Pack Mentality

by Deathcomes4u

Summary

Prowl is born into slavery, and worse still, turned into the lowest form of slave at a young age. He knows nothing outside his role as a Wolf-Mech, a pet and plaything for the rich and affluent, until a visiting Ambassador decides he and his pack should have better. Finding a way to free them from the iron servo of control their master Thunderwing holds over them is another matter altogether. Overcoming the only way of life you've known is no walk in the park either.

(p.s. please don't dismiss this out of hand, this is not the typical 'bots turned into wolves' trope. I promise it has merit.)

Notes

The plot bunny for this came up and bit me out of nowhere in September of last year (I blame Laura not being online), and I just HAD to start it. In fact, I MUST credit where it's due, the initial bunny was a direct result of reading GATEKAT's 'Trials of an Ambassador'. It's on FF. net, so go look for it!

Prowl as a Mechalycan however, is something I have been RPing for quite some time with Laura. Turning my favourite characters into werewolves is a recurring trait of mine XD Thunderwing was a character carefully chosen after a bit of scrounging though TFwiki. He is canon, but he's an oldie from the marvel days. The closest thing to him in recent TF history is...
TFP Dreadwing, whom they gave his colourscheme and a bit of history to.

So the main instigating factor for this story was my desire to reverse the little trope of Noble!Prowl who falls in love with Slave!Jazz. I Wanted slave Prowl and Noble Jazz, but of course Prowl is never going to be a normal slave, and Jazz isn't really Towers material, so they aren't a standard switch.

And a quick explanation of Mechalyancy as I've developed it.

Lycan nanites change the base code in the mech, making all the nanites the bot then produces just like the infected ones, until eventually it alters the construct of the mech's frame and systems. New code is brought in and threaded into the processor from within.

With the influence of magnetic fields created by the alignment of Cybertron's two moons with the planet, the Mechalyancy is triggered, causing transformation into a huge, wolf alt mode with a lust for energon straight from another bot's systems. Processed, circulating energon is much richer in all kinds of alloy and mineral particles, hence it's appeal to the Mechalycan's instincts.

As Wolf-HOUND mechs, the Mechalycan coding has been altered after it has settled, with suppressors and obedience codes. Slavery programming really. Only very few, very skilled mechs can alter the Lycan coding to create these Obedient, sentient wolf-mechs. They are simply another class of slave, low on the pecking order, like working dogs that double as pets of a sort.

They are not considered real people with any rights, despite the fact they are easily as intelligent and have the same emotional subroutines as any Cybertronian.

Now, don't go thinking this means I won't be updating my other stories, I AM still working on those, but progress is slow cause of recurring Writers block. I have every intention of finishing them, even if I have to force myself.

This story is not planned as a particularly long one. 6 Chapters at most i'm thinking, and probably none of them reaching my usual 10,000 word standard. It's more of a size comparable to Legacy or Seekerbee.

SO, here is a teaser Prologue. It's tiny at only 990 words, but it should give you a taste of what you're in for.
Chapter 1

Prowl had trouble remembering what it was like when he was normal.

His sparkling-hood had never been normal to begin with.

He had been sparked into slavery, and taken from his parents without them being able to do a thing.

At far too young an age, he'd had mature downloads and a battle computer installed. Learning to live with these at such an early stage in his development had been confusing and stressful. On top of this, his carers (and the term is used loosely) were unyielding to the fact he was young and emotionally undeveloped. They expected him to know his place and act like an adult.

Never mind that he and the other younglings had no idea how to do this, but they learnt, and learnt fast.

The only small mercy had been that he was raised among other sparklings given much the same treatment.

They had banded together, and that was the first Prowl knew of pack mentality. Stick together, get behind a strong leader and support each other, fill in the emotional gaps left bare by the caretakers.

The oldest sparklings were generally the leaders, but they would be taken away one by one, and eventually Prowl became the leader. He ended up that way for quite some time from what he could remember, and his leadership became his nature.

And then they had taken him too. Taken him to be infected.

From then on in, for about two or three vorns, his memories were mostly a haze of pain.

