Sunrise

by seekingjets

Summary

On Hiatus
-

After Skyfire’s resurrection and subsequent desertion, Megatron finds himself responsible for reeling his Second in Command back from a precarious edge --- learning more comes with a seeker’s renewed loyalty than just vows of allegiance..

Aka: Jealousy is a strangely powerful thing.
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(Set directly after the events of “Fire in the Sky” and diverging graciously from there.)
The beginning of this fic DOES deal with canon-typical abuse between Megatron and Starscream. BUT FOR A REASON and I promise is not a constant theme of this fic, but a point to be made. Read with caution.

Also: Pretend Skyfire was with the Decepticons for a longer amount of time than the afternoon of first meetings shown in the cartoon. (Like, a month or something) I'm also not going to fact check which Cons were present. Cause I do not want to. :)

As always, please excuse any egregious grammatical errors and misspellings, I’m never one to edit past a general review

I have never held myself to the tethers of canon and I will not start now.
The return to the Nemesis reeked in defeat and embarrassment, one Megatron knew would sour the morale of his soldiers for time to come. They were not graceful losers, often quick to snap and bicker among themselves when frustration gained the upper hand. He’d need Soundwave running tighter surveillance, prepare to run interference on any squabbles which might lead to in-faction fighting. It was protocol to go into lock-down after a defeat and the restless nature of his soldiers - especially those with a natural disposition to claustrophobia - had already begun to raise the tension in the underwater base. It would be managed, as always, with a strict schedule and a reminder of obedience to their cause. This strain would pass and they would try again. United.

And then there was Starscream.

Megatron had been near when the unholy sound ripped its way from the medbay and caused even the heartiest of soldier to flinch. Soundwave’s visor glistened in running code, nodding, their flat tone explaining “Starscream. Online.” as Megatron took one step towards the surgical suite doors just as Hook pushed his way out.

“Get his trine!” He snapped, clutching what looked like a deep puncture in his servo, dripping pale pink down the wrist joint. No sooner had he spoken a crackle of electricity and the brief scorch of oxygen as Skywarp and Thundercracker appeared. Pushing their way into the room as the medical officer yelled: “The slag were you two?!”

Skywarp flipped him off with a crude human gesture and the once busy hall of sparsely injured soldiers went silent as another screech followed Thundercracker’s voice. Hook just looked tired when Megatron approached, the frowning Constructicon thumbing his nose towards the suite and turned nearly into his leader’s chest. Startled and apologetic with surprise.

While Megatron had suffered the humiliation of being tossed aside by the unearthed Cybertronician, it was Starscream who took the most damage of all present in the skirmish. Astrotrain had been summoned to lift the Air-Commander back to base, though Megatron had only heard of the injury upon his return. The sensitive seekers grew twitchy waiting for news of Starscream’s wellbeing. Which Megatron always found hysterical how quickly the emotional builds turned on one another...then fell apart the next.

“We’re gonna need to pick at our supply. He took some damage.” Hook updated Megatron without need to be asked, appreciated. “Nothing life threatening but the mid-air collision tore out a decent amount of his undercarriage. Got the broken fuel lines secured for the time being but more than one will need full replacement.” Megatron only clicked his vocals in acknowledgement, listening as the seekers inside began to argue at an impressive volume. A few soldiers hugged their laser-seared limbs and decided to bow out - glancing nervously at the suite doors. Having clearly decided their injuries were not worth whatever mood the seeker commander might be in.

While the excursion had not been a total waste, Megatron had been determined to speak with Starscream on what /exactly/ had occurred in the frozen wasteland. Wring it out of his neck if necessary, but from the abrupt crash of equipment and the crackling appearance of Skywarp outside the doors, Megatron accepted Starscream would likely not be in a position to discuss recent failures. Skywarp glanced back over a wing and made an apologetic face.
“He’s uh….in a bad mood.”

Seconds later said seeker appeared, bursting through the doors with blue servos clawing at his side over the startling damages. Armor cracked in a fragmented web down his torso, dried and fresh fuel swelling in the seams. Starscream’s face was drawn into something hideous, not of pain, but of utter and absolute contempt to some ghost only he could see. Each dragging step the seeker took Megatron could hear the strangled whine of some part of his anatomy, crushed and begging for relief.

Beside him, Hook let out a groan. “Why do I bother fixing him if he’s just gonna break himself more?”

Thundercracker was pulling his trine-leader back with firm but careful hands and for his efforts received a threat of which even Megatron could not translate. Skywarp took his place, trying to slow down Starscream’s progression and the trine fell into their native tongue. Sharp, quick language of Vos, as airy as the open sky and bladed like their long-fallen towers. The argument grew and the three sounded like plated serpents bickering over a meal. Brittle language piercing their audience’s receptors.

One word stuck out, repeated by the Air-Commander as he struggled against his trine. A shared term in Tarnish, though it sounded prettier in the seeker’s mouth. Kill. Starscream bit and dug blue claws into his trine-mate’s collar when they couldn’t contain him. Kill.

Skywarp grew weary of the fumbling and grabbed Starscream’s throat when his trine-leader bared sharpened denta in warning. The sight drew Megatron to act. “Enough!” His tone shattered the glass-language, heavy and loud where he stood just out of reach. He noted fuel dripping a steady stream down Starscream’s pale leg and an impossible fury rose through his processor. “You injured fool, keep struggling and I’ll kill you faster than you can do it yourself!”

Megatron saw Thundercracker’s face tighten with a wince, apparently disagreeing with his choice of words which only stilled Starscream but a moment. The dark face curled in disgust towards him, optics so bright with frustration that it cast red light across his cheeks and mouth - so that when he spoke the fuel staining his lips was red.

“You. Utter. Coward!” Skywarp almost let go as Starscream’s vents roared past what was safe. “Decrepit and worthless--”

“Starscream!” Thundercracker gave his trine-mate a shake, optics darting between Starscream and the poor focus of his ire. “Shut up!” It wasn’t enough, Starscream wretched his arm from Thundercracker’s hold and the nullray (Which Hook apparently forgot to remove as was customary whenever Starscream underwent repair. For everyone’s safety.) was thrust upwards, level with Megatron’s gaze. Only Skywarp acted quick enough, slamming his shoulder against Starscream’s injured side, choking out the building charge as his commander was overwhelmed with pain. Violet spilled across the floor and smeared when Megatron’s pede stepped across, the red seeker optics unchanged from their thin fury.

“I order you to stand down!” Megatron bellowed.

Starscream spat fuel in his face.

“Megatron wait!” Was Thundercracker’s plea before a thick fist slammed into the side of the seeker’s dark helm, almost knocking the tangled three to the ground at the force. Skywarp managed to catch most of the weight, arms locked around a waist where Starscream slumped, limp and quiet. Thundercracker’s fretting servos delving beneath the layers of armor: searching a pulse. The two
alert seekers humming together in unison as Starscream’s stuttering intake filled a panicked silence. “He’s out again.” One confirmed and Megatron relaxed his stance.

“Get him back on that bench. Strap him in if you have to,” Voice dark as he watched the two struggle to lift their third. When Skywarp’s pede slipped Megatron reached in, scruffing the unconscious seeker at the back of his wings (one was bent at a terrible angle, blackened with smoke and cracked armor) and lifted Starscream himself. “Hook. Here's your priority.” He pretends not to hear the sarcastic “as always” from a nearby onlooker and hands the wilted form to the engineer. “Take what you need from our stores, I want him up and running as soon as feasible, we have a conversation waiting.” Hook nods and Thundercracker moves to assist him, almost delicate with how he maneuvers Starscream’s wings into a lower position to get through the door. Skywarp holds the doors open with a cautious frown.

“Thundercracker, assume command of the air division.” Barks the order and catches Thundercracker hesitation.

“Yessir. Um. Until when sir?”

Megatron takes in Starscream’s still form, optics gone dark and only the strained purr of his breathing to show he was still alive. Not for the first time something ugly and unwanted twists Megatron’s thoughts because of the intolerable seeker. By all rights he should limit what resources they wasted on the mech who so openly defined him just then. “Until I decide if it's permanent.” Soundwave falls into line as his shadow and departs in silence.

They were almost in surplus from what had been harvested before the Autobot interruption, to which Megatron was not satisfied but his dark mood lifted at some good news. Soundwave adjusted rations accordingly and left Megatron to the bridge, overseeing the few on duty to maintain the basic needs of the stationary Nemesis and the ongoing production of the Victory beneath the Earth sea.

The Seekers in his company would need to be watched carefully, never doing well in confined spaces especially without Starscream as a distraction. It was certainly more of a gesture to put Thundercracker in charge seeing as how Megatron only gained the service of such winged community due to Starscream and his Trine’s recruitment and appealing strength. Starscream ruled the aerial force by his own worth while Thundercracker lacked a certain charisma to keep such a group in line. Afterall the blue jet could hardly keep Skywarp out of trouble let alone the entire seeker formation.

Though Megatron knew he’d gained favor over the seekers these millions of years and could give orders as a rightful ruler...he still deferred to Starscream to command them as a whole and to manage their daily routine. Having his Air Commander out of sorts would not bode well with this self-assigned lockdown. Seekers did not like to be kept inside for too long and whatever tricks or talents Starscream utilized to keep the emotional builds in line - Megatron wondered if his own command of the aerial force would be tested should his second not regain his damn sense in time.

Thinking on that...Starscream’s outburst was...unexpected. To be in honest, Megatron sitting at his throne pondering the events of the day, he was hardly shocked being the victim of Starscream’s violent language. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last. He’d long-since accepted Starscream would only bend as far as he pleased under command and the rest was careful tactics to maintain what was given. Unfortunate the seeker was simply /so/ good at usurping the ambitions of lower ranks. At his side, Megatron knew Starscream would handle any starry-eyed subordinate who thought themselves a potential replacement on Megatron’s seat. It left him with only one mech to watch out for instead of an army.

He could, and has, spent weeks balancing Starscream’s benefits against his aggravations. One
always outweighed the other and thusly Starscream maintained his position and had been of little interruption of late.

So it was tragic that uncovering this former colleague caused this disruption in Starscream’s stretch of obedience. One might have said he was very nearly pleasant until the tantrum, demanding the resurrection of the bot who very nearly killed him in return.

Skyfire. Megatron felt his servo tighten and the arm of his throne groaned in protest. A few mechs at their consoles daring to glance past their shoulders in worry.

Starscream had been so, desperate. So eager for the return of his former partner that he’d looked at Megatron with an expression of hopefulness that Megatron had not seen on the jet in some time. A mistake unadmitted on Megatron’s part, allowing himself to be distracted by Starscream’s rare earnest moment as they repaired the shuttle. Taller than Megatron, able to toss him away like some brittle sparkling toy. For the disgrace alone Megatron would fell Skyfire one day, but as it stood Starscream was taking the situation highly personal. It had been millions of years since Skyfire was separated from the other and Starscream had still put his own honor on the line, vouching for the shuttle’s capabilities and worth.

It seemed more than embarrassment that sent Starscream spiraling. Repeating kill in his native voice with a look equal to the word in his optics.

Megatron hated to be charmed by it, really, but at times he remembers how and why Starscream remains his Second in Command. He’s too clever and vicious to stand anywhere else and there was no predicting Starscream’s moods. Whether this led to another fit of treacherous schemes or if his Second could withstand the wounded ego to return to him - it would remain to be seen.

He gives it two solar days before checking on the seeker, it’s the longest he can tolerate without seeing for himself that Starscream was still contained and not lurking in the shadows plotting.

“We’ve had to keep him sedated.” Hook explains as Megatron looks over the heavily strapped body on the table, multiple power lines and off-colored tubes stuck into various panels across Starscream’s body. It feels indecent to stare but he’s never seen the other with a placid look on his face - it’s almost worrying. He notices Starscream has dimples. Likely worried into his metal from the constant smirking or snarling. “If he gains enough strength he goes berserk.” Hook waves a servo in the seeker’s direction and Megatron makes note of the crescent moon shape of bite marks left in the dented metal of the medic’s palm. He tries not to find it amusing.

“Have you had any issues with repairs?”

“No, not really.” He shrugs seemingly confident with his statement. “I’ve become accustomed to putting these jets back together - plus they’re damn adept at self repair. Shouldn't be too much longer til he's back throwing claws around.” Megatron grunts his response. “Other seekers keep trying to visit.” Hook mentions, tone as curious as the statement.

“Which?”

“Most of them?” The medic adjusts some pump filtering Starscream’s fuel lines and checks layers of netting laid across the damaged side, satisfied with what he finds beneath. “I can never tell if they're concerned or hoping he's dead. Like vulture-droids hovering around death. Only let his trine in though.” Reassuring Megatron that his Second would not be in any further danger than himself. “For now, just need to get surface components up and running. Shouldn’t be more than a solar cycle or two.”
“Keep me updated.”

“Of course.” Megatron doesn’t reach the exit before Hook speaks up again from his seat, having gained the courage to ask… “That big mech, the one we got up and running?”

“Skyfire.”

“Right. Him. When Starscream brought him in for repair and a few updates, they seemed...pretty cozy.” Megatron turned a glare on the medic who reacted with a shrinking glance downward. “Just thought you needed to know. What with the defection and Starscream’s fit.” Hook wasn’t prepared for the speed in which Megatron closed the distance between them, one servo tight on the console by the mech’s head. Optics wide, the constructicon curled inward, a comical sight if Megatron wasn't the cause of his terror.

“You'll keep that to yourself.” His voice reverberates low enough that glass pieces on Hook’s workbench quake in response. Same as the constructicon. “Send your security feed to Soundwave and leave the espionage to those suited for it.”

“Yessir.” The engineer shifted uncomfortably under the examination of his superior.

“And Hook, next time Starscream comes in for repair and his weapons get turned on me, I’m holding you responsible.”

Three solar days pass and the seekers have begun to show their agitation.

Not unexpected, a week of being cooped up beneath waters has a strenuous affect on all those in the Decepticon base - but seekers have never been ones to contain their irritation. Soundwave does their best to monitor the movements of the more aggressive trines - the ones Starscream favors to use when a frontal assault is their best option - and it only gives the briefest of warning as Megatron arrives just in time to watch a conehead fling a Reflector unit across the mess hall. His presence should be enough, but the Decepticon leader finds he’s required to put himself between the snapping spy and the charging seeker to end the aggression. His faceplate turned in a challenge should the jet continue his course of action. Megatron notices a few other seekers whispering the corner, red optics glittering suspicious and thin as they depart at Megatron’s orders. He feels a tension group and once the mess is cleared summons Thundercracker to the command centre for a talk.

“Are you having problems keeping your division in line?”

“No sir.” Thundercracker was forced to leave Skywarp outside, the purple jet looking quite scandalized at the idea of separation. No doubt he was pacing the halls and considering using his warp drive to defy orders. Without Starscream present it seemed even Skywarp had become a touch more daring. Thundercracker knew his wing-mate’s antics better than anyone but only Starscream had ever seemed interested in punishing him for misdeeds.

“Soundwave tells me we’ve lost communications with your sector of the base, can you explain that to me?”

Thundercracker’s expression made it very clear he certainly did not /want/ to explain that.

“One of the - uh - stealth trines attempted to modify the network throughout our territory.” Megatron wondered what was worse - Thundercracker’s attempt at lying or referring to the allotted space for seekers as /their territory/. “It was more complicated than they expected, but we’ll have it fixed immediately.

“We’ve been through lockdown protocols before, for much longer than this.” It was out of habit that
he looked to his left, expecting Starscream there, relishing any moment where another soldier was under examination. It irritated him that the space was vacant and quiet. “Are you confident that you can keep this mess under control until Starscream is reinstated?”

“You’re giving him back command?” The jet was too hopeful in tone and that brought about more questions. After Starscream’s display a more reserved mech like Thundercracker should be wary of his state of mind. Then again, Thundercracker had been just as surprised when Starscream brought Skyfire back to the ice encampment where his wing-mates had greeted the shuttle with both uncertainty and familiarity.

“Depending on my mood.” Was all Megatron was going to offer, as most incidents with the seeker it would be on Starscream’s own willingness to accept responsibility for his actions. Meaning there was a low likelihood things would be settled without struggle. “But until such a time, I want to make myself clear. I will not tolerate in-fighting amongst our ranks.” Megatron steps into Thundercracker’s proximity, limbs crossed over his chest plate, looking down at the slighter frame with harsh scrutiny. He hoped he didn’t have to specify his meaning. While Megatron allowed the seekers to self-govern to a point, they had a habit of engaging in challenges for rank amongst themselves. Whether by trine or individual. It was acceptable on occasion and sometimes helped relieve the tensions between the more emotional groups…

But, seeing the elite trine arrive to the war room, clawed and dented having just won a duel, never sat right by him.

Starscream, more than the rest, had once been under constant challenge but the role of his Second could not be claimed because of a mid-air dogfight between squabbling jets. Megatron often wondered, were Starscream ever to lose, what the replacement might expect?

“Yes sir.” Thundercracker nodded low, half a bow of respect, and kept his gaze cast down. “And sir?”

“What is it?”

“I want to take partial responsibility for what happened.” That certainly caught Megatron’s attention.

“This ought to be interesting.” He spoke, limbs settling to his side, watching Thundercracker with more intensity than before. “Which incident? Starscream’s tantrum or…”

“Skywarp or I should have stopped Skyfire from joining our fold.” He answered, features stoic and at militant attention. Megatron recalled Soundwave’s dossier on the seekers when they first came into his company. Thundercracker and Skywarp, efficient and deadly former-students of Vosian Air Academy. He remembered now how strange he found it, that their wing-leader had not the same credentials and yet maintained dominance. He would learn so much of seeker culture in the years to come.

“You predicted this would happen?” Surprisingly he felt to additional anger with the idea. Thundercracker shook his helm though.

“Not exactly what occurred. But.” The blue jet was not nearly as adept at conversation as Starscream, or a babbling mess like his trine-mate, but there was a dedication to speak his mind that Megatron had to acknowledge. Something more beneath the surface of this incident than what he was seeing. “I had my doubts that Skyfire would integrate with the ideals of the Decepticons and that Starscream would be unbiased at the first sign of trouble.”

It all lead back to Starscream. His excitement at the long-lost companion, his vicious hurt over the
betrayal. Megatron had yet to see Starscream care about another creature past his wing-mates and even that was fickle to his mood.

“And you wish to take the weight of blame off Starscream because, why?”

“Because he was compromised the moment Skyfire woke. It doesn’t seem fair.” Emotional seekers. Too easily influenced by their innermost thoughts and bonds. Soundwave warned long-ago that the builds could be as troublesome as they were beneficial. But they done well keeping the group in line for so long, Megatron was loathe to admit Starscream’s outburst might be out of his own command. And had not Starscream come to Megatron’s immediate defense once the shuttle turned his back on those who resurrected him?

“I’ll take your words into consideration.” There was a miniscule spark of relief in Thundercracker’s tension, ever dedicated to his trine. “But Starscream is responsible for his actions from this moment onwards. If he wishes to remain in his coveted seat of power at my side, I will expect nothing less than his best behavior.”

“Yes sir!” Thundercracker gave a crooked bow of respect, a renewed ease in his demeanor. Megatron wondered how it affected Starscream’s trine when he fought against him? The three struggling with synchronicity since their awakening on the wretched planet. “Thank you sir.”

“Go.” He dismissed and returned attention to Soundwave’s surveillance-gathering of a power source in the earth location Peru.

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Starscream’s recovery had been silent. Hook sent the communication that Starscream was back on pedes and that it was at Megatron’s approval whether the seeker could return to active duty, which he did not grant. There he expected Starscream to come kicking down doors to fight. Argue and demand his command be returned to him. It was, after all, how the seeker had reacted before. Always a tantrum when he believed he was losing what power was given - quick to put down cocky seekers and establish himself in Megatron’s court.

Starscream remained quiet instead. Seen lurking the base in solitude, not even his trine to crowd him. Soundwave collects data, notes that Starscream vanishes from time to time somewhere on the base. Returns with the same frigid stillness haunting the once-lively seeker. He’s a ghost in the dark, absent from his usual route and habits. More than one soldier caught gossiping on whether Starscream was “broken”. Even more, rumors of upset seekers. Starscream missing from the fold - leaving his kin unattended and un-managed.

Hook’s medical advice, was nothing. He had no opinion, no suggestions beyond letting Starscream alone. Megatron could only reflect on what the officer said previously, that Skyfire and Starscream had seemed…cozy.

Megatron was not a fan.

When his officers gathered, Starscream was notably missing. Likely brooding or breaking some rules in a dark corner of the Victory. Thundercracker stood in his place as the seeker commander, but Megatron’s left was mockingly vacant and his mood soured through the meeting.

“Where is your wing-leader?” He caught Thundercracker as the gathering was sent off and the blue jet seemed wary.

“He still hasn’t been reinstated.” Thundercracker explained, looking at his leader with an expression
of curiosity. “He should still be in the seeker’s tower.” The jet lies, both knowing Starscream had not returned since his release from medical. “Would you - like me to send for him?”

“No.” Megatron growled low. “I just hope you’re keeping him in line.” There hadn’t been so much as a sound from Starscream for days. Wandering the hall and vanishing even from Soundwave. Megatron in turn had been of little mood to interact with his Second. He always expected Starscream to come crawling back with either guns blazing or sycophantic begging.

“Starscream appears to be very…” The jet struggled. “Content with his punishment for now. Uh. Sir.”

Content.

Starscream should not be content.

Starscream should be furious.

Millions of stellar-cycles with the jet and Starscream had never once been content.

“I want him in attendance at the war room by the morning.” Megatron snapped, startling Thundercracker with his tone. “If he’s so at ease then he’s well enough to submit to an inquiry of the most recent failures.” He wanted Starscream to look him in the optic and tell him he’s content. Thundercracker saluted and moved off in a quick fashion, almost as if he wanted to reach the seeker’s sector before Megatron’s anger, which he felt was justified. There was no time to coddle his Second now, and if Starscream would like to pout in dark corners he didn’t deserve the title.

“Megatron.” Soundwave addressed him, monotone voice a strange comfort. Unaffected by the snarl to his leader’s mood. “Starscream. Variable.”

Megatron could only snort in return.

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He’d been more than kind to Starscream. Given him ample chances to prove himself, earn the respect he so lusted after. The universe at his servos and the seeker could only squander it, leaving Megatron to question once more why he didn’t just kill the petulant brat and be done with it.

“What do you have to offer as your defense?” He stared down at the seeker, one knee bent as his helm was lowered in submission. It wouldn’t have been such a disturbing sight had his Second been /grinning/ or snarling - instead Starscream was demure and quiet. Infuriating. “Speak up.”

Starscream said nothing. Behind him, his wing-mates looked incredibly nervous and their anxiety was almost suffocating in the quiet of the room. Did they fear Megatron’s wrath so readily? Starscream and he always had this tumultuous relationship, only worsened by the stress of earth and it’s heinous traps. They once could have a conversation without drawing weapons or fists, where had that soldier gone? His clever seeker now this wilting mess of stillness.

“Starscream.” The seeker still did not address him. Did not look up. As if all fight had been drawn out of him. To Megatron’s right was Soundwave, watchful and calculating. The empath shifting uncomfortably for a brief moment before tilting their masked face away, likely processing some information. “This is not how an Air Commander presents themself.”

“I am not the Air Commander. Currently.” A low reply and both seekers lurking behind flinched with whatever emotion they shared with their leader.
“Yes. I took that from you.” Megatron examined Starscream further, the slump in his wings, the lack of tension in his limbs. All that kept him upright was likely a scrap of pride. What had damaged the seeker so?

“As if your right. Leader.” The smallest flicker of irritation, of life, and Megatron found it ran distasteful down his tanks. Starscream had been repaired, but there was a lackluster shine to his frame. Unpolished. Unpampered. He was dull, flecks of salt across his wings, water stain at his pedes. Where had he been lurking?

[Soundwave.]

[Yes, Lord Megatron?]

[What is Starscream’s current level of fuel and functionality?]

Soundwave shifted again, focus reexamining the seeker kneeling before them.

[Fuel reserves. 23%. Function reduced to 59%. Internal protocols rerouted to low-fuel consumption. Danger imminent.]

The fool.

“Soundwave, hold command until my return.” He takes a step forward, pede directly under Starscream’s withering gaze. “You. Rise. Go to the launch bay at once.” Thundercracker and Skywarp glanced at one another, neither daring to question the change but seemingly just as concerned as before. Starscream thinned his focus in return, but his expression remained neutral. Perhaps tired. Almost broken. When Starscream didn’t immediately move Megatron reached down to roughly grasp him by a wing, yanking him to pedes while the seeker gave a half-sparked screech of annoyance. The sensitive appendage deserving a kinder touch than Megatron granted. “Did I not give you an order?” He snarled in the other’s face and watched as Starscream shrunk back, one pede lifted from the ground.

Starscream should fight. Instead he softens his limbs and steps down to balance, seemingly submitting to the command. “Don’t make me ask twice.” The elite trine fell into formation behind Starscream, but their wing-leader did not hold his chin high. All but slumped as they made their way out of the war room leaving Megatron to ponder the true focus of his fury.

“Megatron?”

“If only one of us return, we will have unruly seekers to manage.” He speaks with a tactical certainty. “Be prepared for a possible insurgence if Thundercracker is no longer a valid candidate for replacement.”

Soundwave nodded, visor dark with calculations running behind their mask.

“Yes. Lord Megatron.”

When he arrives at the launch pad, more than the elite trine are present. Scattered seekers and a few ground soldiers seemed to have heard of some commotion. Gossip traveling fast and Starscream’s demeanor had not gone unnoticed by the Decepticons in lockdown. With little else to do it seemed the only entertainment his soldiers could find was seeing whether or not Starscream would survive the next week.

Thundercracker leaned in to address Starscream in private, Skywarp turned to watch the nosy other seekers. One, pale blue and gray, drawing closer with a lean expression. Hungry. Challenges were
likely to begin soon if Megatron did not fix this mess - or remove the broken wheel in his command. When the underling seeker drew too near Skywarp took a step forward, denta bared in warning as dark wings rose to better cover his trine.

Megatron noted how protective even Skywarp was being, and how slowly the other seeker took to retreat. Troublesome, and it showed in Skywarp’s expression turning back to Starscream.

“I believe, none of you are supposed to be here.” He announced at his arrival, looking directly at the lingering soldiers who all but jumped at his attention. Trying to, as stealthily as possible, escape his glare. (Scavenger tripped over a cassette and Astrotrain ran into a door as Megatron doubted his life’s work.) Once relatively cleared he stepped between Thundercracker and Skywarp, exiling them from his focus and Starscream looked up at him - needed to raise his chin higher than comfortable with how closely he stood.

“We’re heading west, I’ll give you further instruction once we are airborne.”

“We?” Starscream’s expression changed to one influenced by doubt, good, at least he was able to react past his moping.

“Have you lost the function to carry a passenger?”

“No.” A hint of irritation.

“Then we will transform and once we are airborne I will give you further instruction.” He repeated, nothing Megatron despised more. “Well?”

The seeker took a cautious step back, shifting his gaze past Megatron’s shoulders, and his body began to fold. Intricate systems rearranging until his jet form ran dominant and Megatron followed. The heavy layers of his armor melding together, layered or sub-spaced for lack of necessity, and Starscream gathered him in his cockpit as the tower rose from the waters with a rush of noise. Being held in this way by Starscream was not new, but hardly preferred and only occurred if traveling by his short-range flight capabilities would not be enough.

Starscream rose into the early morning sun, a rumble of engines where Megatron’s awareness relied solely on his proximity sensors, and they began heading west.

It was difficult to communicate in alt-mode but not impossible. Starscream had been trained in all manner of handling Megatron as were a few other hand-picked candidates. Important that when in this most vulnerable of states he would not be used inappropriately. Starscream opened his communication range to the right frequency, able only to receive code from Megatron while in gun-mode, but the seeker didn’t talk. Which was fine. They would have time to converse upon their arrival.

A five hour flight that looped twice, ensuring human radar would lose them in the obscurity of their own flight plans and fickle atmosphere. Starscream did not question the orders given but with the connection necessary to communicate Megatron could sense the beginning signs of his trepidation. Concern. Agitation. He’d been told that the ability to feel emotions in this way was similar to Soundwave’s telepathy, though on a much lower scale. And in a way how seekers interacted with one another. That their language was a combination of code, sound, wings, and emotion. Leave it to his aerial force to be the most lethal and complicated of them all.

They land on a rocky shoreline, mountains falling into the foreign ocean. Birds scatter from dark trees at their disturbance, Megatron settling out of Starscream’s frame, transforming to land on a slanted hill while the seeker hovered a moment.
“Land.” He ordered, and Starscream hesitated again before following, taking the higher ground where his pedes met the terra. He doesn’t address Starscream again, approaching him and walking past and up the steep slope and didn’t turn back to see Starscream follow. The seeker did, quietly with wings high in caution. The cliff’s top was flat and dusted in green and dirt, undisturbed by more than nature. No humans or Autobots for a great distance. The salt of the ocean and heat made the air thick and humid - Starscream’s lack of complaining only urging Megatron’s decisions.

“Why are we here?” Finally the seeker dares to question as he stands on the edges of Megatron’s shadow.

“You’ve become, a problem. One that I must solve or risk further disturbance in the ranks.” He expected Starscream to react, withdraw, anticipate something. Anything. Instead his seeker remains dull and still just out of proximity. “I’ve given you too many chances. Tolerated your upsetting behaviour because you are /powerful/. But we’ve approached the end of my patience and you --” Megatron shifts to take in the seeker. To look him in the optic to judge the weight of his words on the other’s mind. Starscream is wholly unaffected.

Megatron’s servo tightens to a fist. Starscream catches the movement - and still does not react.

“Do you understand what few options I have left?”

Starscream turns his wings, letting them rest as if it were the greatest pain to keep them up.

“My trine begged me to grovel.” He interrupted and threw Megatron off his focus. Staring at the other with a tilted helm, trying to decipher his meaning. Starscream kept his gaze on his leader, shimmerless and slow. Exhausted by his own existence. “They asked me to grovel. Beg. Plead as I’ve done before when my antics caught your anger.” His following smile was terrible and sent a sharp pang of discomfort through Megatron. “But I’m tired of my life being something I have to /beg/ for.” He laughs. Unfolding brittle laughter like glass falling to the floor. Shattering.

Megatron wondered if he looked as horrified as he felt, watching Starscream’s spark bleed through his mangled laughter. “So just kill me if that will make you feel better.” He spat.

Megatron struck him instead.

The fist cracking across Starscream’s jaw with a sickening sound, vibrating through the distant treeline. The jet crumbling to the terra as instinct directed him to turn. Raise servos in defense as if he still sported the missing cannons on his arms. Starscream’s surprise at his actions only twisting him further, throwing arms down in defiance to basic survival coding as fuel dripped from the fractal split across his faceplate.

“You rotten coward!” With Starscream not trying to escape it was easy enough to snatch the jet’s collar, lift him off the earth and throw him down again. This time watching the seeker’s body collide with soft earth, kicking the organic mess about, with a low whine of something broken. “Is this all you are worth?” He goes to slam a pede down over the unguarded torso where seeker frames run lean, but Starscream reacts. Turning away at the last moment and barely escaping the impact which sends rocks and dirt erupting into the air. “I thought you wanted to die?” He mocks, blinded by his own disgust as Starscream hesitates to move.

“No. I---” He dodges a moment too late, Megatron’s fist colliding with his frame, sending him rolling back in a terrible squawk of pain.

“Where is my soldier?!” He demands and watches Starscream struggle against the hurt. Trying to pull himself up and out of reach. “Where is my Second in Command?!” His roar is only silenced by
the abrupt pain of claws slashing across his abdomen. Starscream just beneath him, looking up with a nasty glare.

“Where?” The seeker bit back, thruster igniting to lunge forward, catching Megatron by surprise as the force knocks him back: slamming into the torn up earth with a harsh sound of metal and pain. “Where?!” Claws scrap over his chestplate, his lower half weighed by Starscream now straddling him. Trying to pull him apart with vicious strikes. ‘Beneath your fist! Beneath your stomping temper where you’ve kept me!’ A claw tears into a minor fuel line, splattering pink across them both. The shock distracts Starscream enough that Megatron can grab him, hurl their weight and drive his elbow into the seeker’s temple. Knocking him off balance and dazed.

“All because of your constant schemes!” He bellows and grabs Starscream by the pede as the other tries to drag himself upright. Needs to keep Starscream grounded. Pulling his lighter body back across the earth while the jet fights to gain purchase. “You give me no choice!”

“No choice?!” A shrill echo and Starscream ignites his thruster once again, scorching Megatron’s grip and the war-lord can only drop him in response to the wretched pain. “You made me your enemy!”

“You made yourself that!” Megatron has to step back, clutching the worse of his servos burnt and aching to his chest. Raising an arm in preparation for Starscream’s next attack. “You diverted from our cause for your own selfish ambitions.”

Starscream lets out a cry louder than Megatron has ever heard, he’s met with a destructive force of violence. Claws tearing into his armor, desperate to reach his spark and rip it out. Starscream was out for more than first blood and Megatron found himself enjoying seeing life back in his seeker’s face, despite the situation.

He was not expecting Starscream’s next words, “You abandoned me!” Megatron ducked low, Starscream unprepared for the change, and loses his balance, as Megatron catches the weight of the frame over a shoulder. Rolling him off his back and feels Starscream crumble to the ground.

“What are you saying?!”

“You-!” Starscream digs servos into broken earth, trying to sit up, but low fuel and damages are beginning to catch up to him. “You don’t care about your soldiers any longer, why should we care about you?!” Voice cracks in static, earlier assault taking its toll. He moves back as fast as he can drag himself when Megatron approaches, but can’t escape the war-lord’s grasp. Lifted up by his collar once more to meet Megatron’s gaze.

“Stop your rambling!”

“You lead us like you don’t care if we live or die!” Starscream bared his sharpened denta which reminded Megatron of these earth creatures. Predators. Hissing low in threat.

“You insane little wretch!” He never took criticism lightly and being insulted by the seeker who, not moments ago, had been practically begging for death was hardly settling well. “What have I ever done to-—” A warm line of fuel drips steadily from Starscream’s shattered cheek and to the servo grasping the injured body. The breakage rising to his optic, flickering in disrepair as Starscream judges him with the fury of the universe.

What was the purpose of bringing Starscream here? To beat him back into submission? To break him just enough that he felt anger once more? Megatron snarls at his thoughts and in return the seeker growls back, following his leader’s line of focus.
“Tell me again what few options you have and I’ll tell you mine.” Starscream snarled as claws ceased their digging into Megatron’s arm.

Megatron drops him. Letting the seeker scramble back, expecting another attack. Instead of bracing for it Megatron watches the fuel scattered across his limb, Starscream’s limited resources in his time of despair. The seeker watching him now with an unreadable face, likely shuffling through what had just occurred and what would keep him alive - should he care to survive any longer. Vents roaring in distress, torso panting heavily against the damage and expended energy on such low function.

“Do you think I want to kill you?” Megatron asks, watching Starscream’s every smallest motion and the seeker only looks distressed.

“And lose your favorite whipping boy?” He growls, but there’s a real pain behind his words.

_Skyfire._

Megatron reflects on Starscream’s immediate dedication to the unearthed shuttle. How quickly the seeker had grown reattached to the figure from his past. Megatron would be lying if he claimed no suspicion but in earnest - it was Starscream’s frivolous commitment that had upset him most. How inseparable they had become after millions of years apart.

Hadh’t Starscream once been so dedicated to him?

The earth quakes when Megatron lets limbs go slack mid-battle. Sitting with arms resting on knee joints. He does not face Starscream, but in this action it is apparent he could not stop him from flying away.

“What are you doing?” The jet asked, suddenly aware of the injury to his face as claws moved to hold the broken jaw. A flicker of pain runs the course of Megatron’s armor, damned seeker, and finds the fight washed from his mind and replaced with a cold upset.

“We cannot go on as we are.” He answers, staring up at the bright sky with it’s blue the color of Starscream’s hands. “We will not survive each other like this.”

“That’s an option?” Snark returning, Starscream retreating into old ways to protect himself. Megatron does his best not to face him, allows the seeker to make up his mind whether he will meet this small offer of a truce with his leader...or escape.

The silence leads to a shuffle of metal, Starscream keeping his distance, but settling on the valley they clawed into. Looking down at the earth while Megatron focuses upwards. It takes time, hours as this world’s star moves across the sky. Birds return to their perches, cautious of the still giants. What is time to them? These earth solar-days meaningless to they two who have witnessed stars born and and collapse. Who have seen more systems than these flesh creatures could imagine.

“I miss Cybertron.” Starscream speaks eventually and his tone is even and tired, resonating with Megatron’s own exhaustion. They both look a mess, torn and broken, watching the foreign planet with bitter optics. Megatron nods and believes Starscream can see the movement, careful when he shifts backwards to lean on sore arms. That the seeker doesn’t flinch is a minor comfort. He is cast in orange light from the setting sun, wings slumped and tension has seemingly been cleared from him. Dried energon smearing his mouth as Megatron’s limbs and face are filthy in the same. Battle fought and lost on both sides.

“You are suffering a loss of faith.” Megatron spoke up, allowing Starscream time to adjust. “One I have been allowing to consume my ranks and now has risen to challenge me. That I can
acknowledge.” It’s difficult not to look, see whether the other is listening or preparing to fly. Where would Starscream go if this is not settled - and would he give chase? “I can take responsibility for my actions. My pride has not consumed me yet. But, I cannot fix what has broken in you by command alone.”

“Broken?” Starscream sounds offended, but does not speak further. Only draws himself inward, digging a pede into the loose dirt.

“I do not want to abandon you again, Starscream.” The words feel awkward, foreign, but the sentiment is earnest. His soldier. His seeker. His second should not doubt him. Starscream’s faith should reflect in the sparks of all those who serve him and that is Megatron’s responsibility.

He brought a war to Cybertron on the idea that a society’s failings were the responsibility of its leaders - and that no mech should be beaten into a mold. Denied themselves. What more had Megatron done to the seeker than just that? Why should he punish what he created?

“You’re asking for my obedience?”

“I’m asking for your faith.” Finally he directs the weight of his attention on the seeker who appeared younger than Megatron has ever felt in his lifetime. “You belong with us, Starscream, and if I have failed you then I am at fault but you are stronger than my mistakes.”

“Pretty language.” He sneers but there’s little heat to his tired words. “You once excelled at pretty words. Your grand rallies, spreading such ideals of equality.”

“And you once defended those ideals.” Megatron reminded and with a grunt, moved to stand. His greater form towering over Starscream, the sunset behind him and veiled the seeker’s form in his shadow. Swallowing him in the dark. “I need you at my side. Not under my fist.” He lowers a hand, offers Starscream aid in rising, but the seeker remains still. “We can make it like it was.” Before Megatron tried to force his soldier to bend. Before Earth. Before Skyfire.

“Can we?” He smiles and it’s a wicked thing, all stitched charm and broken spark. “Are you so sure? We’ve been hurting one another for so long.”

Megatron stares too long at the fuel scrubbed mouth, the fracture across a dark faceplate, and knows this cannot continue. He takes a knee before the seeker, startling them both, and brings from his subspace an energon cube. Holding it to Starscream who will likely be feeling the affects of his self-imposed starvation: the wasted energy from their skirmish and the flight.

“I would try.” He vows and the sun continues to set behind him as Starscream takes the offering.

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They return to the Victory to lingering voyeurs, trying to seem like they belong there and not trying to see if only Megatron returned. It was apparent in some of their disappointment and the way Skywarp hisses at another seeker trine who began to whisper. Starscream transforms and allows Megatron free, a series of blank stares and open gawking at their state of being. Megatron’s armor clawed and spilled fuel dried down his chestplate. Starscream bent and broken with equally grotesque stains of their fight.

“Thundercracker, Skywarp” He ordered and wondered if the trine could feel Starscream from the distance? Did they know what occurred? “Escort Starscream to the medbay.” They nodded and Megatron didn’t have a chance for a parting word with the seeker before Skywarp got hands on his wing-leader. Crackle of light and sound before they vanished. Onlookers deciding amongst
themselves what must have happened, gossip and rumor likely already spreading.

“I didn’t think so many of you would be assigned to clean this sector!” He announced, taking in each of their faces. “What a scrubbed ship I will have, won’t I?!” They scattered just as quickly - save for the blue and gray seeker who had been there before. “I want all those present to be assigned to cleaning duty.” He speaks, knowing Soundwave will appear from the shadow as they always do.

“Affirmative.” They agree, standing to Megatron’s right without announcement. “Seekers?”

“Seekers…” He pauses. “Not those two. They were acting as expected. But certainly the rest.” Soundwave leaned in too close, examining their leader with an unusual tilt to their visor. Having known them for so many stellar-cycles Megatron could tell they were deciphering emotion and information. “Were you able to gather any read on Starscream?” He asks, knowing Soundwave was likely waiting to do just that.

“Affirmative.”

“And?”

“Starscream. Variable.” They repeat an earlier sentiment, though it somehow lacked the same weight of concern. “Thoughts consumed.” They walked closely to Megatron who began the long trek back to the command centre, wanting to return to the normal route of things as quickly as possible. Any divergence might seem … suspicious by those wanting some nefarious reason to spread gossip. This lockdown couldn’t end sooner.

“Consumed by what?” He felt his rumble in the split armor from Starscream’s claws. The chaotic thrashing leaving its mark and certainly he would require repairs, but for now wanted to leave the med bay free to the seeker.

Soundwave remained focused forward, the hint of curiosity in their tone.

“Thoughts consumed, by Megatron.” They answered.
Hey guys. My laptop was sent into repair so I’m quite behind on writing for this week. More than I wanted of this was typed on my phone and reviewed quickly at work before anyone noticed. Thanks for waiting.

As always, please excuse any grievous grammatical or spelling errors as I am not one to edit past a general review. Because I am lazy and have no excuses to give.

The next day Starscream is not present on the bridge as expected. Hook confirmed the seeker was repaired and sent along in the care of his trine. Soundwave had confirmed their entry into the seeker’s sector and not a peep from the red and white creature since their (battle) (discussion) reexamination of their positions.

Megatron had permitted Soundwave to view his memory logs of the skirmish, only to be disappointed when Soundwave’s only comment was: “Undecided” to Megatron’s request of an opinion. Soundwave was not a good liar, and often when Megatron asked for a response the telepath did not want to give: they resorted to flat statements of uncertainty. But Megatron did observe his Third Commander watching him with a tighter stare than usual. Possibly searching through the base projections of his processor as the other was prone to do. Megatron wondered what they were searching for.

Three soldar days later, and deeper into the Decepticon lockdown, Starscream is still “missing” from duty. Asking Thundercracker after his trinemate is unhelpful. Given responses like, “Well he’s not reinstated”, “He’s resting”, or the irritating “I am not sure should I find him?” before the blue jet looked ready to panic. Megatron knew he could not kick down the seeker quarters and drag his suspended Commander out by the pede - that was exactly the sort of behavior he was supposed to be adjusting. It frustrated him to have the common option removed. So much easier to manage Starscream when scruffing him was permitted.

He found once he allowed the initial flare of annoyance to settle, Megatron lacked volatile thoughts against the seeker. Simply tired of the empty chair to his right and the lack of his irritating voice interjecting at the worst time. Yes. Primus help him. He missed Starscream’s voice. Sitting in a war room with mechs unable to think - or question anything for themselves grew tiring. Quickly. At least Starscream had the gall to demand reasoning from Megatron. Insist on being a part of planning, threaten if need be if he felt the plan was below his standards.

And while usually the seeker was wrong, on the rare occasion he was correct in challenging Megatron, he'd only beaten him down and berated him.

Certain things were beginning to seem obviously clear.

It’s during one of such gatherings with his higher command, Megatron half-ignoring what the Reflectors were saying on some fleshling myths, that a communication summons distracted Soundwave. The telepath moving to address a flashing console, Reflectors continuing to speak
“What is it Soundwave?”

“What is it Soundwave?” The room went quiet. Thundercracker was not present at Megatron’s dismissal, knowing the other had plenty of snappy kin to handle, and he was hoping the communication was anything but Thundercracker declaring the aerial force had finally snapped and flooded the base.

A similar instance had occurred on the Nemesis once. He shuddered in memory.

“Put it through.”

