. If Teris was going to join him on Charr he had better let go of his

reservations and hand her something that she can defend herself with.

As he left the room he found Teris walking through the hall, her tail swayed from side to side as she moved. Starscream called out to her and she stopped. Her amber eyes glistened in the light. He knelt down so he was a bit lower and held his hand out revealing the pistol.

"Take this; Charr could be a tricky place."

The lizard reached out and took the weapon. She looked it over for a moment and back at Starscream.

"You operate it much like a cross bow; only you don't need to load an arrow into the string. It's a bit like my own weapon just smaller and not as powerful. Pull the trigger," he pointed to a curved button in front of the stock, "and it fires." he pointed out a small knob on the back of it. "These are settings, stun, normal and lethal. Leave it set on lethal, it won't kill a creature like me but it will hurt them for sure. It would easily kill one of your people on that setting or pulp a human."

Teris looked at him in surprise. "You haven't...?" she was worried that he might have taken a few Guana test subjects.

Starscream laughed softly, "No, I am familiar enough with your species to know what you can handle with out testing. Your people are naturally very rugged and tough. Humans, on the other hand, are very soft and they do die easily," his tone became sinister as the sentence ended.

He beckoned her to follow him into the cargo bay where he transformed. He told her to climb in much as he had to Santor. She hesitated before she climbed in. She was uneasy; for once she did not quite trust him. She hefted a leg into the cockpit and nestled herself in. Her tail was slightly cramped. The amber canopy closed over her head and she was sealed in. She thought it strange to be sitting inside the god.

"Open the cargo bay doors." He said over the radio to the lizards on the bridge.

"Aye, N'kosi." came the quick response.

The small cargo bay door was slowly opened, air hissed out into space and the stars could be seen shooting past at high speed. When the doors were fully retracted, the red and white jet blasted out. He watched as the ship and the Guanas dwindled into the distance. He would have felt entirely alone if he did not have the passenger with him. However, they flew for a couple of hours through deep space in complete silence. Neither Starscream nor Teris made any attempt to speak. Teris was too afraid to speak to the god. It felt almost like he had eaten her. Starscream had not said a thing as he was privately contemplating his plans. Only the whir of his jets could be heard.

But the stillness was broken, "You fear me?" the Decepticon Seeker asked suddenly as he flew through the black void of space. He felt her hands grip the armrests of the seat. He knew that she was uncomfortable by the question.

"You don't give me much reason not to," she replied. "You could squish my life out of me at any moment. You have been quite different since we left Guandonnaland." Her tone was tainted with a hint of unease. She watched the light flash in sync with his voice on the instrument panel in front of her.

"This is true." The thought had occurred to him on several occasions during the flight, but his Scientist kept insisting that she might be more useful to him alive than dead.

Teris looked at the stars ahead of her; her mind went over the past week or so thinking about her nightly observations. "You dream a lot. And they disturb you." A long period of silence followed the statement. "Your dreams make you talk and even cry out. What is it that you fear?" she asked boldly.

He wondered how much she knew of him. She was frighteningly observant. So she had watched him at night when he went into his recharge cycles. "I fear nothing." he shouted back, "Except that empty oblivion, where I only existed as a shadow: a thought. Oh there were times it was fun but it does get lonely. Back at Guandonnaland, I exist with your people but I have no one of my kind there, again, it is lonely. I once stated; I will rule the universe even if I was the only one left in the universe, but what would the point be? What's the point in being the ruler of nothing?" He knew if he was the only one left in the universe he would have only his scientist side chattering, bickering and commenting to him. That would make him go completely over the edge and he would most likely kill himself.

"No, if I were to be destroyed again, I would want my laser core extinguished, put out, whatever. Being "dead" and still aware sucks. I couldn't touch anything, I couldn't feel anything, worst of all it's very difficult to get anyone's attention with out them running away in fear of me. I knew what I was missing and I missed being truly alive." He sighed as his thoughts slithered more and more onto their morbid paths. The cockpit shuddered with his sigh. They remained silent for a few more hours. Teris had fallen asleep and was quietly snoring. Several times he wondered if he was ready for this challenge, the closer he got to Charr, the more worried he became about his mortality. He suddenly wondered if it was wise to bring the lizard with him, she would have been more useful to her comrades than she would be to him. 'Oh well, too late to stop now,' Said a soft thought.

The dead planet of Charr loomed darkly ahead. It orbited a dull orange-red star. The world looked bleak as he entered the atmosphere, a dead planet that was almost completely ruined. The air heated around him rushed towards the surface. "I recommend that you keep out of sight when we land. This could become very dangerous. Keep me within your sight. If I can't find you when I am done I'll leave without you, understood? Also hide the emblem you wear in my cockpit. If the other Decepticons thought you were with me...." He let his last words trail off; he did not need to say any more.

Teris awakened at the sound of his voice she looked about groggily, staring in horror of the ruined world below her, not a tree in sight, or a body of brilliant water, the sky was filled with a reddish haze of dust and smog, buildings that looked long forgotten lay ruined. There were lights on in a small area ahead of them the yellow glow from windows did not liven the barren world much. As she listened to the Decepticon speak, she murmured an agreement as she removed the pendant and hid it in a compartment in his dashboard.

"But there is no life here, where are the trees, animals, rivers and lakes? The sky is not even blue. What is wrong with this world?" Her voice sounded very upset.

"Not every world is like Guandonnaland," Said Starscream banking towards the lit buildings. "It's an old world; it had its golden age long long ago. War ravaged and exhausted, this is the world that my people have fled to under the rule of my nemesis. I think Charr is an appropriate name for this burnt out ruined place. Don't worry yourself about it too much, we won't be here very long."

They glided in very low and landed he allowed Teris to clamber out and stretch her legs she darted behind a rock. From a pouch in her pants she drew out a laser pistol Starscream transformed. She looked at him for a moment and adjusted the settings the Seeker nodded in approval.

His entrance into Charr airspace had not gone unnoticed like he had planned.

* * *

Cyclonus and the Sweeps had seen the white and red Seeker's arrival. They were

Scourge and Cyclonus were hidden in some buildings. They followed at a distance stopping occasionally to watch Starscream's progress. One of the sweeps spoke up. "It's the ghost of Starscream. What is he looking for here?"

Another sweep glanced back towards the main building. "He is looking for another body. I think."

Scourge turned to the two sweeps and quietly whispered, "He is not a ghost anymore see how solid he looks, how he casts a shadow and how his feet make noise when he steps. He did get what he asked of Unicron before the head was destroyed. He then seeks Galvatron."

"Then we must stop him." said Cyclonus as he leapt from the covering of the ruined building and aimed his weapon. He decided that he would want to see Starscream's look of horror when he realised he was not going to win this fight. "We'll keep him as a trophy and allow Galvatron the pleasure of finishing him off." He lowered his weapons setting.

"Halt, Starscream!" Cyclonus yelled.

"Whaaa?!" Starscream turned with jump, at the sound of his name being called. His optics widened in momentary surprise. He had not been expecting a welcoming committee. He realised his plans had failed. There would be no surprise attack on Galvatron; the surprise attack was on him. In front of him stood Cyclonus flanked by Scourge and the Sweeps. Cyclonus has his weapon trained on the Seeker the others had their weapons drawn. A bolt of laser fire, discharged from Cyclonus, hit him square in the chest. He gasped as the unexpected force of the blast threw him backwards into a wrecked building. He let out a surprised yell. His head hit a wall hard and all went black.

He awakened his head sore and throbbing from the impact. His optics were slightly blurry as he focused and saw he was being held behind bars. He was disarmed: his rifles were

nowhere to be seen. It was obvious all his other built in weapons were either removed or neutralised. He sighed. Then he decided he would test the energon bars. He reached out to test one of the bars but he jerked his hand back. They were electrified for certain. He paced back and forth in the small holding cell. Looking out hoping some how his luck would change.

He sat on the cold metal plank that served as a resting area for prisoners and despaired. His plans had failed again and far sooner than he had originally anticipated. He had not spent ten years of his life planning this attack to wind up as a prisoner before he had a chance to get a shot off. This was not in the plan. How had he been noticed? He wondered. He cut his engines early came in at a very low angle so he did not bring much attention to his atmospheric entrance, he glided in the rest of the way flying at subsonic speed to reduce anyone from hearing his approach. How had he been seen? Long range scanners? Were the Decepticons somehow expecting him? He felt a bit paranoid. Had they noticed The Blue Dragon? He had so many questions and he wondered how many would be answered. He also wondered about Teris. Had she been seen? If not, where was she and how long had he been out? More questions rattled across his mind. He looked down at his chest for a moment, the weapons discharge must have been on stun, he had no damage on his canopy. He hoped that the Guana would have better luck getting off this rock, he held onto the faint hope that Teris would somehow find him and help him escape. Part of him doubted that she would even try.

'Now we will find out if you pushed her away or if she is still your ally.' The thought said firmly.

"What could she do if she remains my ally? She does not have the size or strength to break me out."

'You underestimate the Guanas. They have incredible intelligence, or did you forget.'

"No, I did not forget, I just don't see how it is possible." He said his voice edged with despair. He pushed his thoughts from his mind and sat on the bench, waiting. He waited for whatever was to befall him. He sighed again and looked at his hands that were resting across his knees. How could he break free? He looked around the room. The lights, the bars or even the floor there had to be a way to bypass the charging mechanism of the cell.

"What brings you back after such a long absence?" Asked the voice of Scourge as he came into view. He looked like he might be somewhat sympathetic to Starscream's plight.

Starscream looked up from his pondering. "What do you think brings me back?" hissed Starscream. As he stood up to face the intruder his hands rested lightly on his hips.

"You have come for Galvatron." Scourge said. "He is not here. He is out raiding an Autobot stronghold on Earth with the Predicons."

Some how that bit of information slipped his scanning. He had arrived too early or late. He stood up and approached the bars regarding Scourge who stood on the other side. "On Earth, joy," his tone was disgusted. "Let me go, Scourge. Let me out and you can join me. We can help each other. You could be my second in command. Let me out so I can finish my job," said Starscream smoothly and hopefully. He really did not want to see Galvatron

while being disarmed and defenceless.

"How many have you promised to be your sub commander, Astrotrain? Blitzwing? And who else? No one here would follow you—you're dead, and have been for twenty years."

"I am not dead, not any more than you are! Scourge, I was brought back by the same entity that brought you back!" Starscream's voice pleaded.

Scourge looked at Starscream for a moment a glimmer crossed his optics and his face firmed once again. "It did not have to be that way, your word is worthless, Starscream, you left us to die. My allegiance is to Galvatron and the Decepticons, not to a lone traitor and renegade. I have more reason to hate you than any other Decepticon alive, even more than Galvatron." Said Scourge acidly as he started to turn away.

"Please!" Again the Seeker implored, "Don't go, please free me!"

"I am sorry but my orders are to hold you here till Galvatron arrives. I suspect he will execute you quite quickly. Or perhaps slowly." Scourge had a savage twinkle in his optic. He turned and left the brig.

Starscream paced the cell again looking slightly frantic. He looked around for any sign of an access panel in which he could disrupt the energy in the bars. If he had his null ray he could have easily broken free. As it was, the weapons he had were probably locked away in another room or destroyed. He continued his circling, stopping to look up at the lights. He reached up and attempted to twist the screws out with his finger tips. He tugged and pulled at the fixture, no such luck; he inhaled deeply and started to pound at the metal of the light, it dented slightly but nothing more. All he could do was wait for his soon to come execution. He exhaled.

He returned to sitting on the uncomfortable metal bench in the corner, feeling like a pent up lab rat. With his elbows resting on his knees, Starscream placed his head sourly into his hands. He knew from that point of conversation with Scourge that the chances were that he would never be accepted as leader of the Decepticons. What about his destiny? His second chance? He should have given it up in the swamp. He allowed his optics to go off-line and rested for a while in despair.

* * *

Teris watched from behind a pile of rubble. She witnessed the attack on Starscream, she remained hidden unsure what to do. She looked down at her pistol should she help him or stay hidden. She remained out of sight as they removed his weapons and picked his limp, unconscious body off the ground. She waited for a few more minutes before she came out of hiding. Teris was surprised that they did not come after her. She must have not been seen. The Guana looked around and crept out of her hiding place. She followed at a safe distance behind the Decepticons, ducking behind rubble and slinking into obscurity.

They entered a large grey building. It looked better kept than the rest of the area. She sniffed the air, Starscream and the others of his kind did not have a very discernible odour. Teris sighed as she entered the building creeping through the corridors staying close to the walls and remaining in the shadows. She lost them, the Guana looked around her.

There were doors everywhere. Where had they taken him? She slunk into a dark corridor and waited. She knew he would awaken soon.

She loitered in various small low alcoves till she heard Starscream's voice, the Guana followed it. There was another slightly soft spoken voice, she crept low to the ground and peered around the corner. There was Starscream being held in a barred room similar to the brig back on the ship, however this place was much smaller. There was no point in attempting an escape now with the other god creature there. The Guana wondered if she could find his weapons, it might help him escape. She hunted several rooms until she came across one that held them. They were resting against a wall but the chamber was barred with glowing rails.

She returned to the shadows by Starscream's prison, she watched and waited as the Decepticons finished their conversation. By the tone of Starscream's voice he was pleading for his freedom and the other was not accepting it. The big Decepticon returned and walked down the hall and out of sight. Now it was her chance.

Teris returned to the chamber that was sealed with glowing bars. She walked over to them and slipped through. She was small enough to pass the bars without touching them; they were designed to keep creatures the size of Starscream out. She hauled on one of his rifles. They were very heavy, she was surprised at this as she had seen him fly and assumed he was very light. She wriggled out of the chamber and noted the panel with buttons.

It had to be an access panel one that would open if the right combination of numbers were keyed in. Teris ignored it as she slowly dragged the astoundingly heavy gun down the hall.

"N'kosi! Here!" she called softly.

Starscream looked up from his hands. Relief crossed his dark face. So he had not driven her away after all. That was good news, she was moving with great difficulty dragging something behind her; as she got closer he could see she had his rifle. It surprised him that it seemed as though she cared enough to look for him. It surprised him even more that she was dragging his laser weapon to him without his asking for her to find it. After all, she had faced the business end of it a couple of times.

'Guanas are not stupid.' The thought informed him. 'She will have to use the manual switches to fire the null ray at the bars, there is enough energy stored in it for a couple of shots.'

"I know all that." He murmured back.

Then he will need to reattach it to him to fully charge it again. His options seemed fairly bright at this moment. He stepped over to the bars where she stood, he kneeled and whispered, "Teris there is a switch on the underside, flick it down and aim at the bars. Hit the red button that is beside the switch. That will discharge a null ray that will short out the electrified field." he said quickly glancing down the hall. "Quickly, I have no idea how long I've got."

He had hoped she would be able to hold onto the gun when it fired. It did have a tendency

to pack powerful recoil. He moved quickly to the other side of the cell. If he got in the way of his own null ray, he might as well give up on any plans to escape.

She fiddled with the weapon, heaved it into position, then hit the red button as she was instructed. A purple pink ray hit the bars and with a crackle they shorted out. Teris was thrown across the room and Starscream chuckled. He had been expecting that.

"Great! Now slide me the gun. Hurry I can use it to break free," said the Seeker urgently.

Teris rapidly shoved the weapon through the bars. Starscream picked it up easily and connected it to his arm. She watched him as he aimed at the bars.

He could feel the rifles drawing power from him. "Get out of the way!" hissed Starscream quietly. Teris blinked and ran down the corridor as the weapon discharged. There was a low boom and squeaking sounds as Starscream bent the bars out of his way freeing himself. He smiled and nodded to the Guana. "Where is my other rifle?"

"In here N'kosi." She pointed to the keyed room.

Starscream smiled wryly and fired another null blast; the bars stopped glowing he looked over his shoulder to see if any one might be coming and fired a bolt of his laser at the bars. Teris used his leg to shield herself from the flying metal fragments. He shot another quick glance over his wing. Still no one.

The lizard woman showed him to where his other gun was. He snatched it up and attached it to his other arm. It clicked. 'Good,' he thought, he was armed once again. It gave him some of his shattered confidence back.

The Guana female looked down the corridor. He had seriously hoped that they might not have heard the escape attempt. She nodded at him and ran quietly down the hall. One question that nagged at his mind was, 'Where were the guards?' Surely they did not just leave their prisoners unwatched.

Teris ran on ahead through the corridors as she was smaller and less noticeable than Starscream. She could tell him if the way was clear. Her hand was on her pistol, as she entered a large chamber she froze and waited. Scourge and the Sweeps were sitting at a table illuminated by a single lamp; the rest of the room was fairly dark. They chatted while playing cards. Teris waved to Starscream. It was time to sneak through to get to the other doorway.

"Where did he come from?" asked a sweep. "I mean he has not been seen in almost twenty years." He piled a bunch of credit chips into a heap.

"Then he was alive when Galvatron blasted at him, I am quite surprised that he managed to survive. There are few planets even close to Cybertron that he could have gone to. Most are inhabited by Autobots and they for sure, would not have helped him," said another Sweep, raising the previous bet by ten.

"So he must have gone to a different more distant stellar system," Said Scourge. He tossed his cards down. He had a flush. He grinned and scooped up the energon chips.

The other Sweeps moaned in disappointment, tossing their hands down. Scourge had slaughtered them again.

Starscream listened. He leaned out and caught the shoulder of Teris. "We must not go in there, we are outnumbered. We should leave. It appeared that no one heard us break free," he whispered.

She nodded in agreement. "Leave to live and fight another day."

"Now is there another way out beside that door?" She nodded. He picked the lizard woman up and they turned the corner to a different corridor. "Which way is out?" he asked. Teris sniffed the air and pointed. Starscream figured he would have a better chance of survival if he just left and came back at a later time, to lay low for a while, to gather his nerves again. He really wanted to return to The Blue Dragon. He wanted to nurse his disappointment and failure. What really needed him was that he no longer had the element of surprise. Galvatron would soon know he existed. He would have to get out of this system fast, he knew they would not stop until they had hunted him down and killed.

Starscream ran flat-out down the hall with the lizard woman nestled in his arm. He was almost to the outer door. He faltered for a moment as Cyclonus walked through the door. Starscream ran faster and barged past Cyclonus. The Decepticon stumbled, his mouth open in surprise.

"Sorry for this reptile lady but I don't have time!" He tossed Teris into the air and transformed catching her neatly in his open cockpit the canopy sealed shut and he gunned his engines to full throttle and flew into the sky with all his available speed.

"What are we to do now?" Teris had asked. "Will we be followed?" she looked over her shoulder at the planet as it shot away from them.

Starscream thought for a moment. "It would not be safe to return to the ship as planned. I had hoped I would simply go in and eliminate Galvatron. It appears that, as I had said before, plans have gone awry. Galvatron was not even here." His he said with disappointment tinged with worry.

He shuddered as he detected four blips on his radar. "Slag! Cyclonus has gathered the sweeps. He is coming after us. Use my radio com link and warn the Blue Dragon to proceed to Cybertron. Tell them I will try to meet them there," Starscream said with an urgent tone. "I hope." He added in English.

Teris made the call as Starscream put all his mental powers into speeding up and dodging incoming laser fire. He headed towards Cybertron. There was no other place could think that might prove to be sanctuary, what might deter the Armada from following him. "I'd transform but it would be very uncomfortable to do that with you inside me. Going to Cybertron myself with that lot on my tail is a dubious plan as well as the Autobots might just open fire thinking I am leading an assault, however I am hoping that Cyclonus and the sweeps would not try to follow me that far."

He got distracted and a blast from one of their weapons hit him in his left wing. "Arg! I'm

hit!" he wailed. His wing tip was missing and smoke issued forth. Teris had covered her ear holes with her hands. Starscream's cry of pain and displeasure was very shrill.

Starscream fought for balance as he tried to compensate for his damaged wing. "Hang tight, I'm gonna have to fight back!" Starscream transformed. He fired both weapons at the encroaching Decepticons. His null ray hit both Cyclonus and Scourge. They went limp and the other Sweeps hesitated in their pursuit.

Starscream reformed into jet mode and high tailed it out. He was disgusted in his flee policy he had taken as of late, but it was obvious that if he did not have the element of surprise he would end up dead before you could say Galvatron. Starscream flew as fast as he could through the void of space hoping against hope that they might break off their hunt. He was starting to get low energy warnings.

"N'kosi we are getting hailed. I don't understand what they are asking. Its in your language." muttered Teris as she listened to the comm.

Starscream took over the comms. "Mayday, mayday. I request assistance. I am damaged." He grimaced. He was asking the Autobots for help.

"Identify yourself." The comms crackled.

Starscream thought it was odd that they did not recognise his voice, but he realised he had spoken in Guana not in English and the accent was very different. He repeated the request in English. "I am—I'm Starscream. I'm damaged; please, I need assistance, please help, Over."

There was a very long pause. "You are cleared to land. Starscream. Then drop all your weapons. We have two laser cannons aimed right at you. You will be taken as our prisoner until we decide what to do with you. Try anything and those cannons will be fired."

"Hurt me in any way and you will hurt my passenger; and I know how you Autobots are when there is a flesh creature involved." he hissed back. He had figured that something like this would happen; at least they were going to give him a chance to explain himself. The odds were in his favour that they would not give him to Galvatron. He might even seek asylum for the intern. "I will comply with your instructions. Please, I seek asylum."

He scanned the planet briefly. He spotted the two laser cannons and they indeed tracked his movements. Autobots gathered around as he came in for landing. They were surprised that he did not transform immediately but opened his cockpit to allow a small reptilian creature to climb out. She stepped aside as Starscream transformed, the creature did not run away. She stood next to him with a proprietary hand on his leg and her pistol aimed at them.

"Teris, drop your weapon. We must disarm. These Autobots won't harm us. We've agreed to their terms. They are usually good to their prisoners." Starscream whispered in Guana. He knew they would be good to her but the question remained: what of him?

"Yes my lord," and Teris placed her pistol on the ground. The Autobots closed in on them.

Starscream disconnected his rifles and gently placed them on the ground. With his hands slightly raised he backed away slowly. He could almost feel the laser sight of the cannon burning into the middle of his back. For a moment he doubted the Autobots would keep their end of the bargain. The Autobot Security chief waved towards the cannons. He felt the heat of the laser diminish. Without further ado the Autobots lead them away.

* * *

Again he was locked in a prison cell. This time he was "safe". The Autobots were not known to execute prisoners without reason. He hoped that they would not have reason to execute him now, although he was responsible for several of the deaths in the attack on Autobot city. He hoped that they might overlook that incident and spare him.

The Guana woman was locked in a cell across from him. The Autobots had tried to speak to her but she answered their queries with questions in Guana. She was confused that they could not even speak the language. She looked over at the Decepticon and he shrugged. The Autobot turned and walked away.

She and Starscream spoke back and forth all day. There was no news at all from the Autobots whether or not a ship loaded with Guanans had given their distress call. The chances were they would not tell Starscream even if they did get it.

There was a knock and the door opened. Rodimus Prime entered. He looked at Starscream then looked at Teris. He seemed to have a bit of confusion.

"I don't quite understand what the relationship is between you and this creature..." said the leader of the Autobots gesturing between them.

"Guana and there is no relationship." injected Starscream tartly.

"This Guana. Where have you been? Where did this person come from? We have just received a mayday from a ship with twenty nine more of them on board. They are in the process of landing." Rodimus said softly.

Starscream breathed a sigh of relief. News of the Blue Dragon landing quelled some unease he had with Cyclonus and the sweeps out and about.

"That ship is mine, and they were told to send that message should I not return. My plans were momentarily foiled and I was unable to return to them without jeopardising their safety."

Rodimus looked surprised at this statement. He'd never heard of a Decepticon giving a care about other living creatures and what made it even more difficult to believe was that Starscream had said it.

Starscream looked into the perplexed face of the Autobot leader. He seemed to read the question that lay behind the pale blue optics. "Over twenty years of fighting for survival in space and on a distant planet can change a person somewhat." He was glad Teris could not understand or speak his language as what he was about to say would alienate her

almost immediately.

"I befriended these creatures mostly on lies. It is these lies that have built a strong relationship with their species. I had thought of exterminating on several occasions but something compels me not to. This disgusts me. Makes me feel weak, but I cannot bring myself around to harming them," he said with evident self disgust. Starscream launched into a telling of his time on the backwater planet.

The Autobot leader was not expecting this sort of confession at all. It appeared Starscream had become caught between two worlds. One where he was a murderous treacherous Decepticon who would kill just for the sake of killing and the other where he was a caring almost compassionate individual who cared for what he worked so hard to sow and reap. "I am not sure I believe this."

The Decepticon sat scrutinising the bars in front of him. He was humiliated by what the Autobot must think of him. "I've tried to destroy the one who destroyed me. He was not home now I don't know what my next step will be. Perhaps I'll return to exile in Guandonnaland." He said with defeatism both in voice and body language

Rodimus was impressed with the tale yet remained cautious. This is Starscream; good with words he could spin lies as a spider spins webs. He was a ruthless killer in the ranks of the Decepticons. Deadly fast and unmerciful. His tail did not jive with his known personality. "Is there a way I can speak to the Guana and confirm what you have said?"

"I alone speak her language. She does not know ours." He sighed heavily. "Let her come to me and I can translate. The language is fairly simple."

Rodimus did not like this idea but he relented. It was the only way he could confirm the story the Decepticon had told. He opened the door lock and motioned for the Guana to enter. She gave him wide berth and came to Starscream. She looked at him and spoke in her language Starscream responded. She nodded.

"She asks if she can remain with me. She is frightened of you, which is strange, they fear very little." said Starscream with a tone of amusement.

"Why would she fear me?"

Starscream inquired, laughed and translated. "You are an "evil" Autobot."

"Will she answer my questions?" said Rodimus annoyed.

Starscream inquired. The Guana spoke rapidly looking between him and Rodimus. "It depends on the question. She also asks when she can go. I told her that her kind has arrived."

The interrogation went along quite smoothly. The Guana confirmed with the Autobot, Starscream's claim. They started with simple yes and no answers and then ended with more complex questions as Rodimus rapidly learned the newcomer's language.

"She is free to join her companions. You, however, are not." said Rodimus. "I will be

sending someone to question you further later." The Autobot led the reptilian creature out of the cell and locked it behind him leaving Starscream to his thoughts.

He looked out the bars at the empty chamber ahead of him. The cell was electrified with a null charge so if Starscream so much as brushed against it he would short out for a moment. He was distressed. He knew he did not belong in either world anymore Decepticon and certainly not Autobot. Was it possible to go neutral again? He wondered. Would he even want to?

* * *

"I mustn't leave N'kosi," Said Teris after she was gently shoved from the room. She shot a look over her shoulder.

"We have to ask him more questions, and these must be asked in private." He said as he led her down the hall. There were lots of the creatures; they all looked different from one another. But they all wore the same red face on their bodies. One of them came running up the hall.

"Rodimus!" he yelled out.

The Autobot leader stopped, "What is it Overcast?"

"You should look on that ship, its incredible, the stuff, jewels, and the whole place looks like a flying temple. But that's not what concerns us... the energon that is on board that ship... there are whole rooms filled with energon cubes, and they are definite Decepticon formula."

"How much?"

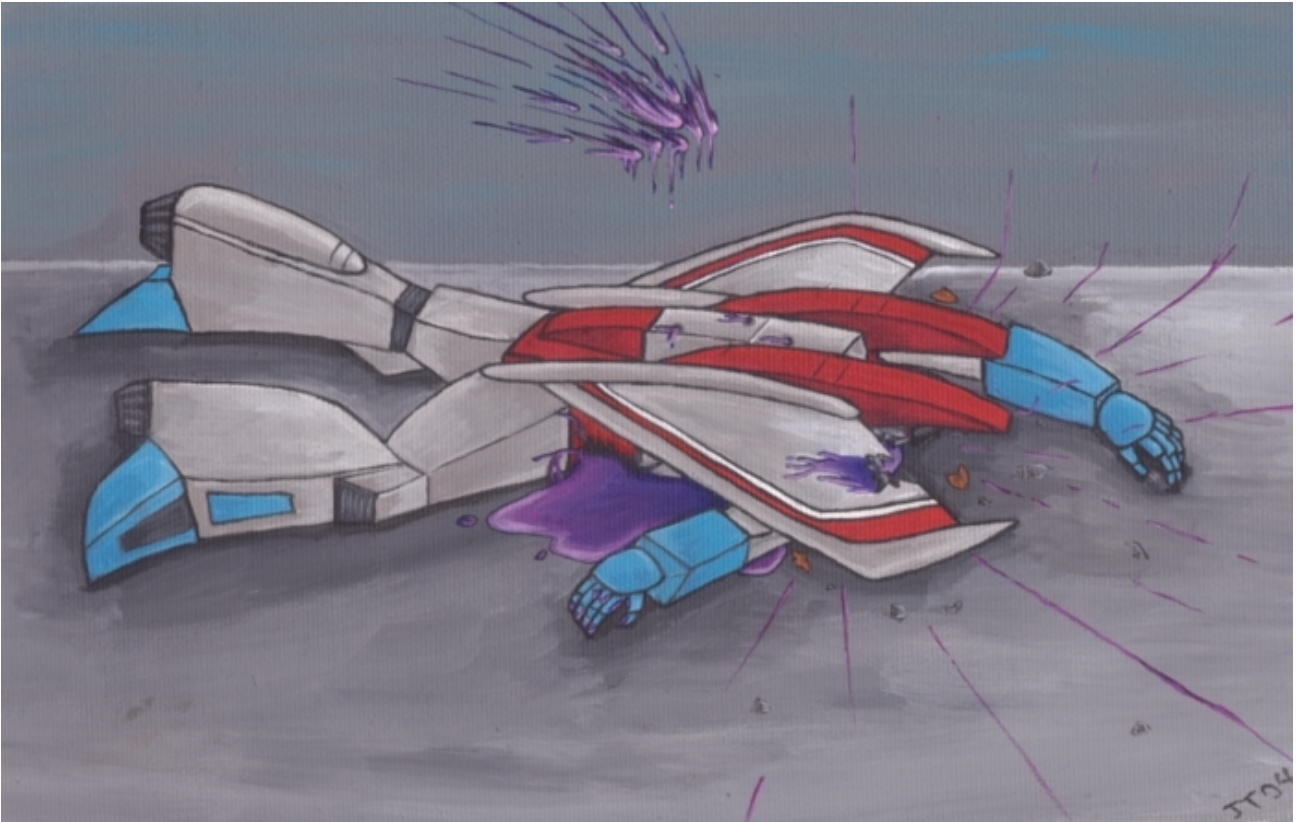
"Several million left, it looks like just under half have been used for powering the ship. Here is a list of things that have been found on board, weapons, supplies and much more."

"I'll inform Upland, he's the one who will be questioning our guest."

"It looks like Starscream has been living it up; he must be doing mercenary work now."

Rodimus frowned. "We'll talk about this later. I have to show this woman to her shipmates." Starscream would have some serious explaining to do.

PART 2: DESIRE FOR FREEDOM



Chapter 10

The Conflict of Interests

He had several more days of very intense interrogation:

The Autobot interrogator regarded the Seeker through the energised bars; he lifted his finger off a red button on the table. "And you know nothing of the Decepticon plans?" he said looking disbelievingly at Starscream.

"I only went to Charr to—" Starscream replied shakily.

"To destroy Galvatron, yes you've told us this." His tone was dismissive.

"I was captured, I got freed and we left. There were no other plans. I am not part of them. I am a renegade by their classifications. Why can't you believe me?" he pleaded, he felt utterly exhausted. This had already gone on for several hours today, question and answer, they'd ask a question, he'd answer they would insist that he was uttering falsehoods.

"Starscream you come to us out of nowhere, with thirty reptilians in tow, with some cock and bull story about being hunted. That ship of yours is very well laden for someone who is asking for asylum and who has claimed to be marooned for ten years. What are the plans, who are you delivering that energon too?"

"For the last time there are no fraggin Decepticon plans! I've told you why I am here." The Seeker shrieked. He rested his hands on the table and pushed himself to his feet. He was angry. He realised belatedly what his outburst was going to get him: Pain.

The Autobot shook his head in annoyance. He pushed the button on the table. An electric charge shot up through The Seekers shackles and sent him reeling back.

"SLAG YOU!" he screamed as he picked himself up off the floor. His optics flashed with hatred, he glared at the Autobot on the other side of the barred cell.

"You will tell me what I want to know! What about the energon? Where did you get it? Who is it for?" he asked with his hand hovering over the button on the table.

Starscream could hardly believe this. The Earth humans had a dark age like this where they would force innocent people into confessing that they were in league with the devil. It seemed the Autobots had taken a leaf from their gristly past. "This is a lot like the Spanish inquisition back on Earth; I thought the Autobots were above and beyond this sort of method for information extraction." He stated as tingling from his limbs eased. "I collected energon from Guandonnaland, its mine; the whole lot of it is mine. It's enough fuel to get me here and back again with extra for emergency. There is no buyer, there is no scheduled delivery and there are no fraggin plans! And for the record, I am not a Mercenary!"

The Autobot smiled twistedly. "I am surprised at how much of this you can take."

"Don't!" he shrieked. "I am telling you the truth!" He held his hands out beseechingly, in a weak attempt to stop the interrogator from tormenting him further.

The Autobot's finger pressed the button again but he did not lift it off right away. Starscream yelled out and attempted to regain his composure; he was failing miserably. "It's the truth!" He gasped. "It's the slugging truth! For Primus sake, believe me!"

The Autobot lifted his finger off the button. "I don't believe you, Starscream, However I will be seeing you later. Hopefully—you will be more co-operative with my questioning." the Autobot picked up a datapad and left the brig.

Starscream shoved himself back into the chair. His elbows rested on the table and he placed his head into his shackled hands. He was unsure of how much more of this he would be able to put up with. He allowed himself to go partly off line in an attempt to rest.

* * *

"No mech can withstand that sort of treatment for seven days." said the interrogator to the Autobot leader. "So he is either telling the truth or he's a glutton for punishment. And being it's Starscream we are talking about, I think it's safe to say he is being truthful, he would have broken at least five days ago if he weren't."

The Autobot leader nodded. "Then I will inform him, personally, he is to stand trial."

* * *

The door of his cell opened. Starscream looked up from his hands. Usually interrogation sessions were every four to eight hours. This was too soon for him to have recovered sufficiently to take another pounding.

"Are you going to take a turn now?" Hissed Starscream acidly as the Autobot leader walked up and sat down in front of the barred chamber. The Seeker's optics flashed hatred at the Autobot.

"No, but you convinced the interrogator." Rodimus looked at the Seeker for a moment. This was the once proud Decepticon sub commander; he was a wretched sight now. Starscream sat hunched over the table supporting his chin on the back of his fist, his wings sagged slightly, his eyes shone with intense hatred and of recent suffering. The Seeker watched him closely as he settled back into his chair.

"I did, did I? Could have fooled me." he snarled after a few minutes. He scrutinised the Autobot leader; he was young and had a very different attitude from the old Autobot leader Optimus Prime. From his first encounter with the recent Autobot leader, he had thought he might be reasonable, understanding but he seemed as cruel and unforgiving as a regular Decepticon.

"However it's not his decision on what is to become of you, it's the council's. You're to stand trial tomorrow at noon. You should conserve your energy, you will need it." Rodimus stood up from the table. He looked at Starscream one more time. "Good luck." he said as he left the room.

Starscream snorted and returned his face to his palms. At least the interrogation was done. He had not honestly thought he would go through this, he had simply asked for

asylum, protection from Galvatron, if he had known this was going to happen he would have said "frag that" and returned to the Dragon and flew somewhere else.

'Hindsight is twenty - twenty, Starscream,' a thought said miserably, 'you could not have possibly known.' The Seeker folded his arms on the table top; he leaned his head on them and fell into a deep sleep.

* * *

The Seeker was led into a room with his hands and feet bound in energon shackles. His appearance was rather haggard. Several Autobots sat in chairs around the edge of the circular room. He was placed in the centre of the room, inside an electrified cage. They were not taking chances. It was an Autobot tribunal, a sort of trial during which the facts and statements he had made over the last seven days were discussed, torn apart and flung back into his face.

The Autobots asked him more questions. Attacking him verbally from all sides in an attempt to get him to contradict his statements. He attempted to answer but the Autobots' questions were sometimes ambiguous. Things were not looking so good. He looked from face to face and many wore either frowns or expressions of hatred, disgust or loathing.

After a few hours, the Autobot leader called the others to recess to discuss the information and decide what they planned to do with their prisoner. They all filed out of the room and left Starscream standing alone. His hands and feet still bound. He looked around and took a deep breath in an attempt to calm himself. He was very nervous. He had not expected a warm welcome, he did not expect, however, to be brutally interrogated and put on a war crimes trial.

There had been questions in his involvement in crimes before and during the great battle of Autobot city. He had argued that they were irrelevant. As far as he was concerned they were not crimes. He was doing his job as a soldier, following orders. Well, not all the time. He insisted that he was not quite like he was before and he wanted asylum. The Autobots ignored his pleas and hit him with another barrage of questions. He knew he was not innocent of the charges against him but that was before Galvatron vaporised him.

Then came the question about his association with Unicron. He said in a very Decepticon like manner it was only a means to an end that for the chance to be returned to life, there was no price too high, even if it meant selling out his world to achieve it. He realised with that statement he had just dug a large hole and jumped in. How would they ever believe by his statement that he was a refugee? Surely his time on Cybertron was also a means to an end. He still planned on locating Galvatron as soon as he had his nerve and as soon as he was freed.

There was a knock at the door to the court room. Starscream looked up from his reflections. The Autobot guards opened the door for the council. The Autobots filed in one by one and sat down. Rodimus Prime alone stood. He looked grim. Starscream swallowed. His throat suddenly felt very dry. He felt a swell of panic build up. He managed, however, to keep it under reasonable control.

"We understand that you are a renegade now, Starscream, no longer a functioning part of

the Decepticons. Your previous death at the hands of Galvatron, does not absolve you of your prior life's atrocities, although, there is little evidence to support your claim as a changed individual, we are going to consider your request for asylum. You will not have freedom of Cybertron until we are certain that you are genuine in your claim." Rodimus said looking directly at Starscream. It was almost like he was trying to fathom some ulterior motive in the Seeker's claim.

Starscream exhaled a small sigh of relief. They were going to give him the benefit of the doubt. He had been worrying that they might have considered putting him to death for his prior life's actions.

"There are other things to consider, Starscream. You are quite powerful." said the Autobot leader as he read off the Deception's sentence. "You are strong enough to easily overcome your guard if you should try to escape."

Starscream insisted that no such attempt would be made, but it was the decision of a simple majority. The voting outcome was barely fifty point one percent in his favour.

"I am sorry to say," The Autobot leader said, "that you will not be permitted to re-charge your personal energy reserves over thirty – five percent."

Starscream was outraged. He was going to be kept in a state of enervation. "I object!" he complained. "This is not fair. I have the right to be at least—comfortable." He grabbed hold of the charged bars of his cage in his rage and let go with a shriek as he received a powerful shock. He teetered as he fought to regain his balance. He wanted to avoid falling against them again. There were a few chuckles of mirth from some of the Autobots present. He knew they were enjoying watching him squirm.

The Autobot leader held his hands out in apology. "It's the vote of the majority. If we are to keep a potentially dangerous Decepticon in our midst, you, this is what we have to do. You will gain your freedom in due time," he said calmly.

There were others in the room that seemed less than pleased with the verdict. It seemed like they might prefer that they did not let him re-charge all.

"But energy deprivation-" he said weakly.

"I am sorry, Starscream, that's the way it will be." interrupted Rodimus. "You are also required to give up, temporarily, your ability to fly and transform."

Starscream staggered with the blow of his words. A muted cry managed escaped his lips. A pained expression crossed his face. "You—you can't do that!" He stammered. They were going to ground him as well as lock him in robot mode. The ability to fly meant everything to the Decepticons who had the jet alter-mode. Flying was his life. He thought he would rather die than be grounded again. After all he had spent a miserable three years locked in robot mode.

"There is another option," said the Autobot.

Starscream glanced up hopefully.

"The minority favoured the de-activation route- The choice is yours."

The Seekers face fell, "I Uh—please don't—I consent." He shook his head in disgrace. 'No' he thought, 'I would not rather die.' He now realised that his life was literally, held in the balance.

The Autobot leader nodded to the guards that stood by the doors. They walked up to the enclosure and de-activated the energon bars. They took him roughly by the arms and led him down a long white corridor. He was directed into a room marked INFIRMARY where he was first entertained by the medic who severed his transformation relays and had his flight program taken off line. He felt very defenceless. He was then drained of some of his energon until he was at the level decreed. He hung his head dejectedly. He regretted coming here. He had no idea how long he was going to be kept as a prisoner. It could be days but most likely it would be years. He cringed inwardly at that thought, if he could only find away to escape.

He realised this was just a precautionary measure but it still distressed him. He had told them the truth why couldn't they go with that? He exhaled in a deep sigh. The medic hummed something tuneless while he worked. Starscream strained at the bonds, they would not budge. Abruptly he felt exhausted. His energy drain had now taken effect. He knew he would have to spend most of the day in a rest or re-charge cycle. The guards returned on command of the medic. His tasks were now finished. The guards grinned ruthlessly at Starscream. They knew he was at their will. The Autobot medic gave Starscream a re-assuring pat on the shoulder. The touch made the Seeker want to lash out and pound the medic's head in, alas he did not.

The guards once again grabbed Starscream by the arms. They were rough. They pulled him violently to his feet. He made a small cry of surprise as they hauled him out the infirmary. He was astonished in the manner at which they handled him. It was unusual for Autobots to mistreat their prisoners, Decepticon or otherwise and he really did not enjoy being manhandled. He momentarily lost his balance, the Autobot squeezed on his right elbow joint in response. A sharp pain jolted up his arm.

"Do you mind?" he said sharply. "That's highly uncomfortable!"

The Autobots looked at each other and laughed. "He is thinking we are mistreating him," said the one on his right. "You want us to go easy on you? Show you mercy? Come now Starscream, you were the worst of the lot."

Starscream glowered at the floor.

"We should give him something to really whine about," said the second as he pulled his weapon out of subspace. He placed the weapon in the middle of the Seekers back. "Now shut up and get a move on, or I will fulfil the minority's sentence."

Starscream was unsure of the validity of the threat, but he figured that these were not the run of the mill Autobots. They had guts and if he gave them any reason to, they would spill his. They would most likely blame it on an escape attempt, although he would not have

the energy to sustain himself to get away.

He felt a sharp squeeze and a tug in his left joint. He was then led down a bright hallway. He tried to move more quickly but his legs would not respond at the speed the Autobot guard wanted. He sighed heavily shooting the odd sidelong glare at his escort. 'Perhaps it was psychological.' he thought. He'd been far lower than this back home. Then it was because he was working on all those projects. Also he had the option to stop and re-charge at any time he wanted.

The second guard opened the door as they lead him roughly outside. Starscream looked around himself. He did not recognise where he was. Several buildings stood around in varying heights. They formed a square which they were about to cross. The courtyard area had a huge rust coloured Autobot symbol laid into its surface. There were benches located in several locations around the perimeter; some were occupied by Autobot personnel.

The escort led him down the stairs of the tribunal building. A few other Autobot guards joined in with the march across the courtyard to a large seven level building. It was a gun metal grey with a few large windows. He thought if this was where he was being imprisoned it was in a very public place. He looked across the yard and in the distance saw something that struck him as familiar. The Blue Dragon. How he longed to be back on board that ship, flying away through the vastness of space back to the world, back to his freedom, which he had originally thought of as the world of his prison.

They entered the building and led him up a couple of flights of stairs. They opened the door to a large room and released him of his bindings. He rubbed his wrists where the energon shackles had been bound tightly. One of the guards laughed and shoved him into the room. Caught off guard, Starscream fell sprawling to the ground. The Autobots laughed as they locked the door behind him.

"You will have "free" roam of this building as of tomorrow," said the second guard through the open window in the door. There was a burst of laughter from several voices. The Autobot slid the window closed and walked away.

He looked towards the door, hatred seethed in him. How he wanted to encircle the Autobot's soft metallic throat with his fingers and squeeze the life and light out of him. Angrily the Seeker picked himself off the floor. His anger stemmed from his confusion, dismay and demoralisation. So much for the thought that Autobots would treat their prisoners well.

He stood fully upright and glanced around at his new surroundings. The room was quite Spartan. Light grey walls stood around a floor that was dark grey. Simple florescent lights hung overhead. Above the door was a red light. An alarm beacon he assumed. The room was furnished with simple chairs and a table in the centre. A hard couch on the far wall as well as an almost redundant recharge alcove. On the wall next to the couch was a computer access terminal. However one thing in the room stood out as nice: a huge window. It over looked Cybertron. Not the courtyard he had just walked through but a good view of the planet itself. The window gave the room a feel of being somewhat larger than it really was, this was comforting. The chamber was a far cry from his luxurious home on Guandonnaland, however plain as it was, it was better than his alternative. Strange, he

thought, how he now really missed the planet he worked so hard to leave.

'We can still go back. It's more like home than here.'

"Yes," he agreed, "One day when this is all over we will go home", but for now he decided he'd like to rest. The past week had been harrowing.

* * *

Days spanned into weeks and weeks dragged into months. The Guanas seemed quite content with being shown Cybertron. Many had learned the language Starscream spoke and they could converse with the Autobots. Many took up learning more technology so they could return one day to their world and improve upon the improvements already there.

Starscream was bored with the movies and games he had to entertain himself with, bored with going to the library to research various topics and watching old news files. There were files covering various Decepticon outcasts and renegades, most of which had not been seen in decades. He was bored with doing nothing but waiting.

The Guanas were free to come and go and many stayed with him and talked about what they had seen. The images they spoke of made Starscream ache to go outside. He looked to the window. What Starscream ached for above all, was to be free, to fly, to feel the rush of wind against his wings and the sun warming his body. He felt like a bird in a cage, restless. Even if he could get outside, what would the point be? He could not go anywhere without flying.

More months went by and Starscream slowly stopped doing things. He spent ages looking towards the window deep in thought. The lizard people came up to see him and he shooed them away. He did not want them to see him like this, enervated, languished. "You are such a fool." He said to himself. "What in Primus' name were you thinking when you came here?" Even his scientist side was unhappy, the warrior usually could count on a bit of support from his alter ego but even he was sinking into the depths of despair.