By the end of it, he was in his second frame.

He DID have an absolutely crystal clear memory of when they had him bitten.

It had been ludicrously sterile and efficient.

Hold the sparkling in restraints exposing the shoulder.

Force the viced jaws of the Mechalycan to penetrate the flimsy sparkling armour and break an energon line. Give the vice controlled jaws a few nano's sunk into the shoulder before winching open the vice and taking the Lycan away.

Lock the sparkling up to let the infected nanites spread and take over it's young frame.

Even once the infection had settled and Prowl was changed, right down to the fundamental base coding, that was not the end of his torture.

After he survived (and apparently, there was a 70 percent fatality rate in infected younglings, but he didn't find that out until much later), he was then subjected to the temperance process.

This involved the hacking of his code, changing of the Mechalycancy to exclude the deadliest, least controlled aspects.

It was the first step in crafting him into the perfect loyal, obedient, efficient wolf-hound mech that the
nobility had become so very fond of owning.

After his infection and reprogramming, he was turned out with other surviving wolf-hound mechs to train in hunting and obedience.

Only after they had broken him and reshaped him into a prime example of his kind did they upgrade him into his third frame, allow it to be adjusted by his infection and coding, and put him up for sale.

The first mech to buy him was a second level noble named Quickgrip.

He was old and firm, but overall not as bad as some of the trainers Prowl had endured in the facilities.

Quickgrip honed him into life in the station of a lowly hunter.

Once he had a good feel for the requirements of his station and developed a temperament agreeable to his owner, he was upgraded into his final frame, and then bred with the alpha Mech-wolf, Sundance.

Prowl liked Sundance with an intensity he couldn't describe.

He hadn't a clue about the concept of 'love', and so didn't recognise it for what it was, but he was more than happy to bear his first litter to his alpha.

He was content to raise his pups, born as were-mechs because both their parents were infecteds.

After the pup's first frame upgrade, Prowl's content world collapsed around him.

Quickgrip needed credits rather badly. His estate was losing value with the decline in his primary investment- Tin mining.

Tin became cheaper and more readily available shipped from a new trade-partner planet.

To hold his position while he found a new asset to float his estate, Quickgrip sold all his salubrious possessions. This included his prized mech-wolf pack.

Quickgrip was more credit-shrewd than he was compassionate, and had no qualms whatsoever about separating his pack members to whoever would pay the highest for each specimen.

At the very least, he had to sell Prowl with his pups, but Sundance went to another estate in Simfur.

Prowl and his first offspring were bought by a very wealthy, very powerful upper class noble in Crystal city.

His name was Thunderwing, and Prowl's immediate impression was that his designation should be changed to Thunder-vocoder, since he seemed to like booming out his orders.

Lord Thunderwing was of high standing, with a military background and a lot of wealth.

His estate was large, but not large enough for his liking. Prowl also deduced that it would likely never be large enough for Thunderwing's liking. The arrogant noble would have taken all of Cybertron's lands as his if he were given the chance.

Thankfully, he was not. But the land he did own, and everything and everyone on it, was under the iron fist of his rule.
Prowl lived a hard life there, and was shaped into an absolutely exquisite example of his breed by Noble's standards.

This was because of Thunderwing's training methods. He did not threaten harm to Prowl if he should not obey or perform perfectly… he threatened his pups.

And Prowl did anything and everything to keep them from harm.

Prowl never complained. He wasn't ever under the impression he could, really. This was his lot in life. His place in society.

He was an alpha, and his duty to his pack was all that really mattered to him.
Chapter Notes

OK, so our actual story starts.

As a piece of writing, I can't say this is great, but hopefully you'll get the idea of the atmosphere and shit. I feel like I'm over-using words a lot, but there's not many variants so it can't entirely be helped. My weirdly placed capitalisation is just plain derp, because I tend to write somewhat organically, which is bad of me *gives self smack on wrist*

Also, In terms of the time measurements I'm using, I'm shit with maths so they're really rough OK?

nanoklik- half a second
astrosecond- one and a half seconds
klik- roughly a minute
breem- 8 kliks
cycle- roughly an hour
orn- A day cycle
joor- 8 orns
decacycle- 4 joors
and so far the rest is irrelevant so whatever.

