



Wild Goose Chase

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Sent on a mission of the up most importance, Starscream, Skywarp and Thundercracker find themselves in a very odd and embarrassing situation.

Chapter 1 Birds of Feather...

Chapter 2 ...Flock Together

Chapter 3 What's Good for the Goose...

Chapter 4 ...Is Good for the Gander

Chapter 5 Our Goose is Cooked

Chapter 6 So Scream's a Goose



Birds of a Feather...

Late September.

The combined thunderous roar of jet engines split the cool autumn sky.

"Prepare to attack!" shouted Starscream at his two following wingmates. They tightened their formation until they were flying almost wing tip to wing tip with their commander. They flew with skill and precision that could only be achieved from millennia of flying together.

Below them, the ground sped away in a blur of brilliant colour. Dark patches of green, bright yellows, fire reds and blazing oranges, were the leafy treetops of forests. The lighter greens and browns were the fields of un-harvested corn, open glades and animal pastures. The glinting dark blues were from the deep cold lakes and shallow streams. It was autumn in all its glory. Soon this vast open landscape would be covered in a cold white blanket of snow.

Ahead their target loomed, an old house that was constructed early in the twentieth century. Built in a secluded area of Northern Ontario.

Starscream quickly analysed the situation they were heading into, the house was garrisoned by about a hundred humans manning simple machine guns and larger cannons on the outer perimeter walls. He could see a small private helicopter within the courtyard. He watched as the roof of the building opened and a large cannon was raised.

'This weapon must be of great importance,' he reasoned as he watched the people running around the platform setting it up. Starscream prepared to unleash a couple blasts of his null ray to de-activate it should it be any threat to him

"Remember, Megatron wants that weapon the humans have constructed... so *don't* destroy it!" warned Starscream as he prepared to fire.

"Why? What does it do?" asked Skywarp.

Starscream's mind wandered slightly from his targeting. "I don't know, Skywarp, Megatron wants it. Laserbeak suggested that it might be of use to him... wait, look out!" he screamed his warning as he saw a huge bolt of red energy shoot from the muzzle of the weapon.

The energy beam struck him and his wingmates. They instinctively transformed and fell from the sky and into the water of a lake below. His cry of surprise sounded strange to him. It resembled a wretched honk and his body tingled in the most unusual manner.

His left arm flared with pain as the water impacted and surrounded him. Shocked at his discomfort he sank deep into the water. He opened his mouth in surprise and water flowed in, struggling against the confusion of what had happened to him he kicked up, his chest ached and burned. He thrashed with his arms until his head broke the surface.

He gasped and coughed, water sprayed out of his mouth and the cool autumn air flowed in, his mind started to clear. Before him he could see two unbelievably large waterfowl swimming toward him.

"Skywarp, Thundercracker?! Where *are* you? Help me!" he cried as he struggled to swim to the edge of the huge lake. 'That was odd,' he thought, 'I could have sworn this lake was a lot smaller when I crashed in.' Struggling with his swimming he managed to drag himself to shore and lay on the muddy bank. His breath came out in heaves.

The two very wet water fowl swam over to him and waddled awkwardly onto the bank.

Starscream started to claw at the ground feebly. Abruptly he stopped and looked closely at the two birds. There was a hint of familiarity to them, one had a blue tinge to his feet and feathers, while the other was darker, almost black and had some faint mauve markings under his throat. Both looked at him with their baleful red eyes. Their black pupils narrowed as they scrutinised him.

"No, no it can't be?" he wailed, "Skywarp?" the dark bird nodded, "Thundercracker?"

The blue footed bird cocked his head in acknowledgement, "Yeah, It's me. That weapon Megatron wants has turned us into birds.

Starscream shook his head. "No, this cannot be!" he extended his arms to look at them, pain he had not paid attention to jolted him but he could see the wet light grey-brown feathers that graced his body. Turning his head to peer at himself he could see his chest was slightly reddish in areas.

"I'm a goose..." he with disbelief, "I *look* like a Canada goose!" Starscream cried out as he tucked his head under his wing. He wished this was all a bad dream.

"Can you fly?" asked Thundercracker, ignoring his commander's panic.

Starscream un-tucked his head and stretched out his wing. It moved as he wanted but it hurt. "This is not good, I think I must have bruised it or something. Never mind that then." Starscream stood up tall and extended his wings and tried to jump. His anti gravitational systems did not activate and he fell promptly to the soft ground. "I can't fly!" He wailed beating his wings into the mud.

"Are you stupid, Starscream? We're not jets anymore, we're birds and birds flap their wings to become airborne." Skywarp beat his wings in demonstration and rose slightly into the air, wind whistled at his wing tips.

They were startled as a crack of a gun fire split the tranquility of the lake and forest in a deafening boom. Small spurts of mud splattered around them. Skywarp suddenly vanished and reappeared in a bush a few feet away. Thundercracker and Starscream stared dumbly across the lake. "Uh guys... we better move..." came Skywarp's nervous voice. "It's Autumn and we're dressed like geese."

The two Seekers came out of their stunned surprise and glanced at each other. "Agreed," said Starscream running in an awkward gait towards the bushes where

Skywarp was hiding followed by Thundercracker. "We can figure out the mechanics of bird flight when we get a moment."

Starscream stumbled as he ran, he spread his wings and beat them. Trying to ignore the ache that his left one was causing him. He noticed that he could pick up some speed in this awkward, half running half flapping, manner and reached the bushes. Thundercracker did the same and they took cover.

They peeked out from the bushes unable to see the human who fired the gun. Starscream knew the humans were well hidden and likely wearing the colours that would camouflage them in the forest. He knew they were still out there, he was sure he could smell them. He knew there was more than just the danger of human hunters, he now had to worry about predatory animals. Starscream quivered slightly with worry.

"You don't suppose the same human that did this to us, might be trying to shoot us to get us out the way." Thundercracker suggested.

"Great," muttered Skywarp, "my wildest nightmare is going to come true, I am going to be stuffed and served for a human thanksgiving ritual."

"I wonder, they might be able to reverse this and give us our real bodies. We have to get to that house," Thundercracker continued, ignoring Skywarp.

"Wait, Skywarp, you teleported... how could you still do that?" demanded Starscream.

Skywarp's goose form paused and blinked dumbly at his commander. "I don't know... do you suppose that the essence of our natural forms might have been captured by the machine and reformed into our new bodies?"

Thundercracker laughed in an ironic tone. "Do you possibly think that I'm gonna be able to create a sonic boom in this slow moving body?"

Starscream shrugged. "It remains to be seen if I can use any of my abilities, I just hope I am still the fastest flier. Now shut your honking and get a move on, before those humans come after us. Right now we are sitting ducks and it is going to be a long walk."

"It's only two kilometres from here," replied Skywarp.

"Yes Skywarp, only two kilometres as jets is nothing, but right now we are no more than a group of flightless waterfowl!" hissed Starscream, his voice taking on a suppressed panicked quality.

"I bet Megatron is having a bird," muttered Skywarp.

Thundercracker let out a wispy sigh at Skywarp and they plodded their way through the forest.

What's Good for the Goose...

Early A.M. Megatron's private quarters:

The door buzzer rang and Megatron glanced at the monitor. It displayed the tall blue form of the Communications Officer. The Decepticon leader pushed down a communications button and invited the mech in.

"Have you anything to show for your efforts?" the Decepticon leader asked wearily.

"Satellite scans of Earth have reported negative results." Soundwave handed Megatron the datapad with the results of the search.

"Have you probed deeper into the Earth? Caves and old land bases?" he inquired, not looking at the data report.