“Yes, Lord Megatron.” Soundwave agreed, and the response was immediate.

“Hello!? Does anyone know how to answer a slagging communicae? Megatron can you read me you bucket headed—”

“Yes. Starscream.” Voice raised to spare them both the fight, his spark settling somewhat to know that Starscream had not withered away in the dark. Such a fate would have rendered their dispute meaningless and Megatron would hate to be confronted by a corpse. “What is it?” He growled instead of yelling at the seeker's absence.

See. Growth.

“Well. I’ve been trying to get the communications back up and running after a few rusthead seekers got antsy and tried to hack into the launch pad controls.” Oh. Megatron recalled speaking with Thundercracker on just that. He’d not been aware nothing had been fixed yet. It was a bit insulting to consider now that perhaps Thundercracker, despite his claims, was incapable of repairing the damage done by his kin.

“Do you have it back up and running?”

“Yes, that’s why you all get to bask in my delightful tones and vocal delights.” A few soldiers groaned at the table, hearing a snide “guess he’s feeling better”. “I’ve established connection, Soundwave make sure to run diagnostics, I want to ensure no idiots tried anything outside of their brain capacities.” Barking orders as if he were never removed from power.

“Affirmative. Diagnostic procedures impending. Please wait.” Soundwave agreed, rather smoothly Megatron noted. Usually when Starscream gave orders Soundwave tended to look at Megatron as if to say “do I have to?” and allowed Megatron to decide. “Results in approximated one deca-cycle.”

“Ugh, fine. Just send them my way.” Starscream sounded annoyed, like he wanted to be done with basic repairs in a more immediate fashion. (which was very Starscream like. Impatient and all demanding.) Megatron was satisfied that the seeker was feeling better. “For now we shouldn’t have further issue unless there’s something I missed, a diagnostic should catch it. If need be I’ll permit Soundwave entry to the aerial tower for repairs.” A strange offer considering the last non-seeker to venture into that sector was nearly beheaded by the inhabitants. Rumble scarcely recovered and had been afraid of anything with wings for three months.

“Very good Starscream,” He interjected before the other could slip off the line, offering the smallest acknowledgement of the other performing his duties.

“Yes. My lord.” Starscream sounded like he was trying to remember how to form the words without sarcasm. “Starscream out.” The connection dies after that. Short and perfectly respectful. In fact so,
someone in the room drops their datapad in shock.

It was Soundwave with a cassette hanging out of their storage drive, face slack in surprise.

Megatron felt a sliver of confidence. Small steps after all. Give and receive.

“I believe we were in the middle of something?” He addresses the confused room at large and the Reflectors are quick to continue their discoveries while their leader’s mood improves.

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There’s a seeker incident within the first week of Starscream’s return to active duty.

The hallways outside the mess during ration distribution often grow crowded, but a base full of irritated Decepticons does not an orderly line make. When Megatron is summoned to address the scrap, Soundwave is loath to inform that at least three ground soldiers have lost their limbs and a seeker’s wing was bent.

Meaning all the seekers in the area were out for blood.

It was a cloud of beastial noises and an assortment of colors. Claws dragging, armor torn asunder, lean seeker bodies being tossed about. No deaths. Yet. But from the smashing of walls and the threats Megatron barely made out in Vosian it would not be long. He watched a conehead throw himself into the fray, trying to scorch a ground unit with his thrusters while Megatron tugged Soundwave back as someone lost the armor to their leg. The torn piece skittering across the warzone of flipped tables and shattered benches.

Megatron snarled, taking a step forward preparing to bellow an order - white wings cut him off.

Starscream shrieks a word, no more than two syllables, in Vosian over the crowd. Standing before Megatron, claws on his hips and wings shaking in irritation. The chaos freezes abruptly, the seekers who understand the word going still and rigid while the rest are startled only by the cold stop to the brawl. Some mid-choking another, others spared having their optics clawed out. Megatron can feel a strange heat coming off Starscream, as if he'd just returned from a heavy flight or a fierce battle. His vents roaring in scarcely contained anger looking over his aerial force.

“Who. Started. This?” His voice a hiss, dangerous and even Megatron finds himself watching Starscream carefully. He's faced this angry creature before, knows what that fury can lend him in battle and finds extreme delight in having it used for his benefit instead of demise for once.

As far as Megatron was concerned, Thundercracker still held the title of Air Commander. Starscream only returning to duty but not to his command. He was still not even his Second, but that was more due to their lack of further communication. He’d not seen Starscream face to face in more than brief passing. The bridge always busy, the seeker always working now that he wasn’t wasting time arguing with Megatron. (Realized very quickly how much more time there was in the day when he wasn’t trying to manage Starscream’s moods.) He’d not granted the other his title back because...perhaps he wanted Starscream to ask for it.

But it seemed to the seekers, Starscream was still in command. Proving once again, popularity did not equate power to the winged builds.

“No one?” His voice twirled, curious and cruel. “Well we all know how much I love guessing games…” A few seekers nearby twitched their wings. It was a motion which shivered through the crowd, reaching as far as Megatron could see. Fascinating, their silent language, proving quite useful when a seeker was pushed forwards by two others.
“I was, sir, but it wasn’t my fault!” He immediately defended. A pale green with one wing twisted at a grotesque angle. Shaking in either anger or pain, Megatron couldn’t decide. Seeker wings contained more sensory webs than most limbs - seemed a need for retribution was more important than tending his wounds. “One of the dirt lickers stole my ration!”

“I did not!” An unfamiliar soldier pushed forward, fuel dripping from long claw marks down his unarmored face. “Defunct little freak!”

“You slagging piece of--” The seeker tried to lunge at him but Starscream was faster, arm extended to catch the snapping jet by the waist and with a kick of thrusters tossed him back into the crowd. Crashing into his fellow fliers.

The ground unit in question started to laugh at the seeker’s misfortune but Megatron caught his gaze and watched the soldier try to swallow his glossa.

“I don’t recall giving the orders for my army to tear itself apart like cannibalistic drones.” Megatron’s displeasure rumbled through, causing those nearest to shrink down in surrender. Another seeker spoke in the airy language to Starscream. A familiar blue and gray, the same from the launch bay days ago. He spoke quietly, focus only on Starscream. Starscream answered with a dangerous hiss of warning between clenched jaws. The seeker backed down, but did not cower.

“Return to your tower. All seekers not on active assignments are forbidden exit.” A sharp rise in complaint, a mixture of Vosian and common binary as the pretty frames all seemed to shake in anger or shock at the punishment. “Would you like to add cut rations to that?” He scarcely had to raise his voice to silence the crowd of winged harpies, now either glaring or frowning in disbelief. But Starscream’s ire was not complete as he whirled on one thruster heel, stalking to the ground build who seemed to be gloating. “As for you,”

“You can’t do anything to me.” He mouthed off almost immediately, glancing towards his fellow soldiers in solidarity. “You’re not even of rank anymore.” He mocked in Starscream’s face, prideful and arrogant, towering over Starscream’s more delicate features. It was a surprise that Starscream looked to Megatron, optics flat yet clear, the first they’ve sought him out since their conversation. The idea that they could do things better.

“He doesn’t have a wing for retribution,” Starscream addressed Megatron, ignoring the fading smirk of the soldier. “May I rip off an arm instead?” He was waiting for Megatron to grant him power once more. It wasn’t the official request Megatron wanted, but it was good enough.

Megatron gave a minute nod and the vicious smile that unfurled across Starscream’s face made something click in his processor. To his right Soundwave shifted uncomfortably.

“No Starscream,” He addressed the crowd. The soldier’s cocky demeanor was renewed, grinning once more at the seeker thinking himself saved. “Arms are tiresome to repair and he may need it in battle. His glossa should do.”

“My lord, that’s hardly equivalent to my seeker’s injuries.” Starscream complained, but his voice was a song despite the violence he desired. “I want an optic too.”

“Wait - no -” A shivering plea as the crowd woven of ground units and aerial soldiers watched the space between their leader and his Second in command.

“An optic? I suppose that will do.” Megatron hummed, stepping forward to examine the ground unit who looked ready to crumble upon his approach. He stood at Starscream’s side, servo light on the pale shoulder. “All this for a stolen ration? Tsk. A waste of my time. Make it fast.”
“Wait!” The soldier scrambled to bring an energon cube from subspace, holding it out in offering. “I took it ok! He can have it back!” Megatron didn’t move to retrieve the cube, allowing Starscream to snatch it up, pass it blindly behind him where Skywarp was suddenly waiting.

“And…?”

“And I’m sorry! Just don’t take my eye!” He fell to knee joints, looking desperately to Megatron for help. “Sir?”

“I believe your groveling should be directed to Commander Starscream,” Megatron corrected and felt Starscream’s abrupt shudder at the title. “He’s the one with your life in his claws.” He gave the seeker’s mantle a quick squeeze, turning away as something was whined from the begging soldier. “Afterwards, those of you who cannot fly, I expect this room repaired by the time evening rations are served.” There was a shuffling and silence.

“I believe our lord gave a command,” Starscream’s voice rung out and the shock of “yes sirs!” was startling. Megatron didn’t look back as he collected Soundwave, his Third glancing just past his shoulder. Megatron could see Starscream watching him in Soundwave’s visor.

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Megatron is informed later the soldier wouldn’t stop crying and Starscream’s punishment was mere sanitation duty for the next ten stellar years.

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“...further investigation onto the signal, I can determine it is of natural origins. But the surrounding topography does not reflect any signs of influence so it is likely dormant.” Projections hovered about Starscream’s helm, casting the deep shade of his face a pale blue. Eyes dark and violet. “I would ask the drones retrieve a soil sample. That way I can test whether or not is it having an immediate effect on the terra - possibly identify its components and whether it will be of use.”

“Soundwave, route a drone to do just that.” Megatron agreed and Starscream hesitated before nodding in turn. “Anything further?” He addressed the rest of his war room, no one bringing much more to the table than awkward grunts and wasting his time. Some watching Starscream openly suspicious. “Then you are dismissed. Except for you Starscream, remain behind.” It was Starscream’s first attendance since their spat and subsequent conversation. The chair to his right once again filled and his expectations soaring as the seeker came with more to discuss than himself or complaints. He noticed a few officers pause to look back, flickering optics between them, and shuffling out as Soundwave remained in place over Megatron’s left.

Starscream noticed, mouth going thin and tight. “Soundwave, you too are dismissed.” That almost made Starscream smile.

“Sir?” The telepath protested but their objection did not continue past Megatron’s brisk wave towards the door. They nodded and Starscream followed the other out the door with his gaze, smirking gently to himself. Took so little sometimes to make Starscream happy…until he seemed to recall he was alone with his leader.

“Yes sir?”

“Sit.” Megatron ordered, leaning forward in his own seat, arms folded. Starscream sat, but it was not with haste. Seemed to find every corner and hitch in the table and chair. Starscream’s wings meant he was given a special chair, backless and broad for balance. Raised so his wings did not scrape the
floor when he sat which meant he normally crossed his legs like a primp and proper prince. Then when he was feeling daring, stuck them under Megatron’s chair trying to knock him out of it.

He was successful only once and Megatron had his own chair secured to the floor instead of taking Starscream’s away. It was something he thought of now, how he’d always done the opposite of the obvious when it came to the seeker.

“We haven’t spoken since our time off-base.” He began and would ask Soundwave to send him the security feed of that moment, the way Starscream’s features comically flashed in embarrassment and annoyance. Dwindling to an attempt at an uncaring shrug. Far too emotional. “Your behavior as of late has implied you’ve taken my words to spark, but I would like to hear it myself.”

“Hear what, exactly?” Huffed, struggled to remain still, a nigh-impossible task for the flight build.

Expecting attitude, Megatron rose from his seat to relocate himself against the table. Leaning back so his greater bulk was both an intimidating sight and yet open to attack should Starscream see fit to fight. It clearly threw the seeker off and he shrunk back in the chair, optics shifting up Megatron’s form likely trying to decide if this were a trick.

“I overlooked how you knew of Reflector’s investigations, despite not being present at the time or permitted into the surveillance archives.” Starscream looked away but Megatron pressed onward. “Before, I deemed it convenient to ignore your credentials. Wanting to harness your tactical skill and while frustrated at my failure to do so, denied you the chance to show off your intelligence.” He’d never seen Starscream take a compliment so quietly before. “I’m attempting to amend that, can you at least look at me?”

“Oh. Is that what you’re doing?” Starscream finally does address him, but with a look of suspicion instead of flattery. Unexpected. “The rations incident was one thing, but how am I supposed to speak to you now? A quivering suck up? I’m no Shockwave.” He’s frowning heavily now, claws squeezing back into fists. “If I correct you, are you going to strike me down? Make another example out of me?”

“No.” Megatron answers rather quickly, even by his own expectations. Starscream shares in his surprise. “There was a time we could speak to one another without ending in blows.”

“Was there?” Starscream responds behind the safety of sarcasm while Megatron exhaled a low grumble in irritation. It’s enough to make the seeker adjust his posture, almost fool Megatron into believing he was relaxed. “What do you want from me?” He offered, chin proudly high and meeting Megatron’s gaze. The brightest thing in the dark room, ever the royal.

He feels that same shift of something in him, equal to when Starscream spoke bloodthirsty and violent.

“Your ingenuity, your power and command.” Motioned to the empty table. “I want you here, at my side. I’ve said this all before.”

“Maybe I like hearing it.” There’s something more to Starscream’s response that Megatron feels he misses entirely.

“I don’t have the time left alive to drown you in the amount of accolades it would take to satisfy you.” A smile cracks Starscream’s mouth, it’s a strange relief. Megatron takes the victory as the seeker rises from his seat, extending a servo in the same fashion as Megatron a week ago. The one Starscream hesitated to reach for.
“We're to have a truce then?”

Megatron takes his hand, squeezes the deceptively delicate claw in his brutish grip. So near, he smells like fine polish and salt.

“A renewal of our trust. Can you agree to that?” He questions while Starscream seems momentarily distracted by the varying size of their hands.

“I can.” He answers and Megatron releases the grip. Remains silent but pleased as the seeker collects his things and doesn’t ask to be dismissed. He feels it best not to complain though, certain things would never change.

“Starscream,” He calls out, catching Starscream with a hand hovering above the door lock. “In fairness, what do you want from me?” It’s a mistake, every fiber of his code is telling him not to give so much to Starscream. Take the victory and run. Keep it settled. But it nags him, an instinct to provide in return for the gift Starscream is reluctantly offering. He never asked before, merely took from his soldiers and officers. Promised only glory in return. A second chance. Yet nothing of himself.

Starscream lingers at the door, helm tilting in thought as his features remain neutral.

“Your faith will do.”

He moves out the door before Megatron can swear it.

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The remainder of the week goes by without any remarkable challenges. Starscream is present, attentive, almost obedient. They still naturally disagree on most things, but find ways to circumvent a fight. Now when opinions vary it doesn’t feel like a last straw about to break and send them careening down an endless pit. There’s a way out.

Of course their duties demand of them separately so they spend minimal time together, which feels strange. Starscream managing his aerial division, also working to reinstate himself properly in the army’s opinion. He was never popular, prone to snark and disagreements. (in the beginning Megatron couldn’t go a day without having to physically lift the seeker off another soldier. Trying to claw them to death.) A rabid animal at the best of times, but still lethal and once obedient (enough). Starscream was not well liked, hardly respected any longer, but in his prime he’d proven capable of commanding Megatron's armies - ready to put any dwindling doubts to bed with his own power. Megatron was eager to see that confidence return.

The current state of the seekers was an interesting test for Starscream’s strength. They were not happy. It was obvious in the short scuffles between them, the glares and way anything with wings seemed to cling to dark corners of the base. Watching. Setting terror into the minds of their victims (namely any other mech in their path). Starscream had arrived to a morning briefing with his trine in tow, each of them dotted in thin scratches and looking furious (none more than Starscream) but when asked what happened, Starscream shrugged it off.

“Politics,” He said, and Megatron allowed him to handle it. He felt something more than antsy seekers suffering the imposed lockdown was going on, but he'd always permitted the aerial division to settle things on their own terms. For their safety, and his.

Which made a small occurrence stand out in Megatron’s thoughts, something he thought to share
with Starscream later.

He’d been just leaving his chambers for a scheduled meeting with Shockwave when a seeker approached him. Rankless but recognized. Blue and gray, darker than Thundercracker with more a streamlined look than the elite trine. This seeker had appeared now and then, enough to catch Megatron’s recognition.


“What is it?” He wondered briefly if Starscream had sent a lackey to him? Which would be unusual. Even at their worst Starscream never sent anyone on his behalf citing "they’d just get it wrong" when overburdened and still refusing to delegate.

“Sir, I’m sorry to bother you,” The seeker had a strict tone, poised in a high-chaste accent similar to Starscream. But. Without the influence that Starscream had allowed to bleed into his tone and inflections. Megatron wasn’t stupid enough to tell his seeker that he spoke with an edge of Tarnish now, too many years together. “I was hoping to discuss with you the pre-arranged flight patterns during close combat of--”

“What is your station?” Megatron interrupted.

“Stealth division, second wave - Quad alignment. Sir.” Un-trinned then. It happened. Starscream had built groups of four when it did. Sticking solo seekers with an established trine to even the ranks. “My designation is Moonlace.” Megatron didn’t ask his name. He didn’t care.

“And Starscream approved of you approaching me so openly to discuss matters which directly fall under his command?”

The seeker turned his chin, reminding Megatron of Starscream for a moment. Handsome in ways Starscream was not. Learned control, his wings low and still. He carried himself with a regal air and his expressions did not change when questioned by Megatron. Moonlace. He's learned through his years surrounded by the fliers that the closer to the fallen throne of Vos they were, the more likely they would have a celestial name.

“I believed it more relevant to discuss such matters with you. Our leader.” There was a look about this Moonlace that Megatron did not like.

“And I believe it relevant that you be very careful with the game you are trying to play.” His response did nothing to the seeker’s mild expression. No fear, no respect. Only patience. “Starscream is my Second in Command. He is your direct superior and if I hear of you - or any other seeker - creeping about trying to ignore the institute I set in place…” Moonlace gave an abrupt half-bow, cutting Megatron off from his words.

“My apologies. Sir. I stepped out of line.” Offered the apology too easily, unlike any seeker (that wasn't Thundercracker). Megatron committed the seeker’s proximity code to memory.

“You’re dismissed.”

“Of course sir.”

Megatron had not missed the lack of eye contact afterwards. The way the seeker made his exit with a patient stride, no more affected by the correction than the silence of the bulkhead. He brought this information to Starscream when they found a moment alone. His Second did not handle the news as calmly.
“He was outside your quarters?!” Came the hiss, claws stretching wide. "Do you often take council in your room!"

“I don’t think that’s what you should be focusing on.” Megatron commented, and narrowly avoiding being smacked in the helm by a wing as Starscream paced. “Is this going to be a problem?” He knew it was a common scenario - the natural claustrophobia took its toll on the flight capable warriors. Megatron knew a similar feeling, trapped in dark mines with no room to move. No freedom. He found sympathy for their situation but knew he could not go back on his command.

“Nothing I can’t handle.” Starscream reassured him, a wave of a servo, dismissive. But then the ire of Starscream was focused on him like a serpent swinging about and baring fangs. “Don’t interfere any further with my command.” He accused and Megatron only could roll his eyes, dared to reach out. Place his large sergo on the seeker’s light shoulder.

“Are you capable of controlling your brood?”

“Yes!” Snapped and around the corner a soldier caught their attention. Quick to scurry off with a ducked helm and stumbling pedes. “Yes.” Starscream repeated quieter and shoved Megatron’s touch away.

“Then that’s all that matters to me.” And that was the end of it.

Overall Megatron felt hopeful, small and brief, at what might be developing. Soundwave held no opinion but if he could continue to guide Starscream back into his trust then perhaps it could change the tide of their current predicament. He would have his soldier back and Starscream could earn the respect he so desperately craved. The other's momentary lapse in sanity could prove beneficial.

That it was a catalyst such as Starscream’s old lab-partner to start it all...Megatron still had questions on that. Thoughts for another time. For now he would bask in the strange feeling of peace in his officers of rank. It had been so long.

Well...

 Mostly.

After all the problem with trying to amend things with Starscream, is sometimes the seeker is very...very...VERY annoying.

Such as now, as he’s dragging claws against his station, grinding denta in sharp gnarled sounds, and being an utter nuisance to everyone. Even Soundwave sent their cassettes out after the brats started crying out whenever Starscream sighed. Loudly. Soundwave knew Megatron wouldn’t tolerate much more from either side before someone got thrown across the bridge so out the cassettes were quickly dismissed crying “Freedom!” as they ran out.

Megatron wished to go with them as Starscream let out another long-winded groan. Brittle scratching back on the console.

“Starscream!” He barked, the seeker jumping to attention and looking ashamed for it.

“What?”
After their talk, his attitude had slowly returned, albeit restrained for the most part. He hadn’t called Megatron a name in days, but his jittery nature was getting the best of him. If it was due to the lockdown of the base, they still had over two weeks to go and Megatron was not about to give in to spare himself Starscream’s frustrations. There had been three more seeker driven incidents that his Second had to manage, one resulting in Starscream demanding permission to throw one of his own into an acid pit for calling him fat. Permission denied of course, but it was more than just claustrophobia getting to the seekers. They’d suffered longer lockdowns than this before, but not one where their commander was temporarily removed from power.

He wondered if his interference had indeed caused more difficulties for Starscream.

“Is there a problem?” He asked, gripping one of many tablets Soundwave needed him to review before the next morning.

“No.”

“Then why are you sulking?”

“I’m not sulking.” Starscream responded by sulking further and pale wings dropped low.

Kliks later he was sighing again.

“Starscream. Follow me.” Megatron jumped to his pedes and moved off the platform in one step. Landing with a shudder which woke Skywarp from where the other had been drooling on his keyboard. (Exclaiming something about not sticking it in yet) and the few at the bridge watched Starscream all but fall out of his chair to stalk behind his leader. Mouth twitching the entire way.

It was a later shift, quiet through the halls of the base, and Starscream was once again warm at his side. Enough that even with a few feet between them, Megatron couldn't help but wonder if the other was ill.

“Where are we going?” He whined and Megatron only walked a touch faster, knowing Starscream hated it when he wasn’t side by side with Megatron. Some idea of superiority fed to him by his high-chaste upbringing. A shocking act of submission to allow another to walk in-front of you, he couldn’t stand it. So Megatron did just that.

“You’ll see.” The jet didn’t like that answer and by the time they reached one of the rarely used training rooms, he looked all the more miserable.

“Primus why?” He groaned and immediately slumped into the wall. “Didn’t I spend enough time suffering watching you train back in Kaon?”

Megatron stared at him.

“When did you watch me train on Kaon?” Starscream and his trine had been present during the final days of his gladiatorial career. While Megatron starred in rallies and rings, the seekers had worked for him in secret. Carefully planned assaults, organized reconnaissance and missions he couldn’t entrust to anyone else. He knew Starscream had been present at the fights at times, something Soundwave had strangely disliked, but training was normally a private matter. He never permitted onlookers.

Starscream made a face which resembled his shameful grimace when caught preening in reflective surfaces.

“Forget that, what are you going to make me suffer now?”
Megatron stood center of the flat ring, servos resting at his sides and looking Starscream over. It made the seeker flinch.

“You’re going to train with me.”

---

Soundwave watches Megatron shift to his left, narrowly avoiding the deft blue claws as they spark across a pauldron. Starscream ignites thrusters, launching over their leader’s helm. They watch as Megatron grows distracted by the ways red hips move, so much so that the blue marked pede comes slamming into Megatron’s face, knocking him to the ground.

Soundwave doesn’t worry though. They watch as Starscream lands, laughing at their leader’s prone form, only to be caught by Megatron’s swinging fist, leg buckling and landing without a thought of grace on his red aft. Megatron now the one laughing.

Soundwave has watched this while managing the several datapads Megatron was supposed to be reviewing before Starscream’s bothersome existence caused their leader to seek a solution. They listened to Megatron’s thoughts, his frustration and the skipping trail of cause and consideration. Until Megatron decided the best way to burn off Starscream’s pent up energy was to fight. Fight or Flight. In a way it was logical. Soundwave might have commended their leader had Megatron not assigned himself to the task, forsaking all other work in favor of the seeker. Something Megatron has done in various forms for many, many years.

Soundwave did not worry for Starscream’s state of mind in terms of betraying Megatron at the moment. They had been keeping a close eye on the seeker, following the rise and fall of chaotic energy. The twisting self deprecation. The guilt and regret which had always dictated Starscream’s motives until pride and arrogance took its place. Soundwave had not worried when Starscream knelt before Megatron those years ago, proclaiming loyalty and service without hesitation. Listening in to the seeker’s spark as awe and admiration challenged his own internal conflict. Soundwave knew Starscream had been searching for a purpose when they brought the trine to Megatron in the gladiator’s hovel. They knew Megatron would provide as the noble Megatron would always provide.

What Soundwave had not predicted to worry about was exactly what was occurring in their security feed. Watching Starscream lay flat on the training room floor, letting out shrill curses as Megatron stood over him, mouth cocked in amusement. Aiding the seeker to rise by a familiar touch. Servo drifting briefly to the seeker’s hip. Starscream brushing Megatron with his wing.

Soundwave did not worry when a lovely trio of high-chaste seekers all but screamed like fans when they met Megatron. Their leader was focused and not so easily distracted at the time. With the beginning of a new age, they all had priorities. The way Starscream had tried to flash pretty smiles and pale legs at the gladiator had gone unnoticed until it stopped. Starscream's intentions and frustrations settling to different avenues towards Megatron.

Now. Now Soundwave was worried as they caught the flash of Starscream’s smile, ducking under their leader’s arm to dig claws into his side, reigniting their spar with a cackle of delight. Megatron stretching back trying to catch the seeker who could fly out of reach, but does not.

They worry now because, through their time with Starscream, they had never experienced the seeker to hurt so openly as he did when Skyfire betrayed him. They’d felt the moment Starscream’s world
flooded in confusion like a black sea, drowning him. How Starscream’s terrible mind dwindled past fury to emptiness until Megatron had stepped forward and nobly dragged him out. Giving him the chance to breathe once more. Whether Starscream truly accepted the terms remained to be seen. Even Soundwave could not predict the on-goings of the seeker's mind. Always changing. Always chaotic.

But they worried regardless as Starscream’s first instinct was to kill his former lover when Skyfire did not live up to expectations, as ache and tragedy dictated Starscream’s thoughts into pure fire. Whether he realized it or not, Megatron was all but running to fill the jagged space left behind.

And Soundwave worried.

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“You're so slow, no wonder Prime always leaves you limping off the battlefield.”

Starscream spoke while he fought, and while that was one of the most annoying things Megatron has ever had to suffer: Starscream grinning at him made up for it.

“And how many times have you been grounded by those without wings?” He snaps back, rolling from Starscream’s dive towards his helm. Turning just in time to deflect repetitive strikes with his free arm. It was a strange feeling, training with the other. They had before, but only in the beginning when he worried his new seekers were not strong enough. Wanted them bulkier, more comfortable in their upgraded war frames. Since, Megatron had only engaged in close combat when trying to break Starscream while the seeker tried to break him in turn. A vicious cycle and one that showed through in this exercise.

They knew one another more intimately than Megatron had imagined.

Starscream knew when to dodge, deflect. He knew almost instinctively when Megatron would try to ground him, when to be out of range. How long it took Megatron’s joints to recalibrate and where Megatron’s blind spots were. In turn he knew Starscream more than he thought. When they fought before it was merely to hurt, restrain, shut him up and send him limping away. But now he saw Starscream’s lethal speed for what is was, his abilities without relying on his artillery. Megatron knew when to sacrifice a body part to avoid a greater strike, when to duck as Starscream swung with his leg - try to use his thrusters as an equally formidable weapon. It was like fighting Prime in a way, two entities in sync. Knowing one another.

Pure.

He wrapped an arm around the seeker’s waist, using momentum to hurl him downwards and Starscream swung roaring thrusters down, throwing Megatron off balance. He tried to curl around and escape the arm like a vice at his torso but Megatron doubled down. Let his natural body weight take the fall while locking servos together around Starscream’s body. Clutching just under his wings.

They landed backwards in a painful noise, something snapping, something else whirling pitifully. He was unsure which body took the damage past the speedy pulse of his fuel lines.

“Oh.” Starscream hissed, shuffling on top and sitting up, Megatron’s servos relaxing in what felt like a natural position...Only to have a null ray shoved under his nose. Training programs switched to battle protocol and his fusion cannon began to warm, rattling Starscream’s thigh armor where it rested. “Surrender.”

Megatron growled and watched the battle alerts begin to flicker off of their own volition. The first
time in many years his computer did not read Starscream as an active threat. Interesting.

“‘We agreed no weapons.’

‘That was before you copped a feel.’ Starscream’s body was rigid beneath his servos, sleek thighs tense and tight where they spread obscenely wide to settle over Megatron’s torso and…

‘Ah.’ He commented…and didn’t lift his servos. Starscream’s face did a lovely thing. Between a twitch and a smile and a sneer. Calculating his options, and perhaps deciding if he would really shoot his leader after all. Megatron would likely survive, but their tentative peace would certainly be over.

Maybe. Megatron was still deciding. He might allow Starscream to shoot him for the feel of him under hand, strong and lean.

“And you say I’m the cheater.” His voice was lax but the language of his body was entirely different and Megatron withheld the urge to laugh at how ridiculous their positions were.

And how unwilling he was to move.

“Aren’t you going to shoot me?” Megatron asks and notes with interest that Starscream’s gaze drifts, startles, and returns to his weapon trained on his leader.

“With my luck you’d survive.” He sneered and with a roll of the eyes retracted the weapon. “Which is a shame, I had you almost where I wanted you!” Megatron takes advantage of Starscream’s distracted by the sound of his own voice. One arm sweeping wings down to their lowest position so when he rolls their forms he does not crush the delicate things. It means when they land, Starscream’s back is resting on his arm - but his seeker was not so slow. Able to turns knees to press directly into Megatron’s chest, keep him from bearing down the full of his weight in turn so he would not be pinned.

He has Starscream held by position alone, the free arm a column by the seeker's helm to keep him from falling entirely on him. Crushing him.

“You should have shot me.” He chuckles low and Starscream’s entire face turns in color as he struggles to speak - unusual. Very little tended to stop Starscream from speaking and Megatron had not planned to hurt him? Starscream turned dark. Features flushed in energon with the sudden shiver throughout his body as it takes Megatron a moment to realize the cause. Their position. The seeker’s curled legs leaving nowhere else for Megatron’s hips to go except Starscream’s lower half.

Intimate panel roughly braced against equally intimate panel. The seeker looks horrified...

At least until he kicks Megatron in the groin.

---

Soundwave keeps looking at him with suspicion.

Megatron does not feel as though he should /have/ to address anything.

The telepath is not satisfied and it shows.

“We were training.” He defends, though Megatron does not feel it is required to explain himself to his Third in Command… “It was an accident.” Soundwave unleashes a low pulse of sound, like an unenthused *hum* as they continued to walk. It had been two days since the training room incident where Megatron had limped back to the bridge, snarling at any mech who dared to notice the dent in
his pelvic armor. The smallest scratch of blue. Soundwave had taken one look at him, dropped the collection of datapads into his lap (which hurt) and walked off the bridge.

“Starscream. Radio silence.” Soundwave comments and Megatron curls a lip.

“I know.” Not that Starscream had vanished, but the seeker seemed more than happy to not speak to Megatron. It was a test of his renewed dedication to not fight with the other. He felt very close to failing that test.

“Suggestion?”

“No.” Megatron snapped. “I am not apologizing.”

“Do not address. Do not engage.” Megatron paused briefly, considering Soundwave’s words. He didn’t feel the need to apologize, nothing was done. Unfortunate circumstances do happen after all. Once he saw a constructicon grab Prime’s second by the codpiece and he ran away screaming. No one brought it up (Except for Rumble and Frenzy whenever they wanted to see a multistory Devastator cry). It was ridiculous, a slip, and he had right to decide he was the clear winner in that match.

“I agree, Soundwave.” He nodded and his Third seemed satisfied as they entered the bridge.

Starscream’s wings flashed and the seeker let out a hiss. Physically pulling himself away from Megatron despite that they was quite some distance between them. Those present watched with wide optics, startled by the sound and Starscream’ abrupt change in demeanor. The jet held a tiny datapad over his body, slinking away to the other side of the room. Megatron wanted to chase after him and throw him out to sea.

Starscream hissed again before he vaulted over a terminal and ran out the door leaving the rest only to stare at their leader.

“Starscream. Gone..” Soundwave spoke up a few moments later, calculating.

“I can see that.” Lip curled.


“Away heathen!” Starscream was lucky no one was around to hear him or else Megatron might have actually opened fire chasing him down the open corridor.

“Stop that!” He only caught up because Starscream allowed him, knowing better than to assume the seeker couldn’t just fly out of range, likely taking refuge in the seeker’s district of the Victory. His second lett out a squawk as Megatron closed a servo around the lean arm, yanking him back until wings hit the bulkhead.

“Ow!” Snapped and Megatron pushed into his space, shrouding him in shadow. Starscream quickly changed his tune. “O kokok. Calm down! I’m sorry sir!” He shrunk down and Megatron did his best not to raise fists, even to box the other in. “It was a joke!”

“To embarrass me in front of my soldiers?” He demands, and instantly regrets it the way Starscream
looks. Entirely unapologetic.

“I mean…it was funny to me?”

“Starscream…” Warned, pushing closer until his chestplate brushes the bright glass of Starscream’s cockpit, causing the seeker’s expression to go all sorts of funny. He’s recalls the look Starscream gave when Megatron fell into him. How he choked on words, frame shivering, unable to make a sound past the tiny whine stuck in his vocalizer. How small he felt at the moment, how he’d been grinning as they panted about the training room, tearing into one another as if it were the most natural thing.

“Sir?” He squeaked and Megatron maintained his proximity, listening to fans click on as Starscream’s face began to color. His lip dark under worrying denta...

“Take your seekers out flying tomorrow.”

“What?” The change in his tension was immediate, Starscream straightening and further brushing their bodies together. He seemed oblivious to this as legs slotted together in the cramped space. “Really? But the lock down is still---” His optics were bright and blue servos briefly clung to Megatron’s bulky torso.

“I’ve decided we’ll be doing a smash and grab in a few days. I want my aerial combatants ready.” He explained and then Starscream smiled and Megatron didn’t know what to do with himself.

“Yes sir!” Cheery, but more invested in slipping out from Megatron’s grasp, not bothering to turn and thank or acknowledge his leader in any way. Megatron watched as the seeker got only a few steps before cursing at the idea of running and his transformation was seamless. Body twisting in one elegant turn and with a shock of engines vanished around the corridor, leaving the scent of scorched air and heat behind. He commed Soundwave once Starscream was out of sight, who answered with a flat greeting.

[Yes, Lord Megatron?]

[We’re ending the lockdown tomorrow for Aerial units only. Give clearance to Starscream to utilize the launch pad. Also begin preparations for a raid later this week.]

Silence.

[Understood.] Another paused as Megatron leaned back into the bulkhead, feeling where the seeker had been. Sighing with a nameless struggle until Soundwave followed up. [Is Starscream going to return to shift duty?]

Megatron punched a hole where Starscream had been. “...That little!”

---

There are grievances amongst the ranks that morning as the launch pad is raised and the aerial force is all but crawling over one another trying to get in line. Megatron makes his presence known, standing at attention while seekers are flashing colors and smacking wings. Low whines and sharp hissing. He watches trines and the unbound move in anxious circles, all staring at the closed doors above like Primus themself was about to peek inside.

Starscream and his trine look exhausted. Apparently managing their eager kin was not an easy night
and when Megatron approaches Starscream, the seeker Commander looks him at him with suspicion.

“No take backs. I already told them they could fly and I will let them kill you.” He says quickly and Megatron shakes his helm, unfazed by the threat.

“I’m here merely to ensure you receive no trouble. You have command here, Starscream.” Explains and the seeker gives him a look before shuffling off.

Starscream barks commands at the groups. Partially in standard and some in Vosian when his orders are not adhered to by the letter. He organizes them by rank, by speed and stealth. He’s ensuring the trines of rank know the routes by spark - no deviation from flight patterns knowing the amount of fleshling satellites and how carefully they watch planes over populated areas. He seems to have been up all night planning this, navigating through their database to create multiple flight patterns so no groups had to be grounded and wait for others to return and Megatron was indeed impressed. Watching Starscream tend to his subordinates, his trine following in perfect unison. It reminded him of how it used to be, back on Cybertron. His bickering trio of dramatic wings, lethal and a mess, but perfect in every execution of his orders.

Megatron has done the math. He knows how long it was between Skyfire’s crash and Starscream’s arrival at Megatron’s pedes. Starscream would still be grieving when he vowed allegiance to him in Kaon.

“This is going to be loud,” Starscream appears and a blue servo is placed over Megatron’s insignia, a gentle nudge to guide his leader past the marked lines. He allows it, only due to his confusion that Starscream would touch him so openly and without insult. Taking the required steps back until Starscream deems it satisfactory. “Dim audial receptors to 57% or else you’re going to have quite the processor ache.”

“What of them?” Megatron nods towards a group of frowning ground soldiers, watching in disdain as the seekers all gathered to leave. Bitter and jealous. He knew there would be hell to pay for this decision but it would be easily fixed with the upcoming raid, needing to wear out his soldiers fast as he could. Get them back in working order.

Starscream looks in the direction and almost seems pleased.

“They’ll just have to learn.” The seeker winks an optic and Megatron looks away, adjusting his receptor as the Air Commander raises a servo.

The world is deafened.

Never before has Megatron had even this fraction of the aerialforce all together transform and ignite their engines in such confined a structure. He can feel the vibration of the collective shake the ground where they stood. Found himself needing to stalk low, assaulted by the sound. Beside him, Starscream is entirely unaffected and almost ecstatic as the bay doors stretch wide, casting him in the pale light of morning, his colors violent against the darkness of the launching pad.

His first look to the open blue sky and his optics are bright. Smile feral.

Thundercracker and Skywarp stand by, behind them the pouting observers cling to their helms in pain. Pushing off the railings to seek cover from the all-consuming noise. Starscream presses a servo to Megatron's arm, one wing flashing silver and blinding and the seekers react. A hive of movement, shivering across the brightly colored wings. Sections break off, groups begin their ascent. In perfect form the seekers twist and cut through the opening of the bay doors. Jetting off to the skies in shapely forms of diamond patterns. Their orders, clear, each knowing where they needed to go.
Megatron realizes Starscream’s light hold was for his Second’s benefit. Needing a grounding touch so he doesn’t run and push the others out of the way and jet to the sky. Entire frame shaking in need to fly but doing his best to direct his force with the flashing of wings and a silent speech. Megatron stands at full height in response, wanting to give Starscream the stability he needs as the final groups tear out of the base with the same natural elegance as all the seekers. He spots a familiar color scheme, Moonlace, following a trine as their fourth and he wonders if this will solve any further problems with Starscream’s ranks.

“Star. Scream. Let’s. Go!” Skywarp’s voice can be heard now as the last seekers are out, vibrating walls in the wake of such a display. In the sky Megatron can still count the distance flecks of jets separating formation. Going off to stretch their wings and drawing pale streaks in the sky. The elite trine the last to go, Thundercracker looking ready to throttle their wing-leader as he seems to hesitate. Shaking where his hand still meets Megatron’s wrist.

“ScreamerWeWillLeaveYou!” They shout and Starscream gets three steps before whipping around, bearing a smile worth the Decepticon cause.

“Come fly with me.” He asks, ignoring his trine mates who throw hands in the air and begin heading towards the launch pad. Megatron has only a frown to answer, his vocalizer inhibited by the curve of Starscream’s mouth. “I can carry you,” Taps his cockpit, optics glancing to the sunlight above. “If you’d like?”

Megatron only closes the distance with a servo, gently brushing the tip of his Second’s bright wing to watch Starscream color dark in response.

“Not this time.” Motions towards the trine about to abandon him. “Don’t let me slow you down. Go dominate your skies...I’ll be here.” Starscream bites his own lip, look dissecting something in Megatron’s features, before nodding with a quick “yes my lord”. He almost looks disappointed but recovers well. Doesn’t run - but turbines burn hot in Megatron’s proximity. The graceful twist of his body in transformation as he pays no mind to the dock workers diving out of the way. Brilliant white wings catching the sun like a mirror, causing Megatron to shade his optics with a servo to watch him lead his trine out. One turn. Two turns. Three turns as he ascends and claims the sky as his once more, streak of white dividing the blue peace of the morning.

Megatron watches until there is no more Starscream to see, not even specks on the horizon, and moves to return to his duties. Likely brawl with some subordinate who might disagree with his choice in granting the seekers freedom.

He almost runs into Soundwave, the telepath with helm tilted curiously in examination. Likely picking Megatron’s thoughts which suddenly felt invasive after millions of years of allowing just that.

“Soundwave, were you able to gather an opinion on Starscream’s mood just then?” Suddenly very curious to know after Starscream asked him to fly. Looked at Megatron with such hope he’d say yes. The swelling of excitement in his handsome face…

“Negative.” Soundwave’s voice is curt, irritated, Megatron can’t imagine. He personally was in quite a good mood suddenly.

“That’s alright, I have a feeling he’s doing rather well as of late.” He’s walking past his Third, expecting Soundwave to fall in line and follow as was habit at this point.

“Sir?”
“Yes?” Megatron watches the telepath and his oldest friend to bear his symbol fix him with a look usually spared for when a cassette does something unforgivable. “What is it Soundwave?”

“Do not offer Starscream more than you are willing to give.”

---

The seekers return hours later in waves of sound and storming pedes. As far as their intelligence has found there were no sightings past a few fleshling youths who chased jet shadows across their desert homes. No reason to think Autobots might have caught on. Already an improved atmosphere is reported, their winged soldiers going for rations and lingering with tired, pleasant expressions. Leaning against one another or some even falling asleep at tables.

Megatron already had Soundwave adjust their ration percentage to accommodate for the excess energy burned today. But. He hoped they were worn down so as to perform admirably and obediently during the upcoming raid. He wondered if Starscream would be just as tired? Hopefully so. Perhaps the seeker would be pleasant tomorrow, even explain why he asked Megatron to fly /with/ him?

There was a power station in the east with little to offer in terms of amassing a substantial haul, but with multiple alternative plans in works taking what they needed would be easy. Plus they never had to go back unlike certain areas where Autobots deemed it too tempting a source and kept guard tight and vigilant. He was working on mapping possible infiltration sequences at his desk in his chambers when he’s alerted by a summons at his door.

Unlikely to be Soundwave, his Third requesting the evening to spend with their cassettes since the entire base was on minimal shifts due to the seeker force being out. He approached the door, spotting a sharp wing in the security display. Megatron thought briefly of the seeker who’d waited for Megatron in the hall, wondering if it could be a similar incident, but then three sharp bangs were followed by,

“Megatron!” Starscream’s voice sounded annoyed, not urgent. “I felt you approach, open up!” He pressed the intercom instead.

“What do you want Starscream?” He asked, watching the seeker shuffle back in the display, stare up into the camera with a twist to his mouth.

“I need to tell you something.” He was trying to get closer to the camera. “Just open up!”

“It’s late.” He complained, but his servo was moving as he thought once more on the way the seeker had looked standing in the sunlight. Blinding white and vicious red as he commanded one of the most lethal forces known to the galaxy with only a smile and flick of a wing. “What is it?”

Starscream appeared surprised that it worked and Megatron was quick to notice a few differences. Namely the wind rough look to the seeker’s normally so pristine armor. The smallest whine to his wings as they shifted in movement along with their owner, overused and likely in need of a touch up. It seemed likely Starscream didn’t stop his performative maneuvers the entire time he was out.

“You look, tired.” Which was true but Starscream’s playful grin sent off small alarms in Megatron’s processors. He crossed his arms both to imply impatience. “You wanted to tell me something?”

“Thank you.”

Ah.
What?

Starscream’s smile nearly split his face in two, laughing.

“You look so horrified!” He clutched his chest, continuing to cackle at his leader while the other could only wait until Starscream regained his senses...or suffocated.