ALSO:

/blah/ - is comm. speak
~blah~ - is bond speak
Italics - thought

Hope you enjoy despite my multitude of lazy writer shortcomings XD

"Remind me why ah'm doin' this again? Ah can't stand this mech. I mean, you Crystal City nobles are a pain in the aft for even one cycle, let alone a whole decacycle. And don't get me started on the issues with negotiatin' anything' with you lot"

"Oh, mute it before I set Hound on you Jazz." Mirage drawled with wry amusement and a lazy, sultry look at his company. "And don't think you're going to sweet talk me into showing you why you put up with Crystal City nobles right now. You know damn well I hate this mech as much as you do, but he's no reason to go slandering the rest of us perfectly respectable examples of the breed."
Jazz laughed and kicked back with a bored sigh on the plush bench of the transport unit.

"Hound wouldn't hurt a fly, let alone me. What's he gonna do, lick me to death? Tamest wolf-mech ah've ever met." He scratched the happily panting wolf-mode mech on the head, earning a happy rumble from him.

Mirage made a light noise of amusement. "He's one of the ONLY wolf-mechs you've met Jazz, and the rest are mine too. I've heard about and seen Thunderwing's pack for myself. They're unmatched in their class, champion Cyberwolf and Crankbear hunters. They are nothing like as lazy or disobedient as my lot."

At his masters words, Hound looked up with a slightly hurt wine and wide, bright blue optics.

Mirage rolled his optics and leant over to scratch his pack Alpha behind the ears, earning instant affection.

"Alright, so you aren't all that disobedient, but you ARE all lazy compared to Thunderwing's lot. Don't you go near them too soon Hound, they're honed weapons the lot of them. I don't want Thunderwing to have them attack you for his own amusement on sight."

The transport pulled up slowly to the gate of the brutish Noble's estate, sending an ID code to authorise entry. When the gate finally opened for them, the Transport swept through and smoothly up the long, winding path.

Jazz looked out the window at the rugged grounds within the high, re-enforced walls. It was more a fortress than a family mansion, and quite different to anything but the military bases in Iacon.

Actually it was nastily like the military bases, and the moment Jazz was inside the walls, he itched to get out again.

Mirage stayed his frazzled temperament with a cool, steady servo on his shoulder.

"It's only negotiations and an accommodating façade. Think of it as a chance to get in some role-play practice time. I know you like the whole 'be some mech you aren't and fool bots' thing. You can play this game in the name of better military co-operation between the city states, no problem."

The Blue visored ambassador nodded with a soft ex-vent.

"Still hate this place. Hate this mech. Wanna leave as soon as possible."

Mirage hummed in sympathy and soothingly rubbed his back as the transport pulled up finally at the front of the estate mansion.

It was a huge, stark and imposing building. All sharp, sloping angles with flourishes of black crystal carved to look like support pillars all the way along each level. The only really interesting and palatial feature were the ornately crystal set and creatively shaped windows spread uniformly between the shining black, slanted obsidian columns.

Waiting for them at the head of the stairs and looking as arrogant and imperious as ever, was Lord Thunderwing.

The Noble's bright Blue and Yellow paintjob stood out starkly against his mansion. It's handsomeness didn't suit his nature, but it's flashiness did. The excessive gold detailed badges on his arms and wing panels were also rather tacky, but unfortunately they were well earned.
Thunderwing was a ruthless air commander and a cunning strategist. He was not a mech to underestimate, or to piss off.

Jazz knew he'd be spending most of his time trying not to deliberately do the latter.

It was ridiculously easy to insult this lord. Unfortunately, that would be counter productive, and loyalty to Iacon and his Prime came first.

"Greetings, Ambassador Jazz and Lord Mirage! I trust your trip was agreeable?"

Thunderwing made rather overdone gestures of greeting as the two nobles ascended the front stairs to exchange formal introduction and accept his welcome.