"Affirmative: Seekers are claustrophobic. Highly unlikely that they would retreat into unshored caverns."

"What about the space bridge? Any possibility that they've escaped through that?" He wondered if Thundercracker had perhaps convinced his wingmates to defect or leave the war. He knew Starscream would not hear such an idea and Skywarp was far too loyal to the cause. However, all possibilities had to be looked at.

"Unlikely: Space bridge has not been activated. Commander Shockwave has been informed to search Cybertron regardless."

Megatron looked down at the datapad in his palm. "I'll determine a course of action within the next few hours, have everyone on alert. Dismissed." Megatron left Soundwave to exit as he returned to his control centre in his quarters. His own private search had also turned up nothing.

"I refuse to believe that you three are dead, but where on Cybertron are you hiding? And why?" Megatron settled down to examine the reports in hopes he could find somewhere that hadn't been searched.

* * *

Circling above the forest the two goose-formed Seekers flew looking for a sign of their wingmate.

"You're a coward, a chicken! You've left Skywarp to die."

"Nonsense Thundercracker, Skywarp can take care of himself, and by the way I am *not* a chicken." Starscream looked over the dark landscape. He found that he did not need to beat his wings very hard to maintain a decent speed of his flight.

He glanced at Thundercracker who flew along side him. The blue Seeker's avian body bobbed slightly with every stroke of his long graceful wings.

Starscream cocked his head slightly as he listened to Thundercracker's flight. He seemed to have more of a deep thrum than the wispy whistle of wind as it slipped past his own feathered wing tips.

Starscream allowed himself to study Thundercracker who flew with such ease and grace. The goose body was a joke on land. Although it was shockingly light, its movement was a lumbering side to side waddle. But in the air, it was a machine designed for the sole purpose of flight.

It was not too hard to get into the air, it was not much different from taking off in jet mode. The taxi-run while beating the wings to decrease the air pressure under his body and level flight was a pleasant experience. He discovered that his wings did permit some gliding, an experience that his own jet form was incapable of achieving.

He revelled in the new experience and decided that should he get his own body back he might take to studying Earth birds to learn more on how they evolved to become such efficient flying machines. There might be something useful to the Decepticon cause, to be gleaned from this experience.

Starscream wondered about a goose's agility. 'Were they capable of flying aerobatics?' the thought tempted him to experiment and find out, but he ditched the idea. There was too much risk. He was in a body he knew almost nothing about. The Seeker did not know how much stress that the flesh and bones of his fragile frame could take. He did not want to risk breaking his wing or anything else to learn and it would be a waste of energy.

And then there was that issue, energy. Something he was going to have to address soon. He exhaled sharply and his breath came out in a loud honk.

The sound startled him, as it had on so many occasions throughout the day. He did intake air in his mech and alternate forms but he had never really been aware of it. His avian form was different, his body rose and fell on a constant basis with each inhale and exhale. He held his breath for a moment and felt his body object to abrupt lack of oxygen. Unlike his natural form, breathing was an involuntary and very necessary function.

"*Skywarp!*" Thundercracker shouted. His deep voice barely penetrated the darkness.

Starscream was brought back from examining his own self to the task at hand, by the blue Seeker's call. They flew side by side calling out for their wingmate to little avail. "It's no use, Thundercracker, I say we push on," Starscream said after what seemed like ten minutes. There had been no sign of Skywarp and he wondered if Thundercracker had been right.

Thundercracker rumbled an obscenity in his long neck at Starscream. "We can't leave the area... We don't have radios; he'll have no way of finding us. *Skywarp!*"

Starscream realised that Thundercracker would insist on continuing the search. His eyes

took note of the brightening of the eastern horizon, soon it would be day and the sky would become unsafe for two oddly acting geese. "You were right, Thundercracker, I made a *mistake*," He confessed, "Skywarp is *dead*. Give it up and let's go." He leveled his flight and glanced at Thundercracker.

The blue Seeker gave a sad honk and joined his commander.

"I'm not dead, I'm right here," came the cheerful voice of Skywarp as he materialised beside his wingmates.

Thundercracker almost literally exploded in surprise. Feathers flew from his body in all directions from the shock of Skywarp's mid-air appearance.

"Skywarp! You sneaky son of a cessna!" Thundercracker rejoiced as he closed the gap between his wingmate.

Starscream chuckled trying to shake off his own surprise. "I take it went well?" Starscream asked the dark Seeker. He was relieved to see that Skywarp had managed to escape.

"Yeah, it was almost as fun as scaring you two. I teleported three metres away from the animal and it looked so surprised that I managed to escape it's claws, well almost." Skywarp twisted his body in flight to show a small streak of blood that stained his light chest feathers.

Starscream shuddered as a flare of sympathy pain shot through his body. Skywarp did have a close scrape with the feline.

Thundercracker glanced at the wound and banked slamming into Starscream. "He could've been killed!"

"You will kill us both if you knock us out the slagging sky," snapped Starscream, stabilising himself.

Skywarp glanced at his wingmates for a moment then resumed his forward gaze. He fell in to Starscream's left taking advantage of the lead Seeker's wake in the air.

Reluctantly Thundercracker fell to Starscream's right. "You're lucky geese don't have hands, Starscream, because I'd be snapping your neck with them."

Starscream glared at Thundercracker and beat harder. He pushed ahead leaving the pair to mellow. He felt the energy drain more acutely than he had the night before. He knew it was time to get some energon, then he realised, geese don't consume energon, they need to eat organic fuel. He slowed his pace and allowed the other two to catch up.

"We need to eat," he said as he fell back into the lead position.

"What?" inquired Skywarp visibly confused.

"We are in flesh bodies, we need to consume solid fuel so we can convert it into energon, like the Insecticons do." Starscream tried to explain so Skywarp could understand.

"What do geese eat?" Thundercracker asked.

Starscream remained silent. He had no idea what a goose consumed for energy. 'Were they Carnivores?' Starscream figured that geese were not carnivorous, they lacked the tearing beak and the sharp claws that birds of prey possessed.

'Insectivores perhaps?' Starscream ran the loose fleshy ribbon that was attached in his mouth across the top and bottoms of his beak. The top and bottom edges of his bill was rough and serrated in an almost tooth-like texture. He wasn't sure he could stomach an insect. He envisioned himself crunching on Kickback and almost gagged.

'Herbivores maybe then?' His mouth was not designed for chewing in the manner of other creatures but the mouth seemed to be designed more for tearing and cutting vegetation.

'Omnivores was then a possibility.' He had to find out logically, he did not want to eat something that would poison his body.

Skywarp looked thoughtful for a moment before. "I dunno, why not ask one?"

"Interesting idea Skywarp, but it remains to be seen if we can even express ourselves to other geese. We can communicate to one another but does it extend only that far? Does anyone understand us?" It had been a nagging question for a while. What would happen if he saw other Decepticons? Did he sound like himself? Or did he sound like a regular goose? Skywarp's suggestion was not unreasonable, although it sounded a bit far fetched.

Not too far away beyond the trees and the lake they had fallen into was the house. Many lights flooded the courtyard and the tiny figures of men could be seen walking back and forth along the length of the wall.

Starscream was tempted to change paths and return to the building to see if they could figure out a way to get their bodies back. He felt the uncomfortable pains of hunger. Now that he had identified it he realised he was feeling almost crazy for sustenance.

They were well fuelled when they were turned into geese and remained comfortable throughout the day. So it appeared the fuel-energy was translated when they changed. The reverse, then, was likely true. Hungry geese would likely turn them into Seekers that had little or no fuel.