He would sit alone. He twiddling his thumbs while he sat on the edge of his sleeping couch. For hours he sat like that: hunched over, elbows resting on his knees, rolling his thumbs over one another looking at the floor. With an enfeebled sigh he lay down and slept.

* * *

Teris was the only Guana who dared to intrude on Starscream when he wanted to be left alone. She was concerned. In the last few weeks he had not left the chamber to go with her to the library and in the past few days he had not even moved from the couch. Not even to the recharge alcove. He had told her of his longing to be back in the sky, but he had not told her why he was being held against his will. She could not understand the problem; the Guanas were allowed to go anywhere they wanted. Why would N'kosi be any different? She was perturbed by his overall lack of life and vigour. All she could remember was the very active, energetic god back on her own world. This was a thoroughly different being.

Teris did not often leave his side. She sat talking about various things she had found in the computer. He would lie looking up at the ceiling ignoring her presence saying nothing. His optics glowed a dull red. Every so often they would brighten a little as if she said something that might have interested the Seeker. She was not even sure if he was awake most of the time. Teris let out a sigh and leapt off the side of the couch she needed to find the one called Rodimus.

It was obvious to the Autobots that the female lizard seemed to have an attachment to the big white and red Decepticon. It alarmed them why would any living creature want to consider the Decepticon Seeker a friend. The rest of the Guanans when they were questioned also seemed to hold him in very high esteem. They considered him very wise and they insisted he was very good to their people.

The Autobots however, were not sure of Starscream's feelings towards the Guanans. He was naturally duplicitous and they thought he would most likely kill them or abandon them if his own hide was at stake, they thought. They hoped this would not be the case; anyway, he was not in condition to kill anyone.

They were apprehensive about Seeker's increasing signs of depression. The Guana woman was worried that he would pine away. She had also informed them that he had not recharged in a couple of days. The Autobot leader wondered if he was being too hard on the Decepticon ex-air commander, but sadly enough it had to be this way. All Decepticon defectors went through this, but being this was Starscream they had to be absolutely sure.

* * *

The afternoon was dull as any normal afternoon he had recently. He turned his head to look out the window. So indeed it appeared Cybertron was starting to thrive again. Mass transport aircraft flew through the sky and vehicles drove the long roads on the steel landscape. For him, he longed to be free in the sky. Soaring, diving. There was still no news as to when and if he was ever going to get his freedom. With a resigned sigh he returned to snooze in boredom. There was nothing else to do.

He was awakened when the sirens blared. Red lights flashed at the top of the door. Starscream hissed as his audio sensors were assaulted with the whine of the air raid sirens. He sat up and scrambled to his feet walking to the door to silence the sound in the room.

Still the sirens could be heard throughout the building. He stepped over to the computer bringing up his news station. He regretted tuning in. He found out disturbing news. They were under attack. A group of Decepticons, lead by the Seeker Dirge, were heading in the direction of the Autobot headquarters. Autobots from all over flocked to defensive stations.

He suddenly had an idea, help them fight off the attack if anything to get him outside. In a sudden burst of energy he ran down the hall to the stairwell and to the entrance of the building. He yelled out trying to get their attention.

"Let me fight," he screamed. "I can help," He grabbed the bars of the door and shook them.

"How do we know you won't turn on us?" replied an Autobot. One of the guards he recognised as being un-cool about him being allowed to remain functional.

"Please, you'll have to trust me."

"Trust is not in your vocabulary, Starscream. Forget it." The Autobot turned, transformed and sped off to the fight.

Starscream was left watching. He felt renewed resentment of the Autobots as they went off to fight the enemy. Starscream was still viewed as an enemy. He still bore the insignia. The Seeker was disappointed but who really could blame the Autobots for not trusting him.

On countless occasions he had claimed to be disowned by the Decepticons and then attempted to lead the Autobots or a selected victim to their doom. He had led others into traps by complex lies and deceit but the one time where the truth was spoken it was not believed. Humans had a story that described it neatly. "Never cry wolf". An ancient story of a little shepherd boy who for fun called the villagers out to fight off wolves, but when it came to a time when he was really under attack and he cried for help no one came. The little shepherd's flock was destroyed. With this thought he turned on his heel and returned up the stairs to his chamber.

Starscream resumed his watch on the battle. The battle had broken out. The Autobots fought bravely causing the Decepticon raid to fall back. There was a cheer then the fighting resumed as the Decepticons charged in with renewed force. There were casualties on both sides but the Autobots were taking a hard hit. It was unusual for the Decepticons to even bother with Cybertron anymore, but who knows what was going on in the mind of their mad leader these days. They preferred to attack outposts and smaller less defensible places.

The sirens stopped. However the sounds of fighting outside remained. A nearby explosion rocked the building sending Starscream to gaze quickly out the window.

While he was viewing the battle, he had a creepy feeling that he was being watched. It started with a prickle at the back of his neck that he tried to ignore. Slowly it crept down his back into his limbs ending at his fingers and feet. He could not ignore the feeling. There was something wrong, dreadfully wrong. He looked over his shoulder towards the door, it was cracked open. He scanned the room but did not see anything. Nothing but creepy silence. He felt very certain he was not alone.

"Who's there? Teris?" he asked. A touch of the uneasiness that he felt coloured his words. "Show yourself." He looked around him but he could not see anyone or anything but there was someone in the room with him.

A voice behind him spoke up, "Hello, Screamer, it's time to take a tumble with Rumble! Galvatron wants your head and for you to stay dead!" The little blue warrior transformed his arms into pile drivers and started to pummel the ground. Starscream fell from his seat and crashed heavily to the floor. The open door slammed shut. He crawled to the door and attempted to stand up. The ground shook violently and he fumbled with the latch. The door swung open and he darted through. As he did, he heard the monotone voice that

would only belong to Soundwave.

"Ravage, eject, operation extermination." There was a hiss and a growl and the black feline leapt from Soundwave and down the hall after the Seeker. With a shriek, Starscream scrambled down into an alcove and hid as the feline sprinted past. The black jaguar stopped, sniffed around and darted down another corridor.

A surge of panic set in. What was he to do? His back was pressed against the cold wall. He had no weapons. The Autobots had seen to it that they were removed and stored away until they could decide if he could be trusted, whenever that would be. How could the Decepticons have slipped past the Autobot security? How did this happen? 'Primus', he thought, 'Help me!' So many questions and no one could answer them. It appeared to him that the troop lead by Dirge was a decoy. And that another force had infiltrated through an unguarded passageway. No one had expected an attack least of all him. If he only had his transformation ability he might have been able to transform, smash out and escape.

He peeked around the corner. The corridor was empty, he crept out and he started to run stopping every so often in an attempt to open various doors. He was desperately hoping that he could find some sort of weapon for defence. Anything would do right now, a pipe or even a metal rod. He rattled violently on a door, hissing curses and obscenities at it. He felt it loosen, he sighed with relief. He turned, and pulled the handle. He cursed again. He had not opened the door, but broke the handle off instead. He regarded it for a moment, turning it in his hands, looking at it in disbelief. He exhaled in frustration. Suddenly, from behind came a sound like a growl, Starscream spun to face his assailant, his hands out to his sides and his feet apart in a stance of balance. Ravage leapt from one of the alcoves and Starscream tossed the knob at the feline. Not the kind of weapon he had wanted. With a swift movement he grabbed the cat by its front legs and threw him hard against the wall. The jaguar fell in a limp heap, it was stunned but not out.

He looked both ways and crept further on into the hall, checking for open rooms. Looking over his shoulder frequently. He knew that Galvatron would not stop until he had Starscream truly dead. He seemed to be that way inclined. Starscream had found out he had booted Blitzwing from the team. He knew he was hunting down Octane when the Seeker was a Spectre. Galvatron had a history of randomly eliminating his troops. With this thought, the white and red Seeker became very afraid.

'Fear. That's the feeling you get when you know that nothing you are about to do is gonna make a blind bit of difference,' he thought. 'It's erratic, it's irrational, it's a survival instinct.' Starscream was angered with the direction his thoughts were taking him. When Galvatron first destroyed him he was not afraid. He did not have time to be afraid. It happened far too quickly for him to stop it, but it was not a demise that belonged to Starscream. No, to him he was ignominiously executed, a public humiliation. Today on the other hand, he was very scared. He knew what the stakes were and he was lost in the building that was his prison, without any form of defence.

He was trapped unless he could find the point of entrance where the Decepticons broke through. He was afraid they would have that heavily guarded. All he had to do was look and keep from being noticed. 'Good luck,' Came a thought. 'Not with your colouration.' he suddenly wondered where he was. His mind was not thinking clearly and he could not

remember what level he was on or where in that level he was. He could hear the fighting outside he knew he was close to an outer wall. He knew that the Autobots were fighting a diversionary attack while the main troops were coming through the back door seeking his blood.

Blood he thought. He did not have blood. Not the way the Guanans did, but he had small passageways that wove throughout his body that fed energon into systems that needed it most. Now he thought about it, he guessed it was his version of blood. It was fluid, like blood, and he could, if he ran out, die like any blooded creature. As well he also doubted that he could get revived if he did run out. O.K. then, energon was like blood. It seemed to be the same damned stuff. Only energon was pink and iridescent and made of condensed energy, whilst blood was red and opaque and made of organic materials.

The ground started shaking and distracted him from his thought. He fell to the floor. He took a deep breath, stood back up and hung hard to the wall. He knew he must have been spotted by the little runt Rumble. If Rumble was in here there was a chance that Frenzy and the other Cassetticons were loose. He left the doors alone and struggled to keep upright while he took off down another shaking maze like corridor. He was unsure of where he was headed. Panic was starting to cloud his judgement.

He stopped twisted another door handle. He was surprised as it swung open for him; he hesitated for a moment looking down: a stairwell. Choices, choices, too many choices. Up or down? He could hear the sounds of pursuit echoing through the stairwell. He looked over his shoulder and back to the stairs. He was unsure of the direction that the sounds were coming from or from what level. The building was seven levels high on the surface but it went twice that down into the planet. He should be able to lose them, he hoped. He looked up quickly; Starscream thought he saw a shadow move. He bolted blindly down the stairs skipping every other step and jumping the last three steps to the landing. His thundering footsteps echoed up and down. He cringed as he knew they could track him to the stairs.

He grabbed the railing with his left hand and allowed the inertia to throw himself around to the next flight of stairs. His feet pounded down the steps, he again jumped the last stairs throwing himself at the door, flinging it open with a resounding crash. He turned sharply left and shot off down the corridor. He could hear the rumble of feet coming from behind in the stairwell.

He was being pursued; he knew it and they had managed to track him. It did not really surprise him. He inhaled sharply. There were more sounds of running feet. As he looked behind him, his face twisted into a grimace of terror, Cyclonus and Scourge! They both appeared from separate halls. Trying to cut him off. They were calling after him, taunting him, insulting him. They chased him; their weapons drawn. They started to fire, lavender laser bolts shot past him. Starscream screamed out as pain lanced through his back, he stumbled forward. Three of the shots had torn into the middle of his back and a fourth ripped through his right wing, shredding a hole near the upturned trailing edge. He stumbled again but caught himself. He twisted his body forwards and ran rapidly through the corridor.

"The hunt is on," said Cyclonus clearly from behind, "The quarry is now wounded."

"He leaves a trail, he'll be easily tracked," said Scourge looking down at the scattered drops of energon on the tiles.

Starscream turned sharply into another passageway. He had a feeling like he was in the middle of a nightmare. He was in someway; things were happening to him so fast that it felt like slow motion. Screams were sounding like whispers. Whispers echoed and reverberated like screams. The voices of the pursuing Decepticons echoed in the hallway. Bouncing off walls and corridors it sounded like they were everywhere to put a precise point of origin was impossible. His own cries sounded disembodied to him, like he was hearing it from a third person point of view. He could hear the other voices yelling orders to one another.

"Cut him off that way."

"Don't cut him off! Cut him down!"

"Don't even touch him, he is mine." The last voice was familiar and it sent such a burst of terror through his entire body that it paralysed him. Galvatron was nearby.

His mind went suddenly numb. All thought processes ceased for a moment. Terror coursed through him like an Arctic wind on a hot summer's day. He stopped dead in his tracks for a moment, his electric pulse froze then quickened and the hammering in his chest was almost deafening. 'Run,' Came a disembodied thought. He shook his head to try to clear the angst from his mind; he bolted and continued to run from his pursuers.

Soundwave appeared from around a corner and stepped into the hall ahead of him. The tall blue mech stood silently regarding Starscream for a moment, his wide bulk almost spanned the width of the hall effectively blocking the Seekers passage. There was, fortunately for him, another junction just ahead of Soundwave. Where was he to go? Should he run left? Or right? Should he just charge for Soundwave? Again the choices overwhelmed the Seeker. There was no way back to the stairwell, Cyclonus and Scourge were way too close behind him.

He hoped when he took one of the joining halls, he might find an open doorway or even the storage locker where his weapons could have been hidden, where he could lock himself in and hide. His hopes however were fruitless. The Decepticon pursuers were now too close for him to hide unnoticed. There were shouts behind him and more laser fire. He stumbled. He pressed his hand against the corridor wall to rebalance himself. "Nowhere to run and nowhere to hide..." he whispered as he tripped and stumbled again. "Primus cut me some slack!" He gasped, feeling sickened by his sudden ineptitude.

He was panting. His breath was being drawn in short, sharp, gasps. He felt as if he was not getting enough oxygen in his fuel mix. He remembered suddenly, that he had not charged in several days. He had done nothing but lie completely idle; staring at the ceiling did not require much energy. He had not expected to suddenly end up running for his life through the halls. Again he resented Autobots would not allow him to fully recharge, their fear that it would only make him stronger. That he could overpower them. He knew they had a legitimate fear, he probably would have overcome his guard and escape rather than remain captive. He was still a Decepticon after all. And well known as a traitor, mustn't forget that. That was all he was, a traitor, nothing but scum. Someone no one would ever

truly gave a damn about, no one cared! Why should he care? He thought as if he was trying to justify giving up.

'There was one who cared once,' a thought interjected.

"Not now. Go away." He wheezed back. His mind was filled with despair and terror. "Why *not* just give it up?" he gasped.

'But that is not your way, Starscream, never was. You're a fighter, a warrior. It's your life; you don't want to give it up without a fight.' No, he agreed. He did not want to give Galvatron the satisfaction of an easy victory. Life was too precious to just toss aside and he had a second chance to make things right. But he still had no method of defence. He could only run and he was starting to lack the energy required to keep that up any longer. "Some fight this will end up being," he whispered anxiously.

The junction loomed ahead. Soundwave aimed his weapon and readied to fire. The fleeing Seeker made his choice and with a yell he threw himself into the right hand corridor losing his balance and fell face to the ground. His arms outstretched, he skidded to a halt. As he pushed himself up from the ground he had a sinking feeling. That sort of feeling that one might get when one realises that they have bitten into a wormy apple. That feeling where one knew that they should have, probably, turned left instead of right. An electric prickle shot up the centre of his back. He knew the chase was done, that he was finally captured. He had fallen at someone's feet. And he had an ugly feeling that he knew whose feet he had fallen at. 'It was a fifty-fifty chance,' Said a thought bitterly. He whimpered and his body shook with fear.

As he slowly lifted his head to look up, his optics focused on the dark shape ahead of him. Dread terror filled him once again, his body went like ice. "N-noooo!" he half screamed and half wailed. Panicking he attempted to correct his deadly error. Ahead of him, with his plasma cannon aimed, was Galvatron. His face smug and unsmiling, he looked down upon Starscream as if he was the foulest insect. The face of a true killer. A person with no conscience or any remorse. His optics twinkled with purest of hatred and malice as the cannon fired.

Starscream's metal feet scabbled with the slick polished white floor as he attempted to rise and get out of the way. The blast hit him broadside and then the all too familiar searing pain of the plasma weapon's discharge, centred in his right. He could feel his metal body melting and circuits evaporating. Energon sprayed on the walls as he fell heavily, writhing and screaming, to the ground. His energon rapidly leaked out and pooled on the white tiles of the floor.

He was still alive. He gasped for breath and with each gasp, pain exploded in his chest. It appeared the blast had ruptured an air filter. He struggled to stand, grasping for the wall. Pain shot through his body. He moaned and whimpered as he finally got up to his knees. His other hand still resting on the ground, he coughed and gagged. A trickle of energon seeped from his mouth and dripped onto the floor. He uttered a low cry of anguish. The smell of scorched metal, ozone and energon stung in his nose. He could hear a nerve shattering laugh from above him, his body shuddered visibly.

He knew Galvatron was toying with him, as a cat plays with a mouse just before it kills it.

He had not used his plasma cannon at full power, as the blast had only wounded him. Or if it was at full power it was not as effective as it was when he was transformed. But either way he knew he was being played with, tormented, and tortured. He gasped with each throb of pain that pounded at his mind and body. With each throb he felt a bit weaker; his fuel pump rapidly forced the precious liquid energy out of his wounds and onto the floor. "P-p-please... no," he stammered. He placed his hand, painfully, over his wounded right side trying in vain to hold the valuable fluid inside of him. He felt the warm energon seep between his fingers. It was sticky and thick, it shimmered. He glanced at his right wing. Energon seeped from wounds there too. He did not want to think of his back. Starscream could feel the warm trickles running towards the ground. He looked up at Galvatron. He whimpered. He knew it. He would soon be dead. "I don't want to die!" he said half to himself.

Shaking his head, he attempted to clear his mind of that sickening realisation. He slowly backed away from Galvatron until he was pressed with his laser scored back against the metallic wall of the Autobot prison. He had nowhere to run. He felt like a bird, netted, cornered and surrounded. He could feel his strength quickly ebb from his hideous wound. Soundwave, Ravage, Rumble, Scourge and Cyclonus closed in from all sides, their weapons readied with menacing expressions. His optics darted left and right. There was absolutely no avenue for escape. "Don't-please." he pleaded to Galvatron. "Will someone please—HELP ME!" he screamed the last two words in a terrified wail. He shook from the agonising pain of his injuries and terror that the huge Decepticon leader had filled him. Still no one made a move to his aid. He felt dizzy and light headed.

Galvatron took a step forward his face was menacing, "Do you defy death Starscream?" His optics glowed a brilliant evil red. "Do you defy me? I've killed you once and I shall again, and this time your laser core won't escape." Galvatron's face was enraged and a crackle of sparks shot from the side of his head. His face twisted into a sadistic grin. He stepped one more step forward. He leaned down into the terrified Seekers face. "I shall enjoy this, Starscream, I shall enjoy destroying you this second time very much indeed," he laughed.

"Galvatron—no! Please—I beg of you!—don't kill me!" he shrieked with a sudden surge of fear produced electro-adrenaline, but it waned as soon as it came on. "Please!" he whined more weakly as he frantically looked from face to face in hopes that one of them might help stop his impending destruction. There was no sympathy. He did not expect any. If anyone showed Starscream sympathy they would ultimately die with him which was the way with Galvatron. The "new" Decepticon leader made Megatron seem very kind and generous and above all merciful. Galvatron had been known to kill Decepticons on the slightest hint of treachery or just because it amused him.

He sobbed painfully. One of his air scrubbers were filling with liquid energon. His voice became very raspy. "Please!—Galvatron—let me be!—" he sputtered with a gasp. "I have no challenge to your position—any more," he said between the agonising stabs of pain. Galvatron merely looked disgusted at Starscream's display of fear. The Seeker felt another massive swell of panic and terror. 'There would be no reasoning with this guy,' he thought. Galvatron had only one thing on his mind, Starscream's destruction.

He looked down at the floor at the thick pink fluid that pooled on its surface. 'You're pathetic aren't you?' a distant thought chided him. 'Anyway look at the floor, your life fuel,

guess what Screamer, you're dying.'

He felt annoyed for a moment and responded to himself hoarsely, "I know. There is not much I can do to stop it." he coughed and retched. He spat out a huge quantity of the iridescent life fluid. It was laced with a darker liquid. It appeared he had a few other internal injuries. He breathed in with difficulty that triggered another bout of coughing. He sobbed as he doubled over holding his chest and wounded side. 'Why could he not get this over and done with?' An irritated thought came. 'Why did he have to drag it out?'

"I am not Megatron, Starscream," said Galvatron echoing Starscream's unspoken thoughts. "I don't show anyone mercy, especially to the likes of you." Galvatron took aim again with his weapon. "Now do us a favour, shut up and DIE!" He fired the weapon at point blank range. The blast was aimed for the Seekers chest. Time seemed to slow down for Starscream.

Starscream continued to plead for his life between gasps and coughs. Not that it was going to do much help now. 'Face him like the warrior you are.' that distant thought insisted. He looked up and faced his executioner. He braced for what he knew was to come. He raised his left arm to cover his face and optics and his right hand in a pathetic gesture that might ward off the incoming final blast of the weapon. Even, he thought, if his laser core did survive, he would never see another chance at a new body again he would have to resort to possessions.

It was not even a matter of a second before that blast hit him, however that moment felt like eternity. He saw the brilliant white - purple plume of the charge erupt from the end of the plasma cannon. His optics widened in a moment of pure terror. The blast expanded as it moved towards him. He glanced up for a nanosecond, and looked into the sadistic grinning face. He off lined his optics and screamed as the blast enveloped him. It burned and tore at him. He could feel his chest breaking apart. Suddenly he felt the floor smash against his face as his cockpit shattered. He had not realised he was falling. He could feel his energon pump sputter and fail. In his last moment before the blackness of oblivion took him over, he thought he had heard Autobot voices and laser fire. With a final, faint thought, 'Shame, they are—too late. Oh well, sorry old buddy.' Everything went black and all senses ceased.

* * *

The Autobots had burst into the hallway. Galvatron looked up and paused in his aim. "Autobots" he hissed to himself. A few laser bolts flashed by his head. He looked down at the quivering, blathering heap that was Starscream. He hated him. He despised him. He wanted to make his death as slow and as painful as possible, however it was not an option to give the traitor the lingering death that he so deserved. He fired the cannon. The blast struck Starscream full in the upper torso.

Starscream's chest exploded and he fell face down, sprawled on the white floor, his face against the tiles, his head twisted to the side in a glistening pool of pink energon. The glow in his optics flickered and went out. The pool of energon steadily grew larger as there was nothing left holding it in. Bits of his body lay strewn around in a large radius. He did not move.

Galvatron was satisfied. He would have preferred to have fired a second shot and slagged the worthless lump, but it was certain by the severity of the damage, Starscream was indeed dead. He would have preferred to have taken the renegades head, but he was being pushed back. "My job here is done, Autobot fools," he snarled as he turned and ordered his troops away. Several of the Autobots pursued.

The remaining Autobots looked down at Starscream. Rodimus shook his head in dismay and for once showed pity. The Guana woman walked out from behind the Autobot leader. She knelt beside the fallen Seeker, her hand resting on his torn wing.

He was, without warning, aware, yet unaware; perplexed, where was he? Who was he? What happened and why? He could not move his body, it would not respond, he felt paralysed, he felt trapped. He could hear sounds, sounds, there was lots of sound. He could not make out what the sounds were or where they were coming from, and there was pain, excruciating pain, like the fires of the Sun had just engulfed him. He tried to see, there was no vision, just a grey haze that was darkening. Yet there were voices, calling, calling, urgent voices calling.

"We need to roll him over, one, two, three, lift"

An unexpected movement triggered a horrendous pain that sheared his mind in half like a living fire ripping through his soul. His mind screamed out, his hazy grey vision abruptly went black.

"Carefully—slowly, flip—"

"Primus in Cybertron! He's *not* going to make it."

"He did ask for our help. We have to at least try to save him. If he dies, then he dies; Down!"

"His damage is far too extensive. Even if we could, it would take days—"

"Well then, get on with it—" said a louder commanding voice.

He did not understand the words. Soon all the sound and pain faded away into blackness upon blackness, deepening into utter oblivion: it was dark.

The lolling blackness ebbed and flowed like gentle waves on a deep dark ocean. He felt like he was floating on his back in the warm sea, looking up at the blacker than black sky. Overhead was a pinpoint of light, it flickered and glowed like brilliant blue-white star, it reminded him of something. Curious. He wanted desperately to get to the light; to hold it. He reached up to grab it.

FLASH! The light blinded him and pain seared his senses. He opened his mouth to scream but only a gasp came out. He felt confused. Voices shouted to each other so loudly that they rang in his head but he could not quite understand them.

"There is a dip in brain wave activity. Try to re-start that fuel pump."

His mind reeled from the pain. He felt as if he was spinning on his back, dizzy, he attempted to stop the motion of his mind. Suddenly he jerked as pain like fire blossomed and burned at his thoughts.

"Control his movement."

There was more murmuring as he sank into a haze of fog, another pain jolted him. There was too much confusion here. He returned to the dark ocean.

Time floated by or perhaps it did not. He could not tell. It seemed like an instant between awakenings. But time seemed to go by, speedily yet endlessly into the timeless limbo. There was nothing here, in the black void of nothingness, just the slosh of warm black water, on his back and the warmth of a black sun shining darkly in a black cloudless sky. Again there was a glimmer, a spark of scintillating light in the emptiness that surrounded him. He hesitated, not wanting to leave the black warmth. He remembered the agonising light. Yet something compelled him, the light was too tempting, it glowed, it called to him. He desired it. Once more he reached up, watching, as his unseen hand closed around it.

FLASH! The blinding light was still there but not the pain. Cold numbness coated his entire being and he could not move. He could not open his mouth but again the voices were calling back and forth: It was frightening.

"We have a drop in the brain wave...."

"That slagging fuel pump is not functioning..."

All he experienced was a very sharp tingle but no pain. He was curious, very curious. He wondered, could he float higher? past the light?

"We are going to lose him try—zap him again!"

"Can't a replacement pump be found?"

"The Junkions are still looking. Compatible parts for him are very hard to come by."

"We'll have to hook him to the machines; this is not going to be pretty."

Then came a pain so intense it penetrated his numbness. He was brought back down with a snap, like elastic that was stretched too far. He snuggled into the protective black blanket of his deep ocean.

It was an odd sensation the light and the darkness. It confused him. Why should this void be so warm and comfortable and the light so painful and frustrating? Who were those voices and why should they cause him pain when he went to explore the light?

His time in the dark was endless. He would reach up to the light and each time he was brought back forcefully. He resented it and he was angered. Why should he strangely prefer the painful brightness of the light? The dark ocean did not make him hurt. It lulled him but it was boring. Nothing to do but float in the water. Up above was the dazzlingly bright star. It beckoned to him, It spoke both of promise and of warning, like a lighthouse by a rocky coastline, a promise of safe harbour or if he ignored it; of death. He reached for it but he was tied to a great weight. Something heavy...

FLASH! Again searing pain and the glare of bright unnatural light. He screamed a word and that brought the attention of the other voices. What had he said? He wondered.

"Skyfire?" One of the voices murmured. A shadow crossed his field of vision.

Did he say Skyfire? He thought that was a good description of the blinding light. It seemed the sky was on fire.

"Stop his writhing—"

"Give him another sedative."

"I can't work with all that slugging movement!"

Coldness swept over his body like a cold rain, oh how sweet, he thought, as pain slipped from his mind. He re-entered the dark abyss of his private ocean. He relaxed and waited. He was starting to find the star interesting. Twinkle, twinkle little star. How I wonder what you are. He could hear the voices, but the star was not there. There was no glint in the sky, only coolness, not the warmth he was accustomed to.

"For Primus sake—he's a damned Decepticon—"

"Do as I say, Overcast, contact Skyfire."

He sank back in to the murky ocean depths. Only this time it was different, his lovely black ocean formed a dark blue ball in the middle, surrounded by millions of tiny pinpoints of light that flickered and winked at him. As he drew nearer to the sphere, he could see that it sported splashes of green and light blue and white, the colours formed shapes like land masses. He found this very interesting. He soared to the jewel like globe. He was drawn closer, as if pulled by gravity and entered the atmosphere of the planet. He flew through white clouds and dove to the brilliant blue waters of an alien ocean. The world was strange, yet familiar and primitive.

He landed on a white sandy beach. There he stood for a moment, looking at the horizon. The magically turquoise waters touched with the deep blue-black of the celestial blanket. In the sky, glimmered a very bright white star.

He stepped into the ocean. It lapped gently at his feet. The water was pleasantly cool; he waded out into the sea until it went to his knees. He halted and glanced down at the water. The water slowed its motion and stopped. It reflected the light of the star that shone brilliantly over his wing and shoulder; he could see himself reflected in the mirror-like surface. He touched his face, with the tips of his azure fingers. He crouched, studying his reflection. He looked deep into his own glowing red optics, for a moment he remembered, he wondered, was he dead? Is this limbo? Was this Heaven, Hell, Valhalla or Summerland? Many more names for the afterlife darted across his mind.

He looked around himself at the visage of the world in front of him; it could not be, not again, not now. It had to be a dream. Slowly he lowered his hand to take the flashing star from the water, his fingers touched it, as tendrils rose out the smooth glass-like surface and entwined themselves around his wrists, ankles and body. He writhed. They pulled him into the solidified liquid. The Ocean started to flow into his mouth, he struggled to keep himself above the fluid but his body was dragged under. He renewed his struggles, pulling free of some of the tentacles. His head burst out of the water, his arms flailed as he

gasped. One tendril rose, high, out of the sea, thickening; forming the head of a huge lye spitting Wyvern. Its blood red eyes regarded him with hatred and fury, it reared, beating its weak wings as it opened its mouth, exposing many sharp titanium teeth, dripping with caustic saliva. It lunged at him; unable to get away he screamed, its mouth closed around him, teeth sinking into him, he screamed.

FLASH. The blinding light hurt his optics. He turned them off. Pain pulsated in his head as he struggled to get free. A groan erupted from his mouth. He moved his fingers slightly, he winced, his entire body ached. He opened his optics again just a little. He could see undefined shapes as well as muted colours.

There were those voices again.

"He's coming to."

"I am curious why we are actually trying to save him. Would it not be better to have just let him die?" murmured a second voice with a tone of deep disgust. "It was most likely a waste of time and effort."

"Perhaps, I am not so sure he is the Starscream we knew long ago. He might be the one that Skyfire once knew and still laments for." said another.

"Well he still is in pretty bad shape, but he should live. It will take a while to patch him completely up." spoke the first voice.

"I am not surprised Skyfire reacted the way he did, after all he's done for him," said the second voice disgustedly.

"Starscream? Do you hear me?" asked a voice that was a notch closer.

"Starscream?" The Seeker whispered. "Who?" he was confused. "Where am I? Whaaa happened? Why can't I move?" His voice was barely audible. His head pounded from the loudness of the voices.

"You have been immobilised. I did not want you suddenly moving. We are still working on very delicate circuits. You suffered critical damage in the attack and we did not expect you to survive this long, however your main functions, for the most part, have been stabilised with help of external life support equipment. It's now a matter of finding the more elusive, replacement parts, for those components damaged beyond repair." said Perceptor.

"Am I dead?" he asked wondering. His thoughts were confused. He had a vague memory of kneeling on the ground in a pool of energon. He squinted at the owner of the voice trying to get his optics cleared. His vision however remained cloudy and supersensitive to the light.

"No, Starscream, you are very much alive. We think, however, Galvatron believes you are dead. He was about to slag you when we arrived but we managed to beat him back." Said Rodimus.

"Galvatron?" The name was familiar, it made him feel cold. But before he could grasp the

meaning of that name Perceptor administered a sedative.

"Now go back to sleep Starscream, we've had a gruelling week."

"Thanks," he said with a wispy sigh. Then he allowed himself to be taken over with the cool numbness.

He stood on top of a snowy Mountain top. He knew this mountain; he had been here a few times before. He slowly turned around and looked at the world from the highest point. Chill wind buffeted at his wings as a wisp of snow blew around him. He gazed downwards at the sea of clouds that covered the world in a thick white blanket. Behind him the blazing golden sun warmed his back. He could see his dark shadow, on the clouds below, outlined by the glowing golden halo known as the glory that surrounded him like an aura of power. He remembered this mountain: Everest. It was the only place on Earth where he could ever feel on top of everything; feel at peace and to feel truly alive. He opened his left hand and looked into it, the glowing blue star scintillated as it grew and infused him with its brilliance.

His previous dreams became a haze, as it started to drift to the recesses of his mind: confusion, anger, anguish, pain, blackness and the star. He suddenly realised what the star was, a revelation like a blast of chill air that slammed into his back like a thousand metric tonnes of super cooled steel, it was his soul, his lasercore, his spark, his life.

* * *

Teris waited for several days in an observation room watching the medic as he carefully rebuilt Starscream's midriff and chest. The god had almost perished. Several times in fact. The one called Rodimus had told her that he seemed to be trying to release the soul of his being.

It was a terrible sight to see, him laying there for days, while Autobots worked around the clock carefully reconnecting torn and melted circuits. They were quite concerned with a large round shaped device that was the fuel pump. That kept stopping. When she questioned them on the importance of it they explained it was much like a Guana's heart. It regulated the flow of energon through his body, so in silence she watched on.

* * *

She had been with a small group of Guanans' in a library, Empangeni; the pilot, had been working on flight training, his landing of the Blue Dragon had been questionable but he had potential. Umfolosi, the engineer, was researching improved engine designs. She had found that The Blue Dragon's engines were very outdated and inefficient. Tuli and Zumbo sat close together looking though information on metallurgy, to improve the metals that they manufactured back at their homes.

"Teris, any idea when we will return to our home?" asked Tuli looking up from a datapad she had been punching information in.

"It depends on N'kosi and the Autobots."

"I miss home, this world is strange, cold and very dry." she said with a slight whimper. Zumbo snaked an arm around her and nudged her with his snout affectionately.

"I would prefer this world to that ruined Charr," Said Teris, idly rubbing the gold pendant that she wore.

"He said he'd send us home." Tuli said bitterly. "Perhaps Madba was right. Perhaps we will never see our families again, perhaps he is false."

Teris and Umfolosi both hissed in surprise.

"Regardless of who or what he is; he has given us much and that we are to be grateful for. Anyway Madba is a bloated, close minded slug. He has it coming to him."

Empangeni and Zumbo exchanged glances, their eyes twinkled with mirth, they said nothing. Empangeni leaned back into his chair and kicked his feet outwards and intertwined his hands on his abdomen.

"Aroab and Kibaya and a few others want you to take the ship back home. Empangeni is skilled enough to fly it himself. N'kosi can follow when he is ready; there is little point in us remaining. We have garnered enough information. What about you? You can't even speak the language. What information have you gathered?"

"I am not going to abandon N'kosi unless he tells me we should leave and he has not given us that order! Taking the ship would be Mutiny." Teris said angrily. "As for the language, I have learned how to read it. That is enough. If Starscream wishes me to speak it he will teach me."

"For N'kosi's voice, Teris, you are pretty mute. He has to speak to you in our language." snapped Tuli.

Teris shot Tuli an angry glance. "I will...." She was cut off.

"That's enough you guys, I can't concentrate with all this bickering!" Zumbo barked. Tuli opened her mouth to say something and Zumbo nudged her sharply in the ribs. His pupils narrowed sharply and she closed her mouth again.

Teris had ended up being their leader by default. It was not a job she really wanted but it was how it ended up being. Her basic knowledge of the shamanistic ways, her being daughter of Santor and being in almost constant company of Starscream, but sometimes even she wondered about the great one. Those doubts she kept mostly to herself. She would have to word it carefully if she questioned Starscream, as he was apt to take it the wrong way.

They were sitting talking quietly amongst themselves when they heard the sirens. Tuli and Zumbo both looked up. The sirens had never gone off before. The sound was shrill and irritating to their hearing. Umfolosi held her hands over her ear drums expressing a very sour look on her face. Empangeni ran to the window.

"There is an attack! Creatures who look like N'kosi, when he is a bird," Empangeni said

eagerly to the others. They had read about the wars that went on between Starscream's kind and the group that ruled this world. They had never seen gods fight gods before. The other three Guanas clustered around the window as a bomb rocked the building.

"Teris, you must see this!" Umfolosi said eagerly. She looked over her shoulder but Teris was not in the room. "Teris?"

Teris was pounding through the halls, her head jutting out as her strong legs stretched out full length. Her tail held out straight behind her. She increased her speed running. She had a bad feeling. There were robots running through the halls. She leaned forwards further to increase her speed. She darted between their legs and out the door. She stopped and looked ahead. The guards at the building were leaving, her eyes could just make out the shape of Starscream at the door as he turned and returned up the stairs.

Teris ran forwards again, glancing over her shoulder at the building behind her. As she shot across the courtyard her feet barely touched the ground as she ran at lightning speed. No one was in her way to slow her down. She took deep breaths as she ran, her throat felt dry. She opened the gate in the door that was built so she and the others could visit. The sirens in the building stopped as the ground rumbled from the shock of another explosion.

She ran up the stairs and dropped herself flat abruptly. A strange blue god crept in the hall from the other side. She held her breath, her lungs were burning. Cybertron's atmosphere was far too dry for a Guana's comfort. He pressed his finger to his shoulder, his chest opened and a small rectangular cassette shot out. It transformed into a little blue robot. It looked up at the larger god, said something and opened the door a crack and crept through.

She could see on the front of it that it had a symbol identical to Starscream's. She wondered if this was a friend or a foe. Suddenly the ground shook. Teris slid down a couple steps, she clambered back up. The blue mech stepped into the hallway blocking the passage and most of her view. Suddenly Starscream shot out of the room. He looked frightened.

Teris realised that these were not friends; they might have the same symbol as Starscream but that seemed to mean little amongst his kind. She had fled down the stairs and out the door. She looked into the sky looking for the planes she spotted them slightly to her left. Where there is smoke there is fire. She ran hard between buildings. The fight was not that far away but her lungs felt as if she had drunk Wyvern venom, they burned. She ran to find Rodimus Prime. He was the only one she could talk to, the only one who knew her language. Her large amber eyes scanned the bunker, looking; she managed to spot him and ran to him.

"Hail! Rodimus! Please help N'kosi, help him; I fear he is in danger!" She said rapidly in Guana over and over, her words came in between great heaving breaths. She had not realised how out of shape she had become. Too much sitting around reading or talking.

The Autobot leader leaned down. "Slow down little lizard. I can hardly understand you."

"Please help lord Starscream. He is in danger! He was being chased by a large blue god

who gives birth to smaller ones."

"Soundwave! You are sure?" He asked quickly.

Teris nodded her head vigorously.

"Magnus you stay here." He pointed to Springer, Upland and Sandstorm. "You three come with me."

The four Autobots transformed. Rodimus opened his door. "Jump in quick we might not have time." She hardly had the door shut when they shot off around the building. They came from behind and there was a huge hole in the back wall rubble strewn around the ground. Teris figured this was probably from the explosion earlier. They drove around to the front of the building. Teris rapidly exited the Autobot and ran into the stairwell. The four Autobots transformed, Springer and Sandstorm flattened themselves against one side of the door while the blue Upland leaned against the other side. She waited inside as Rodimus punched in the access code. The door swung open.

Teris went to step further in; Upland placed a hand on her. "Keep back."

"N'kosi is my friend, I am not a weak minded mammal so can take care of myself." She snapped as she darted up the stairs. The Autobots shook their heads and followed her. They could hear echoes of voices. Teris looked around sniffing at the air. There was no odour, it frustrated her, and she could not track anyone if they did not have a scent. They walked quickly through the halls.

"Frag they could be anywhere."

Teris cocked her head slightly listening. She could hear sounds. Pointed to the doors of another staircase. "In there. There is activity, one level below us."

"You three split up this is a big building. We might have a better chance at finding him if we take different routes. Teris come with me." The other three Autobots ran in different directions. Rodimus opened the door and Teris stepped through. Suddenly the stairwell was filled with thundering of someone running. "Someone is in here, run! Run follow!" Teris darted down the steps at the end there was a loud crash. They quickly arrived at the door. It hung on two hinges the door was bent someone had gone through it very forcefully. Teris peered closely at the door and noticed some flakes of red and blue.

"Which way?" Asked Teris looking left and right. There was a shrill scream that ended in a stifled sob. The sound reverberated. The sound seemed strongest in the hall to her left. "That way," said Teris pointing. They ran forwards. She saw some pink splotches on the ground, Teris suddenly stopped she crouched and scrutinised the splat, instinctively sniffing at the air, she dipped her fingers into a thick pink glowing fluid, looking at its shimmering iridescence she knew what it was: Energon. N'kosi was wounded. "He leaves a trail that is all too clear, we must find him!"

There were voices coming from the halls ahead, the sound of a weapon discharging and a loud bloodcurdling scream. Teris froze for a moment. She had never heard a cry so filled with fright and anguish. She was worried that they were too late. Her feet picked up speed

and she tracked the voices and followed the energon.

"I hope we are not too late!"

Echoes of a very pained panicked, pleading voice came from the right hand corridor. Ahead appeared the other three Autobots. Rodimus signed them to move up. "Teris, stay here." he said softly to the lizard.

She looked around the corner and saw what she really did not want to see. Starscream had been beaten to his knees and was begging for his life. That memory burned in Teris' mind. She had never seen him so humbled before. It haunted her to see rabid fear on his face as the blast hit him.

The Autobots attacked and drove the Decepticons out of the building and away from Cybertron. But it appeared it was too late. He was laying face to the side in a pool of pink. His mouth was slack and a thin line of energon seeped out. All expression of his previous terror was erased and there was no light in his eyes.

"N'kosi wake up!" she called softly. Her voice was choked. She shook his arm. "Please! Get up."

She waited for the medics to arrive. Tears trickled from her eyes but they dried up at the announcement that he was indeed alive but barely. However they had to bind him to the table in the infirmary and told her to keep out of the way. Rodimus explained that this was to prevent him hurting himself further when he awoke. He awoke often. Struggling or screaming sometimes he shouted out a name or a place. It appeared he could not see as he did not notice her. It was quite obvious that he did not notice anyone. More minutes drifted into hours and hours dragged into days. The operation was almost complete.

* * *

"Teris?" A soft voice asked. "I will be reviving him in a few minutes," Said Perceptor distracting her from her thoughts. He beacons her to follow. They unlatched his arms and legs. He almost looked as if nothing had ever happened. Perceptor turned Starscream's right wrist up and opened a small aperture that exposed a glowing pink conduit. He administered a stimulant to the Decepticon's energon flow.

The red and white Seeker's eyes flickered and then glowed an unsteady, dull red. He turned his head as he focused on the Autobot standing there. Suddenly vague flashes of memory trickled past his mind's eye, running, falling, crying for help, Galvatron firing, dying..... Or did he? Suddenly he was not sure. He felt confused.

"I was at Galvatron's mercy," said Starscream wearily. "How did I manage to survive?" Starscream realised Galvatron and mercy was an oxymoron. There was no such thing. He had expected a relatively slow, painful execution. He had certainly not anticipated ever waking up again.

"Well, if we were few moments later your wounds would have been fatal for sure." Perceptor leaned in closer to Starscream and whispered, "If it was not for her informing us of the second attack, you would have been slagged without a doubt." he said pointing at

the lizard.

Starscream moved his head to briefly look at the Teris. He laid his head back with an exhausted sigh. "How long has it been since the attack?"

"Nine days," Perceptor replied. He tapped on the computer. "You resisted us almost all the way too. Your fuel pump kept seizing and had to be replaced. You had several full system failures, but somehow we managed to keep you functioning. Finding compatible replacement components, for you, now that was extraordinarily difficult, we don't have very many Seekers on Cybertron and we also don't make a habit of repairing Decepticons."

"Nine days?!" He exclaimed. It felt like only a few hours had gone by at the most. He had no recollection of any of his previous awakenings. "And what of Galvatron?" he asked nervously, feeling his body quaking slightly. He remembered asking the same of Megatron before his ill fated coronation.

"We managed to beat him back. He said he was only coming to finish off a job. I assume you are the job he was referring to." said Perceptor coolly. "I think he thinks you're dead."

"He nearly had me that way. I could not defend myself." said Starscream bitterly. He remembered everything far too clearly. "You 'Bots almost had me killed because of your precautions." He attempted to sit up; he was very groggy and his head pounded. Lights danced in front of his optics and his mind swam. He groaned and refocused his optics.

"Starscream," Perceptor spoke softly. "Prime decided you are telling the truth. He offers you asylum." He brought out an Autobot insignia. "He was wondering if you wished to wear this emblem," He held out the insignia.

Starscream looked at it for a long hard moment. Nausea welled up inside and he thought he would be ill. If there was a remote chance that he, Starscream, Decepticon Ex-sub commander, would have ever considered taking their banner they lost that opportunity at his interrogation. He was disgusted with the Autobots. "He decides that after he sees me nearly killed?" He shot the Autobot a dirty look. "Oh boy, look the Decepticons really mean to kill him. Maybe we should apologise." spat Starscream sarcastically. He was angry, he was frustrated. Somewhere amongst those feelings he was hurt. He was grateful for their attempts at saving his life. But there was no way he would ever stoop to their level. "My answer: hell no! Who do you think I am? I'm not even sure who or what I am anymore," replied Starscream harshly.

"Well he figured you would not wish it. He told me that you have freedom of Cybertron and your weapons are to be returned to you. You are not permitted to leave Cybertron, without valid reason. He also wishes you to know that if you attempt to cause any Autobots harm you will be incarcerated again or rendered harmless permanently."

The Seeker scowled. The Autobots were laying restrictions on him again. They claimed he had freedom but all he had was a larger cage.

Perceptor held out the two weapons that Starscream wore on his arms.

The Seeker held them for a moment, looked them over slowly. He looked for evidence of tampering, finding none, he reattached them carefully. He could feel the draw of power. They remained unused for so long that the energy within them had dissipated. He looked at the Autobot. "What's freedom to me if I can't fly or transform?" he hissed.

"Take a look at your diagnostics. We've reconnected your transformation relays and your flight program is also back online."

He was secretly delighted, freedom and the perks that make life worth living. But he maintained an indifferent face. "Thanks," he said in a sarcastic tone.

"I'll leave you two for a few minutes. I need to find Prime," the Autobot said and he left.

It was bound to be common knowledge of what he was by now. He was not immortal; he was a living creature like any of them although he could survive in very harsh conditions that would easily wipe any of them out. The strange thing was he was starting to believe he was a god and really thinking that nothing would ever happen to him: Arrogance. He knew that cost him his life the first time.

"You are not really a god, are you?" Teris said sadly echoing Starscream's thoughts. "I saw you reduced to your knees like a blubbing spawnling." She glanced nervously at the weapons he now wore.