“You’re welcome to leave me at any time.” Grunted and glared past the seeker’s wing. Being so openly mocked was something he’d hoped Starscream’s change would have left behind. But the other did not seem unsympathetic, pressing pale servos to Megatron’s arms and drew careful shapes over the mech’s thick armor. Optics round and playfully apologetic.

“In earnest then?” Offered, going up on pedes and using Megatron’s body as balance. He tried not to consider that this was the same creature who a month ago tried to kill him and days ago had screeched like a banshee and kicked Megatron in the groin for an accident.

“What are you thanking me for?”

“For today.” Paused, clearly gathering the words. “I know the strain it puts on you. To play favorites.” Megatron chuckled and it made Starscream’s wings bounce.

“You think you’re my favorite?” He challenged, but the seeker never faltered in his smile.

“I know I’m your favorite.” Voice held an unexpected sense of promise, sent Megatron searching the other’s features for a further meaning but there was none obvious to be found. Megatron considered Soundwave’s words. Not to offer more than he can give? A riddle for all it bothered him.

“Are your seekers happy?”

“They are far more relaxed, grateful for their mighty Lord to have given them such reprieve.” He almost sings so of course Megatron decides to ruin the good mood.

“Are you still in agony?” Starscream shudders. Arrogance slipping long enough that Megatron can see that hurt still edging the surface of his seeker’s mind and he wants to reach out. Crush it between his hands.

"Why would I be?" Tries to cover his mistake, flattering optics warm and red in the dim light. Megatron finds it deplorable.

"So." He has half a mind to shrug Starscream off, but he finds he wants the seeker close. Wants him unable to pretend not to hear him. "We’re back to lying?" The toll is instant.

“Haven’t I been exemplary?” Voice drops in warning, insulted as digits squeeze to pinch his armor. But Megatron only fears Starscream’s denial. He may play pretty and subservient all he likes, he would rather have an honest wreck than a fake soldier.

“You are exemplary, Starscream. But what Skyfire did to you…” A clear mistake to say that name as fire flashed in the seeker’s eyes. Shoving at Megatron with all his strength. Megatron easily catching himself, elbows the open door frame for balance as he’s faced once more with a snarling entity.

“Am I not giving you what you wanted? I'm behaving! I'm letting you get by with stupid decisions, not challenging you past what doesn't matter. What more do you want?”

Megatron strangely does not feel any heat in return. Instead, a rare sympathy watching his Second do all in his power to deflect blame or distress.
“I want it to be earnest, or nothing at all.” How Starscream had laughed during their spar - that the other wanted Megatron to fly with him. “I don't care if you heal from the wounds inflicted upon you by your former friend.” Starscream had to physically turn to escape the word. “But what I want, what I asked, is that you not bleed to death from it. Skyfire is dead.”

Starscream looks broken before he snarls to hide behind rage.

“You survived once. You will survive again. Why should our faction be torn apart between our petty grievances?” Megatron felt that was enough, let the brat drag someone else into his tantrum. If forced to deal with the seeker any further a mistake will be made. He pushes back into his room, watching Starscream’s features strangled to decide his reaction, but Megatron has no time for this. He's given the other plenty of chances, chased him to that edge, asked him not to jump. It's not his responsibility if Starscream crumbles.

With the taste of what it could be, he hopes Starscream is stronger.

“Rest Starscream. Male up your mind. But I’ll need my soldier in the morning.”

…

They agree to hit the energy station sooner than anticipated. Sightings of Autobots on the move, best time when their enemy was spread out. Lessened the odds of Optimus or his heavier hitters to arrive before the seekers were able to airlift their payload out of danger. The plant itself was on the edges of Autobot reach so they would need to be careful. Expedient. It would rely on seekers.

Starscream agrees with the plan, tone flat and optics focused. Soundwave watches him with a heavy gaze but Megatron is able to set aside his thoughts on Starscream for now. Either he rises to the challenge or he is not the soldier Megatron needs him to be.

“My only amendment, prepare a disruptive force by the main road in case the fleshlings have heavier artillery than expected.” With slender claws he draws a red line on the projected map. “It won't do terrible damage but if speed if essential, I can't risk it.”

“Fine. Scrappy, you and Bonecrusher cover the road. Myself and Astrotrain will fall back to provide cover for the seekers and evacuation for the ground units once they are clear.” Starscream made a face like he wanted to argue but was unable to hold Megatron’s gaze for too long. “Agreed?”

“Agreed.” The table echoes and Megatron prepares for battle.

It is by luck alone that Megatron catches Ironhide’s swing before it can punch a fist-sized hole through Starscream's wing.

Speedy cars encircle them, but the seekers have already been loaded and taken flight. Starscream ducks between the struggling fists of Megatron and Ironhide towards the exit. Turbines kicking on as he takes aim and unleashes a firestorm upon the Autobots trying to latch onto escaping jets.

“Gotta per-tect those perdy wings huh?” Ironhide laughs and tries to kick his knee joint out. He narrowly avoids the danger, letting the bulky mech lose balance to his own weight as Megatron copies Starscream in falling under arms and slipping out.

Unlike Starscream, however, he's sticking to the plan.

“Get out of here!” Yells at the red and pale jet lingering at the roof, now torn asunder from their
arrival. He can hear Astrotrain’s excited crackle as the triplechanger transformers and a damn train slams into one of the sleek cars about to fire on Megatron.

“Let’s go!” Starscream yells and sweeps back down in his direction. Megatron doesn’t have a chance to curse as he’s running forward. Starscream’s arm outstretched to lift Megatron, but instead, Megatron all but throws him to the ground with an unceremonious screech of metal. Just as Jazz opens fire towards delicate wings.

“The plan Starscream!” Positively growls as he unleashes a violet beam from the fusion cannon, far wall exploding in debris and smoldering flame. “We will be right behind you, go!” He almost kicks the prone seeker, but overrides the long-set habit. Standing over him, covers him, until Starscream regains his barings.

“Stubborn old mech!”

“Spoiled brat!”

Lays down suppressive blasts from the cannon, pushing the weapon to it’s limit with the constant charge. At least until he sees glistening white slip out from the broken roof and into open sky. Good.

“Astrotrain.” Megatron dodges in time to miss Ironhide’s punch, slamming his own fist into the old mech’s gut. “Collect the others. Meet me on the roof.”

---

It’s a successful raid. Morale soars and those who fought sit high on mess hall tables and show off their cracked armor like the newest fad. The seekers join, eager to complain that their superior flight was the determining factor and it ends in shoving matches or snarling fights - yet the base is filled with energy renewed. How such a small thing can have such an influence.

There’s minimal damage to his arm, the fusion cannon under stress leaving painful fissures in his armor. Otherwise, a few typical scraps and a displaced jaw, Megatron suffered more damage once assisting Soundwave catch their cassettes for bath time.

Hook gets done with the cosmetic repair before the doors are slammed apart and Starscream begins yelling. Accusing Hook of tampering with *delicate equipment*. That the medic isn’t *qualified*. Waving claws about and claiming “precious cargo” as he began kicking Hook to make him leave faster.

Megatron was too tired, sated after the brawl with Ironhide, to try and stop him. Just waved blindly at Hook as the medic tried to argue but was unsuccessful at over powering the small chaotic fit.

“He didn’t hurt you did he?” Starscream tenderly cooed and Megatron sat up to stare at him in both confusion and horror….

Only to watch Starscream fall over the fusion cannon like a coddling mother.

“You’re ridiculous.” He groans, slouching back onto the medical bench and surrendering to Starscream’s wandering servos as the seeker began to detach the cannon.

“Look at this mess! If Prime were there he could have just punched your arm clean off!” Starscream over exaggerates, fussing with delicate clasps. “Move.” Orders and Megatron is forced to scoot to the side, allow enough room for Starscream to sit at the edge. Tool in hand already prying open connector panels while Megatron’s arm rests across his pale thighs.
He was warm.

“Can I blame you for this?” Grunts, sitting up now to watch dexterous servos at work. His chest brushes Starscream’s shoulder and the seeker doesn't seem to notice, too focused on his work.

“I didn't abuse the trigger and melt a cell.” Half the weapon shifts from place and Starscream attacks the next tether. “I build you so many beautiful things and you always try to break them. Try to be gentle for once!”

Megatron’s growling breath caught the seeker off guard as it coast across his helm due to their proximity.

“I was the one to rescue you.” He reminded. “You nearly lost a wing.”

“Oh stop complaining I would have been fine.” Megatron reaches with his free servo, giving the nearest wing a sharp tug which was a horrible mistake. Not only does Starscream yell, but the hooked tool digs right into the open wound causing him to roar in the surprise of pain.

“Damn seeker!” He clutches Starscream’s thigh while the pain ebbs. “Always causing so much trouble!” Starscream was quick to apply a liquid spray in the wound, another tool pressing on a nerve to suffocate the pain. Instant relief appreciated, though he did not release the leg from his grip.

“Oh right. Because I'm sooo much trouble.” Starscream mocked, wings shaking likely in insult that Megatron touched them at all. “Just leave me there next time!” The cannon detaches and Megatron has to quickly reach around the seeker’s frame to catch it before its weight crashes to the ground.

“Have I ever abandoned you?!” Wants to yell louder but he's currently wrapped around Starscream, feeling every twitch and shudder coming from the sleek body. His anger deflates into a dull frustration, hoisting the cannon as Starscream leads it to rest at the foot of the bench.

He's currently got one arm wrapped around Starscream’s waist as the other is left unsure of where to rest. He chooses his own knee, bent at Starscream's back. Gives the bright wings more room.

“No.”

“Pardon?” Finds his voice is too gruff and tries to clear it, but Starscream is watching him with open curiosity. Megatron almost jerks back in surprise.

“No you have never abandoned me even when I know you want to...You decrepit tin can.” His mouth twitches to smile and Megatron groans, falling back to slouch once more on the medical bed.

“You're exhausting.” He complains and feels Starscream shift beneath his hold. Goes lax, not wanting to make the other feel trapped whereas Megatron feels as if he's lost some battle. Name calling back, he should have expected it sooner. “I want my cannon back by-”

A soft mouth closes over his before he registers Starscream so near.

He’s startled to stillness, optics aware but unable to process past the almost tentative motion of the other's lips against his. Separated before he react.

It's brief as it was gentle and Starscream tries to shuffle back, saying something which skips unheard by his sensors. Megatron's servo grips the back of the smaller helm. feeling tension jerk through the seeker, and presses back to him.

The response is immediate. Body heated as Starscream scrambles higher up the berth, kissing into
Megatron’s mouth both starved and furious. The sweep of a sharp glossa and Megatron breaths hot across the seeker’s lips. Delving down to the parted mouth, wanting to bite smirking lips dark. Servo pushing between pale thighs to yank Starscream onto his lap.

The noise the seeker makes fries his processor. He is dead and dumb to all but the taste of the other. The pin prick pain as claws cling to his pauldrons. Thighs spreading across his broad torso and Starscream bites his mouth hard enough that Megatron growls. Yanking a wing as punishment and the delightful sound from before is moaned into his mouth...

Just as Hook barges in wielding a crowbar as a weapon, yelling about protocols.

Starscream yells, spinning so quickly that his helm smashes into Megatron’s face. Something snaps and a burst of agony erupts across his olfactory sensor. Megatron reaches up to clutch his face and it's slick with fuel and a tearing pain.

“He's all yours!” Barely hears Starscream through the throb pounding across his helm. Doesn't see the cannon snatched or the doors slam shut as optics struggle to recalibrate from the shock of the blow.

He can see the bridge of his nose jutting at a highly incorrect angle and his body screams with vents trying to recollect himself.

The pain helps.

So does Hook staring at him, makeshift weapon lowered and looking as if he would do anything to not have walked in when he did.

Megatron can relate.

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It’s late by the time Megatron is able to return to his chambers. Olfactory sensor reset and resealed, damages to his bracers filled and secured. Hook struggled to ask if he wanted to have the tell-tale blue streaks of paint transfer buffed from Megatron’s pauldrons but Megatron only snarled and his medic worked silently for the rest of the time.

Starscream had kissed him.

Interesting.

Megatron was stuck on that: Interesting.

He’d not considered at any point in time...well perhaps that was not true. The seeker was a flirt, notorious for poorly timed smiles and had caused a great deal of trouble now and again with such flirtations. He’d never seen Starscream do more than string an idiot along to sedate shallow boredom - and before now he would likely rather have gurgled acid than find out if half the rumors of promiscuity were true.

But Starscream had kissed him.

Worse, he thinks, thumb stroking his lip as he walks, turning a familiar corridor to his room: Megatron had kissed back.

Interesting.
Plagued with thoughts he does not noticed the figure waiting at his doors until he’s forced to approach them. Soundwave, silent and vigil, watching their leader approach with no sign they knew what was pulsing through Megatron’s thoughts.

Megatron was quick to try and suppress the memory, his shifting feelings on it...the feel of Starscream’s…

“Whatever it is, wait for morning.” He tries to push the officer aside, not wanting to deal with anything right now besides scrubbing the remnants of spilled fuel from his broken face.

Soundwave tilted their head, looking over Megatron’s state, but did not question.

“Urgent information.” They were already illuminating a projection hologram despite Megatron’s orders.

"I said it can wait!” The images flicker to life, a familiar wasteland of frigid cold and bitter ends. Optimus Prime steps into view, overseeing the operations as his diligent workers bring something from the ice.

A figure moves, pale as the snow itself. Massive wings scorched with Starscream’s weapons and Prime is the only one large enough to offer a servo, assist Skyfire from the grave.

“Have you cleared the databanks of this information?”

“Yes. Sir.”

“Good. Keep it that way. I want all surveillance destroyed of that area, we can’t risk even having the drones return with ghosts of the recordings. I want it all gone.”

“Yes. Sir.” Soundwave’s images flickered once more, replaying the moment Skyfire rose from the excavation site. Clutching his spark and looked to the sky. “Suggestion. Inform Starscream?”

He watches again as Prime assists the shuttle from what should have been his final resting place, a fury builds at the memory of how empty Starscream’s optics had been when he asked for death.

Wanting to die rather than live in a world where he did not have Skyfire.

“No. This stays between you and I.”

“Affirmative.” Soundwave bows and Megatron enters his room, chewing on a soft dent Starscream left across his lip.
"Starscream, my permits have been approved for travel!" Skyfire had been glowing in that moment, so excitable that he found it necessary to squeeze his datapad to his chin whilst hovering over Starscream’s workstation. Made it difficult to ignore him, the bright white shuttle all but bouncing on his pedes.

“I’m so happy for you,” He’d answered, needing to push around the other to reach for a tool. “How long will you be gone, two thousand stellar years? I’ll be running this stupid place by the time you return.” Skyfire plucked the intended tool out of Starscream’s grasp causing the seeker to scowl.

“What are you doing?”

“You are upset.” Skyfire stated.

“Why would I be upset?” Huffed and tried reaching for the item only to fall short. “Your studies are dependant on travel.” He managed to grab the blunt end but Skyfire wouldn’t let go, forcing Starscream to step into his space. The other leaning in too close to examine his frown as if Starscream were a foreign entity on his table.

“Stop it.”

“You could come with me.” Skyfire’s grip loosens on the tool and nearly causes Starscream to trip backwards. He growls low and tries to return to his work, brushing Skyfire away with a flicker of wings.

“Oh /can I please?/ Let me just abandon all my work to go slum it on organic planets. Camping on asteroids without a polish brush in sight.” He mocked and usually at this point Skyfire would sigh and accept Starscream’s sarcasm. Surrender in whatever the latest topic of disagreement was. Instead he watched Skyfire’s shadow as the shuttle approached, settling in to lean over his left wing, blue optics terribly kind.

“It could be fun?”

“You hate fun.” Skyfire frowns in response.

“No, I dislike wasting time.” He corrected. “But having a mech such as yourself, with your vast knowledge and ingenuity, as my assistant could only be beneficial to my work.” Starscream spun around and felt tricked that Skyfire was waiting to smile in the face of his glare.

“Oh, I’d be your assistant would I?!” Shoved the greater bulk of the shuttle who laughed, giant and ticklish and clearly amused at Starscream’s reaction. He never flinched when Starscream yelled. Never seemed bothered by his volume.

“I would be the senior member of the expedition,” He offered, chuckling as Starscream continued trying to push him away from his workstation. "Ecology isn’t your strongest division.”
“I’m no one’s lackey!” He snapped, digging claws against Skyfire’s hip to make the other yelp. Push off the table to avoid damage to more sensitive equipment.

“Then be my partner?” Skyfire’s hopeful tone broke through Starscream’s annoyance. Always did. Always could and Primus how Starscream hated him for it. This earnest, open creature who had to duck to enter classrooms and could reduce Starscream to a quiet mess with only a word. “I cannot imagine doing this without you.”

Just as Starscream couldn’t imagine a day without him.

I'm a scientist, not an executioner!

Scorched metal breaks in his servos. Weakened by Megatron’s abuse of the intricate weapon, it crumbles brittle in his palms. Starscream leans back from the fusion cannon, unable to focus and not wanting his distracted mind to influence his work. He could kill everyone on this base with one wrong move and while he’s suffered the temptation before it would also mean killing himself.

And Starscream was too angry to die.

I knew him once…

“I’ve already mourned you!” He smashes a fist down in the workbench as he screams at ghosts. The dent left behind does little to ease his mood but the soft pain keeps him on track. Prevents hurt from reaching out and drawing his trine to him.

How long had it taken last time, to forget Skyfire? How many years until he stopped looking for his smile in the crowd? The star-white figure with all the humble grace of a minicon, haunting the periphery of his sight as Starscream continued living without him. He once thought about Skyfire every second of every day, only bothering to hide it after binding himself to Skywarp and Thundercracker. Two faceless seekers he picked up, not believing he’d need them long, and instead stitched his spark to theirs like an idiot. The idea of losing them driving him to all sorts of stupid decisions. But Skyfire was always there, lurking in the dark. Waiting for a blue optic or soft chuckle to emerge in Starscream’s mind, blossom like an all-consuming fire over his processor. The first time it happened after binding to his trine Thundercracker thought Starscream was dying. Back then he would have done anything to make it stop.

Then again, Starscream could recall the moment it did stop.

The violence of the ring mirrored his own anger. The shattering of bodies and bloody pleas, the way titans fell to stronger, more clever survivors. For years he’d suffered, wanting justice for what happened to him. From losing Skyfire to the cruelty of a planet that denied him respect. His trine and he outcasts, unable to return home, but here in the wretched squall of gladiators and brewing rebellion they found purpose.

He found Megatron.

The gladiator preached that the world was wicked, so they should done the mask of the wicked in return. That no mech, regardless of build, should accept an assigned fate. That he could be more than society’s scapegoats and the forgotten. To start new, find purpose in the death and tragedy already on his servos, it all sounded great to Starscream. Quick to join, to crawl his way to Megatron’s shadow. He wanted Megatron to need him the same way Starscream needed his words, his validation.

Starscream ran a pale servo down the body of the cannon. Dissected and scattered into thousands of pieces across his work space where only Starscream knew how to put it back together.
When Megatron ordered Starscream off base those weeks ago after Skyfire, his trine had asked him to beg for his life. They three knew Starscream’s antics had gone too far and their leader was at his breaking point. Where Megatron could forgive treachery he was never kind to shows of weakness and Starscream himself knew that’s all he could offer at that time. He fell apart because of Skyfire and was too stupid not to let Megatron see.

“Don’t die.” They had begged him. “Not because of this.”

Funny. Megatron had asked the same thing. Suddenly so many cared about him. Convenient. Wonder how long this joke would last? It was enough to make him chuckle, cover his mouth with tense hands, laugh until his wings ache and he finds peace resting his helm against the table’s edge.

He’s done everything in his power to convince Megatron it was all better now, but the old fool saw right through him. Won’t let it go. Tragic. But he supposed at this point he’s stood with the warlord longer than he ever knew Skyfire. Lived at Megatron’s side, serving his leader’s will. It likely meant Megatron knew Starscream better than Skyfire ever had a chance to.

Skyfire had looked at him like he was a monster while Megatron forced him off his crumbling knees. Ordered him to survive this. Ever the noble warrior, and afthead Starscream thought, mouth twitching in a smile.

He feels Skywarp’s approach before the telltale crackle of energy swells warm at his wings. His wingmates quiet as they shuffle in the small space of his workshop hidden in the many unexplored walls and stolen space of the Victory. Whether Soundwave even knew of his lab was uncertain but the telepath had yet to take it from him, so Starscream only had these two to fear breaking anything.

“What?” His emotions were clearly running too broad, brought the other here and why? He didn’t know. They’ve been up his aft since Skyfire the same as Megatron, same as the lurking stares of their kin hungry for Starscream to slip up. Waiting.

“We uh,” Thundercracker stumbled.

“You good?” Skywarp, never one to read the mood, pushed his way over Starscream’s shoulder. Examining the table as an excuse to touch his wingleader. A seeker comfort, their intertwined sparks reaching for eachother. Starscream hated it, that even now he still wanted his trine with him. They’d begun to despise one another since before earth, this horrid place. Starscream didn’t know how to fix it. He didn’t know how to fix anything.

“I kissed Megatron.” Answers while pulling a tool from Skywarp’s grasp, moving to realigned two conductors and use his work to keep from listening to the squeal from his trine’s sparks.

“Oh.” Thundercracker leans at his side, arms crossed and looking flushed even in the dim light. Starscream can feel Skywarp struggling not to explode on his other side. “How does that...make you...feel?”

He openly thinks about Megatron’s servos pulling him in, the strain of his body trying to clutch his leader by his thighs. How Megatron had eagerly swallowed his kiss with a vicious and unexpected return.

“EwEwEw!” Thundercracker shrivels. “Ok we get it hot wings,”

“I don’t know TC,” Skywarp chirps, tone a little too enthused. “If Screamer starts clanging Lord Megatron think about all the perks we’re gonna get.”

“You’re sleeping on the floor tonight.” Thundercracker threatens, but Skywarp seems hardly afraid.
Starscream begins to weld new latches to the cannon’s base ignoring the lover’s spat occurring overhead.

“What a great idea Skywarp, but we should do this as a team.” Starscream comments and has trouble keeping himself from laughing at Thundercracker’s horror. “Imagine all the goodies we could wring out of the old tin can then.”

“I mean. I don’t hate the idea…” Skywarp trails off and Starscream ducks Thundercracker’s scooping a servo full of fragments and scattering them at Skywarp’s head.

“The floor is too good for you. You’re sleeping in the sea.” He’s upset, warmed in the face by his bond mate and Starscream’s teasing. “You joke, but I’m sure the remaining house of illustri would love to throw a tantrum about that.” Both Skywarp and Starscream groaned together in response.

“I hate those high-caste morons. They don’t even like being a Decepticon.” Skywarp slumped. “No offense Screamer.”

“Offense taken.” Starscream’s thoughts flickering back to what Megatron had said before, how the seeker *Moonlace* had waited for him by his chambers! He stabbed at the latch he was now blindly reattaching trying not to think of simply how inappropriate that was!

Not that Starscream hadn’t personally gone to Megatron’s chambers the other night. For some reason. Why?! It felt right at the time but what was he expecting to happen? He’d been flight warm and energetic, all but ran to Megatron’s door - wanting to see him. All this nonsense between them blurring lines. The new way Megatron looked at him, different than before. Like Megatron knew the wrong word could break Starscream. He hated being treated fragile and Megatron was the worst offender. It was an insult, a trick. It wouldn’t last.

And still he kissed the rusted old fool like nothing had ever mattered more.

“My relationship with Megatron is none of their business, and they know better than to upset me.” Starscream defends. “We already had to put down their only real contender for Air Commander years ago and there are only a few of them left. Besides. I’m the highest ranking in Megatron’s command and by coded-right hold title over the rest.” He sneers, reliving these arguments again and again had grown tiring during the establishment of ranks at the beginning of this war and only served to enrage him now. Starscream had better things to do than to fight off cousins of long-dead dukes from their fallen home. Starscream was heir to Vos regardless of his past disgrace, and he would remain that way.

Skyfire had asked of Vos only a few times, why Starscream had left. He never told him despite the other’s gentle attempts to learn more of his past, his culture. Megatron had never asked, Megatron didn’t care - the Decepticons were built on the idea of a new beginning for creatures like him. Starscream had been relieved.

“Think someone will issue a challenge soon?” Skywarp asks, resting his chin on Starscream’s shoulder. Starscream finds he doesn’t mind it. “We all know how riled up the coneheads get when you make a spectacle of yourself.”

“I’m not letting some displaced chamberlain’s brat take what’s rightfully mine. If they try, we’ll handle it.” Starscream assures and doesn’t miss the warmth his wingmates lend through their bond, both clearly pleased at his use of “we”. It had been just /him/ for so long, giving minimal to their connection, granting them nothing of his time. Trines weren’t as common in peacetime but Starscream was the one to approach the others about cementing their connection back in Iacon - before they fled to Kaon. He wanted to never be alone and in return cast off his wingmates the
moment their attention became inconvenient.

“So, you kissed Megatron.” Skywarp’s finger pushes at his helm, quick to distract or unable to keep
on one subject for long. “You sure that’s how you want to handle all of this.” He means Skyfire’s
death (His second death. How many times will Starscream watch him die?) and Starscream finds
himself too exhausted to be angry.

“It was a mistake,” He corrects and before he can hold the fusion cell’s chamber in place
Thundercracker is already there. Helping without being asked or allowed. Skyfire never tried to
interject himself into Starscream’s work, had kept a respectful distance and waited to be given
permission. He always seemed to want Starscream to feel like it was all under his control even when
it wasn’t.

Starscream appreciated Thundercracker’s help.

“You gonna tell Lord Megatron it was a mistake?” Skywarp nudged pieces of solder alloy closer to
Starscream’s reach so they would be ready when he needed them. Starscream didn’t acknowledge
the small act, but didn’t yell at him either.

“I’m sure Megatron will understand, the adrenaline after a battle - with everything that has occurred.
I doubt it made any impression.” Dismisses it entirely. If Megatron was true on his offer to give
Starscream a chance to prove himself - simple mistakes like this should also fall under the “whoops”
category they seem to be ignoring for now. Just as Starscream had forgiven Megatron for molesting
him in training, his leader would have to accept they all made mistakes. “It won’t be mentioned
again.” He spoke confidently.

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“Starscream, report.”

“How were in charge of inventory over this last raid, considering your seekers were the only ones
used as transport for our wares.” He blinked, lowering his pedes from the edge of the empty chair at his right. The
the table was staring at him, Megatron more so than the rest. He hadn’t exactly been paying attention.
Post-raid meetings were simply the most boring things one had to suffer through in higher command
and unless something had gone terribly wrong (with anyone else but Starscream) he never paid them
much mind until someone was yelled at. (So long as it wasn’t him.). Then again, with how Megatron
was turning his servos into fists he supposed he should be trying a little harder to be a part of the
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was turning his servos into fists he supposed he should be trying a little harder to be a part of the
conversations.

“Ah. He didn’t take inventory. Instead, Starscream had thrown his carriage full of cubes at
Thundercracker and ran to the medbay to see if the cannon was alright...and in a lesser sense the
mech it was attached to.

“I didn’t…do that.” He admits to his own surprise...and the lack-of-surprise at the table. Soundwave
just behind Megatron’s shoulder looking down at him with thin suspicion. He’d done all in his power
not to think about the events which had occurred the evening before but in this moment that was
difficult.

“No?” Megatron’s tone fell low but he wasn’t screaming yet. Starscream had to admit, he didn’t hate
the added patience of this “I’ll try not to be an intolerable wretch” Megatron. Starscream just wished
he knew better than to test this strenuous truce. “And what else was so important that you chose not
to complete routine protocols?” He demanded and Starscream couldn’t help the nervous twitch of his
Don’t think about it don’t think about it don’t think about it Soundwave’s helm tilted ever so slightly. Starscream had learned to distort his connection with his wingmates, and while Soundwave’s telepathy was similar, it wasn’t a perfect science. He could only block out specific images and thoughts, but emotions tended to slip through. Especially loud ones, like the quivering sensation when Megatron’s large hand had dragged down his wing and...

“Oh.” He focused on Megatron’s brow instead of his mouth, tried to sound like he wasn’t about to swallow his own tongue. “You know...stuff.” The strained glare he fixed his leader with was dangerous, revealed too much, but if the slagging brick for brain wasn’t going shut up...

Judging by how Megatron jerked his shoulders, he’d finally caught on. Though the way Soundwave’s head snapped to the side to stare down at their leader made Starscream want to shriek. He almost didn’t notice Hook shifting uncomfortably at the table. Almost. The medic was too dedicated to Megatron to spread rumor of what he saw, but that didn’t mean the next time Devastator merged his less-than-intelligent brothers wouldn’t download the information. That was, if Soundwave didn’t read him first.

Starscream regretted not just striking the fusion cell last night and killing them all. Maybe the Autobots would make a statue of him? He always wanted a statue.

“Fine.” Megatron seemed to shrug off whatever thoughts had made Soundwave flinch, redirecting his focus onto the table as if it were Prime himself. “Get it done after this meeting and submit your reports.”

“Of course, Lord Megatron.” Agreeing to labor far beneath his station just to move off the subject. Threw in the honorific to see if Megatron had any reaction and was satisfied with the smallest shift of his leader’s mouth before pushing on.

His mouth which Starscream was certainly not staring at.

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As punishment for Skywarp’s teasing Thundercracker had taken a group of unbound seekers for patrol and practice, leaving his mate whining and following Starscream throughout the day. Literally getting in the way of everything he was trying to do until Starscream snapped and pushed the task of inventory off on his miserable wingmate. All the calculations would likely be wrong but Starscream doubted the ever diligent Soundwave hadn't already measured rations and storage accordingly. Giving the task to anyone else was merely a show, they all knew it. So long as Starscream submitted a report Megatron would be satisfied.

Ugh. Megatron. What to do about Megatron?

Starscream couldn't risk sneaking off base, too obvious, so he found himself creeping through old divisions of the Nemesis. Unused corridors which had been too damaged in the initial crash and majority of machinery relocated elsewhere. The ship was once the pride of the Decepticon armada, now reduced to basic function. Stripped and dissected to expand beneath the sea as Megatron saw fit.

It unnerved Starscream to think a ship would never fly again. His seekers built their division sector far away from the broken craft as they could for such reason. Across the universe there were plenty of crafts, Decepticon and Autobot alike, reduced to nothing more than shriveled husks of past glory but the Nemesis had been Starscream’s home for the past millions of stellar years. He held a soft spot for the old wreck and wished to see it fly again.
There's a flicker of anxiety in his connection to Skywarp easily ignored. Probably just forgot what number he was on and panicked. He’d likely have to head back to aid him, not necessarily feeling guilt over abandoning him to the task, but his wingmates had been so sensitive towards him lately. Perhaps it would be worth it to show them more consideration in turn.

Except something else caught his attention first, scattering the illness of good intentions. A door he'd not seen in some time.

The navigation room was overrun with toppled chairs and gutted consoles, repurposed elsewhere during the construction of the grander base. Levels below the still-utilized Bridge, Starscream had requested a room solely for navigation upon the Nemesis’ commission. A mere seat on the bridge wouldn't be enough and singular station's console couldn't handle the information he needed to access so Megatron had agreed. The addition was built alongside Soundwave’s aid, a first and last time they worked well together.

Amazing that any equipment remained and Starscream's distraction led to him pushing about the room. Righting fallen terminals and following broken wires to old power lines. Thrilled when he managed to scrape together at least one functioning system, route old files back into rotation. The console sparked and bite his servo but Starscream only cursed at it, like the exposed wires of his rush job could be lectured. There was no point to any of this beyond occupying his time, or perhaps Starscream wanted to fix something. He’d been unlucky so far in repairing the fusion cannon and the sting to his pride was obsessive. Rewiring dead computers was apparently his new task. Making something dead come back to life...might have been poetic if Starscream cared about such things. Too focused on his work to hear the movement behind him until a low voice spoke,

“Starscream?”

“Aah!” Spins with the muzzle of a mounted cannon ready to stab out an intruders optic only to find Megatron’s displeasure. “What are you doing here?” He “forgets” to lower the weapon until Megatron easily swats it from his face. Displeasure molds irritation.

“Stop pointing your guns at me,” He frowns and Starscream rests servos at hips, keeping them away from Megatron’s reach.

“Well don't sneak up on me.’ Starscream felt a burn up his backstrut, ashamed of allowing his leader the chance to sneak. Bulky, broad shouldered, thick mess that he was - Starscream should of heard him coming.

Of course being alone with Megatron means attention wanders. His puzzling glare trying to predict Starscream’s intentions (good luck pal) to the reflexive clenching of fists at his side. A tick of Megatron’s since Starscream watched him first in the gladiator pit, anxious to fight - to win - to soak in applause. Then there's the lightest scratch against his mouth, one Starscream believes he left there and he's putting distance between them like Megatron might strike.

“Shouldn't you be somewhere else?” Megatron asks, knowing the answer and really it's a waste of both their time. He reflects on the spark of anxiety felt from Skywarp earlier, now understanding its origins. Ah. Megatron actually had been looking for him then. “This is the old navigation center?”

“You remember it?” Starscream asks with uncertain surprise.

“I had little reason to visit personally,” Megatron seemed to forgo his earlier query, stepping further into the toppled room. Servo brushing a cracked console which had been stripped of parts and remained little more than a metal box. “But I recall a certain seeker, jumping on this very station to yell at me optic to optic when we were nearly trapped in a wormhole.” Primus help him Megatron
was actually smiling at the memory like it was a fond one.

“Well. You wouldn’t listen.” Starscream felt himself defend. “I’d flown through the territory before, I knew what was coming.”

“But I never knew you were so well-traveled.” Megatron points out with the lightest statement that feels like an attack. Or perhaps Starscream suffers due to the truth of it. “I might have listened had I been made aware.” Starscream feels that this is dangerous territory, for himself, wants to brush it off as soon as possible. He wanted his past, his secrets to be kept. Skyfire just had to ruin all of that didn’t he?

“Are you here to drag me back to the store rooms?” He asks with a flat tone, perhaps riling Megatron would be the best course. That way they can skip any conversation Starscream thought was better left for dead. Yelling at Megatron was almost cathartic at this point in his life, Starscream almost missed it with their attempts at reconciliation.

“We both know Soundwave already handled it. I only wanted you to take responsibility for once.” Megatron watches him instead, seems to be calculating - deciding something Starscream couldn’t possibly fathom. Clearly his plan had been to trap Starscream in the storage room all along. “There’s something I need to discuss with you.” He speaks gravely and Starscream feels a cold chill shiver up his wings. “My initial intention was not to say anything but…” Starscream cuts him off before the conversation can unravel out of his favor.

“I shouldn’t have kissed you, I know.” He speaks up and watches his leader’s face flicker through surprise. Likely wasn’t expecting him to admit to it so easily. But Starscream couldn’t handle Megatron trying to let him down easy as if it had mattered. “It was a mistake, a moment of insanity if you will. Considering all that has occurred…” He skirts an issue they will NOT be discussing. “I suppose I wanted to thank you for it.” Not entirely untrue. Megatron looks puzzled, mouth parted as words froze on his lips. It’s both adorable and infuriating and Starscream stomps a pede in response. “Well? Say something?”

“Why do you think...kissing me...was a means of showing gratitude?” He asks with suspicion. Starscream could have slapped him.

“I don’t know!” Starscream whines and puts more space between them, feigning interest in cut wires and an old datapad left to dust and obscurity. “You have everything else of me - it seemed like a good idea at the time.” What was he supposed to do, make Megatron a card? Write Thank you for not slagging me as I realized my life meant nothing?? Starscream withdrew his emotions, his trine listening now more than ever. He couldn’t worry them more.

Megatron had sparked a disgusting want to be better.

To his leader’s credit he seemed to be considering Starscream’s words like they were not the lies of a panicked mech searching for any excuse to give. His optics flickering over his face, stance almost relaxed. He looked very much like the brushed metal mech Starscream had folded himself over railings to get a better look at. This star lit gladiator who might force the world to make sense again. Perhaps beneath all his menacing bravado he was still that noble creature. Maybe beneath all his lies Starscream was too the same.

“Do I?” Megatron asks and Starscream flutters his wings.

“What do you want?”

“Have everything of you?” The surprising warmth of his tone flooded Starscream’s face.
Unexpected, especially now as Megatron tilted his helm to look at Starscream like he was accepting some truth not presented aloud.

“Isn’t that what you asked of me?” Huffs, wishing their conversations could be more professional as of late, instead of leaving Starscream flustered and pissed for uncertain reasons. Megatron rumbles something he doesn’t quite catch and returning his focus to the other’s mouth was a mistake. Yes. Starscream did leave his mark there. It looked good.

“Starscream I think it’s about time I share with you an ancient Tarnish tradition.” He adds to Starscream’s surprise. “If you are available after the evening cycles.” It was posed as a question but he does not feel the invitation was much of a request. After all, attempting a truce or not, Megatron still held command over Starscream. He could just order him.

“It’s not a fuel bleeding ritual is it? I’ve heard stories.” The wrinkled look interrupting Megatron’s stupidly endearing face was worth the comment.

“Don’t you trust me?”

“Pff. No.”

“End of the solar day. Holodeck.” Ah, there was the command. “I shouldn’t have to clarify that your trine is not allowed, yet here I am. Clarifying.” He adds, turning attention once more to the room as if charmed by its mess. “Also, Starscream…” Why did he have to say his name as such? Low, deep and rumbling like a sigh. “I’d like my weapon back as soon as it is ready. Regardless of the trouble it causes me, it is mine. I dislike being without it for too long.”

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Thundercracker returns and is subsequently nearly killed by Skywarp. The purple jet leaping onto his mate with a sharp cry.

“Starscream has a date with Megatron!” He shrills and Starscream is quick to grab him, try to smother him with his own fist. Thundercracker is left trying to break them up, getting bit by one for his troubles. The mess is expected, tearing through Starscream’s private quarters with wings and claws dragging across one another. They get tangled and slam into a far bulkhead, Skywarp pinned by Starscream sitting on him while Thundercracker lays over them both.

“Just like the academy!” Skywarp sing-songs and warps out from beneath them both, leaving Thundercracker to crush Starscream with his weight.

“Get off me!” He snaps, shoving the other off and Thundercracker rolls to the floor, expression flat with exhaustion.

“Welcome back TC, we missed you TC. Any news TC?” He mourns quietly as Starscream tries stopping Skywarp from rummaging through his stuff.

“What are you griping about?”

“Nothing Screamer,” Thundercracker laments. “Just glad to be home is all.” He watches Skywarp begin throwing jars of polish from a chest at the far wall and speaking rapidly to himself about “preparation” and “gotta look real nice” while Starscream seems to be having difficulty deciding whether to shoot him or hit him with a nearby chair. “So, what’s this about a date?”

“It’s not a date! Stop saying that!”
“You abandoned me to paperwork, you can suffer.” Skywarp’s smile is met with a snarl but he presses on, unafraid of Starscream in this way. “Megatron invited him to a private meeting on the holodeck. It’s a date.” He giggles, optics flashing in their wingleader’s direction who seems to be leaning towards hitting Skywarp with the chair.

“The holodeck?” He echoes, relocating himself to sit on the edge of Starscream’s berth. Wanting to keep limbs out of their destructive path. “Isn’t that where the grounder’s go to make out?” Starscream stumbles in his attempt to pry a polish brush from Skywarp’s servos long enough to look ill. He even bothers faking a gag. “Oh don’t be so above it now, you’ve already kissed him.”

“We discussed it!” Starscream places a pede on Skywarp’s torso, half kicking him away to regain control over the brush. “It was agreed that it shouldn’t have happened.” Sort of. Mostly. Maybe, he thinks. “Megatron said it was some, Tarn-ritual thing. I don’t really have a choice.”

“It’s not fuel bleeding is it?” Thundercracker asks just as Skywarp warps out. He knows his mate enough to be prepared, holds open his arms and braces for the impact as Warp reappears across his lap, clinging to his shoulders.

“No!” Actually, Starscream reflects, he never did get a clear answer on that. “But can you two stop long enough to consider that perhaps our leader isn’t some frenzied beast and this is some respectful offer of comradery?” He asks, servos extended in expectation.

Thundercracker and Skywarp laugh so hard they fall backwards on the berth, Starscream snarling above.

They calm down in time, watching Starscream complain as he picks up the destroyed room from the tornado that is Skywarp. The purple jet busy rubbing circles in Thundercracker’s wings, having missed him during the day. A small apology for his earlier actions which had driven his mate to ignore him. Starscream was prepared to shoot them both if they tried anything on /his/ berth.

“So, shelving the fact that Megatron is either going to kill you or ‘face you,’”

“Or both.” Skywarp adds unhelpfully.

“Or both,” Thundercracker agrees. “I actually do have some interesting news if anyone is interested.” Starscream didn’t look up, busy examining a jar of polish for damage while Skywarp rolled out of his lap. Nodding enthusiastically enough for the both of them. “We have some fledglings wanting a thrice bonded union.” The announcement was enough for Skywarp to sit still and Starscream to lower the jar, staring at Thundercracker like he was expecting a lie. When his wingmate didn’t retract the statement, Starscream almost dropped the jar.

“Who?” He demanded and had to sit down on the storage trunk, scattering the mess with his slump.

“New from Cybertron, Shockwave sent them not too long ago. Overlook, Windcoil and Hailbound.” Starscream shuffled through his memory banks trying to recognize the names. It wasn’t often Shockwave sent untrained seekers to them - usually meant they needed additional training (aka, they were pissing the lump-build off too much). Thundercracker was unable to hide his grin and Skywarp was shaking he was so excited. It did not match Starscream’s stillness. “They want the full ceremony, they’ve never seen one before.”

Neither had Thundercracker when they met, but Starscream had witnessed enough. Old traditions drilled into his coding from an early age.

“How long have they been together?” He asks.
“Three thousand stellar cycles,” Thundercracker answers. “Give or take.”

“Absolutely not.” Starscream waves a servo and his trine mates gawk. “They aren’t ready.”

“We knew each other for less.” Skywarp defends and it was clearly the wrong answer as Starscream’s lip curls in annoyance.

“Exactly. We nearly went insane trying to figure out whose thoughts were whose. Not to mention they want a union.!” Starscream feels as if he shouldn’t need to state the obvious. “We were lucky not to have jumped to that decision!”

“You mean if you had agreed.” Thundercracker’s voice falls, his optics trained in a flat stare on his ranting wing leader. Starscream did his best not to react, he recalled the hurt conversations between the three of them when the idea of forming a trine had been put on the table. His own suggestion, wanting to keep the two seekers close as possible. But when further was suggested, that they bond together as more - he’d all but shriveled up and almost ran away. “Screamer, just think about it. We were sloppy with ours, but maybe they won’t be.”

“Yea, maybe they like each other.” Skywarp added, shuffling pedes against the floor trying to block out the tinge of hurt brewing at the edges of his thoughts. Thundercracker and Starscream felt it, the former reaching over to pinch his mate’s wrist while Starscream struggled to step forward. Strangled at the idea of offering any help, simply because he no longer remembered how to show comfort.

Megatron wanted him to try. Try being his soldier, try being his Second in Command. Perhaps he should try being an equal member of this trine again. He’d left them alone for so long after all.

“Do you think they want this?” He asks of Thundercracker with a crack in his resolve.

“They’re young, but yea. They love each other. Plus think of the morale boost to our brood. We could use something to celebrate.” Starscream hated the look on his wingmates’ faces. Primus spare him they almost looked mature. His wings dropped in his resignations and he didn’t have to say it for the two to feel his agreement.

“I’ll think about it.” Starscream groaned, he was going to have to ask Soundwave a favor and figuring out a new schedule was going to be a mess! There was already regret charging his systems.

“Oh sweet!” Warp cheered. “We get to plan a party, Screamer is gonna bang Megatron, this is a good week!”

Skywarp was unable to dodge the jar of polish that came flying at his head, and honestly Thundercracker didn’t warn him.

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Starscream was left to the rest of the day to worry about Megatron and now the impending ceremony of union. He’d performed such in the past, when the war bled over Vos and new seekers banded together under Megatron’s flag and promise of redemption. He’d been unsure of himself but information was less strained over the seekers then and ensuring the ceremony was done correctly hadn’t been too difficult. The wonder of it all had faded over time, as the war grew bloodier - more demanding. Those who wished to trine did so on their own as Starscream had, without the traditions of Vos to stop them. Starscream felt a bit morbid at the idea.