His eyes panned across the lake below and he spotted a group of bobbing bodies floating in the dark water. He decided he would have to go among the lesser birds and watch them as they carried on with their natural way of life, perhaps he could figure out what they ate and how and maybe as Skywarp suggested, to ask them.

Starscream banked and started his descent.

"Starscream the house is that way," Thundercracker pointed out with a thrust of his head that caused his flight to become somewhat jerky.

"No, I see a flock of geese perhaps we can see what they re-fuel with," stated Starscream as he flew low over the water and suddenly realised he had no idea of how to land... he extended his feet and caught the water between his webbed toes. He was flung head over heels and landed in the water. He struggled to regain his composure. Skywarp and Thundercracker landed with a bit more grace. They glided through the water and pulled up beside Starscream.

"Well done, fearless leader, good landing," quipped Skywarp laughing.

Thundercracker opened his mouth in an attempt to smile, his red eyes glittered with mirth. He chose not to say anything to his commander.

Starscream scowled and proceeded to realign his feathers along his back. He had found it to be an almost pleasant occupation while he had been wasting hours watching for danger. "It's taking a bit time to adjust to being a bird," he said mouthing on a wing feather. He stopped his grooming, shuffled his wings a bit until he found them comfortable, fluffed up his feathers and began to slowly swim toward the flock.

The sun was starting to rise and a pink glimmer brightened the blue black sky. The triad drifted gently through the geese that floated serenely in the water.

"I don't like this," said Thundercracker glancing at the motionless, frost coated birds around them. "I know it was cold last night but I didn't think that these birds would freeze."

Skywarp extended his neck and pecked the back of a goose, they were greeted with a hollow 'thock' sound. "That's because they aren't real... they're decoys."

"Then we better get out of here." Starscream quickened his pace. The others followed without question. They moved off to an area that was out of sight of the decoys and hunters if they arrived. Skywarp and Thundercracker poked around at the water while he heaved himself up on to the bank.

Flying lead was exhausting. He did not wish to give Skywarp or Thundercracker the chance to take point. Had he done so he could have taken advantage of the wake that they left behind. He was their leader, they were his subordinates, he did not want to give them a taste of power; it was a matter of pride.

Starscream sighed as he tucked his bill under his wing and fell into a light doze, listening to the faint chatter of his wingmates.

He awoke as he was nudged from both sides. He lifted his head and gazed at two Seekers, blinking back his fatigue.

"We dug around and found stuff that should give you energy Starscream," said Skywarp

indicating to the pile of wet grasses, algae and other mud covered water plants that they had deposited in front of their leader.

Starscream gazed at the disgusting pile and yawned. "Skywarp, this is no time for a practical joke."

"No, seriously, eat this and you'll feel more like yourself in a short while." Skywarp demonstrated by taking some grasses from the top of the pile and swallowed them.

"That does not look very appealing Skywarp, surely there is something better."

"We let our body's instincts work, Starscream, loosen up a bit. Your body will know what's good for it," Thundercracker urged.

The Air Commander sniffed at the offerings and gingerly sampled a wet plant. He found that the smell and taste appealed to him and he instinctively he knew that this was what he had wanted all along. Starscream started to gulp down the rest of the green food, keeping his eyes glued on his wingmates.

Skywarp stepped closer and Starscream felt threatened at the dark Seeker's proximity to his meal. Blind fury filled his being and he hissed, spraying fragments of grass at his wingmate. He reared, beating his wings in an effort to drive the intruding ganders off.

Startled at Starscream's abrupt change of behaviour, Skywarp and Thundercracker backed off to a safe distance. They allowed the Air Commander to finish his meal without any further interruption.

"Gees, Starscream, you didn't need to have a hissy fit," said Skywarp as the Air Commander joined them as they browsed the banks.

"Sorry Skywarp, I don't know what came over me," he sighed. "My life has become irrevocably tainted realising I have now eaten swamp scum... and enjoyed it," said Starscream as he dipped his head into the water to locate more of the tasty tender plants.

...Is Good for the Gander

Nemesis war room:

There had been no success in the search for the Seekers on and off the Earth. Megatron had to assume the worst, The Seekers were MIA and were possibly dead. Still, Megatron wanted to be sure of this before he wrote the triad off.

The Decepticon leader paced back and forth in front of the small group of gathered Seekers. Soundwave stood off to the side watching in emotionless silence as Megatron spoke.

"I have decided to send in a search party." He glanced at Soundwave and then back at the Seekers. The blue mech had reminded him once more of the possible threat to other Decepticons should they be shot with the same weapon that had destroyed the Seekers so effortlessly. Megatron acknowledged the warning of danger but decided it was in the best interests of the Decepticons that they should, at least, try to retrieve the weapon.

"I want a thorough search of the area where the triad was last recorded being. I want you to look for anything: parts, pieces, foot prints, fragments. I want *answers*! Secondly: I want that weapon, it's too dangerous to be left in the hands of humans. If they have actually destroyed my top Seekers; we could use it to destroy the Autobots."

Dirge, Ramjet and Thrust frowned at the suggestion that they were anything less than the best. They had to agree though; such a weapon would be of great value to the Decepticon war effort.

"We will fly to our Alberta badlands base, providing we are not harassed by the humans. From there, we will prepare to mount an attack for tomorrow afternoon on the Northern Ontario experimental weapons facility. Our first order of operation is to take the weapon for our own, then look for the missing Seekers. Get yourselves ready we leave in *one* hour. Dismissed."

Megatron watched as the three Coneheaded Seekers left the room talking amongst themselves. He glanced at Soundwave who stood silent and deep in thought.

The Decepticon leader was not too worried about the Canadian Forces once they crossed the human's political boundary. The Canadian people seemed far less aggressive than their southern neighbours when it came to protecting their airspace. He assumed they relied on their southern counterparts for that.

They were well known as peace keepers and in the past had even tried to negotiate with Decepticons rather than send in the heavy artillery, a tactic they had soon found to be futile waste of energy and life. The only thing he expected to see would be a few CF-18's watching from a safe distance.

The Communications Officer's optics brightened briefly as he turned to face Megatron. "I will stay behind to monitor progress," he suggested.

Megatron nodded in agreement and muttered "coward" under his breath as he left the room.

* * *

The three Seekers sat in a sunny forest glade, hidden amongst the tall blades of grass.

The lake they had landed in earlier had become an unsafe area as humans with guns appeared. Starscream, who had no desire to find himself peppered with lead shot, led his wingmates into the cover of the forest.

Skywarp had insisted that they fly to the building but Starscream told him it would be better to gather enough strength, rather than act with a partial re-charge.

The truth of the matter was that he had no idea how he should proceed and he wanted time to think and come to grip, beforehand, with possible failure.

'A day. Give me a day to think and find out what we are capable of,' he thought as scratched bare the soil with his bill. He wanted to infiltrate the human's base and hopefully find a way to activate the weapon once he thought up a plan. It was a question of how three geese could even think of operating a weapon that was made for creatures that had hands. And the bigger question; was it even capable of giving back what they had lost.

He glanced at the sky and watched as a large V of geese flew overhead. They honked as they proceeded towards the lake. Their calls echoed over the forest followed by the blood chilling crack of gunfire.

Thundercracker and Skywarp stopped dead still for a moment before they realised that they were not in danger. The noise seemed so loud and so near. Starscream knew that they would have to proceed with utmost caution if they were going to survive. The Air Commander figured, although the gun shots was near, they were not at risk and could rest for a while.