Starscream remembered his reaction when he heard her say that before. He felt a sense of guilt as he recalled holding his weapon mere centimetres from her face. He recalled Megatron doing the same to him as he questioned leadership, however she was not questioning his leadership, and she was questioning his word. "Do I have to be?" he asked.

"You lied when you said the Autobots were evil. They claim that you are evil." she whispered. "They spent days repairing your broken body, when they could have easily walked away. That is not evil."

"Evil and good is merely one's perspective on things. True, they saved me and this I am thankful for, but..." He thought for a moment. However, they have treated him cruelly, "clipped" his wings and taken away all his defences. He knew they were evil. Benevolent beings don't treat their POWs like that, some Decepticons tended towards the sadistically harsh side but not every Decepticon was like that. Even some Autobots were like that. Starscream had been known for his cruelty, experiments, vivisection of both machine and animal. But for the most part it was for learning how things work, why they work and ultimately how to stop it from working, but that was only to improve warfare. Science was often considered evil. It depended on how you used it. For the Guanas he used science in their benefit, for good, teaching them things that they might need to know to improve their way of life. There was something unique with them, was something about their memories that intrigued him. Something that he could not quite put a finger on.

If there was any species in the universe he would want to see extinct, that was the humans. They were prolific, not very bright; although, they thought that they were brilliant, and the best things that had happened to the universe. Hypocritical and weak. Their overall weakness and fear of the unknown made him hate them. He had experimented on

them ruthlessly. He wanted to find out how they multiplied, but his experiments in trying to get a few pairs to breed in captivity failed, and he had to dispose of the specimens. There was enough information on that subject kicking around their world but it never seemed to work in a controlled, lab environment. All he wanted to find out was how to render them sterile.

"We have been fighting for eons and I can't even remember why." he sighed sadly. "It was how I was taught to think when they sent me to the war academy." He looked at the floor interested with the tiles. "The war had gone on for so long at that time that most of us had forgotten the reason that it was being fought. I guess each side thought they were right. Each side thinks the other side is evil, that's the nature of war. Each one trying to wrest power from the other. Pick a side and fight with them."

"Like you and Galvatron? You are trying to take him out, to take his position."

"Excuse me?" Starscream said with insult taken. "I think I am in my right mind to attempt to destroy him. It's not about power anymore, it's about revenge, it's now about survival. An eye for an eye, a life for a life." He paused for a moment thinking. "I am not sure how things would have been if I was not killed in my coronation. I had been told once that there would be someone waiting to take me out. I had not anticipated that it would be so soon. Hmmm But then again, is it not my comeuppance? I have wriggled my way to the top, lying, betraying those who would stand in my way." He felt more like he was thinking out loud.

"Your species envied my powers of hunting. I could kill a deadly beast with one shot. Take a hit that would kill any of you and live. I could not resist the glory I had felt in being worshipped by creatures I deemed inferior. I have since learned that Guanans are very intelligent and perhaps worthy of more than I have given." He knew the scientist hiding in his head was gloating. "I honestly think it would be good for all Decepticons and Autobots if such a madman like Galvatron was contained, preferably destroyed. He is insane. Deactivating him is my task. When I am ready to confront him I shall go alone."

Teris listened intently she thought for a moment. She understood what he meant it was only a perspective. "If you need a friend, Decepticon, I can be that, but I don't want to be threatened again. I can hold your secrets and no one ever has to know, who or what you are."

Starscream nodded. He slowly sat up hunching under the throb of his head. He looked over at his wing insignias for a moment thinking. He reached up with difficulty and tore first one then the other off. "I am "free" now, to make my own choices. I am presently bound to Autobot rules about *MY* life, but in essence I have my freedom. I am not locked in a little cage. Galvatron will still pay. His death is in my debt. In that I have no choice. As long as he lives I will never be truly free for he will seek to destroy me when he realises he has failed." He opened his palm and the tattered insignias fluttered off and lay on the floor.

Teris shivered. She had seen the anger in the evil purple Decepticon's face. He was meaning for Starscream to never wake again.

Perceptor returned. "O.K. Little lizard lady, Starscream needs, some final examinations and to rest, he's been through a lot."

Teris walked for the door. As she passed the insignias she picked them up and hastily stuffed them into a pocket.

"You will be free to go in the morning, just don't forget, Starscream, you owe us a big one. There were more in favour of letting you die this time than those who wanted you fixed... fortunately for you, Prime does seem to have some faith in you." The Autobot put his face in front of Starscream's. "Don't disappoint him."

"He will be ready for release tomorrow morning Prime." Said Perceptor. "Do you really think it's wise to allow that Decepticon to run free on Cybertron? There is no telling what he will do."

"Don't worry yourself about it. He will be under surveillance."

"I think he would suspect that."

"Let him suspect. If he wants to remain uncaged he will do as we say. He knows we are not bluffing."

"Hmm, he had me help him remove the insignias off the back of his wings. He had already torn them off the front of them and when I had offered it to him, he refused our brand outright. As a matter of fact he looked revolted at the prospect. I haven't any doubt that he hates us for what we've done to him."

Rodimus chuckled lightly. "Decepticon pride still flows strong in him then. I would have been more worried if Starscream took them." He firmed up his tone and voice. "Well tell him this, he needs to take up residence somewhere else, I want him off this base in three weeks. He needs to find himself something with which to occupy his time."

"Yes, Sir," Said Perceptor.

The Autobot leader watched the scientist turn and leave. He hoped that he had made the right decision. What would Optimus have done with Starscream in this situation? Slagged him? Exiled him? There would be no real way of ever knowing.

* * *

Starscream laid still and waited until Perceptor had left for the night. Quietly he sat up and leaned against the wall. His head hardly hurt now and movement no longer created balls of coloured light to bounce into his field of vision. He looked around the room allowing his optics time to adjust.

Something did not click. Something felt wrong. Why save your enemy? What were the Autobots going to gain from letting him live? He knew the Decepticons would never have considered repairing an Autobot who was damaged, especially if it was potentially terminal. Not unless he had valuable information they could use.

'Perhaps they are just being good natured.'

"Think about it Mr. Logical." Starscream said to himself. "Doesn't it seem a little odd that they put me through that whole ludicrous war crimes trial, starve me, so to speak, and when I almost get killed, they suddenly give me what I wanted in the first place: Asylum, along with their symbols. I don't trust this."

'I recommend you run your internal diagnostics, look for unusual energy fluctuations that

could mean a marker in your energon flow. Scan for foreign metals, they could also be tracking markers or worse a bomb. Check for redundant circuits, incomplete connections etc. I would also run several scans of you data banks. Since I am still here things do seem to be normal.'

"Nothing has been normal since you showed up."

'Turn your mouth off and your scanners on.'

Starscream accessed his self diagnostic systems and ran a thorough scan. He leaned his head back against the wall and watched the program analyse his systems. This was going to take the better part of the night. He awoke with a start about three hours later. The diagnostics were still scanning but they had detected an inconstancy in his life support system.

'There is a tracking element in the energon that flows through you.' said the scientist. 'I have been closely monitoring the scan. Unfortunately there is nothing that can be done to remove this from our system save a complete transfusion of energon from a clean untainted source and this we can't do alone.'

Starscream cursed under his breath.

'On the bright side, there are no traces of elements or metals in you that would make up a bomb or any other form of disabling device.'

Starscream exhaled a sigh of relief.

'Don't worry too much about the tracer in your energon; it will dissipate in—oh, about ten months. It should not affect your normal functions either. All they can do with it is find out where you are at any given time, not what you are doing or saying,' Said the Scientist cheerfully. 'The rest of the scan is looking for tampered or dislocated memory files etc. You might as well zone out again, I will alert you if there is something wrong.'

Starscream leaned back again. "I need to think, I am going to have to re-plan my next attack. I've had time to ponder about it since I arrived on this world and I have second thoughts about running in with my guns blazing. I really am starting to doubt the power of my own Null Rifles. If I attack him and make one wrong move I've had it."

'Ah for once you are actually looking before you leap. You will need to either find more powerful guns or enhance the ones you already have. Both ideas are wrought with drawbacks. Firstly; you would never get clearance from the Autobots to construct such devices. Secondly; you would have a fun time locating parts for such devices. Thirdly there would be no real way to test the power of such a device. So if you did construct something you would be putting yourself at huge risk taking it untried into battle.'

"Can I enhance my rifles then?"

'Yes you can, however, it would be complex and cumbersome and probably un-reliable.'

"Then what do I do? Galvatron could find out about me and track me down." His voice

was shrill with frustration.

'I think you have some time yet. At least if he does come back you can fly, fight and transform.' The Seeker sighed and allowed his mind to ponder possible methods of enhancing his own weapons.

He became aware of a knock on the door. The Seeker tensed as he held his rifle ready. The door slowly opened, Starscream was nervous and almost fired off a shot when Perceptor stepped in. He lowered his weapon and leaned his head back against the wall.

The Autobots optics flashed brilliant blue for a second before he spoke. "Ah you are awake. Did you have a good rest?"

"No, I was up all night," Starscream said softly, "thinking."

"Ah that's only natural, to want to collect your thoughts, perhaps to rethink about what you want out of life. Near death experiences do have a tendency to prod ones consciousness into over activity. Did you want to talk about it?"

"Not particularly."

"I mean you have a very unique experience, you have experienced death, your body was atomised, yet somehow, despite all odds, you were given back your life. What grabs my interest in you is what is life like after death? To clarify, what was the life like between this one and the last one?"

Starscream flicked Perceptor an annoyed look. "There is no life after death." He said through clenched teeth.

"You came back a ghost, how?"

"I don't know how and I'd rather not talk about it." He said sounding fairly irked.

"Does it not make you in the least bit curious? Your personal experience in all records is unique. There are no other records of ghosts." Perceptor continued to press the subject. The Autobot scientist started pull a computer out from the wall.

"I don't want to have to tell you again. Drop this subject, immediately. I am not comfortable discussing it." Starscream hissed angrily as his optics burned bright red.

"I'm sorry to have given you any distress." He said bringing the computer in line with Starscream. "Now what I am going to scan for is to see if your self repair systems have come back online or not." Perceptor attached a couple of wires to the Seekers head, chest and wings.

Starscream did not enjoy the Autobot's close proximity to his head and wings. He could have told him it was fully functional, it checked out in the scan. But he did not want to alert him with the knowledge that he knew that he was going to be tracked. The Seeker winced inwardly as the Autobot placed the last suckers against his wings surface.

He tapped on the number pad and flicked a small toggle switch. The machine hummed to life as a series of numbers and images flashed across the screen. Perceptor watched as he spoke. "I talked with Rodimus last night, he tells me to inform you that you have three weeks to move out of that building and that you need to get some form of useful occupation."

Starscream sighed. What work could a displaced Decepticon air commander do on a planet full of Autobots? He wondered. "What if I can't find an occupation, then what?"

"I don't know, I suppose you could be brought before the tribunal, or you could be sent deep into the planet to mine ores. Hmmm," Perceptor said leaning into the machine. "Well you check out fine, all your functions are normal." He unhooked the machine from the Seekers chest and rolled up the wires into neat coils and laid them on top of the machine.

Starscream thought about the 'bots words he would not want to see the inside of that tribunal again and he did not want to end up mining ore that was a slave's occupation.

"Science."

"What?"

"Look into Science." He said as he rolled the machine against the wall. "The universities are always looking for those who are scientifically minded as you are. I am sure you can find a place at one of them. There you go now, Starscream, you are done, leave, go, get out of here and I don't want to see you back." said the Autobot as he turned away and started pulling glassware off shelves.

The Seeker shoved himself off the table and stepped onto the floor and started for the door.

"One more thing, Starscream, don't use your weapons, don't even threaten to. Your continued existence will depend on your discretion."

Starscream's optics flashed in acknowledgement however he was quite irritated: more rules.

* * *

The Cybertron sky was bright and clear as the blue-white Star glowed with intense luminosity. He had a really weird feeling wash over him when he glanced at the sun. He shrugged and gazed at the buildings in the distance. Some of the old buildings had scaffolding as work was being done to repair the ruins. Things were looking, in twenty years of Autobot control, better than it had in millions of years of Decepticon control. He approved of the work that had been done, he did not enjoy the memories of it as the tattered and ruined world it had become during the war. Many great cities had been demolished.

He gaze strayed from the semi repaired building to rest on The Blue Dragon. The large blue spacecraft was still moored in the same place it had been when it had arrived. He smiled; if he had to move out he would prefer the comfort and the luxuries that his ships

cabin would provide him.

He strode to it but as he got closer he realised that there were two guards standing watch over it. He grimaced then he forced himself to look unconcerned. Starscream had recognised them, Sandstorm and Overcast. He tried to ignore their presence and stepped up to the hatch. He had reached out to palm the door open when a laser bolt shot passed his head. He jumped in surprise.

"That shot was a warning; now get away from that ship 'con," Said the tan and olive Autobot. "The next shot will blow your head off."

"Come on, Overcast, no need to shoot or threaten him," said the other gently as he nudged the weapon's muzzle to point down at the ground.

"No, he is not to go near this ship, Sandstorm," Said Overcast as he tried to jerk his weapon back up. Sandstorm kept his fingers tight around the barrel.

"Why the hell not?" snapped Starscream fighting the urge to shoot at the Autobot. "It's **my** ship, after all" he glowered at the Autobots who now stood between him and his ship.

"You will only try to leave Cybertron," Said Overcast trying to free his gun from his partner's strong hand.

"No I wouldn't!" He retorted. "I want to make it my residence while I stay on this planet."

"Get lost, Starscream, orders are orders. This ship is impounded." The Autobot fired a shot that grazed Starscream's hand. The Seeker let out a yelp and battled his impulse to fire back. He turned away from the ship seething with anger and stomped off. He could hear a taunting remark from Overcast.

He reached the door of the building and glanced around. He wondered if his access code would work for him here now. His fingers lightly tapped at the pad, keying in the code. He shot a glowering stare over his wing at the Blue Dragon.

He had been disappointed. He would have preferred to have the comforts that the ship would have afforded him. It felt like his home away from home. But he knew he would have to return to that dismal place. Fortunately now he could leave whenever he wanted. The door swung open and he stepped inside. A cold feeling shot through him. He did not enjoy being here too many bad memories started to awaken. He forced his focus back to the door that closed the room that he had lived in for the past several months. He looked nervously around the room. I had almost been two weeks from the time of the attack. Everything was in order. Someone had come in and straightened up. He spotted a small grey lump in the corner of his couch. He held his weapon at readiness but his optics picked out a familiar outline of a nose.

'I told you she would be an important ally, didn't I.'

"Teris," he said softly, "what are you doing in here."

Teris moved and untucked her nose from under her arm. She sat up blinking,

straightening her shirt pulling it tightly around her to give her some extra warmth. She sat with her arms crossed shivering slightly. "Your world is too cold in the morning."

Starscream cocked his head in amusement. "Well they did provide your people with climate controlled accommodations. Why are you here?"

"I was waiting for you." she replied somewhat stiffly. "I need to ask you a question."

Starscream scowled for a moment. "You have been asking a lot of questions as of late." He sighed, "Fire away."

"I am under considerable pressure to ask you when we are leaving."

"Soon."

"How soon? You said you would send us back if things became a problem."

"There isn't any problem, look, I need you and your people, please, don't leave me yet."

Teris bowed her head, "As you wish, N'kosi." She slipped off the couch and walked to the door. "What are your plans now?" she asked as her hand rested on the handle.

"They have not changed much but I am sure I will need your help. Please bear with me."

Teris turned and left. There was more she wanted to say and he knew it, but she was not going to open up. Something was bothering her. Perhaps the whole attack. He wondered why she would spend the night in his quarters when her own would have been more comfortable. He sat on the edge of the couch thinking. He shot a look around the room. He did not feel comfortable here anymore. Not that he ever did feel at ease. But this whole place scared him now. He half expected Soundwave or Cyclonus to creep into the room and gun him down.

He walked across the courtyard and down a narrow alleyway. The walls were so close together that his wings almost brushed them. He knew he was being tracked yet still felt like he was being hunted. Paranoia? He looked over his shoulder and wing nervously.

'I don't know what you are worried about there is nothing out there, you big coward.'

"It does not hurt to make sure." He said nervously carrying on with his walk. A jet flew over head and the Seeker jerked in fear and drew back into the shadows. He recognised the plane as Silverbolt.

'You are far too jumpy, relax.' Starscream muttered a curse under his breath as he felt embarrassed by his reaction.

Starscream came to the end of the alleyway. It had opened up to a huge expanse of open space. He could see the spires of huge buildings, in the distance, of other great Cybertronian cities. He looked about. Aircraft and other vehicles abounded. The sun was bright and the air cool, in the distance he could see the dark reddish clouds that would result in acid rain. He would want to avoid that direction. He took a deep breath.

'Relax, enjoy yourself.'

He had not expected to feel the sense of freedom he now experienced; one that he had not felt in millions of years. Cybertron reminded him of the time before the war.

But what defined freedom? The condition of being free of restraints, that's what freedom was thought of as. If that was the case then he was not free at all and never was. He was limited by his design. If he was being chased or chasing someone who could fly at mach 2.9 he would either be caught or never catch up at his speed of mach 2.8. He was ruled by minute things that one would never think of. He was bound by the laws of nature. He encountered them constantly when he flew, when he walked he was being held to the ground by the planets gravity or when he fired his weapon he would feel it kickback, for every action there is an opposite and equal re-action. The laws of nature were accepted by everyone without any second thought.

The Autobots told him he could have his freedom with a few exceptions, he could not do what he wanted, say what he wanted, live where he wanted. What made it worse was they had a tracking device flowing through him so they could see where he was at any given time and a greater infringement of his freedom is they had not actually told him about it, therefore he had no real privacy.

The Decepticons would never let him be free for as long as Galvatron lived. Their leader would track him down and attempt to kill him wherever he went. So the little freedom he had was limited even more by his constant peering around ensuring nothing was about to threaten his integrity. Given all the natural and externally imposed restrictions, he did not have very much liberty at all. The only thing in nature that was truly free, in theory, was chaos.

He glanced up at the sky and ran a few steps forwards and jumped into the air, flew a short distance into the air watching the ground recede. Despite all the restrictions on his freedom he could fly and that was what, at the moment, meant the most to him. He transformed into his F-15 alt-mode and fired his jets and flew at traffic height and merged. He felt life returning to him, energy flowing through his body and feeding into his engines. How he had missed this. He twisted into a corkscrew spiral as he flew forwards. The cool air brushed over him as he laughed in pleasure. He had not felt this good since he had left Guandonnaland.

He found that, as soon as he entered the traffic, a huge space opened up around him. At first he thought it was a courtesy thing but it became evident that most of the other flying vehicles were avoiding him. His circuits cracked with muted fury. He knew they recognised him. It was probably not common knowledge that he was now a loosely termed Cybertronian citizen. They did not have to like it. They made it clear he was not wanted by giving him the space.

The speed of the traffic was too slow, air speed restrictions, he thought, if he were meant to go slow his creators would have created him as a Cessna not a supersonic jet. Starscream desired to stretch his wings a little more. He applied more thrust to his action starved engines, they whined with pleasure as he bordered the point of sonic speed. Yes this was more like it, he thought happily as he wove through traffic, tipping his wings left and right as he slipped through narrow gaps grinning to himself as some of the aircraft

moved hastily out of his way, enjoying the feel of "freedom." He dove and darted. Everyone made room for him. He felt a bit reckless as he put his flying skills to the test. He was certain that his erratic flying behaviour made everyone around him extremely nervous. He sighed wistfully.

'Oh well, enjoy it while you can.'

He banked suddenly cutting through oncoming traffic, other aircraft shot up and down to avoid colliding with him. He laughed shrilly as he exited the main flow of traffic. He figured they would be pleased to see his vapour trails.

He discovered he was instinctively flying towards a distant city, one that had his ancient university located within the centre. He found himself puzzling as to why he was heading there.

'Skyfire.' Said a thought. 'You are "neutral" now so you are seeking Skyfire to ask him to take you back as his partner in science.'

"I take it you are leading me there?" He asked.

'You are lonely as all hell, Starscream. Skyfire, if he is indeed there, might be the only one who will accept you as a friend.'

"You think he will even want to see me after all these years? Is it possible that he even cares that I live? I mean I've fired on him several times, attacked him, and branded him a traitor amongst other things."

'You have nothing else to lose, Starscream, you have no friends.' The thought said rancorously.

The Seeker sighed and all thoughts quieted. He looked at the ground as it sped below him. Buildings, vehicles and robots merged together in a colourful blur. He delighted in the abstract colour and form that his dizzying speed created. He broke away from the normal traffic route and flew over the planet looking, searching and circling. He saw the true extent of the work being done, that whole cities were being rebuilt. Robots and aliens from all over had returned. He was surprised to see shipping canals again filled with clean water and boats laden with cargo drifting easily through locks and under bridges. Much had changed in twenty years, yes, much had indeed changed.

He arrived at city of Tavis. It seemed familiar yet different at the same time. The layout was almost identical to Vos but the buildings had been all been rebuilt so they were taller and airier. Huge spires touched the crisp sky. He banked and flew over a ruined area. Demolition vehicles and machines were smoothing out the torn landscape flattening broken buildings into the gaping wounds. The one city that could never be rebuilt on its original foundations was his home city. He was curious as to what would eventually be constructed there.

He transformed mid flight and landed in an open yet populated street. He walked by looking at shops and stores that lined either side of the road. Most of the people he saw were neutrals. They bore no symbol. Some had insignias from other worlds or other

factions. It was interesting that so many groups of robots and aliens could co-exist. He, however, did not see anyone wearing Decepticon symbols. Although he was not wearing his insignia, he might as well have been. Some of the citizens scattered out of his way. His flying shape, before he had landed, was not foreign to them. No Autobots had the F-15 jet form, none that he knew of. It had appeared his infamy had preceded him.

"This is fun!" he whispered as he watched the robots recognise him and then suddenly take different paths. He glowered fiercely as he looked about himself.

'Starscream, It's not wise to scare them.' A thought interjected abruptly. 'I am not over keen in getting de-activated.' Said the scientist cautiously. Starscream had a keen sense that the scientist knew something he had not noticed.

"You're no fun," sighed Starscream. "OK then, let's find Skyfire." Starscream felt reservations about looking for the big Autobot. How would Skyfire react to his presence? Would he be angry? Resentful? Or happy?

Further into the city he walked and he still found that robots gave him a wide berth. He ignored it. He was sure none of them knew he was not, at the moment, in league with the Decepticons. His symbols were gone but not his history. He had been known as cruel, blood thirsty, murderous, cold hearted and very dangerous.

Looking up he noticed that he was indeed being watched. Autobot security was keeping pace with him, noting his every move. He now noticed a defensive laser turret tracking his path. He sighed. He was going to have to be very careful. So much for any ideas of tormenting air traffic again. It appeared that most of the Autobots would not have qualms about lasering him down in an instant should he provoke them.

'As I was saying, I don't want to get us de-activated. I have a hunch that that tracer in your energon will also allow for an instant lock on should they choose to fire.' Starscream looked up for a moment. 'Don't let them know you are aware of them look away, go to the subway we can get to the university through that.' The thought hastily said. For the first time today his thoughts sounded really nervous. He wondered if his reckless flying brought too much attention to him. He cringed inwardly.

He continued his walk to the subway entrance. It was busy with commuter traffic. The tube cars would arrive and hundreds of passengers would disembark. Another group would load the cars and they would shoot off in different directions through the planet. Many of the commuters looked at Starscream, with apparent shock and hurried along.

He realised another thing. Most of the robots that were commuting were not of a transformer model. They had only the one form and they were not well equipped to fight. Starscream was taller than most, broader, and his definite warrior build and the fact he was openly wearing weapons set them at unease.

He could hear them whisper to each other, they were not too subtle about it. He felt angry; living on this planet with his reputation was not going to be easy. He walked past a small cluster of smaller mechanoids. Only one in the group was a transformer and he wore no symbol aligning him with any particular group.

"A Decepticon.... Here.....?"

"Looks like Starscream, what in Primus name is he doing here?"

"Look at the size of him, he's frightening."

"How has he managed to get here? I thought security would not let Decepticons near this world."

"We should see if we could get him removed." There was a murmur of agreement from the group and they started off rapidly for the door.

The Seeker glared at the few others who stopped to point at him. They immediately looked busy with other observations. He felt like he was on display at a human freak show.

With a keen sense of disgust he entered a subway car. He noticed that no one else cared to join him so he closed the canopy and punched in his destination co-ordinates as he had once done every day for so many centuries when he was a scientist here. Back then people looked at him in awe not fear. They commended him on his accomplishments in the field of science. Now all they remembered was his questionable deeds with the Decepticons.

He punched a button and the tube sealed itself shut with a hiss as the air pressurised. It shot through an endless maze of tunnels past subterranean shops and schools where new robots were being taught basic knowledge like he had once been taught. None of the new robots had insignias. Some would join the Autobots others would remain neutral. Just a few would seek out other employment on other worlds. And a tiny few would join the Decepticons. He wondered what happened to those who did show Decepticon tendencies. Were they brainwashed? Or were they summarily destroyed? Did they have real freedom to choose? Did the instructors say you can't be a Decepticon, they are evil misguided people!

He could not remember his early days very well. It remained very hazy. He recalled that he did not show Decepticon tendencies until sometime not long after Skyfire had been lost. Fear, anger and hatred seethed in him from that point on unchecked and uncontrolled.

Bright colours danced hither and yon. Lights flashed and Starscream found himself going into a daze; mesmerised by the blur of motion. He was not very used to moving at high speeds and not being in control of it, in some way it made him feel ill.

He had to admire what the Autobots had done since he was last on Cybertron. Even with the infrequent Decepticon incursions they were indeed re-building and bringing Cybertron back to its golden age. A twinge of excitement pulled at Starscream's thoughts. Cybertron was richer in energy now than it was in its last golden age.

The tube car decelerated suddenly and Starscream found himself face first into the comm panel. He snorted, attempting to get a little more dignified composure. He had forgotten to latch himself into the car before he left. He popped open the canopy and the air exited

with a rushing hiss. He rubbed his face, frowning with displeasure. He would have to remember to put the restraints on next time he rode the tubes. He placed his hands on the edge of the car and stepped out. The car sealed itself behind him and shot away.

He looked around. The University had not changed very much in all the eons. Over the entrance stood a sign.

UNIVERSITY OF ALIEN CULTURES U.A.C

Huge pillars stood between the ground and the ceiling. They were in a soft pink- red granite coloured metal. The steps that lead to the entrance of the university were bright white and freshly cleaned. Fountains bubbled on either side of the door and lights danced in the water. Strange fish swam in the water and flowering aquatic plants floated on the surface. Starscream leaned to take a closer look and a couple of the large fish swam to the surface. Their huge orange and white mouths opened to the surface. He could see the long moustache like growths on either side of their great maws: Koi, he identified.

Groups of robots and aliens had entered and exited, chatting excitedly about this and that. Others stood around in quiet conversation. Very few noticed the red and white Seeker which, for once on this trip, was very comforting.

He entered the grand building. It was the way he had remembered it. The lobby had huge cathedral ceilings and solid pillars reaching the ground. Bright lights hung over large planters where alien trees and plants grew. He looked at the one closest to him and he was surprised to see earth plants. Tropical palms in one section and desert flora in another. One of his tasks when he went with Skyfire to earth was to bring back plant samples. He never had the chance to get any. He shook himself out of the memory. He did not want to remember why he had left the university in the first place. He did not want to remember that hateful day.

He strode to the reception. He hesitated trying to think of an appropriate approach. Being as infamous as a Decepticon, he did not want to cause any unnecessary panic.

As he came closer he could see that she was a Seeker. How unusual. Almost all the Seekers that were ever created went over to the Decepticon side at some time; it was in their nature. A yellow-orange female sat so only her profile could be seen. Her face was like his, a little smoother and a little rounder, she was very familiar. She was typing. "Can I help you?" She said automatically without looking up. Her voice was alto and clear, but her tone was cold.

Something niggled him about it. "Uh... Hi..." He squeaked suddenly, recognising her. "Ahem.... I'm looking for a scientist, Skyfire? Is he here?" His voice returned to normal.

The female robot looked from her work abruptly, she had recognised the voice. "Starscream?!" She was surprised. "What the hell are you doing here?" Her tone hardened for a moment and her red optics narrowed as if she were trying to see the wall on the other side of him. "You're supposed to be dead," She looked around.

Starscream was taken aback by the hostility in her tone. He had not expected to see her

but he had hoped she would be at least pleased to see him alive and well. "Uh thanks nice to see you too, Sunburst," he said sarcastically, "I'm looking for Skyfire." He mumbled cursing at himself silently.

"Right, yes—Skyfire, fourth elevator on the left, up to white level three then hang a right to lab forty seven: Exobiology. You can't miss it." She pointed to the elevators then glanced back down at her papers and continued to sort them out.

"Uh, ya—right, thanks," He muttered as he slowly backed away and turned from her. He felt nervous as he forced a weak half smile. Females, why was it he could not trust them? They served well with the Decepticons but he never really liked working with them. They put him at unease; they were illogical at times saying one thing meaning the opposite. They were emotional; swinging from mood to mood like a pendulum on an Earth clock. It was not that he did not like them, it was he could not trust them and only Primus knew the reason why.

She made a slight snort as she glanced up. She wore a slightly nettled expression on her face but she managed to smile and wave. "Yeh, See ya Screamer." She said flatly.

Starscream stopped to look back, but she had resumed her work. Her face seemed perplexed and a bit distressed. He wondered if he should ask her what was wrong but he wanted to see Skyfire, that was why he was here. Without further ado he walked to the elevator. He pushed the white and then the three button and waited. With a ping the door opened and he stepped on.

The Elevator vibrated for a moment and Starscream's knees buckled slightly as the lift started to move quickly up. The numbered lights at the top of the door illuminated in sequence, the trip seemed to take forever.

'She has not changed a bit.' A thought said. 'She is as nice as ever.'

"Changed? Oh she has changed, as for nice? I think absolute zero of outer space is warmer than she was just now." He thought for moment. "Hey, isn't she Windraker's companion. What is she doing here on an Autobot held planet?" He asked himself puzzled by the thought.

'Well... she is—was a Decepticon. That's for certain. I don't know where she was assigned, but I do know that she was occasionally a mission leader. She's fast, agile and fairly bright. She almost beat you for agility at the academy. That would have made you sick, beaten out by a female.' The thought snickered. 'What she is doing back here is a good question. Perhaps old Mr. Pessimistic has died.' He thought.

"I remember her flying. She was not as fast as me mach 2.7 if I remember right. Her failing was a design fault in her engines. Her agility was as good as mine: very nimble." It would be fun to fly with her for old time's sake. He thought to himself. He watched as the numbers in the elevator slowly counted up to level thirty three.

'We all have our limits that nothing we can do can change. Save a painful upgrade. She could have that flaw fixed by now.'

The elevator door slid open and he stepped out into a reasonably quiet, blindingly white hall. Muffled sounds of voices came to his audio sensors lectures behind closed doors. He cocked his head to try to listen; he could not make out what was being said. He looked up at the directional sign, 1 – 25 left, 26 – 50 right as the door of the elevator slid shut with soft thud.

He walked down the hall looking at the door numbers. The doors were spaced quite a distance apart. He came to the door marked forty seven in medium sized black numbers with Exobiology in large letters below that and, in a smaller font, Skyfire. He wondered whether or not he should knock or just walk in uninvited. Who would want to invite him in, he thought caustically. Quietly he opened it and stepped in.

The room was large, white and an utter catastrophe. A huge black topped table stood in the middle, precariously balancing all sorts of beakers and glassware clean and filthy. The air was shrouded in a thin purple haze that came from an unattended gas Bunsen burner boiling away at some purple fluid. Papers and datapads were scattered everywhere. Lumps of organic samples were strewn all over the place. The place was a mess, unusual for someone like Skyfire. Starscream grimaced at the clutter, what on Cybertron has driven Skyfire to this level. He remembered him as being very orderly and tidy.

Starscream wrinkled his nose as an acidic scent assaulted his olfactory sensors. He firmed his mouth into a line as he picked himself a clear path through the mayhem. This room was the embodiment of chaos, it was free of order, it appeared that the laws of nature had abandoned all hope of maintaining any form of rule in this place. Skyfire was sitting at a desk covered in all manner of things. He was writing something on a small desktop computer. Starscream inadvertently placed a hand on the table and into some sticky foul smelling solution, he shook his hand in disgust as his foot kicked something causing it roll noisily, bumping and clattering through the room.

The robot did not look up, he kept writing. "Please put the test results on the table, thank you and you're dismissed." His voice was soft but cheerless it had little life.

"I'm not here to hand you test results, I am here to hand you a resume." Said Starscream in the most sneering voice he could conjure. He felt the need to tease his old friend.

The other robot immediately stopped what he was doing. He twirled around on his chair. His face lit with surprise and delight. He stood up. The giant robot towered over the Seeker.

"Starscream!" He exclaimed. "You're really alive!" Skyfire said in a soft, yet loud voice filled with surprise and joy. "How did you get here!? I saw you dead. Killed by Galvatron twenty years ago!" Skyfire moved from his desk. Objects fell from the cluttered surface yet he managed to catch them and quickly place them back up.

"Then Rodimus has not informed you that I was taken prisoner?" He questioned, surprised and disappointed.

"Well, he had one of his lackeys contact me saying something like you brought a contingent of creatures from another world here." He sighed. "I dismissed that as low quality Autobot teasing. He knows of the friendship we *had* eons ago." He said sadly

regarding the Seeker before him. "Then about a week ago or so, he came up with a story that you had been brutally attacked and almost killed by Galvatron. His lackey insisted that he wanted me to go see you. I declined the invitation."

"He was telling the truth. He's only just released me this morning, providing I remain a "good boy." I figure its safe to assume that if I am a "bad boy" they will simply destroy me without warning. I know I am being closely monitored. But why did you decline?" Starscream was hurt. He was never told that Skyfire was asked to see him. He was very upset although he did not let it show on the surface. Instead he looked around the room trying to figure the best way to get the place cleaned up.

'A nuclear warhead would be the most efficient.' Came a thought. Starscream only smiled, he did not want to answer his thoughts in front of Skyfire.

"Oh, I thought he was just trying to get me to visit him or something. I told him that you were dead. That the Seeker I once knew had been dead for millions of years." He said apologetically. "Why are you really here?" Skyfire asked suspiciously looking into the Decepticons red optics, the Seeker averted his gaze.

"I came to find you, of course. I had hoped we might be able to re-ignite our broken friendship." replied Starscream unsure of what he read in Skyfire's eyes. He kept his voice level and cheerful. "I need to find employment so I wish to pursue science again. If I can't find something to do I fear I will be forced to slave in the mines, That's where the Autobots send their troublesome criminals isn't it? Since I believe there is no place left for me in ranks of the Decepticons. All my prior ambitions have been shot down, to put it mildly. I doubt that anyone would take me seriously, even if I did succeed."

Starscream had been down to the mines a few times when the planet was under Decepticon control. He knew what the Cybertronium mines were like back then. Cybertronium was as valuable as life itself so high security was needed to ensure it did not get into enemy hands, electrified fences, laser turrets, body searches, long hours and no personal time. One did not get an opportunity to keep up with general maintenance so the miners bodies wore out quickly and they were then sent off to be slagged. He wondered how strict the Autobots were with the mines now. He doubted that they would be as strict the Decepticons once were, but one could never tell with them and he did not want to personally find out.

Skyfire said nothing. He knew Starscream very well once, eons ago. But now the cruel Decepticon stood before him, insignia's removed, talking as if the years had not been so long as if prior words and deeds had not burned like a spray of acid. A part of him wanted to open his arms to his ex-colleague and the other part wanted to tell him to get lost. He felt joy in seeing his friend alive, but he wondered if there was an ulterior motive.

"I doubt it will be any meaning to you. As I am sure you have been filled in with oodles of stories about me from others. At how I lie, deceive and double cross etc. I don't deny any of those accusations. It will take me years, if ever, to gain the trust I have lost with either side. So I have chosen the path of neither. I figure it would be far easier and less risky to be with the Autobots now than with the Decepticons. I've sought asylum, I have also sought you." Starscream hesitated.

"You were my only friend I had from the moment after we re-activated you. It was almost like the old days. But then you turned against me and that stung me like a laser whip. I fired on you in my anguish that I knew we could no longer work together, that the war even separated best friends. I had to do that, I had to shoot you if not; Megatron would have surely de-activated or reprogrammed you once he learned that you were not of our mindset. I did not want to lose you again by either method. I know it was not a very kind thing to do to the friend I once had, but I had to do it. I ask you, Skyfire, please forgive me." Starscream lowered his gaze to the floor. His voice was choked and pleading.

Skyfire patted Starscream on the shoulder. He looked down at the Seeker and smiled. "I forgave you long ago lad."

Hours went by as the two discussed their recent past. Skyfire learned how Starscream's isolation caused him to re-discover his love of science, of helping to teach others to improve themselves rather than destroy themselves.

Skyfire was delighted but he still had some reservations about the honesty of Starscream. He had forgiven him but he could not sure he could forget some of the cruel things the Seeker had said or done. He was willing to try to brush aside some of the damage that had been done, to try to let the open wounds heal. His joy in having Starscream back alive outweighed some of the possible drawbacks.

"Before you go, I have something that might belong to you. It has your sign on it." He paused, for a moment looking through piles of papers on his desk. "I know you're around here somewhere." He opened a drawer and shuffled through the contents. He closed it and looked on a shelf. His hand pulled down a stack objects. "Ah here it is. Does this belong to you?" He asked handing Starscream a grimy flat black datapad.

Starscream's optics widened and flashed in surprise. It could not be, this had to be a joke. He turned it over in his hands. He brushed some of the dust off the corner and his saw personal sigil. No joke, this was his datapad.

"Is it yours?" Asked Skyfire impatiently.

"Where did you find this and have you opened it?" Starscream said surprised while looking mortified.

Skyfire chuckled nervously. "We captured Astrotrain after your ghost ditched him years ago; I managed to ask him a couple of questions about your whereabouts, days before you died. About five years later, I got the urge to go in and snoop around to see if you had left anything behind. I found that thing, dust covered, in a locked drawer. And no I have not looked in it."

"It—it is mine." He said as he flipped it upright. He hit the switch but it would not power up. "Batteries are drained." He said with a disappointed frown. This archive could have been very bad news to him if the Autobots had got hold of it at his interrogation. He was torn between wanting to keep it and wanting to keep it hidden where the real incriminating evidence of his said war crimes could never be revealed. "Uh thanks, this was unexpected." He slipped it quickly into a chest compartment. "I must be going; this has been a good day."

Skyfire extended a hand; Starscream looked at it for a moment and grasped it in his own. They shook and the Seeker exited stumbling over all manner of mess.

* * *

It was very late by Cybertron standards when Starscream left his old friend to return to his home in the "prison". He flew steadily through the cool night. Not racing or frolicking.

When he arrived, he was adversely greeted by Overcast. The Autobot sneered at him. He seemed to be trying to provoke a reaction from Starscream; perhaps he was trying to give the Autobots a reason to eliminate him. The Seeker ignored the comments and continued into the building and walked wearily up the stairs

The Guanans were pleased he was back to full health. They had heard from Teris that he had been almost obliterated. All of the Guanans had greeted him with exception to Teris. She sat away from the others staring at him in silence. Her eyes glistened; she looked like she might have been crying. Tears were foreign to him. Being upset and tears seemed to go hand in hand with many organic creatures. What on earth was eating her? His admission? He could not get Teris alone to speak to her. The other Guanans clung to him like burrs to a blanket.

When he managed to finally separate himself from the attentions of the Guanans, he had returned to his barren chambers. The Autobots were only going to allow him to call this place home until he could find quarters that were preferably off their base. The truth was, most likely that he was a security risk, he figured that they really did not want another Decepticon attack at their headquarters because of his presence there. He also did not want to remain here with the sneering guard outside and frightening memories in the halls.

He thought about his visit to Skyfire. He was pleased by the overall outcome of his meeting. Skyfire had promised that he would seriously think about his offer to join him in his scientific research. Skyfire was also intrigued enough to want to return to Guandonnaland to see how much had changed for himself. He was delighted about the rise of a sentient species. It would be incredible to compare notes from then to now.

Although it appeared that Skyfire still had a level of distrust in Starscream, it was not too hard to detect. And it coloured some of his words and actions. That much hurt the Seeker. But Skyfire had returned to him his most personal possession.

Starscream pulled out the black datapad. He looked it over in a half dazed manner. He pulled at a small wire in the back and plugged it into the wall. The Seeker brushed some more of the dust off and booted it up. Grinning wryly as he leaned against the wall, he typed in a password and was delighted when it was accepted.

Teris called together the Guanas after Starscream had finished collecting blood samples from them. He had handed her a data file that listed precisely what he wanted her people to do. He seemed slightly anxious when he handed it to her and he quickly left saying that it was important to get the blood to Skyfire while it was still very fresh.

When she opened the data file in her personal datapad it was encrypted and in Guana hieroglyphics. It read:

"Ensure you follow these plans to the letter, only speak about it in your own language and only when there are no other Transformers around; I don't know how many know your language. What I have is a list of things I need you to procure in one way or another. You are small creatures and you can go un-noticed almost anywhere whereas I am being closely watched.

Some of the items on the list need to be picked up from the locations I have specified, others need to be found as I am not sure where to get them. The larger items listed will be too bulky for you to move and you would be questioned as to why you need it. Just tell me where they have been located so I can go in and round them up at a later time.

If you are questioned to your activities make something up. Don't tell them you are doing this for me as my plans will go down the tubes. I will be in contact with you as frequently as I can. It will all depend on what I get stuck doing with Skyfire, good luck. - Starscream"

"N'kosi has plans for us once again, although I don't quite know what it is he is doing, he wants us to work in small groups of two or three, judging by the list. He has set the work groups that are after things that you would be most familiar with," said Teris as she stood with the group close around her.

There were whisperings and sounds of excitement. They had grown bored with the tedium of sitting around waiting. Now they were seeing some of the creative action they had been craving. As natural predators they itched to be hunting, even if it was only for assorted parts it was far more interesting than standing around reading books.

Teris rattled off the group mission and members and handed each a data file. "...Tuli and Zumbo, you are to locate metals that are similar to these alloys. He wants large pieces so it looks like a 'locate and return to tell me where it is'. Also..."

"I am not sure I really want to be part of this, it sounds wrong," Tuli said as she looked at the list of things that were required.

Zumbo looked at Tuli annoyed. Somehow his mate had a growing animosity of Teris that bordered hatred. Several times in the past two weeks he had to calm Tuli down and apologise to a very upset Teris. When Starscream was attacked Tuli jumped at the opportunity to try to rally the Guanas saying that Starscream had fallen, that he was no longer worth their time. Zumbo had respect for Starscream and he was very annoyed with his wife. Fortunately for the crew there were only five known dissidents and lucky for them

Starscream did not know about it.

"Please, Tuli, stop giving me such a hard time and just do the damn task. The sooner we get it done the quicker we can get off this planet and go back home. Just do it for N'kosi."

Tuli looked distastefully at Teris. "No. I'll do it for us," she snapped.

Teris sighed. It was days like this where she wished she was back home meditating in an incense filled skin hut with her father.

"Empangeni, Aroab and Kibaya; Starscream wants you to gather... these things. I am not sure what any of it is. Anyway I am sure you do or else he would not have grouped you three together." There were some of Starscream's words that really did not translate well into Guana hieroglyphics, The Seeker had attempted to keep the whole list in their language so no one would understand it. She had a tough time with some of his strange items.

"Umfolosi you are with me. We need to collect some spare parts from The Blue Dragon. Ok every one that's it, go out and find those things. And remember don't get caught. If you do; make up a good excuse."

* * *

Starscream strode through the entranceway of the University and past the front gardens. He walked to the fourth elevator down the hall. Up ahead a yellow, white and orange seeker walked towards him: Sunburst. He cringed. He had seen her on a few occasions when he visited Skyfire. Each time she was cold or hostile or just ignored him. However instead of walking past him she walked up to him. Starscream reached out to press the call button.

"Starscream, come walk with me," Her voice was neither gentle nor soft. It had a commanding edge to it.

Starscream was not keen on her tone but his interest was slightly peaked. "I am overdue as it is; I am supposed to report to Skyfire."

"He'll understand," she said sharply, cutting him off. "Come this way." She reached out and grabbed his arm.

Starscream became inflamed; no one touched him without his consent. He flashed his optics at her in annoyance. "No, really Sunburst, I have to see Skyfire," his tone quavered as he shook free of her grasp.

"Trust me, Starscream; he will be fine with it. I will talk to him later; I will tell him you were delayed by me."

"It's not him that I am worried about."

"Just shut up and come with me, I want to talk to you," her voice was sharp and authoritative. She placed an arm behind him and shoved him towards the hall by the small

of his back.

Again the unwanted personal contact and vocal tone seared him with fury. He chose to bury the angered emotions as his curiosity took precedence. "Uh, where are we going?" he asked.

"To the Arboretum."

She led him down the hall to a large greenhouse like structure. Huge lights hung from the ceiling along with massive hanging planters loaded with strange and unusual plants.

They walked deeper into the greenhouse, tall trees stood all around them some areas had thick tops that leaned over the path like a green ceiling. Smaller plants and bushes grew between them. He could see that in the real dark areas of the Arboretum grew luminescent fungus.

Sunburst led them into an area that was roughly in the middle of the indoor jungle. The trees did not completely shroud the area in shadow and the brilliant sun-like light filtered through the tops of the branches to cast light and dark splotches on the fine stony path. Breeze from ventilation ducts rustled the top most leaves giving the green house a real out of doors feeling. If he did not know he was deep in Cybertron he would have laughed at anyone for telling him he was. It was quite peaceful.

Further on ahead he could hear the sound of water tumbling from a great height due to the thickness of the plant growth he could not see it. Starscream glanced around himself. He recognised several species of Terran plants and noted several species of alien plants growing harmoniously together.

"What we have here is an example of some of the most interesting plants from most of the alien species we have contacted," she spoke like a tour guide, "There are about fifty eight different worlds we have plant species from. Now since we have a limited space here only plants that are very rare or have great scientific value are kept. Guandonnaland is world fifty nine and we will prepare some area for the selected specimens. One of the Master gardeners has contacted the Guanas. Their botanical expert was very enthusiastic."