Twice he’d stopped himself from spark bonding suddenly to another in peacetimes and here were three fledglings ready to do so without hesitation in the middle of war! He felt oddly responsible and considered refusing to do it if just to absolve himself of trouble if anything went to slag. Losing one
you love is difficult enough, but to bond and lose them? Even Starscream hesitated to be so cruel.

Clocks set, the day’s end left Starscream taking his sweet time seeking out the holodeck. Unused for the most part, it was really more of a flourish than anything. Shockwave so proud of himself for the stolen tech, leaving Soundwave to assemble it and Starscream to complain. It wasn’t a functional augmented reality, more of a limited display - Starscream didn’t see the appeal unless you wanted a light show and somewhere to slip off to to debauch a partner. Which made Megatron’s invitation all the more suspicious.

If he knew Megatron, and he did know the brute well, something was planned that Starscream was likely not going to enjoy. Against Skywarp’s prattling he held no considerations to the concept that Megatron might have any further intentions towards him. Their kiss was a mistake, agreed upon in less than specific words. His leader seemed satisfied that Starscream wanted to grant him any form of attention and that was all.

See? He was trying. Wasn’t that enough?

“You’re late.” Megatron announced upon Starscream’s arrival in the chamber. Domed ceiling and walls a patchwork of metallic honeycomb panels, empty save for his awaiting host.

“You just said end of the day, that’s not exactly a specific time. How can I be late?” He complained but Megatron seemed immune to the bait, waiting until Starscream stepped further inside to motion to the center of the room. No chairs, no table, no potential torture equipment. Just Megatron and a strange current to the room he couldn’t place. “So, what are we doing?”

“Sit.” Megatron orders.

“On the floor?”

“Sit.” Megatron repeats and Starscream obeys for once in his life. Keeping a cautious tension in case this all went terribly wrong. He had yelled at Megatron not too long ago, snapped in his face for pretending to care --- then kissed him like that was a thing he was allowed to do. BUT Starscream had done much worse with lesser punishments than death. Perhaps this wouldn’t be so terrible.

Megatron waits until he’s settled to unspace two higrade cubes and hand one down to Starscream.

“Ancient Tarnish tradition?” He asks, taking the cube with slight hesitation. It smells bright and sour, warm to the touch with crackling energy. There’s a swirl of pale teal in the center and Starscream knows from personal experience this was not cultivated in some pitiful filtration system like the gunk the triple changers brewed in the old engine room. Megatron in turn seemed pleased.

“The most ancient of our traditions actually.” He stands near Starscream, but not too close. Yet the bulk of him still causes warmth to reach Starscream’s wing in a distracting manner as he examines the shifting color of the higrade. “If you cannot punch problems away, drink until you forget you had a problem in the first place.” Starscream can’t help but snort at this, amused briefly and Megatron reciprocate the feeling.

“You know I think we had this tradition on Vos.” He echoed and waited for Megatron to drink first before trying it himself. Sharp smell but sweet on his glossa. Heavy too. His tanks chimed delighted at the fill. “Excuse me if I sound, unappreciative...but are you serious?” Dared to question but Megatron didn’t seem insulted.

“Why not?” Megatron offers in return as if that were enough explanation. Which for Starscream it
was NOT. There had to be another angle. This subdued version of his leader was not to be trusted. Somewhere in this would be something terrible that Starscream would regret letting his guard down for a klik and then… “Actually, there’s one more thing…”

“Aha! I knew---” He barked as Megatron shifted to type something into a control panel and the panels shimmer just a moment before the space shifts. Pitch black. Quiet. Until small sparks of light begin to swell in pinpricks across what appears like endless dark. Starscream expects an attack or something horrific to happen…but no. The lights continue to blossom across the void until the chamber is nothing but freckles of light pinned against the black.

“Aha?” His leader mocks and in the dark Megatron’s optics shine dark when compared to the rest of the room.

Starscream takes time to observe, rises from his spot on the floor without permission to examine the lights. No immediately discernible pattern and only the smallest fluctuation in size. Curious. He needed to uncode this mess fast to get one step ahead of whatever game Megatron was playing but all he could think of was how the specks reminded him of the night sky…

“Primus,” He gaped when realization struck him and almost didn’t hear Megatron shift in approach. When his leader drew closer Starscream turned to face him, having to tilt his chin high to meet his gaze in the dim light.

“You said you missed Cybertron.” Megatron explained and raised a servo, shifting the specks about until the patterns looked painfully familiar. “Your presence in the old navigation room brought this to mind. Shockwave was able to upload the chart at my request.” Starscream felt dizzy.

“This is, the northern hemisphere. The star map over Vos.” Megatron didn’t comment, allowing Starscream to step forward, free servo cradling a particularly fat “star” in his palm.

As he “touches” the light thin threads spin outwards, beginning to connect certain orbs together forming a makeshift shape that resembles nothing but almost brings Starscream to his knees.

“Starscream?” Megatron’s voice is a comfort in the dark as a small laugh breaks through.

“It’s the Siren’s squall.” He explains.

“The what?” Starscream fixes him with a look which might be lost in the dark if Megatron hadn’t adjusted his visuals accordingly.

“The Siren’s squall, one of the most well-known constellations.” Snaps without heat. Without any real anger as he’s too busy smiling. How long has it been since he looked up these stars? Flown through them on his own merit?

“I don’t know it.” Megatron explains and he’s standing at Starscream’s side, close enough that when he brings the cube to his mouth their elbows brush and Starscream doesn’t flinch away in upset.


“Miners aren’t given much opportunity to look up, let alone learn the names of stars.” He explains. “I can navigate by them, but do not know their stories.”

Starscream finds himself twisting in regret, wishing not for the first time he thought before speaking. His leader does not comment further, sips the brightly colored cube and the tension shifts - Starscream needs to fix it.
“Well. This is the Siren’s squall.” He begins unprompted, setting down his cube to reach for another freckle in the “night”. It uploads navigation and historical records at the touch and the same silverlight threads between a variety of stars. It branches like fractals overhead and Starscream finds a small delight watching his leader stare in wonder at the winding combination. Needing to shift to follow the moving trails. “And this is the Yggdrasil. Old mythology places the combination as some ridiculous tale, Primus striking the heavens and that nonsense. Fracturing the darkness to bring forth life blahblah. Textbook. It’s supposed to mean life. There’s a phenomenon every three million stellar cycles, a meteor shower fills the spaces between interconnecting patterns. It’s surprisingly pretty. If you’re into that.”

“Yggdrasil.” Megatron repeats and nudges a light with a servo. “You learned this at Iacon?”

“Vos. My education was expansive.” He corrects, retrieving his cube to stand once more by Megatron. The other catches his gaze in the dark, a silent moment likely where any normal pair might have gone into further detail. Explain the many teachers he had, the minders who chased him across silver towers and brilliant skies until his carrier was summoned.

But they were not a normal pair and Starscream did not want to give Megatron his past so easily.

“And this one?” Megatron seemed to understand, shifting attention from Starscream’s small offering to a bundled cluster of stars which brought Starscream to laugh.

“Oh, you’ll like this one. That is Gladious. A titan whose bonded fell in battle, so he ripped a star from the sky and placed it in their empty spark chamber.” In the dark Starscream could still see Megatron’s grin.

“You’re right. I like this one.” He agreed.

They drink and speak of stars and Cybertron until Starscream slurs and Megatron laughs so loudly the room shakes. It doesn’t frighten him, strangely enough, how easy it is to share knowledge with his leader. To be the one talking for once instead of arguing. To be heard. He’s a good student, seemingly eager to learn even when topic strays hours later. Both now sitting on the floor surrounded by woven constellations and empty cubes. Megatron warm to the touch where Starscream grips his arm to demand his attention as he retells a story of meeting Soundwave for the first time. His descriptions of first impressions make Megatron laugh so Starscream finds he becomes more theatrical until his leader does so again.

“We met for the first time soon after,” Megatron offers his tale. “I knew you were not dwelling in Kaon long. Too clean.”

“Beauty knows no city limits.” He frowns at Megatron as he finishes off his (third? fourth?) cube and systems are growing weary. Overcharged and tired but not a strike of illness in him. Yes. This was certainly better than the sea water he’d been drinking.

“I suppose that’s true.” Megatron nods along and Starscream would grow warm but his frame already feels heated. Sedated in his leader’s presence. The broad mech always did run hot, perhaps it was his mere proximity?

“But you’re wrong, I had already seen you.”

“The fights?”

Starscream stretches his arms until claws fanned and rested over thighs. A star floated nearby and Megatron caught it at the bend of a knuckle, brought it close to better examine the hologram. It light
his face in terribly charming ways that Starscream was not ready for.

“I was a fan.” He admitted, bleary warmth keeping him from thinking. “Warp tried to pop into your training once, steal a souvenir.”

“Really?” His genuine surprise was astounding. “I knew you attended the matches but,”

“I watched your sermons, read your work, attended your rallies long before Soundwave ever crept out of an alley and offered my trine a job.” Pouted when the last of his cube was drained, slouching back on the wall of panels which still resembled the endless night sky. Beside him Megatron rumbled, probably was speaking but Starscream didn’t hear it past the pulse of his frame. He recalled with a tragic pain how the world and its cruelty almost made sense when explained by the then-gladiator. Megatron’s words resonating with his hurt. “You know I joined you because for the first time I believed I could reclaim my destiny. If I could just be at your side,” His drunken laugh cracks at the edges. “I felt I could do anything.”

Megatron is watching him too intensely and the weight of his admission strikes him. Too much, but his leader is still and warm, reaching between the divide to hook a knuckle beneath his chin as gently as he had a star moments earlier. His system floods with heat and there’s an uncomfortable need ringing across his thoughts.

“What else could I make you feel?” He asks. Wings shudder and Starscream knows he could push forward to meet his mouth with no complaint. He carefully grips Megatron’s wrist with both his claws instead.

“Like I’ve drank far too much for my answer to mean anything.”

As if on command Megatron retracts entirely. Returning to his position against the wall, still close enough that the slightest movement brushes the edges of their bodies together. Silence fills the moment, awkward and unwanted, but how was Starscream to answer?

“Why are you doing this?” Unsure if he meant the room, the gift of Cybertron’s stars - or all of it. “What do you get out of it?” Megatron’s sharp noise could be a laugh, but it reads to Starscream more like a scoff and the frail moment is broken as he rises. Offers down a servo to assist Starscream to rise amongst empty cubes and fading stars as the illusion shuts down.

“Curb your paranoia Starscream, not everything is bound by selfish intentions.”

Starscream doesn’t believe him.

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Returning to the seeker division this late was not unusual, but Starscream was drunk and hot and trying to decide how exactly he should go about killing anyone and everyone who might see him in this state. Which is of course the moment he steps into the protected doors he’s accosted by the unfortunate company of seekers he is simply too drunk to deal with.

There are two of Moonlace in his drunken haze, pretty and sneering as the other looks him over, likely realizing quickly his Commander’s inflections. A second seeker also wavering between two figures at his side. The other is nameless because Starscream doesn’t care. Probably something stupid. Like Twinklesun or whatever. He just wants to lie down and not think about Megatron - or think about Megatron a LOT.

“Sir,” Moonlace begins with the worst impression of a polite soldier Starscream has ever heard. Which is an insult, because he invented it. “You doing alright?”
“I’m fine.” Tries not to slur and takes a great deal of power to stand steady when faced with these remnants of the old houses. Forever trying to claw their way up the hierarchy of soldiers with a politician’s strength alone. “I was about to retire for the night, what ever can I stop everything and do for you?” His attitude caused them both to grimace. Good. He hoped his breath smelled terrible too.

“Well, sir.” The other began. Pale yellow with lighter blocks of blue. All ugly. “We heard there was to be a unification ceremony.”

“Good news travels fast.” Moonlace adds.

“I’m so glad you waited for me at this late hour to ask about scheduling.” One stupid comment away from baring his denta. It had been a long night too. Megatron and his strange offering, hours spent in his leader’s company where he was the center of attention…that look the other had given him in the end. Should he feel regret for leaving? “But as of right now I’m undecided on the matter.”

“Oh,” Moonlace brought a servo to his mouth, glancing between Starscream and his companion. But he knew that look all too well That calculating bite to dark optics, the fake sigh and dramatic voice…it was only cute when Starscream did it. “I suppose that’s a good thing. After all, it would probably be inappropriate for you to perform such a ritual. Sir.”

Starscream had never sobered up faster in his life. Vents desperate to roar but he needed to maintain his appearance. Couldn’t let this idiot think he’d gotten to him.

“Is that so?” He smiles to keep from biting the other’s nose off.

“You’ll forgive me for saying so, but your very creation represents everything that could go wrong with these intense of unions. When a triple bounded strays from their trine?” Moonlace dared and Starscream was rethinking not killing him outright. “The messes they leave behind…”

“If you’re referring to my sire,”

“Will all due respect,” Moonlace’s companion added - the same sickly tone. “You’re more focused on incompatible builds these days than your kin.” They both smile. “We’ve been worried since the incident up north. Perhaps this ceremony would be better held by another of merit. Just trying to help. Commander.”

Starscream allows the insults to brew and settle and the sharp bite of their words are nothing in comparison to the strangled pain it takes for him not to break something…laughing. So he chuckles. It’s an easy sound, one learned and perfected after years of this. Political games and bloodshed. Weak and wanting high-caste fools looking for a fight did little to him after all this time. If his wingmates weren’t jolted awake by his vicious emotions by now, they soon would be.

“Oh no, this is so sad.” He settles back on pedes, servos comfortably resting at his hips. He thinks about how Moonlace tried to circumvent his command by going to Megatron and how Megatron had pulled Starscream into his lap and stroked his wings. How he built the sky over Cybertron for Starscream. “You simple little cretin I’m going to say this once and only once.” His voice carries, a few seekers wandering late through the entry corridors pause, a few more peek out from their bunks. “Stop this before I make you regret it.”

“Sir, there’s no need for a show.”

“Oh I think there is.” Starscream’s smile could kill and he wished by the gods locked in the stars that it would. Just this once. “You see, there’s a rather gaping difference between the two of us.” Thundercracker appears, Skywarp sleepily in tow. They were going to hate cleaning up after this
later but Starscream was already leaning into the pretty face. “You’re clinging to a throne that burnt
down with the rest of Vos along with whatever royal claim your woeful carrier or spike-suckling
politician sire had. While I built a throne all on my own from its ashes. So I recommend you tuck
your wings and start acting like you have some pride as a Seeker and fall in line. Because you can’t
have what’s mine.”

Starscream pats Moonlace’s shoulder, letting claws trim the edge of his helm as he leans in to
whisper, “Now if you’ll excuse me I have to go think about the many ways I’ll let Lord Megatron
take me on your grave if you dare try.”

They look at him with disgust. It’s the greatest feeling in the world.

“See you at the ceremony, should be great.” He smiles brushing past them and towards his trine.

Across the room Skywarp cheers “The party is back on!” while Thundercracker groans.

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“A what?”

“A thrice bond union.” Starscream explains, nudging a datapad out from under Megatron’s gaze
demanding full attention. Hip braced against the table as they share the room without distraction.
(Soundwave elsewhere, looking for a cassette whose suddenly disappearance Starscream had
/Nothing/ to do with. )

“So, forming a trine?” Starscream thought Megatron looked cute trying to keep up.

“More than than, but good enough.” He leans in, wanting to look as appealing as possible. Which
wasn’t difficult, really, but he did notice Megatron responded better with eye contact. And. Sure he
wanted his leader to look at him was that a crime? “It’s actually not been performed in this way for
quite some time. Good for morale, and what a better celebrity guest than our glorious leader?” He
smiles, Megatron does not seem convinced.

“You and your brothers are usually quite adverse to the idea of...outsiders stepping onto your
territory.” Megatron tries to pull the datapad out from under Starscream’s claw but he’s already
holding it out of reach.

“True. But this is important.”

“Important to who?” Suspicion. Really? After everything?

“Important to my seekers, to me.” Speaks with more honesty than he believed he had left. Dipping
his chin to better keep Megatron’s focus. “I want you there.” The datapad is brought back into
Megatron’s grip but his leader doesn’t take it immediately.

“Then I will be there.” Megatron agrees and Starscream hopes his trine can’t feel the soaring of his
spark or the devious twist in his mind.
Megatron and Starscream in a good mood with one another apparently means the rest of the base has to suffer. Thundercracker and Skywarp most of all. (Maybe Soundwave too judging by their sour disposition as of late.) It was sort of a relief, thought Thundercracker, watching his trine leader make a fool of himself obsessively checking a datapad. Tracking Megatron’s movements through the base. At least they didn’t have to suffer alone.

“Are you proud of yourself?” Thundercracker nudges as they settled in the mess hall, trying to keep his voice down as Decepticons were known for spreading gossip faster than a virus.

Not that Starscream’s drunken walk of shame from the holochamber, followed by Megatron, hadn’t already made the rounds.

“Yes.” Starscream admits too quickly without turning his gaze from the tablet screen. “Probably. What are we referring to?” It’s impossible not to feel the pure waves of delight radiating from Starscream as he adjusts his position, almost knocking Skywarp over as he moved to perch on the table. The datapad showing Megatron heading in this direction. Thundercracker and Skywarp shared equally exasperated looks.

“Is hitting on Megatron part of your truce? I thought it was you just doing your job and him not being mad at you for it.” Skywarp offers and dodges Starscream’s blind swipe at his helm.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” The mess was at its most busy, plenty of mechs trudging their way through ration lines, fighting over benches, loudly enjoying the moment of peace and comradery the room provided. Thundercracker felt, were half the occupants not murderers or horrifically modified war criminals, it might feel something like a home.

“So you’re not waiting for Megatron just to make a spectacle of yourself?” Thundercracker asked and Starscream looked positively wicked in return.

“Can’t imagine why I’d want to do that.” He purred with the same eager thrill as the other night when he returned to the seeker’s tower. The interference of Moonlace and the other Illustris seeker failing to bring him down as Starscream climbed into Thundercracker and Skywarp’s bunk for the night. Sleeping sprawled across them, all but vibrating with his glee. Skywarp had been shocked, then settled quickly. Not one to miss the rare opportunity of Starscream’s attention Thundercracker was the last to sleep, almost distracted from his concern at the sight of Skywarp nuzzled into Starscream’s wing joint - their trine leader recharging peacefully for once.
Things certainly were changing after Megatron and Starscream agreed to end their “Will they, won’t they murder each other” tension. Replaced with something entirely untrackable, Thundercracker was having problems keeping up.

Megatron makes his entrance then, Soundwave ever the blue shadow at his side, and Starscream’s body language changes. Megatron glances about, seems to be looking for something, trying not to be so obvious in the crowd, while on the table above: their wingmate struck a pose. Arched backstrut, wings high with legs crossed and pointed down the bench and towards the floor. Sipping from his cube like a rich-mech on a galactic yacht just enjoying the view.

He looked stupid.

“You tried this before on Kaon,” Thundercracker groaned, recalling that fun mess. “He wasn’t receptive to it then…”

“Shut up Thundercracker, this is different.” Starscream didn’t let the sneer last for long, returning his features to something…“unaware”. As if he was often caught half laid out across tables. Which, wasn’t entirely untrue but Thundercracker was burning with embarrassment on his behalf. “Besides, you lack the delicate art of seduction.”

Skywarp made a face at that, adding “He seduced me pretty well.” with a proud wink to Thundercracker’s further embarrassment, diving down into his energon cube to avoid further comments.

“He got the short end of that pipe.” Starscream just had to get the last word in, and it was unfortunately struck Skywarp’s defensive nature. Looking at Thundercracker with shock as their trine leader continued to lay himself out across the table in case Megatron looked over. A few other mechs were looking too and Thundercracker wanted to leave quickly and quietly - abandon Starscream to his display, but Skywarp had other plans.

Namely rearing back and shoving Starscream off the table in the middle of the canteen.

He crashes with his aft high and nose down - a squawk of pain and energon splashing across the floor - as the position left him helpless for any sort of graceful recovery. All pale wings and scrambling limbs as Vosian curses ring out from the screeching face and Thundercracker tries to duck out of the impending fight. Skywarp’s laughter the loudest in the room, a few observing mechs clearly afraid of openly mocking their superior - while plenty of others joined in at Starscream’s expense.

“When I get my hands on you---” Starscream began his threats, untangling himself from the mess. Bright violet dripping down his frame and face where the cube left him drenched. Skywarp only laughed harder at this and just as Starscream slipped trying to get his pedes back on stable ground a shadow fell over the three.

Megatron’s hulking form appeared without a sound, unsettling the seekers and those who had been watching. Quieting the mess as surely as an order, reaching down with a singular servo to grasp Starscream’s arm. Hoisting the other to his pedes - but even further - lifting to relocate him out of the spilled mess. Letting Starscream settle in his shadow, Megatron looking down at him with an expression littered with both amusement and satisfaction.

Starscream never looked so strangled for words.

“Enjoying your refueling?” Megatron asks the three but his gaze rests solely on Starscream, taking care to scrub a drip of energon off the seeker’s dark cheek. To the side Skywarp looks impressed and
sends an impulse of approval to his trine - it’s enough to snap Starscream from his wordless stupor, gently pushing himself out of Megatron’s grasp.

“Oh, you’re here? I hadn’t noticed.” Starscream attempts to recover his position, shaking off the mess from his frame and sneering as best he can while maintaining the act of “unaffected” by Megatron’s presence. Which really was a waste since Thundercracker and Skywarp could feel systems heating to be in the same space - and at the disadvantage. “I was just leaving.”

“Without your ration?” Megatron noted the floor and seemed to respond kindly to the way Starscream’s face darkened further.

“I’ll wring it out of Skywarp’s neck later.” Mouth smiled, but it was all denta and annoyance, glancing back at his equally pleasantly smiling wingmate.

“You and Thundercracker have a materials run today...I need my seekers at their best.” Megatron corrects and in one fluid motion presents an energon cube beneath Starscream’s nose, not giving him the chance to reject the offering. Starscream takes it, allows Megatron to openly appreciate his state of disarray, and marches on through the canteen to carry out whatever business he initially had. Leaving Starscream gawking and his trine impressed.

“See Starscream,” Skywarp pats his wing. “Seduction is a delicate art. Maybe Megatron can give you some pointers.”

Starscream reaches out and dumps the new energon cube over Skywarp’s head and only Thundercracker sees Megatron watching with equal parts irritation and amusement. He had a thought, as the two began chasing one another, shrieking and cackling in tandem, that perhaps this scenario wouldn’t be the worst possible ending for these many...many...many long years.

Maybe this could be a good thing?

He follows his trine back to the showers, standing guard while the two clean up for the day. There’s a sharp slap and Starscream’s yell proving things were beginning to feel more like normal. The way it had been years ago. Thundercracker warmed at the thought and found Starscream and Skywarp resonated with the feeling. A peaceful moment for the three.

“But really Screamer,” Warp, unable to drop it - or perhaps as concerned as Thundercracker. “You? Lord Megatron? It’s gross but about time!” His grin is met with a dismissive scoff and the trine prepared for Strascream to lie, so used to it at this point they wondered why Starscream even bothered.

“You’re so dramatic,” Starscream dismissed without a second glance, scrubbing dark remnants of energon from his frame. “Megatron and I have a better understanding of one another, simply put: that I’m worth the trouble.” The arrogant smile did not sit well with Thundercracker.

“I don’t think that’s it.” He warned, deflating at Starscream’s lack of insight -- or at least the way he pretended. Thundercracker had a similar talk with Screamer when his old “Friend” was found, asking with unease if he thought it was a good idea. Starscream, soaring on long-buried emotion, had been unable to think straight about the ordeal and shrugged him off the same. “Look, I’m not saying you can’t just be careful? If he thinks you’re tricking him...”

“Is this really the place for this conversation?” Starscream lowered his volume, realizing Thundercracker’s intentions. “What happens between Megatron and I is my concern and mine alone. Don’t fret. I know what I’m doing.” Thundercracker wonders if Starscream can feel the lack of conviction in his own words. Uncertainty and conflict still webbing its way through his trineleader’s
spark. “Trust me?”

Thundercracker didn’t feel like he had any alternatives while Skywarp just huffed in frustration, burying his face back in the spray.

“Fine.” Surrenders. “Just don’t say we didn’t warn you.”

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Subtlety was not Starscream’s strongest suit, and even worse there was nothing he loved more than disturbing meetings.

Starscream could sit and plan all day long, whittle away the hours on his own creations and schemes. But sitting and listening to his lessers drone on while his time was wasted? No. It had caused issues with Megatron before, and yes he was supposed to be balancing on a precarious line as drawn so nobly by his leader...but when fun was to be had…

[You’re pushing my patience.] Megatron’s voice rings in his head after Starscream managed to remotely hack the display of Shockwave boring him to death mid-information dump. Personally Starscream thought the manipulated display of Shockwave with a bulging head and high-pitched speech was an improvement.

Neither Soundwave nor Megatron seemed to agree.

[Put it back.]

His tether into the display retreated and the Nemesis war table seemed confused by the change, yet Shockwave remained entirely unaware.

[You’re no fun.] He sent a message back, eyeing his leader who appeared just as bored of Shockwave’s speech as he was! Hypocrite. Skywarp had already fallen asleep and only by Thundercracker’s good graces remained sitting upright.

[This is not supposed to be fun Starscream. This is preparation for the next step in our dominion over this planet’s resources.]

[Agree to disagree.] Answers and can see Megatron’s frown without turning his head.

[You can’t just say that every time you disagree with me.] His leader huffed loud enough that it caught a few mech’s attention, likely hoping for any foreseeable end to Shockwave’s endless drivel.

[Why are we having so many meetings lately? It’s even more unbearable than before.] He groans and wonders how far he can push this clandestine conversation. Megatron seems fully prepared to chat with him instead of listening to Shockwave - perhaps he could use this to his advantage?

[Because a mech recently informed me I treat my soldiers like cannon fodder.] Megatron’s voice is a low and steady rumble across his mind. [I would like to prove him wrong in the future. The better prepared we are, the less likelihood of Decepticon casualties. So. More of this...agony.] He adds with the smallest regret as Shockwave shuffles to “the next order of business” and Starscream is left silent for once.

It takes little time before the mind numbing boredom kicks back in. Starscream sticks his stylus in his mouth, chewing on it while slouched best he could against the table without spilling out of his chair. Rolling it across the lower part of his denta with the smallest clicks as it moved, manipulated by his glossa. Hypnotized by the smallest light going out on the ceiling.
He bet he could shoot it before anyone could stop him, thinks while closing his mouth around the stylus. It would likely explode, end this meeting rather quickly. Maybe even Warp would be so startled he’d teleport into the wall again. That incident had taken three constructicons to get him out and two hours for Starscream to stop laughing.

[Starscream.] Megatron again. [Behave.]

[What? I’m listening.] Lies and tries to review his recordings of whatever Shockwave had just said when he notices more than one at the table is glancing his way. He pulls the stylus from his mouth and they look away, leaving him confused.

[How can you be listening when you're too busy gnawing on your supplies?] Megatron presses and Starscream turns to force his leader’s gaze, watching a frown settle over his stupidly regal face.

Starscream proceeds to lick the length of his pen with one heavy swipe in childish rebellion.

[It helps me concentrate.] He fires back and wasn’t expecting Megatron’s vents to rattle and the warlord’s optics to go so wide with surprise. Two other mechs at the table have similar reactions and Starscream glances down at his stylus, then back up at Megatron who is now looking away with such determination he’s almost worried he’s going to short circuit.

[You idiot.] Thundercracker chimes in just for Starscream to scowl in answer. [It’s our turn.]

“The material collected should be sufficient for our prototype build.” Steps into his role without pause, uploading the device specs to the room. “I’ll begin construction just as soon as the metal is processed. Whatever radiation this crystal emits should be contained as you can see in diagram 3a and 3b. Once I’ve completed the inner chamber the constructicons can handle it from there.”

“Should? Are the metals not suitable for this purpose?” Shockwave DARES to include his opinion and Starscream sticks his pen back in his mouth to keep from screaming. “I would recommend a higher grade metal alloy for containment. I’m sure Earth has better options?”

“This metal is fine.” Starscream defends and flutters wings in irritation. It should work...probably.... “You’re not here, you don’t get a say.”

“Shockwave is the Head of our Science division.” Soundwave reminds and Starscream mutters “more like the head up your aft division” where only Megatron can likely hear. Strangely he doesn’t get reprimanded for the comment. “Suggestions should be received with gratitude.”

“Well I'm Starscream, Second in Command.” He reminds, because he’s ALWAYS having to remind everyone apparently! “Head of the everything division. Hi.” Besides him Megatron shifts in his chair, finally daring to look back at Starscream as Soundwave makes a face that implies they're complaining via internal communications. He frowns dark, just waiting for Megatron to pick Soundwave's side over his! Like always. Typical.

“Do you believe you have the best materials for this device’s construction?” Megatron asks to both Soundwave’s and Starscream’s surprise. Both blinking at their leader with with cautious stares. On screen Shockwave does a great impression of an offended flashlight. It only makes Starscream blossom with confidence.

“Of course Lord Megatron,” Answers, trying to disregard all doubt from even his processor. Leaning into the other’s space until he could get pale blue claws over Megatron’s arm. Really just to see Soundwave upset was enough, but Megatron did not flinch, ever the restrained warrior. But he watched Starscream for a moment, allowing the seeker close before making his decision.
“Then I trust you. Continue with Starscream’s offered expertise.” He orders and even though Starscream understood the terms of their truce, he did not expect Megatron to ever agree with him over Soundwave so readily. It leaves him shocked, turning his chin upwards to better examine Megatron’s face until realizing how foolish he might have looked. Half draped over their leader with no show of discomfort. Mechs would talk.

Mechs were already talking. Rumors were thick within the seekers and oh how Decepticons loved their gossip. He retreated carefully, deciding then to be quiet and graceful. More like the Prince he was raised to be.

“Thank you for your confidence.” He shows respect because it causes on-lookers to gape and whisper amongst themselves. His own trine (Skywarp awake enough suddenly) judging him from across the table with thin matching smirks.

“We will begin relocating resources to the artifact’s location upon the completion of the device.” Megatron orders and stands to show the meeting should come to an end. “You have your orders.” He turns his gaze down to Starscream who quickly presses the stylus back into his mouth and gathers his things. Struggling not to fall to pride as Soundwave glared in his direction.

His trine caught up with him as he made for the open labs, wanting to get his project underway as soon as possible. Starscream had personal matters to attend to later that evening and he was behind schedule already.

“So that was, weird.” Skywarp ducked to press himself into Starscream’s side. “TC, how many times has Megatron picked Starscream’s side over Soundwave?”

“That would be uh, a whooping zero times Warp.” Thundercracker planted himself on Starscream’s empty side, both grinning like the irritating devils they were.

“I see two seekers looking to be shot.” Starscream sang with warning, his matching grin lacking humor - replaced by irritation. “I’ve told you before, we’re working things out.”

“I think he wants to work something out.” Warp snickers, motioning something to TC while his mate gets a touch flustered and Starscream doesn’t have time for this. For once, he doesn’t want to slack on orders - if to justify Megatron’s faith in him. He knows what he’s doing and the less anyone else comes between his understanding with Megatron…

“Oh, I sensed jealousy.”

“It’s really not new.” Thundercracker corrected. “Remember back in Kaon, how heated Screamer would get when Megatron would lock himself up with Soundwave for days.”

Yes. Starscream did remember. But that had more to do with the insult of being recruited and then sat outside a door like sparklings awaiting chores! Nothing to do with Soundwave, the wretched suck up, or Megatron’s lack of attention. Sure.

“Don’t you two have work otherwise? I’m pretty certain we have a rather important event you dragged me into.” His wingmates brightened at the reminder, circulating information through their trine so Starscream was up to date on progress. “I’ll be seeing Megatron later this evening, I’ll inform him.”

“He’s really going to be there?” Thundercracker sounded a touch unsure but Warp had yet to stifle his excitement. There was few seekers left who grew up in Vos proper, old traditions and once-carefully guarded culture now left to ruined bits of memory and those posh cretins who believed they
owned their history. Starscream had yet to decide if inviting Megatron was a means to push the few seekers who had been unsettled as of late -- or if he simply wanted his leader there.

“He will be.” Starscream spoke with confidence. “And if those soft-strutted morons make a move…”

“We’ll take care of it.” Thundercracker offers, steeling himself against impending trouble. Warp just looks excited.

“Precisely.”

---

It was a good day for Starscream.

At least it would be, lugging the case towards Megatron’s quarters. He was always there at this time of night, his warrior’s discipline or something useless. It was quiet and he’d managed to drag the damn heavy thing without much trouble - but also couldn’t request help. This was a private matter, one that had left his trine rolling their optics at him when he left. But what did they know? What Megatron and he were doing was … beneficial to the Decepticon cause. A Lord and his second should maintain close relations. Megatron should need him. Much like the gladiator with half formed plans and little concept of the world of glittering things needed Starscream’s insight.

It felt good to be important again. To be the focus of Megatron’s attention.

He knew what he was doing...his trine were worrying needlessly.

Eh.

He feels a surge of excitement, pressing the summons for the chamber door. Dark in the corridor, his leader’s room lit with a singular red lamp overhead. He waits three kliks and rings again, frown impatient, fist poised to knock before there’s the smallest vibration beneath his pedes as Megatron approached on the other side. A thrill running up his wings trying to neaten his features at the last moment.

“Starscream?” The comm answered and the camera shifted as it activated.

“I’ve something for you.” He answers, rising on his pedes to bring himself closer to the camera. “Open up.”

“It’s late.”

“Is it?” Starscream’s rose in fake surprise. “You’ll like this, open up.” Almost on command the door shifts, spreading wide onto the visage of Megatron staring down at him with a small glint of irritation. Or that was his usual expression - Starscream wasn’t sure any longer. Either way it caused him to smile, claws wavering in the direction of the case. “If you would be so kind?”

“You dragged it here.” Megatron responds, missing the delight of his gift to point out unimportant details. Starscream’s frown must have spoken enough and Megatron reaches down, hoisting the case beneath an arm with little effort as the seeker ducked beneath to relocate himself inside the room without waiting for invitation.

He’d been inside Megatron’s resting chambers only a few times. Large but plain. A work desk with a simple connection to the rest of the base’s network. Minimal storage for personal effects as the warlord carried little with him that would not fit in a subspace compartment. Beyond that, a broad berth that never seemed used when Starscream had entered the quarters before and even now seemed
a poorly utilized as ever. It was here he focused Megatron’s attention, motioning for the case to be brought in that direction as it was the only furniture large enough to bear the size and weight.

“Be careful.” He took a seat on the berth’s edge, pale legs crossed as he waited for Megatron to catch up, not missing the smallest wrinkle in his leader’s expression trying to keep his gaze squarely on his task. Adorable. “There we go.” When the case was settled down Starscream took no time crawling on knee joints to open intricate locks, stretched over the length of the black container with wings freshly polished and catching the dimmest light in Megatron’s room.

Megatron waited patiently for the lid to unseal and when Starscream revealed the fusion cannon there was a pleased rumble from his leader.

“You've made some changes.” Megatron casually observed, lowering a hand to trace the modified weapon.

“Just a few touches here and there.” Starscream was practically purring, claws curled over the case lid as he searched Megatron’s reaction. “Refined a few system drains, decreased recharge time by seven percent not to mention reshaped the fusion chamber for a more streamlined expulsion.” Wings flickered in excitement at his own work, Megatron did not look. “It will rely more on your targeting computer, but I think you can handle it.”

“Amazing how only now these changes are available when I have been requesting an upgrade for years.” Megatron lifted the cannon from the case, examining his seeker’s craftwork with open appreciation.

“Well it's amazing how more efficiently I can work without dealing with constant head trauma “ Starscream snarked, rolling optics but didn't let the comment ruin his pleasant mood. He seemed perfectly comfortable now, seated on Megatron’s berth and Megatron was quick to turn his back on him. Letting the attachments of the weapon settle over his arm, metal plates and sealed latches come to life to grasp the cannon’s mount. Starscream watching from the berth as Megatron’s optics flickered ever so slightly as the weapon synced with the rest of him following a perfect purr of woven systems.

“Good.” Megatron tests the weight and offered nothing more.

Starscream has certainly bared his scowl faster in his life with Megatron, but this was top ten at least.

“Just. Good?” Snaps, sitting up a little straighter from his perch.

“Should I lavish you in praise for doing your job?” Megatron asks in return, shifting to face Starscream now, his shadow towering long across the seeker’s poised body. To no surprise Starscream meets his query with a nod and it almost brings the warlord to laugh. Megatron softening with amusement at Starscream’s spoiled demands. “An overindulgent youth has spoiled you.”

“My overindulgent youth provided me with the tools to build you such a weapon, be thankful.” Only minimal sting in his tone, settling back to be more comfortable on the berth and trying his best not to consider his position. His leader however held no such tact, blatantly watching him with a roaming gaze. Calculating, curious and unsettled. Starscream could only stir with the idea that he was making the old mech uncomfortable. Brought a soft grin to his face and at the sight Megatron turned away. How sweet he thought.

“How is your work on our newest weapon? On schedule?” He asks suspicious.

“Completely.” Lies through his denta. He would have to work a bit late into the next night to have it
ready for the next stage. “You said you trusted me, so trust me.” Megatron seems to accept his answer and Starscream only feels a touch worried at the lie.

“You have further business here?” Asks while examining his returned weapon, which Starscream was glad to provide. He disliked seeing Megatron unarmed in such a way. He liked knowing /his/ work was intertwined with his leader’s systems.

“In a couple solar days we will conduct the Rites of Unification.” Starscream crossed a leg with a wide arch. “You’re still attending?”

“At your request. Yes.” Megatron nods. “But I still wonder how this will help your current status amongst your kin. They have been unsettled since Skyfire's demise.” It takes some strength not to flinch at how casually Megatron speaks the name, but he would no longer shake at the memory. There was no more place for a twice killed stranger in his thoughts.

“I am their Air Commander if I want my Lord to witness a Trining then they can only accept.” Speaks too quickly and worries for it. When dealing with Megatron now he needs to be careful, as seen earlier the other has taken to bothering remembering what Starscream says. A new talent indeed.

"You said you missed Cybertron.” Megatron had rebuilt the Vosian skyline for him after a simple statement of mourning. But what Cybertronian didn’t miss home?

"What else could I make you feel?” Starscream manages with great talent not to flutter in memory, the swirling of overcharge in his tanks diluting his senses. Vocalizer worn from what felt like hours spent with Megatron’s full attention, teaching the warlord fledgling tales that a young miner was not privileged to know....

Ugh. What a mess.

“You’re my Second by talent and terror;” Megatron interrupts Starscream’s musings. “But their Commander by birthright.”

Ah. A subject Starscream was tired of facing. Not that it was secret, any longer. Mechs who spent as much time around his brood as Megatron would know.

“By skill too, don’t sell me short.” He complains and remains still as Megatron removes the large case from the berth and sits in it’s place. Now only the width of the cannon sat between them, a quiet hum of dormant power against both their frames.

“Vos proper and your kind were always strangers to me. You were not the first seeker I met but one of the first I held a conversation with.” Megatron admits. “But I worked their alloy component mines - heard rumor of their social structure. Uneducated, I believed all trines were split-spark siblings.” This made Starscream grin a touch, recalling the many times Megatron referred to his trine as “Brothers”. Easier to accept than to argue, and no seeker would take offense. They were all a family in a strange, unwanted way. Their shared bloodline a broken city and a lifetime of war.

“My creator was untrined. A steward of the Illustris court in Vos. He served the Royal Air Commander directly. The Grand Overseer.” Starscream found an uncomfortable urge to share. Very uncomfortable. He tried to tap it down, but Megatron’s focus was his once more and he was thrust back millions of years. Young. Starved for purpose while some scarred gladiator assembled against the forces which held them cowering in the dark. “My sire however was trined. And more even, sparkbonded with his wingmates.” He almost laughed at a joke only he understood.
“Even your creation is tragic.” Megatron comments simply, perhaps not understanding the implications but that was fine. Starscream knew his leader was acquainted well of a life of outcast and upset. Clawing for every scrap of respect and freedom he could find. It was something Skyfire had never understood, nor could he. The singular rift between them, the point of bitter anger Starscream could never let go of. Abandoned his city for Iacon to prove himself worthy and then left Cybertron for Skyfire to belong.

Both had left their wounds and Starscream had learned to leave scars of his own.

“We were both born to be tools it seems.” Starscream adds with playfulness in his voice. Leaning against the cannon’s weight to flatter optics at his leader - trying to dispel the tense mood. “Expected to be dumb obedient tools until needed...but we bit our handlers.” At this Megatron’s laugh is more a soft choke of air, the sound echoes in the otherwise still room.

“You’re hardly a tool, more like a weapon without restraint, firing at your wielder.” The complaint is familiar and Starscream trails claws down the cannon’s new body. The weapon a brand of Starscream’s mark on Megatron’s existence.

“And who is this wielder I rally against?” Laughs but Megatron leans in close with such swift ease that Starscream finds himself struggling not to bow away. Optics startled and wide as only one servo keeps him from tumbling away.

“Who has ever brandished you with such skill but me?” He asks with a sharp tone. Possessive and low not unlike what Starscream has heard before. This close he can see his leader has yet to buff the scrape Starscream’s denta left on his mouth and his own systems warm too loudly at the sight.

He finds an excuse to leave soon after and realizes he does not know what he is doing.

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“So I think I figured it out.” Warp kicks his legs in the air where he’s laid out across Starscream’s workbench in the main laboratory, ignoring his wingleader’s third attempt to shoo him from his space. Thundercracker was busy that afternoon, working with the trio of seekers wishing to be trained. Starscream had yet to meet with them directly, finding himself still uncertain about this path but really --- he shouldn’t care. Let them make their own choices. Why should he stress to protect them from foolish mistakes? Starscream had been lucky not to bond with a mech who flew off and “died” not a stellar year later and his trine was bad enough as it was. Couldn’t imagine being so absolutely beholden to them! It wasn’t his fight. He should stop caring.

“Figured out what? Why you’re an idiot?”

“That was pretty lame Screamer.”

“Shut up.” Threw a servo full of bolts at his head and returned focus to the chamber, wanting to have this complete for Megatron before his leader had to ask. The other night had been...strange. Too similar to their overcharged moment, an unspoken challenge issued that neither of them took. Perhaps Starscream was bothered by that - he’d kissed Megatron already hadn’t he? If it was something Megatron had wanted perhaps he should do something about it?

No. That’s not what he wanted. He wanted to be respected by Megatron. Needed by Megatron. If he wanted to seduce Megatron he could have done that ten times over! It wouldn’t be that difficult, just flash polished wings and whine with subservience and UGH! Starscream flung a tool across the room and Warp couldn’t help but snicker.
“No really, listen.” Still amused, rolling over to his chest to catch Starscream’s gaze. “You wanted to be his favorite, you sort of accomplished that. THEN when he took it away - you fought him. Gave you something to do. But now that he took that away too what’s left?”

“To shoot him and rise to the leader of all Decepticons.” Answers blandly, reexamining the chamber’s structure for any weakening in the frame.

“No. If you can’t fight him then you want to F---”

“Warp.” Starscream stops him dead only half paying attention with his attention drawn in halted horror at his work. “Warp did you touch anything on this device?”

“What the weapon?” Warp, while hating to be interrupted, slide down to look over Starscream’s wing with a curious stare. “I know better than to touch your geeky stuff.” Starscream’s expression shifted, moving around Skywarp to access logs for the room. Bringing up multiple display windows on screen while Skywarp continued trying to understand the trouble.

“Oh.” He saw it finally. “Some of these pieces are different materials,” Just as Skywarp was feeling proud of himself for “solving the case” he looked up as Starscream honed in on security footage for the labs, finding missing pieces and well-versed in Soundwave’s tricks that it only took moments to unscramble the data. Return it in appropriate order. Unlike Soundwave to be sloppy - if they wanted something removed from record it took very little for them to go above even Starscream’s abilities. He’d consider what that meant later, for now the screen cleared and Starscream was able to track what had occured during his absence.

Unsurprisingly the footage showed Soundwave sitting at the bench, removing and replacing parts of the weapon with similar components of different materials. Tampering with Starscream's work.