Jazz used a considerable amount of control to not one-up the showy flier Lord with even more flamboyant hand gestures, and kept it to a simple servo across his chassis, inclination of the helm and slight bow. The classic international greeting. Mirage performed a gesture more Crystal City oriented, and let his gaze divert to the Wolf-Hound mechs lined up impeccably and standing at perfect attention in their quad alt modes.

The pack of 6 stared directly ahead, not twitching a single cable or even audial fin.

Thunderwing's training was even more rigid than he'd thought.

They stood three a side, lining the path on the balcony that lead inside.

"Come, let us dine together, and you can tell me of your recent exploits over evening fuel. I hope you don't mind, but I haven't received the special order energon I sent for an orn ago for your stay, so everything is jet orientated. You don't mind do you? It might give you quite the buzz. So hard to get decent couriers these days." Thunderwing rumbled flippantly as he led the way, the two visiting Nobles following with a shared glance of distaste, the wolf-mech pack filing in to bring up the rear.

Hound made sure to keep very close to his masters side. He hadn't missed the disdainful glance or derisive sneer from Lord Thunderwing in his direction. He also noticed the look of pure, innocent interest in him from what was obviously the youngest of the resident pack. He didn't dare give more than a curious glance back, noticing the Alpha flanking him on the left.

While he too was an Alpha, he was not on his own territory, and so must automatically yield to the other when appropriate.

In the company of his master, Thunderwing’s Alpha would do nothing. On his own however, he would be treated however the Alpha deemed he should be, and he would have to fall in line.

To be fair though, Hound didn't assume the worst of the other wolf-mech. Despite the rigid stance and doubtless ordered flanking for intimidation, he didn't see any real malice in the other's optics. Not that they were easy to read.

The Alpha didn't even look at him in fact.

/I've never seen another one of us like him! He looks… why does he move so… swingy?/

/His master is lenient. I used to walk like that. It's how you walk when you're not paying attention to keeping your conformation./ Inferno replied to Bumblebee's excited pack frequency comm.

Being the second eldest of the pack (Trailbreaker was the oldest), he'd had two previous owners to
Thunderwing, and neither had been nearly as strict.

Behind him, Trailbreaker made a sub-sonic rumble of agreement.

/Mind you don't lose your concentration Bumblebee. Thunderwing won't tolerate us at anything than our best with guests./

Bumblebee chirped his understanding over the line and continued with his rigid and uniform posture as they flanked and followed the visitors per their master's orders.

Underneath the warning was the unspoken understanding that Bumblebee never wanted to do anything to cause Prowl harm.

Their Alpha was silent, trusting his pack to be on their best behaviour despite the excitement. After all, he was the one to receive punishment if any of them slipped up. It was a harsh, but effective means of control.

To be fair, what they were doing right now was far from difficult. Slipping up in basic formation would be shameful in front of another Alpha, even one as easygoing as the Green and gunmetal specimen Prowl was following.

His two progeny behind him were behaving themselves well, but he could feel them being exceptionally judgemental of Lord Mirage's Alpha through their creator/creation bond.

They had always been rowdier and cheekier than him. It was Sundance's influence.

Prowl sighed almost imperceptibly. He still missed Sundance, but he'd learnt to accept that he had to move on.

He would not always be able to stay with the ones he cared about, that was how the world worked for his kind.

He cared, and he showed his affection, but he had to be prepared to be separated.

Not that Thunderwing would get rid of him or any of his pack any time soon. They were too good. Too effective a team. Too valuable.

Prowl made sure to keep them that way, because so long as they were an effective pack, they would be kept together.

His greatest joy was being able to remain with his pups. He didn't like thinking about life without them.

The other three members of his pack may as well have been family too, and he knew it in the depths of his spark.

Inferno and Trailbreaker were his secret rocks of stability, and Bumblebee was an absolute joy after what Thunderwing had done with his…

But the master had done what was his right to do.

A part of Prowl's spark, deep down, knew he had absolutely NO right to do it, but again… this was his lot in life, he was fit for nothing else, so he would make the best of it, and they were ALL grateful for Bumblebee.