Starscream pondered for a moment. He could not recall anyone who had special skills in native flora in his crew roster. He shook his head for a moment. "Who is the Guana botanist?"

"Her knowledge of our language is limited only to the written word so she usually brings an interpreter along: Teris."

Starscream was surprised for a moment until he remembered that Santor had incredible knowledge of the flora on Guandonnaland. Such information was second nature to the shamans. Teris was an apprentice shaman so of course she would be interested in this. "Ah, I should have known. But you are not here to give me a guided tour of plants now are you? This is just a pretext to avoid the real reason we are here."

Sunburst sat down on the edge of a garden, her orange hand reached out to touch the leaves of a two metre tall leafy green bush that was dotted with tiny pink flowers. Her hand

lightly brushed the plant; the leaves folded up and bent downwards. When she was done the bush looked like she had killed it off. "Mimosa pudica, one of the more interesting Earth plants we have. It has several Common names: Sensitive plant, sleeping grass and in some areas dead and alive plant. The leaves' folding up is a defensive mechanism. The leaves also close up at night hence the name sleeping grass."

"Yes, this is all very interesting, but why have you brought me here," he asked again.

"I am on break, Starscream, I saw you and I am curious about you and why you are here. Like this plant, dead and now alive." She pointed to the slowly opening leaves.

The Seeker scowled. He was getting tired of this question. First Perceptor, then Skyfire obviously, and now this Seeker. "Perhaps before I give you my answer, you tell me why you have turned your back on the Decepticon cause?" his tone was accusatory.

She laughed coldly. "You're the pot calling the kettle black, Starscream. My reason is not too much different than yours. At least I don't have the entire Decepticon force trying to kill me."

Starscream shot her a dirty look as he sat down.

"Don't look at me with that tone of voice, traitor, you've only gone neutral to save your cowardly metallic skin. I know your history, I have kept myself updated on you," she laughed icily.

"Why me? What of Windraker? Where is he?"

"Ah, Windraker," she sighed. "Now that was a Decepticon," her voice was dripping in sarcasm. "He's been gone for about a hundred thousand years."

"Gone, gone where? What is he doing?"

She laughed again. "You're naive. He's a botanist, didn't you know? He pushing up the tulips, in other words," her voice became very harsh, "he bit the dust, Starscream. To put it bluntly so you can understand, he is dead."

The Seeker was flabbergasted at her tone and inflection and he was irked at how she spoke about him. "I thought you liked Windraker."

"Yes I liked Windraker, but I did not love him, he did have his special skills that made him, for a while, attractive. His skills as a sniper were fantastic. But anything else was just about average. He was the gloomiest Decepticon I have ever known."

"It's obvious then, that you never met Dirge."

"I know Dirge; at least Dirge does not act like Ramjet. Windraker died in the most humiliating way. We both got shot and he crashed into a building, crushed his brain, end of story, end of Windraker. That was my mission. I was its leader, he died and I was demoted."

"Why then did you stay with Windraker, if you did not like him much?" He was irritated because he knew Windraker. Although he was depressing he seemed like a nice enough Decepticon.

She looked at Starscream for a moment. Her red optics flashed in her white face. "You really don't have any clue do you? Well then, here's a hint. I had my heart set upon another from the start. Before Windraker, I had an overwhelming crush on him, for lack of a better term. He had things that Windraker did not have; he was very fast, a good shot and power. Oh yes he had power. In the end he squandered it and died too. Have any clue yet?" her tone became very sinister as she looked at him with her head slightly cocked.

Starscream did not like what she was implying. "No," he lied.

Sunburst shook her head in disgust. "You are pretty darn dense, Screamer, I will let you think about it, now answer my question. Why are you alive?"

"If you are so up to date on me, why is it you don't know?"

"Oh but I do know, I looked it up when I saw you two weeks ago. Now all I want is to hear it from you, from your mouth, not from strangely twisted Autobot propaganda. I know all about your death so no need to go into details there: treason. You don't do anything subtly do you? You blabber mouth about your ambitions and got killed for it. Why did you have to be so incredibly daft?" her voice was fully angry but her tone was very upset. Like his previous demise had some profound negative effect on her.

"Unicron, I struck a bargain with Unicron," he shrieked, "I did him three favours and he grants me my one wish. But I reneged once I got my wish granted. Happy?" he stood up abruptly. He wanted to get away from this female. Her words had struck at him like so many acid tipped barbs.

"Well?"

"Well what?" he asked harshly.

"Aren't you going to solve my riddle?" she asked her tone slightly softer yet still having a caustic cutting edge.

"I don't need to answer your riddle," he screamed, "because I honestly don't think you have any real feelings for me. No more than you had for luckless Windraker." He placed his hands on his hips, his optics bright with anger. "Yes Sunburst, I knew that you liked me. Many females have sought me in the past, but I have my reasons as to why I declined. Do you really want to know why?" his optics burned bright like the flames of hell. Sunburst nodded. "It was because of power. I wanted power; I don't like sharing power, not with anyone. If I had a female at my side she would take some of my power, stand in the shadow of *my* glory. Another reason perhaps? Because if I allowed myself to love or like someone, it would leave me vulnerable, open to attack emotionally, cause delays in life or death matters that need instant bang-on decisions," he angrily balled his fist and slammed it into his open right hand in emphasis, scowling fiercely as he did. "Especially if it is about the said individual. That person would want special treatment, favouritism

occurs and the whole damned system comes falling down like so many ill placed bricks. That was why I had initially turned you down. Not because I did not like you, because then it was not meant to be." His optics lost their heated glare.

She frowned. "You are as selfish as they say Starscream, perhaps then you and I could just be friends?" her tone was very disappointed yet hopeful.

Starscream rubbed his face with his hand in frustration as he placed a foot on the edge of the planter. "You are persistent aren't you?" He cocked his head as he took a long deep breath. "I suppose there is no real harm in being associates now, Sunburst, remember, I cannot give you more than that, like you said, I have the whole Decepticon force after me, because, when they find out I still function, all hell is likely to break loose. I will either fight, flee or die trying. I have to prepare for that eventuality. *I* must be the first to make my move or the outcome of another invasion will leave me in worse condition than I was a month ago. I am sorry Sunburst, I must now leave and go to Skyfire, I need to get these samples to him and we also have less than a week to get me out of Iacon." He straightened and walked through the arboretum leaving the sun yellow Seeker behind.

He was thinking: he was not accustomed to another Seeker talking to him like that. Ah, yes well Skywarp did. Skywarp; so many little things reminded him of that big prankster these days. Skywarp did not always badger him. It was only in recent years that the dark Seeker had placed Starscream in his sights, and only in the two decades before the dreadful day that he seemed to be harassing his commander almost constantly. It drove Starscream nuts, the constant teleportation pranks, jibes and insults. But none of his comments were as cutting or as insulting as this female Seeker's were.

Skywarp was fairly soft spoken, he laughed a lot. He found almost everything humorous in one way or another. He did not seem outwardly bright but if he was truly daft he would not have made it into the ranks of the elite. He was never really sure why Skywarp acted the way he did, perhaps it was a cover for other feelings. Only once did he fail to catch onto the warning signs, that Skywarp was upset, quickly enough to prevent the fight that ensued between them. The result for both of them was almost catastrophic.

Yes he was surprised and angered by the attack but he never really hated him for it. In retrospect he was really more impressed by Skywarp's assault. He had seen his skills in battle before but Starscream never realised he could bring another Decepticon, who was of equal size and slightly stronger, down with such unexpected speed, force and fury.

He stood by the elevator and pressed the button absent mindedly. He was still buried in his thoughts. If it were not for Thundercracker intervening, Skywarp might have not stopped until he had pounded the life right out of him. The Seeker winced painfully at that thought.

He missed Skywarp and his dreadful pranks. When he had the occasion to realise he was looking around for that Seeker he realised how much those jokes and pranks had meant to him. It was a shame how much you could miss someone when they were gone. He looked gloomily to the floor for a moment

The elevator arrived and he stepped in, automatically turned and faced the door as it closed. He gazed at the lights above the door and watched them slowly count up. They

stopped at another floor to pick up someone else but Starscream never really paid any attention he was too deep in thought.

Sunburst, he had not expected to see her when he first arrived here. He had known her eons ago at the war academy. Although he was not very thrilled with it, he occasionally flew with her on training missions, sometimes with her as the leader other times as a wingman. She had seemed pleasant enough back then. However, their paths were separated when they were assigned to different sections and he had not thought much of her since.

Her attitude about Windraker was most shocking, almost as much as the news that he was dead. Starscream wondered how many of his academy wingmates were still functioning. He could remember only two who he flew with on a regular basis: Rainmaker and Heatwave. They were not exceptional Decepticons but good nonetheless. Why was it, he wondered, if Sunburst really liked him, that she verbally attacked him? It made no sense.

The elevator door opened for a moment and started to close. Starscream suddenly came out of this thought stream realising that he was about to miss his floor. He placed an arm in between the closing door causing it to re-open from his presence and he stepped through.

* * *

Starscream walked into the lab and slammed his body into a chair as he kicked his feet onto the table. His face was contorted with frustration.

"Starscream, you're late. Did you get the blood samples I requested?" asked Skyfire looking up from a microscope.

"I managed to procure them yes." He removed a small metal box from his chest compartment and placed it on the black top of the table.

"What's up with you?" the larger robot asked as he looked over at the Seeker who sat glowering.

"I am not sure I want to talk about it." He sat upright, removing his feet from the table. He propped his elbow on the surface instead, idling tapping his fingers. "How many Seekers are there on Cybertron?"

Skyfire looked up thoughtfully. "Not too sure, ten, fifteen perhaps less."

"Ok then, what do you know of Sunburst?"

Skyfire smiled wryly. "Ah, she does not tell me much about her past. She has a head for botany. It's interesting how a lot of you Seekers have a taste for science in one form or another. Why do you ask this? Are you interested in her?" asked Skyfire teasingly.

"No, yes—Primus no!" He was torn. "I can't be interested in her. We must get off this topic," his voice had a touch of panic to it. "Did you have any success in finding me a

place?" he said suddenly changing the subject.

Skyfire shook his head gently. "Ah, well, no. You are far too well known for your past. No one wants a Decepticon in their neighbourhood. I'd invite you to my place but there is hardly enough room in there for me, let alone you." He looked at Starscream. "There is one un-tried option and you're not gonna like it." Skyfire watched the Seeker for a long moment. "I know she has a second re-charge chamber."

Starscream looked horrified.

"Take it or leave it, Starscream I doubt you will find anything else," Skyfire said with a sigh.

"I'll leave it for now if there are no other options then I guess I'll have no choice."

* * *

"I don't know why you let Tuli get to you," said Umfolosi, as they walked up to the Blue Dragon. "She is only being a bully."

Teris scowled. "I try not to let it bug me but keeping the crew together is a heck of a job. Off our own world in a cold environment is making every one cranky. Even my skin is feeling too dry." Teris held up a hand to show the cracked skin between her fingers. "I spoke to N'kosi and he said we'd leave soon but he gave me no time frame." She inhaled deeply.

"Well, hi there Teris and uh..." said Sandstorm with bright cheerfulness.

"Umfolosi."

"And what can I help you two ladies with today?" he asked brightly.

"Uh," Umfolosi looked at Teris for a moment and she only shrugged. Teris could not speak to Sandstorm.

"Say something, but to the point," said Teris quickly in her language.

"We need to pick up something from our cabins. Also Teris is having skin problems and there are some native salves on board in the sick bay that can help alleviate the problems." She grabbed Teris' hand and held it up.

The Guana leader looked surprised but smiled weakly.

The Autobot guard laughed sympathetically and let them through the hatch. "Go on then, try not to take too long. Overcast will be here in a short bit and he is over protective of this ship and its contents."

Umfolosi thanked him as they passed through the doors to the craft closed behind them.

"What did you say to him? He was so agreeable," asked Teris.

"Ah Sandstorm, he's a pacifist. He's harmless. I just told him we needed stuff from our cabins and wanted salve for your hands. Speaking of which, we should see what is in the sick room. There should be some ointments for that skin."

Teris only smiled. Umfolosi had given a reason to be carrying stuff out.

"We will have to hurry though, Overcast is coming and he is not the kindest Autobot I have observed. I have seen the way he harasses N'kosi. The items we want should be found in the cargo bay and the secondary weapons locker," said Umfolosi as she looked over the list. "Where is the secondary weapons locker?"

"I think I know," whispered Teris.

The two lizards quickly ran through the darkened ship past the crew quarters and down to the cargo bay.

"The orange bins have the capacitors that we need and the blue one has the diodes," said Umfolosi carefully unscrewing a panel on the wall. She held the screw driver between her sharp teeth and started to hook a sharp claw under the panel to pry it up and off.

Teris slipped her hands into her pockets and pulled out a couple of zipper bags. She reached into the bins and carefully selected a couple handfuls of each type of component. These she carefully placed into the bags and returned them to her pockets. She sealed the bins up and returned them where they belonged.

"I've got the diodes." Teris quickly walked to Umfolosi who was busy unscrewing two small cylinders from the panel.

"Starscream wants four of these. I am not sure I can get him more than two," she said as she carefully removed the parts.

Teris held open the bag and Umfolosi dropped it in. She sealed it and placed it into a pocket. "I hope we can get this stuff out without being noticed."

"I have a pack in my cabin and some old clothes I can grab those and we can hide these things in them. Let's get to that weapons locker."

Teris and Umfolosi darted down the hall to the tall door. "And I thought it would be secret," Umfolosi murmured unimpressed.

"He has a few hidden alcoves here and there." Teris said flatly, as she punched in a couple numbers into the door passcoder. The Lights flickered on as the door opened. The room contained weapons of various sizes.

"He wants the plasma inducers from the rifles against the back wall," said Umfolosi pointing. Teris grabbed down two large rifles. She handed Teris a screwdriver.

"It says here to *'open the casing by the hand grip of the rifle, behind the trigger'*." She looked up from the datapad and at the weapon. "Here and here," She pointed. "*Loosen the screws, pry the case off, disconnect the three wires: red, green and yellow. That will*

cut the power from the power source'."

Teris looked at the screwdriver head and back at the screw in the weapons outer casing. "It's the wrong head type, do you have the star one on you?"

Umfolosi reached into her pocket and pulled out a couple of drivers. She selected one and handed it to Teris.

"Remove the two prisms, those are required parts." Umfolosi pointed at the triangular piece of glass. "*'The plasma inducer is the oblong thing in the middle. Remove it by unscrewing it from the circuit board'*. There is a warning here. *'The plasma inducer is quite dangerous even when disconnected from the power source. You must not touch the tool to the black tip'*."

Teris nodded as she followed the detailed instructions.

Twenty minutes later they had acquired their loot. Eight prisms, four plasma inducers and several other obscure pieces. "I'll meet you in sick bay, Teris, I am going to grab that bag and some assorted junk from my cabin," she said as she helped pack the parts into the black fabric zipper bags.

* * *

Teris and Umfolosi left the sick bay with a few packages of ointments and herbs that they used for medicines. The others would be happy to see this stuff. Most had some sort of environmental induced complaint which most of these should alleviate.

"Did you need anything from your cabin?" asked Umfolosi as they passed the huge doored chamber that Starscream had occupied when they were flying through space.

Teris shook her head in negation. "No, I have little. The ointment is enough for me."

She unloaded some of her pockets into the folds of Umfolosi's clothes and other strange objects. "We best be getting out of here now before Overcast arrives."

Teris and Umfolosi gathered the bag up and left the ship.

"Took you a while," Sandstorm said cheerfully. "Did you find what you were looking for?"

"Yes," replied Umfolosi as she held up her pack and the tub of ointment. "And then some."

The Autobot waved to them as they ran quickly away grinning.

* * *

Starscream shot a furious glance across the room. Sunburst stood looking out the window. She had said nothing to him since she arrived at Skyfire's behest. He did not have much to move but he would have liked some polite conversation. All he got from her was the occasional grunt or snort to his questions.

"I think I can understand why you don't like being here; I would feel uncomfortable living smack dab in a base loaded with Autobots. I might be a *real* neutral now but I still don't love them," she said finally glancing over at Starscream as he packed the last datapad into a small metal container.

Starscream made a slight frown. "The Autobots have given me no real reason to want to even trust them. By the way, you still have not told me why you left the Decepticons."

"I don't need to tell you if I don't want too. It's none of your damned business," she snapped.

"For Primus sake Sunburst, will you cut it with the attitude! I have tried to be civil but my patience is starting to wane, you don't want me to snap because the results will not be pretty." His optics flashed for a moment.

She glared at him for a few seconds. "When we get back to *my* apartment you follow *my* rules, you're not Air Commander any more, you're just a craven traitor. And when we arrive you are to disarm immediately; I don't allow weapons in my home. There is a storage locker they can be placed into."

Starscream glowered at her for a moment; her words had hurt him. He had no real understanding why she was being this harsh. "Why? What have I done to deserve this? You asked me for friendship yet you stab at me with poisoned words," his voice was coated in irritation and hurt.

"I want more than friendship."

"With that attitude you won't even have a friend," he snapped. "I am done now Seeker, show me the way," his words ended in a snarl.

Sunburst turned sharply and left the chamber and started down the stairs. Starscream followed carrying the box of datapads.

Starscream walked to the entrance of his old abode shooting one last glance up the cold barren stairs. He would be glad to get out of that place; too many memories haunted him each day he remained.

He strode past the Autobot guard, Overcast, looked at him then at Sunburst. The Autobot appraised the female Seeker with obvious delight; looking her up and down. To Starscream, it appeared that Overcast would like to get to know her better. He seemed a bit put out that the female was in league with the renegade Decepticon.

"Hey, Screamer picking up the birds already?" he said with a sarcastic tone.

Starscream was beginning to get really ticked off with the attitude that seemed to be following him wherever he went. "Lay off Overcast, don't you have something more constructive to do other than standing around insulting me every fifteen minutes?"

Overcast ignored Starscream's comment and spoke to Sunburst, "Watch it with him ma'am, he's bad news. But you might be interested in me." He shot Starscream a dirty

look. Sunburst gave him a disdainful glance and carried on walking past.

Starscream, however, whirled to face the Autobot. His hand shot out and his fingers tightened around the guard's soft metallic throat. He squeezed. The Autobot gasped. He could not get any words out as the Decepticon was cutting off his air supply. Heat and hatred swelled up in the Seeker as he increased the pressure his fingers exerted around the throat. He could feel his fingertips denting the metal. Joy and fury welled up in him: he enjoyed this.

Sunburst stood watching a few paces away her hands were at her sides and her mouth agape. She watched as Starscream's face twisted into fury and malice. His optics shone with ire and pleasure. He had become in a split second a full Decepticon again. Suddenly the pleasure faded from his optics only to be replaced by a glint of fear or unease. It looked to her that he was somewhat worried about what he was doing but had little control about it.

Starscream could see in his minds eye the defensive turret orienting on him. He thought he could feel the burn of a laser sight in the middle of his back as it targeted his lasercore. He could almost feel the Autobots preparing to fire on him, he could envision the finger curling around the trigger waiting for that right moment to fire. He knew ought to let go immediately if he wished to live but he could not yet. There was still one thing he needed to say.

"If I were what I was before, Overcast, I'd have killed you with my fingers by now. One more comment though and I *will* crush your pathetic life out with my bare hands," the Seeker hissed angrily. The Autobot hung onto Starscream's arm with a shocked surprised look. "If it were not that I was indebted to you 'bots for saving my life, I would seriously consider killing you." He was certain the laser that was aimed at his back was feeling hotter, that death was imminent if he did not let go. So Starscream released Overcast letting him collapse, gasping, to the ground, making no other word or comment. The robot looked at Starscream with sheer terror.

'Now you've done it,' said a thought. 'You better get a move on before they can arrest you.'

"Sunburst, please fly quick I might have just brought the 'bots down on us," said Starscream taking a few running steps as he jumped into the sky and transformed stuffing his box of datapads into a cargo compartment. He gunned his engines as Sunburst's triangular form flew easily in beside him.

"You're too brash, Screamer, what in blazes were you thinking back there?" she asked.

"I don't know and I don't think I want to know," he said nervously. "I know better than that, they have a tracking element in my energon flow. They don't know that I know about it; however I suspect that they can lock on to me instantly. "Primus I hope they let me off on this one." There was no attack by any of the defense turrets he flew by. Slowly he was placed at ease and he started to enjoy his flight.

Sunburst added extra throttle to her engines and she shot forwards. Starscream uttered a curse and caught up spinning in a tight roll. The gold Seeker banked suddenly and shot up into the sky flying at sub orbital levels.

Starscream realised she wanted to play games. He grinned smugly to himself she must have forgotten that she was not that fast or skilled that he could out fly her hands down. But if it's a game she wanted he would be more than happy to give it to her. Any excuse to put his skills to the test. He could see her up above him flying like a golden arrow. He fired his thrusters to full and blasted into the sky.

Sunburst suddenly rolled to the left and pitched downwards in a rapid corkscrew spiral. Her cold laugh drifted back to him as she streaked downwards.

Starscream caught by surprise, banked and dove sharply. He fired his jets watching as her yellow speck grew larger. He caught up to her and finally shot past. His sudden increase of speed caused his field of vision to go grey at the edges. Quickly he nosed up, flying vertical to the ground he flipped over horizontally onto his dorsal surface flying over her as he looped around and came in close behind.

The golden Seeker dove down to the city. Her engines rocked the buildings as she twisted and turned between spires, daring him to follow. She was agile darting around buildings and under freeway overpasses.

'So she wants to play dirty,' Starscream thought as he followed her plunge into the city, flying at almost ground level. He tilted to his right and turned so he was flying knife edged between a narrow space between two buildings that were too narrow for her to manage in her pyramid shape. He shot out into the open and narrowly missed Sunburst who erupted from between two other buildings. They both shot upwards into the sky slowly spiraling around one another until Sunburst flew up and over ending her maneuver in a half cuban eight turn, slowly rotating upright as she nosed back down at a forty five degree angle.

Starscream carried on flying straight up into the sky. Abruptly he cut his engines, gravity acted on his weight and he started to drop down, the Seeker experienced a moment of zero gravity. He applied some left rudder as he performed the hammerhead stall. He watched the ground as it rapidly neared while he dropped down. Starscream gently added some flap, and re-engaged his engines as he leveled out to fly next to Sunburst.

Sunburst lazily rolled as she flew, slowing her speed until she leveled out completely. Starscream banked right as he flew another loop and twisted into a couple of slow speed rolls: it was a thrill.

"That was entertaining," he said as he pulled alongside.

"I am rather impressed that your ungainly earth form is as maneuverable as it was," she replied tartly. "Your wings looked as if they might break off at any time."

Starscream sighed inwardly. She was still being incomprehensibly awkward. He had hoped that their flight might break her of her hostile shell. He remained silent as they flew over the City of Tavis to land near the top of one of the tallest spires.

Sunburst opened the door to a hallway that had several doorways. Her apartment was one of these places. He looked over at the vista she sure had a lofty location. He appreciated the view. He never really liked being at ground or sea level. He tolerated it but

he preferred a location where he could view the full picture.

He followed her in silence down the hall till she punched in a code to the door passcoder. It swung open with a hiss.

"I suppose you will need the code, Sun 4172, remember that or else forget ever entering here again," she said as she opened the door to let them through.

Sunburst had few possessions, but she had books. Shelves were lined with books and datapads. By the window she had several small pots with foreign plants growing. Saguaro cactus from Earths Arizona desert grew four or five metres tall. Small potted palms and a couple of banana plants clustered closely to the huge window that opened on an incredible view.

"If you have not figured it out yet Starscream I am into botany. Skyfire has been teaching me some of his science. Decepticons should look closer at the way plants grow. They can learn much about how they produce energy efficiently. Plants need the sunlight to produce chemicals that they convert into fuel to allow them to live and grow. This process is called photosynthesis. It's really quite interesting when you get down and dirty with the whole thing and realise that we are often dependant on plants for our own fuel."

"Oil and coal, being two most common fuels we convert into energon, are based from plants. Like an earth's cow is an herbivore we are, in some way, also herbivores." Sunburst picked up a watering can and carefully added water to some of the pots. "Plants require carbon dioxide to breath, without it they will perish. The plants release oxygen which many species of alien animals seem to need to survive. We also need the oxygen to maintain our bodies. It does allow for efficient fuel burning although it's not completely necessary, it does help to our systems clean. The plants also require dihydrogen oxide. Although we don't need water to survive we can use it to extract useable oxygen and compress the hydrogen into energon."

Starscream watched as Sunburst wandered around checking on her plants making notes and recording results, all the while talking. Starscream placed his box of datapads on a table. He disconnected his guns from his arms and propped himself against one. Why was she talking to him as if he knew nothing about how his body functioned in oxygenated or un-oxygenated areas?

"Do you wonder why Cybertron is almost back into the golden age? Solar power. Most of the buildings now have photovoltaic cells embedded in the outer surface. The buildings use what they need and store the rest in energon. Like green growing plants the solar cells are taking light energy and making it into useable energy." She stopped and looked at Starscream who was leaning against his rifle looking utterly bored. "I'm sorry I kinda rambled. You were a scientist you should know all about plants and photosynthesis."

"No please go on. I enjoy how you believe I am unintelligent," he spoke sarcastically as he shifted his balance from the weapon. "So you are doing all this research for the Decepticon cause? What are you a spy? I thought you were a neutral." He laid his guns on the table beside the box.

"I did not mean it like that, thick head. Anyway get those weapons off my table and into the

locker; that door behind you." Sunburst pointed with a sudden jerk of a warm orange finger to a closet.

Starscream felt anger surge through him. Did she have to continue to test his patience? Did she have to incite his temper? He snatched his weapons off the table. He quickly turned his back to her. His eyes flashed for a moment in his contained fury. He swung the door open and thrust his rifles in. He knew these arrangements would make his life almost as miserable as being back at Iacon. He would have to continue to look elsewhere.

* * *

Zumbo and Tuli searched through a Cybertronian landfill site.

"This is pointless," Tuli snapped as she held out a scanner to some of the scrap metal she had found. "We've been searching for three days and we've come up empty. This piece is too thin, but right alloy." She stepped away from it angrily.

"I really wish you would not hold such a grim outlook on things Tuli, we will find it. It's just a matter of time; Empangeni is having a rough time trying to locate the rubies and things his team is searching for."

"Its the oddest task he has ever handed us." Tuli said bitterly. "Kind of like a childhood scavenger hunt game." She leaned over and scanned a particularly thick slab of metal. "Ah I think I've found something that we can use!" she said with delight.

Zumbo wandered over peering at the huge metal slab. It had the dimensions that were required and it had very similar properties to the alloy required. "Yes this is the stuff. Place this marker beacon on the underside and pick up those smaller pieces we can take those with us for further study. If anyone asks us what we are doing." He handed Tuli the beacon

"I hate all this creeping around," she muttered as she popped the small beacon on the metal. "Well lets hope he finishes his task quickly, did you take a GPS reading?"

"Aye, ya the position is marked he should find it easily enough," said Zumbo punching the co-ordinates into a datafile, "let's go."

Ultra Magnus and Rodimus stood side by side. The Triplechanger, Sandstorm and the irate, Pinzgauer, Overcast stood before them.

"What are you going to do? Arrest him? Send him to the mines?" Asked Overcast hopefully. Starscream had reacted as he had hoped, however he would have preferred a short blast from his null rays rather than the strangle hold he had received.

"We are not going to do anything until we find out what provoked the attack." Said the blue and red mech who stood with his arms crossed in front of him.

"I tell you Ultra Magnus, he should be de-activated!" Screamed Overcast, rubbing his throat. His blue optics bright with indignity.

"Did you provoke him? I know you don't like him." Inquired Rodimus calmly.

"No! He attacked me without any reason, He passed by me and suddenly he was trying to strangle me!" Overcast could feel the indentations that the Decepticon's fingers had made in his throat.

"I was at the space ship Rodimus, I saw Starscream attack him but I don't think it was an unfounded attack." Sandstorm said with an apologetic glance at Overcast.

"Explain yourself." Rodimus gazed at the two Autobots. Sandstorm was first on hand to aid Overcast. The latter was almost uncontrollably angry screaming for someone to shoot down Starscream. Sandstorm had been quick to call the turret operators and suggest that they ought to hold fire until the reason for the attack was sorted out. Sandstorm did not like unnecessary energon shed.

"I've tried to keep the peace between those two, it's more along the lines of keeping the peace with Overcast more so than with Starscream. Overcast has antagonised him from day one. He even fired on him..."

Rodimus turned sharply to Overcast, his calm countenance replaced with anger. "Are you trying to incite him? Are you trying to get him to attack you so that we will have an excuse to put him away?" The Autobots tone was slightly disgusted.

"He's a damned Decepticon whether or not he has his insignia on. He should have been killed when he first arrived and no questions asked. He should have been allowed to expire after Galvatron attacked him. He is not worthy of the trust you are giving him." Overcast was livid with anger. His fists were balled. His plan had been seen through; he would have to find some other way to get the Seeker arrested.

"Now, now, Overcast, He has not done us any harm since he's been here." Sandstorm spoke in a soothing tone which served only to ire Overcast further.

"Do you call this," He pointed at his dented throat, "no harm?" He could not understand why he was being made out as the bad guy here, he was an Autobot, Starscream was a

Decepticon, simple white and black, no grey.

"I've seen you harass him; I have seen the struggle in his optics, Prime, Starscream is trying to play by our rules. He should be given the benefit of the doubt."

Rodimus shook his head. "Overcast, none of us like him. He is being watched and Skyfire is keeping us informed. What did you say to him just before he attacked you?"

"He was with that Neutral Seeker, Sunburst, I only told her to watch her back with him. It was right after that he turned and attacked me." His voice was a tone of innocence and disbelief.

Sandstorm chuckled softly as if he realised something that the others did not. "Prime, it's obvious, Overcast provoked him without any doubt, I think that Starscream thought he was making a move on Sunburst."

"That's nuts. They hate each other. You should've heard them snarking at one another as they came down the stairs. Anyway I would not hit on her, she is as much a Decepticon as Starscream is. Why you even allow renegades and mercs to remain on Cybertron is beyond me. What are you going to do when more ex-Decepticons or neutrals join their group?" Overcast's optics glowed angrily as he planted the seeds of doubt in his leader.

"Enough, Please, both of you. Sandstorm, keep your personal views to yourself; Overcast, no more provoking that Seeker. He remains an unpredictable danger to us." The Autobot was irritated by the thought that both Sandstorm and Overcast had put forth. Skyfire had failed to mention Sunburst. This could be a disturbing development. Starscream was known to be very manipulative. Could he be trying to raise his own army? What other things motivated the red Seeker? Again he wondered if he made the right decision in setting the Seeker loose on Cybertron. He glanced over at Ultra Magnus who only nodded. The Seeker would be harder to catch now than he was earlier.

"Then if he is such a danger to us, why did you free him? Catch him now and have him killed." Overcast insisted.

"He has my word and I have his." Rodimus stated justifying his decision.

"BAH!" He spat venomously. "The word of a Decepticon means nothing, they—he cannot be trusted... Starscream's word should be even less trusted!"

"Why this uncontrolled hatred, Overcast? What has he done to you?" Asked Sandstorm softly. He refused to raise his voice maintaining it just low enough so the others had to keep theirs down a few octaves so that they could hear him.

"What has he done to the Autobots you mean!" Overcast was furious. "It was long before you and your people joined us here from Paradron, you never knew Starscream as the cold blooded murderer he is, you've never seen the broken bodies of friends he's killed." Overcast thought for a moment of Brawn. "He deserves nothing other than to be thrown screaming into a slag pit." Overcast could just see himself cheerfully pushing the Seeker into the slag pit as he begged for mercy; watching him shriek as he dissolved. His optics

glowed bright as he reveled in that mental image and his lips curled savagely.

"Two wrongs don't make a right. Killing him would only make you a cold blooded killer too, no better than his past; do you want that on your conscious?" Sandstorm's voice was raised a little. He was disgusted in the Pinzgauer's bloodthirsty idea.

"Killing him would not make me feel guilty in the least." Screamed Overcast back shaking a fist at Sandstorm. He could not understand why everyone was protecting the Seeker. It made no sense.

"Cut it out you two!" Said Rodimus as the argument escalated "Overcast you are being re-assigned and ordered to keep away from Starscream. Sandstorm you will be assigned a new guard."

Overcast glared at Sandstorm saluted and left. As he exited he muttered, "We'll see." He had no intention in letting the matter drop. Starscream would face the justice he so deserved.

Rodimus watched the small Autobot and the Triplechanger exit. He rubbed his chin in frustration. "Ultra Magnus, inform Hot Spot and the other Turret operators to be prepared to shoot Starscream out of the sky, on my command. I hope it is not necessary and get Skyfire here."

* * *

Starscream stood regarding the assorted collection of pieces that the Guanas had managed to acquire. He had liked some of the stories and excuses that the crew had used in justifying their needs for their ill gotten gains. His only real trouble was getting hold of the huge metal plate. It was large and not very easy to get into the lab unnoticed. He had only just picked it up an hour earlier. He carefully propped it against a wall.

Six and a half weeks earlier this would have not been a problem. He could have easily hidden it and probably managed an excuse to Skyfire that it had been here all along, but being that he was going to have to work in this place; he had quickly managed to have it cleaned up to his impeccable standards. Shelves were neat, datapads filed, experiments were set up and executed with proper care and precision with results and notes recorded in a timely fashion. Everything was cleaned of the disgusting spills and splatters that decorated the walls, tables, floors and ceilings.

The Seeker booted up his datapad and loaded up the schematics for his rifles power boosters. He hoped this plan was going to work. He knew he was going to have only once chance at succeeding, if he did succeed the rewards would be great. But if his plan failed, Starscream knew he would not have to worry about anything else after, as he would be, in all likelihood, nothing more than a puddle of molten slag.

Thrusting that unpleasant yet possible outcome to the back of his mind, he pulled a stool to him and sat down. He studied his plans as he reached for a circuit board and slowly pieced his puzzle together. Hours later he stood up from his work as he placed his tools down. He straightened his back and un-kinked his knees. It had been a very long, tedious night, one of the longest he had had in quite a while. He glanced casually at the digital

clock on the wall, four-fifteen am. Skyfire had left the lab at around seven pm. He sighed deeply; it was almost time for him to call it a night and head for home.

He had spent longer and longer hours in the lab so as to avoid Sunburst. He was grateful to her for allowing him to stay at her residence. But she was not easy for him to be around. Arguments and fights were often breaking out. Most of which was over what he considered an invasion of his privacy. He kept all his research and datapads in the recharge chamber that was designated as his. And he would return from the lab only to find them lying around everywhere.

It reminded him of his episode with Skywarp and Thundercracker, when they found the secrets hidden on his personal log. Starscream now kept his datapad on his person at all times, hidden in a subspace pocket that only he had access to. He had thought about destroying it a few times since Skyfire had returned it, but it had too much valuable information going back a very long time. If Sunburst got hold of it, he dreaded the thought, he knew she would have a field day blackmailing him. He shot a look at the black object in his right hand and he knew that he should destroy it. In the wrong hands it had the potential to hold too much power over him. Later maybe, he would see that it was destroyed but not right now; for now it held the plans for this weapon.

As he peered from the pad back to the confusion of wires, diodes, prisms and other assorted bits. He poked at it gently making sure the connections were solid. Satisfied he tipped it carefully on its side and held a laser pen light to the opening that would re-direct his rifle's laser into the power pack. He flipped a small switch and the pack started to whine redirecting the light from his hand held laser through the prisms. Now it should bounce the enhanced laser light from mirror to mirror and maintain it there until he released it, he thought to himself as he turned the laser out. However the results were disappointing. The energy dissipated. Had he failed? Or was the laser pen's beam not strong enough to maintain its power?

Starscream stopped the test run, and made note of his simulation. There was something flawed in the design, he sighed, he would have to sort that out later however he figured it would be safe enough to test the power of the pack on his own weapon. He took one of his rifles that was propped up against the wall and laid it out on the table. Carefully he opened the casing and removed an energon conduit hooking it to the mechanism he had painstakingly built. He eyed it suspiciously for a moment. Hoping that this has not all been a complete waste of his dwindling time.

He fumbled with some settings on the outside of the null rifle and carefully reattached it to his arm. He could feel the rifle taking energy away from his systems as it charged the gun. He aimed at a metal plate against the wall; with his hand he quickly flicked the feed switch that redirected the laser of his rifle into the attached pack.

Abruptly the energy drain he had experienced increased tenfold as the device drew massive amounts of power away from his basic life support systems. The laser beam was then passed through a pair of prisms that shattered the laser energy into spectra. The shattered light was put through filters that extracted the unnecessary light waves.

From there the remaining spectra, mostly ultra violet, violet, indigo, and infra red were focused through several lenses where the light waves were reformed into a concentrated

beam. This beam was fed into the plasma chamber where it was intensified into raw plasma energy.

The energy draw was feeling most uncomfortable. The device suddenly started to hum ominously as it heated up. Quickly Starscream flipped back another switch manually and he fired a plasma bolt at the plate, a hole melted into it the size of his head. However, he also left a sizeable scorch mark on the wall behind it. He stumbled suddenly; the pack was still drawing power from him at a terrific rate. It was starting to sap his strength. He scowled as he slapped the switch and turned the pack off. He could feel the power draw cease.

There still needed to be a lot of work done on the pack before he could adapt such a weapon to work harmoniously with his systems. He knew if he used it for any length of time the chances were it would sap him of all his available strength. It had to use considerably more energy to redirect his laser charge into the plasma chamber than he had anticipated and the resultant charge was unstable he could tell by the ominous hum. If he had waited in firing, it could have literally blown up in his face. Something had to be changed. He looked back at the datapad. He had run computer simulations and the results were good. With disappointment he placed his datapad down and walked over to the still smoking plate and wall.

He looked closely at the metal, a sly smile played at his lips. The plate was the toughest armour he could acquire on Cybertron. That is truly not saying much, as Autobots were not as heavily armoured as Decepticons were. He had identified it as a chunk of outer armour used by the ancient guardian robots. Tuli and Zumbo had done well. All he needed to do now was find more and dispose of this piece.

The wall behind the armour plate was made of standard building materials; not very tough stuff but adequate for the purposes of building non military structures. It had taken a very deep burn into its surface. Soot from the smoke covered the edges of the gouge and a cooling puddle of slag had formed on the floor. Starscream looked around for a piece of cloth so he could wipe the wall off and picked up a chunk of debris to scrape the still hot slag off the floor and onto the plate. It would not do to let it adhere to the floor. He looked around he could move something to hide the hole. He figured that he could be hard put to make up a good excuse to explain why the burn was there.

Although there was a flaw in the pack, the overall results were promising. He knew he would have to run more simulations and scan the device to see where the problem lay. He would also have to run more simulations on how his weapons would hold up to the vigours that this device would put them through. If he could maintain the strength of the blast or make subtle changes in the setting and make it stronger. Could anyone stand against him?

'Beware of your overconfidence.' Came a cautioning thought. 'It has been your fatal flaw.' Starscream did not respond to the caution but he noted it.

He looked around the lab and wondered how he could quickly re-decorate. Skyfire had grown used to his frequent shifting of things. He slid a bookshelf in front of the hole, so as to hide it from immediate notice. He figured he could just say, if any one asked, an experiment went very bad. Things like that often happened in the pursuit of science.

He lifted a large steel tool box he had stored under the work table and placed it on the top. Starscream unlocked it and opened it up. It seemed larger inside than it appeared on the outside. The beautiful benefits of subspace pockets, they could hold more than meets the optic. He had almost forgotten about subspace during his stay on Guandonnaland. He did not have the technology on him that he needed to access it there in this manner.

Starscream carefully placed the unused parts into their bags and placed them inside the box. He did not want anyone knowing his plans, least of all Skyfire who would most likely betray him to the Autobots. He had the distinct feeling that Skyfire was not all that overjoyed with his presence. And he also figured that Skyfire would blab to Sunburst. He had found out from the giant flier that he had found her injured in the Sol system. What she was doing near Earth remained unanswered. He had inquired with Skyfire and all he said was she would not talk about it.

He attended to his other legitimate experiments that he was working on as the excuse for staying later. In silence he logged in his findings and filed his reports and signed off. He dropped the report datapad on Skyfire's work table. The large flier rarely expected him to arrive any earlier than noon.

On his own datapad he recorded the results of his test. Indeed the weapon drew far too much power from him, he felt quite drained from that single experience. Having two weapons simultaneously charged would drain him in a matter of two or three shots each. That was unacceptable as it would most likely get him, the user, killed.

With a sigh Starscream signed out of his datapad. He gathered his rifles up and reattached them to his arms. He picked up the melted plate and tucked it under his arm as he stepped out the lab. He closed the door firmly behind him and keyed in the exit code. A loud thunk echoed in the empty hall as the locking mechanism sealed the door shut. The Seeker stuffed the datapad into a chest compartment and he started slowly down the hall.

The hall had every other light out to conserve electricity. There were very few robots around at this time of night. Security personnel were about and they had become used to Starscream's frequent late night presence. If it were not for the fact Starscream had disabled the alarm system in the lab he figured that the security personal would be running down trying to find out why he discharged his weapon. He often wondered why the 'bots had even returned him the rifles even though it was suggested, for his health, not to even think of using them.

He reached the elevator doors and hit the button to call it to his floor. He leaned heavily against the wall. The drain caused by the weapon was very intense. He felt exhausted and desired to have some form of energy boost. When he got home he could relax and enjoy a re-charge

The elevator arrived quickly; there were very few people using them at this hour of the morning. "That would soon change." He thought as he rode alone and in silence.

'You'd be lucky to get that pack to work without it drawing all of your power.' Came the unwanted thought.

"It will take bit of time to get it sorted out." He replied tiredly. Starscream did not want to

battle his thoughts right now.

'Time, my friend, is something you might not have much of. It will be only a matter of weeks or even days before Galvatron catches wind of your survival.' His thought said warningly. 'He will come back to get you.'

"That is ever close on my mind." Muttered Starscream. "I expect to get this done long before then."

'That pack you are making might not be wise. Your weapons are designed to work with you. They are what you were created with, they are what your systems are used to. Changing them might cause you greater physical problems in future. The draw from your personal power is excessive, it's dangerous. I recommend ditching this idea.'

"Recommendation is ignored. I do not intend to use them all the time. It is not like they are going to be a permanent part of my armament." He sighed. The elevator door opened. Silently he walked past the huge plants of the U.A.C. entrance while he listened to his internal monologue. He realised that over the years he had become far too used to listening to his internal self, talking to it as if it were a separate individual. It was interesting in the facet that the internal voice was very logical and sometimes spotted things that he missed. It saw things on a subconscious level then voiced its findings. It was disturbing because he could not figure out how to turn the voice off. He knew he was in that very dark grey area that was the border of insanity.

'If you insist that you are going to use the pack then I would recommend that you not put the packs on the weapons until you are just about to need them.'

"Do you have any good advice on how I should tweak it to lower the energy consumption and keep the firing output at that level?"

'No. Not at the moment. I will think about it.'

"Then, please, go away." He said loudly in frustration. A mech coming off the tube car looked at him strangely and shuffled away. He walked up to the vacant car and climbed in. Starscream belted himself into the seat of the vehicle. He punched in the destination and the canopy of the car sealed down over him. The car shot away and Starscream found himself mesmerised by the blur of his surroundings and fell into a brief doze.

The car stopped abruptly and the Seeker was jolted to wakefulness. He looked around feeling groggy. Yes, he had arrived at the surface. A fifteen minute ride and he had spent ten of them asleep. He disengaged his restraints and hauled himself out of the car. The Station was empty; his footsteps echoed as he walked to the surface.

Walking outside, down the street in the crisp early Cybertron morning, it was quiet save the humming of the planet itself. Light illuminated the street in circular pools of amber. He glanced up at the towering spires; most were partially blackened. Only white light emanated from a few windows where other mechs worked or resided. Most places of business were closed at this hour to help conserve energy so Cybertron could maintain the highest standard of living that any of the mechanised worlds had.

The conservation was something he learned the Autobots had imposed sometime after 2015 when the restoration of the planet really started to show. When one side of Cybertron was cast in its shadow most things, save the major factories and important functions, should be shut down to conserve energy. It was a logical course of action, though it made nightlife a drag. Not that he really wanted to indulge in such activities. Starscream leapt into the sky and transformed as he tucked the plate into a cargo compartment.

* * *

Overcast drove rapidly over the rubble of a landfill site, he had his headlamps off so his activities would be more exciting. He had been angry with Rodimus' decision. Starscream had attacked him; he should be de-activated for that. Thoughts ran across the Autobots mind of all the violent things he wished to do to the Seeker if the opportunity presented itself.

He did not like neutral mechs either, they were undecided and possible threats, what he hated more were Decepticons who claimed to be neutral and above all he hated Starscream. He accelerated with frustration. He stopped suddenly and backed up. He spotted a new possible challenge.

He aligned himself with a bunch of concrete and steel girders sizing them up, seeing if they were remotely interesting as a challenge. He sighed. There was little to do on this world: too flat. There were no natural mountains that could test his courage and skill. The buildings were tall enough and he had taken to jumping off them to get the thrill he desired, but even now that thrill was worn; he wanted something else to try that was dangerous.

From above there was a roar of engines. Overcast transformed and looked up. In the darkness he could see the form of an F-15 jet: Starscream. Curious, he hid himself under an overhang of rubble keeping out of sight.

The Decepticon transformed and landed. He dropped a sheet of metal and sprinkled and kicked other bits of trash over it hiding it partly. Overcast was intrigued. Ammunition for the gun: Starscream was up to something covert. He grinned wickedly and readied his weapon in case of discovery.

Taking Starscream in hand to hand would be a thrill. He owed the Seeker one and he now, more than ever, wanted to see Starscream's energon on his hands. Silently he removed his canvas backpack opening it to dig around in the subspace looking for his starlight amplified camera. He would take photos of the Seeker, incriminating evidence that would hopefully help issue an arrest warrant.

* * *

It was five am and he had found himself creeping through a landfill site. Starscream dropped the metal plate on the ground and kicked and sprinkled debris over it to partly hide it. Could he not have chosen a more suspicious activity to get into while he was on Cybertron, he wondered with a wry smile? He walked over to the area where he had originally collected the slab. If there was that small piece of Guardian robot there had to

be more. They were huge mechinoids which were almost extinct. Omega Supreme was one of the few that survived, if not the only one left.