“That...miserable...wretched...glitched little…” Starscream was hissing and Skywarp could feel his wingleader’s temper surge and twist as he didn’t even bother to contain his emotions. (no surprise really.) “Even after Megatron commanded them to…Oh I can’t wait to inform our leader that his most precious Soundwave disobeyed--”

Onscreen Megatron stepped into view. He didn’t need to check the recorded time stamp. He just needed to see the upgraded fusion cannon shiny and returned to Megatron’s arm.

"Starscream claimed the device was complete. Your verdict? " Megatron asked and Skywarp took a step away from Starscream who gripped the console with claws digging into soft metal.

"Material components incompatible with expected function. Upgrade complete. " Megatron made a face but didn’t immediately burst into cursing Starscream’s name.

"Fine. Delete security footage and let’s hope Starscream doesn’t---” The screen shatters in glass and sparks as three ray blasts go through it.

“I’m going to kill him.”

---

Soundwave is their own alarm system at times. Good to keep around as any large emotions of nefarious intent approaching them - they know. Such as now when Megatron extends a servo for Soundwave’s report as they make their way towards the bridge -- and his intelligence officer freezes.

“Soundwave?” There’s a sinking feeling in his tanks and Soundwave drops the datapad. Years of war and even longer struggling to survive has honed Megatron’s instincts. He’s grabbing
Soundwave by the collar of their armor and flinging them both to the ground and the bulkhead behind them erupts in flashes of red and sizzling smoke.

“I told you to delete the security footage!” Roars, knowing too well the sound of Starscream’s weapons. Quick to roll to the side as the jet engines scorch overhead.

“You liar!” A heinous screech and Megatron narrowly misses the swipe of claws as the seeker transforms. Landing with a skid of thrusters where Megatron’s helm once rested.

“Starscream stop this immediately!” He orders and is given time to stand when Soundwave tries to eject a cassette to aid in wrangling the furious seeker. Starscream flung himself onto Soundwave’s frame, knocking them back to the floor and kneeling on their chest compartment with claws poised over their helm. Skywarp flickers into a nearby space - quick to yell Starscream’s name but is ignored.

Megatron throws his arm around Starscream’s midsection, using his strength to pry the seeker off Soundwave - wincing as claws drag loud and painful down the telepath’s armor just to sink into his own frame. Trying to hold Starscream at bay was like fighting with a spiked demon from the depths of the pit. All snarling bites and tearing claws sparking as they clashed against Megatron’s armor.

“Evacuate Soundwave!” He yells over the seeker’s cursing as Skywarp looks on with uncertainty. “NOW!” Starscream tries to fire his weapon at Soundwave and it takes great effort to keep his arm controlled before Skywarp can snatch the telepath and pop out of danger.

“Let go of me!”

“You are overreacting!” Megatron has to suffer claws digging their way into his shoulder seams, trying to rip out necessary components before slamming Starscream into the bulkhead - the seeker letting out a choke of pain as his helm snaps harsh against the metal.

“I’ll show you overreacting!” So preoccupied by the claws Megatron forgets to pin all limbs, struck by the sudden and searing pain of thrusters firing against his leg. Withdraws quickly, snarling through the hurt, but pulls Starscream with him only to slam him back into the wall with a greater force. Effectively breaking the chance for the seeker to escape the hold. This time he’s sure to force him down, making it difficult for him to use the same trick twice or chance losing any stability in their wrestling match.

“Surrender!” Orders and is met with a familiar sneer of hatred.

“Make me!” It’s instinct at this point. Fist heavy at his side knowing that a strike at Starscream’s midsection would send the seeker crumbling. He’s done it before. Left Starscream gagging as systems choked, curled and suffering on the floor after a disagreement. It would be so easy to end this.

Starscream’s expression shuffles through the full scope of his emotions as Megatron’s fist opens and grips the overlaid seams of his pelvic plate. Hoisting him effortlessly until Starscream had no choice but to shift his limbs, spreading legs for Megatron’s broad size to pin him to the bulkhead by weight alone. Servos freed, he digs them sharp into his leader’s pauldrons, doing little damage but satisfied to cause even the smallest of pain while Megatron crushes him back into the wall.

He has a perfect shot at tearing into Megatron’s throat, and doesn’t take it.

“Put me down!”

“Humble yourself a moment!” Megatron’s servos fall to hold him just beneath his turbines.
“You lied to me!” Screeches in his face, his chin brushing the bridge of Megatron’s nose - tempted to break it again for good measure. Vibrating furiously but no longer trying to claw out optics. “You didn’t trust me!”

“I did trust you!” Megatron answered and squeezed ever so slightly. “But you were wrong!” He reels his head back to avoid Starscream biting him and returns by pressing more of his weight into the seeker’s frame until he flinched. “Your fragile pride is not enough to put the Decepticons at risk! If I had openly doubted you where would we be now?”

“You’re trying to control me by lying, that’s my gig!”

“Starscream did you truly have no doubts about the materials?” Starscream considered swallowing his own glossa to not have to answer. “Be truthful with me now, did you for a moment consider you might be wrong?”

“I could have made it work.” Voice strangles a bit, knowing he was caught. “I would have.”

“Why risk it?” Megatron does not seethe at the admittance, only seems to fall lax with frustration, easing off Starscream’s frame to make it easier to move. “If you had doubts you should have admitted them not put the mission in danger. That is what I trusted you with.”

Megatron didn’t answer. Merely frowned and turned still-flaring optics away as he struggled not to erupt into another tantrum. The pinch of claws on Megatron’s armor fell, now only a twitching sensation of servos on his shoulders. Megatron did not wish to surrender because his seeker pulled a face, but he felt little more could be done to convince Starscream that this trouble was his fault. (And now Megatron had an injured shoulder joint and scorched shin armor to deal with for his trouble).

It takes little to return Starscream to the floor, let pedes touch with small clicks and when he tries to rise again to full height - allow Starscream his moment to sulk - servos remain tight on his shoulders keeping him lowered.

“You likened yourself to my wielder.”

“I did.” Megatron wonders how long it will take for Soundwave to send reinforcement - or for Starscream’s brothers to come running to his aid.

“You’ll never control me.” Ever the rebel, fighting a cage Megatron is not trying to shove him into (any longer). He can’t help but be amused, the roll of his optics lighting Starscream’s face with a settled understanding. His impossible seeker, now that throttling him was taken off the table what was left?

“I don’t want to control you.” He speaks to the confined space made by their bodies, himself hunched and Starscream close that Megatron is dazed by the scent of clean polish and violence. He had settled their battle by soothing his seeker rather than breaking him down. Megatron would call this a victory. “I want you to choose to bow on your own.”

“You’re going about it a funny way.” He mocks, using a digit to knock the insignia on Megatron’s chest, and his claws remain to trace the shape. “Try being more direct.”

“Says the one who keeps crawling to my room at night.”

Megatron is fixed with a look he’s seen only once on his seeker, moments before Starscream crawled up his body in the medical suite and bit his mouth.

“Are you disappointed that I leave?” He challenges.
Megatron regretfully thinks of Skyfire. Alive. A threat to what Starscream and he could build from what remains, a new war to win.

“Starscream,” He brushes his mouth against the seeker’s cheek when he rises, sure to speak quiet against the audial receptor. “Next time you come to my quarters, you will not be leaving so easily.” Wings rattle where they touch the wall. "Consider it a warning or a promise." At full height he can appreciate the dark color flooding Starscream’s dark face even in the dull light of the corridor left clawed and scorched from their short spar. Starscream has always been lovely, but in this certain moment Megatron understands what more than that. His deceptively pretty seeker with more anger than the universe could satisfy with war or a second chance to kill those who hurt him.

Perhaps Megatron could satisfy.

“Lord Megatron!” Apparently it takes exactly that long for Soundwave to send reinforcements. No seekers. Perhaps restrained by their superior or worried their presence will not be of help. The few soldiers take a look at the corridor, Megatron’s leg, and Starscream’s lack of injury and seem perplexed only for Megatron to raise a servo in dismissal. Soundwave finds their way through the small force, their expression hidden by a mask, but concern clear.

[This doesn't get you out of the ceremony. Try to look nice.] Starscream interjects into his internal communications while Soundwave approaches, head tilting back and forth between the two trying to puzzle something out. [You promised.]

[I always keep my promises, Starscream. You would do well to remember that.]

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Chapter End Notes

P.s. if you are familiar with G1 "Fire on the Mountain" you know what's bound to happen.
Idealization

Chapter Summary

So here's the second part of the last chapter.

Notes: This chapter deals with /some/ non-explicit sexual content, the author making up culturally relevant events, and a disappointed Soundwave. (but aren't they always?)

“Before you say anything, permit me the opportunity to explain.”

Soundwave does not.

“Inappropriate.” Their opinion offered without hesitation. Megatron permits the interruption due to the many years Soundwave has stood loyal at his side. There is no other he would permit to speak over him... “Incorrect. Starscream constantly undermining you.”

“Stay out of my thoughts.” He orders, knowing full well the other would not. “And Starscream does not count.” A huff of musical notes from Soundwave, sitting upright and clearly furious in their chair. At least Megatron had the foresight to ask the cassettes be left outside the war room while they discussed these delicate matters. He didn’t need Soundwave’s hoard running right to Starscream with this information.

“Misguided confidence in Starscream has caused issues before.” Soundwave warns and a thousand memories flicker to the surface of his thoughts. Plenty of occasions when Starscream failed him whether by whimsy or weakness. (Or literally the other day when Starscream lost his damn mind) A brutal warrior the seeker might be, but keeping him in line was a war all its own.

“I believe it could be beneficial to----”

“Negative.”

“Consider what Starscream ---”

“NEGATIVE.”

Megatron fixed his mouth into a line, watching the telepath’s jaw grind in frustration.

“I need you to understand that I am sharing my thoughts with you out of courtesy. I’m not asking permission. You may interrupt me one more time before I take it personally,” Warns, this time with the power of his station and authority, and Soundwave responds immediately. Resetting their shoulders and allowing servos to fold atop the war table, giving Megatron their undivided attention. They even nod in acknowledgement, ever the perfect soldier. “Good. Now. Imagine the force of the Decepticon army without a percentage of our focus wasted on keeping Starscream in line?”

“Favorable.” Soundwave agrees. Good. It's a start.

“Starscream is my Second in Command, when granted that title I had great hopes for him that have
been dashed over these past few years. His behavior was unacceptable.” Megatron’s thoughts flicker to the way his seeker had stared up at him, broken face with a ferocity comparable to Megatron’s own as he judged his leader without restraint. “I believe the options of maintaining this peace are limited. But. With recent interactions with Starscream an opportunity I hadn’t considered before arose.” Settling into his chair Megatron’s chin finds his palm, fingers curling to brush absentmindedly at the smallest dent down his lip.

He’d noticed Starscream staring at it before and the look of his seeker’s face was worth the new scar.

“We’ve survived one another at our worst and now we have a chance to truly unite. Combine our might into an unparalleled strength.” He’s excited at the prospect. No more hiding, or uncertain terms. He would face this potential headfirst, and he would win.

“Permission to debate?” Soundwave requests, calm and polite, catching the budding grin on the warlord’s face. They do not move until Megatron agrees.

“Granted.” Megatron does not startle at the sudden images flickering to life which fill the room. Colorless blue in the hologram emitted from Soundwave’s expert control of every inch of this base. Manipulating the war room’s capabilities to their counterpoint.

Skyfire’s image is unsightly and the warlord’s servos pull into tight fists, enraged at the offense. Skyfire on the table brought back to life. Skyfire trailing after Starscream in the maze of ice. Skyfire accepting a blaster from the eager seeker who all but clung to the other’s wrist and didn’t take optics off him for a singular moment.

Skyfire crashing into Starscream above, sending them both broken and damaged to the frozen earth. Skyfire rising from the grave replaying itself between Megatron and his subordinate as Soundwave’s visor reflected the multiple images like an insult to injury.

“Query. Were Skyfire not discovered, would this opportunity have presented itself?” Soundwave asks carefully.

“Starscream chose to stay loyal in the end. As demented as he is, he remained by my side.” The defense feels weak even to him, never good when dealing with a telepath, who just nods. Accepts the response though with no affect to their demeanor as the images continue to loop, mocking him.

“Additional query, would Starscream be as receptive to your attention were it not for the recent loss of Skyfire?”

“Your point?” Megatron swipes a servo through the nearest projection and it fades on command. The rest stay and continue their taunt.

“Conclusion...” Soundwave changes every hologram to when they first resurrected the shuttle. Starscream, standing with wings high at the table weighed down by Skyfire’s unconscious form. His expression one of open hurt and fear, his orders sharp and desperate as he commands the revival with a tremble in his voice. “Starscream’s affection is distraction. He would not pursue if Megatron did not continue to advance. Attention: insincere.”

Megatron falls quiet to his own thoughts, taking a moment to compare his instinct and what the past has shown him. Starscream at his worst was treacherous, constantly undermining him and prone to lies and tricks when it suited him. But when Skyfire “died” he almost took Starscream with him. Selfish and furious. Megatron was left to gather the pieces and now stood at the moment of repair deciding how these pieces would be put back together...and how much of Megatron himself would be used as solder.
“Courting, ineffective means of controlling Starscream.” Soundwave offered, deciding with a flat statement Megatron’s intentions. Perhaps there was something to it.

“For your council I am always grateful.” Megatron does not address his intelligence officer further, tense as the images disperse like the stars he created for Starscream the other night. That engagement feeling untouched by past indiscretions and had left Megatron distracted from his goals for the briefest moment. Starscream had taught him the tales of stars and he’d listened, enraptured.

“Our objective in Earth mountains remains on schedule.” Soundwave provided a diversion and Megatron takes pause.

“How did Starscream uncover the security footage you deleted?” His thoughts fall to their discovery of Skyfire’s second resurrection. He would not have Starscream uncover that truth just yet. “Are you certain various sensitive information is secure, even from him?”

“Affirmative.” Soundwave’s voice never changes, always firm and steadfast in their offering. Unlike Starscream who could sing-song a lie for days, Soundwave had never been one to lose directive or lie to him. At least not yet caught. “Soundwave, superior.”

“See to the rest of your duties.” He dismisses, the images lingering like a ghost in his sight. “Let us all remain as focused as yourself.”

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The Nemesis was never a ship built for fun, but some Decepticons seemed to forget that. Multiple hangars that once carried quick ships meant for open space fights now left empty to slow expansion of the base. Taken over by bored Cons once it was clear the Nemesis was likely not to fly again. It was here scrap supplies were wasted in recreational renovation, but Megatron did not hold his soldiers to impossible standards. He knew trapped and idle warriors only mean trouble for him, so allowing them space to roam and build on their free time or find other means to use the space went with little trouble.

Except now.

“We need it.”

“I heard you the first time, but I’ll ask again: for what?”

“You’ll see.” Starscream whined and even nearly kicked his pede like a child. “The ceremony is tonight. We need the space.”

“Negative.” Soundwave added and while Starscream never spared a cruel look towards the telepath, Megatron couldn’t help notice the level of disgust on the seeker’s part had increased. Drastically. He made a note not to leave them alone for any extended period of time. Soundwave was brilliant as they were useful but Starscream’s ability to hold a grudge should never be underestimated. He did not want to see who would win between the two if left unchecked.

If Megatron wasn’t currently bewitched by certain ideas of Starscream, he wouldn’t be so ready to be alone in a room full of only seekers so soon. But yesterday he was holding Starscream into a wall and expressing his desire towards him -- and months ago they were trying to kill one another. Things change too quickly. He feared Starscream would be better at playing this game than Megatron expected. Perhaps Soundwave was right. Even now Starscream failed to hold Megatron’s gaze, likely haunted by Megatron’s declaration of intention.

“You’re demanding of me to clear out one of the few rooms where no trouble happens so you can
“Hold a party?” Megatron huffs. “I think not.”

“*Megatron,* I already promised them.” Starscream’s voice falls sharper, blue claws flexing at his sides and there’s a genuine upset in his face like he’s swallowing poison. “Please?”

Soundwave and Megatron look at one another while the seeker waits for an answer. He thinks to Soundwave’s lecture, the telepath expressing their great dislike of the situation and it would be a complete mistake to bow to Starscream’s demands a DAY after his tantrum nearly took off Soundwave’s helm.

“Negative.”

“Fine.” Megatron spoke over his Third. “On one condition.” Starscream makes a face like he was trying to dissect Megatron in his thoughts.

“What condition?” Asked with all suspicion.

“Apologize to Soundwave for your outburst.” It was petty and tempting another violent reaction from Starscream was a dangerous course: as nothing upset his seeker more than lowering his pride to another. But still, if Megatron could prove to Soundwave his efforts were not in vain perhaps Megatron could recruit the telepath to his side of the argument.

Of course asking Starscream to express regret was like asking a ground-build to fly.

“You're kidding.” Megatron just stares patiently in return as Soundwave appears quite curious as to how this will pan out. “You're not kidding! But they tampered with…”

“Under my orders.” He reminds. “You attacked a subordinate without justifiable cause. You're lucky this is the only punishment I'm presenting you.”

Starscream so very obviously struggled with his emotions. His pride likely demanding blood while another part of him seemed hesitant to reject the option. Whether by a change of spark or he truly did need the space so desperately. How far would Starscream go to keep a promise to his seekers? Before this, Megatron would think “not an inch.”

The seeker turns his elegant chin to face Soundwave who seems tense and ready to leap out of firing range.

“I am sorry,” Voice low enough that the few Decepticons in the room wouldn't be able to hear.

For a moment, Megatron was actually proud. Perhaps he knew what he was doing after all…

“I am sorry our leader put you in a position to be attacked. And really if I had been trying to kill you - you’d be dead. So actually you're welcome for sparing your life.” Starscream’s smile equaled Megatron’s frown.

“Starscream that's not…” but it was too late. Starscream had already decided he was done with a flat glance to Megatron.

“There. Now I expect the room is cleared before tonight. I'll be busy for the rest of the day. I’ll see you there at twenty-two hundred.” Chimes with his excitement, stepping off the platform and back to his waiting brothers who bristled with similar excitement at the news. Three sets of wings bunched together and took advantage of Starscream’s declaration - abandoning their posts without hesitation.

Starscream only turning back with a brief smile before the doors closed behind them.
“Inappropriate.” Soundwave hums to themself and Megatron grunts a Tarnish curse in their direction,

“Keep your opinions to yourself and send out the order.”

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Megatron spends the remainder of his day partnered with anticipation. Large events, parties, really any form of expected socialization was hardly his favorite. Years with the fighting ring had meant meeting fans and letting himself find peace in their attention. But even that had quickly faded into a tiresome reminder of how cruel society can be, how easy it is to forget suffering for entertainment. But now, Lord of his faction, ruler of the Decepticons...the most he had to suffer was the occasional overindulgence when supply was high and some group had brewed a gritty higrade for the occasion.

He can recall one of such parties on Cybertron, noticing for the first time how much attention his newly drafted seekers commanded. Three pretty builds spinning delicate to examine their new brands, snatching the focus of every Decepticon who’d never seen someone so *expensive* in their lives. Even then Starscream lavished the attention, but also was quick to publicly humiliate and reject any poor mech who tried so much as to look too long in his direction. More than once in their millions of stellar years together had Megatron reprimanded Starscream for physically damaging a comrade “just because they touched his wing”.

His thoughts drift to Starscream in his lap, the ferocious kiss and the wild sound that was ripped from him when Megatron too had treated the wing with a harsh touch. He couldn’t imagine now siding against Starscream. The mere thought of another touching Starscream left him both agitated and exhausted at once. Jealousy did not suit him...

When it draws near time to attend, he finds himself without distraction in his quarters, wondering if his position on these matters was incorrect. Soundwave had made a clear point, none of this would have been sparked without the interference of another. No matter how Megatron looked at it, these developments were solely the cause of an outsider.

Megatron did not need to ask Starscream for the extent of his relationship with Skyfire, nor would he. He did not want to hear Starscream speak that name or insult the seeker by demanding an explanation. All Megatron wanted was to know Starscream was not thinking of the other.

Megatron steels against wavering thoughts, considering this now a duty rather than a pleasure. Attending a ceremony for his subordinates, what seems to be an important rite of passage for a culture he only can begin to understand. Megatron can’t find reason to decline now, making his way towards the emptied hangar spotting plenty of nosey soldiers lingering nearby. Seekers and coneheads on patrol to keep them away. An unsettling tension through his base that Megatron finds goes quiet at his presence as swiftly as an order.

Tomorrow he will deal with whatever bad comes from this. But tonight, he will serve his role and participate as a guest for these members of his faction. "*I want you there.*” Starscream had claimed, and regardless of how easily the seeker found it to manipulate his leader so blatantly, Megatron still had a promise to uphold.

“Lord Megatron.” Coneheads at the door, twice as large and half as smart - but they seem genuinely surprised when he approached. The smallest whisper of "*told you he’d be here*” before their polite bow of respect.

“I got it from here!” Thundercracker thankfully arrives, pushing back the coneheads to make room for Megatron through the guarded doors. “Sir. Glad you could make it.” Megatron couldn’t help but
note the obvious lie. Thundercracker was not a natural trickster as his “brother”.

“This is certainly a spectacle you’ve made of my base.” Megatron comments and permits Thundercracker to escort him past the coneheads who continue to whisper among themselves. Inside the renovated hangar had been cleared of any collected clutter from the Decepticon soldiers. A rec room now clean and bare save for the waiting seekers standing in a partial circle around the center of the room. Chatting together, grouped by trine or the solo seekers gravitating towards one another with uncertain glances. Clearly Megatron was not the only one present who’d never seen a trining before. He wondered how more elaborate the ceremony would have been in Vos-proper at the height of the city’s power. No doubt drowning in indulgent decor and hours of tedious protocol to ensure everything to the last detail was right. Posh things, these seekers, if Starscream was Megatron’s only comparison for those of higher status.

“Where is Starscream?” Asks as Thundercracker plays both escort and means of diffusing strange looks they receive making their way through. Megatron is calmed to note the majority of looks are of surprise and slight excitement, similar to the gaping crowds of his gladiator years. A comfort to know his soldiers still bowed in respect...but on occasion a seeker turned to their brother, cautious whisper and uncertainty in their expression.

While he had done his best to ensure the varying cultures of his diverse army were respected - Megatron was still their leader, he should not feel unwelcome in any room on his base.

“He’s talking with the kids.” Thundercracker motions across the room and surely Starscream should be easy to spot even in the crowd of his similarly shaped kin.

The light reflects too brightly across shined armor. Crisp white freshly painted, his red as violent against the pale body as any battle Megatron has won. Starscream, ever vain, too comfortable in the element as leader of ceremony. Chin high as he addressed three seekers whom Megatron did not recognize. They looked as young as Megatron felt old, ducked helms listening intently to their Air Commander as Starscream likely repeated himself several times without notice. Each were a variant of blue with intricate red glyphs in ornate patterns down their quaking wings - which Megatron noticed the young seekers each gently soothed their would-be trine mate’s wing in gentle strokes of black servos. The three enraptured with Starscream’s words (which Starscream was high-likely to love) as his seeker had never looked so noble before. A Prince of a fallen city indeed.

It felt too intimate suddenly and he glanced back to Thundercracker who had caught him watching, the other shifting his gaze away as Starscream took notice and led the three in their direction.

“Oh boy.” Thundercracker sighed and when Starscream drew near they were assaulted with an overwhelming scent. The fragrance of sweet smoke and crushed surrexian crystals which reminded Megatron of a senator he’d killed once and permitted Starscream to raid their home.

“Lord Megatron,” He doesn’t bow but the three young seekers do, knocking into one another’s wings and shoulders - still undignified in their movement. Megatron wonders briefly if Starscream and his “Brothers” were ever so clumsy. “May I present to you our candidates for unification. Hailbound, Overlook, Windcoil. They are very excited and humbled to have you joining us today.” They looked entirely identical, having clearly modified themselves for that purpose. Polished and detailed as finely as Starscream and Megatron simply addressed them as one unit. Made it easier that way.

“As I am privileged to be present.” One of the younger seekers let out a muffled “squeak” of excitement and Starscream jabbed him in the side - correcting what was apparently inappropriate behaviour. Hypocritical of Starscream, really. “It goes unspoken you three will continue bringing honor to your Commander,” He eyes Starscream whose mouth is tight but their optics express a
certain hesitation while looking towards the three. “As well as the Decepticon cause.”

“Yes sir!” In unison they confirm, varying smiles across similar faces and it feels like meeting his elite trine for the first time. Now Megatron can’t imagine not being able to tell them apart, but once it was all but impossible. Save for Starscream. He always had known Starscream.

“Alright, go practice your vows.” Starscream waves claws in their direction, nodding to Thundercracker to join them. “We will be starting shortly and remember DON’T let anyone scuff your wings - I am talking to you Overlook.” One seeker ducked their helm while the other two snickered at their expense, pulling each other by the wrists closer to the circle’s center while elder seekers spoke quick phrases in native tongue as they went.

“They seem quite young to be bonding.” Megatron comments and first since the incident Starscream seems to relax in his presence, stepping to match Megatron’s stance.

“They’re hardly out of adolescence, but it can’t be helped.” He gives a small smirk but Starscream’s expression remains flat with concern otherwise. “I’m not their parent, I can’t tell them they’re being stupid.”

“You’re against this?” Asks with a lowered tone, intelligent enough to predict such a statement might cause issue should the wrong seeker overhear. Starscream however seems unphased, likely uncaring if anyone challenged him on the subject. It was interesting, witnessing Starscream with only seekers in his proximity. He held himself higher, regal. His wings wide and his optics constantly flickering across the room-surveying like a caretaker (or hunter) all those in sight. In nearly four million years Starscream had not lost command of his brood despite challenges and failures of his own-it made him wonder how much was Starscream’s birthright and how much was his sheer determination not to be lesser than any other.

“Anything I should know before we proceed?” Chooses to change the subject, careful to keep his servos to himself. Were this Starscream and he in normal conversation, Megatron might have rested a hand over the red shoulder—but felt here his familiarity might be a distraction.

“Remember when I warned you to decrease your audial receptors when my seekers went flying?” Megatron recalled the deafening noise. How the world had swelled with the roar of engines and Starscream’s utter look of peace at the chance to fly.

“Yes.”

“It’s gonna get louder.” He almost giggles and that only adds to the concern Megatron has over his being there. “You know...I’m taking a large risk having you here,” Starscream admits with surprising honesty while his focus drifts to a group of seekers, pushing their way to the front with a sneer to match Starscream. One Megatron recognized as the arrogant soldier who appeared outside of his chambers.

“Then why am I here?” Starscream’s wings flickered, his face turning with a smile that reminded Megatron of all the reasons his seeker was the most dangerous. He worried then that he’d given too much to abuse.

“I told you. Because I want you here..” Starscream echoes a past sentiment where the manner of his voice drops deep into Megatron’s spark as sharp as a clawed servo reaching in and twisting.

There’s a small disruption, Starscream excusing himself and leaving Megatron standing alone, towering over seekers as they begin to squeeze in tighter around the open circle. He is directed with respectful motions as Starscream abandoned him, led to an outer edge where he can observe and not
block any of shorter stature. He can hardly see past the cloud of wings layered over sleek bodies closely gathered, but when he spots the brilliant red of Starscream framed by his trine he settles back and allows himself to merely observe.

That is why he is there after all.

The young would-be trine gather opposite of his elite three, standing in a mirrored position while the crowd whispers together, one or two glancing back to Megatron but quick to return their focus. More than half seem bewildered by the event, eager to see how their fallen city might have performed the ceremony, while some seem too still. Strict features watching Starscream with predatory stares seemingly waiting for fault to reveal itself.

But Starscream did not seem worried, focused on schooling his features into something elegant and much like the commander he ought to be, quieting the crowd with a low spoken word like a hiss. Vosian perfect and twisting musically from fast moving lips and a vocalizer, echoing from his throat.

Megatron chose not to utilize his translator but recorded the proceeding instead should curiosity get the better of him later. Wanting for now to watch Starscream command the attention of his kin, bright blue claws extended as he spoke in such a fashion even Sunstorm looked moved where the maniac observed with their trine. Sharing a look with many seekers who had their own reason to be softened by the proceedings. Whether it was the absence of other builds or the idea of this ritual being performed long after Vos’ death. Megatron can only compare the mood to his own weary-faded longing to return to Tarn when he was younger.

Now he merely wishes to see Cybertron again in all its glory. Alive. Home. A sentiment he knew Starscream shared.

Starscream’s wings rise quickly and the seekers mimic in a startling sound of mechanics, almost completely obscuring Megatron’s view. He can only see helms moving, familiar wings and struggles not to demand a better view, now curious beyond belief as three new voices speak in unison as if responding to Starscream’s voice.

Thundercracker joins, then Skywarp and the command trine become one unit in their repetitive chant which sounds almost like an accusatory song to Megatron’s prepped receptors. The young seekers repeat, and in the space between wings and crowded jets Megatron watches chests shift and crack open. Pale light of sparks glimmer unprotected behind the veil of seekers and Megatron finds himself utterly still watching what he can. Starscream speaking to the center jet, a question and an answer, while blue claws dip into the spark chamber and the young seeker winces.

When claws retract there’s fuel on Starscream’s claws before moving to the next. Repeating. Puncturing the innermost chamber without the smallest motion to his face, sharing claw stained with their life force with the others until finally addressing the third. The young seeker can hardly remain still and Thundercracker smiles fondly as they too are invaded by their Air Commander’s touch-expression shifting from eager youth to a short quiver of pain. The other two are quick to comfort him with brushing wings and a soft hum of energy between them that even Megatron could feel as it echoed through the crowd.

Starscream addresses the room once more, and as he moves his gaze across the faces of his brood he finds Megatron. Pauses there, capturing his leader’s attention with a dark face cast in the light of exposed sparks. This same seeker who vowed himself to Megatron’s cause and was rewarded with distrust and anger. Regret did not suit Megatron so he swiftly replaced his annoyance with determination, granting Starscream a rare smile to which the seeker responded in kind.

Then it got loud.
At Starscream’s motion, elegant manipulation of his form transforming to his jet mode, the seekers nearest the young trine followed. Starscream leading a low circle around the three who moved into one another. Exposed sparks and grasping servos soon shielded from view as one by one the seekers transformed and followed the elite trine into the air. Close, carefully woven motions of broad wings forming a wide cyclone structure of motion. Megatron stepped back, his armor brushed by the force of wind created by the movement. His hearing shut off entirely just to fall victim to the vibration of engines now consuming the shaking room.

They blurred together, individual seekers indistinguishable from each other. A colorful mess of shapeless form perfectly synchronized, wing to wing yet without touching and disrupting the united display. Megatron thought of the elaborate formations of war, the brilliant maneuvers which seemed all too natural to his aerial force and felt almost stunned. He’d no longer be able to deny his endearment towards the build after this display.

The young jets make an appearance, rising over the whirlwind of Vos’ children, intertwined as they cling to one another, shifting in perfect harmony to their altmodes and joining the formation just as he’d hailed. Soundwave reacting to the loud noise of synchronized engines where Starscream had likely cut off any surveillance.

[Situation?] There’s worry in their voice and Megatron watches the wide storm of seekers begin to slow, individual shapes now able to be seen in the mass.

[It’s fine Soundwave. I’ll contact you later tonight.]  

[Megatron…] He ends communication and steps back as seekers begin to land. Keeping his expression strict so as not to reveal his own response to the performance. Watching with envy how quickly the seekers regained their posts, perfectly in line as they were before. Yet now with warmed expressions and shaking wings - the new trine center of the room while Starscream, Thundercracker and Skywarp stood closer to one another. Skywarp quick to nuzzle the side of Thundercracker’s helm while Starscream allowed his trine to cling to his shoulders as he addressed the newly bonded three - his smile genuine.

“See that you don’t embarrass me.” He smirks and all but shoves the three tangled seekers towards the crowd. “Well?” All at once the seekers lose their minds, rushing to greet the new trine with words of adoration or excitement. A conehead yells something and there’s an even louder cheer and suddenly energon darker in color than Megatron has ever seen appears by the plenty. Passed around to fervent claws as no one seems to consider Megatron’s presence. The mood overwhelming of elation and animated seekers all grabbing hold of their trine or bothering one another with bright grins and frantic speech.

Megatron looks up to see one of the three young jets clinging to Thundercracker in a long embrace while another barely managed to break free of the congratulatory cloud to address Starscream. Who in return strokes the side of his helm and speaks quietly something to make the youthful seeker smile somehow brighter.

“Lord Megatron,” Megatron’s fixation is broken to greet Skywarp who hands him a dark colored cube. “Fun right?!?”

“I’m almost afraid to ask where this came from.” Almost? No. Certainly afraid but he accepts regardless.

“Something the coneheads make out of filtered energy when Soundwave isn’t looking. But don’t tell….oh…”
“This is a party Skywarp.” Decides to be benevolent rather than angered at the revelation. He’d give
the seekers one night before beginning an investigation on what EXACTLY they do with their
resources. “For tonight, celebrate as you would.” It seemed to soothe the erratic seeker and Skywarp
grasped servos with a few passing of his kind before returning to focus on Megatron. Expression
strangely playful. Dangerous.

“So. Did you like it?” Asks almost vibrating where he stood at Megatron’s left. Squeezed in as jets
began to fan out, a celebration quick to pour into unoccupied space. Megatron watches as the new
trine keep rushing back to one another, giggling and smiling wide and almost overcome with open
adoration. He’s not used to seeing such peace in his soldiers.

“When you formed a trine with Starscream, was it similar?” His question makes Skywarp’s grin go
wider and he’d not thought that possible.

“Well. No. This was like a watered down version of what they did back on Vos. Apparently there’s
flying banners and some sort of paint but Starscream couldn’t be bothered. But Screamer, TC and I
bonded in the back of a crashed transport ship “ He says, clearly proud of the memory with optics
cast tenderly towards Thundercracker. Starscream has disappeared. “TC cried. It was fun.”

“And the puncturing?” Megatron presses, knowing that he’d only have a short time before
Starscream or Thundercracker realized Skywarp was blabbering once more. “Do you all have that?”

“Oh.” He almost looks flustered. “Oh that’s, it’s a mark. More for show, well, private show? But
that’s only for mated trines, not…”

“I think I understand.” Barbaric and delightfully suiting seekers to mutilate their most delicate of
systems to show off that they love another. Megatron asked his soldiers to brand themselves with
their symbol to show their dedication, he could understand the sentiment. “It was certainly an
impressive display, though I can’t help but notice a few seekers did not seem too fond of
Starscream.” The understatement of a lifetime and Skywarp’s face curled in a very Starscream like
sneer.

“Oh those are---” A blue claw comes around Skywarp’s head, covering his mouth and yanking him
back into Starscream’s hold where he just smiles with a murderous intent.

“There you are Skywarp,” He greets like a hiss and lets Skywarp stumble out of his grasp.
“Sunstorm needs you. Seems they want to put on a show for our new trine. Congratulations. You get
to be a siren.” Without care Starscream pushes the other from Megatron, baring denta when Skywarp
seems poised to complain, but the other is quick to glance between them. Nod and grows complacent
as he ran off to join the others.

“A show?”

“Please kill me.” Starscream monotones and takes the dark cube from Megatron’s servo, drinking
heavily until his optics flickered in processing the less-than-prime fuel. “I’m going to be hiding
behind you in case anymore children want to bond. I’m not doing another one of these.” Scoffs to
Megatron’s almost fond look.

“You’re complaining an awful lot for having just shown off how high-born you are.” Megatron
found himself amused by Starscream’s souring look. “I found your performance to be...captivating.”

“On Vos we had entire towers dedicated to this ceremony. We would fly until fuel depleted, almost
collapse from exhaustion.” He shares with little prompt, mouth pressed against the edge of the cube
as he struggled to meet Megatron’s gaze once more. “This was hardly befitting our rituals.” His
frown is fierce and enough that Megatron removes the cube from his grasp, bringing it to his own mouth to drink (startling at the sharp taste sending his systems reeling.) Starscream almost looks offended.

“Well. When we rebuild your city you’ll have to invite me to a true ceremony.” He muses and Starscream rolls optics - but his mouth twitches at the thought.

“You wouldn’t be allowed in, we have standards of presentation.” Before them the gathered seekers begin to struggle as Sunstorm tries to direct roles. Growing agitated that no one knows what they’re talking about and to the amusement of the crowd begins berating them with curses. Skywarp mocking them behind their back. “Besides, we didn’t have many stairs. You actually couldn’t get in.”

“Then I suppose I’d have to fly with you.” Megatron answers and Starscream’s look is worth the sudden pain as claws dig into his hip, the seeker quick to fold himself behind Megatron’s back as Sunstorm begins calling for Starscream to “come control your trine!”.

Things do not settle immediately. Starscream is forced to try and manage the now yelling rainmakers and keep Thundercracker from punching someone (much to the coneheads disappointment.) But soon they manage to organize themselves, seekers breaking off into small groups as the celebration carries on. Starscream returning to Megatron’s side, possibly to use him as an excuse for why he can’t help “I have to ensure our Lord is taken care of” or to keep a few glaring seekers away. Megatorn does not ask and allows Starscream to manage their destination.

Megatron struggles not to touch Starscream as they move from group to group, listening to the dramatic retellings of battles that did not go exactly the way some seekers would like to say. Megatron allows it, agreeing when he can and finding it all too easy to play into the gatherings. All it took to blend with seekers is agree that they did things they did not and allow them to act as if they are the most fascinating thing he’s ever conversed with. They love it and he's accosted by more "my liege" than ever before.

Megat orn does not tell Starscream he’s gotten plenty of practice with trying to appease Starscream himself.

Sunstorm finally gets things underway and Megatron finds himself seated on the floor while jets grow increasingly more overcharged around them. He’d not seen Starscream drink more than their shared cube but the remaining two of his elite trine had apparently had enough to join in on the elaborate performance. Some old tale from Vos, living stars gifting prophecies. Shapeshifting creatures lurking in the swirling shadows of wormholes while their hero (played by a VERY overcharged Acidstorm who tripped and fell on his face) continued some mighty journey home. Megatron wasn’t sure if it was supposed to be hysterical, but he found himself laughing along with the fluttering crowd, Starscream warm at his side. It felt strangely like the moments of comradely in the mines, when all they had were one another. Sparklings forced to grow too quickly kept entertained by elaborate tales from old, weary miners. Clinging to whatever joy they could find in the abusive dark. He catches Starscream with rare smiles. Laughing at ridiculous moments of their poorly prepared actors and then looking heinously offended when realizing Megatron can see. Faceplate flushed and lightly reprimanding his leader with nudge from his wing...Only to keep his wing pressed against Megatron's shoulder regardless of who can see.

It’s likely the highlight of his evening.

As Skywarp, playing some Grand Overseer of Vos, decided he would rather grope Thundercracker’s wings (sending a loud cheer from the crowd) Starscream leans in, motioning for
Megatron to meet him as two seekers try to untangle one of the newly trined from drapes that Megatron had no idea where they came from.

“Have you consumed too much, my lord?” Starscream’s voice is hushed, close enough that the seeker’s chin brushes Megatron’s jaw and he’s tempted to lean into the warmth radiating from his seeker.

“No.” Answers in kind, matching Starscream’s volume and in turn Starscream releases a playful sigh against his cheek.

“That’s too bad. If you had, I would have taken responsibility and escorted you back to your room.”

Suddenly Megatron cannot hear the antics of the play. Turning to meet Starscream’s gaze, needing to adjust his height not to knock their heads together. What he finds is Starscream facing him with a look of pause, trying and failing to mask the anticipation with a mockery of calm.

“Starscream,” He lets his voice pick up so the seeker could hear him without strain. “I’m afraid I overestimated myself and am quite, quite in need of assistance returning to my quarters.” He watches the corner of Starscream’s mouth quirk in a smile before the seeker is trying to force his expression still. Glancing past to the distracted crowd and the new trine, not one spark paying them any mind.

“Then it is my duty and honor, Lord Megatron.”

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They don’t make it past the lift doors sliding to a close before Starscream has claws in the seam of Megatron’s chest armor. Dragging him down while Megatron crowds Starscream against the nearest wall. Bent to accept sharp denta clashing against his jaw while his servos find the sharp curves of the seeker’s waist.

There was much he’d failed to appreciate over these many years together, now in a position to correct that mistake. Groaning when claws dug deeper, scraping at the dull surface of his frame while he found it easier to lift Starscream. Hold him flush against the wall by weight alone while the seeker curled a smile across a sharp face. The same feeling of a challenge spilling between them.

He bites the intricate metal netting over Starscream’s throat and Starscream jerks in his grasp when soothing the area beneath his glossa afterwards. Wanting to see Starscream fluster under the tender action, the seeker pawing over Megatron’s helm and pauldrons. Hot to the touch with a clarity in his intense stare.

The lift reaches the intended destination too quickly and Starscream is kicking his way out of Megatron’s grasp with a swift motion. Well-trained in escaping, and without a glance back keeps space between them. Megatron suddenly mourning the sharp scent of the other rubbing against him. Starscream moving with clicking thrusters down the empty hall towards the intended room as Megatron stuggles not to give chase as the quiet corridor turn the tide of the moment. Starscream pulling further away with each passing moment.

“Starscream,” He misses catching the seeker’s arm outside the door, snagging instead the edge of a wing. While it sends a pleasing shudder down the seeker’s frame, Starscream turns a dark, rebellious red glare over his shoulder. Both calculating and hesitant - unable to hide the shift of his expression as Megatron reflected on Soundwave’s earlier warnings. The idea that Starscream would not advance without a push. Perhaps it was time to secure the answer to such query.

He ensures the length of his frame lines with Starscream’s back, leaning over the seeker: Entering the
code to access the door. Quietly delighting in the tremor of wings against his chestplate when the
door opens with a long hiss of pressure. Instead of easing Starscream forward, Megatron side steps,
leaving the seeker standing struck and vulnerable just outside the room. Turning to look back only
when fully inside. Servos lingering on the door command and turning his chin towards Starscream.

“Aren’t you going to invite me inside?” A spoiled huffs, Starscream fighting to remain indignant
with the slightest strain, unable now to hide behind his natural acting and Megatron’s
appetite. Presentation in a telling disarray way where Megatron’s denta and hands had scuffed and
soothed in a frenzy.

“I believe I already have.” Doesn’t move even beneath the weight of frustration that he can’t simply
grab the seeker and drag him inside like every corner of his processor and more base functions
command. “It’s your decision.” Starscream’s mouth twitches to frown but manages to contain his
disappointment. Megatron’s resolve almost breaking when the seeker’s wing shifts back, as if
prepared to turn and abandon the offering.

“Never thought I’d miss the romantic side of you.” Starscream mocks as he steps inside the room,
clawss almost puncturing the control panel to bring doors to close behind him.

The moment the lock sets Megatron is assaulted by claws in his shoulder, Starscream kicking
thrusters to reach his height and he has only a moment to respond. Servos sweeping low beneath
wings to grab hips. Hold the seeker up while a lean mouth bares denta and bites down. The kiss as
aggressive as one might expect of Starscream. Glossa darting across his mouth as Megatron carries
the other’s weight, manipulating lean legs to part around his midsection - catching Starscream’s
mouth in his own more stable kiss. Wanting to draw in the lower lip until the jet was vibrating in
hand, the sensation rocking low through their frames.

Three steps to the berth and Megatron pauses, dumping Starscream onto its surface - the heinous
shriek bringing a low chuckle to the jet’s offense.

“Be gentle!” Starscream curses, shifting wings to a more comfortable position and Megatron catches
a kicking thruster before Starscream knocks off his helm.

“Gentle? For you?” Megatron hums in consideration before yanking the seeker down the berth by
the ankle. Maneuvering the pale leg until the knee brushed Starscream’s cockpit - the briefest flutter
of surprise as he was now exposed to the weight of Megatron’s long, appreciative gaze. “I don’t
think that’s what you want.”

In true Starscream form, shocked or off-guard, but never surrendering - his seeker grinned in his
smug way and stretched the free leg in a similar fashion. Triggering Megatron’s systems to run hot
and demanding. Servos an impossible black on pale legs as he settled low to press a kiss to the inside
of Starscream’s thigh.

“Well I certainly won’t beg for it, if that’s what you’re into.” He teases and startles with a soft yelp
when Megatron’s chin brushes an intimate panel between his legs as he returns the wicked smile.