Gunfire interrupted the serene forest quite frequently over a period of a few hours and the Seekers had slowly grown accustomed to it. As long as the guns were not pointed at them; they were happy.

Starscream studied his wingmates. Thundercracker was huddled down sleeping, rousing only when distant shots were fired, when Skywarp made a loud noise or bumped into him. The dark Seeker nibbled on anything within reach that he could wrap his bill around. Disdaining the insects and other tiny crawling creatures.

Starscream on the other hand found the insects fascinating and had acquired a fair pile of dead ones to examine. He watched as a centipede scurried across the patch of bare soil in front of his chest and made it turn with his bill.

He pondered how such a creature could manipulate so many legs at once and not get confused. There were so many things close to the ground that he never had been aware

of before.

"I am going to name you...oh...how about Shrapnel?" He asked the multi-legged insect.

The centipede said nothing as it scurried away. Starscream herded it back toward himself. He watched it for a moment as it again attempted to run in the opposite direction. He sighed as he grew bored of playing with the centipede. He flicked it into the air and studied it as it hit the ground and rapidly moved off.

"Time to die, Shrapnel." Abruptly he pecked the creature hard, severing it in two. He watched in fascination as the insect's halves twitched and turned in jerking movements before it finally died and lay still. Starscream flicked the invertebrate into the pile and grumbled.

The sun felt warm and pleasant upon his avian body and he watched as Skywarp stood up and knock into Thundercracker, waking him. The dark Seeker wandered a few feet away to sample some lush looking grasses.

Starscream raised himself on his legs and stretched, extending a wing out and kicking back a foot. Repeating the movement with his other side.

The wind rustled the brightly coloured leaves causing them to fall from their branches to the ground.

Thundercracker took a brief interest in the fall of a bright red leaf as it settled on the ground in front of him. "You know, Starscream, I could almost learn to enjoy being a goose," he muttered turning the leaf over with his beak.

Starscream turned his head to glance at his wingmate. "You have got to be kidding," he said, allowing disgust to colour his voice. "I cannot wait to get out of this getup."

"We could have been turned into worse things..." Thundercracker eyed the grass blades that grew near his body.

"Such as?" asked Starscream dryly.

"Like one of those crawling creatures you've been killing, cows, or in a worse case scenario; a human," said Thundercracker between mouthfuls of grass.

"At least a human form is not too far off our natural forms minus the wings, and we'd have hands in which to fight with... Having to pick things up with my mouth is a bit bothersome," he muttered picking up a twig and started to scratch a map into the ground.

"At least when you do that, it keeps you quiet," responded Skywarp from somewhere in the tall grasses.

Starscream let the twig drop from his mouth, "Why don't you mind your own business," he snapped.

"Why don't you find us a way to get back to normal," Skywarp hissed poking his head through the grass to glare at Starscream.

"I was just trying to work that out."

"What?" he said with disbelief. "You don't have a plan? I thought you were smart with all that mad-scientist intellect that you claim you have. Or has the bird form also gone to your head?"

"Why don't you two cut it out," warned Thundercracker.

"That's it! I've had enough out of you, Skywarp!" screamed Starscream as he dove headlong into the grass after his wingmate. His wings were fully extended and his head hung low to the ground as he hissed his displeasure. Skywarp glanced at his charging commander, blades of grass fell out of his bill as he stood too surprised to move. Starscream slammed into his wingmate, smacking him with the leading edge of his wing.

The dark Seeker let out a startled honk as he began to defend himself, beating Starscream across the back with his wing.

Starscream locked his beak onto Skywarp's throat and the two thrashed on the ground hissing and spitting venomously at one another. The angry grey and black slashing ball of beaks, feet and flying feathers, hissed across Thundercracker's path.

The blue Seeker grunted in disgust as he dove in and snatched Starscream by the tail feathers and pulled him off Skywarp.

Starscream screeched; feathers were ripped out the back of his neck as he was torn violently from Skywarp.

Thundercracker jerked his head in a violent sideways twist and threw his commander roughly aside. He half hopped, half flew over to Starscream and pressed his blueish webbed foot on the Air Commanders long neck. Thundercracker leaned his head down within an inch of Starscream's face.

"You might be in a primitive flying creature's body but you don't have to act like one," he snapped. "You too Skywarp." He leaned closer to Starscream and whispered so that Skywarp could not hear him, "I'll kill you now if you don't promise to not endanger Skywarp again," he threatened. "If you do break your promise, I will snap your neck so fast with my wing that you'll regret that you were ever given life."

Starscream's red eyes widened with fury and surprise, his black iris dilated then narrowed. His mouth moved but no sound came out. His lungs felt as if they were going to burst from the oxygen starvation that Thundercracker was causing with his foot pressed against his windpipe.

Thundercracker lifted his foot from the Seeker's throat and Starscream gasped for air. "We need to work together if we're gonna survive this and find a solution."

Starscream stood up and shot a fiery glare at Skywarp.

A snap of a branch caught their attention. The three Seekers froze in their spots as they watched two humans come into view. The men had the bodies of several geese slung over their shoulders, bound together by their feet and a double-barrelled shot gun held in one hand.

"Hey, look Jack," said a man pointing in the direction of the Seekers.

Starscream held his breath for a moment as he attempted to calculate their chances for escape. Skywarp and Thundercracker began to walk into the tall grass keeping their eyes locked on the armed humans.

"I see 'em," the other man replied carefully lowering his load of geese, shouldering his shot gun and sighting along the barrel.

"Go for that gander there, the one with the blueish feathers, he must be a subspecies or a sport. He'd look great stuffed and hung above my fireplace in the lodge." The other man pointed out.

At those words Starscream came out of his thoughts knowing there was only one way of escape. "*Fly!*" Starscream ordered. He turned and ran through the tall grass beating his wings. In his panic and rush to get into the air he stood on one of his own feet and fell beak first into the ground. He honked in dismay and struggled to get to his feet. He stumbled once more and rolled into the grass.

"I've never seen geese with markings like that before," the man said observing the red and purple bands on the wings of the Seekers. "Hey, get that light one on the ground, before he can get airborne."

Starscream managed to stand up and started to run beating furiously through the grasses.

Thundercracker and Skywarp made it to the air, before they realised that Starscream was not with them. The sound of a gun shot echoed across the forest followed by a cry from Starscream. They glanced down and spotted their commander as he dove awkwardly through the grass.

"We've got to help him," said Thundercracker, "He's gonna get killed."

"How? We have no weapons, we're only geese."

"Distract them, Skywarp, I'm gonna try something."

"Not this again," Skywarp sighed veering off at a new angle.

The blue Seeker banked and flew back down toward the humans, he folded his wings slightly and dove toward them at a high speed.

"Hey, look Chris, have you ever seen geese fly like that?" the man lowered his weapon to watch as the two Seekers turned about and flew toward them. Abruptly Skywarp vanished and reappeared to attack from a new direction, Thundercracker maintained his

course. "What the hell... did you see that black goose? He... just disappeared for a second."

Starscream glanced up at his wingmates. "No, you fools, you will get us all killed," he thought as he struggled to his feet. Starscream glanced down at his webbed foot, it was a mess of dirt, grass, blood and skin fragments. He limped holding it awkwardly trying not to touch the ground with it. Starscream held out his wings as he hopped along, grunting with the pain.

Pain sensory did not appear to be too much different between his natural form and the alien body that he wore. The signals were the same, something was wrong and needed to be dealt with as soon as possible. He knew that fixing his wound would be impossible in his present form and he would have to wait for the agonisingly slow process of healing to begin.