He dug through the rubble, searching until his hand touched a thick heavy slab. It was small, being about three metres long and about two metres wide, but he figured it should serve his purpose. He pulled it up brushing the other debris off. He turned it over and peered at it carefully. He smiled as he tossed it aside and kicked more trash over it. He would return for it in the evening. Starscream looked around himself to make sure he was not being watched. He had a strange feeling he was not alone. However he dismissed that as simple paranoia. He knew he could be tracked here if the Autobots wanted to check up on him. Starscream looked to the sky and with a sigh he jumped and flew out.

* * *

Overcast waited a few minutes until he was sure the Seeker was far away. He walked over to the plate Starscream had attempted to hide. He saw the huge smooth melted hole in its surface. He took a deep breath as he dug his hand into the subspace backpack and brought out a scanner. He watched the dials and sure enough the energy signature matched the one on record of Starscream's, it also had an unknown energy signature. It took something very powerful to melt a hole like this into that sort of metal. Rodimus would have to be alerted. He took a few photographs and recorded his scanners finding. He smiled wickedly. He could almost taste Starscream's end.

Without further ado Overcast transformed and drove, as quickly as he could manage the long distance back to Iacon.

* * *

Starscream slowly circled the spire as he admired the view of the city. Abruptly he started to get low energy messages. "Slag." The Seeker silently cursed as he cut his engines and transformed. Slowly he descended scowling as his feet touched the solid surface of the building's roof.

The Seeker glanced behind him at the door to the flats on this level. He did not want to enter quite yet. Although he had spent over thirty four hours awake and was utterly exhausted, he was not eager to return. He almost thought he preferred Iacon and that tiny loud mouthed Autobot, Overcast. He had little choice in the matter.

He walked to the building's edge and stopped. His azure hands rested on the rail as a gentle breeze whistled as it blew past. He leaned heavily against his hands. Stilling his mind, he listened again to the thrum of Cybertron. A flash of a memory crossed his mind: the blinding, frigid whiteness of Mount Everest on Earth. He remembered vaguely having that dream in recent weeks but he could not remember when. In the dark distance he could hear vehicles and way down below he could see the movement of a few people. Cybertron was starting to wake up. He glanced around himself. Starscream figured he was at least nine hundred metres from the surface of Cybertron. Above him stars shimmered as bright fire-like specks in the pitch black sky.

Starscream drew in a deep breath as he turned to enter the building.

He punched his I.D. into the passcoder. The door clicked and he swung it open. The room was dark. He used the dimmer switch to shed a little light on the situation. Starscream walked into the hall and looked down towards the re-charge chamber. Sunburst's door was closed. He hoped she had not heard his arrival. In silence he removed a rifle and started to place it on the rack in his weapons locker when Sunburst came up behind him.

"Its well past five in the morning, Traitor. What in Cybertron do you do that it takes you all night?" She said suddenly, eyeing him coldly.

Starscream almost leapt in surprise. He felt annoyed. He knew what time it was, he did not need to be told. He stood up as he unlatched the left rifle. The Seeker looked at her in silence. She stood glinting gold in the dim light of the apartment. "Will you stop calling me traitor!" He snapped after a long moment. His optics flashed and glowed brightly.

"Is that not what you are?" She asked icily holding her ground.

"I have a name, slag you. You will learn to use it." He commanded, his tone was similar to how he used to reprimand Skywarp for calling him Screamer.

"Starscream which is also synonymous with traitor." She reasoned to justify calling him traitor. "So where have you been?"

He slammed his rifle down on the table. 'She's not my keeper.' He thought angrily. He could feel his optics blaze with red fire. The last thing he needed after a very long tiring day was to be confronted by Sunburst. "I don't have to explain to you what I do with my free time. My time is my business. Now get out of my way!" He shouted. He watched her as she stepped back a step in surprise at his volume. Yes, he could feel her fear, she was now afraid of him. He stood fully upright, straightened his wings and firmed his mouth.

"I have the need to know what you do in my home." She retorted.

He felt heat and fury fill him but he managed to maintain a level yet a very dangerous sounding voice. "I have done nothing in your home; ergo it's none of your fragging business."

She shot Starscream a glance of disbelief. "Then what is this?" She threw down a couple datapads that he had kept in his recharge chamber, onto the table.

Starscream recognised them as the research files he had downloaded from the computer recently. He looked from the datapads to the yellow Seeker, he felt angrier. He clenched his teeth as his optics blazed brighter. He wondered why she had been going through his things. "I don't have to tell anyone what I'm working on. I especially don't have to report to the likes of you, Sunburst." He felt highly frustrated about this confrontation, every signal in his body wanted to rain pure wrath down upon her. Yet he tried to resist. "I have asked you to keep out of my personal effects and affairs." He said stiffly. He did not want to be pressed for answers that he did not wish give. He simply gathered up his rifles and was returning them to his arms.

"If you don't want me looking, then don't keep your stuff here. Now what the hell are you doing?" She inquired.

Starscream felt his weariness fade as he was filled with a burst of eletro-adrenaline. He dropped his rifle as he spun with such speed and anger. He threw Sunburst against the wall as his fingers wrapped tightly around her throat, lifting her just off the floor. Her right hand was pinned between his body and hers. His right hand took her wrist crushing it painfully as he pressed it against the wall. He seethed with intense fury as he looked her in the optics. He challenged her to put up a fight. She did struggle against him but her efforts were hampered by his hand holding her by her neck. He cocked his head, regarding her for a moment. He had never been this close to Sunburst; he could see the panic in her optics. He enjoyed seeing her fear. Yes, although he was very tired, he was strong enough to kill her and that thought was very entertaining. "What did I just finish saying? I don't have to tell you what I'm doing, so deal with it." He ruthlessly tightened his hand that was around her wrist. His optics blazed like the flames of hell.

Sunburst cried out in pain and fear. "Starscream stop you're hurting me!"

"No more than you've hurt me, bitch." He hissed using the vulgar Earth slang. The Seeker could feel his anger radiating out from his body. "Anyway pain is a weakness that does not befit a Decepticon. However, I recommend you learn to enjoy it Sunburst, it means you're still alive." Starscream laughed sadistically as he threw her aside.

Quickly he picked up his dropped rifle and hooked it up to his arm. He looked down at Sunburst, as he held his weapon in readiness. She picked herself off the floor glaring back up at him. Her mouth quivered in fear.

"I warned you not to press me for answers. You are also lucky my energy reserves are too low or you would have tasted my firepower." He said lowering his weapon. With a quick decisive movement, Starscream spun on his heel as he exited the apartment. The door slammed shut behind him as his feet thundered down the hall to the roof top exit.

'Wow! You do have a way with the fembots don't you, Screamer?'

"Piss off." He said angrily as he pushed the door open returning to the wide open space of the roof. He wondered why she thought he had to answer to her. He never answered to anyone else unless it suited his purposes. "I have no idea what goes on in the mind of that female. She's incorrigible." He wondered about her motives. If she really knew about his history she would have found out he was not a mech to be trifled with.

'Yes, so are you. You also over-reacted.'

Starscream snarled with frustration as he leapt off the top of the building. He did not want to have his alter ego jabbing at him now. "I over-reacted because I am exhausted. I need to get down time soon. Also I am sick and tired of her insults and questioning." He soared through the air with his arms out-stretched. He flew fairly low to the ground as he did not trust his present ability to fly. Fatigue coupled with low energy and anger did not aid his judgment.

'I think that she thinks you are out raiding as a Decepticon again.'

"Is that not what I have been more or less doing through the Guanias? I might have to resort to raiding again myself; I will need to recharge soon. Anyway why should I care of

what she thinks I am up to?" He snarked.

'You like her do you not?' The scientist asked softly.

Starscream almost fell out of the sky with that thought. "Why should I like her? And what is there to like about her? And what does that have to do with any of this?" He asked rapidly as he regained his altitude.

'It has much to do with it.'

"I refuse to answer, leave me to my own thoughts." He said angrily as he dipped his arm to the right and veered for the chasm that led almost to the core of Cybertron. Starscream landed at the edge.

He looked down. The chasm got darker and darker until he could not see. Many kilometres deep into the planet it went down. Cities were built into the side looking out into the abyss. Closer to the core the lights were on all day and night. However the further down the less populated it was. The core was creepy. He refused to go down that far. Deep twisting tunnels that were made of smoothed or rough hewn rock rather than metal. Many Seekers refused to go into the depths of the planet. Most suffered claustrophobia to one degree or another. He shuddered at the thought, it was said the soul of Cybertron laid somewhere deep in that abyss along with other ancient Quintesson relics.

Starscream sat himself down on the edge. His feet dangled over the precipice. He looked over the huge gaping hole that spanned several hundred square kilometres. There was nothing for him to do now other than to think. But he disliked being questioned by a "subordinate" as he saw her. He was once the Air Commander of the Decepticon battle fleet, as well as the Decepticon Sub Commander. He regretted the choices he had made in his previous life that put him into his present situation. He had so much to gain, so much going for him and in a simple miscalculation; he had lost everything that had any meaning to him, in a short few days. Skywarp, Thundercracker, rank and life.

'Sunburst is not one of your warriors, Starscream and stop dwelling on the past. Look to the future.' His thoughts tried to soothe him.

Starscream looked into the blackness below, his mind getting lost in the void. As for looking into the future; he did not want to. He felt that he would not like to see what was in store for him. "She is not even a friend." He whispered sadly. He had been excited when he had seen her, he had briefly thought he could befriend her. Very briefly, her reaction to him was not quite what he had expected and he had become defensive. "I wish she would tell me what she has been doing since Windraker's death, why she holds this grudge and why she needs to know so much about my life."

'Well you have an odd way of affirming friendships, throwing her around like that.'

Starscream ignored his internal grumblings. He glanced over the planet again and had to think. He realised he had been looking at Sunburst in rather different way lately even when he had pressed her against the wall he had a strange feeling come over him, instead he resisted and crushed her hand with his in frustration. There was another slightly worrisome feeling that had come over him when he brutalised her, it felt rather nice

and he thought he would enjoy smashing her about again if the need arose.

Despite all her fundamental flaws and failings Sunburst had vitality, viciousness and agility. Despite his mistrust for female mechs, he was somewhat curious about her endless fascination with his life. He understood now why he had avoided her and why he would have to continue to avoid her; he did like her. Starscream knew it was never to be. Not yet at least. Maybe later after all the fighting was done, but even then he doubted he would have that luxury. He did not care to admit even to himself this reality. The Seeker had a weird fear that it would mark her for destruction as it had marked everyone else he had ever cared for, Skyfire, Thundercracker and the incorrigible Skywarp.

He however did not like the feeling that he had to answer to all of her whims. He did not answer to every wish or command of Megatron. He really only carried out the commands of his superior officer if the benefits for him outweighed the cons, she was not his superior by any stretch of the imagination. He took a deep breath as he looked up at the sky. The stars were starting to fade out as the dawning approached. The celestial sphere seemed less black and more of a deep blue-purple.

Starscream was a loner; part by nature and part by necessity. He preferred living by his own rules, by what he saw fit as right and wrong. He felt hindered by the rules and restrictions of others. Sunburst imposed all manner of weird rules on him. The one he disagreed with the most was having to remain disarmed while he was inside her apartment. He had no wish to get caught defenseless again. Necessity dictated that he had to remain more or less aloof from everyone else. In order to make sacrifices that he needed to; he could not have strong bonds with others.

He had comrades in arms but he never had anything special with any of his underlings. Only to his wing mates did he wish he had shown a little more courtesy to. They often defended him and he on occasion, if he felt like it, returned the favour. There were times when he had found his solitary life very difficult and sometimes empty, when he had wanted to integrate himself with the social activities of the other Decepticons, he found himself unprepared, unwanted, and invariably left out.

Once he had a friendship with Megatron but that only deteriorated until all that was left was a mutual hatred of one another. Why had that gone so wrong? He wondered. Once he had a deep respect for the gladiator, Megatron, who rallied the Decepticons to him. He led the Decepticons in the Great War. Starscream near worshipped the ground the larger robot walked on and he pleased his leader so much that he rose in rank very rapidly to the chagrin of the others.

However, Megatron did things that seemed wrong. At first he ignored them as minor oversights. But then they occurred again. They were not oversights. The first time he told his leader of a possible hazard in a plan he ended up facing the business end of his leader's fusion cannon. Although it was set at the lowest possible setting when it was fired at him and it did not do very severe damage to his body, he was forever mentally shattered. Slowly over time his hurt and frustration turned to anger and that blended into hatred of the silver robot. Megatron at the same time grew to hate the young Seeker, but he let him live; the reason being that his abilities as an aerial warrior far outweighed his cons as a treacherous, conniving deceiver. At least until he became Galvatron.

Skyfire was his only true friend he ever had over the eons, he was incredibly patient. Their friendship was strained due to the separation of the ages; Starscream had become a Decepticon warrior as Skyfire remained locked forgotten in an alien icecap until his discovery. The Seeker had become a more dangerous character, someone different, someone Skyfire did not know.

Since Starscream's recent return to Cybertron, he had been working closely with Skyfire, trying to gain his trust and rekindle the broken friendship. He managed to get the larger flyer to tidy up his lab and remove the odd bits of disgusting decomposing organic matter that lay scattered all over the place. He also had renewed the interest of the larger mech in the young planet, Guandonnaland. Old files had been reopened and the contents of the Blue Dragon were systematically downloaded. Starscream's personal research was compared to the first findings. Other tests would have to be done on the planet so they started to make plans for a return expedition.

Sunburst was the first time he had a chance to interact with a fembot on any level. Needless to say, he had not really enjoyed her company. He felt that her incessant and sometimes relentless questioning about his whereabouts and his activities were enough to drive him for the loop. He tried to be polite, asking her to refrain from inquiring. Telling her she would not like the answer if she pressed him further, he had warned her and she had pushed him.

He felt that he did not need to answer to anyone. It was his life and his time to do with as he saw fit. It annoyed him that he had to leave as it was her place and not his. But how long would he remain away? He decided that he would go back, but when? One day, two days? What would he do in the mean time? How could he re-fuel? Starscream glanced up at the tall buildings. He could see the turrets. Raiding would be dangerous. He wondered how much of his energon supplies were left on the ship.

In silence he decided he would return to the lab and work all night and leave before Skyfire arrived. Where would he rest? He thought for a moment. How about in his ancient city of Vos? The old ruins would provide a shelter where he could be left in relative peace. He hoped that no one would notice his absence and call on a search party. That was his decision then: return to ancient Vos.

He looked past his feet and into the deep dark chasm. A few occasions he had contemplated self destruction, but he could never pull it off; self preservation always won out. Starscream smiled wickedly as he pressed his hands to the edge and shoved himself off. He fell free fall for a kilometre, Wind screamed in his audios, lights rushed by in a blur. It felt exhilarating. He allowed himself to fall without restraint for another one hundred and sixty seconds. He had dropped a grand total of over eight kilometres from the start of his daring plunge before he drew on reserve power to transform into his jet mode. He shot up and out of the chasm; his engines screaming with full power and speed. He cut his engines, transformed as he glided down over to the ancient ruins of the city. He felt like he had played a little Russian roulette. If he had not been able to draw on his reserves he might have continued to fall until he disintegrated when he hit the core's unseen bottom. He doubted it would have come to that; he could have just as easily flown out in mech mode.

The sky was brightening with the rising of the Cybertron star. Blue-green light was cast on

the pinkish clouds in the sky. His shadow was long as he landed. He would have to rest before he went looking for energon or some other more conventional method of re-charging. Starscream came to a building and scanned it for its structural integrity. It lasted this long, it should last a few more days. He placed a hand on the outer wall and thumped it with his fist a few times. Small gouts of dust fell along with a couple small pieces of concrete but it would hold well enough. He walked in, stumbling every so often in the loose rubble. He found a fairly sheltered area and hoped that in the next few days it would not rain. The pink clouds in the sky were a little worrying. Getting caught out in an acid rain storm was a very unpleasant experience.

Starscream pulled a few dusty sheets of metal and leaned them against the overhang to provide some extra cover. He kicked out some of the debris as he huddled into the dark corner. He figured he would not be seen. Completely worn out; he settled down with a disdainful glance at his surroundings. He leaned his back against a dusty wall and his head propped against one of his air intakes; Starscream immediately fell into a much needed rest cycle.

* * *

Overcast arrived at Iacon and hesitated. He realised that Rodimus would flip on him if he found out that he had been spying on the Seeker. The evidence he had was minimal and inconclusive: not enough to get the papers pushed. He needed more evidence. In order to get that he knew he would have to get the frequency of the tracking element they had injected into the Seekers energon conduits. Once he had that information, he could track Starscream anywhere.

He laughed cheerfully and continued up the steps. He had some snooping to do.

* * *

Sunburst lay along her couch with a pile of Starscream's datapads at her side. She scrolled through each one in turn hoping to turn up some useful blurb of information on Starscream. Surely he kept a record of his life and if he did it would be the most interesting piece of reading available. She would perhaps understand what makes him tick if she did locate it.

Ever since she had first seen him at the academy; she wanted to get to know him better. He had an Aura of power and mystery that surrounded him. He was very aloof from others keeping more to himself and being very secretive. She wanted to know what drove him what motivated him and why he was so distant from the rest of the class. The mystery was very enticing.

His resurrection from death was also very fascinating. Not many mechs, or any mechs for that matter, who had their bodies completely and utterly destroyed had ever come back. Those whose bodies were still intact came back more or less as zombies. Their brain functions were often messed beyond repair. Starscream however managed to beat all odds and return to life much like his former self.

She still wanted to know what his motivation was; lust for power and control were two but why? Why did he need to have all this power at his disposal? What were his reasons?

There were no explanations here; only technical drawings, weapons designs, power supply schematics and other various strange diagrams and instructions. He must keep his daily record, if he kept one, on his person at all times.

The buzzer to the door sounded and Sunburst glanced over her pale yellow wing. "Yo! Who's there?" She inquired not making a move.

"Skyfire, let me in."

Sunburst sighed she had figured he would arrive at sometime but she had hoped it would have been Starscream returning from wherever he was at this time. "The door is open," she replied, "Just enter."

Skyfire pushed the door open and ducked so he could enter the apartment. For him it was a very small place; he could only just stand upright fully. If he stood on the tips of his feet, his head would touch the ceiling.

"I heard you called in for repairs today and yesterday. Are you feeling well?" He asked as he sat down. "And where is Starscream I have not seen him today or yesterday for that matter."

"I am fine now, where Starscream is your guess is as good as mine." She said reproachfully. "I don't think I really give a slag where he is now." Her tone was bitter and resentful.

"What happened then?" He asked concerned. Something had happened between the two. Sunburst rarely sounded this upset. "Do you want to talk about it?"

She took a deep breath. "I don't know what to think of him anymore. I can tell for certain he hates me"

"I am sure he does not hate you, he just does not know how to express himself." Reassured Skyfire.

"Ya, sure he doesn't. That's why he tried to kill me yesterday morning after an all nighter at the lab." She said sourly.

"He what?!" He said with surprise and disbelief. "You must be joking."

"No I am not. I asked him a few simple questions then he went completely off his handle, grabbed me violently by the throat; pinning me to the wall. After he finished his strangle hold; he then threw me bodily to the floor and threatened to shoot me. That was when he stormed out." She spoke rapidly. "He had a strange look in his optics, like he was confused or something about what he was doing."

Skyfire could only stare in shock.

"I left to get my throat checked. He did not do too much damage but he scared me slagless." She admitted. "I don't really hate him; I just don't understand why he is this way. You know him perhaps you can answer my questions."

"Ah, well, you see, I don't know him as well as I once did. He's changed much and not for the better. He's up to something that I can tell."

"What does he do at the lab all night?" She asked.

"Experiments, as far as I can see. He files meticulous reports on his tests. He's very precise."

Sunburst smiled wryly. "Yes he is a bit of a perfectionist." Her smile faded. "Why is he the way he is?" She said beating around the bush.

"Why is he what?" Skyfire was perplexed. "I don't understand your question."

"Why does he, oh, slag. He is so self-centered, he thinks of no one other than himself. I want his friendship; is that too much to ask?" Her voice was frustrated and sad.

Skyfire took a deep breath. "I think I see what happened. You see Starscream is a recluse, he prefers to live alone and by his rules. As you already know he and I were very close friends once, the bond is not as strong anymore if it is there at all." He shook his head gently.

"Don't try to get involved with Starscream; there would be nothing in it for you. Quite frankly, his life is a cosmic disaster. He seems to resent the universe and what life has put him through; from what I gather he does enjoy your company, although he will never admit it to anyone. He will not reciprocate your affection so don't even bother; there is no future in it. He has his reasons for being the way he is and I don't pretend to understand why or what they are."

Skyfire cocked his head at the yellow Seeker. He was not trying to downplay the red Seeker; he was only trying to make Sunburst understand that forging a relationship with Starscream would be unwise; he did not want to see her hurt again. He knew that Starscream was capable of incredible acts of cruelty.

"I am sad to hear he attacked you but he might have another underlying reason. I think he could be trying to keep you at a distance perhaps for your own protection." Skyfire did not condone the action but he also understood Starscream really only understood pain and fear.

Sunburst shook her head sadly. She would have to be content with the inconclusive knowledge that Starscream might enjoy her company.

"He might come around one day but don't hold your breath. It took Starscream years to admit a tentative bond to Skywarp and Thundercracker and only recently did he even admit it to me. Sadly they are both dead and it grieves him much." His voice was soft and full of sadness. "Again I will emphasise don't seek Starscream's affections, he won't give it to you and if you press him, you will not like the reaction."

Sunburst could not say anything more. Her feelings were devastated. Skyfire remained and chatted to her for the rest of the evening not once mentioning Starscream or his

absence.

Five nights later:

Starscream finished with what he hoped was to be the final tweak of the power pack. It was time again to test. He opened a can of energon and had a few deep sips. He was hoping that this time the whole pack would not blow up. Parts were going to be hard to get inconspicuously at this rate. Tidying up the lab before Skyfire arrived three days before had been difficult. He avoided both Sunburst and Skyfire by working alone after hours.

He had managed to get through the past five days by scavenging energy from various sources around dusk or sunrise, when the light made it difficult to see what he was doing clearly enough. He would refuel then return to the hovel he called home to rest until the sun had set for the day.

Starscream figured that Skyfire knew he was working late at night, as was evidenced by the fact he had found a datapad with a message addressed to him when he had arrived.

'Starscream, what on Cybertron are you doing? Go home and if I find another burn mark in my lab wall, Decepticon, Ah, I cannot come up with a threat that will scare you enough. Just go home; your absence has also been noticed by higher authorities. -Skyfire.'

Starscream chuckled at the note but he did not reply. He did not care anymore who knew where he was. He just left the datapad on the desk with it marked as read. Unfortunately he was going to have to test his pack at least one more time before he could leave return home. He hoped, by now, his point would have been made; he needn't answer to anyone.

He reached for his laser rifle and drew it forwards. He took a screw driver and opened the casing. He picked up the pack and connected a pair of wires to a pair inside the charge chamber. Then came the tube that connected the rifle into his own personal energy supply. This was the area of concern.

He puzzled over it at night in the lab and scrutinised his schematics on the datapad by day. He thought until he had it figured out. His inner ego had suggested that his tests had shown the packs should work fine with his energy signature. However the Autobots had introduced a foreign element into his energon. This did not affect him under usual day to day circumstances. It affected him slightly when he fired his weapons normally. It would draw slightly extra power to burn the impurities out before it could discharge. There was an almost imperceptible delay from the moment. He gave the impulse command to fire the weapon to the time it discharged; almost imperceptible, it effected him only if he moved his arm too soon from the target. His aim ended up off centre.

It had more dire effects when he tried to incorporate the pack to work harmoniously with his systems. When the rifle was hooked up and charging, it continuously sucked at his energy like a vampire. Power was lost purifying the energy and if the filters became clogged; the pack continually charged until the thing overloaded and blew up. Starscream had to spend the remainder of the third night repairing his rifle and trying to remove the resultant scorch marks and shrapnel from his shoulder and wing.

There was one beneficial side effect however it too was slightly worrisome. It helped remove the element from his system. The downside of this was it would alert the Autobots to his research as they would soon find it difficult to track him. He was worried that they would re-capture him and insert more of that baneful element into his body. The other downside was that he had to continually adjust the setting to accommodate the amount of element left in his system to maintain peak performance of the weapon and pack.

All he needed to do was write some programming to integrate the pack to his regular systems; as a weapons subsystem file. In reality it was far more complicated than he had first anticipated. He wanted to maintain his weapons original primary function; laser rifle and secondary function; null rifle. Starscream did not want to overwrite the original programming and make the plasma rifle the primary function and he did not want it to be the secondary function either. He was used to those functions as they were so it had to be the tertiary function. The only problem was his programming did not have an open space for that and it was not wise to re-write one's own programming.

The only way he could get it to change from original to enhanced, at the present moment, was by a manual override. But if he needed speed this was not going to be the way. He would have to get something sorted out so that he could trigger with his intention and reflexes. A slight hesitation in a decision could mean the difference between life and death.

He made the final connection. He covered the pack with a case that he had made. He placed the rifle down on the table and went to the wall which had the burn mark in it. He brought out another sheet of armour.

'It's a shame that this one is not as tough as the first few pieces. Skyfire might just find a new entrance to the next lab.' Came an amused thought.

Starscream chuckled. "Well, let's just hope all it does is make the armour melt and the wall blacken some more."

'Lets hope it does not blow up in your face again.' The thought teased.

Starscream frowned as he stood away from the wall eyeing it as if he had never seen it before. He reached back and grabbed his rifle from the table looking it over just before he hooked it on. He held his arm out straight as if to fire. The rifle whined loudly as the pack charged its plasma chamber. He ran his internal diagnostics to monitor the energy usage. It seemed stable if still a little heavy on the draw. He waited a moment to see if his weapon would start that un-nerving vibration and whine that preceded an explosion.

Nothing.

He mentally triggered the firing mechanism and the rifle discharged. He could feel the heat of the plasma bolt as it left his weapon and hit the plate. The plate glowed red, sagged and melted. Behind the metal plate the wall glowed dark red and the scorch mark grew in size. Indeed Skyfire was not going to be impressed, but the test was a success. He had calculated around the impurities in his energy. That took a little doing: he had to run some small tests on samples of his energon before and after the earlier tests when

the element became suspect.

Starscream opened the small valve in his right wrist and drew out the clear hose. He held it into a glass test tube and let several drops of energon drip slowly into clear container. A few more tests of this nature and he could have the calculations very accurate. Now all he needed to do was to write that program and to make minor changes on his rifles so he could connect and disconnect the packs in a hurry. He still did not wish to leave them on as a permanent accessory, they were still dangerous and unpredictable.

Again he removed the pack from his weapon and prepared his notes. He cleared up his bits and put them away into the subspace toolbox. He glanced again at the scorched wall with a slight grin.

'No point in trying to hide that,' he thought, ' Skyfire already knows it exists.'

"I'll see him in the evening tomorrow. Tonight I shall go home." He was tired of hiding out in the ancient ruins.

He turned from the table, taking his rifle in one hand and the plate in the other hand. He glanced around one more time.

He locked the lab and left.

* * *

Overcast looked at his tracking scanner. Indeed Starscream was on his usual approach. He watched as the purple blip moved across the screen towards his rough location. The Autobot Pinzgauer had built up a blind where he could watch and get some pictures. He had several disks filled with the Seeker's nightly activities and he continued to watch. He did not have any images of what he was doing late at night in the university but he had several good images of the burn mark that he bore on his shoulder and wing. The Decepticon was up to something. Something that could cause him bodily harm.

Once he got the frequency for the tracer he found it easy to locate the Decepticon. He had located Starscream huddled, asleep, in a hovel that he had hastily built in ancient Vos. It was apparent to him that he was no longer residing with Sunburst. Overcast chuckled, like anyone would want to remain housemates with Starscream.

There was a very strong urge at that moment to shoot the Seeker full of holes. No one would have known who did it and he doubted that anyone would really care, much less investigate. He would not have considered it murder; he would have simply considered it more along the lines of exterminating a rat or another type of noxious vermin. But taking the Seeker out while he slept would not have been very gratifying in the least. No, he still wanted to take him on hand to hand and the thrill of the ultimate challenge.

Overcast had witnessed Starscream raiding energy behind the university as well as a few other scattered locations around dusk or just before dawn. However during the dawn raids he gathered several cubes and took them away with him. He consumed them voraciously in the morning hours. One had to be careful in consuming raw energon. It hit the system really hard and fast, like alcohol to a human. The Seeker had probably fed in the morning

so he could sleep off the effects during the day.

He could hear the roar of the Starscream's engines closing in on the landfill area. Overcast knew his routine. He would drop the damaged plate bury it and dig around for a new one. It was obvious that the plate had to do with the damage of his wing and arm. That was the night that he did not bring a plate back. So Overcast had to track him to Vos.

He remained silent as the Seeker landed nearby and dropped off his damaged cargo. However unlike most other times Starscream leapt into the air immediately after and transformed. He cursed as he watched the red and white jet fly away. He was flying in the wrong direction too. Overcast left his hideaway and kicked angrily at some tires that lay nearby. Oh well, he thought, he would follow the Seeker later.

* * *

He stood outside the doorway looking at the number pad. His thoughts ran rampant as he hesitated. There was the distinct possibility that she could have changed the ID code, if so it would be safe to assume he was not welcome. However, Skyfire had told him, in the message, to go home. This place, for lack of a better location, was home.

He had grown tired of living in the old ruins, it was not his style or his way. It was cluttered and dismal. Starscream had 'wealth' once. As the Decepticon Sub Commander; he had his quarters away from everyone else. He had his own private supply of energon so he did not have to go to the public re-fueling area. He had, at times, control of an entire army.

He wondered again about the choices he had made in the distant past. There was no way he could change the past, not unless he could find a machine that would send him to a point in his life that he thought would change the outcome of his future. He doubted, if he did find such a device, that he could convince his past self to alter from his suicidal path he had unwittingly taken. That was why people had said to forget the past and just live life now as it unfolded.

He was still perplexed as to why and how his lasercore had survived. He was grateful for that fluke of nature. Humans often had stories of ghosts. Many different interpretations about why or how they existed. Some said they were an energy life force: Their soul. It was similar to the spark of a transformer. He could accept that idea.

Another group would suggest that ley lines on Earth had a lot to do with whether or not a ghost could leave the mortal plane after the body dies. Some areas of that dismal planet had numerous ghost stories such as England and when he looked into it there was supposed to be numerous ley lines. He dismissed that idea; there was no scientific proof, pendulums and divining rods; that was metaphysical rubbish although there was something significant about the positioning of ancient monuments and their more modern buildings such as their churches.

Some said that the ghosts were nothing more than an aural projection that just remained behind mindlessly walking the paths that they had walked in life and had no actual sentience. This would seem to explain why they floated through walls in new buildings. Starscream as a ghost could walk through walls, disappear and reappear, possess others. He could also plot, plan and think. To be truthful he felt almost alive. To him he seemed

solid enough, until he tried to interact with something on the mortal plane and passed through without resistance. He would have preferred to have been fully alive or fully dead, not trapped as some ethereal figment of everyone's imagination. So he did not agree with the people saying that the ghosts had no sentience, he did.

There was another suggestion that depending of the weight of good or evil upon such an organic spark would depend if it would go to their heaven or hell. Those that were almost equal in balance remained trapped forever or they chose to remain behind until they could resolve an unfinished task that was set before them while they were alive, especially if they were taken out of turn. Starscream wondered if that was the idea that fit him the best. He did not know. He doubted he would ever know the answer, and he was not sure he cared to know the answer.

He reached down with a blue finger and punched in the passcode. The door unlatched with a soft click. He pushed the door open and entered the room.

Early morning light spilled into the lounge. He took a deep breath and he could smell the earthy scent coming from the moist soil from the potted plants. He looked around expecting to find his various possessions scattered about the place. Upon looking he could not find anything that did not belong. Quietly he looked into his re-charge room and noticed his shelves were neat and organised. Sunburst's door was closed.

He returned to the lounge and sat looking at his datapad pondering how to write a program to allow him to use the third weapon function. After that was done he would have a few more late nights to create the second pack, a few more test runs and he would be ready. It would not be much longer now. He leaned his head back in thought for a moment and fell into a doze.

"Starscream?" Said a firm voice as a hand reached out to shake him.

He awoke instantly, his optics flashed on bright in surprise for a moment as his hand lunged out to grab whoever it was who had touched him. His laser rifle oriented along his arm in readiness, he narrowed his optics as he focused on Sunburst who for a moment looked utterly terrified. He let go of her and she backed away unsure of his motives.

"Sorry, reflex." He chuckled. "I don't recommend creeping up on me like that; you are likely to find yourself shot." Starscream placed his datapad that had slipped out of his hand onto the floor while he had dozed off, back into his chest.

"Why have you come back?" She asked, coldly crossing her arms in front of her defensively.

Starscream's mouth fell into a frown, hurt, he moved to stand up. Sunburst placed a hand on his shoulder and stopped him from rising. "You don't want me here; you never did so I will gather my personal effects and leave." He stated attempting to rise again. Sunburst maintained a strong hold on his shoulder.

"Skyfire told me there was evidence of you working in the lab after hours. Burn marks in the walls..." Sunburst had noticed his right wing and upper arm. There were a few minor stress fractures and visible scorching. Her optics narrowed in a brief flash of concern. "I

had thought you had fled to Charr to battle, The Guana people have been looking for you."

"I was just preparing files for my trip back to Guandonnaland." He lied, not wishing to reveal his activities. "Which is something you might think about as I would like you to come with Skyfire and myself, we will be returning. There are a lot of fascinating plants that need to be categorised." He suggested.

"You are not telling the truth; can't you explain why you have that burn in your shoulder and the condition of the lab?" Her tone remained cold although it had softened some. "I want a promise that you won't return to Charr."

"No." He threw her an annoyed, don't you even go there look.

Sunburst just glared at him. Her red optics brightened in frustration. "And why not?" She dared to question him again.

"Because it's a promise I can not keep." That was the truth; he did not like to make promises. He was never good at keeping his word. She still persisted to aggravate him with questions. "I am truly sorry in that Sunburst. I cannot keep running and hiding forever. As I have said before, one of us is going to go down and I would prefer it to be Galvatron. It's not about power now, it's about revenge." The aggravation faded from his voice.

She let out a hefty sigh. "Well I have to go." She threw up her hands in slight irritation. "You're welcome to stay if that is your desire." Sunburst quickly turned away and left the apartment.

Starscream frowned unhappily. He knew they were still at odds. He had answered many of her questions yet she still did not answer any of his. Quietly he made his way to the recharge chamber for a bit of proper rest.

* * *

Three weeks after his return; he was still fighting the usual battles and arguments over his desire to keep his laser rifles close at hand. They did not diminish until Starscream, in desperation, threatened to drop her houseplants along with her research off the building. He insisted that he could feel attack was imminent therefore wanted his rifles nearby at all times. Two weeks after that; he had thought he had seen the Combaticon, Swindle. When he went to take a closer look he saw nothing. Once again he was set to feeling ill at ease and very paranoid.

With this in mind he re-doubled his efforts with writing the weapons tertiary sub-routine and made the second plasma pack. He was looking for a plate to test his new power pack when he spotted Overcast hiding in the ruins. He quickly dropped the plate and flew out. He wondered how long the Autobot had spent in the ruins. He hoped it was an only a coincidence that Overcast was present at that particular place at that particular time.

He often went to visit the Guanas. Teris inquired a couple more times when he was deciding to leave. He told her that he had completed the weapon as well as the necessary programming to operate it and that they should leave within the next thirty or forty days. Teris obviously was delighted.

He had been spending many hours at the university helping Skyfire with preparations to leave for Guandonnaland. They had uploaded necessary ancient files to the ship along with notes of things he wished to test, experiments that they wanted to run and a couple of theories he wanted to prove. He wanted to find out what were the direct ancestors of the Guanans of today. He had spent so much of his time with his studies that he could not spare more than a brief visit with Teris and her people.

* * *

Sunburst was still asleep in the other chamber when Starscream awoke from his recharge cycle. It was very early in the Cybertron morning. Relative to Earth it would be about quarter to four. He was nervous. This was the day. He brought his optics on line and stared up at the ceiling and took a deep breath in an attempt to calm himself: it did not work.

He wanted to delay this day, he had dreaded its arrival. But he had to face it. One way or another he would face his nemesis and he preferred that it would be on his own terms; when he was ready. Although his second plasma pack was untested the program was fully integrated and functioning. He had spent time practising switching between modes until he was used to the tertiary function.

Starscream stretched and silently sat up on the sleeping couch. He looked around the room for a moment thinking quietly to himself. He had doubts that his internal thoughts quietly reassured that he was doing the right thing. It was now or never; somehow he had known his time was running out. He reached down to the floor and grabbed his rifles, resting them on the top of the re-charge bed. His other hand opened the drawer and removed the packs. He hooked them to the adapters on the butt of his rifles and with shaky fingers reattached them to his arms.

He was ready.

He fought to suppress the jittery nerves. He did not want to appear weak. He wanted to look menacing and dangerous. He stopped and glanced into the room where Sunburst rested in re-charge. He had to leave early; he did not want her interference. "Good-bye Sunburst, I might not be back." He whispered almost silently as he regarded her sadly for a moment silently wishing things could have been a bit different. He had no room in his present agenda for a female. Not unless it suited his purpose and at present she had no purpose for him.

He quietly crept into the living room area and found the datapad. He printed a small message. It hopefully would buy him a few hours to escape. He was often disappearing for a day or two with Skyfire. It would give him about a day's head start before she found out the truth when Skyfire arrived looking for him. By that point he figured that they would wait to find out whether or not he returned.

The note was simple:

Gone on a research trip on other side of planet. Be back in a day or two. S.S.

He put the pad down on the table as he crossed the room quietly. He passed the private re-fueling area of the apartment and his hand snaked out and he grabbed two cans of a

high energy energon beverage. He held them tightly in his azure fists as he walked to the door. Taking a deep breath he stepped out of the apartment.

The hall was dimly lit. There was nobody around this early in the morning. He walked towards the door at the end of the hall that led to the darkness of the roof. He was on a mission, one he had planned to do from the start. He opened the beverage and took a deep swig. He felt the high energy drink course through his body as it gave him a burst of nerve calming power. The other can he placed in his chest compartment. He would need it when he arrived on Charr.

He stood outside, alone in the early morning darkness. The stars were bright. He looked above him. High above he saw a glimmering pinpoint of yellow fire, Guandonnaland, he thought. He downed the rest of the energon; crushed the can in his hand and tossed the crumpled remains into a waste receptacle. He took another deep breath and leapt into the starry sky. He transformed into his jet mode and flew high and fast. There was something more he needed to do before he left Cybertron, perhaps for good.

* * *

Starscream arrived in Iacon at the barracks where the Guanas lived. They were settled in asleep at this time. He located Teris' room. She was curled up in a thick blanket. Although Cybertron's climate was fairly regulated, the Guana people were far more used to a very hot, humid environment. She moaned softly as she awakened and her big amber eyes flickered open. Her pupils dilated suddenly as she recognised Starscream.

"Go away, it's early." She hissed groggily.

"Teris, I need to talk..." The Guana woman rolled over and slapped a pillow on her head. Starscream pulled it out of her grasp and tossed it aside "Seriously Teris...."

"I am tired, come back later." She responded in annoyance. She did not want to seem like she was disrespecting Starscream, she was just not in the mood to be disturbed.

The Seeker needed to talk to her as he had suddenly realised he did not have a hope in hell in succeeding in this plan. He wanted to say good bye at least. She rolled away from him and he reached down and caught her. He looked straight at her and sighed. She wriggled in his grasp. He held her firmly.

"What the hell has got into you?" He asked exasperated as she tried to ignore his presence.

Teris just looked at him coldly. "You want to know what has gotten into me?" She hissed "Tuli, that's what. She pressures me every day. She wants me to take the ship. I insist we wait until you are done. What about us, Starscream? We want to go home!" She sounded plaintive.

"We will be going home soon, I promise." This was one promise he could guarantee, if not for himself, for them. "I am planning on doing the task that brought me out here in the first place." He sighed. He thought he had felt some tension in the room when he was around Tuli. Teris had been loyal to the core and he had wished he had some way he could

reward her loyalty. She knew him for what he was and saw past that.

"You're going for Galvatron?" She said suddenly and stopped wriggling in his grasp her eyes growing large in amazement.

"Yes." He said simply.

"When will you be back?" The Guana asked her interest now peaked.

"A couple of days at the most." He figured on the positive side.

"And you worry that you might be killed?"

Starscream frowned with displeasure. "Um... truthfully... Yes." He replied feeling interrogated, "although I hope I have the element of surprise and it won't come to that." He felt the flutter of nervousness deep within himself.

"Sunburst, will she be with you?" Asked the Guana.

"Not if I can help it," Starscream replied. "I would like you to see to it that you ready the ship for launch in two weeks." He changed the subject from Sunburst. "Prep it so we could leave earlier if we can make it. I don't plan on getting killed."

"Can I go with you then?" She asked hopefully. She did not really want to hang around Tuli. The tension had increased in the past few days and there was a whispering that a battle challenge would be soon issued.

"Too dangerous," said Starscream. "As I have said, Galvatron could very well destroy me and that would leave you stranded." He reasoned. Starscream did not want her to be stuck on the cold, burnt-out world of Charr. "It would be safer if you stay here. If I don't return, leave in two weeks." He said with a creepy feeling crawling over his mind. He would have to re-focus on the mission rather than the possible ifs. If he was to succeed he would have to think positive.... easier said than done.

"When are you leaving?" She inquired satisfied with his reason for not allowing her to go. She did not relish the idea of being stuck anywhere.

"Now."

"Right now, now?!" She could not believe the short notice he was giving her.

"Before I change my mind." Said Starscream grimly. He felt a bit like he was about to march off to a funeral. His own funeral. He placed the lizard back onto the cot. He stood silently for a moment fighting off the uneasiness that threatened to overwhelm him. The Seeker had a burst of fear that made him feel as if he wanted to turn and run. He took a deep breath, and pushed the erratic feeling away from his mind.

Teris sat looking defiant. She hated his plan. She wanted to run after him and scream at him to stop. She was afraid of losing him. He meant a lot to her people. He had brought them prosperity and better lives. She knew what he was up against. He was much smaller

than the evil Galvatron and he was only one against a possible many. She had seen the results of his previous encounter first-hand and that memory lived forever in her dreams, haunting her. Teris kept her tongue firmly in her head.

Starscream forced a smile, patted her scaly head and turned for the door. He stopped for a moment looking back at her then he closed the door behind him.

Teris turned for the computer and composed a message. "Stop or help Starscream, please! He's going on a suicide mission – Galvatron.– Teris." She hated this plan utterly and she did not think he should go alone. She punched the send button and sent one to Skyfire and one to Sunburst.

The Lizard lay restless on her cot feeling worried. She could not return to sleep. A few hours later she walked down to the Guana common room looking for food and something to drink.

Teris walked into the room and stopped in the doorway when she spotted Tuli. The other lizard was angry, her teeth were bared and her mouth pulled in an ugly snarl. "Enough, Teris, I think I stand for the betterment of our race when I say this, you are too weak. Shamans have never made good leaders. Look at how your father brought this upon us! We had a simple but good life!" Tuli spat her words at Teris. Her sharp clawed finger angrily jabbed Teris in the chest. "I challenge you to a duel. The victor becomes leader as has been the tradition of our people!" Tuli grabbed the pendant that Teris wore and tore it off flinging it aside.

The other Guanans stopped what they were doing and looked over at Tuli. She had issued the challenge. The lizards spread themselves out to encircle the pair. Umfolosi stopped to pick up the gold Decepticon insignia and placed it in her pocket. She would return it to Teris as soon as the fight was over.

The thick chain had cut into Teris's neck. She placed a hand to her wound and snarled. Her lips were pulled back in a grimace exposing many razor sharp teeth.

"Hand to hand." Said Tuli defining the rules of engagement as the challenger could. "Claw to claw, tooth to tooth."

Teris nodded in agreement. If she declined the challenge, Tuli would take control of the lizards immediately. This could not be allowed: her loyalty was to N'kosi and her people. Tuli was loyal mostly to herself. She looked around the room at the other twenty eight Guanans. They backed away loosely forming a ring.

Teris and Tuli stood in the middle facing each other, teeth bared and claws extended. They watched each other intently eyes locked.

"I don't know what you see in him." Said Tuli as they started to circle each other hunched in a ready position. "Have you even looked at what his kind is? Have you read the stories, Teris?" Her words were angry and loathing. "HAVE YOU!? Do you really want to be known as a Decepticon supporter?"

"Yes." Said Teris firmly, answering both questions at once. "I have read the stories and I

have the wit to understand it is only one side of the story twisted in the Autobots' favour. It's a territorial battle, much like we have now. You will tear our people asunder as their wars have torn theirs!"

"It's time for a change Teris! I have followed you long enough. I am the oldest female on this ship." Tuli lunged for Teris, slashing out with a clawed hand. Teris, surprised, leapt back but not quickly enough to avoid the longest finger on her opponent's hand. Blood welled up from the fresh wound on her arm. Teris only snarled in discomfort. "You are a pathetic slug, Teris; you are willing to betray our people! Lead them into slavery." Tuli continued to goad Teris.

Teris's vision went red with fury; she opened her mouth and lunged at Tuli. She knocked the other down and brought her teeth down to bite. Tuli reacted suddenly, balling her hand into a fist and punching Teris in the snout. She flew off and landed on her back with Tuli leaping after and landing on top of her.

Tuli tried to get her claws at the big vulnerable eyes, Teris fought her off with her hands, hissing angrily as Teris kicked her footwear off and used a sharp claw of her toe to dig into her opponent's leg, tearing it open. Abruptly they jumped apart. They were both bleeding from their wounds. Again they circled.

Tuli had her head cocked, her eyes glowering with hatred. Her mouth opened slightly. She limped; Teris' attack had left a deep gouge in her thigh. She also shook her feet free of the restraining foot garb. Her tail lashed angrily back and forth as the blood stain on her clothes grew larger.

Teris and Tuli both lunged and they collided with a massive thump. Entangled, they fell to the ground and rolled across the floor in an angry ball of red, grey and green. They hissed at each other in their language, the curses were lost between the snarls and hisses as they bit and slashed at one another. To the spectators it appeared the duel was going to be set to the death. Their hatred of one another had become too intense.