“Let’s see if I can prove you wrong.”

---

Megatron wakes to his battle computer sounding a vicious alarm as something loud erupts in his
room. Sitting up in the berth, covers tangled at legs as the fusion cannon raises prepared to fight off
what could only be a monster from the pit judging by the sound.
He’s lucky Starscream is too busy covering his mouth to mock him for the startle. Busy post-shriek, shrunk down as Soundwave stands in the doorway - seemingly stricken frozen in place as they stare at the seeker in return.

Memories of last night settle in at the first glimmer of black scuffs down Starscream’ pale legs, the gray transfer across wings, and the telling flush flooding the seeker’s dark face. Optics pinpricks of horror shifting now back and forth like a trapped creature before muttering something and diving past Soundwave’s still form before Megatron can say anything to stop him. Leaving Megatron to awkwardly rearrange himself in the berth, Soundwave’s focus as lethal as any sniper scope trained on him.

“Soundwave.” He greets as if this were any casual morning, shifting on the berth to cover deep claw gouge marks down the headboard and clears his vocalizer. Grappling to contain the thrill of victory of last night’s conquest. The delectable memory of Starscream’s writhing form in the dark as he indeed begged. “I hadn’t realized I’d slept in.” There's a clatter as Soundwave flings a datapad to the floor in surrender.

“Inappropriate.” They turn and leave without shutting the door on Megatron’s proud grin.
Impact

Chapter Notes

Life got in the way a rather bothersome amount. I apologize for the delay! Also new psued to help me stay organized.

---

Megatron gives Starscream a three hour head start before going to seek him out.

Well-aware the longer he waits to confront the erratic seeker, the more likely it is that Starscream will succumb to his paranoia and devious nature. Possibly even rewriting the evening’s events to suit some self-victimizing narrative in which Starscream has better control. Leaving Megatron scrambling to regain lost ground. Amazing that Megatron finds himself yet again trailing after the seeker, not that he is too proud a creature, but that it is STARSCREAM after all this time to reduce him to this mess is perplexing.

And yet Megatron finds himself in high moods at the thought.

He steps into the central communal labs, silent as one his size can manage, finding it unsurprisingly empty. With few plans in motion it left room to stretch in the cluttered space. No pressing need for a busy lab: freeing whatever was considered his “scientific minds” to work on individual projects at their own leisure or location.

Starscream too had his own “secret” workshop that not even Soundwave could find. Tucked somewhere in the belly of the Nemesis, the cradle of so many terrible tools and threats to Megatron’s life. He finds the prospect of those days being put behind them to be quite pleasing, if he could only find the damn brat.

If the remainder of his elite trine were to be believed, his Air Commander should be here. Megatron had sought them out first, scruffing Skywarp before the giggling fool could disappear with his partner in crime. When he first pressed for the location of Starscream, Skywarp had turned a deep color and snorted up his morning rations while Thundercracker panicked and claimed “He died?!?”

The second time he asked they were more willing to assist.

Clearly Starscream had intended to avoid him in the sanctuary of the labs. Sacred space of over-used (and mostly stolen) equipment. Walls and floor the darkest color to hide chemical spills, scorch marks, and the occasional murder. Various tables pinned with dissected Earth technology or the half-bake schemes of his more creative soldiers. Megatron left the supervision of the labs to Soundwave, trusting the other to keep an eye on things here. Otherwise Megatron only cared about the labs when he was waiting for results...or looking for a seeker.

No mech in sight Megatron clicked on proximity sensors, his battle computer poised as well just in case. He’d never been shocked at the petty things Starscream might attack him for - and servicing the seeker through multiple overloads might be seen as a declaration of war depending on the other’s mood. (He thought, with no small amount of pride.)
With the labs seemingly empty at a more thorough glance Megatron was forced to consider what a sane mech might do...then decide the opposite to better predict Starscream’s frame of mind.

Three steps and it takes nothing to lift one of the solid work tables out of place with the shriek of protesting metal. Hoisting the furniture until he could see Starscream curled on the floor, now looking up in terror as his hiding place was revealed. Flustered and quick to file through several emotions like a sharp digits flipping through a catalog. Settling to a flat annoyance and adjusting himself to appear less tense now without his fortress.

“Have you seen my plasma scalpel? I’ve dropped it.” He lies with incredible ease, schooling features into passive frustration instead of horror and embarrassment that one might expect. Pale legs now clean of Megatron’s marks bent beneath him as the seeker pretended to scour the floor in search of something with spread servos.

Megatron drops the bench with a harsh *clank* that causes Starscream to flinch, reaching across to the next table to pluck a scalpel from it’s charging port, examining it with a knowing look.

“This?” Megatron asks and his seeker’s face fills with color. “Get up, Starscream.” The order gives Starscream something to complain about, and he does so with gusto as he rises. Darting to stand behind another cluttered station as if fully intentional and not means of putting something between them. Megatron allows it, though he very nearly rolls his optics.

“As you can see, I’m busy, so whatever business you have it will have to wait.” Tries to flick a claw in Megatron’s direction but is unable to commit to his act, optics struggling to avoid his gaze.

“Do you think because I permitted you to boss me at times last night, that I will tolerate it by morning?” Megatron enjoys the startled jump of wings. “Though you were surprisingly obedient as well...once you were satisfied.” When Starscream moves, trying to circle the outer distance of the room, Megatron steps to face him - but does not advance. He could likely catch the other should he try to flee, but he does not intend for it to get that far. While Starscream calculates his next move Megatron has already decided how this conversation will end.

“Last night? What are you talking about, I don’t recall anything---”

“Then why are you cowering?” Megatron parries the dismissal, hoping his expression only irritates Starscream further with his amusement.

“I’m not cowering!” Indignant and insulted but finally meeting Megatron with a glare and ego that suited his seeker. “Fine,” Starscream huffed with gentle sneer and a dramatic tone, as if he were the one being inconvenienced. “What do you want to hear to go away? I was overcharged? It was the ceremony? Temporary madness? Take your pick.”

“I’d trade my throne for you to be so receptive when you actually do something wrong.”

“Can I get that in writing?” Starscream tries for a smirk and falters when his sass isn’t met with the usual annoyance from his leader. Megatron instead takes the moment to draw closer to the furniture separating them in one clean step. Hips brushing the table’s edge and Starscream’s optics thin with suspicion to hide the uncertainty.

“This isn’t quite what I was expecting to find this morning.” He muses, ensuring his own frustrations that last night hadn’t simply flipped a switch in Starscream’s processor were well hidden.

“And how am I supposed to act? *Lord Megatron.*” Starscream’s voice raised a notch, his irritation sharp as his glare. Good. “Grateful? Adoring? Did you think a good ‘face would sort me out?”
“Now you’re merely insulting yourself.” Megatron snorts like a laugh but it upsets the other. “But if you’re offering, I’ll accept the added benefit.” Starscream doesn’t answer and Megatron leans in, though prepared to duck in case of open fire or to snatch a seeker from the air. “You crossed the threshold of your own free will.”

“Oh shut up I remember!” Flustered and annoyed, but surely responsive. “We could have just forgotten about it.” He whines, claws flexing at his sides. “I didn’t expect you to--”

“Come after you?”

“Precisely!” Starscream seemed elated, as if they were finally on the same page. Meeting Megatron’s gaze and regretted it immediately judging by the shift of his features. The way wings grew tense as the expressive face stumbled over things it seems Starscream doesn’t want to ask. Megatron finds it simply a waste of time, but his memories of last night have kept him patient.

“I think it’s clear that my intentions towards you do not stop after one evening.” That sent a visible jerk through the seeker’s frame and Megatron’s mouth curves to smile as he can recall the weight of Starscream’s denta slipping against his jaw. “I’m not a mech who likes to repeat himself, so when you’re finished playing dumb, we have four million years to make up for.”

Starscream’s vents try to circulate a sudden warmth and the seeker recovers well, jutting his chin out and making as much noise with his stomping pedes as he can.

“Don’t I get a choice in the matter?” He asks, failing miserably to keep his voice even as Megatron takes his time. Looking the seeker over with a long, appreciative glance.

“Of course.”

“Oh.” Starscream grows distracted, watching Megatron’s mouth. It’s unsubtle. “Good.”

“Glad we’re agreed.”

“Right.” They stare at one another as if sharing in the same memory of clattering metal as they struggled to remain on the berth in their exuberance the night before.

“Starscream,”

“Yes…” Megatron is tempted to reach out and nudge the seeker’s slack jaw closed.

“Our scheduled meeting started ten minutes ago. You’re late.”

---

Starscream has begun to suspect he perhaps underestimated Megatron.

Specifically now, while he is supposed to be explaining to the rest of the (idiots) how exactly his device will harness the radiation from the crystal … and instead he’d trying not to draw attention to the very obvious and very blue scuffs down the back of Megatron’s pauldron.

He hadn’t noticed in the labs, their discussion leaving little room for Starscream to fully glare daggers at his leader. Then with Megatron almost laughing at him as they moved quickly towards the command center Starscream had been equally distracted. Trying to stand as he normally would in the cramped space of the lift only to find any additional proximity to Megatron made it impossible to think!
He was thrust back into the mindset of himself on Cybertron. A worthless, two-bit criminal floundering beneath a newly appointed flag and desperate for the attention of a gladiator. Ugh! If he could just shoot Megatron again it might make things better, but no. Now he was trapped with the knowledge of what having Megatron’s full focus was like and how DARE Megatron wait four million years to bend him over a---

“Starscream?” Megatron’s voice peeled open the thought, leaving Starscream struggling for focus.

“Huh?” He was stared at by a full table of confused Decepticons, two worthless wingmates would couldn’t stop grinning, and Megatron. The bastard.

“You stopped talking.” He corrected with a knowing twitch to his mouth and Starscream considered maybe just taking the chance to fire off a couple rounds now. Should set them back on course, rid this nonsense between them. He didn’t even have the distraction of Soundwave to keep him on target, the communication officer elbow joint deep in a control panel they were practically rewiring.

Technical difficulties had left Shockwave and Cybertron unreachable and while Starscream was always glad to be free of the one-eyed wonder’s sycophancy, he needed anything to keep him from Megatron’s obvious lack of subtly. Starscream had certainly done a number on multiple points of Megatron’s armor but to not at least buff out transfers!? Was he doing it on purpose?! To prevent Starscream from denying the whole thing ever happened?!

Yes. Probably.

Starscream hated that it was working.

“I don’t know why I bother, the intricacies of my work goes above the combined intelligence of the room.” Megatron included, he hoped didn’t need to be said. “Basically shove the crystal inside - weapon of incredible power. You’re welcome, where’s my applause?” No one applauded, Starscream was only partially disappointed.

“Then it seems we are on track.” Megatron dropped his eyes down Starscream’s frame in full view of the table and shifted to an uncomfortable looking Scrapper. “I want Starscream’s device ready for shipment immediately. It will be a small operation, until we have secured the crystal I want the earthlings unaware of our presence.” When he moves to address Soundwave Starscream spotted the blue transfers again and it took biting his own glossa not to throw a tablet at his leader’s fat helm.

[Think it’s weird?] Thundercracker’s voice chimed in, disturbing his misery.

[What’s weird?] Starscream, unable to resist intrusive thoughts. He’d needed his trine to pop a dent out of his wing plating this morning and that was the ONLY reason he shared last night’s events with them. Tragically Starscream now couldn’t help but wonder who would do the same for places Megatron couldn’t reach? Who might he call? Soundwave?

[Have we ever been stealthy before?] TC questioned and Starscream had to pause in his murderous plans against Soundwave to consider the truth in such statement.

[I’ll speak with him.] Starscream answered as it seemed the meeting was wrapping up, now with a confirmed timeline of their quiet invasion of the Earth territory known as Peru.

[Yea, I bet you will.] Skywarp cackled and Starscream didn’t mind if Megatron could guess why the datapad was flung in the direction of his trinemate. It felt good to get the violent energy out one way or another and the act seemed to hurry his lessers along.

Never safe to linger in a room with an irate Starscream. An ancient Decepticon proverb.
Thundercracker tugged Skywarp whining out the door, nodding to Starscream that they’d wait outside and didn’t need confirmation.

“Lord Megatron,” He approached now with new confidence, Starscream surprising himself that his voice fell even and calm with choosing to address Megatron instead of slinking away. Megatron seemed just as surprised and checked his shoulder to watch Soundwave carrying torn bundles of wire and connectors out. Frustrated in their failure to establish communication.

“What is it, Starscream?” Hardly professional, drawing out Starscream’s name in the deep voice. Pleased looking. Too pleased. Starscream had to fix that.

“This plan is stupid.” He answered point blank and thrilled when Megatron’s expression thinned to a glare. Starscream found he could overcome the quiver in his memories of Megatron’s hands if he was snapping at the warlord instead.

“And why is that?” Tense voice from his leader, closer to familiar ground.

“We shouldn’t have to be stealthy.” Snips in return. “What are the squishes going to do? Throw rocks at us? We have plenty of time to extract the crystal and relocate before human military forces arrive.” Starscream really had considered keeping his head low and mouth shut but it really was a dumb plan. “Since when do you go quietly into war?”

“We aren’t merely trying to avoid tampering by earth forces, Starscream.” Megatron corrects, jaw set in annoyance before relaxing quickly. Ah. Starscream recognized that tick. “To lose this artifact to the Autobots would be a waste of the time and resources poured into obtaining it in the first place. Unless you enjoy doing the work for them?”

“Autobots can’t get there fast enough.” Starscream reminded, a strange feeling like he was missing something. He didn’t like it. “So unless Autobots sprout wings suddenly I’m not too worried about our time frame.”

He’s met with a strange look - one that has nothing to do with the crystal or his complaints. It’s vacant and suspicious and Starscream certainly doesn’t like it.

“Trust me.” Megatron veers off the course expected (Starscream had been waiting for yelling) and pins him with a look as noble as the first time Starscream watched him preach in the coliseum. “There’s no downside to caution, and no benefit to commotion.”

“Coming from a mech who treats every conversation like a war?” Starscream thinks his snark is appropriately insulting, but Megatron’s sudden grin tells him otherwise. Any confidence at being alone with the warlord goes draining from him.

“I wasn’t under the impression you preferred a gentler method,” Megatron’s voice did something Starscream wasn’t comfortable with and found his thighs tense in response. The table scrapped his wings when he stepped back and Megatron followed. No longer a safe distance between them as his leader bowed his helm. Brushing his chin against Starscream’s cheek when he says,

“Considering how enthusiastically you cried harder.”

“Is this really the place for that?!” Starscream snaps with little conviction, trying to step out of Megatron’s space only to have his wings knock into a chair.

Megatron’s servo is quick to rest around the slim curve near his hip, thumb drawing slow circles as Starscream shivered against the intimate sensation it caused. An involuntary sigh ghosts across Megatron’s lower jaw and Starscream can see the fading scuffs of his own mouth from the night
“Good point. You should inform your trine you won’t be joining them again tonight.”

Starscream has to shove Megatron away to escape, it’s surprisingly easy and he knows it’s because his leader allows it (judging by the smirk playing over his stupid face). He’s scowling and sneering and cursing Megatron in sharp, quick fragments of half formed thoughts as he’s moving out to meet his trine - failing to not stumble under the weight of the sheer want in Megatron’s voice.

For him.

“Why are you smiling?” Thundercracker asks when Starscream catches up, dodging his trinemate’s wing as Starscream can’t help but _strut_ with a renewed energy.

---

Starscream’s workload had taken on a new face since his “truce” with Megatron. It was more signing things and reviewing complaints than ever before. Managing that which he just assumed Soundwave would cover if he didn’t (or would make Thundercracker do it). He never imagined actually doing his job would involve so much damn time away from what he wanted to do! Namely in this moment either plot Megatron’s death (he couldn't talk to him so he had to die.) or spend the rest of the evening polishing himself to a mirror finish. Just in case…

Between ensuring the Constructicons didn’t break his device, mapping out flight patterns for patrols to be certain no surprises would be awaiting them in Peru, and apparently taking on part of Soundwave’s work as the other had yet to emerge from whatever digital crypt they slunk off to! Starscream had little time to think about Megatron further. A blessing.

His trinemates helped best they could. Meaning Thundercracker only. Skywarp wasn’t allowed to touch, talk, or help in any way past making notes on who was on Starscream’s “kill or maim later” list depending on what idiot did what idiotic thing. Impossible to ignore, past the changes of Megatron and himself, his trine had also not felt so unified in many years.

Starscream hated to admit it was...nice. It felt like home.

On the subject too, Starscream couldn’t help but notice his seekers seemed relatively calmed since the ceremony. More of them than expected had been hungover the next day, and half the issues Starscream was sent to sort out was due to grounders being fussy they weren’t invited. Rumors spread that it was some seeker orgy or sacrifice or worse and Starscream only trimmed gossip that involved him in unflattering circumstances. Otherwise he never minded the free publicity. His brood seemed equally delighted with the reaction from the base, and when morale was high, Starscream had less to worry about keeping them under control.

He might even be able to eradicate the Arctic incident from his subordinates’ minds all together. The ceremony had gone well, just as showcasing any of their lost-traditions tended to soothe tension. And Megatron’s presence had only encouraged his seekers that they had the favor of their Lord - which did wonders for his popularity.

Starscream couldn’t help but think of his Sire in times like this. What he would do if the city had watched him falter and how he would go about bringing himself back up in their eyes. Probably just order a public execution or two and call it a day. Starscream wondered how that scum of a seeker kept power for so long... Now that wretchedness sown by his Sire was becoming Starscream’s problem.
“Commander Starscream, a word?” Suddenly. A public execution sounded great about now as a familiar voice called out. Catching his trine as they wrapped up last minute business in the seeker tower. Grimacing, Skywarp took on a similar expression, glancing over their wings to the approaching seekers. His dislike of Moonlace had taken on a more personal offense knowing the other had gone to Megatron’s quarters!

“Just one word?” He smiled back and Thundercracker kept close to Starscream’ right in a protective manner, something that a few months ago would never have occured.

“Hopefully several.” Moonlace addressed with a soft voice and another solo seeker at his wing. Starscream recognized the script on their wings, court rites of Vos proper as if they mattered any longer. “We were given our new assignments and it seems, once again, our talents are reserved for basic patrol and transport.”

Well what a relief, you can still read orders.”

Moonlace didn’t like the sarcasm.

“I was under the impression we were preparing for another raid. Somewhere in the south?” The second seeker mentioned, looking rather pleased. While that information had not been released, Starscream has hardly surprised to hear of it like common knowledge. Decepticons were great liars, and terrible at keeping secrets.

“If your talents in patrol and transport were needed on that mission, you would have been assigned.” Starscream smiles and Moonlace smiles back. Beside him Skywarp radiates a tense energy and Starscream sends a pulse of calm his way. Or at least as calm as Starscream can muster while wanting to pluck out someone’s optics. “You’re wasting your time whining, and more importantly: you’re wasting mine. Is that enough words for you?”

Moonlace and his companion seem too calm, Starscream doesn’t like it.

“I was under the impression we were preparing for another raid. Somewhere in the south?” The second seeker mentioned, looking rather pleased. While that information had not been released, Starscream has hardly surprised to hear of it like common knowledge. Decepticons were great liars, and terrible at keeping secrets.

“Commander Starscream, some of us are growing increasingly frustrated with the state of our role in this war. It’s something we’d like to discuss with our leader...” He says smooth as fractured glass grating Starscream’s thoughts. It takes a great deal of will power not to shoot the other right then. He believes he would be justified, Skywarp at least would cover for him.

“I’m sure Lord Megatron will love to hear of your treasonous complaints. Would you like me to escort you to him? Can I watch?”

The pretty, pale face turns in an expression Starscream only enjoys when he himself is wearing it in a mirror. Something proud and hungry that causes Starscream to realize his mistake.

“I thought you were our leader, Commander Starscream?” Moonlace asks without posing a question at all, smug and pleased with the smallest give.

[Permission to warp his head out through a wall?] Skywarp chimed in.

[No.] Thundercracker sent a pulse of irritation at them both as Starscream’s quiet was received as a victory. “Why don’t you two find somewhere else to be worthless?” TC stepped in, imposing as he can be with Starscream’s mistake overshadowing them.

“Of course, sir.” He didn’t take optics off Starscream. “Thank you for your time.”

“By Primus, just go away you snotty little tin cans!” Skywarp snapped and a crackle of energy ran the length of his wings, irritation causing his warp drive to ignite like a threat. It made a point as their
company stepped out of range of Skywarp’s reach, knowing well what he’s done with Autobots and the outer walls of ships.

The elite trine shared a moment of frustration, a strain settling through their connection like a puzzle shifting out of place. It didn’t matter if other seekers in the corridor had overheard, it was another step in a bad direction.

“He’s looking for an opening.” Thundercracker states the obvious, but was still careful when turning to meet Starscream’s rigid form. Searching his wingleader for any reaction, or confidence. “You can’t give him one.”

“Oh darn there go my weekend plans.” He snarks. “He can’t challenge me over a comment.” Starscream reassures and it sounds thin even to him. At his side Skywarp can only frown.

“Seekers serve Megatron.” Skywarp answers with an unnaturally steady voice. “We wear his mark, we obey his command. I don't see why this is a problem?”

“Because it’s not Megatron he’s trying to make look weak, Warp.” TC answers as Starscream is already concocting seven plans out of this mess. Outright murder is the top five. “Screamer, it might be best to inform Megatron. It’s been some time since there was a valid challenge for your command - there’s going to be a fallout if he can make a case against you.”

“What sort of coward do you take me for?” He sneers and has to frame his wingmates with a low glare. “I will defend my place as Air Commander and rightful leader of all seekers. Some bastard cousin of mine isn't going to scare me from it!” He’s certain they can feel his anger twisting and pulsing from his spark. Raw and undignified as Starscream feels, now faced with the disrespect of another. They look uncomfortable at his remarks and, amazing even himself, Starscream continues.

“We’re so close to putting messes like this behind us,” Thoughts drift to Megatron. "I can fix this, I just need your support.” He asks in earnest, bringing his trine to look at him with open expressions of surprise.

“This reminds me of when we first met,” Skywarp can’t help but crack into a smile, nudging Thundercracker with his wing. “How many state officials were after you?”

“Like two.” Starscream huffs.

“Seven.” Thundercracker corrects and crosses his arms. “And I got shot.”

“But did you die?”

“Has a point.” Warp answered unhelpful and with a shared nod Starscream had his trine united once more. “Well, let’s try not to get you killed.”

“Story of my life.” Starscream sighs, unable to speak his appreciation but is certain they can feel it.

---

Despite his best efforts Starscream was the one waiting outside of Megatron’s quarters that evening.

He couldn’t stand the lack of surprise in Megatron’s face as he approached. Large steps sending familiar vibrations across the floor as Starscream had long-since memorized Megatron’s stride. Could feel him approach from a distance away and it had saved his neck more than once.

“Starscream,” His leader greeted with a sudden purr and Starscream wanted to smack him. But
instead thrust a servo between them, halting any further of this nonsense.

“No.”

“No?”

“We need to have that talk and I can’t take you seriously sounding that way.” He announced and it had taken no small amount of pride stuffed down his own throat to decide to approach Megatron like this. Starscream wondered had the confrontation with remnants of court seekers not taken place, would he be here at all? Usually when things bothered him, he sought a workshop or firing range (or subordinate to kick around). Instead he’d all but ran to Megatron’s door.

It was telling.

Megatron shifted his expression, interested but not suspicious. Calculating like Starscream didn’t often give him credit for. The warlord entering the key combination to his room and allowing Starscream to duck inside first with wings closed and lowered. Fighting not to regret his choices the moment the door hissed to close and Megatron’s steps moved too comfortably around him. Forcing Starscream to try and find anywhere else to look but the imposing form of his leader.

The berth was no longer in the state of mess he left it in that morning, which was a relief, but it did little to make him forget half falling off the damn thing with Megatron.

“Well?” The object of his twisting tanks took up space across the large room. Sparse and quiet, quite unlike Starscream’s own quarters where he hoarded anything he could get claws on. Megatron found a place to lean against the broad desk stacked with neatly labeled tablets and some pieces of earth tech he didn’t recognize. Casually working to detach the mounted cannon as if Megatron ever liked being without it.

He’d worn it to bed the night before...

“I’m not interested.”

“Not interested.” Megatron echoed, a quirk to his brow in the dim light. “In what exactly?”

“In whatever game you’re playing.” Starscream clarified. “While I appreciate not getting my spark ripped out for earlier...misbehaviour...” He said carefully of what started this whole mess in the first place without saying a certain name. “The special treatment, the small favors,” He thinks of the holochamber and the brilliant skyline of Vos -- how desperately Starscream had wanted Megatron to fly with him the day the lockdown was retracted.

“You don’t like my attention?” Megatron asked calmly and Starscream burned at the hint of a smirk on his leader’s face.

“I’m not interested in buying respect on my back!” Snapped, and felt the weight of Megatron’s gaze like a pressure around his throat. With a loud snap the cannon is removed and set aside with almost tender care, Megatron stretching the limb free now of the weight. “So...if that’s what you’re wanting in exchange for...”

“Starscream.” Megatron interrupts and if he could look more relaxed during this conversation - Starscream thinks he’d melt right into the desk. “Do you really think you’re that good in the berth?”

...It takes him a moment to compute and catch up and he’s left with only the need to rest servos on hips and look at Megatron like he’s crazy.
“Well we BOTH know that I am.”

Something changes. A shift of tension, or perhaps the return of delight in Megatron’s features gives Starscream reason to reflect the same. Acceptance 99% bitter and 1% common sense as they’re standing at drawn lines on a battlefield, wrought with millions of years of war between just them two.

“You're here to negotiate, so state your conditions.” Megatron’s tone is one of a treaty table and Starscream straightens his posture to match. As if he were staring down a challenger.

“I want privacy.” Starscream begins. “It’s difficult to keep your rabble under control, worse if they think I’m trading my aft for my rank.”

“Agreed.” Megatron accepts with no pause. “I already show you favoritism enough.” Starscream frowned at that, but it was curved at the edges, pleased at the acknowledgement.

“This won’t be a service I provide. You can’t order me to your berth.” Points an accusing digit at the warlord and Megatron again, simply agrees. “If I say no that’s it! You can’t control me this way.”

“Of course not.” He answers and looks amused in a way that doesn’t immediately set Starscream off. “Unless you want me to.”

“Unless I--” Struggling against the warmth now flooding his systems, he wished Megatron would stop looking so relaxed about this. “And all the extra benefits…”

“You’d like for those to stop?”

“Absolutely not.” Starscream almost laughed. “I like my hard work being appreciated. I just want you to know that.” They’re quiet for a moment, Starscream unsure if he could demand respect from Soundwave and for that he’d likely be willing to go back on his earlier claims and exchange it for depraved acts. But now he’s faced with Megatron, calm and collected to his apprehension.

“Well?” He urges with no little frustration. “Is there anything you want?”

“Yes.” Megatron leans his shoulders back, taking in Starscream's tense form. “For you to get over here.”

He’s stunned again, posture slouching before he can correct himself.

“This new you isn't my favorite.” He lies poorly. “I think you're going for charming but it’s really--” He yelps when a dark servo moves too quickly for a mech Megatron’s size. Wrapping his wrist and drawing him close in one solid tug. They clash in the middle, Megatron holding Starscream’s blue claw spread and firm above his wing.

“Stop. Talking.”

“I told you not to order me around.” He kicks up on pedes to meet Megatron’s growing frown with his own mouth.

---

Starscream was in a fantastic mood.

They are without news from Shockwave for two days and Megatron could not delay their plans longer to have his chief science officer’s approval. Starscream deploys stealth jets to survey the
territory and is handed (with glee) full control of their departure while Soundwave is preoccupied trying to get things back online.

“It's probably just a magnetic storm disrupting the signal. “ The seeker dismisses and Soundwave pays him no attention. Focused solely on rebuilding their communication tower. A mad task if Starscream ever saw one. His official advice to Megatron of “Soundwave finally broke, we should throw them away” only earned him an optic roll and losing a trine to tend to Soundwave’s every request for more materials. (Apparently Megatron’s favoritism did not include Starscream’s subordinates)

Which is why he couldn’t fathom how exactly he was roped into assisting the intelligence officer.

Perched on the Decepticon satellite tower.

In the middle of a storm.

“Why am I doing this again?!” Snarls, spitting salt water the harsh winds seemed determined to spray into his face. Below Soundwave was unbothered by the storm as they continued working on the open panel at the base of the tower. Rumble and Frenzy were pretending to help, hoisting cables larger than their puny bodies as though truly being of use to Soundwave. Starscream found it a waste of time.

[Intellect required.] Soundwave answered through comms rather than yell over the storm. Yelling made Starscream always feel better, perhaps Soundwave should try it.

“You say that—” A large wave struck the side of the elevated section of the base and thunder crept loud and deafening over the dark skies. Starscream has flown through worse storms in his life but even his systems were giving strict warnings to relocate to a safer location. “Are you trying to get me killed?!?”

[Negative.] Soundwave crouched and began rewiring something Rumble was holding as Frenzy jumped at the latest flash of lightning. Then just as quickly rushed to the platform’s edge to watch the harsh waves brew. [Your death would not benefit me in the least.]

“Sure it wouldn’t.” Snips, returning to his own work installing the new antenna that had a minimal chance of success. He’s certain Soundwave only brought him out here in hopes of a wave knocking him down and dragging him to the bottom of the sea. Probably a revenge tactic for his rightful acquisition of Megatron.

[You think too highly of yourself as an active threat.] Soundwave’s voice invaded his thoughts and oh how Starscream despised that. [Your success is my success.]

[Excuse me?] Starscream almost fell off the tower at that. Bowing back to gather a better look at the other, watching Soundwave so peacefully work with a cassette clinging to their arm in wonder at the latest crack of lightning. [What wild accusations are you making up down there?!!]

[I knew what you were when I first brought you to Megatron.] Their voice fills every crevice of Starscream’s mind like a shroud, dangerous and heavy that the seeker froze against the tower - the storm growing violent around them. Soundwave did not seem to notice, nor did they even bother looking up towards Starscream as they continued to work.

[Your ascension through ranks and eventual command reflects positively on my decision. Your failures, too, are useful. It is all data used to better the Decepticon goals.] Starscream can almost imagine the flat shrug the telepath would give were they face to face. [You are integral to our success
Starscream let's thunder answer for him, unable to form words out of his perplexed thoughts as Soundwave took a heavy cable out of Rumble’s slipping hold.

[Yes. You've always seemed like my fan.] Snarks his disbelief above and is tempted to break the antenna out of pure spite but that might upset Megatron in the short term. He was still navigating how to manage this development. It had only been days, but even before the night of the ceremony, things had changed so much. He was struggling to keep up and make it look effortless. [Just stay out of my business with Megatron, understood?]

[I protect Lord Megatron.] They announce with a finality that Starscream would have killed for in his youth - had in fact killed for. [That extends to protecting those around him - from becoming a danger.]

Starscream finishes the last installation and uses the branching antenna like a perch, glaring down through the gray-wash of the storm at Soundwave who sat up from their work. Staring upwards at the glaring seeker with their masked and empty face, giving no clue to what their true intentions were. Leaving Starscream to wonder if he should be complimented, or concerned.

Another roar of thunder overhead, waves kick over the elevated platform and Soundwave has a servo on Rumble’s shoulder as the water washes at their ankles, almost toppling the small cassette over. Frenzy was not so lucky. Little more than a streak of color sliding across the surface at the current’s command.

Before Soundwave could deploy Laserbeak, Starscream was already off his perch. A dead drop backwards off the tower, limbs closed and wings tucked close - nearly colliding with the platform’s edge where the ocean gnawed vicious and Frenzy was swept off. Snatched the flailing brat with a servo and kicked thrusters out at full power as his form twisted middair - rearranging his position so the snapping waves wouldn’t catch him too. The sudden propulsion sending him circling the platform in a loud arch until he could land with only the smallest skid across the soaked surface - the cassette all but clinging to his servo out of terror.

“Worry about your own brood first.” He snapped, tossing the small shape at the telepath who caught him with gentler hands, Frenzy looking dizzy but no worse for wear. “And I’ll worry about me.”

“We’re not saying thank you - geek!” Rumble, still clinging to Soundwave’s leg, stuck out his glossa and Starscream made sure to splash the bot with water as he brushed past Soundwave with a look.

Soundwave has their cassettes return to their resting chamber for safe keeping and they finish the work side by side without another word. Only once does he feel Soundwave’s curious tendrils reach out but Starscream blasts his processor with shrieking memories and puts a stop to that. They don’t try again and Starscream doesn’t demand to know what Soundwave might be looking for.

Eventually the weather is lulled to no more than a bleak sky and thunder quaking in the distance, Starscream chose to remain behind. Sitting on the platform’s edge, dangling pedes over the receding waters now calmer without the oppression of clouds striking the surface with lightning and storms.

The sun was beginning to set and a mangled blue and black sky fought against the haze for dominance. Water drips from Starscream’s wings and he thinks he should be more annoyed by it. Surely later he’ll throw a fit scrubbing salt out of his seams, but for now in a rare event, he just wanted the world to be gray. Quiet. To stop thinking for one moment.

“Let’s go inside.” Megatron’s voice almost melds into the fading storm and Starscream allows
himself to be helped to rise. Megatron’s servo lingering on his elbow joint

“What am I late for this time?” Starscream asks, thinning an optic at his leader who seems entirely bemused by the state of the seeker.

“Nothing. Soundwave mentioned you were out here.” He turned his sight across the darkening sky with a searching look, trying to see perhaps what had kept Starscream from returning to him. “You’re wet.”

“Why thank you leader, I hadn’t noticed. Where would we be without your impressive observational skills?” Falls into the whiney tone he knows Megatron despises but his annoyance is challenged by the quirk of his smile.

“You’re going to taste like salt.” Megatron observes.

“Well, it’s a good thing you have a private shower - isn’t it?”

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“ I can’t disassemble it once the crystal is in place you know. If the artifact is in working order we’ll then have to wait for Astrotrain to arrive to carry the weapon back! ” Starscream complains as Megatron had been falling into recharge. Optics clicking on to see the seeker where he left him. Dark cheek resting on pale armor, watching Megatron with thinly veiled irritation that lacked the seeker’s usual sting. He still smelled like a storm. “What are you so worried about?!”

“Must you be suspicious of everything?” Groans in return so that Starscream can feel the vibration against his cheek which brings claws to stretch against Megatron’s waist.

“Yes. Everything.” Starscream answers quickly. “It’s kept me alive this long.” He says like it’s something to be proud of, and perhaps it is.

“What about me?”

“Oh you’re the thing I’m most suspicious of.” He does laugh this time as if he couldn’t imagine Megatron thinking otherwise, and in truth, Megatron hadn’t. A couple days of...eventful nights wasn’t going to repair them. But it certainly had done wonders for Starscream’s moods. Megatron had only gotten three complaints so far against his second in command threatening to disembowel subordinates...rather than the usual thirty seven.

“Best to keep me close then.” He clicks off his sight and moves as if to return to sleep, only to shift his weight, pushing Starscream back to the berth with wings carefully folded so as not to bend. The seeker lets out a sharp noise of complaint but pale legs spread nonetheless and Megatron finds himself warm and cradled in their grip.

“You’re insatiable.” Starscream complains, thrill peeking in the bright of his expression, and distracted for now from his earlier complaints.

“You could try.” Megatron’s smirk is traced by the light touch of sharp claws down his lips.

“That wouldn’t be safe, you’ll throw out your back.” Starscream's punishment comes in the form of a harsh bite to the underside of his jaw, causing the seeker to tighten his hold around Megatron’s torso. A low sigh as Megatron now understands the correct way to shut him up, applying simple but firm strokes down the seams of his wings. Dipping to run easy circles against vibrating metal at Starscream's backstrut where the pale wings met.
It melts the seeker, fluttering optics and hips rising for friction as his interest grows - and abruptly and at once Starscream bites out “Stop,” like a crack of gunfire against Megatron’s cheek.

He stops. Moving to balance over Starscream by the strength of one bent arm. Watching him. Warm and wanting, trying to judge if Megatron stopped fast enough for him. His seeker liked to test it. Whether he had a choice and could order Megatron to stop. And not once had Megatron failed to uphold his word...hoping that eventually Starscream will stop needing to test his resolve.

Then again Starscream was not known for giving up easily.

“There’s an idiot seeker who would be stunned by this development. “ Starscream speaks of himself and Megatron eases his position backwards. Letting scuffed white legs hook over hips as he kneels on the berth to better observe his lovely second.

“Is it really so shocking?” Starscream makes a face and Megatron relents with a nod. “Fine. But if we didn't kill one another it was likely only a matter of time before this happened. A tragedy it took so long.” The dark faceplate turns in an unreadable emotion before settling on his favorite frown to cover the embarrassment.


“You'd like me to recite poems for you?”

“No!” Shrieks and Megatron chuckles low at the look of horror. “Primus, I take all this back-kill me instead. Just spare me the poetry.”

Even as a joke, an insult to Megatron’s beginnings, he finds himself unable to move past the memory of what brought them here. His devilish seeker fallen low and weak by a lesser creature. An artifact of his past which caused Megatron to realize how very much he would not suffer losing Starscream in such a matter. Especially not to another.

If Megatron could thank Skyfire before killing him. He might.

Resting servos on Starscream’s thighs, light as they trailed down to red hips, brought the other’s attention back to him. Try as Starscream may, he was not able to fool Megatron in moments such as this.

“Have I stopped long enough?” He requests and the world makes sense again when Starscream grins and beckons him closer with a claw.

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To keep on Megatron's good side, Starscream hadn't broken into security records in some time. It was a rather telling feat considering it used to be a daily occurrence. If not more. His paranoia knows no limits and after the intervention of his weapon model by Soundwave - things had changed too quickly. There were lines between Megatron and himself Starscream was trying to decide if they needed to be redrawn or scrapped altogether.

Afterall Starscream had not returned to his own chambers at night for the past week. His trine knew, of course, but the sudden urgency to collect and command Megatron’s time felt powerful and new and Starscream had forgotten what being excited for something felt like.

Megatron’s attention had always been coveted, but now Starscream could claim it as his own. Even if the old mech’s vent circulation system rattled and snored in recharge...it was his.
There’s backlogs for weeks of cycled patrols and drone surveillance across this terrible planet. Every image of fleshling civilization and green terrain causing Starscream to sneer alone in the dark of the communication hub. His body tucked uncomfortably between two processing towers of dark metal and glittering indicator lights as the low hum could be felt through his wings.

Starscream wasn’t sure what his need for this was. He could simply demand Soundwave hand over records but Starscream had yet to change merely because Megatron was exceptionally impressive in berth. His nature wouldn’t be rutted out of him by any mech. Besides. It was easier to steal what he wanted than ask, not wanting Megatron to doubt him at such a request.

Even as it soured his tanks to do so, Starscream traversed Soundwave’s intricate webbing of digital records in search of his goal.

“Starscream? You’ve rescued me…”

Starscream pauses the clip with a sharp wince, the perspective from Soundwave’s own vision as Skyfire is brought out of stasis. His pale features twisted in discomfort, but his optics meet Starscream’s in bright relief. Starscream is ashamed to see himself in a much similar state.

He recalled that moment. The swell of disbelief and almost panicked state which he fought to control - but it was almost too much.

He presses on, not wanting to relive that insult. How Skyfire tricked him into believing he was back and then turning on him like an alloy-serpent waiting in the dark. It was difficult to smother the sickening anger to keep his trine from reaching out, but he’d grown talented at keeping things from them - even as it had begun to feel wrong to do so in recent weeks.

It’s Soundwave’s standard protocol to remain observant of past battlefields and sites of Decepticon activity. In case they forgot something, or perhaps if Autobots uncovered something they had not. Starscream found it almost insulting that HE was considered the paranoid one when Soundwave’s profession was based on imagining the worst and preparing for it!

The collection of weeks after Skyfire’s fall and the Decepticon’s failure is neatly arranged on his datapad which glows pale blue in the image of a snowy field. Wind storms, the shifting of rock and rolling winter clouds are all surveyed as Soundwave’s drones patrol the area in Decepticon absence. Their route finally bringing them to the site of scorched earth and broken ice that serves as his former partner’s final resting place.

He just needed to see it one last time so that perhaps he would stop dreaming of a pulse beneath the frost…

The data stream ends abruptly as “corrupted files” flash before his optics.

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Megatron’s chambers are not vacant when he returns for the evening. It is becoming more common for Starscream to be waiting outside of his door, but the seeker had yet to enter without invitation yet. It’s rather telling of his mood…

As well as the seething look in his optics.

“Before you open fire, would you like to speak your grievances first?” Megatron maps the room, searching for anything out of place as he is unsure how long Starscream was in his room. The seeker could have rigged bombs to any surface, rebuilt the chambers into his own heinous murder-box in wait for Megatron’s arrival. One could never be too careful when faced with the snarling creature he
found waiting in his room.

“Why can’t I access the surveillance of Skyfire’s grave?” Sharp denta bared and Starscream looks undecided if he wants to scream or claw out optics and it gives Megatron the focus he needs to remain still at the discovery, jaw set tight.

“What do you need from a dead mech?” Megatron kept his anger in check best he could but he found himself pacing the room in a wide arch parallel to Starscream. Similar to when they’d fight before - when he’d break his second down.

“I’m asking the questions! Soundwave can recover almost any file - how did THAT particular data get damaged?” Starscream’s voice strained under duress and Megatron recognized the tone. With optics darting like a mad mech preparing to battle shadows, it didn’t take much for Megatron to realize that Starscream was not angry...

He was afraid.

“Starscream,” Megatron stopped moving, brought shoulders back and met the other’s gaze. He spoke clearly so as not to be misunderstood and if he had one chance of putting his seeker’s thoughts at ease - he would do so.

But Megatron also knew he could not share Starscream with a ghost.

“The Autobots returned to the site, hoping to save him most likely.” The seeker went very still, wings high and tense behind him. “They took what remained.”

Wings fell. “What remained?”

“We already confirmed his death before the Autobots bothered. I only had Soundwave erase the footage after their desceraton of his grave.” Megatron watches Starscream carefully, the swell of thoughts causing his seeker to shake his helm as he processed.

“Then why hide it from me?!” He demands with a sharp voice, but Megatron finds relief in the lack of doubt. His lie easily accepted because Starscream did not want his former partner to have survived.

“For exactly the same reason why you are here. Though I am glad you at least listened first.” Megatron approaches with loud steps, wanting Starscream aware of his approach even if his optics were clouded in thought. He doesn’t reach for him but instead allows the seeker to choose. “It wasn’t something I wanted you to see.” At least that part is not a lie.

“I don’t need your sympathy! And if you lie to me again---” Snaps, but the tension settles into something else. Exhaustion brings the wings sweeping low and Starscream is awkward in Megatron’s sight. “I wanted that traitor to remain in the ice.” He admits and Megatron believes he has given Starscream the gift of ignorance.

“Will you be remaining here for tonight?” If not, Megatron needed to have a conversation with Soundwave.

“I don’t think...I’m in much of a mood for it.” Starscream admits and his tired stance seems to jump as Megatron’s thumb touches the edge of his chin. Guiding the seeker’s gaze upwards.

“Remain here. Just to rest then.” He veers his tone as far from a command as possible, but it still feels like an order.
Starscream agrees.

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“Skyfire. Alive.” Soundwave reminds their leader while weaving a dissected console back together. They did not seem happy to hear of Megatron’s lie to keep Starscream in line.

“Any reports of him?” All sky patrols were pulled to the seekers dismay, yet Starscream was doing a surprisingly competent job keeping his division in line. But Megatron was not deaf to the rumors...

“Negative. Skyfire took more damage in aerial skirmish than Starscream. Autobots not known for their expertise in such builds. Likely still under repair.” Soundwave confirmed with a tilt to their helm. “Starscream’s discovery of this falsehood will lead to further complications.”

“When this mission is over I will tell him, but for now we don’t need Starscream waging a panicked battle against the Autobot base.” Megatron almost convinces himself that’s the issue at hand. “Our goals proceed any personal matters.”

“Withholding information from Starscream does not seem logical.” Soundwave was careful with their lecturing tone, knowing well that Megatron was not a sparkling to be spoken down to. But. They still seemed comfortable questioning Megatron’s decision.