Beating his wings with all his strength; he managed to get himself airborne. The Seeker tucked his feet in close to his body as he flew into the azure sky. Starscream cringed as the wind licked at his torn foot.

Thundercracker dove toward the pair of perplexed humans, concentrated and clapped his wings together, tips touching tips, and sent a small ball of air rushing at the men. The men were blown backward as they were hit by a controlled mini sonic boom.

"Those birds are super-natural...hey, don't the Indians have a thunderbird?" said Chris scrambling to feet grabbing the geese and gun.

"Yeah, but I thought that was just a myth."

"So did I, run.... that one is coming back at us!" The two men ran into the forest with Thundercracker following behind. The blue Seeker balled the air in front of him and pushed it with forward thrust of his wings. The men fell to the ground and Thundercracker, satisfied, pulled up and returned to his wingmates.

Skywarp flew ahead of Starscream, breaking the way through the air. Starscream resented being forced into a secondary position, grumbled deep in his throat as Thundercracker merged beside him. "Starscream is wounded," Skywarp informed him.

Thundercracker glanced at his commander and at the torn foot. "Bad?"

"I think it's just minor but I'll want to look at it soon." Starscream suppressed the hurt in his voice. "Land there by that stream," Starscream ordered.

"Don't forget to slow your speed down this time," reminded Skywarp as he flared his wings slowing his speed down.

Starscream ignored the dark Seeker's comment and prepared to land.

Our Goose is Cooked

Decepticon Badlands base: Alberta, Canada.

To a casual onlooker, the base appeared nothing more than a solid wall of rock. A holographic projection that was built into the force field, gave the base the look and feel of genuine stone.

Megatron watched the sun rise over the barren wastelands that the humans had called the badlands. The eroded rocks were bathed in golden light as they displayed the millions of years history compressed into thick layers of stone. Tall cliffs were black silhouettes against the rising ball of yellow fire.

There was still no word on the missing triad. Soundwave had even hijacked human satellites to enhance their ability to scour the planet in search of them. Sonar signals were sent into the lakes and oceans that flooded the world looking for any sign of the lost Decepticons.

Even radio and energy scans continued to pick up nothing. If they were alive they were underground in an area that contained vast amounts of nickel or iron ore. That was the only way they could remain hiding and Megatron knew there were a few such mines where they were last seen.

The Decepticon leader wondered if Starscream had captured the weapon and decided that he would keep it for himself. Perhaps he meant to use it in order to obtain leadership of the Decepticons.

Soundwave again recommended that they only capture the weapon and forget looking for the triad, that there would be nothing to be gained from the prolonged search, except wasted energy. The recommendation was acknowledged and ignored. Megatron decided he would still look for a sign of them.

The sound of footsteps beat out a steady cadence from the hall behind him. He turned to see Dirge.

"Do you have the weather report?" inquired Megatron of the approaching Seeker.

Dirge tipped his head as he glanced down at the meteorology report in his hand. "A dense low lying cloud system covers most of northern Ontario and Manitoba, with it heavy rains and possible thunderstorms. It's nothing that we can't handle," he reassured.

"We can use that as cover to mask our attack, anything else?" he asked taking the report, glancing it over and turning it off.

"No."

Megatron stood frowning. "Are the others prepared?"

"My team is ready for battle," the grim Seeker stated with a curt nod of his head.

"Very well then, we'll leave in fifteen minutes."

Megatron glanced out the window at the shadows shortening as the sun slowly rose. There remained a distinct possibility that the Seekers were still in the area, waiting for a suitable length of time before coming out. But if Starscream knew the search was closing in on him, he might panic, try to flee and therefore expose himself.

"Where are you?" he asked, looking into the blazing sun. "Your excuses had better be good when we find you, Starscream, or else you will suffer my wrath."

* * *

The Seekers were huddled together by the stream.

The morning brought thick grey clouds and a stiff breeze. The air was very bitter and chilled them to the bone. The leaves fell thick around the three Seekers as they sat close to each other. It had also lightly snowed during the night and that was slowly turning to an ice cold rain.

The Air Commander rested at an angle with his foot thrust out. He was unable to find himself a comfortable position and grumbled constantly to his wingmates irritation. Skywarp and Thundercracker did what they could to make their commander comfortable, if only to keep him quiet.

Starscream had been unable to sleep well, though his body burned blazingly hot, he felt icy cold despite his fluffed up feathers. He was confused as to why his body seemed to be getting hotter, he had not been doing any activity.

Thundercracker studied Starscream's foot closely and gently nudged it with his bill. Starscream groaned and pulled the foot away tearing loose the shreds. It seemed to glow as red as the leaf he had rested it on.

"Sorry Screamer, I can't help much with this, so stop your whimpering and don't move that foot."

Starscream glanced up at the blue Seeker. "What's wrong with it? Why is it looking like that?" he asked studying the swollen extremity, "it feels so hot."

Thundercracker looked thoughtful for a moment. "I am not familiar with heath issues not relating to transformers, but to me it would seem like it's um...infected." he leaned down and nudged the pieces back.

"Infected? Ouch...like a virus? Argh! Thundercracker, you're *hurting* me," said Starscream as he twisted away from his wingmate.

"You're such a wimp, Screamer," said Skywarp coming up from behind.

Starscream hissed an obscenity at the dark Seeker.

The blue Seeker again tried to place the fragments of skin back where they belonged and exhaled as Starscream jerked away it messing up his work. "For Primus sake, Starscream, will you hold still!" pleaded Thundercracker.

Skywarp sat himself beside his commander. He used his body to prevent Starscream from sliding away as Thundercracker worked.

The blue Seeker resumed his attempt at guiding the loose skin fragments back into position. "If you don't move your foot, the blood might dry and hold the pieces into place. Give it a day... maybe two. As for the infection, I suppose we'll let nature take its course with that."

Starscream glanced angrily down at the mess on the end of his leg. "Great. The longer we wait the less chance we are going to have to get ourselves back to normal. For all we know the humans might have moved it by now expecting another Decepticon attack."

Thundercracker glanced to the sky. "Yeah, I wonder why we haven't had another team come in yet. Surely they would come to retrieve our bodies if they thought we were dead."

Starscream remained silent.

"Couldn't we just go to the house and get our bodies back, and then return for Screamer?" asked Skywarp as he walked around pulling up tufts of grass. Piling them close to his commander.

"And who's gonna guard Starscream? He's easy prey to any hungry predator that walks by."

"Oh yeah, I didn't think of that."

"Anyway we all might need to be present for the change to occur properly. I'd sure hate to find myself stuck in Screamer's body. No, it's best if we remain where we are until his wound heals enough to allow him to walk about without tearing it."

Starscream observed his wingmates in silence. Thundercracker had taken the reigns of leadership. He was grateful for the care they had provided but he was irritated at having the decisions made for him. He decided he would not challenge the blue Seeker out of respect. However, he would deal with him in his own way when the time was right. He closed his eyes, shivered and suffered the illness in silence.

Skywarp added leaves and grasses to an ever growing pile in front of the Seeker and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Go away, I am trying to get some rest," Starscream snapped.

"C'mon Screamer, you haven't refuelled since yesterday afternoon, you must be needing it by now."

Starscream glanced at the pile of greens, snorted and tucked his bill back into his wing. "I am not feeling the need, Skywarp, I will have it later," came the muffled response.

The dark grey clouds drifted overhead bringing with it more cold rain. Starscream blinked in displeasure as the heavy drops splattered around him. Thundercracker glanced at Skywarp as he settled down beside Starscream. He spread a wing over his commander's back.