The tension between Teris and Tuli had become so heated that Zumbo feared this eventual outcome. Tuli had been talking for the last few weeks about challenging her leader. She was angry because they were still on Cybertron. N'kosi had rarely been to keep them updated personally and Tuli decided she was going to assume leadership and take the ship back home.

Zumbo zoned out and thought about the mild argument he had earlier in the morning.

"We are all needed!" Zumbo had insisted.

"The ship can manage with less crew if necessary." Hissed Tuli. "I had hoped that our scavenger hunt would have allowed us to leave Cybertron faster!"

"Tuli, you can't possibly issue a challenge against Teris, she has done so well for us."

"Has she? She's at the beck and call of that—that creature. She cares nothing of us: if she did she would have returned us home!" Tuli pointed suddenly at machine in the corner of the room. "I have my egg to worry about now. I want to take it home. I don't want my

offspring to hatch off its native world!"

Her maternal instincts were clouding her judgment. Female Guanans often went into uncontrollable rages when their young were at stake. "Tuli... if you battle Teris our offspring might not have its mother." He pleaded for her to ditch this crazy and dangerous idea. She was diligent, hardworking and loving: all the characteristics of a good mother. Zumbo loved her very much or else he might be thoroughly angered with her hatred of Starscream. He had two conflicting loyalties.

"HAH! I will succeed, Teris is weak. Her whole line is weak. Shamans were never the toughest stock." She had turned and stormed out the room to hunt down Teris.

Zumbo kept his mouth shut. There was no point in arguing with her once she had her mind set. He could only hope for the best.

A ball of green and grey rolled across the room towards him distracting him from his thoughts, the challenge had been issued and it was between the combatants: the leadership issue would be resolved shortly.

Teris disengaged and rolled aside. She had a slash across the tip of her snout. She eyed Tuli with fury as the other ran to her. She lifted her foot and spun around lashing out with her tail. All her strength and body weight was in that movement. Teris's tail connected and she could feel Tuli's head whip to the side as the force of the blow sent the older lizard reeling to the ground with a scream. There was an appreciative hiss from the spectators.

Teris completed the spin and faced her opponent, blood dripping from her nose, hands out-stretched in readiness. It was not over yet. Tuli picked herself up with a slight shake of her head. Several teeth were broken; not a major wound. They would grow back again if she survived.

Again they circled both limping and hurting from their wounds, both weakening from pain that they refused to acknowledge. Teris spat at the feet of Tuli, insulting her. Tuli charged, her mouth wide open, wet blood stained teeth glistening in the light. Teris dropped to her knee, rolled aside and stood up. She spun rapidly around and knocked Tuli, who had turned to meet her, off her feet with her tail.

Pain lanced through Teris' tail. She knew she had broken or crushed one or more bones in it when she connected with her opponents strong legs. She winced; she could see Tuli smile maliciously. She knew that she had just lost a valuable weapon.

Tuli seeing the weakness leapt at Teris with her great jaws open. She was too slow to step aside and was thrown onto her back with the enraged Tuli upon her. Suddenly she felt teeth sinking into her throat as the pressure increased. She hissed in surprise and pain.

Abruptly she remembered something in her pocket. Something that Starscream had given her months before. She slipped her hand into the pocket as she fought to draw breath. Tuli was heavy. She pulled her hand out and pointed the object up at Tuli and pressed the button.

A bolt of lavender energy exploded from the pistols tip. It burned through Tuli's shoulder.

Tuli screamed in annoyance as she flew backwards through the air. Teris' throat was bleeding from many small puncture wounds. She looked down at the pistol in her hand and looked at the setting. Normal strength. The smell of burnt flesh hung in the air.

Tuli unsteadily stood up. "You cheated!" She screamed in disbelief.

"You did not specify that no other weapons were to be used." Teris had a small loop hole. However she knew traditional fights were usually fought with traditional weapons. Starscream's pistol was not a traditional weapon. The fight had been close. As much as Tuli irked her she did not want to render the unhatched spawnling motherless. She was within her right to kill Tuli at this point if she desired.

Teris watched on as Zumbo walked to his mate and slung an arm around her to comfort her. Teris took a deep breath and turned to walk towards the edge of the ring. The battle was over. She had won.

"YOU! Don't turn your back on me!" Tuli lunged as she screamed, breaking free of Zumbo's grasp.

"Tuli—NO! Tuli! Teris has won, she is our leader!"

Alerted by the shouts Teris flipped the settings. She spun around on her foot and fired. The bolt of lavender blue light encircled Tuli; she screamed and fell into a heap. She caught Zumbo's horrified stare. "Zumbo, get your mate out of here and to the Autobot's infirmary, she's only stunned, not dead." Teris hissed angrily as she staggered to the door to find a medic who might be able to help set her tail.

* * *

He looked back at the closed door with a helpless sigh. He figured it might be the last time he saw Teris. He tried again to hold a positive outlook. 'Oh cyber-rats.' He thought. He still did not expect to return from his mission. Galvatron was always a hard opponent to deal with. Galvatron had a way of returning Starscream to his base elements with his Plasma cannon. Be it turning him into black ash or a quivering heap of fear and incoherence. He proceeded to the door and the outside world.

The sky was beginning to fill with flying transformers or vehicles of those who could not transform or fly. 'Tough luck to them.' He thought with an edge of hostility. The air was clear and the stars were still bright. The blue sun was just starting to peek over the horizon. He took a deep look at the vista around him. He expected this would be last time he set foot on his home world. The buildings and the smell of the air made him almost think against his task, but it was now or never. He drew upon some hidden reserves of courage as he transformed and took off for Charr.

The Seeker's engines roared with full power as he blasted away from Cybertron. The ground diminished swiftly and he broke through the Cybertron atmosphere; he knew he broke a cardinal rule that the Autobots had imposed. He was not to leave Cybertron without their consent. He did not care about their rules anymore. This was his fight and not theirs.

Around him the star formations changed and danced around, as if they were alive. He often admired the beauty and freedom of space, once he had increased his speed enough then with the odd addition of thrusters he could maintain it almost indefinitely. He flew towards the sun so he could use its massive gravity well to expedite his progress to Charr.

Starscream thought of the distant stars. He knew them for what they were, huge balls of hydrogen being fused into helium releasing massive amounts of energy and radiation into space. He could feel the solar wind against his sleek body. His body felt the extremes of temperature; one side was searing hot, while the other side was frigid. It made him feel somewhat uncomfortable. He rolled slowly exposing one side then the other. His mind drifted to the thought of his home world's star.

Cybertron's star was nothing spectacular as regular stars go. It was small, very bright and towards the blue-white end of the spectrum. If it were a blue giant, it would have burned out or gone supernova eons before robotic life could have a chance to evolve on Cybertron. The star, however, was without a normal classification, which made it very interesting. It was small enough to be classed as a dwarf; it was blue in colour due to the extreme temperature of its core. But Dwarf stars are not known to have any hydrogen left to burn. They were cooling dead stars, whose cores were reduced to iron from the final burst of their lives. Cybertron's star, however, seemed to burn endlessly. It was figured to be many billions of years old and would continue to burn for many more billions of years. The Cybertron star was far older than Earth's Sol.

Starscream's mind began to swim. He was not an astronomer. He could understand the basic concepts but he knew only enough about stars and stellar charting to navigate in the vacuum of space. He was more interested in alien biology, if there were intelligent species, alien history and culture. He knew how to use such information to his advantage; he also knew if he understood the internal workings of a race better, that race could be easier to destroy if it was necessary. And he was also interested in geology and geography.

No, the secrets of Cybertron's star remained hidden. Probes from scientists, Autobot, Neutral or Decepticon all failed to turn up anything useful on the composition of their sun. Most probes melted before they got to the corona. One theory remained... it might be an artificial sun, but what fueled it?

His mind gave a short sharp throb. Astronomy was not his field so why was he dwelling on it? Could it be due to the fact he had spent a lot of time drifting through the cosmos in years gone by?

As he shot away from Cybertron and its star he could feel the gravity of the system diminish and let go. He felt his momentum speed up as the gravity from another distant system grabbed him, pulling him towards it like a hungry beast. It was a huge distance for him to cross. At his present speed and the closeness of Charr, it would be but a day's flight.

The Seeker's mind started to drift. He became drowsy; boredom filled his mind with erratic and occasionally disturbing thoughts. He decided to allow himself the luxury of a brief rest. He scanned the route ahead of him checking for any possible hazards. He left his radar on and he allowed himself to go into a light rest cycle.

* * *

"And so you see Rodimus, these have been his activities over the past eight weeks." Overcast ceased his slide show. The evidence was irrefutable; Starscream had failed to hold up to his ends of the bargain. Overcast smiled smugly. He had managed to ward his leader's anger to insist he was only spying for the good of the Autobot race.

It had become known to the Autobots that the Seeker had gone missing for about a week when the Guana Teris had inquired if anyone knew where he was. The Autobot leader was annoyed when he inquired with Skyfire about the lack of information. The giant flyer simply stated that Starscream needed to have time alone. He seemed unworried about the Decepticon's motives.

Now Skyfire sat watching the pictures shamefaced. The melted plates, energon cubes and the scorch marks on his wing and shoulder. Upon his return Starscream explained that he had mixed incompatible substances by mistake due to fatigue and the experiment exploded injuring him and damaging the wall.

"Skyfire, since you ensured you would report all of his activities would you care to explain all this?" Inquired Rodimus.

The flyer sadly looked over the small group of Autobots present, Rodimus, Ultra Magnus, Springer, Upland and Overcast. He raised his hands in defeat as he spoke. "I had no idea of his activities. I assumed he had just taken time off and I was led to believe that it was a botched up experiment that had injured him." He hung his head.

"As he is a very dangerous Decepticon I can no longer allow him to remain free on this planet. He poses too much of a threat. But to be fair, raise your hand if you wish to see him re-captured." Everyone excepting Skyfire raised their hands. "I will need your help, whether or not you wish this, to help capture him."

"What do you intend to do with him once you have captured him, de-activate him?" Inquired Skyfire with suspicion. Overcast grinned at the possibility.

"No, he will be sent to the mines until we review his case." Stated Rodimus.

"You can't do that to Starscream, sir, most Seekers are inherently claustrophobic. Sending him down there would be a death sentence to him. Deactivating him would be kinder." He did not like either option.

"I am sorry Skyfire, that is my final ruling. He is not an Autobot or even a Neutral for that matter. He is a Decepticon and always will be. If you cannot bring him in peacefully, you may use whatever means necessary."

Skyfire was torn between the ancient friendship and his loyalty to Cybertron. He looked down at the insignia on his chest and took a deep breath. "Yes I will assist you to capture him alive. But reconsider your choice in sending him to the mines. You can find him this afternoon at the University." The flyer stood up and left.

Sunburst was aware of Starscream leaving. He tried to be relatively quiet. She checked her internal chronometer 03:47:52. It was unusual for him to rise this early. She wondered what he was doing but decided against asking; she feigned sleep.

Sunburst could hear him whisper something as he walked by her room. She felt a twang of concern. What was he up to? Why would he need to get up this early? She wondered. She could hear him creeping through the apartment. Silence. A few minutes later the door clicked as he locked it behind himself.

She dozed off not thinking much more about the Seeker's early departure. When she awoke she looked around. The sky was bright. She checked her chronometer 10:30:21 am. She was surprised at how long she had lain in re-charge. She got off the couch and walked into the re-fueling area. Starscream had taken a couple of cans of her energon drinks and left only one. 'Greedy self-centred hog,' she thought as she opened the can and sipped. She started to feel the stimulating drink awaken her senses. She sat on the lounge couch deep in thought. From the corner of her eye she spotted a flash from the datapad. She reached down for it.

Two new messages it read. She brought up the first message

03:52:21, Gone on a research trip on other side of planet. Be back in a day or two. S.S.

She let out a hefty sigh as she sipped again at the beverage. She thought it was odd that he was leaving a note, what was he up to? For her, residing with the ex- Decepticon Air Commander was quite the challenge and often very unpleasant.

He had his quirks, short temper, frequent lies, threats and one occasion he had attacked her. His demand for precision and perfection sometimes made her angry with frustration. However he occasionally showed a side that was humorous; although his humour was often very dark, sarcastic or sadistic in nature. Then it would seem that he realised he was having fun and a shadow would fall cross his face: the humour in his optics would be replaced by a sort of coldness and abruptly he would withdraw to seek privacy.

He never had the inclination to explain his whereabouts before so what was he playing at today that she rated a note? She wondered again. She took another sip of energon.

The second note was from the reptilian, Teris. There were often messages from the Guana botanist looking for Starscream. However they became very few and far between in these last two weeks. Sunburst glanced again at the message on the datapad. No, the message was addressed to her.

She regretted instantly opening the email. What she read made her go cold. Her hands shook.

05:05:17, Stop Starscream. He's going on a suicide mission – Galvatron – Teris

The notepad fell from her hands onto the floor. She looked to the door. It became clear as

crystal. Starscream was going to face his mortal enemy: Alone. Damned fool, she thought angrily, why would he go do this? She stood up feeling a mixture of fury and fear. What was she to do? She wondered, Teris said stop him, so that's what she would do or at least attempt to. There was no time to locate the lizard. Starscream already had about five and a half hours head start and he was a far faster flier than she was.

"Slaggin' reckless fool, he's going to get himself killed." Sunburst cursed again, She knew that Starscream was thinking of this trip but she did not realise he was intending to start so soon. He had not spoken of any plans, in recent weeks, having to do with returning to Charr. She thought he might have been only jesting when he even suggested he would go after Galvatron. What inane idiot would think he was capable of taking on Galvatron alone? She knew he had a superiority complex; that he thought very high of himself and his abilities but surely he had some common sense buried in that thick head. A sense that would tell him that this was a futile effort, a waste of time and all likelihood his life.

She wondered for a moment if she should wait, he was a big coward after all, surely he would return soon with his tail dragging between his legs, shouting curses at everything. But could she count on it? Could he have actually found the nerve he needed to do this on his own? Did he think he'd actually succeed? Was he insane? If he wanted to get himself killed in this manner; should she even be considering talking him out of it? He had told her before not to interfere with his affairs; that he could take care of himself. He had been quite adamant about the whole keep out of my way issue.

She could stop now and leave him on his path of destruction, but something within her compelled her to carry on. What it was that was driving her; she did not know. Sunburst opened the storage locker beside the one Starscream had used for his rifles, when he felt like keeping them in there. She removed a plasma pistol and placed them into the right thigh compartment that acted as a holster in her leg.

She reached for her plasma / laser rifles. They were similar in style to the ones that most of the Seekers wore except hers were slightly shorter in length. She hitched them to her arms. They felt strange and heavy. It had been a very long time since she had last worn them. There had been little need for them in her present line of work.

She had spent many thousands of years working as a mercenary for various group factions and governments. She gave it up soon after Skyfire discovered her blasted body on the planet Mars in the Sol System. He rescued her and patched her up as best as he could and flew her to Cybertron for more extensive repair.

Since that time she felt as if she owed the giant flyer a favour in return. She learned his ways of peaceful science taking up botany for more or less self interest. She did not know that he knew Starscream until he got the news file of his death sent to him. The Seeker had been destroyed after which Skyfire fell into utter despair. He told her sometime after that he had hoped to try again at their friendship. The older Flyer's spirit had fallen into ruin and his own lab went from order to chaos.

"Idiot!" She hissed angrily to herself, "Why am I doing this?" Abruptly she knew the answer; she was doing this for Skyfire. She had no wish to see his spirit crushed again because of Starscream and his selfish ambitions.

Sunburst left the apartment. Her mind was distracted and she forgot to lock the door. She reached the outside. People around stopped and stared at her in surprise. They were familiar with Sunburst, but they had never seen her armed. She glanced up to the sky. The sun was brilliant blue. She leapt into the air and transformed. Her pale gold triangular form shot through the heavens and into space. She flew towards the sun hoping to pick up speed by using the intense gravity well of the star to slingshot her to Charr faster than she could normally achieve.

* * *

Skyfire sat sadly peering into the microscope. He paused from his scrutiny to make a couple of notes in his datapad. He felt as if he were making a big mistake in agreeing to help them capture the Seeker. He was a friend, this sort of betrayal would forever damage any hopes of keeping their friendship alive. The Decepticon had seemed very well behaved and almost good natured but he was well known for his abilities of being deceitful and cunning, especially when he had something to gain from it.

Starscream had confided to him that he was not comfortable on Cybertron anymore. He had said he was worried about being followed and watched. Skyfire was torn then between the friendship he had for the Seeker and loyalty to the Autobots. With Rodimus' persistence he had agreed to report on Starscream's activities.

"He's my friend, it does not feel right to spy on him like this." Skyfire had gently protested.

"Your reports are only as a precaution, Skyfire." The Autobot leader reassured. "Just report to us if he does anything out of the ordinary."

'Out of the ordinary,' Thought Skyfire, taking time to be alone was one of his old traits when he had known him eons ago; it was not out of the ordinary. Starscream had often taken absences to think alone and often he would return with a brilliant idea. It never occurred to him to inform the Autobots that the Seeker had taken off for a few days. He was angry to hear that Starscream had attacked Sunburst but she sometimes could get his edge up, he only figured that the Seeker wanted to get away from his unwanted house mate.

He had put Starscream in that situation without really thinking about how he would feel about forced closeness with another mech. He had not realised that the Seeker would be so uncomfortable with the arrangements.

The images of the energon cubes, the metal plates etc... disturbed him. What was Starscream up to that he would resort to Decepticon-like raiding? He had figured the energon was to supply him with sustenance while he was away from the more conventional methods of re-charging. But what of the rest? Why would he need those metal plates and what had caused the damage to them and his person? He glanced over at the metal toolbox that was stored neatly under the heavy black topped work table. Whatever he was up to he knew the answer lay in that box.

"You said he'd be here by now." Said Overcast looking at some objects on the table. The Pinzgauer was becoming annoyed with the wait. He itched to arrest Starscream, he

wanted to see him beaten and demoralised. "What's taking him so long?"

Skyfire looked at the clock. It was past four PM. It was very unusual for The Seeker to report in any later than one PM. He knew the Seeker spent much of the night working on experiments and would be here soon. He pressed a button on his desk.

"Sunburst, It's Skyfire, have you seen Starscream?" He often had to inquire on the Seekers arrival.

"Sunburst did not arrive today, Skyfire." Came a soft voice.

"Thanks." He responded puzzled.

Overcast looked at Skyfire with worry. He had a bad feeling about Sunburst's no-show and Starscream's lateness.

"She's probably left me a message." He reasoned flicking on the computer. Indeed the message icon was flashing in the bottom right hand side of the monitor. He opened it up and read the message.

"Primus no...." His voice filled with fear. "He left around four-thirty this morning for Charr. The message is from Teris to Sunburst and me." He knew suddenly why Sunburst had not shown. She was also no longer on the planet. She was following Starscream to his fate.

"I must follow them. Skyfire stood up and ran for the door."

"He left almost twelve hours ago, he's halfway there!" Overcast realised the Seeker had thwarted his plans. He also realised that no one could have informed him of the midday meeting. This annoyed him greatly; he was so close, so very close.

"I can go twice as fast as Starscream if I want to. Especially once I reach space."

"Then I'm coming with you, to make sure you bring him back if he lives." Insisted Overcast. He decided that he did not want to miss a chance of having a go at Starscream off Cybertron. There would be less chance of discovery should he get the opportunity to finish the Seeker off himself.

"Hurry it up then." Muttered Skyfire. He did not wish this Autobot to go with him but he did not see that he had much choice. He knew he'd have to watch Overcast: the Pinzgauer hated Starscream with a passion.

* * *

Skyfire sped through space, Overcast sat in the pilot's seat watching the stars shoot past with boredom.

"Skyfire." He said looking down at the radar. "I am picking up something on radar. It's slow moving and is of Decepticon configuration."

Skyfire did a quick scan ahead of him to determine what it was that they were flying

towards. "Ah, we have reached Sunburst, hail her, tell her she can come on board and rest."

Overcast was not amused to have the neutral Seeker join them but he also knew she was a compatriot of his.

"Sunburst this is Overcast onboard Skyfire, we're coming up on your six. Do you wish to board? Over." For Primus' sake say no! He thought.

"I'd be grateful for the rest." She replied "I don't have sufficient energy to reach my destination in a timely manner." Her voice was tired.

Overcast looked on in disgust at the yellow triangular shaped Seeker as she changed her flight to intercept.

Seeker once meant fear and terror; they were the Decepticon birds of prey, blood thirsty hunters of the air. It was hard to put aside a lifetime of conditioning and beliefs. It was hard for him to believe that a Decepticon would change allegiances after millions of years or pretend that nothing ever happened by becoming neutral. It was wrong and was very unnatural. Overcast did not trust those like that. Skyfire was almost an exception; he was a Decepticon for only a few days before he saw the light and changed sides. But even he was to be somewhat wary of, he was a friend to Starscream and that could mean he was being corrupted by the Seeker. He did fail to supply important information on the Seeker in the past.

Skyfire could very well warn Starscream never to return to Cybertron robbing him of his desired revenge.

Skyfire closed in on her position and slowed down allowing her to transform to board. "I will be arriving at Charr in a few hours." He said as the pale gold Seeker sat down in the co-pilot's seat. "We will have to start proceeding with caution I think we should be visible on their deep space scans and soon after that their radar" The giant flyer muttered worriedly.

Sunburst thought for a moment. "I might be able to help." She looked over at the Autobot in the pilot's seat. "Overcast I need that position, remove yourself." Her voice was cold. "Now!" She commanded.

Overcast glared at the Seeker as he stood up allowing the pale yellow Seeker to change chairs. He settled himself down in the co-pilot's position watching her closely.

"How so Sunburst?" Skyfire sounded curious.

"I have an ability. I am capable of jamming radar and infra-red scans, only for a very short time though and I am not even sure I can shroud your signature." She replied.

Overcast was surprised that Sunburst had stealth capabilities. That was a dangerous trait in some Decepticons as they could sneak up on their target and attack before the victim realised they were even there.

"You may proceed when you are ready." Skyfire responded.

"I will need to link myself directly into your systems in order to do this." She warned feeling uncomfortable about this idea. She hesitated for a moment before she opened up a control panel. She glanced over at Overcast who sat with an amused scowl. Sunburst opened her cockpit canopy and drew out a cable that she fitted into Skyfire's control panel. "The link is complete. I am starting to jam radar and suppress your infra-red emissions." The drain would be huge on her system trying to shroud the much larger jet.

"Let's hope we are not too late." Murmured Skyfire as they flew on towards the dim red star ahead.

* * *

His guidance system awakened him as he neared the red dwarf star system that the planet Charr orbited. He scanned his immediate area checking for any signs of trouble. He noticed some Seeker type jets in the distance; they were in process of landing. He charged his wing missiles in case his presence was noted by them. He remembered the last time he was here he was caught off guard. He had not put too much thought or planning into coming here the first time. He knew had he encountered his quarry he would have failed regardless. He hoped this time he had planned well.

Starscream cut his engines off before he made atmospheric entrance so he could start his glide silently to the surface of the planet.

Charr was much like Cybertron once. Huge metal buildings that towered into the sky and buildings that were built almost to the very core of the world; however, unlike Cybertron, this world was almost utterly dead. The iron core was cold, the atmosphere was full of reddish dust and the huge spires of once tall buildings had crumbled to the ground. It was a shocking change to the thriving energy rich beauty of his home world. The desolation of this planet struck him more this second time around than it did the first time.

Very little power was to be found on this world. It had been drained of it eons ago. One small area was lit and that was the place he would be landing, the same area as he had been months before. Charr was a ghost world for certain and he knew if he became a ghost again, he would look for a livelier location. Charr seemed more desolate than it was on his earlier visit.

Starscream entered the planetary atmosphere. His outer hull heated up but not too brightly. The atmosphere of Charr was very thin. Thick atmospheres such as Earth or Guandonnaland made an approaching craft look like a conspicuous beacon, drawing unwanted attention from all over. He slowed his descent and inclined towards an area not far from where he had landed before. He made certain he had checked for any foes. There appeared to be none. He landed in jet form and quickly transformed as he sequestered himself in some ruins.

The planet's dull sun shone dimly in the morning sky. It watched him unblinkingly like the baleful blood red eye of the Wyvern he had slaughtered so long ago. The ruins cast long dark shadows. The light was red tinged, almost smoky, as if someone had tinted his optics with a fine coat of dust. It was fairly creepy. He scanned over his surroundings slowly; his

weapons ready for action.

Nothing, only the haunting whistle of wind blowing through broken windows. There was a clatter of some metal junk that was picked up by a stiff blast of the wind only to be spun around and around by the formation of a small dust devil as the wind was caught between the ruins. The gust died down and it became eerily silent.

He waited for ten more minutes. No Decepticons had seen him, he hoped. He would rather not get cut down too soon. He crept out from behind his sheltering building. He took cover once more fifty metres down from his previous hiding spot. Here he waited again and watched. No one came. He felt he was clear to proceed once more.

He crept silently from building to building, waiting and watching between movements to assure that he had not been detected. His fuel pump hammered loudly to his audio sensors and he was afraid someone else might hear it. He took one last glance around and ran quickly to the door of the main building.

He and Teris had fled from this place so long ago, when he had scooped her up under his arm and barged past the startled Cyclonus. That was the beginning of his fight for his freedom and his right for existence. That all started when he fled to Cybertron. How long ago was that he wondered.

'One year, three months and eleven days.' His thoughts supplied.

He did not answer his thoughts as he did not want to give away his presence by the sound of his voice. He crouched; cocking his head slightly so he could listen. There were voices, and yes, Galvatron's was the main voice. The sounds echoed so he could tell they were not in the immediate vicinity of the doorway, they actually sounded quite distant. Galvatron sounded very annoyed, nothing unusual there. There were two voices, one deep and the other fairly light and they both sounded quite nervous.

Starscream initiated the tertiary setting on his rifles. A high pitch whine was emitted from the packs as the weapons were charged in readiness. He initiated the power feed cut off that would reactivate as soon as the power was discharged from the weapon. If he did not do this the packs would quickly drain him of his own energy reserves. This would also occur if he used them too liberally; he knew he had to be careful with them. He smiled wickedly as he felt the power that was being stored in the guns.

He hesitantly pushed the door open and peered inside, first left then right. Then he listened. He tried to slow the hammering of the fuel pump within his chest so he could once again hear the voices that echoed. He stepped through the open doorway closing it gently behind him, cringing at the silent yet almost loud click.

The hall was not brightly lit. Some of the bulbs in the overhead lights were out. Others were flickering in an almost strobe like manner. It bothered his optics causing him to squint in the rapidly changing brightness. He could not adjust to the erratic lighting. Some areas of the hall were very dark while other areas were bright. He passed a hallway that had some exposed wiring that poured blue sparks to the ground. Small creatures scuttled away from him through the darkness as he walked on.

The Seeker paused and listened carefully tracking the voices; being careful to place his feet down softly so as to keep the sound of his footsteps down to a minimum.

Starscream followed the voices until he arrived at the double doors of the throne room. He flattened himself with his wings pressed against the wall, his head cocked listening. He could distinctly hear the two worried voices. He peeked through the cracks in the door and saw Galvatron leaning forward on his throne; his face was angry. A pair of Seekers was kneeling in shame on the floor getting reprimanded.

"I am sorry does not cut it Whitespark! You have been warned before and yet you still abandon him."

"But Sir! I..." Pleaded the white Seeker.

"Idiot!"

Starscream watched as the Decepticon leader aimed his cannon at one of the unfortunate souls and the white Decepticon cried horrifically out as his body exploded. His grey comrade hit the floor flat with his hands over his head as his partner's body showered down around him.

"Let that be a lesson to you. Should you fail in your mission again..." Said Galvatron to the grey Seeker who lay on the ground.

Starscream swallowed in disgust as he realised that Galvatron was quite capable of killing him in a single shot if he so chose too. He would have to be sure that he fired first. The Seeker's attention was brought back to the spared Decepticon who whimpered in fright as he stepped slowly away from Galvatron, not turning his back.

'That guy is a menace to the Decepticons even. I'll bet he has killed more Decepticons than he has Autobots.' Starscream's thoughts observed.

He had to agree with that thought, Galvatron was a brute.

The Decepticon headed for the door and Starscream ducked around a corner and hid behind some rubble. He watched as the grey Seeker walked away in a very dejected manner. He quietly turned down a corridor until he was out of sight.

* * *

Battle ensued not far from their landing site. Skyfire's presence was noted upon their entry into Charr airspace. Sunburst's jamming efforts had failed. Cyclonus and Scourge welcomed them with warm laser fire as they disembarked and spread out.

"Your jamming did not work!" Overcast screamed to Sunburst as he dove behind some broken walls. He suspected that she had allowed the Decepticons to track them. Ramjet and Dirge flew in for a strafing run; Overcast aimed his shoulder mounted rocket launcher and fired. Ramjet's wing flew off and the Seeker spiraled out of control behind some buildings not far away.

"It's designed to work with my physiology. Now shut up and fight." She hissed taking cover behind some buildings firing at Dirge as he closed in.

"Autobots, foreign Seeker you will pay for that!" Shouted Dirge as he flew in low.

Suddenly an explosion rocked the ground between Sunburst and Overcast. She flew back almost into Skyfire's position. She landed holding her forearm. Flying rock and shrapnel had given her a hefty gouge. Skyfire pulled her under cover glancing over where Overcast had stood. There was a huge crater.

Sunburst started to move forwards again, Skyfire rested his hand on her shoulder holding her back. "We will need to fall back." He whispered. "Overcast is missing and we are outnumbered three to one." Another blast rocked the area. Sunburst stumbled and Skyfire held his hand out to steady her.

"We need to find Starscream." She replied standing up shrugging off Skyfire's assistance.

"We will, let's just get through this mess first." Skyfire fired a few shots towards the Decepticons. "He'll probably appreciate this; we've provided him a useful distraction if he is on his own, uncaptured and alive."

Sunburst nodded as they backed away firing leaving Overcast somewhere behind in the dust and debris.

* * *

Starscream returned to looking into the chamber through the door. He took a deep breath to calm his worried nerves. Galvatron was already angry enough to use one of his own troops as an example. He would undoubtedly shoot Starscream the moment he stepped through the door.

The Seeker looked over his wing and surveyed the hall. He could hear a fire fight not far in the distance. Decepticon animosity most likely the cause; he had seen it many times. Disagreements had often escalated into all out fire fights that had the ability to cripple the efficiency of their war efforts. It occasionally happened that one or more of the combatants were killed in these internal skirmishes. He wondered for a moment how the Decepticons managed to survive all this time despite these pathetic petty battles.

There was a point in time where the Autobots were almost extinct. The Decepticons had almost won the war. "Megatron—Megatron did not try hard enough; he had opportune moments where he could have killed Optimus Prime, rendering the Autobots leaderless and in chaos." He whispered aloud to himself.

Megatron often came up with loony plans to take over the world and drain the energy resources: a good idea only after you remove the Autobot presence. One of Megatron's plans had merit and almost succeeded if it were not for Thrust shooting Telatran One, disabling the program that was sending the ship that the exiles were in into the Sun.

Somehow they managed to get word out that they needed help. Autobots from all over the galaxy flocked to their banner swelling their troops. It was fair that the Decepticons

managed to find small pockets of help but it was not enough to turn the tide of the war. It became what the humans would term, a Mexican stand off.

Megatron could not see that his outdated, antiquated methods were holding the Decepticons back from their right to rule as the supreme race. Starscream figured if he had a chance to prove himself, he would have led the Decepticons into a reign of glory and a reign of terror for all those who opposed him. He strongly believed that his younger, fresher ideas and ways would have brought the Decepticons their birthright. Cybertron and the Decepticon Empire could have been his.

Now that was not going to be the way. Unicron re-formatted Megatron into a super insane Decepticon who would destroy anyone who stood in his way; ally or foe. It was just unfortunate that Starscream was his first victim.

He was about to push the door open when he caught sight of a Sweep dragging bound and somewhat battered Overcast into the throne room.

Starscream's optics brightened for a moment. "Slag," he muttered, "what brings him here?" The Seeker was worried about his plans now. He pressed his face close to the door peeking in, straining to hear what was being said.

"Mighty Galvatron, I have captured this Autobot intruder, as we speak we are bringing down the rest of them." He shoved Overcast roughly to the ground by kicking out the back of his knees. The Autobot hit the floor with a pained yelp. Beside him lay the dead Seeker. The Autobot turned his head to glance at the corpse at his side. He looked revolted.

Starscream suppressed a chuckle. He was pleased to see the Decepticons had captured the loudmouthed, macho Autobot. 'Not so tough now, eh, Overcast?' He thought with smile.

"Do you wish me to terminate him?" Said the Sweep holding the gun to the Autobot's head.

"No," Galvatron's mouth curled into a cruel smile, "take him to a holding cell; we will interrogate him later. See what useful bits of information he has about the Autobots. Then I will have him slowly slagged." Galvatron gestured sharply with his hand. "Take him away."

"As you wish." The Sweep turned away from Galvatron pulling the bedraggled Pinzgauer to his feet and with a rough shove; he pushed Overcast towards the door. He jammed his blaster into the Autobots back. Overcast reluctantly stepped towards the door. Starscream backed away and into his hiding spot, watching the Sweep and his prisoner exit the throne chamber.

Starscream remained in hiding; thinking. Overcast's presence could only mean one thing. The Autobots were now aware of his absence, and that they found out very quickly. He wanted to find out how many there were and why they were here. It was too much of a coincidence that they arrived only a couple hours after he landed. He would have to locate Overcast and ask him a few polite questions before he proceeded. He wanted to know what that little parasite was doing here.

Starscream left his hiding spot walking quietly down the dark, maze-like halls to the holding cells where he had been imprisoned many months before. He grinned as he saw Overcast sitting sourly on the steel plank. He had taken a huge gouge across his chest plate that had been leaking energon. He looked battered enough to have almost been directly hit with a well placed missile.

"I see that this place really suits you." Chuckled the Seeker as he stepped out of the shadows and leaned against the wall, placing a hand on his hip. He regarded Overcast who looked startled at the sound of his voice.

Overcast glanced up at Starscream. "Are you here to question me for Galvatron?" His tone was filled with hatred and his optics glared icily. His mouth twitched as he moved to stand. He was in a fair amount of pain. Starscream felt no sympathy.

Starscream's mouth fell into an annoyed frown. "No, I am here to question you for my own purposes."

Overcast stood close to the bars. "Let me out and I'll answer your inquiries, Decepticon."

Starscream shook his head negatively. "I am not a fool, Overcast, you will answer my questions first. Then if I see fit I might let you out. Not the other way around." Starscream held his arm up training a weapon on the Autobot. "Why are you here and who is with you are my first questions."

The Pinzgauer's gaze passed between the weapon that was aimed at him and at Starscream who stood before him. Overcast looked up at Starscream, thoroughly annoyed with the Decepticon; then his mouth turned into a sinister grin: He had an idea. "You really want to know why I am here and with whom?" He laughed dryly. "Ok then, but I doubt you will free me after I tell you but it should be worth your reaction."

Starscream suddenly felt uneasy, he did not like this Autobot very much and he could trust him even less than he liked him.

"I am here with Skyfire AND Sunburst." He laughed heartily. "You see, I have gathered evidence that you are still acting as a Decepticon and you know exactly what I mean. Late night trips to the landfill, early morning energon raids. You see Seeker, I've been trailing you for weeks and now Rodimus has ordered to have you re-captured and destroyed. Skyfire and Sunburst have agreed to help me bring you down. And you thought they were your friends?" He laughed again at Starscream's horrified expression. "Yes, Starscream, I have orders to bring you back to Cybertron in a very big body bag."

Starscream stepped back away from the bars like he had been slapped across the face. It was not what he had expected to hear, his own friends? It was impossible! He had ensured that there was no one around during those minor raids. "Yes, you are right Overcast," said Starscream dangerously, "I am not going to free you. As a matter of fact I am going to come back when I am done and kill you." Starscream emphasised the last two words as turned away leaving Overcast to grin smugly in his cell.

Starscream returned to hide in the alcove by the door. He held his head in his hands as he dealt with the betrayal. He could not believe this; Skyfire and Sunburst could not have

agreed to help capture him. Skyfire was his friend; sure there were problems in that relationship stemming from before, but they still had an understanding. And Sunburst was, well, an ally, or an acquaintance at least; or so he had thought. Unless Starscream looked in the direction that the cells were kept, unless Overcast was only attempting to exact revenge for his attack months ago that he was really only trying to unnerve him. That thought made more sense. Overcast was trying to make him lose faith, so he would err and get himself killed. But it did worry him; who were the others the Sweep spoke of?

Starscream stood up charged with renewed purpose, Overcast had almost succeeded in demoralising him. The Seeker was not going to let a little pipsqueak Autobot rain on his parade. He straightened his wings and set his mouth into a firm line. He was determined more than ever that this war was going to end here and now. He felt power and energy surge through him, electro-adrenaline. It was do or die trying.

Starscream stepped forward inhaling deeply as he kicked the door open with his foot. He held both rifles ready aimed at the dais.

* * *

Sunburst and Skyfire quickly ran past the inert bodies of the Decepticons. Some were dead and others were unconscious at least. Cyclonus and Scourge lay somewhere under the ruins of a building that Skyfire and Sunburst collapsed with a combined volley of missiles.

They stood outside the Decepticon Headquarters looking around hoping that there would be no other attack. "I am too big to go into that building unnoticed." Skyfire observed. The door was too small for his bulk. "You go in and find Starscream; I'll make sure that no one else gets past. Watch out for Decepticons inside." Skyfire warned as he held his rifle ready.

Sunburst nodded and darted inside. She quickly walked down a hall and found herself by the brig.

"Sunburst! Am I glad to see you!" Overcast chimed cheerfully as he waved her over.

Sunburst looked at him with suspicion noticing his damage. "I thought you were dead." Her voice expressed keen disappointment; she did not like him at all. "Oh well, never mind." She stepped over to the control panel and disabled the energon bars freeing the Pinzgauer. "Have you seen Starscream?" She asked.

"Um, no, he must be hiding somewhere. He probably realises he can't win this fight or he's already a dead mech. I saw a dead Seeker lying on the floor in the middle of the throne room when I was brought before Galvatron." He said nonchalantly as he reached for his backpack and weapons.

Sunburst dropped her plasma pistol. She slumped her shoulders forwards sadly leaning against the control panel. She knew Skyfire would have a slag fit when he found out about this news.

Overcast walked up and placed his hand on her shoulder. "Now, don't grieve over

Starscream. You know, you should head back to Skyfire. I am sure there are other jets in the sky." His words were cloyingly smooth.

"No, I need to get his body to take back to Cybertron; then we will leave." Sunburst collected her pistol from the floor and ran down the ill lit hall with Overcast following a distance behind.

* * *

He burst through the doors. Head held high and defiant. He noticed that the body of the white Seeker was gone with a few still glistening pools of energon and scattered debris remaining. Whitespark, he remembered. Galvatron simply sat smugly seemingly unworried about the Seeker's presence.

Although he felt shaky he gathered all his reserves to appear fearless and menacing. It would be a battle of wits. He wondered if he could bluff the Decepticon leader.

'No,' he thought, 'It would be a fight to the death.' The Electro-adrenaline was still strong in his body but the sight of the Decepticon struck fear deep within the Seeker's spirit.

Galvatron glared at him as he recognised who stood before him; his mouth was angry, sparks flashed at the side of his head as he leveled his weapon, regarding Starscream with contempt.

"Starscream! You're supposed to be dead!" Said Galvatron in disgust. Was there any way he could keep this pest exterminated? He could not believe the audacity of the Seeker, his ability to return again and again when all instincts screamed that he was done for.

"I was almost dead, Galvatron. Now you're the one who is going to die!" Starscream gestured with his rifles.

"I should have taken your head." He said reproachfully regretting the interference of the Autobots. Kill the head and the body dies he thought. This time he would go for the head. Removal of that would be the only surefire way to guarantee that the Seeker would remain dead.

"It was your urge to torment me further that stopped you from killing me, had you really tried; I surely would have died then." He was grateful in some way for that torment. It bought him some meagre time. But it was very unpleasant; he had been ready to give up at that moment in time. Starscream fired a shot of plasma at Galvatron missing him completely. Starscream tried to hide his annoyance. The energy filtration caused that fraction of a second delay.

"You still don't know how to shoot." Laughed Galvatron.

"Is this better?" Starscream fired again with one weapon and the blast seared his shoulder leaving a black scorch mark. The delay again, The Seeker scowled angrily as his mind processed the problem with the delay. He felt quite worried about the results and he hoped he could hide his disappointment.

Galvatron decided he was no longer amused with Starscream's lame attempts on him. The grazed blast stung as it scorched his armour plating. He was surprised at how hot the beam was. Seeker weapons were generally not very strong and Starscream's weapon was known to be particularly useless. "NARGH! You will pay for that with your useless and pathetic life." Said Galvatron. "You will die an unimaginably, slow and painful death." He stood up and approached the red and white Seeker.

"Promises, promises! No, Galvatron, not this time. This time it's my turn to show you who is superior around here." He fired two more blasts of plasma at Galvatron. They both hit and Galvatron fell backwards to the floor. There was a whine as the Seeker's weapons charged up again.

"You will pay for that dearly," spluttered Galvatron, shaking his head, somewhat stunned by the power behind the attack. Two glowing holes smoked from his hip and shoulder.

'His armour is really tough.' His thoughts observed worriedly. "What have we got ourselves into?!"

"You and what army?" Sneered Starscream trying to keep up appearances. "Where is all your help now? You keep killing them off, one by one. I could have been your ally but you made me your mortal enemy." Starscream stepped up to the dais as Galvatron quivered in fury on the floor. The two blast holes had stopped smoking but they leaked energon. "I will crush you!"

From behind there was a crash at the doors, they swung open and Sunburst emerged. "Starscream?! I thought you were dead!" She sounded surprised, relieved and yet almost annoyed.

Galvatron laughed loudly. "Everyone here thinks you should be dead, so let's not disappoint them." he oriented his weapon on Starscream.

"Sunburst?!" Starscream was caught off guard for a moment. "Go away this is my fight!" He shrieked. His weapons wavered in their aim. He was so sure that Overcast had been lying, Skyfire, then, must be outside waiting for him to try and escape. It could not possibly be. The Seeker felt suddenly disheartened.

Galvatron noted Starscream's countenance and used the distraction to fire a couple of blasts of his cannon at the Seeker. Starscream saw the motion of the plasma discharge out of the corner of an optic. He jumped to dodge the incoming blast; one blast hit his wing blowing the tip off. The other blast clearly missed him.

Sunburst charged blindly forwards and inadvertently ran into the path of Galvatron's weapon fire. It sent her spiraling to the ground with a scream where she lay unconscious.

'Sunburst you stupid fool.' Thought Starscream as he straightened up. 'Keep out of my affairs.' He did not feel very imbalanced from his broken wing; the damage was minimal however he was angry. The damage would limit his agility in flight when he would have to flee this world. He looked at Galvatron hatefully; his fury masked his pain and dulled his anguish.

"You're next." Sneered Galvatron lunging at Starscream as he fired.

The Seeker fired several blasts from his weapons at Galvatron. The Deception leader returned fire: a few more shots. Starscream took another hit, this time on his left air intake. He yelled out in pain as he turned his face away from the damaged intake. Red fragments flew out in all directions, peppering the back of his head. The Seeker spared a moment's glance at the damage, he had lost a third of it. He knew that had he moved slightly that blast would have removed the top of his head.

The air was beginning to cloud from smoke caused by small fires that the weapons had created. He leaped away as he dodged several rapid blasts from the cannon. He got off only a few more shots in the direction of Galvatron, missing completely. Those shots that had hit seemed to have little or no consequence.

Galvatron noted the pain and fright on the Seeker's face. He laughed maniacally; his shoulders and chest shook with the force of it. "You're not going to see the light of another day, Starscream."

Fearfully the Seeker took a few steps away from his adversary. Galvatron stood surrounded by the fire; casting an evil orange glow over his body, illuminating his twisted unsmiling face. For a moment he stood there and resembled a daemon from human lore; the black smoke thickened as it swirled in around Galvatron fully engulfing him. When it had thinned out he seemed to have disappeared with it.

He leapt back shooting terrified glances around himself as he did. Now he was really worried; where had he gone? He did not see him move. He just faded into the blanket of grey. He looked around trying to quell a swell of panic. He could be anywhere in this cloud. Starscream rapidly glanced around again trying to pinpoint his nemesis. It was impossible to see.

He glanced down at his rifles with trepidation; he was certain that his weapons should have done more damage than they seemed to have caused. Starscream hesitated for a moment as he readied his rifles, taking a step into the haze. The air was now very thick with black-grey smoke; he could not see very far. The Seeker hesitated, looking around. He could hear no noise other than the crackle of the flames.

He heard a noise to his left and jumped to face that direction. Nothing could be seen. Where was he? Could he have killed him? Starscream wished he could see clearer. The inability to see what was near him was terrifying. He could feel intense heat radiating from his weapons. It was overheating from continuous use. He knew the internal filters were likely getting clogged with the smoke from the air. He worried about them exploding. He needed his weapons. He could not turn them off, not now, not until he was certain of his success.

Starscream could feel the heat of the fire as it spread around and consumed the flammable materials that lay around the outer edge of the room. He thought he heard a malevolent chuckle. It could have been the crackle of flames or the sound of metal expanding in the heat.

"Galvatron?" Starscream whispered. He could no longer tolerate the wait. He would have

to find his nemesis himself. The Seeker stepped into the thick blanket of smoke in an attempt to locate the Decepticon. He could not see very far into the cloud. He fanned the air with his hand trying to assist it in dissipating. He wanted to see what he was aiming at. He did not want to waste energy bolts by shooting at the wrong thing like the floor or the throne. Starscream started to cough as the acrid smoke wafted into his face, messing with his filtration system.

Without warning, the dark form of Galvatron leapt at him from the side, striking him in the chest with a balled fist cracking his amber cockpit canopy. Starscream shrieked in surprise as he was ambushed. He noticed that the Decepticon leader was no longer wearing his cannon.

He turned quickly and balled his left fist striking back at Galvatron. The Decepticon leader caught Starscream's fist before it could hit him. "I will...succeed!" The Seeker snarled his lip curled in cruel determination and intense concentration as he fought against the larger, stronger Decepticon. He curled his other hand into a fist and slammed it violently into Galvatron's side.