“You doubt my ability to decide what is best for my own soldier. Especially now that Starscream has finally shown he can indeed obey.” And an eagerness to show his gratitude for the attention bestowed upon him. Megatron had never imagined it would all feel so simple.

“Negative.” Soundwave lowered their helm in respect, moving to refocus their attention to the intricate work before them. Something sparks and there’s a sharp whine of radio static in the distance. “I only am using previous experiences as data for the most logical conclusion.”

“Which is?” If there was any luck on his side, Megatron could kill Skyfire without his seeker learning otherwise. It would be the best for he and Starscream both. Then there would be nothing left lingering in the dark.

“That Starscream is most dangerous when mishandled.”

---

They leave for Peru at the week’s end when the nearest military base will be at its quietest. Megatron seems satisfied, though impatient. He orders scattered ground raids across the globe to throw Autobots off their plans.

Starscream, Megatron keeps at the base. Convinced only with the excuse of needing him to take command of Soundwave’s slack which he accepted with pride. They were busy with final preparations and Starscream’s mood had found balance after his discovery. He appeared content once more with the belief that Skyfire was not a threat. The only further comment made on the subject was Starscream asking if they could retrieve the body from the Autobots...

Megatron promised him the night before they left that he would let Starscream burn the Autobot base down with this new weapon.

“Get down from there! That’s not a toy!” Starscream restrains himself from tossing the cassette off the weapon frame as it’s being loaded in delicate pieces onto Thundercracker (who wasn’t happy about it). Rumble slips out of range just in time for Frenzy to run between Starscream’s legs, cackling as he did so, dodging blue claws as they tried to snatch him up. “Soundwave control your brats!”
Soundwave did little to intervene until Megatron gave a motion and with little more than a wave both cassettes found their way back to the telepath. Gleeful as they stuck glossa out at Starscream, scopped and set on stacked cargo boxes in the hangar to watch the preparation.

“The first thing I do when I’m leader is purge our ranks of little---”

“Back to scheming already?” Megatron asks over his wing and Starscream tilts his shoulder so that the edge brushes his leader’s arm.

“Was I supposed to stop? Sorry. Didn’t get that memo.” Hums and Megatron draws a knuckle down the length of Starscream’s backstrut as he passes. The twins exchanging glances with each other and giggling wildly to themselves until Soundwave lifts a servo to block their view.

“Are we on schedule?”

“Affirmative.” Soundwave approaches, stepping between the seeker and the warlord, bringing up specs of the mountain range and the temple housing their latest goals. “Reflector observing military bases and earthling villages in area. No unexpected activity.”

“Good. Soundwave you will travel onboard Thundercracker. See to it nothing happens to our weapon during transport.” Soundwave agrees and gathers their cassettes to their chest, tucking them away with minimal complaints before approaching Thundercracker. Skywarp watches with a pinched frown as Thundercracker opens his cockpit for the transformed stereo to settle in. Proceeding to pet his mate’s nose cone in sympathy. There’s an engine roar of protest that only makes Skywarp laugh before eyeing his leader and trineleader. Mischief bound and TC unable to divert him.

“Oh! Lord Megatron why don’t you ride with me!” He suggests with a chipper tone, scrambling to be an unwelcome third where Starscream had just opened his mouth, likely to suggest the same. “Unless...there’s any reason you wouldn’t want to. Sir.”

[Your death will not be painless or swift.] Starscream promises as Megatron sizes Skywarp’s delighted smile.

[Oh noooo you’re gonna talk me to death?!”] Starscream tries to smother Skywarp in pulses of irritation and Thundercracker can be felt in their trine link, miserable and awkward on their behalf.

“Unfortunately Skywarp, I believe I owe Starscream a flight.” Megatron answers without missing a singular beat. Doing well pretending not to see Skywarp’s grin widen as Starscream became the sole focus of his attention. “Isn’t that right?”

“It would be my pleasure, Lord Megatron.” Starscream almost pushed Skywarp aside, exhaling a low hiss meant only for the other’s receptors, but he was terrible at keeping his voice low and a few lingering constructicons halted at the sound. Even Astrotrain, ready on standby, seemed to go still. “Shall we?”

The flight to Peru was short, but Starscream still complained most the way. Megatron, limited in his gun mode, had no means of which to hold on when Skywarp clipped Starscream’s wing “on accident”. Followed by his Air Commander initiating a less-than-gentle spiraling match with his subordinate until the other relented and apologized to avoid crashing into the ground. Starscream only sharing his sympathy for Megatron’s knocked about state by promising to “kiss it better” later.

Which was the least he would do.

Getting established at the temple meant Starscream and Soundwave fighting over who took the lead
on excavation, only broken up by Megatron ordering Soundwave to begin reassembly on the weapon frame while Starscream and he sought the crystal. He bought it, agreeing that Soundwave should do the “boring parts” and abandoned his trine to follow Megatron into the temple.

Blasting holes through the earth ruins and caring little of what they destroyed cutting a path through ancient corridors. It took nothing to find the glittering gem sitting atop a pedestal carved from the very earth as if waiting for them. Starscream’s readings seemed unstable and Megatron waited for confirmation before approaching any closer.

“I thought it would be bigger.” The seeker observed with an unimpressed look. “The radiation is harmless to us, you’re fine to remove it…” He paused, struggling. “Just remain cautious.”

“Worried for me?” Megatron teases at the seeker.

“Don’t be so arrogant. I’m only enjoying the benefits of obedience while they last. I’m sure I’ll grow bored of you eventually.” Starscream’s smile is something that might have irritated Megatron before, but now - Primus help him - it’s become something close to charming.

The set stone is no match for Megatron’s strength. One clean pull and it breaks free, the crystal’s surface almost vibrating and hot to the touch. He didn’t have time to question Starscream on it before the seeker was clawing his waist in surprise as the temple gave a violent shudder. Blinding light erupting from the pedestal’s now vacant mouth. Violent energy burst forth in a solid beam. The air grew hot and almost caustic in proximity and Starscream was snapping at him to move back as Soundwave flooded Megatron’s communicate with queries.

“It’s a power fount.” His seeker seemed entirely hypnotized by the display but didn’t dare step closer. Which was for the best, Megatron didn’t feel like dropping the famed crystal just to drag his second from danger. “Corrupted energy stream from a planet’s core, that crystal must be merely a cap. Usually this phenomenon only occurs on planets mutated by radiation similar to Cybertron…”

“You’ve seen something like this before?” Megatron questions and watched features on Starscream’s face go soft in memory.

“In travels...yes.” Megatron moves to block Starscream from the view, allowing the seeker to gather his thoughts and return to the moment. Claws slide down the pale green gem in fascination. “You have your prize, Lord Megatron.”

“Indeed.” He allows Starscream to walk ahead of him. “Now let’s put your weapon to the test.”

---

Only after Starscream reworks everything Soundwave had done to the weapon frame does the seeker present it to Megatron with a proud smile. Taking the crystal of power and installing it within the round chamber, working quickly and diligently: ready to show off the results of his labor.

Megatron only has a moment, feeling the tremor build beneath his pedes, stepping forward to catch Starscream round the waist. Hoisting the seeker away from his contraption before an energy surge rips through the device.

The same scorch-scented vibrations emitting from the weapon as the fount below as the air around it steamed from the flash.

“See. Told you it’d work.”

“Forgive me Starscream, you have done an excellent job.” He answers with no spared sarcasm and
sets the other back on his pedes, approaching with a long look, recalling the trouble this weapon frame caused him before... “This isn’t going to explode in my face is it?”

Starscream almost bothered to look hurt.

“Don’t be ridiculous, I only put traps on your new toys when I’m upset with you.”

“Aren’t you always?” He questions, putting a servo out to the manual controls as Starscream tucks in at his side.

“You haven’t been too terrible lately…” He gives a knowing smile and Megatron believes that’s security enough for him. Chooses a target and fires.

The mountain top explodes in a crackle of light and sound like a scream. The landslide tearing down the face of the mountain as fires catch on harmless earth vegetation and smoke plumes flood the sky.

The weapon hums pleasantly under hand just as Starscream clings to Megatron’s arm with pushy servos. Wide-optic and delighted in the sheer destructive force of their new weapon. Smile wicked and bright, leaning into Megatron’s shoulder without pause or care of their audience. He looks like the Starscream who watched Iacon burn with a similar delight at his side many years ago.

Nothing seemed to resonate with Starscream more than violent destruction.

“I’m going to blow up so many Autobot ships with this.” Starscream almost swooned as Megatron took a step back, guiding Starscream’s servo to the controls.

“Start with an earth mountain.” He suggested and stood by as his seeker took up his place, adjusting sights and selecting a target. For a moment he glanced back with a rather suggestive smile that had Megatron struck until the weapon discharged. Scorching through the mountainside with a chaotic rush of pale energy, seering trees and thick terrain with unstoppable force.

Megatron was almost certain he heard Starscream laughing when he finally let go.

“Satisfied?” He asked, noting the warmth ghosting Starscream’s dark face.

“What happened to stealth?” His seeker teased and looked back to admire his burning mark through the mountain with a fondness. “Astrotrain isn’t going to make the same time we did getting here. You really should have listened to me. Now we have to wait.” Megatron ignored Soundwave’s figure just in his sights and pinched the edge of Starscream’s chin. A welcoming sight that the seeker did not jerk away.

“You’ve done very, very good work here today Starscream.” He watches pride filter through Starscream’s expression and meets Soundwave and the lingering trine. “Soundwave. Contact the base. Inform Astrotrain to remain on high alert as he travels. I want eyes on the local roads just in case.” Soundwave nods, deploying Laserbeak who sweeps over Megatron’s head once before dropping down towards the forest below.

Starscream clearly considers grabbing the controls again (likely wanting to make the avian spy target practice) but Megatron gives him a single “no” that makes the seeker groan and mutter, but stick close as they regroup.

Starscream grows interested in the fount below, so Megatron orders Soundwave to stay with him. Assist. If only for the prospect of further energon sources. He watches his seeker actually work alongside Soundwave for once - the two comparing radiation levels and what further steps it might take to convert the energy into appropriate fuel that wouldn’t melt any pumps that tried to down it.
It gave him further hope that this change in direction with Starscream did not only benefit himself, but the Decepticons as a whole. He must remember the two were not exclusive.

“We really should be scouring the area for further sources of the mutated core. It’s likely this is only a large vein, but the entire area holds greater potential.” Starscream was looking out towards the forest, dark green and unsettling closeness. Megatron knew no seeker liked cramped spaces but that hadn’t stopped Starscream before.

“Are you considering a trek?”

“Possibly.” Megatron didn’t respond immediately which made the seeker frown. With the others busy keeping Skywarp from lobbing rocks into the energy stream there was no one around to prevent Starscream from stepping into Megatron’s shadow. Pretty smile a lovely disguise for such a terrible creature. “Why? Worried for me?”

Megatron crooks a digit beneath the sharp chin, shaking his helm in consideration.

“I am rather enjoying the benefits of your obedience.” He echoes and slips his mouth to Starscream’s, allowing the seeker to set the pace. Surprisingly slow, drifting touches and low exhales as their kiss is something warm and teasing. A hush of a promise for when they return to the privacy of the base: a more appropriate setting.

Then Starscream licks Megatron’s denta and he’s considering just pinning the seeker to the temple floor.

“When we return to the base, there is something we need to discuss.” He says, the grave tone lost against Starscream’s mouth.

"Ominous or promising." His seeker turns his chin to nip at Megatron's mouth once more.

“Lord Megatron.” Soundwave enters and while Starscream makes a sharp noise of protest, the telepath manages not to flinch at the sight. “Laserbeak report. Activity to the east.”

“Activity?”

“It’s probably nothing. Autobots can’t get here that fast.” Starscream dismisses but Megatron is already pulling back, calculating odds.

“Soundwave, collect Skywarp. We’ll investigate.” He ignores Starscream’s snort of annoyance. “Starscream, you and Thundercracker remain here”

“What do I have to stay behind?”

“Because I need someone guarding the weapon.” Megatron doesn’t have time to argue.

“Then let Soundwave stay. I’m no grunt!”

“Phenomenal idea, And when you’re surrounded by trees unable to fly?” Starscream goes quiet, optics shifting though his mouth is still drawn tight in annoyance.

“Fine.”

“Alert us if anything approaches. Do not engage.”

“Oh I’m shaking in my wings.” He groans and Megatron clips the seeker’s cheek with his knuckle before moving off with Soundwave. “While you’re out there if you stumble across - oh say - another
They travel until the trees grown sparse to give room for rocky structures. Dry, dirt mounds and shallow canyons carved through the earth by ancient rivers. It’s not far from the temple, but Megatron finds himself unable to settle his thoughts as Laserbeak circles above. Trying to relocate whatever they had shot down before.

“If it’s an earthling satellite, can I have it?” Skywarp asks, hanging off Soundwave’s shoulder and disturbing in-depth scans of the distant forest. As if on cue Ravage comes bounding through the distant treeline, something grasped tight in jaws. Sharp metal jutting out at burnt edges and Megatron kneels to remove it from the feline’s teeth.

“A drone. Earth make?” He lifts it to Soundwave who almost topples over from the weight of Skywarp leaning over their side.

“Negative.” Soundwave corrects, visor flickering in the scan. “Combination. Earth. Cybertronian.”

“Autobot?” Skywarp asks and Megatron turns the drone in servo.

“A spy perhaps, but not sentient--”

“No, Sir!” Skywarp slaps Megatron’s shoulder to gain his attention, optics focused high towards the sky. “Autobot?!”

The speck of pale on a cloudless sky gives way to the sound of harsh engines as it grows in size. Larger and larger as it approaches with speed, white pale wings slashed in red undisturbed by the quick approach. Megatron feels rage drop heavy and acidic into his spark as he’s quick to stand, cannon brimming with life at his anger.

“He’s here.” Megatron snarls watching the shape navigate the skies. He’s too far for a clean shot and his enemy is skirting the edge of the dry canyon, heading straight for the temple.

“But he was...dead. I thought...” Skywarp’s voice cracks through the rush of static flooding Megatron’s processor, sending an alert to Starscream and Thundercracker as the loud engine grows distant now passed.

[Did you find another--] Starscream answers the call.

“I want you both to retreat from the temple immediately.” His voice is firm but lacks the true weight of urgency. Starscream doesn’t need any reason to doubt him and yelling will only trigger his suspicion. “Regroup at Reflector’s third location.”

[What’s wrong?] Starscream presses and before him Megatron is faced with Skywarp’s confusion, turning to Soundwave for confirmation. Soundwave remains quiet.

“You follow my orders, now I want to hear your thrusters kick on and--”

[Wait. Starscream, we have an approaching craft.] Thundercracker can be heard, voice dropping. [Is that...]

Starscream’s voice lets out a strangled noise.

“Starscream!” Megatron snarls into the communication. “Listen to me. Alive or dead, he is still your source of incredible power...let me know.”
enemy - you know what you must do.”

He waits, no response and the engine grows louder as Thundercracker abruptly yells:“Autobots!”

“Starscream!”

“You’re right.” The seeker’s voice is low as he answers, sending a concerning tremor down Megatron’s processors. “I do.”

The line disconnects.
Losing to the Autobots came with consequences of morale and order. Their faction thrived on pride and power - so having their leader so thoroughly defeated was bound to ruffle plates. They lost the skirmish, the new weapon…

And Starscream.

On the bridge, Thundercracker watched as Megatron tore a console right from the wall. Slinging it across the chaos of the command center and narrowly missing Thrust as it smashed into a row of screens. Scattering glass and sparking wires where the wreckaged began to smoke. TC scarcely had time to motion to Dirge to shut Thrust up before the conehead had the chance to make himself target for Megatron’s ire.

TC had been there as Skyfire made his appearance. Had watched Starscream’s look of abject horror twist and mutate into something bloodthirsty as he ended the communication with Megatron. Skyfire hadn’t come alone, in moments he was dropping Optimus Prime and a whole gaggle of Autobots on the field before the temple and Thundercracker looked to Starscream for orders.

Starscream only had kicked on his thrusters and jetted out towards the pale shuttle.

Twisting middair to escape the weapon fire of the Autobots below - and meeting Skyfire in the air. Thundercracker had expected the worst but the shuttle didn’t fire as Starscream and he turned in a trained unison which spoke of years together and began their quick escape from the battle. Thundercracker hadn’t any time to pursue as he became the only target before the familiar crackle of Skywarp’s appearance. Megatron already with weapon drawn.

Thundercracker watched him call for Starscream once before a furious snarl ripped through him and he charged at the progressing Prime.

Megatron had yet to calm from the heat of battle.

“I want every flier out there - tear apart anything that gets in your way.” Megatron has to lean against the side of his throne as vicious wounds down his torso let out a shrill sputter. Try as Hook may, he could not get Megatron to hold still. “Bring him back!”

Megatron had not informed the Decepticons of Starscream’s departure with the Autobot Skyfire - and had instructed TC and Warp to keep that information silent. It might have sparked a riot if they’d known - which TC imagined would only benefit Megatron’s wrath. Why he was keeping it silent, he didn’t pretend to know.

There’s a rush of energy, seekers and triple changers, shuttles and winged Decepticons alike trying to push their way into some form of order. Like cyber chickens with their proximity alerts plucked out. It’s a mess. About this time Starscream would have fired at the pedes of his subordinates, snapped orders at them -- forced them to pay attention. But Starscream was not there.
TC looks to Warp for commiserations but his wingmate is wearing a scowl so deep he fears Warp’s face is going to stick that way. Wrath and disgust pouring off the other like smoke, hard to miss, Thundercracker wasn’t sure what to do.

“Alright!” He yells, choosing his place in this mess. “Coneheads with me. Rainmakers take the south and--”

“Not. You.” Megatron doesn’t need to yell as the daming tone reverberates through every present mechs’ spark. Sending a chill in the air as Thundercracker turns to face his leader.

“Sir?” In Starscream’s absence the power of command falls to him. The look in Megatron’s knotted face says otherwise.

“Skywarp and you are grounded until he is found.” It comes as a surprise to every Decepticon, who do terrible jobs pretending not to listen.

“But Sir…”

“Yes Sir.” Skywarp steps forward and accepts their fate without complaint, posture rigid as he still has yet to feel anything but anger from his mate. TC almost is dizzy from the charge of emotions from the seekers, but its Skywarp who is going to knock him down.

“Lord Megatron,” Unwelcome as always. Moonlace approaches with two seekers at his wings. One so dark Thundercracker can’t even make out their face from their helm, the other a polished red and orange that shifts in hue as she walks.

The three give respectful bows in the face of their leader, who Thundercracker was relieved to see didn’t look too happy with the interruption. Moonlace placed a spread servo over his chest like a senator addressing the council of old.

“My companions and I, Umbra and Novaflare, served as lieutenants to Shockwave during our assignments on Cybertron.” TC looked to Warp expecting him to be as scandalized, but still nothing. “At your word - it would be our honor to step in as temporary flight command while the elite trine is...otherwise indisposed.”

Thundercracker can feel sets of seekers look towards him, leadership questioned and the shift of power taking place before them. Thundercracker can see the new trine in the mess, naive jets looking just as dazed as he feels. He was never a court seeker and only has sparse memories of Vos proper from early years, but somewhere in his coding: this feels wrong.

Megatron let's pale fluid drip freely from his wounds. Managing to remain at full height without allowing obvious pain to bow him, his anger keeping him steady. This is not the Megatron who not so long ago had laughed at their ceremony and brought Starscream back to them. This was the warlord they all feared and served out of respect of that fear.

“In whatever condition, by whatever means. Bring him back to me: alive.” He gives the order and Moonlace smiles. His company mimicking the elaborate bow.

“Yes, my Lord.”

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“Warp! Wait up!” TC has to run to reach his retreating mate, glad that he hasn't kicked on his warp drive yet or else Thundercracker would never catch him! The halls, moments ago flooded by Decepticons running to gossip or try to earn a place in this mad hunt, now fall quiet as they move
further from the command center. The stillness of dark corridors matching Skywarp’s mood as TC finally gets a servo on his mate. “What’s the matter with you?!”

“With me?” Skywarp pulls his arm free of TC’s grasp, turning to pin him with a glare learned from Starscream it seemed. “What in the name of the Pit is the matter with YOU?!” He accuses and Thundercracker isn’t sure how to respond. Which is made obvious to his mate by the blank stare and silence.

It only serves to rile Skywarp more.

“He left you TC!” Warp snaps and Thundercracker almost flinches at the shrill of his voice. “You against how many Autobots?! Against Prime?! He left you to die -- I could have lost you!” Thundercracker actually hadn’t considered that. The moment Starscream had taken off with Skyfire he was more focused on seeking cover. It was mere moments before Skywarp arrived anyways. “If Megatron hadn't ordered us to keep his running off with that *Autobot* silent…”

TC moves his servos palm-up, imploring Skywarp to calm down while he does his best to think of what might soothe his wingmate’s current state. Through the haze of anger he can feel hurt and it echoes Thundercracker’s own feelings on the matter. But he was too upset by the current state of things to let it wreck him.

“I was ok though?” Offers as if that would make it better. Warp’s trembling snarl proves it was the wrong thing to say. “Okokok! It was a bad thing and I’m mad at him too! But we can yell at him when he gets back, right now we need to---”

“If he comes back?” Warp spits in disbelief. “You think he’s coming back? TC, you felt it. When he saw Skyfire again?”

He had.

Between the layers of hurt, of anger and the snarling betrayal that TC realized was for Megatron...There had been relief. Contrasting to the way Starscream had reacted when Skyfire was originally found, but relief nonetheless drowning in the sea of absolute hatred he felt at the sight of Skyfire approaching in the distance.

Then nothing. Starscream closed his connection to them like a fortress gate, severing all ties. It left them both dazed and sparks stung from the loss. Starscream might as well have be dead for all they could feel of him. Only knew he was still functioning because their union had not severed- and they were not suffering a broken trine.

“He doesn’t care about us TC, it’s time we face it.”

“Don’t say that.” He defended, struck with how sincere Warp was in the claim. It felt like a hammer against his spark. “Screamer has always been bad with feelings and trash like that. Everything that’s changed, he does dumb things!”

“Like abandon his trine to die?” Skywarp clenched his jaw, shuddering at the thought clearly haunting his processor and TC wanted to reach out for him but in some ways Warp was just like Starscream. Neither liked feeling trapped. “Why are you defending him?”

“Because things were getting better. Like when we first met? All the things he did for us, how he helped us find a place outside of just being science experiments…” TC can feel the energy fading, the traction of his certainty beginning to slow. “He cared about the seekers again! He wanted to be better - Megatron was getting through to him.” Skywarp’s laugh hurt as it likely hurt Skywarp himself.
“He used the same tricks on Megatron as he does to keep the aerial force in line.” Warp dismissed and TC can feel him tuck away the proof otherwise - just wanting to hurt instead. “Starscream has always been good at giving others just enough of what they want, only to take it away. We’ve seen him do it, use it to control others. We’re not special to him.” He almost yells.

“He was getting better.” TC repeated and finds he’s losing the will to argue with every heated statement from the other. They both fall quiet, memories and feelings a whirlpool between them. An argument in sensations and thought alone without a singular word spoken. No conclusion was reached, even their bond was tilting.

“We can figure this out when he comes back. Bring the seekers in line - we’ve recovered from worse before.” TC spoken finally, hopeful for the sake of them both but Warp only withdrew.

“If he comes back, he can fight for his crown by himself.” Warp answered with the weight of finality behind his words. “We’re not a trine, we never were.” The hum of a the warp drive forces Thundercracker back a step, watching the twisting crackle of light swirl his mate in pale violet until his image faded in a sharp flash. Only his hurt left behind.

Thundercracker brought servos to his face, heavily venting from his nose as his processor ached from the warring thoughts.

“What have you done Starscream?” He asks no one, and no one replies.

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Few days pass with no sign of their missing Air Commander.

Megatron finally submits to medical attention after almost losing function in his leg and Soundwave puts out a base-wide transmission that all reports should be sent directly to them alone. Megatron was not to be bothered. There were rumors the Autobots were searching too, and made it difficult for their troops to avoid the enemy. Decepticons were not known for covert. Soundwave had encouraged the idea that the Autobots were seeking Starscream as means of information gathering. That urgency was of the utmost importance and that was indeed true.

Still no mention of Skyfire.

Moonlace and his patchwork trine were forced to withdraw a great number of seekers to avoid open skirmishes with Autobots and Thundercracker only took solace in Rumble’s gossip that Megatron was very unhappy about that. It had to be done. They couldn’t find Starscream AND fight an open war at the same time. The seeker tower was a mess of nerves and high tension. Fights broke out among themselves and at least three trines had been put in holding cells for going against orders. It was little consolation to see Moonlace and his company wrestle to keep control - even of just his new command of active duty. Thundercracker assumed it was because he just assumed authority - whereas Starsacream had built this force up from the burning remnants of Vos. As much as he wanted to find relief in the other’s struggle, it only meant that his brood were lost in the chaos.

“Did he really leave us?” Windcoil asks, his trine close behind as they followed TC through the seeker tower. The trine, not more than a week formed, had chosen to linger closer to Thundercracker during this time. He advised them to follow orders, not to risk upsetting the precarious balance of the new TEMPORARY command, but there was only so much he could do to control young ones such as them.

“It’s...complicated.” TC can only answer and the look of the young seekers means he failed to
inspire much confidence in them.

“Not that complicated.” Ramjet spoke loud enough that every optic in the open corridor turned to face them. Great. Just what TC needed. “We always knew Screamer would show his true colors eventually. Surprised it took THIS long.”

“Too afraid to face Autobots...” TC heard a gathered trine mutter to themselves.

“Watch your mouth.” Thundercracker directed his annoyance towards the gossiping wings. He feels Skywarp as a gentle pulse in the back of his processor, looking up to see his mate perched on a walkway above, watching with the same empty expression he’s worn the past two days. Making no move to approach or aid.

“Why should we?” Sunstorm, of course Sunstorm had to say something. “Once a coward, always a coward.”

“You’re forgetting who outranks you.” Thundercracker snaps. “In the absence of Starscream, I’m in command and I’m ordering you to shut your trap!” Despite not being able to even LEAD the seekers out of the base.

“What happens if he doesn’t come back?” Dirge asks, moving to stand too close to Thundercracker and startles the young trine into standing behind TC. “When Megatron finally offlines that creep, where does that leave you?” At this, Skywarp hops off the walkway. Quick to lower himself effortlessly until he was equal with Thundercracker. Dirge seemed less enthusiastic at the additional confrontation.

“That’s not something for you to concern yourself with.” Skywarp hissed and the coneheads were getting riled.

“I think it is, actually..” TC was SO tired of hearing Moonlace’s voice that he didn’t even want to turn around.

[You should have let me warp his head into a wall when we had the chance.] Warp complains before they’re addressed by the three courtly pains in the aft.

“You can only hold command in the absence of a leader.” Moonlace explained and not for the first time TC was glad Starscream wasn’t like this. His flaws at least made him tolerable - Moonlace was just a riveted prick. “But our dear Commander Starscream isn’t absent. He abdicated.”

TC was at least relieved to feel Skywarp at his side just as furious with the claim as he was. Certainly felt less alone in the room of seekers all expecting an explanation.

“You think you can snatch up command because Starscream is out on a day trip?” Skywarp almost laughed, his smile mocking as he was well-aware the haughty seekers were made most uncomfortable by him. A gift of being considered low-chaste in the opinion of things that never looked down. “You don’t speak for Megatron and he hasn’t said anything of the sort.”

“Can’t imagine why.” Novaflare smirked and there was a soft hush of whispers, the tension in the room becoming almost mocking to the order they had not days before. Thundercracker would be so happy to see Screamer again, just so he can punch him for the trouble.

“Once Starscream returns then you can work out whose wingspan is bigger than whose.. But until then, he’s still your commander.”

“Defending the one who left you to die to the enemy?” Moonlace reminded the tower and there was
little TC could say against that. “Your loyalty is misplaced.”

“No. It’s not.” TC smiled back, because that’s what Starscream would do and he would know how to handle creeps too much like himself. “It’s because I know that deranged wingleader of mine - and he’ll be back. If for nothing else than just to wipe that stupid look off your face.”

Thundercracker noticed Umbra, the dark seeker, looking less confident than their companions as Moonlace took a step forward. Chin tilted downwards as if his next statement was for Thundercracker only - but didn’t meter his voice to keep it private.

“I can’t wait.”

Shift change. Moonlace and his trine go to meet with Soundwave to give futile updates and the seekers try to busy themselves as a distraction from the undercurrent of disorder now, no longer seeping, but flooding their ranks. They were not some hive mind like the Insecticons, but they still needed stability to flourish. They still required a stable commanding force to keep them together.

Likely why Starscream was always a mess, trying to provide something he didn’t have.

“You really think he’s coming back?” Skywarp asks as TC dismisses the new trine. Sending them to stick close to the Chromatic Trines, knowing Redwing was always eager to look cool in the optics of younger seekers who didn’t know better.

“Yea, I really do.” TC feels the smallest strand of hope from Skywarp, both missing their idiot third.

“Why?”

“Because Megatron is here.”

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“Your faith will do.”

Starscream had requested so little of him that day Megatron can’t help but reflect on Soundwave’s earlier warnings. Specifically to not offer the seeker more than could be granted. What had he done instead?

He should have known this would happen, Starscream ever the chaotic mess. The troublemaker. Unreliable and wretched. Cowardly and frail in ways Megatron had never imagined and had only recently discovered. Even gone, the seeker was the cause of the base in high alert. He knew the desperate search was not to bring Starscream back, but to appease Megatron’s snarling orders. An attempt to gain favor in thinly veiled flattering and eager volunteers. No Decepticon was truly surprised when Starscream got himself into trouble…

So Megatron was suffering that burden alone.

Cleared by Hook for return he’s stepping onto the lift towards his chambers, wanting little more than to step onto the bridge but knows his presence will not benefit the search. He can at least force himself into a restful state before addressing the troops, feeling as though Soundwave will be a troublesome reminder of his actions. By the Pit. The damned lift is a reminder of his choices as it practically echoes the sounds Starscream made that night, lifted and pinned to the walls. Held in place by Megatron’s bulk alone as he discovered a much better use for his mouth.

Not to mention the way Starscream almost bowed to him. ALMOST was the dedicated soldier Megatron so long ago believed he could be. Starscream had looked to him with trust and servitude
only slightly rippled by his natural disorder, but they had been close hadn’t they? Worst of all, he couldn’t blame Skyfire for this. All the traitor had done was survive...

The Master over all Decepticons does not feel regret. But he can certainly acknowledge what has been wasted. He’d ordered the whole of his faction to drag Starscream by any means necessary. So long as he was alive. He can’t help but consider his expected reaction should the seeker be returned in a broken condition...

The lift doors open with a familiar grind, Megatron stepping out feeling a shadow fall over him. Thoughts heavy with uncertainty on his decisions, his reactions.

“Your faith will do.” Starscream had asked of him, and Megatron couldn’t even grant him that.

He slouches into his weary thoughts, unlocking the chamber doors with mindless motions trained after these years - an empty space where nights before Starscream had been standing. Impatient and sneering, lip twitching not to smile as he complained with little conviction of his “current plight” yet more than eager to be thrown over Megatron’s shoulder and carried inside.

Now the empty room will be a mocking voice in the sea of disorder his processor has become. All thoughts consumed by Starscream. All knowledge screaming that Megatron had made a mistake.

The door opens.

His room is not vacant.

“Welcome home darling.” Starscream grins and Megatron is stunned for long enough that the seeker reaches out, something in his claws. It snaps heavy over his cannon’s mouth just as Megatron thinks to raise his weapon and pull for a charge. A strange tremor of electricity runs the length of his arm before he can even fire.

It’s enough to force him to dispel the charge as Starscream jumps back a few steps. Posture ready to fight or flee.

“What have you done to me?” Snarls, too angry to feel relief at the seeker’s presence. The contraption remains, a cuff like device snapped onto the cannon like a parasite, the smallest unknown vibration down his limb like a riled warning of a serpent.

“Safety precautions.” Starscream answers with the leanest strain to his voice, tense and fearful though his smirk certainly would convince a less-familiar mech otherwise. Likely because they both know Megatron does not need his cannon to put Starscream down for good… “If you try to fire the charge will implode, likely won’t kill you but should break you.”

“You’re a terrible liar.” Megatron is scanning the space behind the seeker for further dangers, battle computer already tracking the slightest motion of Starscream’s claws. Preparing for an all-out brawl should the other finally have lost his damn mind.

“Try me.” Starscream’s lips part in a low hiss, a soft sound like the incoming of missiles across the horizon. “I’ll remove it after you’ve listened to me.” Megatron doesn’t want to, swinging his arm downwards as if to rid himself of an illusion.

“I’m surprised Starscream, I didn’t think you’d come crawling back so soon.” Does his best not to gnash denta together when speaking to the traitor, watching Megatron in return as if he’s something to be upset about.

“The doors were open.” Starscream answers, delicate steps as silent as spilled needles where they
stand off against one another. Tension high and certainly Starscream feels it too, the threat of a shatter. “And I crawl for no one. Not even you.”

“Why have you returned?”

“Why?” Starscream laughs and it’s both frustrating to hear and quirks Megatron’s lip to smile. He shouldn’t receive the seeker’s impudent behavior like a welcome home. “I’m a Decepticon, where else would I be?”

“You lost the RIGHT to your badge the moment you betrayed us on the mountain!” He roars, stepped forward in hopes of intimidating Starscream, but finds the seeker doesn’t startle. Holds his ground with too curious a gaze as he dissects Megatron in ways the warlord has not seen since before Earth and her troubles. “So what is it Starscream? Your Autobot pet reject you in turn?”

“You’re so dramatic.” Starscream almost sounds like he’s inconvenienced by Megatron’s anger. “Did you really think I wouldn’t return?” Megatron takes pause at the question, the seriousness in Starscream’s tone underlined by the way he stares after his leader - thin and insulted at the idea. “Besides, you started it.”

“Me?” Taken aback he storms closer and again Starscream does not withdraw even when Megatron can see his shape in the glass of his optics. “Was it me who abandoned your trine? Who left your troops spiraling to go chase after a ghost!”

“He’s not a ghost, now is he?” Starscream’s wings jump at the fact, chin turned to reveal the length of his throat plating - before their truce he would never risk it. Too dangerous when Megatron had often strangled the seeker with a fist around that delicate neck. It’s a challenge, he’s daring Megatron to lash out.

Interesting to know, in this moment, how he lacks the once ever-ready fury to strike against the seeker. All this anger, betrayal, hurt - disgust at Starscream’s actions: Megatron can’t bring himself to break the other as he once would for less. Snorts his frustration and straightens his posture, looming over Starscream so the other can’t escape, but neither have struck that final blow.

“Do you think you’re such a saint you can criticize my actions and justify yours?”

“No!” Starscream is quick to agree, surprising them both. “But knowing the true angle of your manipulation...honestly I’m impressed Megatron.” Megatron can only flicker optics in return. “And embarrassed that I was so easily molded in my sorry state.”

“What are you going on about?”

“You used me.”

“Now who’s being dramatic?” Megatron chooses a tactical retreat, relocating himself a short distance away without taking his focus off Starscream, who is and always will be a great danger. “You chose to leave with the Autobot. Tell me why I shouldn’t raise the alarm and have the full of my base descend upon you - device be damned.”

Starscream dared to smile like he found the whole thing hilarious.

“Because you ordered that I be brought back to you. Alive.” He sighs. “And conveniently forgot to mention Skyfire at all.”

“It was no one’s place to know.” Megatron defends his actions but his words are weak.
“Sure.” Starscream chuckles, hips sway as he circles the room and oh how Megatron did not miss this version of the seeker. The haughty mess he becomes when he believes he’s holding one over on his enemy. Closed off from reason, unable to see even himself in the cloud of arrogance. “Informing the faction of my “company” would be a death sentence regardless of your orders. And you wanted me back.”

Starscream was hardly clever but made the obvious known with a bright and expectant smile that only dragged like a barb through Megatron’s resolve. There were so many things he wished to demand of Starscream in that moment. To better understand what madness had taken hold of his seeker that he threw their work away so carelessly. Then returned to the base so willingly - attacked him - and tried to push all blame from his shoulders.

In Starscream’s face Megatron saw the events of these weeks being rewritten into something unrecognizable. Something filthy.

“I was going to tell you.”

Starscream stretched his jaw, looking all the more vicious. “Oh I bet you were.”

“In the old navigation room.” He presses onward. “But you sidetracked me with apologies for your humiliation at kissing me in the medbay - and I realized that I had better things to address than your former partner.” Starscream’s expression fell, almost horrified as he began counting backwards.

“You did know...from the start of this...didn’t you?” Stripped of anger by surprise, Megatron has never heard Starscream sound so hurt before.

“At the temple, I said I wanted to speak with you about something, upon our return.”

“You can’t expect me to believe you were going to---”

“I thought it best to keep it quiet at first. Spare us your spurned reaction to the news.” At this point Megatron has forgotten the device on his arm, now only wanting Starscream to listen to him. “And judging from your actions at the temple, I was right in doing so!”

“YOU did this!” Starscream snaps, whatever poise previously held fading away in a step. “I wasn’t able to defend myself against your tricks and you abused your promise of a truce!”

“Take responsibility for once in your life Starscream!” He’s not yelling, but even Starscream’s shriek cannot outdo his voice. “I gave you what you wanted! I spared you my anger and allowed you to right yourself! To return to an obedient fold and you cannot convince me you were not satisfied!”

“You weren’t that good.” He snips and Megatron might not wish to hurl Starscream across the room any longer but he’s likely to hurl his desk at this point.

“I gave you what you longed for. That more occurred...that you found the means to endear yourself to me,” He watches Starscream shirk at the reminder and it doesn’t upset him as he believed it would. They both had found a new place beside the other and it was fracturing before his eyes. “Believe what you will of my intentions, of our truce: you still betrayed me in the end. I cannot overlook that because I kept something from you!”

A moment of silence rests between them. Starscream still and expressionless which frightens Megatron more than he can understand. His part said, now he wished he didn’t care what Starscream had to add. There was no going back.

“Do you feel any guilt for lying to me?” Starscream speaks and it’s certainly nothing Megatron
imagined he’d be asked.

“No.” Answers truthfully and watches wings shift low. “I did what I believed was best. For you. For us-The Decepticons.” Continues in a voice the seeker would recognize. Steady and unwavering. It's enough to keep Starscream from questioning his motives further.

“I suppose if you had said yes, I wouldn’t have believed it anyways.” Starscream admits and looks lost for a brief moment, the smallest shuffle of his features, and back to a stance where he might as well be a galaxy away from Megatron. “For the record. I was trying. I’m sure that means nothing to you - but I was trying.”

Megatron believes him. Which makes this worse.

“We are at an impasse.” Megatron speaks and his berth is obscured in shadow over Starscream’s wing. “Do you really think after your choices, that I can trust you again? That you can return to the Decepticons after this?”

“I’ve done worse.” Starscream tries to dismiss but Megatron shakes his head.

“No. You haven’t.”

“Because it was Skyfire.” Starscream doesn’t need to ask. “You can’t start setting a standard of behaviour now, Lord Megatron. Unless you want to explain to our faction what I did...if you want me back you’ll let me back.”

“I can’t order the Decepticons to accept you into the fold without reason.” Megatron wasn’t sure how he expected this to go? Had Starscream been dragged back - perhaps the seeker would have begged, pleaded for another chance. Megatron could have granted it. But this? Starscream did not bow or seem the least bit afraid.

He knew Megatron too well.

“Yes you can.” The seeker spoke up. “You have before, and you WILL. You owe me this!”

“DO I?” This obdurate, bullheaded brat! Yet Starscream appeared as if his request was not insane. He truly believed it, Megatron was almost shocked.

“Well?”

“Submit to Soundwave for a full inquiry.” He orders. “Only then will I consider letting you remain.” Starscream seemed puzzled. “I want to know how far you’ve fallen.” His optics glance to the cuffed device emitting to low-pulse even now. Better to focus on that. “And what exactly your intentions are…”

“You could just ask me.” Starscream sneered.

“I can’t trust a word from your mouth! Those are my conditions.” He ignored the petulant whine and was torn between knowing this was a terrible idea to the glaring fact that he had left this option for Starscream to abuse. The seeker was right. The doors were indeed open. “Take them or start fleeing, I won’t give you a head start.”

Starscream didn’t take long to answer.

“Soundwave it is then…” He groans and moves with unexpected confidence towards the doors. Megatron stops him with a servo over his shoulder and it’s the first he’s touched the seeker since
“Aren’t you forgetting something?” Questions with no spared frustration, motioning towards the cuff on his weapon.

Starscream looks almost bored.

“What, that?” Starscream shrugs off Megatron’s touch like it’s worthless. “It’s just a refitted distress beacon. It's harmless.”

---

There's an uproar in the base as they made their way to Soundwave.

Gawking faces as rumors spread, Starscream's willing return not kept quiet for long as he walks chin high at Megatron's side. Looking more an escort than a prisoner. Both exclamations of disbelief and some of laughter perk from the gathering crowd. More than once Starscream is at the receiving end of a curse or joke, but the seeker doesn't react.

“Recall Moonlace and the patrolling groups.” Megatron orders as they step onto the bridge of startled optics as Starscream stands freely.

“Moonlace?!” The seeker is quick to snarl, looking up at Megatron with horror. “You really are an idiot.”

“You're in no position to criticize me.” Megatron warns and despite it all, Starscream smirks.

“Never stopped me before.”

Soundwave joins them in the war room and the doors shut them off from the rest of the ship. Not for the first time does Megatron consider how rare Starscream's willingness is, what possible trick up his armor… Yet Starscream merely takes a seat, at the head of the table, and waits for further instructions.

Starscream was demonstrating a remarkable amount of trust in him.

Megatron could have Soundwave rewrite Starscream. Could wreck him, destroy every trace of rebellion until the seeker was little more than a drone. Mindless. Quiet. It would take no more than an order and within the security of the war room, Starscream had no escape.

“I need you to understand the position you’ve agreed to here.” Megatron begins, allowing Soundwave to comfortably make their way to Starscream’s side - as cautious as one should be when dealing with the seeker. Soundwave at least would sense any extreme emotions before the first strike, his only warning system. “If I don’t like what Soundwave finds…”

“You’ll blast me into a million pieces?” The seeker answers unhelpful, flattering his optics with a coy smile. “Haven’t you already?” Soundwave glances to Megatron with a tilt to their masked face to show their concern but Megatron ignores it for now.

“You’re too comfortable by far.”

“I’ve nothing to hide.” Starscream leans back in Megatron’s seat, watching the warlord with open distaste while submitting to Soundwave’s reach. “Unlike some.”

Arms crossed Megatron watches Soundwave take position behind Starscream, servos going to rest
on either side of his helm while the seeker does a marvelous job at not flinching.

“I’ve only three things to ask, to determine the extent of your disorder.” Megatron begins and Soundwave gives a nod. “Where your loyalties lie. If you’ve returned to the Decepticons for some scheme or conspiracy …”

Starscream appeared to be impatiently waiting for something.

[Go on.] He spoke privately but with Soundwave there Starscream had to know the telepath would hear it as well. [Ask me about Skyfire. Ask me why I ran.] He challenges and Megatron finds himself giving pause to his final question.

Soundwave waits for Megatron’s order as the seeker is now vibrating with anger.

[You too cowardly to ask me yourself so rip it out of my mind if it makes you feel more powerful. That's all you care about.]

“And lastly,” He starts up again. “I want to know if you truly believe my affections towards you were no more than a trick.”

---

Starscream’s reintegration into the Decepticons does not go without complications.

The gathered troops outside the war room were a mixture of surprise and outrage upon Soundwave’s announcement that Starscream was no longer to be hunted - more than one mech shouting “Of fragging course” or lesser declarations of a perverse manner. But Megatron has no care to manage rumors and only sought his throne, allowing Starscream to do as he wished with his returned freedom.

In silence he orders Soundwave to keep an eye on the seeker. For good reason. Like times before when Starscream’s outright treachery was forgiven, more loyal mechs came to terrorize him. Or try. Megatron accepted the reports, but did not act on them as he might before. Starscream would not require his help establishing himself amongst the ranks - he never did. Tricky, vile thing with all the charm of a the siren living in his constellations.