Skywarp hesitated before he did the same. Together they attempted to provide both warmth and shelter to their leader.

Hours passed on and the three Seekers sat silently. Skywarp and Thundercracker were unsure of what to do with Starscream, his health seemed to be deteriorating rapidly as the infection spread further into his avian body. His foot and leg was fully inflamed, crusted and was oozing in places.

Starscream had never experienced anything quite like this before. Sure he had infections over the years from viruses, but they were easily eliminated and in the worst case required nothing more than a quick diagnostic by one of the base medics. For the most part, his body was able to keep microscopic impurities at bay on its own.

He could not understand why a flesh creature's body was unable to fulfil the function of battling hostile intrusions, or was it a learned reflex. He did not know and for the moment, he did not care. Starscream grumbled to himself, feeling miserable.

He gingerly pulled the tattered appendage under his body where he could warm it. The pieces luckily, were held together by the tentative crust and the leaf that had adhered to the sole of his foot. The leg felt stiff, sore and throbbing from being held in the awkward position for such a long period of time. The throb turned into a numbing tingle before it returned to its normal ache.

The sound of thunder rumbled in the distance, Starscream groaned expecting an onslaught of torrential rains, then paused. The rumble did not die. Instead it remained as a constant thrum.

The Air Commander un-tucked his head from his wing and cocked an ear to the sky listening intently. "Thundercracker, Skywarp, do you hear that?" he whispered.

Thundercracker turned his head for a moment. "No I don't. You're hearing things Starscream, you're not well."

"No, I'm fine, listen harder," he insisted.

Thundercracker did as he was asked shaking his head at his leader. "That's just thunder, Starscream."

"No, it's not. Those are jet engines."

The blue Seeker sighed. "It's probably just a human jet liner, or something flying over," he said. Thundercracker folded his wings to his sides as his wounded wingmate shifted

excitedly.

Starscream stood up favouring his infected foot, shivering as the cold damp air blasted over him ruffling his feathers. He concentrated on the sound as it approached becoming rapidly louder, he could discern four separate rumbles. "No, it is not a jet liner. You are not listening, Thundercracker, it is the Coneheads and, I think, yes, Megatron." He hopped forward placing his wounded foot down for a moment. Starscream glanced at the western sky, he could see four specks breaking out of the clouds. "They are coming for us!" he shouted in jubilation, hobbling forward.

"Starscream are you *insane*? They won't even recognise us," Thundercracker warned following close behind his commander.

"They must," said Starscream hopping into a partial run as he launched himself into the air.

Three jets flew over their heads in an attack formation, followed by Megatron. The air rumbled as they passed.

"It *is* Megatron! We must get there before they destroy that weapon, it is our *only* hope," he called to his wingmates.

"Screamer are you *stupid*? Come back! They're a thousand times faster than we are," Skywarp shouted as he glanced at Thundercracker.

"We'd better follow him," the blue Seeker replied running and launching into the air as well.

Skywarp nodded and the followed him into the sky. With strong beats of their wings they quickly overtook their leader. Skywarp tried to take the point in order to help his ill commander save his strength. However Starscream, seemingly revitalised, snapped at his tail feathers and Skywarp fell back to his usual position

So Scream's a Goose

Northern Ontario:

Megatron flew above and behind the three Seekers as they exited the thick clouds. The forest that stretched out below them was a patchwork of bright colours. He glanced deep into the trees searching, watching: finding nothing. The forest of reds and oranges abruptly changed to a flat field of browns and greens. That continued until it met the tall fieldstone and concrete wall.

He stifled an urge to call out his lieutenant's name, "Decepticon's *attack!*" he ordered instead.

Thrust suddenly accelerated to twice his speed. He shot past the building flying low with a thunderous roar. The very foundations of the structure shook and the windows exploded outward in a spray of glistening shards. The Seeker cut his engines and turned quickly on his wing. He flew by once more, opening his throttle full as he passed over the outer walls. The resulting sonic boom caused them to crack, sending chunks of concrete and stone crashing to the ground, crushing those who were unfortunate enough to get in the way.

The roof slid open and the weapon platform was raised. Megatron's optics locked on, this was his prize, this was what he was here for. He wanted it for himself. But if the weapon was still here, then that must mean Starscream and his wingmates were destroyed. There would be no search, then, for the missing Seekers. He would collect the cannon and leave.

His lips curled into a cruel smile. He knew that the deaths of the three Decepticons meant that this device was something to be reckoned with. A weapon most worthy of being in Decepticon control. 'I must have it.' He thought. Megatron envisioned himself vaporising Optimus Prime and half the Autobots in a single shot.

A laser bolt that had passed close to the huge cannon brought Megatron out of his moment of contemplation. "Ramjet, Thrust cease your attacks, you two are going to destroy my weapon." The two attacking Seekers stopped their firing and flew in intimidating circles around the structure.

"Dirge I want you to fly in and create a symphony of terror. Ramjet, Thrust withdraw." The grim Seeker had one method that would render the humans helpless without undue harm to his prize.

* * *

The ground passed below Starscream as he quickly flew toward the building in the distance. Already he could hear the thunder of weapon fire and he could easily see the Decepticons as they attacked. He was buoyed by hope, it flooded his boiling veins with strength and energy that he had not possessed earlier.

"Starscream, are you mad?" shouted Thundercracker, "you're leading us into the middle

of a fire fight!"

"I am not insane!" he said in defence.

"You're not thinking with your head," Thundercracker responded.

"He's not thinking with anything," muttered Skywarp.

Starscream ignored Skywarp's snide comment. "Thundercracker, you are quite welcome to stay behind, but I want back what is mine and I am going to have it."

"Starscream, we'll be killed."

"If you and Skywarp want to remain as geese, that is your choice, not mine. I do not want to die in this body," he said as he concentrated on conducting his strength into his wings and surged forth.

"Screamer, those are the *Coneheads* out there. If they see us, we're history," Thundercracker warned.

Skywarp teleported ahead so he could fly beside Starscream. "C'mon, have you even thought for a moment about the humiliation we're gonna suffer when they find out what has actually happened to us?" he said with worry. "It's very unlikely that they're gonna let us live this down and I know that you of all people hate to be made into a joke."

Starscream slowed his flight down for a moment and Thundercracker caught up. "You have a point, Skywarp. But I am not going to stay like this, we have no other choice. If Megatron takes the weapon then we will have to fly over three thousand kilometres to get to it. Trust me, we have to do this now or remain trapped forever as geese."

And then he felt it, the vibrations that sent unrelenting panic through his body. Starscream's blood ran cold as the uncontrolled irrational terror flooded him. He could see his wingmates were similarly effected. He changed his course so he could fly a large circle around the source of the fear.

* * *

Dirge flew in low over the crumbling house. He could feel the prickle of human projectiles hitting his tough armoured body. "It'll take more than that to stop me," he taunted at the gunmen.

'It's time to change the beat to something more sombre,' he thought to himself.

Dirge altered the running frequency of his engines and they erupted in a circuit chilling sound that rained fear down upon the humans. He felt a surge of disappointment as his wingmates were ordered away. He gazed after them as they scuttled to the fringes of his forbidding influence.

Mournfully Dirge flew alone. He was always alone when he was required to use the power of his engines. He believed there was little appreciation of his endeavours. Only a

few could understand the skill it took to produce such disturbing tones and no one could stand to be around him when he filled the sparks of the living with the promise of death. Even his closest wingmates would remain creeped out for hours or even days after if they were caught within it's touch. Despite all this, it was music to his audios.