The Decepticon leader released Starscream's left fist. He drew his arm back, throwing a massive punch in at the Seeker's face. The Seeker staggered for a moment as he reeled from the pain. He held his hand to his face, stunned by the blow. He felt sure that his head had rattled from that slam. Abruptly he found himself face down on the floor. Galvatron had knocked his feet from underneath him as he stood momentarily dazed.

Starscream pushed himself up as he felt a sharp kick in his side, he screeched in pain. He knew he had to get at least to his back as quick as possible; lying on his chest would leave him very vulnerable. At least if he was on his back he could aim his own weapons or see where the next attack was coming from and perhaps prevent it. Clenching his jaw tightly, Starscream cringed against the pain as he torqued his wing unnaturally while he flipped to his back. Galvatron kicked out again sending Starscream skidding backwards. Starscream lifted his arm to quickly take aim in the general direction of Galvatron. He discharged his weapon. Galvatron dodged and leaped down on top of the scrambling Seeker crushing him to the floor.

Starscream let out a brief gasp as he fought against Galvatron, pushing with his right hand struggling to shove him off. Instead Galvatron managed to get his hand tightly wrapped around the Seeker's throat crushing it relentlessly. The Seeker's feet kicked feebly while his other hand pounded against the Decepticon's shoulders.

"Who's time is it to die now Starscream?" Spat Galvatron tightening his fingers on the Seeker's throat. Galvatron grinned as he throttled Starscream.

Starscream's mouth was partially open but he could not draw air in to speak. He jerked his head from side to side trying to shake away the hand; he was battling for his life now. His optics glittered in a mixture of hate, fury, fear and panic. He struggled against the iron-like grasp about his throat, against the murky haze and fog that was taking place of his thoughts.

He had almost resigned himself to die when a memory flashed across his mind a thought from his last encounter with Galvatron. 'You're a fighter, a warrior. It's your life; you don't

want to give it up without a fight.' He knew the other half of him was trying to tell him something using visual memories rather than spoken thoughts. Another thought drifted across his mind as Galvatron's fist hit his face; he was pinned under Skywarp, much like he was now, as the Seeker almost pounded the life out of him. He could not fight back; Skywarp had his arms well pinned. Galvatron did not have the sense to pin his arms, they were free enough to defend himself with them. He remembered what he had tried to do when he was in that fight with Skywarp; he had attempted to use his weapons. He knew what he had to do.

His mind was blanking from lack of power as Starscream ceased his futile defense with his fist and aimed his rifle up against the Decepticon's chest. His optics narrowed with hate and anticipation, the corners of his mouth twisted into a wry smile.

"What are you smiling about?" Inquired Galvatron furiously. He wanted the Seeker to show fear; it egged him on making him feel more satisfied about the act of strangling him. The fear had faded from Starscream's optics so he tightened his fingers even harder trying to starve the Seeker's brain of energon. Galvatron was so preoccupied with trying to terrify him again; he did not notice Starscream re-position his arm. However he felt it when the Seeker fired several shots point blank in rapid succession.

Galvatron's optics flashed in surprise and his mouth twisted with pain and anger. Starscream's rifle started to glow from intense heat as he felt the drain on his energy reserves. The Seeker changed the weapons function to Null and fired a few more blasts hoping that something would free his throat of Galvatron's vice like grasp.

Starscream felt the full crushing weight of Galvatron on top of him. The hand loosened from his neck and he took a sharp deep breath. He could feel the energon flow forcefully into the starved ducts within his head. His body shook all over from a mixture of fear, pain and fatigue and relief. Had he won? He wondered as his mind cleared from the haze.

Most of the small and large fires had burnt themselves out. The smoke was now beginning to dissipate, drifting up through the ventilation shafts. It was still quite thick and black but it was more or less even and he could just make out the doors. He heaved a deep sigh.

With his hands and feet he shoved Galvatron's motionless body off of him, grunting with the effort. He wondered if Unicronians died the same way natural Transformers did, by turning grey. Galvatron had not and he was worried by this. Starscream stood up battered and bleeding energon from a few places. He heard a new sound as he cocked his head. Towards the door there was the sound of running feet. Starscream scowled, he was exhausted, he no longer wished to battle.

The dark grey Seeker he had seen before as well as a Sweep burst in through separate side doors. Starscream aimed both weapons, one at the Sweep and the other at the unknown Seeker. He fired both at the same time. The Sweep fell to the ground with a massive smoking hole in his chest and so did the Seeker. His optics flickered and faded quickly to black as his body became uniformly grey. However something about the dying Seeker had nagged him. He seemed strangely familiar.

Starscream had known many Seekers in his time: he had flown with different wings and

squadrons over the eons. He had seen them come and go. There was a time when there were thousands of Seekers but now he doubted there were even a few hundred left. If there were more than that number; they were probably scattered across the galaxy in small isolated groups.

He crossed the room to the smoking bodies of the Decepticons. He looked at the Seeker and used his foot to nudge the head over so as to get a clearer view of his face. Starscream staggered for a moment. He recognised him as Windraker.

How, he thought, had Windraker arrived here? When Sunburst believed that he was dead, he had barely managed to pry out more information on their ill fated mission. He had learned that he had suffered massive brain damage when his head crumpled into his memory banks. He was supposed to have been put to a merciful death by her rescuers. How could she have been so wrong? He felt fleeting twang of guilt; he had killed Windraker.

The deaths of Seekers depressed him, his kind were slowly becoming extinct. He figured it would be only a matter of several millennia before the last Seeker would die; unless, of course, the war soon ended. There were few new Seekers being made and they were not as strong as they once were. Newer, more powerful Decepticons were designed to replace them; gestalts and, bigger still, the cities. However the larger mechs did not necessarily have the intelligence to lead. They were powerful enough to render their smaller counterparts more or less redundant. As the old adage suggested; "the bigger they are the harder they fall."

He personally believed that Seekers would always be needed as long as they existed. He did not want to feel like his kind were yesterday's models and they no longer had a place in the great scheme of things. It was only now that they were not being created as quickly as they were being destroyed.

Now what? He wondered as he walked to the still form of Sunburst. Starscream knelt down beside her and he carefully picked her up. He brushed his finger across her face as he gently shook her, "Sunburst?" He inquired attempting to get a response. She was still alive: her colours were not subdued. He examined the wound in her chest. It was large, he was certain she was suffering from it. He noticed on the floor there was a large pool of energon. He looked at his hand that held her back. It was covered in the glowing pink fluid. His face wore an expression of pain and sympathy.

He wondered how she had survived the blast looking at all the damage she had sustained. He examined the wound closely and noted that the heat of the blast had sealed some of the ripped conduits. Even at the slow rate of leakage she would soon bleed to death.

Starscream leaned his face close to her audio sensor." Sunburst can you hear me? Please answer me!"

Her optics flickered online. She moved in his arms, turning her head to look. She tried to focus. "Starscream?" She spoke weakly as her body shuddered. "You—you're alive." Her optics flickered and dimmed as she slipped back into unconsciousness.

"Yes it's me, I'm here, take it easy. I'll get you home; I'll get you fixed..." He felt something cold against the back of his head: The barrel of a gun.

"Stand-up." Said the voice of Overcast. "Turn around."

Starscream tipped his head forwards as he off lined his optics for a moment. He heaved a deep breath, exhaling with frustration. He thought he had left Overcast to rot in his cell. How did he manage to get out? He wondered. Starscream placed Sunburst back down on the ground. He slowly stood up as he lifted his hands in surrender and turned around.

"Give me a reason why I shouldn't kill you Decepticon." Overcast grinned at him cruelly. "Not that I would spare your useless life anyway."

"I thought you were ordered to." Responded Starscream weakly. He was exhausted from fighting Galvatron and did not wish to waste energy he might later need messing around with the little Autobot twerp.

Overcast grinned. "I lied. That's what I like about you Decepticon, you're naive. You'll believe anything. No, I'm supposed to bring you in, to send you to the mines. You would not like that." He looked at Starscream's face. "No, I can see that you wouldn't enjoy that. You think you are the best." Overcast laughed softly. "You're nothing, Seeker, and you deserve nothing." The Autobot slowly circled Starscream keeping the muzzle of the weapon trained on him.

"What have I, personally, done to you? I'll rephrase that. What have I done that you've felt the need to scorn me from the very start?"

"You live. That's all. That is enough to warrant me to destroy you and you won't put up a fight. You are not in a condition to."

Overcast had made an apt observation. Starscream was no longer in condition to take another hand to hand battle. However the Seeker steeled himself against what he figured was going to come, he would fight him. "You'll bite off more than you can chew if you challenge me. I'm bigger than you, stronger than you and faster than you." He said in an attempt to deter the Autobot from attacking. Sunburst whimpered softly and he shot a worried glance over at her. The trip back to Cybertron was going to be lengthy and she had lost a lot of energon.

Overcast laughed. "You're so over sure of yourself. Look around you, Seeker, all you ever achieve in life is death and destruction; This won't be any different. As much as I would love to hear you beg, I'll be quick about it."

He wondered if he could buy himself some time to allow his self repair systems an opportunity to fix internal damage. "Please let me get her back to Cybertron. She needs repair. Then I will return with you as your prisoner." Truth was he would flee Cybertron and pray the Guanans kept to the flight path meeting him en-route.

"See, you don't understand Starscream. I have no intention of returning you to Cybertron alive. There is no challenge in it, no sport." Overcast looked down at the supine female Seeker. Yes she had freed him but she too was a Decepticon and the only good

Decepticon was a dead one. She was almost dead as it was, so it would be little effort to finish her off before killing Starscream. "And she would have to die too 'cause she would only blab her mouth off otherwise." He aimed his weapon at her oozing chest. He had almost pulled the trigger when Starscream grabbed the gun out of his hand and twisted his arm behind his back. He jerked Overcast aside and shoved his face into the wall in one quick violent move. Starscream held the gun to the back Autobot's head as he used his knee to pin him.

"I'll kill her, then I'll kill you," Overcast managed to gasp out. Hatred and fury flashed in his icy cold optics.

"You so much as touch that Seeker... Overcast..." The Seeker screamed punching the Autobot in the back viciously. He knew, however, he could not promise that he would not kill him.

"You're a coward; you don't have the guts to try anything! Your threats are hollow they're meaningless!" Sneered Overcast. The Autobot Pinzgauer was almost fearless of the much larger Decepticon. "You're yellow."

"You've a death wish don't you, Overcast?" Starscream was shocked with the Autobot's audacity in harassing him while he was in a position to kill him. "You want me to try to kill you so you can get me destroyed. You've antagonised me for the last time!" Starscream pounded the Autobot a couple more times on the head before he chose to use the butt of the gun that he had seized to slam against the back of the Autobot's metal skull ferociously.

Overcast uttered a pained gasp as he went limp in the Seeker's grasp. Starscream stepped back releasing his hold and allowed Overcast to fall to the ground without resistance.

Starscream stared at the mess that was Galvatron. He was still unsure if the mech was dead or only unconscious. He hoped he was dead. He did not want a replay of the last time he assumed he had succeeded. Starscream aimed his weapon and initiated the top setting. He fired; nothing only smoke issued forth. He looked at the muzzle of his weapon in disgust then gave Galvatron a swift angry kick in the head. He leaned down and picked up the orange cannon: It was heavy and severely damaged. He looked at it closely and decided he might keep it as a trophy.

He looked over at Sunburst. He was torn; he wanted to take her to get her fixed but he was inexplicably loathed to return to Cybertron. He was suddenly torn between two worlds. If he returned to Cybertron he would be repaired then sent to work to death in the mines; he did not desire that. He wanted this; Charr and leadership of the Decepticons. It was what he always wanted. It was his driving force and it was by all rights his now.

His azure hand caressed the throne as if it was his dearest love. He wanted this more than anything. If being the leader of the exalted Decepticon forces meant he would be forever alone, so be it. However he did not wish to see another Seeker die unnecessarily. He had seen too many pass on, ignominiously, in recent decades.

Starscream could not resist temptation any longer. He stepped around to the front of the

throne and sat down. Keeping a worried optic on Galvatron, his hands rested lightly on the armrests. He sat straight and proud as he laughed shrilly in delight. "This is nice." He thought. It felt as if the throne was designed for him. He held Galvatron's weapon across his lap.

A couple more Sweeps entered. They stopped, mouths gaping. Galvatron lay motionless at the foot of the dais. Another Sweep still, if not dead, with a smoking hole in his chest. Starscream sat proudly on the throne in the centre. He was holding the orange cannon that belonged to Galvatron. One Sweep drew his weapon and moved to fire.

Starscream smiled, a chilling smile, a smile of a cold blooded killer. He wanted to keep this perspective. He aimed his rifle and fired a null ray at the attacking Sweep. The Sweep ran for cover as the blast hit him. He flew head over heels and crumpled in a heap in a corner of the room. He was pleased that his lowest setting was still functioning fine despite the power drain.

The second Sweep did nothing. He stood slack mouthed and dropped his weapon. It clattered to the floor. He put his hands up. "If it helps, I surrender," he said nervously.

"I am glad I am not feeling resistance from everyone. All those who resist me will die." Starscream sneered keeping his weapon trained on the Sweep.

He decided it would be a good idea to get himself and the Seeker back to Cybertron for repair. He doubted the Decepticons had an adequate repair facility on this ruin of a world, Cybertron would be better. All he needed were the Autobot's tools and his knowledge of Seeker physique to make the necessary repairs. He wondered if he would get a reprieve if he brought Sunburst back.

He abruptly thought of Teris. What would she think about all this? He intended to come back here. Did he really care anymore? Yes. It was then he realised that he was now torn between three worlds; Guandonnaland being the third. He had hand raised the Guanas from their primitive stone age to a level that would rival humans. He had even managed to instil hostility towards their mammalian counterparts. He felt a sort of responsibility for them. They did not need him anymore, his time with them was done, he assured himself. They had served their purpose. Their minds still fascinated him, how can a creature learn so much in such a short time?

"Your orders?" Inquired the Sweep.

The Seeker broke from his train of thought. He looked at the Sweep with a brilliant flash of his red optics. "Kill him." Starscream said nodding in the direction of Overcast. He was tired of the little Autobot. He did not want him to make more reports, he did not want him to inform Rodimus that he had returned to the Decepticons. It would be problematic especially getting repaired and finally escaping.

"No! Starscream! Don't...wait please!" Whimpered Overcast as the Sweep shot him several times with his blaster.

Starscream leaned back into the throne steeping his fingers, smiling with pleasure and satisfaction as Overcast's fingertips twitched and jerked with each pull of the Sweep's

trigger. The little mech moaned softly as the icy blue glow flickered, dimmed and finally faded from his optics as his body turned grey.

"Dead mechs tell no lies." Said Starscream with a laugh as soon as the Autobot died. He decided it was better to have the Sweep's weapon energy signature on the body of Overcast than his own, not that he had the power to shoot the little nuisance. He still had his plans and he needed to be able to play innocent.

"Is there anything else you wish me to do?" Said the shocked Sweep who shook nervously regarding Starscream. He was afraid to aggravate the usurper for fear of being shot.

Starscream pushed himself to his feet and strode over to the yellow Seeker. "Good question." He said, picking Sunburst up and holding her somewhat carelessly in his arms. "Inform the rest of the troops that I, Starscream, am now the rightful leader of the Decepticons. I will be back shortly." He reached down to grab the lifeless body of Overcast. "I have some unfinished business to attend to. Ensure the bodies of those dead are destroyed. Except for Windraker and the other white Seeker," Starscream added looking down for a second at Sunburst; she remained unconscious. "Put them in a crypt and mark their places." He did not think she heard him. "Ensure Galvatron is properly slagged." Starscream turned away from the Sweep and left the throne room.

Starscream hauled Sunburst and Overcast outside. A large grey cloud blocked the red sun causing Starscream to refocus in the dulled light.

"Skyfire?!" He called out as he let Overcast's arm drop limply to the hard cracked ground.

Skyfire had appeared from behind some ruins where he had been hiding. "Starscream, it's you! I am relieved. I had heard weapons fire and was worried about..." Skyfire stopped mid-sentence as he looked at Starscream's damaged body, at Sunburst who he carried and at Overcast who lay dead at his feet. He was lost for words. He knelt down and took Sunburst from Starscream's hands. Intense sadness replaced the relief on his face.

"We need to get Sunburst to Cybertron and Overcast was killed by a Sweep. I could not save him, it was too late." Starscream said, attempting to sound concerned for the others.

Skyfire looked over Sunburst in his hands and glanced deeply at her wounds. "Hmm," he muttered thoughtfully, "She has had a wound like this before; when I found her dying on Mars. Who shot her?" He was concerned for her survival.

"Galvatron."

"Megatron must have shot her then. We must get her off this place." He handed her back to Starscream.

"I wonder why she was near Earth in the first place." Starscream muttered rhetorically. He knew he was not likely to get the answer.

Skyfire, realising the desperate situation, transformed and awaited Starscream to bring aboard Sunburst and the lifeless remains of Overcast. The Seeker sat in the co-pilots seat looking into Skyfire's cargo area at Sunburst as the giant flyer blasted off for Cybertron. Many thoughts rattled across his frustrated mind. Things seemed so different now. He was hoping that Galvatron would no longer be a threat to his life. He was hoping that he could return to the Decepticons and take his rightful place as their leader.

"I am your prisoner now, am I not?" Inquired Starscream of Skyfire, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

The large mech sighed causing his hull to shudder slightly. "In some way, yes, you are, but it's under protest; I don't agree with this. I'll try to convince them to be lenient."

"What is my present sentence?" He asked with worry. Overcast had hinted to it but he was unsure if the Autobot was speaking the truth or not.

"Work in the mines."

"I trusted you Skyfire!" Starscream's worst fears had been confirmed; he would be going to the mines. The little bastard Overcast was telling some of the truth; he was with Skyfire to collect him. If it were not for him he would still have freedom.

"You did not trust me enough Starscream! You could have told me what you were doing. I could have helped you!"

"You would have stopped me!"

"No, I would not have. Sunburst left eight hours before I did. Only with my speed did I manage to overtake her; I was trying to stop her, not you." Skyfire's voice was full of regret. "She is laying there because she wanted to help you." Skyfire sounded hurt and angry.

"She was not helping to arrest me?" He was surprised.

"Starscream, there is something I should have told you, but I have no idea how you would react." Skyfire paused for a moment to allow himself to gather his nerve.

"No, she did not want you to go on this quest. None of us did, you are being selfish; the battle is pointless and look what it has brought you." Skyfire admonished. "Sunburst, believe it or not, cared—cares a great deal about you."

"Could have fooled me," said Starscream bitterly, "after what I've done to her? After I tried to strangle her? Does she like punishment? ARGH! It makes me sick that you even suggest it, Skyfire." He refused to believe that she would even consider stopping him. It did not agree with his personality that someone would carelessly risk their life in such a manner. Not after all his attempts to force her to keep her distance.

"You must help her!" Skyfire pleaded.

Starscream abruptly became incensed. "Why? Why should I bend for her? She was the one who ran into the blast. She did not need to interfere; I had things under complete control until she arrived!" Starscream could not contain his anger any longer. "If she did give a care why did she tell you and not me? Why all the slugging secrecy? Why did she even bother? You should know better! She should know better!" He shouted loudly. He placed his elbows on his knees and his head into his hands. He knew why all the secrecy, he had told her on a few occasions not to bother him about such issues. It irked him to find out she still toyed with the idea behind his back.

Skyfire said nothing as he let Starscream vent his frustrations.

The Seeker remained this way in silence for a few minutes until he heard a soft moan from the back. He lifted his head and shot a glance over his damaged wing. Sunburst had awakened. She slowly rolled her head awkwardly from side to side as she weakly lifted her hands. He groaned inwardly.

"She should have known that I don't have time for such nonsense. Argh!" He felt another swell of frustration. He was in an incredible amount of pain himself and there was no one here who could relieve him of it or start the necessary repairs. He was on his own and he felt resentful. If she had not barged in he would not have taken those hits. If she had not barged in she would have not taken the ugly chest wound that demanded his attention. "After all I've just been through, this is the last thing *I* fragging well need."

"Help her, Starscream, or you will have her death on your hands as you have Thundercracker's and Skywarp's."

"I have every intention in helping her. Also, I don't see why you need to lay this guilt on me." Starscream snapped sharply. He stood up, clenching his teeth against the grinding pain of his broken cockpit canopy. He felt emotionally unstable. He was not sure what he really should do. Part of him screamed to do nothing to help her. The other part was moved by Skyfire to try to save her. He sighed deeply. He felt very confused. Emotions he'd rather keep buried threatened to surface. He could not let those feelings out; he did not want them to be known, not even to Skyfire. He knew that they would only become a problem, one that would only get in his way and play havoc with his judgement.

Starscream noticed as her hand moved that there was a sizeable pool of energon under her. Her wounds must have been damaged further when he had moved her into Skyfire. He felt a deep pang of sympathy drift over himself. 'Why did it have to be this way?' He cursed silently to himself as he knelt down on one knee beside her. She stopped moving and faded into unconsciousness.

It was the first time he was able to get a real good look at the extent of the damage. It appeared to be much worse than he had initially thought. He realised he should have attempted the first aid repair while he was still on Charr rather than letting it wait this long.

"Sunburst, why did you come? Why did you endanger yourself?" He asked rhetorically as he looked out the front window watching as the darting stars shot past. He felt confused with the conflicting emotions. He realised that she would soon die from her wounds if she did not get proper help.

"Screamer, you got him didn't you?" Asked Sunburst abruptly as she returned to consciousness. She laid her orange, energon coated hand on his forearm.

Starscream glanced down at her, his face softened. "Yes, I hope so. Keep quiet and conserve your energy." He said softly. He looked to the ceiling and off-lined his optics. "Primus help me!" He whispered trying to think what to do next. He returned his gaze to her; her optics had returned to their dull unconscious state.

He took a deep breath and set himself to cauterising her bleeds and leaks with the laser he had in his index finger, much like he had back long ago on Guandonnaland. He grimaced at the enormity of the task. There were hundreds of tiny ducts that were severed and leaking from all locations. Her self repair system was also damaged so she was not getting much help from that. He leaned in and carefully severed and sealed a major conduit that fed most of those little feed ways.

It took the Autobots nine days to repair him from a similar injury. He could not quite remember how he felt during that time but he had a good idea of what she was going through and it would not be pleasant. He had no method of numbing pain receptors and he had no tools. He was good at building or re-building things but he needed parts. He had no parts to fix her with. Starscream shot a glance over at the dead Autobot. He did not think he could get compatible parts for her from him. Anyway the whole idea of using dead Autobot parts in a Decepticon was revolting to him.

'Autobot parts don't mesh very well with a Decepticon.' He thought distantly.

Skyfire flew steadily through space not speaking. He did not want to disturb Starscream's progress. He monitored the Seeker's work listening to him as he silently muttered under his breath, cursed or snarled in frustration. He knew Starscream was having a tough time with the limited tools he had on hand and no spare parts.

Skyfire also regretted telling Starscream about Sunburst having a feeling for him. He had insisted in Sunburst keeping a safe distance from him, to not pursue the issue and he brought up the very subject he wanted to avoid. He needed to get through to the Seeker that he was not entirely alone in this issue, that the only one who was really against him was dead in the back. He did not entirely believe that Starscream did not personally kill Overcast, but he could not accuse him of it; only proper tests would show if the death was indeed from a Sweep.

He felt guilty about bringing up his past with Skywarp's and Thundercracker's demise. But he had to shake some reality in to him. Starscream could repeat his past; adding more salt to his injuries or living on with the knowledge that if she died he had at least tried.

Starscream felt pain dart through him every time she woke up during his repair attempts. Her face was etched with agony and she seemed less and less aware of her surroundings.

Starscream stopped his work for a moment. He had a suspicion he was being watched; the feeling was lingering as if someone was standing behind his wing and shoulder. He darted a furtive glance over his shoulder. There was no one there yet the feeling remained.

He worked in an uneasy silence sealing leaking energon conduits but some were far too damaged to be repaired in that manner. "Her energon is too dangerously low for her to bleed like this. She will die if we don't get her back Cybertron fast." He whispered to Skyfire, his tone tinged with fear. "Did you happen to bring any extra energon along?" Inquired Starscream.

"I have enough to get us back to Cybertron. I'm very sorry, I can't spare any for her. And you know I would if I had it to spare." Answered Skyfire sadly.

Starscream remembered he had grabbed two cans from Sunburst's personal stash before he left for Charr. He had been saving it so he could get the extra energy boost he needed when he left Charr to return to Cybertron. He reached into his chest compartment and removed the can and placed it at his side.

He shook Sunburst gently. Her optics glowed slightly brighter but she did not seem to recognise him. Starscream grabbed the can and opened it. He manoeuvred himself so she was semi-reclined against him. He opened her mouth slightly and slowly poured the liquid energy into her. She did not swallow, the fluid seeped from her open lips instead. He snarled in frustration as he tipped her head back trying to force the fuel duct to open.

"Skyfire can't you fly any faster?" Asked the Seeker in anger. "Swallow slag you!" He cursed as he tipped her face slightly forwards. She coughed spitting some of the fuel out

while the rest drained into holding tanks. Starscream quickly gave her more.

"Going at top speed now. It will still be several hours yet..." Replied Skyfire apologetically.

"She does not have the luxury of several hours!" He hissed fearfully watching the rest of the fuel trickle out of her mouth. Starscream frowned as he laid her back down again. The efforts of forcing energon down into her were not working. He had spilled more of the energon on himself than he managed to get into her: it was wasteful. 'What can I do?!' He thought plaintively drinking the rest of the energon.

"You have it within you to help her." Skyfire's voice sounded suddenly very odd to him, like it was behind and over his shoulder rather than surrounding him. It, in some way, sounded more like a thought than a vocalised word but it was not one of his thoughts. He looked around past his wing. Then he wondered how Skyfire knew what his unasked question was since he had only thought it rather than verbalised it.

'I think he is telling you to do a mech to mech transfusion of energy.' Came a thought. 'It sometimes works in desperate situations.'

"Is there no other way?" He asked himself quietly. "What about my own injuries?" He complained, "surely I can't spare her my own energy. I am low enough on it as it is."

'It's the only option at the moment. Unless you care to pitch her off Skyfire like you pitched Skywarp and Thundercracker.' Said the thought with rancour. "Survival of the fittest."

"You enjoy reminding me of that don't you?"

'Just for once, do it. You won't die; I will prevent it.'

"There is no other way?" He asked again.

'None whatsoever.'

He was afraid of that; there was only one option. If he wished to try to save her he would have to at least try. Since Skyfire suggested it, he would give it a shot. It was a very long shot at that. He opened an aperture on his left wrist and brought forth a brightly glowing pink hose. He knelt beside her and opened a similar aperture on her chest and plugged the glowing hose in. He felt his energon transfuse into her, slowly bleeding away.

He wondered again why he was doing this. He was risking his own life by allowing this transfer. He initiated the safety protocols that would cease the transfusion before he could become critically depleted. If he could not help her in this manner he would rather let her go than allowing himself to die keeping her alive for a minute or two longer than him. Starscream lay down beside her and shut down most of his non-essential systems. He went quietly into a state of voluntary unconsciousness.

Skyfire flew on oblivious to Starscream's activities.

Skyfire arrived on Cybertron. He had radioed for a team of medics to be standing by. They stopped for the briefest moment looking at the grim spectacle. Overcast's grey body lay

carelessly heaped in the back of Skyfire.

A fairly damaged Starscream lay next to a very faded Sunburst in a large dimly glowing energon puddle. The tube between them was empty of energon. Starscream's programming had shortly before ceased the transfusion as it now risked his well being. His body remained in stasis. The medics rushed up and quickly scanned him. He had very faint life signs.

Sunburst's own energy signature was very weak, almost imperceptible. The Autobot First Aid ordered her out first; the next group gathered Starscream up while another group carried Overcast's lifeless body out.

Skyfire transformed and Rodimus, who had only just rolled up, ordered him to the briefing room. He wanted a full report.

* * *

"What exactly happened?" Rodimus asked.

"Starscream followed through on his plan."

"Galvatron is dead?" He asked disbelievingly.

"I don't know, Starscream thinks he is. He's quite hopeful he has succeeded. He's dead if he failed."

"He won't get a chance to be dead by Galvatron if he lives, Starscream must leave Cybertron as soon as he is able. I am sorry but Sunburst must also leave with him as soon as she is repaired. I will have the Guana's standing by to take him back to that world they came from. They are welcome to return. Starscream and Sunburst are never to return."

"But sir! This is their home world. Starscream is my friend, Sunburst is my student! You can't force them to leave."

"I have, I will, and you can join them if you wish. However you are free to return when you want. I'm sorry, Starscream is too dangerous to keep here even in the mines. I've contemplated having him de-activated but if he has indeed killed Galvatron; that would be an inappropriate method of thanking him. That is why he is to return to exile. He does not need to remain on Guandonnaland, he is just not allowed near Cybertron. Orders will be given to shoot him down if he comes within eight million kilometres of this world." Rodimus stood with his arms folded across his chest. "You are dismissed."

Skyfire nodded sadly and left the room to find the repair area that Sunburst and Starscream were sent to.

* * *

The medics only replenished Starscream's personal energon reserves and gave him a bit of a sedative to help numb the pain that he was in. They could do no more for him at the

moment. It was Sunburst who was a higher priority. He accepted this reasoning with only an annoyed grumble.

He stepped into the observation room that was outside the surgery where Sunburst was being attended to. He found Skyfire and Teris waiting for him.

He shot them a glance. "Where is she?"

"She's in there." Skyfire said nodding to the large window that had blinds drawn so no one could see in. Starscream turned for the door. "What are you doing, Starscream?"

"I know more about Seeker repair than they do." He stated with annoyance.

"They are medics. You are not!" Responded Skyfire.

"They're Autobots! They don't repair Decepticons, they kill them! I remember bits and flashes from when I was in there."

"They can help her." Skyfire had his hand on Starscream's arm.

"Get your hand off of me!" He shouted angrily. "I am the best mech for this repair job."

"Starscream leave her be, you can't do anything for her!" Skyfire yelled as he spun Starscream around. He held his arms tightly to his sides. He was furious with Starscream and his stubbornness.

"I created the slagging Combaticons, don't tell me what I can or cannot do." He yelled back. He felt insulted by the implication that he was incapable of helping. Most Decepticons could do minor repairs to one another. Some were indeed better skilled or adapted to that sort of work. Hook was one of the best, if a bit towards the extreme end of perfection. With him one was pretty much guaranteed full recovery in a few short days. Decepticon physique was slightly different from Autobot; they could do so much damage thinking they were helping. He knew that they had managed to pull him through far worse damage, but he suspected that they took so long because they had no idea what they were really doing. "I am a Seeker. I've done repairs to many Seekers in my time; give me the damn tools and I can get the job done!" He jerked himself sharply and broke free of the much larger mech's grasp.

"They don't want you in there." Skyfire said firmly.

"No one wants me anywhere!" Starscream shrieked angrily.

"You fail to understand..."

Starscream cut him off. "Don't you call me a failure!"

"You're not listening; they don't expect her to live. You know that for yourself." Skyfire reached out to place a reassuring hand on the Seeker. It was he who really wanted the reassurance.

Starscream angrily batted it aside; he did not want to be handled. He did not want to be reassured.

"I don't have to believe it! Why is it that everyone I know is taken from me in one way or another?!" He yelled in frustration feeling slighted by the universe. Yes, he knew her chances for survival were minimal. He wondered for a second if he was a toy for fate but then again he did not believe in all that superstitious rambling. He did not believe in fate, that things were predetermined, that the future was already written. It was unscientific and there was no solid proof. He felt that he had more than his fair share of misfortune and those around him often paid the price. "Why does everyone I know have to die?" His red optics were livid. "She will have a better chance if I can help! Anyway, they thought I would die. I lived. She will pull through if I can help." He pulled away from the larger mech.

Skyfire reached out and jerked the Seeker back by the wing joint. "I haven't died! What about me? You selfish bastard, what about our friendship? Do you want to lay that to waste also?" Skyfire said feeling hurt. "Stop wallowing in your self pity and think about others for once in your wretched life. Let them do their job. Anyway, you are far too irrational to make the right choices right now."

Starscream's mouth twisted in an ugly manner, his optics flashed brightly. "Go to hell, Skyfire and don't you ever handle me in such a manner again! As a matter of fact keep your fragging hands to yourself from now on." He warned threateningly. Skyfire let go of his wing, shocked at how Starscream had addressed him.

"Who do you think you are, Skyfire?" Starscream turned to face the larger mech. "Have you even tried to understand what it is like to live my life? Have you even stopped to see and think about what I have been through? I've been killed, resurrected, marooned, captured, tortured and almost died a second time. I've had endless rules and regulations on how I am supposed to live my life. I've tried to accomplish my goals here peaceably, I've been tracked, spied upon, followed and hunted. How dare you call me irrational and selfish after I've been put through all that! It's more than any one mech can or should handle. You're the one who wants to bring me in so I can meet my end in the mines and you worry about our friendship breaking?" Starscream's voice sounded sickened at the hypocrisy. "I had trusted you! I came to you because you were the only one who I thought could help me. You also should know when my survival is at stake that I'll take care of myself first. I won't be captured, I won't be imprisoned again! Never! If it means killing you to maintain my freedom, I will. I shall destroy anyone who comes between me and the sky!" Starscream's body shook with rage.

Teris had withdrawn to the furthest corner of the room. She was beyond shocked. She had never, ever seen Starscream so angry before. She thought he was irate when Madba crossed him; that was nothing compared to the uncontrolled fury she was witnessing in him now.

"That's not what I mean!" Skyfire realised he had grossly underestimated Starscream's present temperament. He was taken aback by the vehemence in the Seeker's voice and rage.

"You've betrayed me. You lied to me the whole fragging time!" Starscream was angered beyond belief. Everyone he knew seemed to be against him in one form or another. He

had no one left he felt he could turn to. He snarled angrily as he wrenched the door open. Two Autobots standing guard on the inside of the room caught him by his arms, holding him back with difficulty. "Let me go!" He demanded with a scream, struggling against the hands that held him back. "Let me help that Seeker before it's too late!" He shouted angrily.

"It is too late. She died just minutes ago." Said First Aid wiping energon off his hands onto a cloth.

"Oh no, not again!" Skyfire muttered weakly from behind Starscream. He felt a gouge of anguish slice through him like a hot knife and his knees almost gave out. He had been friends with her for almost forty years and she was an apt pupil. The loss would be greatly felt at the university.

"You're lying Autobot! You can save her, bring her back! I was brought back, I was dead, she can still be saved..." He managed to break an arm free firing his null ray at First Aid. As the Autobot fell he could see the greyed figure of Sunburst lying on the table. "It can't be." He said weakly as his mouth dropped open. His body went ice cold then numb.

"Let him go." Spoke Skyfire softly to the guards. He watched as Starscream's wings drooped slightly as he froze in his spot.

Starscream numbly felt the Autobots release his arms. He stepped forwards to the body on the table. He could not feel his feet touching the ground and his head felt heavy. All thoughts stopped as he stared dumbfounded.

"She can be fixed." He said flatly picking up a tool looking at it blankly. "She's not gone yet I can still bring her back."

"It happens, Starscream, there was nothing more they could do! Let her go, she's gone."

"Huh?" He looked over his wing at Skyfire, his face expressionless. "No, she's going to be ok. It's just a simple repair really." His voice felt like it was ten feet over him.

The Autobots stood around watching the thunderstruck Seeker.

"Starscream!" Skyfire called. "Give it up, she is dead there is no coming back."

"Isn't there?" He put the tool down slowly turning to Skyfire. "I'm nothing more than a ghost?" He watched through dulled optics as the Autobot, he had shot, stood up shaking himself slightly to regain feeling in his fingertips.

"You were a unique situation. I need your help now." Pleaded Skyfire.

"Wha? I—I could have helped her if I was given the chance to help." His voice remained flat and emotionless. He thought of something, the first thought that he had since seeing her dead. He realised that he too could have let Skywarp and Thundercracker work with him closer. He realised he could have even worked more closely with Sunburst. He could have been better friends to all three but they died because of him and his ambitions. "I could have saved them." He said dully referring to Skywarp and Thundercracker. "I—I

could have been a better friend to them." His tone had no inflection.

"You tried your best to extend her life." Skyfire was stunned at the abrupt change that had come over the Seeker. One moment he was enraged the next moment he was shocked into an eerie unnatural calmness. He had not expected him to show remorse in this manner.

'I'm cursed.' He thought as he turned his head slowly to glance over his wing at Sunburst. He reoriented his head to the front, hesitated as his vision hazed; he then took a step towards Skyfire and abruptly collapsed.

The Autobots lifted him to another table.

"He's gone into shock. Let's get him repaired." Said First Aid.

"Patch him up and get him awake." Said Rodimus as he entered the room. "Take Sunburst to the Decepticon crypt and have her interred."

He turned to Skyfire. "Have you told him yet he is to leave?"

"No."

"He still has to leave Cybertron. Just give him some time to get over this. We don't want him resenting us for exiling him while he is in this condition." Rodimus pulled Skyfire aside and spoke softly. "I give you my condolences; I know you were very close to Sunburst. Which makes me say this: we were aware of the tentative attraction between Starscream and Sunburst. It surprised me after finding out you had her take Starscream in as a house mate."

"She is—was my student. Why would you be surprised? I was helping out a friend; she was doing it for a friend. There should be nothing unusual there." Skyfire tipped his face down sadly. "Her death has had a profound effect on me. I must remain level headed to get us both through it." Skyfire turned from the Autobot leader. "Now if you will excuse me I have stuff I need to get done."

* * *

Teris had called the Guanans together into the chamber where she and Tuli had battled almost to the death a few days before. Her tail was bound in a very light weight cast and it was healing rapidly with the help of medicines that were far more powerful than they had ever seen on her home planet.

Again around her neck she wore the Decepticon insignia.

She had spent the remainder of the day, immediately after Sunburst's death and Starscream's fall, with Skyfire. He was beside himself with grief and worry. She had found out that he had viewed Starscream much like a close brother and Sunburst like that of a sister.

Skyfire was very upset about what Starscream had said. Indeed when he had spoken to

her, he explained some of the things the Seeker had said and why they were said. He also went into descriptions of the way Starscream was before the war and the scientific achievements they had earned together in the realms of exploration and exobiology.

He then explained his meeting with Sunburst. Teris discovered that Sunburst and Skyfire worked secretly together rebuilding the university before the great battle of Autobot city. They had checked out the great arboretum, cleared the overgrown plants taking care to thin out other species. He and Sunburst spent a great deal of time attempting to identify the verdant growth. It was through this that Sunburst developed her love of green growing things.

They were eventually discovered by the Decepticons and questioned. As it turned out one Autobot exobiologist and one Neutral botanist were nothing to be concerned with. They were released and resumed their work. They managed to attract the attention of other science minded mechs and the University of Alien Cultures was re-born. After the Autobots pushed the Decepticons to virtual defeat the university flourished. Many species of sentient beings from all over the galaxy flocked to learn exobiology and geology, history, palaeontology and other foreign sciences. It had become the foremost in exploration.

When it became apparent that Starscream had lapsed into a coma due to some undetermined internal damage, Teris had to rethink what she had to do; he would remain this way for an undecided amount of time. The Autobots could not detect the reason for the malfunction. The Seeker's main operating system went into standby and most of his synaptic activity settled into one area of his brain. The only thing that was running at full capacity was his self repair system; it was repairing some internal damage they reckoned. Starscream had shut down. Skyfire suggested when it was safe to move him that he would take the Seeker back to Sunburst's home for recovery.

She was sad and the others looked at her expectantly. She realised that she had been standing there in silence. Teris blinked as she took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, calming herself in a quick meditation that her father did when he was stressed. She looked across the room and spotted Tuli. The older female sat caressing her egg lovingly while Zumbo sat next to her resting his head on his hands. Tuli had learned her place. She did not have to like it but it was their way and she honoured the Guana laws.

"We leave Cybertron for home in about seven days as N'kosi instructed me." It was a hard decision. She felt as if she were deserting someone who might need her help later. He had told her to take her people and leave if he did not return, and in some way he might not return. She could wait and see if he recovered quickly, or she could leave and hope he would return at a later time.

"What do you mean Teris, is he not coming with us?" Asked Empangeni with surprise. The other Guanans also reflected this sentiment.

"He will follow on when he is ready." She replied keeping her voice level.

"Why is he not ready? We've heard the news, the quest was a success." Asked Zumbo from the back.

"He had success... but it came at a price, Sunburst died. I feel responsible as I had asked for her and Skyfire to stop his quest." Teris hung her head.

"How will he return?" Inquired Tuli.

"The Autobots said they would give him a cruiser when he is well enough to take command of one. They wish him to leave; they see him as a threat." Teris was annoyed at the Autobots. She had found out that one of their number had persecuted Starscream from the start. Fortunately he lay dead, killed by a Sweep. "Get yourselves ready. I want all stations up and running and all reports handed to me." Teris turned away from the rest and strode through the hall feeling lonely and very sad.

The Ship fired its thrusters. Teris stood in front of the massive unoccupied command chair. She held her hands on the railing while the ship lifted off Cybertron. Tears rolled down her face. There was no word on Starscream's progress other than he was still in an unconscious state. Skyfire had handed her a list of botanical specimens that the university desired. He had told her that if she felt there was something of great value that they thought should be added to the list as well.

She looked back over her shoulder at the chair. She sighed, more tears trickled out of her eyes. She dashed them away with the back of her hand. She pushed her emotions back and thought of how wonderful her planet would be when they arrived and how glad she would be to see her father after all this time.

* * *

Starscream banked over the white mountain peaks with Skywarp flying alongside. The Sun was shining brightly overhead, stroking his ice cold body with its warm rays. The Sun's meagre warmth did not help against the cold emptiness within him; that had nothing to do with the frigid minus thirty three degrees centigrade or the wind chill factor brought on by his speed in flight. It was that his world had once again come crashing down around him and he was tiring of it.

Every instinct told him to go fly alone as he always had but something deep within him told him to bring along a companion, at least this time. He simply had spotted Skywarp standing nearby and said, "Skywarp, come fly with me." The black Seeker cheerfully agreed; Starscream was surprised at his willingness. He was glad that Skywarp had agreed to this flight. He somehow had expected the Seeker to tell him to get lost or blow it out of his afterburner. Instead he followed behind as a loyal soldier would follow his officer in charge. He felt it was perhaps time to show him more than the indifferent face he had usually given his wingmate.

Starscream glanced over at the sleek black jet flying smoothly beside him. He wanted to show his wingmate that he was more than just a warrior; he wanted to show him that he really had cared. But how could anyone believe him that he cared after such violent acts or wrong doings?

The wind whistled past him as his engines roared with their power. Skywarp kept up with his speed saying nothing. He flew over the highest peak of the Himalayas. Starscream transformed and landed daintily on the summit. Skywarp transformed and stood beside

him.

"Why'd you bring me here?" Skywarp asked perplexed.

"I never showed you anything. I wanted to show you this place. It means a lot to me." Replied Starscream looking over at Skywarp. The black and purple Seeker rested his hands at his hips.

Skywarp surveyed his surroundings and turned to Starscream. "Peace is not tangible. You won't find it by coming here. You have to look within yourself to find it."

"Why within myself? There is nothing there; if there was I would not be capable of leading those I respected to their deaths. It's quiet here and horrendously cold; it chills my energon so I can return free of emotion."

He knew he would never be able to change completely who he had become over the millions of years and it would take an equal amount of time or more to reverse what history had created. Mountains like Everest would continue to rise as the elements slowly wore them down. Perhaps there was a chance to change his ways slowly. Perhaps the elements would wear him down; grind the rough edges off of him softening him to accept what had happened.

Maybe, like the rocks when they are eroded by the elements, the winds of time and change would expose some of his old wounds, like fossil bones buried for eons. Perhaps then he could learn from these old wounds like palaeontologists learned about the way a creature lived in the past, why they rose to dominance and how they eventually fell to extinction. Perhaps he could learn to prevent his own extinction.

He did not want to wait that long for fear it would be too late. Mountains, civilisations, races and empires all would rise and eventually all would fall, nothing is constant. The only thing in life that was assured was change.

Starscream sat on the frigid rocky peak looking down at the mountains around him. The warm sun was in his face and the sky was perfectly free of clouds. Skywarp settled down beside him. The wind kicked up some snow and it blew past them in a momentary white blur.

"I never told you where I went on my jaunts when I was booted off the base by Megatron, where I would spend hours sitting or standing, this place. Here I can keep my feet firmly on the ground yet I can still feel like I am king of everything. Go ahead, Skywarp, mock me, say I am selfish." Starscream hesitated expecting the usual snide interjection that Skywarp would insert but to his surprise there was no such interruption. He suddenly laughed shrilly; it carried across the rugged landscape. "Would you believe that humans sometimes come up here so they can touch their god? You say I can't find peace here, I believe you are wrong in some manner, not all. I find the quiet and solitude from everything peaceful, even my thoughts will still and sometimes stop all together."

He took a deep breath as he looked over at Skywarp who sat with a rare pensive expression on his face. It seemed as if he was listening to him or else he was tuning him

out as he often did during training or other military functions.

"Go on." Said Skywarp pulling on some things the humans had left on the peak after their visits.

"It was hard at first to be alone up here. Human jets would find me and strafe me as I sat. They would attack until I was driven away, I resisted the urge to fight back and eventually they realised I was not doing any actual harm so they left me be."

"You're beating around the bush." Observed Skywarp with a grin.

"Indeed I am," admitted Starscream, "I know this is a dream, because I remember my past up until now. I know for a fact you are dead and I killed you along with Thundercracker. Now I am also responsible for the death of that yellow Seeker, Sunburst. There is a lot of guilt now on my shoulders I can't outwardly express it; pain is a weakness. I know you are nothing more than a figment of my imagination."

"As you once were a figment of imagination for others." He smiled teasingly.

He wondered what this was all about. He had often had dreams in which he re-lived, often times, horrible life experiences or occasionally dreams that were complete fiction, having nothing to do with anything he had experienced. But this Skywarp seemed quite real enough. Dreams were often like that. Starscream sighed sadly. Again he realised how much he missed his wingmates. "There is little point in talking to you if you are not real. You are dead and have been for over twenty years, but something still compels me to try to apologise to you, even knowing that you are just a creature of my imagination." He shrugged his shoulders glancing up at Skywarp while sadly shaking his head. He rested his arms across his knees and his hands hung limply at the wrists. "I am sure if we had more time we could have worked things out, I wanted to be your friend but I was too afraid—uncomfortable to let you in close to me, same with Thundercracker and ditto for Sunburst." Starscream looked up, the warmth in his energon had almost chilled. "I need to get back down before I completely freeze up here."