Days pass with Starscream seemingly unwilling to rejoin the seekers in their tower, and after Soundwave’s report of Thundercracker striking his leader across the face, his elite trine remained in shambles.

“Suggested Action?” Soundwave asked upon informing Megatron that Starscream had taken to recharging in the old navigation labs.

“Nothing. He can clean up his mistakes up himself.” He answered with a strain of discomfort which had settled into his spark at Starscream’s return. It felt very similar to Starscream’s fall which had begun this mess. His seeker quiet, distant…but at least this time Starscream held his chin high and snarled when required. Didn’t allow others to push him down even with the seeker aerial force was lost in this chaos.

More than once Megatron had to deny an audience with trines demanding to understand his reasons for allowing Starscream back -- or for the hunt all together. Difficult to gauge their preferences. Some seemed relieved, soothed by recent examples of Starscream proving a tolerable leader. Others were disappointed, feeling that the second chance was unjustified.

Megatron only explained, that he didn’t need their permission.
He also was not willing to give an answer, knowing that in truth Starscream had already answered it for him. *You wanted me back.* Of course he did...

Where his loyalties lay, Soundwave determined Starscream remained a Decepticon. If that was all he had left of Starscream, it would be enough.

“Lord Megatron,” Soundwave approaches with their daily report, late in the earth evening as shifts changed and the bridge was almost empty. He gives a motion to approach, share in whatever news they brought.

“What has he done now?” Megatron answers with a flat tone, trying not to seem concerned. He would not allow himself to bend to Starscream's punishment.

Soundwave, however, seemed pensive enough for them both.

“An official challenge has been issued by unbound trine-minor. Moonlace, Umbra, Novaflare.” Only one name meant anything to Megatron, and that was only in the sound of Starscream’s voice snarling at his disbelief a seeker would go to Megatron’s quarters. It wasn’t an unpleasant memory.

So many things were now filed away under such titles. “Not unpleasant” as Megatron fought against his own thoughts.

“Unsurprising.” He comments, ignoring a frustrated churn of his spark. “How many times must I tell these winged devils they can't brawl for titles…”


Megatron remains still in his throne, observing the slow settling of Decepticons taking their stations, trying not to seem too interested in what they were saying above.

“And Starscream's brothers?”

“Starscream accepted challenge on his own behalf. Declining participation of his trine.”

Of course he did.

“So. He intends to battle this aspirational trine alone?”

“First to be rendered incapacitated...or offline.” Soundwave nods and watches Megatron examine his own fist which has shattered the throne’s arm under a raging grasp.

“I understand.”

Chapter End Notes

Obvs not much resolution in this chapter since the two are just mad at each other... But chapter 8 will be the home stretch. Buckle in kiddos.

Also come bother me on tumblr: @seekingjets or twitter: @seekingjets (I don't know what I'm doing with technology pls help)
There was a time, he realizes, when Starscream would have done anything for Megatron.

He’d watched Megatron in the pit long before Soundwave had sought to recruit. Had leaned over guard rails with fluttering wings and wide optics trying to measure Megatron’s strength. Estimate his speed and marvel in wonder at his power. Thundercracker and Skywarp never stopped teasing him for it. Jokingly tipping his heels upwards when he leaned too far at the railing, nudging into his sides as he was captivated by the brutal display.

“I don’t know, he’s pretty small for your usual taste, Screamer.” They joked, using that detested nickname to try and rile him. Which always worked and ended with an embarrassing display in the crowds. It had never occurred to Starscream that they might have been referencing Skyfire. He was deaf to their complaints, only annoyed that his infatuation had been so obvious.

After their recruitment, and the realization that Megatron’s poetic words of revolution were not empty promises, Starscream would have given him anything should he ask. Had Megatron stood over him and ordered he spread his legs at that first war table - Starscream would have likely sprained something to do so. Would have loved for the first Decepticons to watch and know that Megatron was his.

His flirtations were useless though. Soft, lingering glances and pulsing lights when alone. Perched on table edges and outstretched legs, wings pointed to draw elegant lines of his frame: no response. Megatron did not want his offerings, so Starscream set aside lust and focused on what else he could bestow to his lord. Allowing infatuation to fall to a different form of obsession - and much worse over time.

When they marched on Vos, chasing Autobots through the outskirts of the city-state, it was Starscream eager at Megatron’s side. Directing their troops with his childhood memories of the city. Past where door-winged hybrids inhabited the shadow of silver towers. Into the once glittering metropolis of Starscream’s former home. Seekers clouded the skies in panic, uncertain which side to detest more. The unaligned of his brood desperate and horrified at the war bleeding into their once-believed untouchable world.

“Burn it down.” Starscream had given the order when the Autobots had took refuge behind fortress walls. Their enemy hiding in a citadel which once belonged to Starscream’s unlovable parent and a city of fiendish sparks hiding behind old traditions. Long before their march Vos had rotted from the inside out. Slaughtered their rulers, disregarded their oaths. The Vos that was suffering was not the kingdom Starscream once loved, nor the city he’d never wanted to return to.

“This is your home,” Megatron held pause in his tone. Not doubt, but uncertainty in Starscream’s suggestion.

“The citadel was not built for ground-pounders and walkers in mind. They won’t survive evacuation.” Starscream defended his proposal while his wings shook erratic as the battle unfolding before them.

“You cannot take this back.” Starscream faced Megatron then with a look of absolute stillness, abruptly calm as he found peace in the width of Megatron’s shoulders. The flooding memories of a
gladiator who would not fall in the ring giving him hope that they too would rise above this war.

“How can you rebuild this world with old ruins impeding your vision?” He referenced Megatron’s own scripture, scrawled across a corpse lost somewhere to the wilds, and Megatron had never looked so fondly at him. Bathed in the red light of a burning city, Starscream finally had something Megatron wanted: his devotion.

Only the mantra of Starscream’s vows to a rebellion kept his hysterics afterwards to a minimum as he let everything burn for his gladiator.

Surviving seekers had flocked to Megatron’s path afterwards, the destruction of Vos-proper blamed on reaction to Autobot invasion. Megatron had gathered his new force and promised them retribution, all while Starscream cradled guilt and allowed denial to manipulate his own memory of events. Vos burned because they tried to save it, because Autobots had allowed it to burn. He was innocent and the smoking ruins of his ancestral home were no longer a plight on his spark...

But a beautiful homage to his loyalty.

He’d given Megatron everything, so when they turned cruel to one another, Starscream had nothing left. When the rage and wrath of a seemingly endless war took it's toll, scrapped him clean of all else: he thought perhaps he could claw it out of Megatron. Demand repayment in the shape of a crown, a throne, respect of what he helped give the warlord! Yet nothing satisfied him. Nothing was enough and they raised fists and claws, weapons and words against one another so many times. Starscream had learned that a broken limb and fractured pride was better than not battling Megatron at all. It was acceptable so long as he remained at Megatron’s side, with dagger or adoration at the ready. So long as Megatron was looking at him, he could suffer the following wound.

Then Skyfire was not dead, and ruined everything.

Twice now. Skyfire’s resurrection ruined everything...

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“What do you think you are doing?” It was the first time Megatron and he shared a room longer than mere seconds since his fateful return, and their accompanying argument. Days of avoiding the bridge out of spite were better spent cleansing the air about his “temporary departure” from the battlefield…rather than trying to remain in Megatron's company as if nothing had changed.

Soundwave’s issued explanation of “misunderstood orders” was not enough to protect Starscream from the expected bullying and irritation of his fellow Decepticons, though he would quickly admit this time had seemed different. Before, it would take Megatron’s intervention - or Starscream to perform a violent act to re-establish himself. (Once he reached down Bonecrusher’s throat and nearly ripped out his vocalizer to end such harassment.) This time it seemed most were more confused or exhausted by the theatrics. Unfazed by Megatron’s retraction of previous orders, after all, how many times had Starscream been in this same position?

He wasn’t really surprised either…

“Cleaning up a few loose ends.” Starscream responds, gaze trailing just past Megatron’s broad shoulder to Soundwave waiting patient and quiet just off to the shadows. Starscream never thought he’d be thankful for Soundwave’s presence, though he very much doubts they felt the same.

“You know how I feel about these petty squabbles between your soldiers.” Megatron was unmoved past general annoyance. Like nothing happened, like he was not the centerfold of Starscream’s fury.
“And you know how I feel about you meddling in my business.” He says hoping to get a rise out of his lord only to be disappointed by Megatron’s lack of anything. Nothing. He was better at acting than Starscream ever thought. He knows Megatron too well. Can’t imagine this embarrassment of being caught in a game had not left some scar on his pride.

“You’re speaking too familiar, Starscream.” Megatron warns and Starscream holds back from hissing.

“Aren’t we familiar though?” He’s losing grip, needs to center himself before saying just the wrong thing. Starscream has no allies in the base past the few seekers who seemed relieved he returned at all. Possibly due to Moonlace’s proven inability to control them. Starscream returned to his aerial force in chaos, and not just due to his actions. The haughty seeker likely went to the same pretentious academies of Vos as Starscream had attended in his youth. But learning how to lead from a neatly typed datapad doesn’t make one a commander.

It meant some of his seekers remained loyal, though hesitant to admit it. But if Starscream pushed Megatron too far, he would be without any aid. Even his own trine had yet to approach him after their initial confrontation.

How brittle that cord was now that Starscream had stretched their patience beyond a breaking point. His cheek stung in memory of Thundercracker’s fist when Starscream returned…and subsequently failed to give them the apology they so openly demanded. His trine had avoided him since and in truth Starscream was relieved. This was easier if they were not involved.

“Soundwave, you are dismissed.” Megatron’s order sent both Soundwave and Starscream looking at him with discomfort.

“I don’t think that’s necessary.” Starscream tried but ever-loyal Soundwave gave a short bow and began their exit. “There’s nothing we need to say in privacy.” Starscream adds just before Soundwave had left his sight. The summons to the former throne room had been taken with no small amount of fear. Underused nowadays, a relic to the height of Decepticon war-mongering as they sailed endless through stars. This official room had once served as a busy hub of sorts, especially during recruitment, and echoed in memory of broadcast speeches of the earlier years.

Now Megatron preferred the bridge, able to watch his soldiers and remain present in their daily work. Starscream had once believed it to be the mech’s paranoia acting up, but later could not un-see it as a move of dominance.

Once Soundwave had left, Starscream feels his tanks sour, biting back an exclamation he’d been suffering for days now. In contrast above Megatron appears all too comfortable seated on an rarely used throne. High, ornate back carved from layered metal. A relic of their former glory now a shadow of their past. Starscream was left to wonder if Megatron’s decision to meet in this dusty room was to serve as a reminder of who exactly Megatron was. As if Starscream could ever forget.

How stupid he had been to think, for a moment, that Megatron was ever his.

“I want to know if you truly believe my affections towards you were no more than a trick.” Megatron had asked in the quiet of the war room and only then had Starscream struggled against the weight of Soundwave’s inquiry. Like a low sigh against his thoughts, kept at bay only by Starscream’s understanding of the telepath’s means. His trine’s connection was similar enough, he felt capable of locking Soundwave out of the deepest parts of his thoughts and that was the only reason he agreed to the insulting interrogation.

But then Megatron had to go and ask such a ridiculous thing that Starscream wanted to scream as he
battled against the flooding reflections of Megatron’s kindness. His gentle affections. His seemingly earnest intention as he rut into Starscream’s body all while knowing Skyfire was alive!

Used. He had been used!

Soundwave’s reported findings: “Inconclusive”.

Megatron had seemed more disappointed by this than any previous argument. Without looking at Starscream again he’d sent him off and “out of his sight” to active duty. Starscream hadn’t expected it would be so easy. Perhaps Megatron decided continuing the game would only result in further embarrassment.

“Well?” He urges, ready to escape as quickly as possible before this turned ugly. Uglier. Megatron remained seated, looking down at him with that same, unsettling flat expression. Like his thoughts and cares were billions of miles away and Starscream wants to scream for the indecency.

“Why have you declined your brothers’ participation in this duel?”

Starscream hates to admit that he’s surprised that’s what comes out of Megatron’s mouth.

“Do you think I’m so feeble that I can’t hold my own against a few throne ornaments?” Scoffs, looking away with a roll of his optics. “None of this concerns you.”

“It does if my soldiers are tearing into one another like rabid scraplets.” He corrects, voice tense. “When will this duel take place? We are no longer free to the stars, where do you intend to hold such a battle without Autobot or human interruption?”

“I know a place.” Starscream grins, hoping the lean smile upsets Megatron as it should. He can’t tell, Megatron looks just as unaffected as before. How dare he. “Stay out of this.”

“Starscream.” His voice echoes with authority in the forgotten room, cold and dark as it was only them to bring life to the ruins. “Four million years you’ve been mine. Do you think I don’t see what you’re doing?”

It’s commonly joked that Starscream has no patience or self control. That he’s all reaction and no thought. Mostly true, but Starscream also knows if he were truly vacant of such control he would have stormed up the dais steps and shot Megatron where he sat for such a claim.

“Yours?” Repeats, recalling not too long ago Megatron whispering something similar against the underside of his chest vents while Starscream’s legs hooked broad shoulders. His grin twitches. “And what, pray tell, am I doing?” Starscream doesn’t expect Megatron to rise from his throne, and every step closer feels like the world beneath his pedes is shaking. There’s an instinct to flee - or fight - and he’s instead struck dumb the moment Megatron is close enough that a singular motion forward would bring them together.

“Inconclusive.” Soundwave had reported, and Starscream wanted so desperately for someone to tell him how he should feel.

“You run when you lose control.” Starscream is glaring at the Decepticon insignia bright and dignified across the grey metal chest. The symbol which gave him a purpose when he was drowning - while stripping him of all else. “You hide when you do not wish to confront your faults, and worst of all assume you are alone in these troubles of your own making.”

Wings fold back in surprise when Megatron’s large servo comes to rest gently beneath his chin. A singular knuckle suggesting Starscream look the other in the optic while his own hands clench in
wretched anger - his spark churning with desperation to simply return to this fold.

“And?” Is all he can bite out to not betray himself against Megatron’s tender offering. What was he seeking by this? What trick was next?

“And our truce was set to keep us from hurting one another.” Megatron rumbles, not unkind, but Starscream hears his voice stitched in static. “We have failed.”

Their truce, fragile from the beginning. A pathetic attempt for two stubborn mechs to exist in the limited space of their kingdom. Nothing had made Starscream happier than having Megatron’s attention once more. Just as he snarled to Megatron upon his return: he had tried! Only to find that it was all to satisfy his lord’s own jealousy had been a crude awakening.

Starscream reaches up to curl claws over Megatron’s wrist with a certain gentleness he so rarely wished to share with any others. He wonders if Megatron thinks it’s some form of acceptance, or forgiveness, but he takes a sure step backwards as he lowers the servo from his face. Almost disappointed when Megatron doesn’t reach for him again.

“Ask me about Skyfire.” He demands as Megatron turns his helm at the designation, jaw tensing.

“Why should I waste my thoughts on a traitor?” Snarls in response as Starscream felt a weight settle back over his thoughts. “I looked the other way on your indiscretions...you seem unsatisfied to just let it die.”

“Because he’s the only reason you wanted me.” Megatron doesn’t turn back. “Primus forbid someone has something you don’t.”

“You are a naive and spoiled brat.” His leader remarks behind clenched denta, that anger Starscream fans brewing high on his posture. He’s fighting down an outburst, a famous Megatron roar. Four millions years he’s been Megatron’s - it’s not untrue. But the same could be said in reverse. He knows him well enough. “If that’s what you’ve chosen as reason, then so be it. But as you remain in my fold this feud is a waste of my time and care.”

Of course it is. Megatron wants an out, Starscream is good at being that scapegoat.

“I’ll take your truce, because you were right back then.” Starscream straightens his presence, centers himself and feels all the little monster Megatron has ever needed him to be. “I am a Decepticon and I’m not going anywhere despite what you or anyone else thinks of me! The rest doesn’t matter enough to be brought up again. Are those acceptable terms, my liege?”

Megatron regards him with a passing glance and Starscream can’t imagine why it knots his spark and leaves him feeling wretched.

He only nods to agree and Starscream takes that as his cue to go. Megatron allows it with silence. Nothing more to be said and he needs to prepare for his fight. Three against one, hardly fair, but Starscream didn’t have time to consider the danger. He wasn’t lying when he said there were loose ends which needed to be tied up. He lost Skyfire. Megatron. He would not lose his command. It was the only thing he could claw back from a corpse’s hands.

“Starscream,” Megatron calls out with an even tone and no urgency. He looks back across a shoulder, lowering a wing to better see his leader.

"Inconclusive.”

“What?”
“Did you decline your brothers’ involvement in this challenge out of fear they would not stand by your side?” Starscream feels as if he’s transparent at the accusation. Face twitching in annoyance and somehow that makes him feel better.

“I couldn’t take the chance they’d abandon me. If I give them less opportunity to do so, then maybe they won’t.” He says, strangely honest as no other answer felt right. What did he care what Megatron thought of him anyway? He was already so pathetic in his leader’s eyes, what worse could he be?

Megatron seems amused in response, but it’s almost sad. He hates it.

“Then perhaps you can understand why I kept Skyfire from you after all.”

Starscream exits, leaving the statement like a wound between them.

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When he was a mere fledgling, his sire had been challenged for supremacy only once. Singular combat, no need for the royal trine to get involved. Starscream had been afraid then, young and fragile. Easily frightened at the idea of his parent being injured. Just as vividly as he could recall the fear the morning of the duel, he remembers his sire taking him aside. Kneeling down to Starscream’s meager height just to clutch his shoulders and listen patiently as he sobbed his fears.

His sire had not been an especially kind parent. Frigid and authoritative, but he still allowed Starscream to yell and cry and demand he refuse the challenge to avoid being hurt. Only when Starscream had tired of his tantrum had his sire lowered his crown-welded brow to his own. Looking Starscream through with a gaze only cruel and powerful figures ever learned to wear...

"I want you to watch, Starscream.” He’d said, instead of comforting the shaking child. "Don’t you dare look away, don’t you dim your sights. I want you watching as I rip this cretin’s helm from his shoulders.” When Starscream begged to know why, why this was necessary? Why they had to hurt one another at all, his sire only laughed and rose. Standing over Starscream with matching red and the towers of Vos reflecting in his dark wings.

"Words can only take you so far, but action makes a point. You must learn quickly that there can be elegance in brutality.”

After the battle his sire kept the plucked wings of his challenger mounted above his throne for weeks. Only removing them once Starscream forgot how to flinch at the gruesome sight.

While he’s never hated another mech more, he had a point.

Elegance in brutality.

Starscream had thought of those words witnessing a gray patterned miner rise up from the gore of the pit. Fresh kill dripping off his servos as he raised his fist and the crowd cheered his name. Larger than life. A savior. Redemption. Starscream knew even then that his life would only go where Megatron stepped. Whether willingly or dragging his heels all the way. It was a simple truth which made this whole ordeal all the more hysterical.

Elegance in brutality. Megatron had felt like going home.

Now the Nemesis, which had served as his home for how many years, was a crowded testament of how stupid he’d been. One singular mistake of allowing himself to freely want - taking kindness without a second thought or logical doubt. Skyfire should have been the first and only lesson that
kind things do not survive in this universe. Not even his trine bothered to rejoin him, understandable, and
moments where Megatron and he stood in the same room always ended with him ducking out before it was necessary for them to speak to one another.

A new truce apparently meant “we will pretend nothing happened, and not speak.” It’s what Megatron always wanted most likely.

He’s walking halls where he should feel safe, careful and quiet, when a loud exclamation disrupts Starscream’s idle thoughts, turning towards the source prepared to dissuade cocky Decepticons. He’d been out retrieving his rations, having purposefully avoided his duties for the day, and the thought of dealing with more problems instantly exhausted him.

“Commander Starscream,” Novaflare approached, lacking her newly appointed wingleader and their dark plated third. Starscream fought the need to sneer, not wanting her to see how easily his day was ruined by her presence. Their intended combat had been set for the end of the week - on a day Starscream’s selected battlefield would be easier to navigate outside of notice. He really wasn’t wanting to see any of the three before then.

“It’s impolite to meet with the subject of an upcoming challenge.” He “tsked” and tried continuing down his route, only for the seeker femme to step in his path. Glossy wing a bright orange darkening to red as she moved further into his path.

“I could be saying the same for you.” She “tsked” in return, standing half a helm taller than him that Starscream wondered if she were a modified conehead model. “I’m not surprised you’re meddling, but whatever you said to Umbra I’m sure was just as impolite.”

“I’ve no idea what you’re talking about.” Wings high, voice thin, and when he stepped she mirrored to keep him in place.

“What was it? Threaten to send Megatron after them?” She smiles as if imagining the most hilarious joke. “Oh wait, you messed that up too right? Guess after the trining ceremony you weren’t enough fun to keep his attention.” Starscream grinds his jaw and smiles instead of responding. It wouldn’t be good to start a fight here, which is what she was clearly trying to push for. If he were caught battling before the official fight, he’d lose favor in the few seekers who quietly wanted him to remain in power...

“Or perhaps it’s because even Megatron isn’t so lowly as to shove his spike where an Autobot has been?”

He launches at her, but doesn’t make contact, claws swiping short of her cackling expression when an arm wraps his torso and weighs him down. Snarling, he tries to dislodge the vice around his frame, but Thundercracker is used to Starscream’s tactics. Shoves them backwards so he’s too busy struggling to maintain footing rather than focus on attack.

“Cute ‘Flare. You kiss your creator with that mouth?” Skywarp mocks, putting himself between the snarling Starscream and the smirking seeker.

“He started it.” She defends with ease. “I just want to know what he said to cause Umbra to embarrass them self and drop from the fight?” Her face scrunches with distaste and as soft pulses of light run down the edges of her wings. “Or what he did to whittle at our ranks.”

“Umbra dropped out?” Starscream frowns at the news, and notices immediately his trinemes do not share his surprise.
“Well clearly they’re smarter than you two.” Skywarp suggests to TC’s firm nod. “Then again Screamer against two geeks? A little unfair...for you.”

“Adorable.” Novaflare dims to glare. “You know we didn’t want to do this, but he left us no choice. We used to be something terrible, powerful - but now we’re what? Megatron’s little pets? You can’t even stay in his good graces long enough not to get beaten. Who do we serve anymore?”

“Sounds like you’re scared.” Thundercracker scoffs, arm still secure around Starscream who had stopped fighting and was left to watch the bickering - and feeling left out. “Whatever Moonlace promised you to join him, the second he gets what he wants you’re going to be left in the dust. I think Umbra understood that.”

“You don’t get to talk about them.” Snaps, but doesn’t advance the threat. Deciding instead to look the three over in thinly veiled agitation. Starscream has to wonder how Megatron dealt with the seekers when he was gone. Really, they were all mad. “You can’t say our challenge is unfounded.” Her wings flick higher, refracting dim light in swirling pulses down neat seams of metal. “Don’t think you can trick us into backing down.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” Starscream pushes out of Thundercracker’s grasp and stands tall as Skywarp takes up position on his right. Their bond still locked to him but at least present. It was a step.

“Whatever. We’ll settle this soon.” Skywarp and her share a moment, baring a muted hiss as she brushes past. Seeing herself outnumbered, and like most seekers, decides that was a terrible time to start a fight.

“Novaflare,” Starscream caught her before she got too far. Her glare was delightfully refreshing to be honest. Better an earnest reaction than the fake-grin of her temporary wing-leader. “Why did you join the Decepticons?” He faces her without pretense, even though she truly didn’t deserve the honor. Chins high, wings low, quite a regal seeker that Starscream had to wonder if she were also a bastard of the crown. He’d met and killed a few before.

“I was there when Vos burned.” She looks nauseous to willingly answer to Starscream. Yet, there was something else. A hesitation Starscream was greatly familiar with. “Maybe I wasn’t as devastated to see it go. Things weren’t exactly great for us. The Decepticons were supposed to change that, instead it made shareware out of our leader.”

"Hey!" Skywarp snarls but Starscream already had his trinemate by the shoulder, tugging him back.

“I have to thank you.” He says abruptly to the wrinkled looks of his trine and one irate seeker. “Because of you, I’ve decided to take this challenge seriously.” Starscream grants her a famous blade-thin smile and she physically snaps denta in his direction.

“Get slagged.” She pushes him back with her wing that feels warm to the touch, and Skywarp was quick to stand closer. Give her a reminder that she was being watched. “You know Lace isn’t aiming to incapacitate. He’s looking to maim.”

“Expect no less in return.”

“You’re an idiot.” Her certainty falters that Starscream feels confident that he’s at least unnerved her enough that her retreating form feels like a victory...despite TC and Skywarp’s equally tense presence at either side of him.

“How come she gets to call you an idiot, and we don’t?” Warp complains.

“Because I probably respect her more than you.” He answers and waits for the inevitable argument.
For his trine to demand more than he feels he can give. He couldn’t even bend for Megatron. “Wait.” They both look his way, a touch less confident than moments before. “I didn’t say anything to Umbra, why did they…”

Skywarp struggles against a smile, Thundercracker just stared at the ceiling. Entirely conspicuous.

“Why?” He demands, his wings pulling tight and expecting the worse which they sense immediately.

“For the love of...TC do something with this loser!” Skywarp pouts at his mate’s side while TC looks just as uncomfortable as Starscream feels.

“Do you feel bad for what you did?” TC asks, similar to how he asked when Starscream returned and struck him when he failed to answer. “Do you, Starscream, feel like a complete and absolute afthead for your actions?”


“Oh wait, how about this!” Skywarp bounces forward, pressed the tip of his blunt claw against Starscream’s brow. “If you feel sorry, don’t say anything.”

Starscream’s first instinct was to slap Skywarp’s servo away, berate him for his stupidity. His vocalizer stuttered and he caught the sound before it made its way out. Instead he suffered the quiet. Forced himself not to speak to show his trine. A look of relief blossomed over Skywarp’s face as they stood there, silently looking like idiots. A matching trio.

Action makes a point, that’s what his Primus-forsaken sire had claimed, when words failed. He’s watching his wingmates glance between one another, their wings relax as they seem settled. His silence confirming what he couldn’t say. Was it really going to be that easy?

“Do you know where the fight is going to be?” TC asks, arms crossed and looking a little flushed as he says nothing to accept or deny Starscream’ silent apology. “The base is too excited for it. Sunstorm took a tally, seems like a good middle split on what they hope happens.”

“The half rooting for me to fail will be disappointed.” Starscream shrugs Skywarp off with a gentle motion, but allows the other to remain close as their bond opens and configures itself with indescribable peace. Where he belonged, despite his own complaints. As an unfortunate side effect, his trine knows how much he hurts.

“You need to keep out of trouble until then.” Skywarp suggests, ducking to wrap his arm around Starscream’s torso, trying to guide him towards the seeker towers which sent a pause through their connection.

“You talk big but you haven’t dared showed your face? You can’t keep running.” TC chided and Starscream hates being spoken down to, but his wingmate was right. Gross. But he followed nonetheless after telling him to shut up.

It causes a stir in the tower. Seekers leaning from bunks or open walkways to stare as the elite trine returned with proud, timed steps. While Starscream felt it was like putting on an obnoxious parade: he absolutely loved it. The look of swallowed pride to the seekers, probably moments ago talking trash, shutting their traps to avoid his ire. Things were not fixed, but at least one corner of his world seemed to be stitching back together.

If he lives past this challenge, what to do about Megatron?
“So, what did you say to Umbra?” He asks hours later, laid out on his berth. Skywarp had taken up space across Starscream’s lap while Thundercracker remained close. Starscream usually disliked this physical affirmation of their bond. Cuddling. And rarely took part unless something had occurred - or he was too overcharged to return to his bunk on rare occasion. But now, just this night, Starscream wasn’t comfortable having his wingmates out of reach.

Though he would firmly deny liking either of them if asked.

They didn’t ask about Skyfire, they didn’t have to. It was enough for them to feel Starscream’s end of their connection to know what had occurred and neither asked permission to go searching for it. Perhaps a game of trust when he allowed them to find it, examine his memories in a quiet moment settled in his suite. Twin expressions of both understanding (and a shadow of judgement). But whether they could comprehend why Starscream did it didn’t matter. He just wanted them to know.

“It didn’t take much actually.” TC mused as Skywarp was able to reach and trace glyphs across his thigh. “The court seekers who take issue with any of us not up to their standards don’t often make a sound unless they can drag others to stand in front of your anger. So honestly we just picked the quietest of Moonlace’s new posse. Figured they’d be easiest to convince it wasn’t worth it.”

“Fair assumption.” Starscream felt a little stupid that he hadn’t thought it himself. He could have been spending time breaking apart this pathetic trine instead of wallowing in the navigation room waiting for Megatron to suddenly stop existing! (Or for his stubborn leader to fix this.)

“Two against one isn’t so bad.” Skywarp comments and Starscream has to flick him in the cheek.


“Says the one who didn’t trust us.” Skywarp whines across his lap, frowning more when Thundercracker slaps him in the hip in warning. Both sharing a look that causes Starscream’s suspicions to rise with comical speed. Dimming his optics in their direction while they both try to avoid his glare.

“What does that mean?”

“Nothing.” Thundercracker chirps at the same time as Skywarp’s: “Megatron said--”

Starscream suddenly wants to throw them both out of his room.

“What. Did. Megatron. Say?” Hisses long and low as claws grasp a fistful of Skywarp’s wing at the joint. Squeezing until his trinemate gave a sharp whimper loud enough that Thundercracker felt the need to grab Starscream’s wrist.

“Nothing bad! Nothing bad!” Skywarp cried and Starscream dug claws deeper until Warp was kicking his legs.

“He told us what you said!” Thundercracker began pushing at Starscream’s claws, trying to unhinge them from Skywarp’s frame. “That you didn’t think you deserve our support after what happened!”

Starscream stops squeezing on the delicate machinery, ignoring the sharp exclamation from his wingmate who cursed at him with a pitiful voice.

“He said that?” That’s not what he said at all. So what? Megatron lied - for him? Perhaps lie was too strong a thought. He certainly mislead. Shifted Starscream’s meaning into something more-gentle than Starscream’s true selfish worry. It should be endearing but Starscream felt his spark ache in
upset instead. “When?”

“We didn’t know you two were even talking. A few days ago he pulled us aside after meeting with you, honestly we didn’t know what to do since you were still avoiding us.” Thundercracker explained and looked briefly victorious when he peeling Starscream’s servo off Skywarp’s back. “So we tried to break apart the trine, thinking that would help you. Why you didn’t just come to us first…”

They must have felt his distress, both shuffling upwards to observe Starscream’s distant look.

“You’re stupid to believe him.” Starscream’s face burned with embarrassment, wanting nothing to do with anything Megatron had clearly tricked his trine into! “I told him to stay out of my--”

Thundercracker held Starscream’s face in his servo, pinning him with a serious look. One that didn’t suit his softer trinemate in the least.

“Stop talking.” He ordered and Skywarp popped in over TC’s shoulder. “You’re not alone.”

It’s fascinating to recall that after Skyfire’s “death” Starscream had been alone until stumbling across two idiots and keeping them for himself.

“Accept that you’re totally stuck with us, you dork.” Warp winked an optic and Starscream, despite it all, relaxed into TC’s insulting hold.

“Neither of you are getting a hug.” He snips, faceplate warmed to the point of no return and had to accept his trinemates could also feel the waves of affection he didn’t want them to see. Humiliating. Megatron should keep out of his business. It ruined everything before! But why had he felt the need to approach his trine? Did he think it would spark a reconciliation...which it had...but he wouldn’t give the other credit.

“We always know when you’re thinking about Megatron.” TC mused, settling back so they threw could face one another. Similar to their first years together. Crammed in some wrecked transport hiding from police forces, half starved in abandoned buildings of Kaon. Crime to crime, all to survive. “Your thoughts always feel warm and scrambled, like you’re yelling at nothing and couldn’t be happier to do so.”

“We’ve redrawn our boundaries. Second chances and all that.” His wingmates groaned. “Oh what?”

“I can’t do this again TC,” Skywarp complained, rolling over to slouch against his mate’s shoulder. Both were watching Starscream with matching expressions of disappointment - which he did not appreciate in the least. “If every four million years you two are going to realize you want it bad, then stumble back into hating each other, we quit.”

“I know it’s difficult, but don’t be stupid.” Starscream pushed Warp’s pedes away before they could dig under his legs.

“You first.” Thundercracker lamented, tucking one hand under Skywarp’s knee and in a short motion pulled his mate perfectly across his lap to the purple jet’s delight. He clung to TC’s shoulder, neither seemingly shy in Starscream’ presence. This was once “normal” behavior, but chaotic years had changed their interactions so deeply Starscream felt awkward at the show.

“You have something to say?” Sneers, contemplating the best means to evict his trine without having to lose their company.

“Just an observation? You know. As the ones who have been dealing with your aft for how many
years and know you waaaaaay too well.” Warp nods along, by far too distracted by his comfort to
interrupt Thundercracker’s prepared lecture. “You should apologize to Megatron.”

There was nothing in reach that was appropriate for bludgeoning his trinemes with, so Starscream
settled for a hiss.

“Get out.” He orders without moving to physically remove them. “I should have known you’d take
his side—"

“It’s not about picking sides.” Thundercracker waved him off, looking too serious even with Warp
sitting over him. “It’s about you and him finally realizing what you want from each other, and now
you BOTH seem unwilling to budge at the first hurdle.”

“This isn’t a hurdle, he lied to me and used me” Starscream defended and Thundercracker was
unaffected.

“And you left him to fly off with Skyfire, without any sign you’d be coming back.”

He left Thundercracker to the Autobot attack, even knowing Skywarp would be there in moments.
Starscream was uncertain when that would come up, if his trine was willing to forgive him because
they had no other choice. Or because Megatron made it seem Starscream regretted his decisions: He
didn’t. He only wished it had exposed Megatron for the wretched liar he was and undo this game his
leader was still playing.

Instead, of course, Megatron just made things worse by not admitting his cruelty. Instead he had the
gall to act as if Starscream had truly wounded him. “Then perhaps you can understand why I kept
Skyfire from you after all.”

Starscream had every right to storm into the command center and shoot him in the face for the
outrageous notion that he would EVER choose Skyfire over Megatron!

“You realize we can hear you, right?” Warp was giggling by the time Starscream cooled down
down enough to stare into their amused expressions. His anger all but steaming through their connection,
needing to borrow space in their conscious for his rant without realizing it. “By Primus that’s
adorable. And dumb. So dumb.”

“Shut up!” Snaps, looking again for something to beat his trine to death with and fading to an
exhaustion he wasn’t prepared to handle. Face heated and likely discolored in embarrassment as his
trine reached out to cradle his fragile ego with gentle pulses.

“You should stop whining at us, and tell him that.”

“I have.”

“Have you though?” Warp asked, rolling his optics when Starscream was silent in answer. “We’re
not saying throw yourself feeble before him and beg forgiveness, because he’s already forgiven you.
Mostly. Just that…What have you done to deserve it?”

“I’ll think about it.” Starscream catches him off guard with an earnest tone, frowning but knowing
when he can’t convince his trine out of something. They were as stubborn as he is! Good. It meant
they could survive him. So few could… “For now I want to focus on this duel and how I’m going to
embarrass those cretins for making a mockery of my station!”

“And he’s back to normal.” Warp sighed, pleasantly, but none present believed things had been truly
settled between them. Starscream knew there would be a debt to pay for their passive acceptance of
his stupidity.

Another thing to worry about after this challenge. After he decided how best to handle Megatron.

“Hey Screamer?” Voice soft, a dangerous sign for Warp and when Starscream looks up, they’re both staring at him with equally disturbing expressions of concern. He just waits to show he’s listening. “You don’t have to hug us, whatever, but can you answer something without getting mad?”

“I suppose.” He answers, hoping it’s something ridiculous. Like if Warp can have his rations. Or if they can recharge there for the night. He doubts he has the energy to keep up their conversation. Already it was leaving him feeling disturbed and exposed. Too many feelings under scrutiny. “What is it?”

Skywarp let his entire frame rest back against Thundercracker who likely knew exactly what his mate was about to question. Their bond like something Starscream had never seen, and in moments like these, felt envy over.

“What happens if you lose this fight?”

---

“Megatron.”

He knows he catches the warlord off guard, appearing from the quiet as stealthily as Soundwave on a good day, judging by the smallest increase of light behind optic glass. Megatron’s gaze checks Starscream’s servos and behind his wings, likely in search of a weapon. To appease his lord’s paranoia the seeker shows his servos and does a halfhearted turn, allowing Megatron to see him unarmed save for his ever-present weapons.

“I come in peace.” Teases swiftly. Not so long ago he held the full attention of this gladiator so carelessly in servo, having just a fraction of it now felt cheap and ruined.

“Starscream.” Megatron does not advance further down the darkened corridor just outside his habsuite. They had not spoken past five words in recent days, the week passing in rapid moments. They had managed to share the bridge in awkward silence, Starscream’s report quick and redirected to Soundwave’s attention while TC and Warp shifted disappointed in Starscream’s proximity. They had made no more progress than expected and Starscream wasn’t surprised. Megatron had scarcely taken notice of him and in return he granted Megatron the same lack of thought.

The challenge was tomorrow, the stage set. Only a few hours away as night had already befallen the wretched earth and Starscream had tried, oh how he had tried, to put this off. But his trine’s constant and persistant reminders of what could happen made it difficult to ignore the obvious.

“Your last meeting was over two hours ago.” He complained. “I’ve been waiting.”

“And?”

“We need to talk.” Megatron’s helm shifts just enough that Starscream can almost watch the suspicion growing.

“I don’t think that’s necessary. There’s nothing we need to discuss in privacy.” He mocks Starscream’s earlier words in a petty way, that leaves them standing awkwardly in the empty hall without distraction. “What could you possibly want?”

“It’s about the duel.” Starscream answers quickly.
“A duel is between two. Not four.”

“Three.” Starscream corrects. “One of my challengers dropped out due to my trine’s intervention. I’ll be fighting against two tomorrow.”

Tomorrow. The day every Decepticon on board wants a day off - bothering Soundwave with pathetic requests and begging to know where the battle would take place. Starscream knew Megatron would have the information by now, where Starscream had decided to hold such an event. Not in the safety of open space: but somewhere more intimate. When he had selected the field, Starscream had felt confident and cruel. Vindictive. Now he only feels tired.

“Shouldn’t you be preparing then?”

“This isn’t about us,” Starscream explains with a strained voice against Megatron’s decision to remain dumb. “This is about if I die tomorrow.” Starscream does not expect his lord’s reaction to be so...appalled. As if Starscream had just uttered a curse so foul he couldn’t fathom the words.

“I never knew you to be so pessimistic outside of picking apart my strategy.”

“Well. Tomorrow might not go in my favor.” He states. “I thought it best we review how you handle things.”

“Me?” Megatron scoffs, Starscream recalls how almost fond that noise had become. Learning that he indeed could challenge his leader without it resulting to hysterics and fights. He’d made that noble and scarred face frown, and almost smile. Almost. “You’re the one who wouldn’t permit me to deny this event.” Megatron reminds with a bitterness ill-suited for this conversation. Too protective for where they stood with one another.

“There’s no dissuading it. I’m here to ensure you don’t interrupt it.”

“Who said I would be present to do such a thing?” His curt response stopped the seeker in his tracks, carefully knitting guise of calm beginning to pull.

“You’re not coming?”

“Should I?” Childish.

“I don’t care!” Starscream puffs his chest as embarrassment rose in heat across his features. Why was he doing this? Why was he bothering?! “Waste of my time!” Growls as he goes to leave, but Megatron’s hand stops him. Falling in his path that he skids light on thrusters to stop before coming into contact with a black servo that had once been a thing of terror. Now Starscream is plagued by memory of the warmth.

“What of tomorrow?” Megatron asks, exuding exasperated patience. Their gaze meets and each seem to try to recall how they held a conversation before? It was something they could do, once.

"With everything that’s happened recently my victory or potential failure with have a resounding influence on your aerial force as a whole. This has to happen.”

“Meaning?”

A corridor was not the place to have this conversation, private as it was so near Megatron’s suite. But the only option would be to invite himself to Megatron’s room and that was not happening.

“Do you know the first time I saw you in the gladiator pit?” Megatron frowned, clearly uncertain on
the change of subject. “It was before Soundwave sought to recruit aerial-builds. We’d been in Kaon for a short time, laying low after a recent smuggling job through Praxus…I honestly didn’t care much for the fights. Brute headed mechs smashing into one another, destroying themselves for a little bit of credits? I found it morbid, but Skywarp had never seen one before. So we went.” He lies about his initial disinterest and wonders if Megatron can tell?

“You were fighting alongside another mech who was half dead by the time we arrived. It was horrendous, fuel painted across the colosseum like some fine display. The pulsating crowd demanding more. And there you were.” Starscream waves a servo as though to display a memory. “It was you against a behemoth, slowed down by your failing teammate and I recall telling Skywarp you should just kill the mech. Stop letting him drag you down - and no sooner had I made that remark your opponent swung to end your partner’s life.”

“I remember this fight.” Megatron finally comments, optics thinning. “That was long before we ever met…” Starscream just smiles in return.

“You purposefully caught the weapon in your chassis, let it sink all the way down until the wet blade was dripping behind you. Skewered yourself on the enemy’s weapon to protect your teammate...then you surged forward while your opponent was stunned by your action....” He dares a step, one singular movement which brings him back to Megatron’s shadow. The light heat of ventilated air rushing quiet from his leader’s frame. Claws hover over a section of Megatron’s torso, remembering the horror to watch this stupid gladiator, who had fought so beautifully, be taken down so recklessly.

“With one servo, you popped his helm with a crunch that echoed throughout the colosseum. I’ve never heard such ecstatic screaming before. *Til all are one* your fans chanted.” Starscream withdrew his servo and watching Megatron’s own twitch. “Thundercracker purged his tanks on the bleachers while Skywarp couldn’t stop cheering. We never missed a fight after that...so when Soundwave approached us to join you we didn’t hesitate.”

“You believed at the time you would be fighting by my side in the ring.” Megatron noted, soft, but never fragile. His indestructible lord, a pity it had to be this way. “What is the point of your story?”

“If someone had saved you, shot your opponent from the sidelines, your victory would have been hollow.” Starscream explains, wondering if he should remove himself from Megatron’s reach and deciding against it. “All those fans wouldn’t be your soldiers. You would have been seen as some weakling who needs saving.”

“I think I understand.” Megatron is watching some part of him, but not his face. Through him? Who could say? “While I despise these elaborate quarrels I will respect your nature. Win or lose.”

“Lose? Oh absolutely not!” Starscream snarls wicked and loud. “If I actually die you shoot that fragged piece of outdated hardware dead where he stands!”

Megatron makes a sound like he’s choking on his surprise.

“You JUST said…”

“I know what I said. Don’t interrupt the fight, but if he kills me you better not let him live!” Snaps like offended and the grin creeps without meaning to across his features. Megatron sneers, but there’s just enough to give away that it’s not entirely out of annoyance as he sweeps his focus away. Shaking his helm is disbelief. “When I win I can return order to these greedy monsters. But If I lose, I'm dead, so I don't really care what happens.”

“I will never understand you.” He rumbles, posture still tense, but he regards Starscream with a long
look. Trying to find something that’s probably not there.

“Unfortunately for you, that’s not true in the least.” Offers, trying to remember that they aren’t supposed to attack each other anymore. They’re supposed to be this, lord and subject. Commander and Second. He should be able to speak plainly to Megatron, and in return the other should be capable of doing the same.

They were terrible at it.

“I suppose that’s all I wished to discuss with you.” Starscream gives a sighed, as if it were Megatron holding him. “If there’s nothing else, I should get going. Busy day tomorrow.”

He doesn’t even get a step before he’s stopped. “There is one thing.” Ruining their successful attempt at conversation. The best Starscream can do is pretend, lie, trick, deceive for the both of them. He twists features into annoyance as he tilts his gaze back towards his leader, ready to complain about any further hold up.

What he does not expect to see when he turns is Megatron watching him like it physically pained him to do so.

"Tell me about Skyfire."

Chapter End Notes

Come yell at me for not updating in forever on Tumblr: seekingjets, Twitter: seekingjets

Good news. We're almost done folks.
Bad news. We're almost done folks.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!