However, the young mech was still in his third frame, and even HE had not been perfect at that age.
He had been lucky to have Quickgrip, understanding of the exuberance and instincts a young wolf-mech had to deal with.

Thunderwing didn't care. You either did what you were told, or you were disciplined.

Prowl fought a shiver.

Even when they did nothing wrong, Thunderwing felt the need to assert himself over his Alpha. Part of his programming accepted this.

Another part of him… the more mech part, could not condone it. But for the sake of his pack, he would do anything, so he complied, and he did not complain or resist.

/Hey, carrier?/

/Yes Sideswipe?/

/Why does the ambassador keep looking at you?/

Prowl, at his red son's question, shifted his optics from their unfocused gaze ahead, up to meet the visor that turned to look at him.

He held the mech's gaze unflinchingly, and the noble did not look away, looking amusingly like a petrodeer caught in headlights.

Eventually, the white and black mech looked away, and Prowl used the opportunity to look the bot up and down without turning his helm.

/Curiosity I think. If I heard right, he is from Iacon. They do not keep our kind there./

/He's kind of attractive/ Sunstreaker made a slight gust of air to note his appreciation.

/Ha, looking a bit above your station there aren't you bro?/

/I'm the one other nobles keep offering millions of credits to buy, loser/

/Both of you concentrate. He will not be buying anyone if he is from Iacon. Lord Mirage is more likely to try that, but our training, as far as I can tell, is not to his liking, so focus on your job./

Both of the twins made apologetic chirps of assent to their carrier.

The internal dialogue from the rest of the pack did not at all affect their outward appearance or movements, even though Prowl was aware of Inferno and Trailbreaker having a joking conversation about which of them was a better candidate for getting sparked by the visiting Alpha at Lord Mirage's side.

Prowl had no problem with their desire to be covered by another Alpha. He knew though, and was aware they also knew, that any pups they had would simply be sold by Thunderwing.

He already knew that kind of pain.

He didn't want to let any others of his pack go through that. He wasn't so worried though… if anyone was to be sparked, it was him.

And even then, given the shown temperament and lazy gait of the other wolf-mech, it was unlikely Thunderwing would think him good enough to be a sparker.
He may end up having Prowl spark Mirage's Alpha.

Prowl had no real qualms about this. It would not be the first litter he'd sired. And given how… content the mech-wolf seemed, he felt that any pups would be well housed.

The question then really, was whether Lord Mirage would be willing to pay the price for Prowl's good spark-constitution to be bred into his pack.

As they reached the dining hall, the pack moved to settle in formation, sitting rigid behind Thunderwing's seat at the head of the table, unflinching and paying no attention to the servants that flitted in and out, offering the visitors their chairs, bringing out trays of decadent energon jellies and petit cubes and confections.

They did not get any such fuel. Nor would they get fuel for another cycle or so until they were excused by their master. Until then, they had to sit in formation at perfect attention.

This would not be expected of any of the servants. If servants weren't doing their duties, they moved out of sight to do whatever they needed to.

Unfortunately for Prowl, he had to keep his two progeny in check, AND Bumblebee, who had the most trouble remaining in formation for long periods.

Appearance and control were everything to Thunderwing. Any break in their orders was a slight on his Master's perfectly manicured façade, and Thunderwing did not tolerate this.

Prowl did not blame Bumblebee for the punishments he caused him to endure. Bumblebee couldn't help himself.

It was Master's problem, really, and Prowl did his duty and sucked it up.

He could cope, but only because he had Inferno and Trailbreaker to help.

As they sat and the dinner proceeded well into the evening, Prowl became aware that the Iaconian ambassador was staring at him again.

He tuned into the conversation, admitting to himself that he was as curious about the newcomers as they seemed to be of him.

"So, how exactly did you acquire your hunting pack?"

Jazz asked amicably, noting that his question had the desired effect.

Thunderwing swelled with arrogant pride, glancing around at his perfectly ordered wolf-mechs.