Skywarp continued to look at the mountainous countryside as he spoke. "You and I were a lot alike."

"Were a lot alike." Starscream repeated agreeing sadly disliking the usage of past tense.

Skywarp continued, "You came here to freeze your emotions, to turn them cold; I used humour. I was just as cold and angry as you. That's why I played all those jokes. It was my way of venting my frustrations. I never let anyone in. I kept everyone at arm's length, even Thundercracker. I was drawn to you because I felt something in you that reminded me of myself. We shared pain and I wish I had talked to you about it. Things might have been different. But there's no use dwelling in the past." Skywarp turned to Starscream and placed his hand on the red Seeker's forearm; the touch was reassuring and gentle as Skywarp stood up to leave.

"Skywarp! I don't want you to leave I want to stay with you." Starscream said suddenly knowing that Skywarp was going to leave him; perhaps, this time, forever.

Skywarp held an open hand out to assist Starscream to his feet. "If you mean you need to stay in this dream forever; then I'm disappointed in you. That's selfish." Skywarp turned back to him and said in a warning tone. "You're not the only one affected here. Keep up with that attitude and you'll drive away the only living friend you have left. Your pet lizards also need you." Skywarp rested his hand on Starscream's shoulder. "You'll never accomplish anything in life wallowing in self pity, Screamer, you know that." Skywarp smiled gently removing his hand from the Seeker's shoulder. "I forgive you and I'm sure Thundercracker does too. As for Sunburst you know that answer. I gotta go now." Skywarp balled his right fist and brought it to his cockpit in a salute and abruptly disappeared in a brilliant purple flash.

"Skywarp!" He cried out over the rocky expanse, "don't go!"

* * *

He awakened realising he had shouted "don't go" loud and harshly. He felt embarrassed as he looked around. He recognised the surroundings and knew he was in his own recharge chamber. His datapads lined the shelf; he noticed a thin layer of dust. He thought he had just wiped the shelf off the other day. He leaned his head back and looked distractedly up at the ceiling. There was a sound of the door creaking open.

"Sunburst?" He inquired with a croak. He was surprised at the sound of his voice. It was unusually grating and he had been told by others in the past that he had a nasty voice. He felt thick headed and numb. He pushed his hand with difficulty to his head. "How did I get here?" He wondered out loud.

"It's me, Skyfire, I'm here. I won't leave you." The large mech said as he ducked to enter the chamber. He was followed by another smaller mech who looked familiar.

Starscream sighed as he recognised the other mech, Upland, the Autobot interrogator. Starscream tried to move away from the approaching Unimog. His body and joints were feeling stiff as if he had not moved in a long time.

"You've finally awakened; Upland wants to ask you a few questions." Skyfire informed gently.

"Before you say anything I need you to answer these questions. They will be timed." Upland said holding a hand held timer.

"What? Why? Huh?!" He focused on the Autobot.

"I'll ask the questions; what's your name?"

"What?!" Starscream was perplexed as to what they were doing.

"Just answer quickly; you can ask questions after."

"Starscream." He coughed clearing his voice.

"Allegiance?"

"Decepticon."

"Rank?"

"Commander."

Upland felt surprised at this but he did not let it show. "Last question, your Alternative form."

"Earth Style F-15 Eagle, Hunter-Seeker." Immediately replied Starscream with a hint of curiosity.

"He's perfectly fine Skyfire. Answered quickly and concisely, his brain functions seem ok. Now you better tell him." Upland left the room and closed the door behind him.

"Tell me what? And what was that about?" Inquired Starscream, slowly sitting up and moving his stiffened limbs.

"How long do you think you've been asleep?"

Starscream glanced around himself, his wing was fixed and his air intake was patched up. He wriggled his fingers, they too were stiff. "I would say a day or two tops however that I think is not right. I feel a bit stiff so perhaps a week? Why?" He did not notice that his insignia had been reapplied.

Skyfire sat down beside the Decepticon. "You malfunctioned, shortly after, uh, attacking Charr; we believed that your stress might have caused some neuro pathways and synaptic relays that were damaged during the battle to short out. We could not isolate the problem but it appeared that your self repair systems were working full time to sort it out. After much consideration it was decided to allow nature to take its course and I knew it would only be a matter of time before you decided to re-awaken. Starscream, I'm sorry but it's been several months. Those questions were to determine if you were lucid or not."

Starscream sat open mouthed in surprise. "It could not have been out that long. My repair systems should have fixed it up long before then..." He was extremely surprised and upset.

"There is more, as soon as you are fully recovered you are to leave Cybertron and return to Guandonnaland. Where you go from there is up to you but you cannot return here, else they will shoot you down before you even arrive."

"I'll go back to Charr to take my place as lea..."

Skyfire hung his head. "You've been out of the loop for quite a while Starscream. You left the Decepticons open to contest and not just on Charr. Internal uprisings have occurred. Dirge and Astrotrain are current local leaders. However Decepticons crawled out of the woodwork from all over the place to vie for a position as supreme leader. We are bracing ourselves for an attack from whatever Decepticon force takes full control, if the internal fighting ever ends. I strongly urge you—please, Starscream, reconsider, don't return to Charr. The situation there is very volatile and it is still uncertain whether or not you

succeeded in your personal vendetta." Skyfire warned. "I don't want to see you get kill..."

"No... It's not possible! Galvatron is not dead? But I shot him full of holes!" Starscream's tone was filled with disbelief, disappointment and worry.

"It's uncertain, we've heard nothing of him and Astrotrain and Dirge are current leaders. That implies that he's out of the picture. But if you go back and he is still alive..." Skyfire left his sentence hang. "But I doubt he survived." He tried to reassure the Seeker. "Also, the Guana people left shortly after it became apparent you had suffered internal injuries. Teris led them away; she's been back with a load of plants for U.A.C. She has sent a few subspace messages inquiring about your progress."

"Ugh, leave me for a while, Skyfire." Said Starscream turning his back on the flyer; he wanted to think. Skyfire shrugged his shoulders and turned away leaving Starscream to his thoughts.

Starscream sat on the edge of his recharge chamber staring sullenly at the movement of light underneath the door as Skyfire walked away down the hall. He could hear the light voices of the Interrogator and Skyfire as they chatted.

He could not believe that so much time had passed. He desired the leadership of the Decepticons. He thought he could go and fight for it again. He had three major attempts at taking leadership in the last two decades. The first would be his most infamous attempt; he had sacrificed so much to achieve that and had died. He had conspired for years with Astrotrain. He was even found out by Skywarp and Thundercracker about eight years before he took control. He had made them swear to secrecy; they agreed because they did not believe he would be capable of succeeding. Had they known he would abandon them in space; they would have turned him in to be slagged.

His second attempt was a complete failure from the outset. He had been captured only minutes after arriving. He had been so cocky on his eventual success that he did not check for watch points. He did not understand when he was spotted, only that when he had arrived he was welcomed by a stun blast from Cyclonus. Luckily for him he had Teris along and she freed him from his prison. Then he fled to Cybertron only to be imprisoned by the Autobots who were only slightly less hostile than the Decepticons. He was almost killed by Galvatron as a direct result of that failed mission.

Starscream's third attempt he believed was so well planned and thought out. He tried to not keep his hopes up too high for success as he knew failure would leave him dead, but he did try to maintain optimism. However, that slowly turned to pessimism as the day drew near. Yet despite all odds he had succeeded to some degree. He was angry at the interference. How had Skyfire, Sunburst and that miserable Overcast known where he was? He could only guess that Overcast had been the one responsible for reporting his absence. He sighed heavily.

It came in threes. Three seemed to be the way things occurred: Seekers usually flew in a triad, three worlds he was bound to, three people he knew as friends, were killed and three failed attempts at taking control. He was not prone to being superstitious but this number seemed to occur so much in nature.

He wondered if for a moment he was cursed. Many primitive cultures set up scary curses to keep people out of things that were none of their business. Sometimes there was truth behind the curses. He had said once 'where there's a curse on the door there's treasure on the other side.' Ignoring the warning on the ancient Autobot planet they had found the weapon, only to discover later that they had become infected with a form of rust. If his life was to be cursed then where was his treasure? What was the fat reward that he was going to get for suffering like this through all time?

Nothing would ever be the same again he knew. He felt frustration inside. The universe, it seemed, wanted to single him out, thwarting his plans and aspirations at every turn, undermining his desires and killing his dreams. It seemed that there was very little left for him in this harsh universe, only pain.

Starscream moved on his recharge bed and lay down on his chest. He crossed his arms and laid his head on them. The Seeker sighed heavily, glancing across his azure arms to the wall on the other side. He pondered the meaning of that dream. He wished he could have remained in it flying free across the mountains with his lost wingmate. He wondered about what Skywarp had said "Keep up with that attitude and you will drive away the only living friend you have left." It was not self-pity it was disappointment. He did not want to be alone to face this unforgiving universe.

Starscream turned his head to gaze at the door. He might have lost his comrades in arms and the female Seeker. But he still had Skyfire, he hoped and he still had his own life. Perhaps that was the treasure behind the cursed door. He had Skyfire and he had his second chance at life; he was being given a chance to start over where they had left off. He knew then what his choice would be. He would return to Guandonnaland and return to his ancient trade of science.

'It took a long time for you to figure it out.' Came a soothing thought. 'Set aside your fear and anger, become who you know you are. As Skywarp said, "You have to look within yourself to find it." and I am here within you. Give up warfare for now Starscream, Sunburst did. Take up true science once more. You have much to achieve and your honour to regain. It is survival of the fittest, Decepticon and you survived all that. Life is your reward and I kept telling you to not give it up without a fight!' The thought teased.

"I suppose if I were to look at it from that point of view, you could say I've beaten the odds. Science does not give me power..."

'Your quest for power is your undoing; it was not what you were originally meant to do. I have been trying to tell you this from the start; your work is not yet finished in the field of science. Power can come later if that is what is in store for you. Will you go into exile?'

Starscream sighed at his internal thoughts. "Yes."

'If that is your choice I will join with you again.'

The corner of Starscream's lip curled into a very slight smile. "It is." He said softly.

'Then we are one.' The rift in the Seeker's mind closed and he felt complete.

He pushed himself unsteadily to his feet and walked jerkily to the door opening it with stiff fingers. His motor relays were still out of sync. Upland and Skyfire stood up as Starscream stumbled through. Skyfire hesitantly reached out to stabilise the Seeker, he still remembered Starscream's earlier threat. Instead of the angry snarl he expected, the Decepticon reached out and took hold of the proffered forearm. The Seeker balanced himself and let go of Skyfire.

Upland stood back from the pair, watching, saying nothing.

"Skyfire," Starscream's voice had normalised, "if it's not too late, will you come with me to Guandonnaland? I accept exile. There is still so much to be learned about those people. "

Skyfire's face lit into a smile. "I thought you'd never ask!"

Starscream looked up haughtily at Skyfire and then over at Upland with slight disdain. "Nor did I."

Guandonnaland fifty years later: Earth Date 2076

"Fascinating," muttered Skyfire excitedly, "Starscream come here quickly! This is extraordinary!"

"What's on the monitor?" He inquired with a whisper-like tone. He stood up and strode over to the giant flier. Skyfire had three DNA strands slowly rotating showing off several highlighted sections."

"I am comparing the old research files on Guandonnaland. There were no creatures who look remotely like the present Guanans, however there were the Pelycosaur." Skyfire pointed to another screen that held an image of a large reptilian creature with a huge fin on its back beside another similar amphibious creature that had noticeable gills. "They both are similar they share almost identical DNA chains."

Starscream was curious. He leaned forward over Skyfire's shoulder. "It's obvious that the two creatures are related. By appearance alone you can see distinct family traits; and don't tell me that is unscientific reasoning."

"It is unscientific, Starscream. That's like saying the Megalodon is the ancestor of the Great White Shark on Earth because of the teeth." Replied Skyfire.

"Well aren't they? The similarities between the teeth are striking." A shark's body did not fossilise very well, being that they were made of cartilage, so most knowledge of sharks of the past were based on similarities of teeth. A Megalodon's tooth was very big and resembled that of a Great White Shark in many respects.

Skyfire sighed deeply. "They could easily be related but it's difficult to prove without a fossilised skeleton. It could be a dead end in evolution for all we know." Skyfire glanced over at Starscream who scowled back at him.

"Those things were huge, Starscream. They're estimated to be twelve to fifteen metres long and some Earth scientists think they might have been as much as thirty-one metres in length. They would have to eat whales to survive."

"I know their reputation and size. It has not been proven that they are not related to the Great White." Replied Starscream challengingly.

"It's pure speculation that they look even remotely like a Great White Shark. DNA test results would prove if they are related or not. Human scientist's tend to sketch whole animals from the existence of a single molar, part of a jaw or other bone fragments. They could test for DNA similarities from those Megalodon teeth but ultra violet radiation from the sun over time would have degraded those fragile chains."

"Well they still existed when you crashed on Earth. Perhaps we can dig one out of the ice like we dug you out and then maybe we can wake it up and repopulate the species. It would send those pathetic humans into chaos." Starscream laughed thinking of the horror

on the human's faces as they got swallowed up in the giant shark's mouth. He remembered, with a grin, how the sharks remained in close proximity to his lab's sealock door in the undersea Decepticon base. They came from all directions when he disposed of dead or unwanted specimens. He would stand by the huge window and watch in fascination as the sharks tore their prey asunder. The water would haze with blood and the sharks would become frenzied.

Skyfire frowned at Starscream, displeased at being reminded of his nine million year stasis and disgusted at his continued aggression towards the humans. He wondered if his aversion had to do with being reformatted to their aircraft shape. It was not a bad design; humans had a way with aerodynamic forms and his F-15 alter-mode was beautiful to watch in flight. Skyfire was often envious at Starscream's agility in the air. He could perform intricate and complex manoeuvres, darting, twisting, rolling and diving. The Seeker had his flying abilities down to an art form. "I'd be willing to bet it would bite you in two if you revived it." He said in response to Starscream's unkind reminder. "But you are getting me off topic." Said Skyfire with slight irritation. Starscream seemed to enjoy arguing with him or leading him astray in such matters.

Starscream frowned trying not to imagine a massive shark attacking him. Its huge two metre wide mouth could easily tear him apart. He shuddered just thinking about it. If such animals still existed; he would have not been seen in the undersea headquarters on Earth or outside of it at least. However re-populating Earth with them still held amusement to him.

"Anyway, back on subject. I will label the three species into groups A, B and C. Group A: the prehistoric Pelycosaur appeared to have split somewhere along the line with one family evolving into Group B: the modern Pelycosaur, with several subgroups and the other line that evolved into Group C: the modern day Guana. Group A is extinct."

"The Dimetrodon species." Starscream laughed again. "I remember when I saw them in the swamp about sixty years ago and I was thinking how they eventually evolved into humans back on Earth. Here they evolved into the Guanans. So what about them?" Injected Starscream.

Skyfire nodded his head, "Group B: lacks those genes that both group's A and C share. These genes relate to how the creature remembers things. Starscream, what you are looking at is a form of genetic memory. That is how Guana's learn like they do. They can somehow recall information from previous generations. It's an amazing way to keep one's cultural histories." Admired Skyfire, his voice was full of excitement at this discovery. "It's all theory at the moment. But with further research we could prove it."

Starscream stopped laughing for a moment. He thought, puzzled. He remembered something the shaman had once told him long ago. 'Long before our ancestors discovered the use of fire and the stone tool was an unobtainable object...' He felt a pang of grief wash over him; Santor, his friend, had died two years earlier from old age. He knew it would occur some time soon but even knowing that never made it easy. "That explains a lot."

"There is more, When I tested samples from various families, I discovered that some lines had more of those genes than others: the shamans, Santor, Teris, her Daughter Nara and

son Monkoto all have extra memory genes. There are a few Guanas born with out those genes and they don't survive long."

"That's how they remembered our first arrival. Some of their memory is passed on in the genes of the next generation. How very interesting." This was originally noticed when Tuli's first offspring had hatched within months of its birth. She had learned most easily the language of Starscream. Other spawnlings showed similar pre-knowledge in their parent's fields. Most of the Guana offspring that had been born to his crew displayed advanced abilities.

More proof to their intelligence: the Guanas had followed Skyfire's suggestion of constructing their buildings below the ground leaving their planet to look natural and prehistoric. They had huge lights that were powered by the flow of water during their winter rainstorms. Excess energy was stored in huge underground energon vaults that would supply the city for the rest of the year.

Their cities were not barren or sterile like some of the cities on Cybertron were; instead they had huge gardens, climate control that maintained their underground world as bright, warm and as humid as the above ground. They were not bound to remaining under the surface and there were still smaller cities above the ground. Starscream, however was never keen on going too deep in the cities. He preferred to keep to the surface, the sky or in his base just under the standing stones.

Their living arrangements had an advantage that placed Starscream at ease. He was never truly certain he had succeeded in killing Galvatron and he remained slightly cautious; living in fear of possible discovery. But to the casual observer, Guandonnaland looked like an insignificant prehistoric world with only a few small towns and cities built by an incidental primitive intelligence.

Together they worked on the puzzle of Guana and Pelycosaur link. Once their research was finished Skyfire decided he would pay a long overdue visit to Cybertron and present the research to the University.

* * *

It had been over three weeks since Skyfire had returned to Cybertron with their findings. Starscream was disappointed that he was unable to go along. The Autobots were adamant about him remaining off their planet until the tentative Decepticon-Autobot peace treaty was finalised. He grudgingly agreed to this as he had no wish to be shot out of the sky for no reason.

Teris walked into the chamber, her face was grey and aged but she still held an impish glint in her amber eyes. Her long purple robe hung over her shoulder and she walked with grace and nobility. She tipped her head respectfully at Starscream. The Guanas still held a great respect for Starscream even though Skyfire had made it plain to them that the Seeker was not a god and therefore should not be viewed in such a manner. Starscream was angry with Skyfire for this but he did not let it show.

"N'kosi, there is a message from Skyfire on Cybertron." She said softly in the language of her kind. Teris chose either not to learn his language or not to speak it; whatever her

reason was, he did not question it. She was now seventy-three Earth years in age and she still had a powerful spark. She did much to bring the Guana people together after she had returned. A sizeable rift had formed in her people that Santor and the chief Natanja had struggled to reconcile. Teris and her crew along with the rebellious Tuli and her lot, worked together to bring their people in line.

"Thank you Teris." He replied in her language as he watched the elderly reptilian woman sit down cross legged on the floor and chant. Guana's still believed in the mystical even though they were now more technically advanced than the humans. He was intrigued by this but he did not hold too tightly to their beliefs. Science was provable the Metaphysics were not. However he figured now that the meditation was a way for them to access the ancient memories of their ancestors.

Teris often remained in his company or not far away and almost always she remained above the surface. Starscream still held an intense fascination for her. He looked no different to her than he did when he first arrived. Transformers lived for an incredible amount of time. Her life span, although it seemed long to her, would be a virtual eye blink to him. She wondered for a moment if he remembered all the faces of the people he had seen or knew. Fifty years was long, over nine million was mind boggling.

She had seen a restless glint in his optics more and more in the past few years. She could tell he yearned to leave. What he would do and where he would go was a mystery but she figured one day he would leave Guandonnaland. She continued her chant, but he would return one day like he had returned before. Her memories, she knew, would be a guide to future generations and they would know him as she did.

Starscream stood up quickly and moved to the computer desk. He clicked on the flashing icon in the bottom of his screen. He had been waiting for some word from Skyfire. The screen flickered and the message appeared along with a sizeable file attachment.

"The presentation of our discovery went down very well, Starscream. You should be proud. Also the last attempt at peace talks have crumbled and sadly you are still denied return to Cybertron. Oh well, one day perhaps. Anyway that is not why I am sending you this message. I found the attached file in my computer back in the lab, which reminds me, do you want that old tool box? Back on topic, the file was titled important.txt. It seemed to be a letter or something addressed to you. I'm sorry I did read it but it's kind of strange and kind of creepy. Oh, I will be leaving Cybertron in a week or so. Something interesting is happening in the Charr system I will fill you in when I return. - Skyfire."

Starscream opened up the attachment leaned back in his chair. He glanced over at Teris again and she sat cross legged in a meditation. He focused on the screen and read the file.

* * *

Starscream, this is a story I think you might want to know. Perhaps it will answer a few of your questions that I know you've always wondered about. So I shall start.

Eons ago Sunburst, my leader, my friend and I flew on missions deep into Autobot held territories. We did many types of missions together, everything from raids, to

assassinations of top Autobot figures and occasionally to take out upstart Decepticon renegades. Sometimes we had to do rescue missions of fallen comrades. It was in a raid mission that things went terribly wrong for me.

We were flying to bomb an Autobot bunker that was set in a fairly cold world that had a dying star. No not Charr, it was closer to the older outer arm of the Milky Way Galaxy. We had flown in low over the site and we were about to drop our bombs when we were attacked. Sunburst and I were both wounded. I lost control of my guidance systems. I could not guide myself down, instead I crashed into a building. I am not sure of what happened to the rest of my wingmates but I assumed they had all died.

When I crashed, my nose cone crumpled, and it crushed my brain. I was captured shortly after the crash by Neutral robots. The damage was deemed irreversible and I lay in a coma. They tried to mend my smashed metallic skull, but to no avail.

Now they say that when one is in a coma that person is aware of things around them. I was no different in this respect. Some of the medics were discussing in my presence that I was beyond saving and that it would be better to extinguish my spark rather than allow me to live in the pain I was in. This was frightening enough but it was not the worst I had to endure.

A humane death was not what I was going to enjoy. I was kept and studied. They used my body for various nefarious experiments. Dissecting me, poking at my damaged brain trying to figure out how a Decepticon thinks or what makes him tick and they call Decepticons evil. Perhaps it was that, coupled with the damage I suffered in the crash, that made me who I became.

I had become a target for a rescue mission. The Decepticons had found out many years later that I was still "functional" and they decided it was of great importance to them that I should be retrieved.

The Decepticons had better medicine and they attempted to re-construct my damaged brain. Otherwise, my body was fine. However, their reconstruction was far from perfect. I had acquired a very short termed memory as well as amnesia. The amnesia was ok to live with, I guess. The Decepticons knew who I was, even if I could not remember. However they did not tell me everything I needed to know about my past. I guess it was their way of keeping me as a dumb cold blooded killer. It was not being able to remember the simplest things that really bothered me.

Yes, I had forgotten who I really was, what I was doing as a Decepticon, what my original function as a soldier was. I followed the Decepticon orders blindly, although I needed a constant companion to remind me of my missions. I was strangely invaluable to the Decepticon cause. Perhaps it was because I was expendable or because if I was captured I could not possibly leak information to my capturers, as I would have immediately forgotten it. I was a very skilled marksman and from a distance my aim was still deadly accurate. My ability to forget was as much an asset as it was my bane. As it proved on my last assassination mission: I knew I was a top sniper.

I was ordered by Galvatron to take out the renegade and traitor Blitzwing. Not an unusual task for me. I was often ordered to hunt down rogue Decepticons and kill them. This time

it was odd for me as I did not have my companion, Whitespark.

Blitzwing, as anyone should know, was a Triplechanger, a mech with two alter-modes. There are Decepticons who are quite jealous of this ability. Most of the land bound Decepticons envy the common ability of a Triplechanger to have an aerial as well as a vehicular alter-mode. When the going gets tough in one mode they can swap to the alternative form. Blitzwing's reason for his fall from grace with Galvatron was a long winded tale and I don't feel the need to go into it here.

However I do feel the need to explain why I was sent after him so many years after he was let go from the ranks of the Decepticons.

Perhaps it was his activities that was upsetting Galvatron. He had been working as a mercenary for a couple of renegade Decepticon factions. He was also known to sell information to the Autobots. Whoever needed his services would pay the hefty sum with high grade energon. Galvatron had believed that he was attempting to undermine his leadership. I believe he was partly responsible for the death of my kinsman, Thrust.

I had my orders and I had infiltrated his base of operations. Sneaking though the corridors I managed to track him down. I had caught him off his guard. I held my weapon only a half metre from his head.

"Do you have any last words, before I execute you for treason?" I had asked. I often allowed for a last request or a few final words. I would never attend to them as I would have simply forgotten it.

His mouth opened and closed as he formulated something to say to me.

"Starscream survives." He said quickly.

I was confused as to why he would tell me this. Although the name did ring a bell, I could not place a face to it. "Starscream? Who?" I asked, hoping to get more detail as to who he was and why he was important at this time.

Blitzwing looked thoughtful. "You know Starscream, Decepticon leader for a whole two minutes before Galvatron killed him at his coronation oh.. about twenty years ago..."

I was most confused by this. How could he have survived if he was killed once before? However a thought tickled my addled mind. A red and white Seeker at the war academy, very fast and very intelligent. He had very high aspirations. Another figure came into mind. A pale sun yellow Seeker, female. She was talking to this red and white Seeker.... AH "Sunburst" I said out loud as I remembered her name. I knew I had to remember to write this memory down later.

"No, you idiot, Starscream!" The Triplechanger sounded exasperated. I stopped and thought for a moment, as I did I lowered my rifle. I could no longer remember why I had been holding it to his head. He seemed like a nice enough guy.

"What about him?" I had asked.

Blitzwing smacked his head with the palm of his hand. "You have a couple of bolts loose don't you?"

"I don't know." I had wondered if I had been in a fight or something. I was quite puzzled as to why I was there in the first place. Must have not been important. "I can't remember, are you going to fix them for me?"

"You know..." Sighed Blitzwing, "never mind, forget I said anything... get on with it."

For me this was not a problem, I already had. "Ok then, nice chatting to you.. bye!" I said cheerfully. I left the Triplechanger a little more than puzzled. I guess he was quite happy to have been spared his death at the hands of a brutally forgetful Decepticon.

My memory would be my ultimate downfall. It was difficult for others to understand the problem I had. For them it was easy to access memory files but for me it was a major task. My memories would surface at the strangest times and I would try to write them down in hopes to one day puzzle them back together. I had hoped that in this manner I would remember who I was.

I was not seen as a feeling, sentient being. They would see me more a tool to be used and ignored when I didn't have a purpose. It would have hurt more if I could remember life any other way. Those memories I had before the accident were very hazy. Memories after the accident were equally hazy.

As I walked away my memory of Blitzwing started to fade into oblivion, however I had managed to maintain my thought on Sunburst and the associated name, Starscream. I was still unsure what was significant about him. I decided if I could remember I would tell Galvatron about him. I had hoped that he would enlighten me on the significance of his survival. I wanted to know why Blitzwing was telling me this. In retrospect, I think he was attempting to make a deal: Information on Starscream for a reprieve from Galvatron.

I transformed and flew back to Charr. With my memory it was a surprise to most, that I could even find the planet after leaving it. It was a simple matter really. The Constructicon Hook had set up a homing beacon within me so I could follow it home.

On my way back I met up with Whitespark, My companion. He had been off visiting a pleasure asteroid, Monicus. Details of what goes on in such a place I should not go into, however I will say it's usually full of low lives, mercenaries, hoodlums, gamblers and other dangerous characters.

Whitespark was supposed to have accompanied me on my mission. It was high enough security that written orders were not given. Decepticons learned that if I have a form of reminder such as Whitespark or a datapad outlining my mission in full detail I can get my job done reasonably well. I only don't remember why he had left me or when. I guess it had to do with gambling debts he had wracked up with the other Decepticons and Blitzwing's base of operations was not too far from Monicus.

He was chattering to me about all the wonderful robot ladies he had met, that he had made a huge win and had it stashed away somewhere. He was pleased that he could pay off his gambling debts with the other Decepticons and I was happy for him. That was

when we entered the Decepticon throne room. Galvatron sat where he usually sat: on the throne.

"And your mission?" Asked Galvatron as we neared him. His optics looked intensely at me.

"Mission?" I asked, I had thought for a moment that I had been with Whitespark, at Monicus. Then I remembered I had been alone somewhere else. It was very depressing, Whitespark was having the time of his life while I was doing what? I was very confused so I shot a glance at Whitespark. He normally would laugh, slap me on my shoulder and remind me of what had slipped my mind. He quivered noticeably, his optics glittered with terror. I was disturbed by this. He was just explaining to me how much of fun a time he had. It was then I remembered; he had been warned once before about making sure he was with me when I went to carry out a mission. Oh no! I had forgotten to do something, again!

Galvatron had shot a murderous glare at Whitespark.

"I thought I made myself clear about Windraker; you were supposed to go with him, to make sure that traitor Blitzwing, was dead..."

Whitespark glanced at me in the "I am so dead" manner, I only shrugged at him, not quite understanding his fear.

"I'm sorry sir..." Said the white Seeker nervously.

"I am sorry does not cut it Whitespark! You have been warned before and yet you still abandon him."

"But Sir! I..." Whitespark did not get to finish his sentence.

Galvatron had lifted his plasma cannon and aimed it at Whitespark. "Idiot!" He screamed as he fired a lethal blast at the white Decepticon.

Whitespark let out an anguished shriek as his body exploded. The explosive display of the white Seeker was incredible. Energon sprayed out in all directions coating me and the floor. I, in reflex hit the ground as bits of my companions body showered over me.

I felt very sickened at the sight and the feeling of Whitespark's spilled energon running down the back of my head into my face. I was supposed to be hardened against this sort of revulsion, but it was always different if it was someone you knew and saw as a close friend. I looked up at Galvatron in fear, trying to calm the hammering of my fuel pump. I was dumbfounded and in shock. I had hoped that I would not be next.

Galvatron looked at me with pure fury. "Let this be a lesson to you, should you fail in your task again."

There was nothing I could even think to say in response to the vicious attack against Whitespark and I knew that I had better hold my vocalisers in check.

I stood up and backed towards the door. I knew now was not a good time to turn my back to the enraged Decepticon leader. He was much too unpredictable at the best of times; when he was angry there was no telling what he could do and I had no wish to become dead like Whitespark. I reached my hand out behind me and grabbed for the handles on the door, I pulled it open then quickly turned, stepped out and closed it fully before I walked away.

I walked the hall feeling very depressed. I had let my only friend down. I tried to remember what I had supposed to have done when I passed a window opening to the outside. I usually ignored the goings on of the outside world but this time my attention was caught. I had noticed two mechs walking towards the building; one was very tall bearing the insignia of the Autobots and the other was smaller yellow and of the Seeker configuration, bearing no mark. This Seeker was also female and she was so very familiar. I thought I had seen her somewhere but I could not figure out where.

My confusion again irritated me. I hated not being able to remember things, sometimes the simplest things. It often drove me to distraction while I tried to figure out what it was. However, as I often did, I would forget what was bothering me and return to my normal hazy existence. I was often described as living, what others termed, a here and now existence. It was because I did not think too far into the future and I could not remember the past. They said it had advantage as I would not worry over those who I was ordered to kill. I was more or less a mindless zombie to them.

I had not gone too far down the hall when I heard the sound of weapons fire, and soon after the smell of smoke. There was a fire somewhere in the base. As I ran down the corridor the smoke thickened around the side entrance of the throne room.

I waited no longer, I burst through the doors like a mad mech. However I had chosen the wrong time. As I burst through the doors I encountered the exhausted and anguished face of the renegade Starscream. I was stunned that I had recognised him almost immediately. Something triggered a flood of memories to come into my mind almost at once. For the first time I remembered my existence as a whole. His face shifted from fatigue to hatred. As his optics locked on to me so did his laser rifle. It was obvious to me that he now saw me as a new threat. I heard the whine as the rifles charged up. I was about to scream at him not to shoot as the bolt hit the sweep and then myself.

I felt the blast from the enraged Seeker tear into my body, It melted the amber glass of my canopy. The heat vaporised my circuits, incinerated the surrounding energon and fuel ducts. It was intensely hot. I hadn't realised that a Seeker's weapon could be so powerful. With a surprised gasp, I flew backwards and hit the ground heavily. I felt light headed for a moment and I blacked out for about a nanosecond.

A fraction of that nanosecond later everything came back online again. I sat upright looking around myself. I did not hurt from my wound anymore so I looked down at myself; the wound was gone. I remember that I was pleased by this discovery; I had been repaired. I was perplexed at how I survived. I wondered if I was unconscious for a lot longer than it felt. Then my optics sent the confusing message to my brain; I was still in the throne room, smoke was still heavy and Starscream was still standing facing me, his rifles smoking. It was at this point I could see a pool of energon around me and realised

that my body was dead and somehow I managed to survive as a spectre.

I stood up, not knowing what to say, to think, to feel as I watched Starscream, while standing over my lifeless form in transition shock. I had never heard of this happening before. I was also annoyed. For the first time in eons I had my memory back: I knew my past, who and what I was only to lose my life seconds later; it was very unfair. A multitude of emotions crawled over me; sadness, anger, hatred, frustration and fear. But I could do nothing.

Starscream came over to my corpse. He used his foot to gently nudge my head into a position so he could get a better idea of who I was. I was very shocked to see his expression. It was horror intermixed with guilt. It was hard to explain the emotion that I had read in his optics. I paced the throne room shooting glares at Starscream as I struggled to think about what had just happened to me. I stopped my frustrated pace and decided that I would not look for revenge against this Decepticon. He had not acted completely in cold blood. I realised that the red Seeker had not meant me any harm personally. He was only defending himself. Call me a fool, call me whatever you like, but I am not prone to holding grudges; even against someone who murdered me.

I was still in shock from what had happened and I decided that I would go off somewhere so I could think to try deal a sudden flood of memories and come to grips with the overall situation. At this point I had no idea how to appear, vanish or possess. I turned away from Starscream who was now examining Sunburst when I had spotted an Autobot creeping behind. He had a look of ill intent in his optics and I had no idea what I could do to stop him.

Now the reality of my demise struck me like a ten thousand kilotonne nuclear warhead. I now realised I was utterly alone for the first time. I had no one to turn to, to ask for guidance. I had always had someone close by. Sunburst was my leader and a close friend; our paths had separated during that mission. After recovering with the Decepticons, Whitespark had been assigned to me as my partner and we were such for a very long time. I had rarely been alone until he was killed.

"Stand-up, turn around." Demanded the Autobot holding his weapon to Starscream's head. I knew that this menace would have every intention of killing the Seeker. There was nothing I could do. I stood back from the pair, I became incensed when he threatened to kill Sunburst solely on the grounds that she could not talk if he did. After a few moment's struggle Starscream managed to overpower the Autobot knocking him senseless. I could see that by the manner of the Seeker that he was very exhausted perhaps to the point of involuntary shut down.

I knelt down beside Sunburst feeling a wash of sadness waft over me. I looked into her face as she came to for a moment, her optics flickered in my direction, they flashed brightly for a brief second as she muttered my name as she returned to her unconscious state. I wondered if she had seen me or if she was reacting to a memory.

I glanced over at Starscream as he circled the throne. His hand slid over the surface and he had a weird expression on his face. I had no idea what was going on in his mind at that time, he looked torn as if indecision was pulling at his mind like tidal forces pull at a planet's ocean. The indecision was soon replaced by a wicked glint in his optics.

Starscream sat in the throne that belong to Galvatron I knew that he wished to take over. I did not think it would be wise, he had far too many enemies amongst the Decepticons. I thought they might contest him for that position.

When I think about it now; I am sure I would have supported Starscream as a leader, had I been alive. Seekers, even loners like Starscream, needed to be in a group. They functioned exceedingly well in a unit, their combined firepower and overall speed was something to be reckoned with.

Decepticon airforce was divided up into several units, the smallest being the individual Seeker, the flight came next containing two to three Seekers, a squadron contained two to three flights. Next came the wings numbering two to three squadrons and finally battalions which containing two or more wings. When a battalion was set to do battle, the sky could be filled with over eighty-one Seekers. Each having a special ability or power. This force could have played havoc with the Autobots had it been used that way and had they not been kept in the smallest three units.

From what I did remember of Starscream at the Academy he had an ability at being organised although he was a little hyper and excitable. He planned things out quite well, selecting his team on the basis of their skills and how they would be useful in the given scenario. His skills had not gone unnoticed. I saw the smugness on his face when he received his papers informing him that he had been selected to join Megatron's elite force, whereas Sunburst and I were sent to a different sector of the galaxy.

I am sure, with Starscream's leadership, we would have been grouped so that our powers complimented each other even if our personalities did not. But I digress.

I was standing over my body looking intently at myself. I had become so morbidly fascinated with my own death that I did not realise that there had been another attack until I saw a Sweep killing Overcast at Starscream's request. I had never been a cold blooded type, I did not find joy in making my victims suffer like some of my comrades did. I did not like to torment them: I did my mission and killed them as quickly and humanely as I could. Starscream on the other hand was enjoying watching the spark fade from Overcast's optics. He looked as if he took extreme pleasure from it and that did disturb me.

"Dead mechs tell no lies." Starscream laughed cheerfully. I disagreed with him; if I could become a ghost then, I could, if I could find a way, tell my story. As I am telling you now, Starscream, remember that. There could be others like me out there.

I thought about going where ghosts go when Starscream made ready to leave. It's the gregarious nature of Seekers that caused me to realise that I did not want to be alone. I had always had someone there and I decided I would remain with the one who killed me, at least until I could figure out what to do with myself. I hoped I would not be alone as eternity is a very long time.

When Skyfire transformed I boarded along with Starscream. As I touched Skyfire, I felt a mental overlap. I discovered I could read what the mech was thinking; I was fascinated. Skyfire was clearly upset at his younger friend's activities. Although he did not show it outwardly, only sadness. He was frightened when he was sent the email informing him of Starscream's absence. When he discovered that Sunburst was absent from her usual job,

he could only have assumed that she had taken off for Charr in hopes of stopping Starscream. He was angry with Starscream for endangering them, for endangering their friendship. He was anguished by seeing the female Seeker in her condition, there were a myriad of other emotions there as well. I became embarrassed realising I was invading someone's private thoughts. Quickly I broke off the overlap and hovered so I was not touching him in any form or way.

I pondered about the experience wondering if I were to completely overlap myself with Skyfire, if I could take control of him. It was a fascinating thought but again I did not feel like invading his privacy. I did not wish to cause trouble.

Tension increased between the Seeker and the Autobot jet. I realised I seemed to be empathic to their emotions. I could feel the frustration emanating from both individuals. Skyfire was angry, worried and scared. Starscream was furious, confused, hurting and depressed. I was suddenly bombarded with another emotion that I had not anticipated: betrayal. Starscream felt betrayed. I could not see into his mind unless I overlapped him but I could feel an intense feeling of betrayal and anguish.

I suppose with the knowledge that Skyfire was reluctantly bringing the Seeker in to face justice on Cybertron he would feel that his friendship was used and broken. From what I understand gaining Starscream's complete trust is very difficult if not impossible and to lose that trust can be very easy.

After an argument with Skyfire and a nasty reference to Skywarp and Thundercracker, he relented and went to Sunburst's aid. He, on the outside, said he did not care about her condition. On the inside, I knew, he was as worried as Skyfire. I stood behind him watching his repair work, he cut and cauterised attempting to stem the flow of energon. "Primus help me!" He pleaded.

I wanted to help her out as much as he did. His optics dimmed for a moment as his face slackened and he shuddered silently. He stopped his work and glanced over his wing in my direction he squinted a bit as if he was trying to see me. Had he somehow become aware of my presence? I wondered.

"Her energon is too dangerously low for her to bleed like this. She will die if we don't get her back Cybertron fast. Did you bring any extra energon along?" Starscream whispered fearfully.

"I have enough to get us back to Cybertron. I'm very sorry, I can't spare any for her. And you know I would if I had it to spare." Skyfire was truthful in this, if he had spare he would have given it up. A glimmer of hope crossed Starscream's optics and he opened his chest and removed a can of a condensed energon beverage that was never found on Charr. We had to do with raw energon or trade it for more refined stuff.

I paced back and forth behind Starscream offering words of encouragement to both him and Sunburst. I felt his frustration increase when he discovered that his idea was not going to work. "Skyfire can't you fly any faster?"

"Going at top speed now. It will still be several hours yet..." Replied Skyfire with a note of sadness. I could attest he was really trying to fly faster. But as design limitations go, he

had met his.

"She does not have the luxury of several hours!" I leaned over him and accidentally caused an overlap. I caught his hopeless thought 'What can I do?' I broke off the partial possession, stunned with myself. Along with the thought I could read his innermost anguish. It was like seeing him without armour, naked and vulnerable.

I had an idea but I was not sure if it would even work. I knew when I overlapped him, I could hear his thoughts. I wondered, if I overlapped him again, if could I project my thoughts into him. It was all I could think of; he had energon in him if he could only get out of his frustration for a moment to think clearly he would see that it was a way, perhaps the only way, to help her. I was never a field medic. I could do minor patch ups and basic first aid but I never had the training for more intensive repair methods. It was not surprising with my memory, but I had seen mech to mech transfusions performed and I knew that Starscream had considerable knowledge in mech repair and construction.

I leaned over his right audio receptor. "You have it within you to help her." I said thinking strongly of the energon flowing through his body. I hoped that he would listen to me. Starscream shot a look over his shoulder in my direction. I knew he could not see me. He seemed perplexed and confused. He spend a few moments grumbling to himself before he reluctantly initiated the transfusion and went into a temporary stasis.

I could do nothing at this point for either of them. I waited and watched over them until we arrived at Cybertron, soon the pink flow from Starscream to the other Sunburst stopped. And from that moment I knew nothing else could be done. Sadly I walked away from Skyfire and Starscream immediately after they arrived. I knew what was going to happen and I did not wish to see it. Tension between him and Skyfire was already at the breaking point and I did not want to witness what could be a very violent encounter. Starscream was still a Decepticon to the very core, yet I could sense within him that there was something more. Another side of him that fought for a place in his life, a less aggressive and a more curious side. A side that was far older than the warrior and it did not wish to remain dormant.

I walk the halls of Cybertron nowadays; they're very full of people. Going on about their daily lives oblivious to my presence. It is sometimes kind of disheartening; everyone around and no one I can interact with.

I am rarely ever seen. I choose to remain unseen and occasionally when I do let myself be known to someone, I try to convince them to allow me to borrow them for a while. There are things I need to get done here before I go to wherever it is I need to go.

Other days I go down to the eerie Decepticon Crypt. I know I am alone here but I also know I am not the first and there remains that chance for me if I decide I want to try a second chance at life. I often look at the pillar that still supports the Feet of Starscream. But I know only his original essence is buried here not his soul.

- Windraker

Starscream felt a cold shiver creep over his being, as if he were standing on top of Mount Everest. However, on this planet the mountains were small and snow did not even exist.

Teris looked up at him from her sitting position distracted by his sharp intake of breath. He shook in fear and worry, he knew now that Skyfire would know he gave the order to kill Overcast and some of his more secret thoughts.

Suddenly the cold chill he had felt a moment earlier was replaced by a warm breeze and the scent of spring day on Earth.

"N'kosi..." The shaman said, her voice was contemplative, "There is something—someone standing in the corner."

Starscream jerked his head in the direction that Teris had pointed and he could see a grey scintillating form; it was a Seeker, it was Windraker. The grey spectre walked into the light fading slightly in the brightness before he strengthened his ethereal form. He held his hands apart in a gesture of peace.

"Why have you appeared to me?" Inquired Starscream feeling another chill. He wondered if Windraker proposed to possess him as he himself had once possessed others. "You are not going to take over my body are you?"

"I mean you no harm, Starscream." The ghost said, "I am glad you finally got my message. I was hoping that you would have found it sooner but I had not anticipated that you would be in exile for so long. You can imagine how hard it is to type a message without an agreeable host body. And I waited until I could find one who would let me borrow them."

Starscream's mouth hung open in surprise.

Windraker laughed softly a warm breeze tugged at the shaman's cape. "No, I came to tell you that I am watching you and I am your guardian, well sort of. I would have come to you sooner but I wanted to do it after you read my message. I did not want to scare you to death and you of all people should know how others react to the presence of a ghost."

"I'm sorry Windraker... I didn't mean to kill you... well I meant to defend myself and there was no way for me to tell that you were not after me." His tone was guilt laced but it was true. There was no way for him to know that Windraker was not a threat at that time.

The ghost looked thoughtful. "Don't worry about it. I was living on borrowed time anyway. I should have died one hundred thousand years ago from my injuries."

Starscream was lost for words. There were other ghosts? Then it was possible that Skywarp and Thundercracker were also somewhere out there, in the ethereal? He glanced down to the floor, for a moment he felt disappointed; he had hoped that the experience was unique to him alone. Starscream looked up from the floor and the room was empty, the ghost was gone. However, he felt that he was not entirely alone.

"You could see right through him." Said Teris with surprise.

Starscream shot a glance down at her. "I've told you before, but I also existed much like that once."

Teris smiled slightly. "I remember the tales. We don't see our ancestor's spirits, we remember them. I will leave you N'kosi to your thoughts." Teris bowed and gracefully strode to the door. She glanced over her shoulder at the Seeker as he turned back to the screen. She smiled again and left.

The Seeker exhaled a deep sigh as he turned back to the computer. He quickly tapped a response to Skyfire's message and sent it on its way.

Starscream leaned back into his seat, steepled his fingers and drifted into thought.

Old warriors might die but some, it seemed, will never fade away.

* * *

Tidal forces ripped and tore at the abandoned world that orbited the now dead red dwarf star. The ground shook and ancient buildings toppled as huge fissures formed in the crust of the planet. The world of Charr had been abandoned by the Decepticons for over thirty-five years before due to intense tectonic activity brought on as the fire within the dwarf star flickered out.

The world was breaking apart as the star's gravity collapsed its surface in towards its core. The Star was too small in mass to nova but its death caused Charr to be dragged into close proximity. The closer Charr came to the dead sun the worse the earthquakes became. It would be a matter of a few hours to a few days before the planet would be ripped apart by the black dwarf's gravity.

Deep below ground in the abandoned burial chamber remained one sarcophagus; all others had been removed to Cybertron before the evacuation. The massive earthquakes caused the huge metal and granite pillars to topple over and smash across the huge metal coffin shattering it. For a brief moment the tremors ceased as huge clouds of dust and debris settled.

There, in amongst the shards of the sarcophagus and debris from the earthquake, lay the battered body of Galvatron, his optics glowed dimly in the darkness and flashed with hate and fury.