Megatron and his team members refrained from attacking. This was to allow his special sound to penetrate the humans to the bone without interference. The patter of heavy rain hitting the pavement and the wind rustling in the trees helped add an ominous presence to the atmosphere.

He changed the engine's rate of vibration so as to create a melody of terror. The sound rose in pitch to a level just above human hearing then dropped abruptly down to a rumbling bass that sent waves of fear through the very Earth and sky.

He was pleased with the overall situation, it was under his complete control. "All should fear me, for I am Dirge, the bringer of *doom*," he called out tauntingly. His voice blended with the eerie resonance that he alone created.

The men below stopped in their tracks and stared at the circling jet frozen in fear. Their weapons dropped from their numbed fingers with a clatter. After a few moments their souls thawed and they ran to the house for cover, their voices mute with terror.

"Dirge, seize that weapon." Megatron's booming voice ordered over the frightening throb of the Seeker's engines.

The grim Seeker transformed and landed on the platform as he did, the sound of terror abruptly died. Dirge glanced down at the base of the machine. He spotted a man in a long white lab coat cowering with his hands over his head. "Death will be your companion if you don't leave immediately," he said grimly aiming his weapon. Without a word, the man quickly scurried into the building.

"I've acquired the target, Megatron," he said glancing around for someone unlucky enough to be within his range. He poked around at the control panel with his finger until the weapon whined as it charged with power.

* * *

The three Seekers circled around in confusion. They were visibly upset by the sound that assaulted their sensitive hearing.

Dirge's engines had unnerved him and Starscream floundered in his flight. He felt the weariness of his illness take hold once again as the strains of fear cancelled out whatever it was that had given him that boost of strength. However, he did not wish to fly too far away from the area lest he miss his chance to somehow get his body back.

"Starscream?" asked Skywarp closing in on him. "Are you okay?"

"No," he said, "we are going to be trapped like this forever," Starscream wailed, his words ended in a ragged honk.

"It's okay Starscream, it's only Dirge. You mustn't let him affect you. I know it's insane but you are right, we must carry on before that weapon is taken from us, we need to regain ourselves." Thundercracker tried to console his distraught wingmate despite sharing the same feelings of hopelessness.

"C'mon Screamer where is that extra energy you found?" inquired Skywarp. "Your excitement had us all going."

As abruptly as it started the sound ceased. Starscream felt the all consuming terror fade from his spark although it had left its mark. He changed his course and flew with trepidation toward the house realising that he had better not give up on hope. His wingmates were relying on him to make the correct command decision. "We will continue," he said giving himself a little shake as if to remove the last vestiges of fear.

The energy he had before was lost and all that was left was the battered down strength of his own will. "Megatron, It's me, *Starscream!*" he shouted his voice sounded thin and weak, "*Megatron!*"

"Starscream, I doubt they can understand us," Thundercracker called back. "If they can even hear us."

Starscream glanced back at his wingmate for a moment, "No, we can understand them... surely they must be able to..." his eyes grew wide as he realised what was about to happen. Ahead of them Dirge was manning the cannon and had it fixed on their position. "Dirge, no, don't shoot.... stop! You don't know what you are doing. You could kill us!"

Thundercracker and Skywarp began to call frantically to the Decepticons hoping on the off chance that they could be understood and the attack stopped. Their voices were too light to carry very far.

"*Evasive manoeuvres!*" Starscream cried out as the beam of red energy shot towards them. His wingmates split formation and Starscream nosed down toward the ground but too late.

Skywarp and Thundercracker screamed as they crashed into the ground, their feathers flying away from their bodies as they were engulfed by the energy beam. Starscream gasped in pain as he impacted the Earth with a sickening thud and abruptly blacked out.

* * *

Starscream felt a sharp jolt in his leg as someone kicked him near his wounded foot. He instinctively checked his internal diagnostics as soon as he had become conscious. All his systems and sub systems checked out. His fuel pump was running a bit faster than normal. His personal energy levels were very low. He would have to find some energon before he could go anywhere distant.

His diagnostic readouts reassured him that the impact into the ground had not damaged anything other than rattle his circuits. He had thought for certain that he had sustained broken bones when he had fallen and then he realised the reality of the situation; he had

no bones. He had his own metal body back.

He brought his optics on line. He glanced down and saw Skywarp's amethyst fist almost in his face. "Get off me you great oaf," he grunted as he shoved his wingmate's arm off his chest.

"What the slag?" asked Dirge perplexed.

Thrust grinned down at the Seekers and gave Starscream another jab with his foot as Megatron arrived on the scene.

Megatron was unable to completely banish the smile that toyed at his lips as he surveyed the tableaux.

Thundercracker, who had landed face down into the soft ground, had pushed himself to his knees and was spitting, mud, leaves and grass from his mouth. Starscream and Skywarp had crashed on their backs, their arms and legs askew. All three were covered in mud.

"Hey Megatron, it looks like we found the missing Seekers," Ramjet said followed by raucous laughter.

"Thundercracker, you mud kisser," Thrust jeered, "I didn't think you liked the Earth that much." Ramjet and Dirge chuckled at the insult.

Skywarp groaned as he sat up.

Starscream tried in vain to make himself look dignified as he met the amused stares of the Coneheads and Megatron. He averted his optics and cringed with a strong sense of humiliation. Skywarp had tried to warn him that he would end up feeling like this.

"How degrading," Starscream muttered to Skywarp, trying not to look into the face of his smirking leader.

"Yeah, tell me about it," agreed Skywarp wiping mud spatters from his canopy.

The blue Seeker pushed himself to his feet. "We're back," he said glancing down at his grime covered hands with a frown. He flexed his fingers and flicked his wrists trying to shake the sticky mud off of them. "Ugh, I need to wash," he grumbled.

Starscream glanced down at his foot, it was still quite painful and torn to shreds, it appeared the damage was translated from flesh to metal, blood to energon, but he no longer felt the burn of infection that his avian body had sustained. But to be on the safe side he decided he would run a scan when the first opportunity presented itself.

The only adverse effect he felt was the drained feeling he had from not consuming the fuel that his wingmates had carefully gathered for him in his weakened condition.

He realised, as embarrassing as the situation was, he was glad to have his own body back under any circumstance.

Megatron reached down and pulled Starscream to his feet by his arm. "So this is where you've been hiding, " he said glancing at the three Seekers.

"Yes, mighty Megatron," came Starscream's rasping voice. He was annoyed with Megatron's tone. It seemed to sound as if he had been expecting him to have been off plotting treason.

"I am going to want a full report on this incident as soon as we return to the Nemesis, Starscream. I want to know how this happened. What your theories are, if you have any, on the function of this weapon and how this whole screw up of *yours* could have been prevented," he sneered.

Starscream scowled with fury that was barely contained. The blame for failure was, as usual, heaped upon his shoulders. Feelings of hurt and anger was added to his all ready heavy burden embarrassment and humiliation. If he wanted to make a report, he would do it for his own reference in his own datapad. Not for someone else and certainly not for Megatron.

He believed that Megatron was being completely unfair. It was not his fault that he and his wingmates had been transformed into geese. Had Megatron only taken the time to research what the weapon actually was, the whole situation might have been averted. A different tactic could have been found and the cannon might have been taken with little problem.

Megatron allowed himself to smile, "I also want to know..."

Without warning, the Air Commander turned and fired his rifles at the device that Dirge had left unattended. It exploded with a deafening boom scattering its fragments in all directions. "If you want *your* precious weapon, go pick up the pieces yourself," he snapped. Starscream regretted, almost instantly, his impulsive action and words.

Megatron stood dumbfounded as he watched smoke issue forth from what was left of his new acquisition. "*My* weapon! *You've* destroyed *my* weapon! How dare you Starscream!"

Starscream backed away from his leader holding up his hands beseechingly. Megatron suddenly lashed out and smashed the frightened Air Commander across the face with his fist.

The Seeker spun and fell face first into the mud. He pushed himself back to his feet and rubbed his hand along his jaw. He could detect small dents in his chin's surface. Starscream glanced at his mud stained fingertips and saw a small smear of energon. "Good to see you too, Megatron," Starscream muttered in a sour voice.

"You three are a disgrace, get yourselves cleaned up and then we'll return to base."

Skywarp and Thundercracker quickly flew down to the lake and dove in to quickly cleanse themselves of the filth.

Starscream stayed where he was for a moment regarding Megatron. "If you don't mind, leader, I noticed a small hydro-electric dam about ten kilometres west of here, I was

wondering if we could stop to re-fuel there?" he asked hopefully.

Megatron ignored the question, instead he turned his attention from his second in command to the weapons facility behind him. "There is nothing left for me here but ruins," he snarled. Enraged; the Decepticon leader raised his fusion cannon and fired.

Starscream's optics brightened with terror as he jumped out the way. The fusion blast struck the building, swallowing it in an orange plume of flame and smoke. The heat rose quickly into the air sucking up the smoke and formed a mushroom cloud. The building crackled as the fire consumed what remained of the scattered timber frame.

Megatron turned back to Starscream, who stepped away, mouth slack, quivering with worry. "Yes, Starscream, we'll stop at that dam, but first you'll clean yourself up," he snapped gesturing at the lake and his wingmates.

The Air Commander exhaled a sigh of relief as he walked cautiously over to the edge of the lake casting glances back at his leader. Starscream paused for a moment to watch his wingmates's cleaning activities before he entered the water. As soon as he was deep enough, Skywarp and Thundercracker launched at him from both sides and assisted to scrub the mud from his joints, his back and wings.

When they were done, the Seekers shot into the sky. Megatron and the Coneheads followed as they made their way to the dam Starscream had spoken of to refuel.

Starscream, Skywarp and Thundercracker would never forget their experience of having an organic body. It was something they knew that they would not be allowed to forget. They figured that they would have constant reminders from their comrades-in-arms.

Starscream only hoped that this incident would not have any negative effect on his career as Sub Commander, or ruin his chances at, one day, becoming the leader of the Decepticons.

...Flock Together

Back on the Nemesis:

"What happened? Where are they?" Megatron's voice boomed across the control room as Soundwave informed him of the Seeker's abrupt disappearance.

"Unknown: Seekers vanished," he intoned.

"Could they have hidden themselves?" Megatron asked.

"Negative: Terrain unsuitable for hiding," was the immediate response.

"Hail them on radio."

Soundwave turned some dials and pressed the communications button. "Starscream: Report status." There came no reply. "Thundercracker, Skywarp: Report your situation. "There was a long crackling of static and the Seeker's voices remained silent.

Megatron stared at the blank view screen for what seemed an eternity. "Keep trying to raise them," he ordered the blue mech. "I'll send out a search party."

"Unwise: Scans have detected an energy spike before disappearance. Seeker's silence indicates destruction," Soundwave informed his leader.

"Are you one hundred percent certain of that?" demanded Megatron.

"Negative: I shall continue to scan," Soundwave replied dutifully setting up for a planet wide grid search.

Megatron turned from Soundwave leaving the control room ignoring the comments from the other Decepticons. He hoped Soundwave was wrong and the Seekers were only injured and recovering somewhere secure.

* * *

The sun had set on the forest and three Seekers continued their walk.

"We're lost," sighed Thundercracker.

"No we are not," replied Starscream tartly, pausing in his stride.

"Just admit it Starscream, you *haven't* a clue where we even are," snapped Skywarp. "Anyway, I'm tired and low on energy. Couldn't we just stop for the night?"

Starscream glanced at the star spangled sky and the crescent moon. He looked back at his wingmates. Skywarp hung his head low and his eyes were half lidded.

Thundercracker's wings sagged slightly. Starscream also felt the fatigue and the energy drain. Skywarp was on the mark, they were lost. He was not sure that they were anywhere close to that house. 'If only I could get above the trees to take a fix on the landscape then we can get there in good time.'

He sighed and turned to his companions. "We shall stop, but one of us must remain awake to watch over as the other two rest. I'll take the first, Thundercracker the second and Skywarp the third."

"How do you propose we tell the time, Starscream? It's not like we have our chronometers with us," snapped Thundercracker.

"You two are familiar with the lunar cycle of this world. Use that as your guide for figuring out the approximate time."

Thundercracker nodded.

"Now get some rest and I'll watch over you."

The two Seekers settled themselves down beside Starscream. Their bodies pressing in close to their commander for both protection and warmth. Starscream sighed with a windy hiss as he glanced around. His wingmates tucked their beaks into their feathers. He could see Skywarp's eye glisten in the moonlight before the thin lid fell across it.

'What would we do?' he wondered, 'should we be unable to reverse the process?' That was a thought that did not play well with the Air Commander. He had no desire in being trapped for the rest of his life, in a bird's body.

'What was going on back at base?' he wondered. Starscream knew that the moment they were transformed into small fleshy birds, they were lost to radar. 'Megatron must think we are dead and that this place is perhaps too dangerous to send in another attack, we are on our own.' He sighed.

As the sky brightened with the glow of stars and the dance of an aurora, the air became biting cold. Starscream fluffed up his feathers to fight off the chill. He watched his breath as it came out in misty wisps. He studied the moon for a few hours as it sank lower into the sky. The air around him became so frigid that the grass and leaves became frosted in a thin coating of ice.

After what seemed to be a long enough watch to him, he twisted his neck and pecked Thundercracker on the back of his head. Thundercracker awoke with a startled honk. Starscream hissed at him to keep quiet.

"Is there trouble?" he asked. "I had this horrible dream that we..." he cut off his words and looked at Starscream who glared at him. "Right, my watch," Thundercracker said gruffly.

"If there is any trouble wake me right away." Starscream fluffed up his feathers, tucked in his beak and fell asleep.

* * *

Starscream was awakened by a hard thump to the back of his body. Skywarp stood over him hissing with his wings outstretched. "What tha?"

Thundercracker stood beside Skywarp in a similar posture. Starscream jerked his head up and spotted a bobcat standing not more than three feet from him. He looked at the long teeth in the feline's mouth and shrieked in panic.

Starscream quickly stood up and spread his wings, He was unsure why he was doing this and how it would help but it seemed like a good idea. "We are going to learn to fly... Skywarp hold it off."

"What? Me? Why me? Why do I have to distract the cat?"

"Because you can teleport," said Starscream turning quickly to run, he extended his wings and started to beat. 'There is a movement, a natural twist of the wings.' He could feel the wind under his wings. The air was starting to bear his weight. "Thundercracker, do as I do. Follow now," Starscream squawked. His feet lifted from the ground and he rose into the air with each down stroke.

"What about Skywarp? He's gonna get killed!"

"He can teleport into formation."

"He'll not be moving at our speed."

"Do as I say, now *fly* Thundercracker!"

The blue Seeker turned on his webbed feet and ran. He mimicked Starscream's motions and soon found himself airborne.

Skywarp twisted his neck to look at the two fleeing Seekers. He turned his attention back on the huge cat and swallowed. "Hey, look guys... this cat *can* also fly," he said as the animal lunged at him.