"Ah, yes, you don't really follow the hunting culture up in the lofty levels of Iacon, hmmm? Such a shame you do not have the sweeping wilderness to roam or train wolf-mechs in. My pack is servo picked. I bought only the best and finest. Cybertronian wide champions in their class. I dare any Noble to claim they have a better Hunting party than mine. Of course, much of their success is down to exceptional training. It's all in the discipline. A well disciplined Alpha makes for an ordered pack. Of course… they have their flaws. The exuberance of youth sometimes clouds the pup's processor, but he is the finest tracker around. And a fast learner. He was ONCE similar to your specimen there…"

The winged Lord gave an imperious, sneering smile and gesture to Hound, who sat beside Mirage's chair, accepting little confections being snuck to him.
He pricked his audials, poking his optics just above the table level before sinking back in a slightly wary, submissive move.

Mirage petted his wolf-mech's head and turned a cool, gracious expression on the Lord whom he couldn't stand.

"Ah, well, I'm not quite as competitive with my pack. They are companion pets rather than working bots, they enjoy the recreational hunts much the way I do. In competition, I prefer to pit my own training against others, rather than channel it into hounds."

He smiled beatifically, noting with internal amusement how Thunderwing picked up on the very veiled slight.

Thunderwing's smile became tight, and he turned his attention back to Jazz.

"Ambassador Jazz, do you indulge in any competitive ventures yourself?"

"Well, let me see… I do enjoy a good race when ah can, but it's difficult to find the time with my work. My main interest lies in music. Playing, listening, composing… Ah guess you could say I have battles on the stage sometimes, but those are more collaborations than true competitions. It's all in fun."

"Ah, well, to each his own. Have you ever witnessed a high hunt? It is a most exhilarating sport."

Thunderwing fairly crooned, and Prowl could tell there was energon-lust in his tone.

It rather disgusted him, but he made no motion to indicate so.

"Well, ah can't say I'm much for the huntin' and killin' of non-sentient ani-bots for sport, but to each his own, as you say. Ah understand the appeal of the hunt, and the working with a team to achieve a goal. Soooo, your hounds got names?" Jazz tilted his helm with a disarming smile.

There was a reason he was an ambassador. Despite his thick accent, he was a very cunning conversationalist, and a master of manipulating words to drive a mood.

At the same time, he could surreptitiously indulge in his own curiosities.

When he looked at the Alpha wolf-mech again, he was met with the piercing stare he'd encountered in the hall.

Jazz recognised intelligence when he saw it. Even in animal form (and he knew they had bipedal mech forms, but according to Mirage, it was impolite to allow wolf-mechs to be seen in anything but quad forms when company was around.), it was clear to Jazz that he was not looking at some drone, as their posture and movements might suggest.

Thunderwing called his Alpha forward with a gesture, and rather unconventionally motioned him to stand on the table.

Prowl did not hesitate, and when he vaulted up onto the surface, his paws did not touch or disturb a single plate as he stood in display conformation… the perfect example of his breed.

Thunderwing stood, grinning wide and looking rather lethal himself. He spread his arms to emphasise the huge wolf's size… despite the fact Inferno and Trailbreaker were both bigger.

He clapped Prowl on the back, the wolf-mech unflinching, back unyielding to the firm hits.
His plating tingled unpleasantly where his master settled his servo on his back.

"This here is Prowl. Finest, most obedient, loyal, intelligent wolf-hound you'll ever meet. Got a real killer instinct this one. Knew it the first time I looked him in the optic when old Quickgrip was selling everything off like a street merchant. Snapped him and his litter up for a pittance, best bargain I've ever gotten! Those two over there…"

He gestured behind him vaguely to the right, where Sunstreaker and Sideswipe sat rigidly, the only change in their posture being a raising of their hackles.

"They're his first. Sunstreaker, that fine gold specimen, and Sideswipe, as clever a hunter as his carrier here. Sideswipe is fast too, once won a petrorabbit bagging contest with just him, 36 in one cycle! Absolutely unmatched. Over there, we have Inferno, the big red one, and Trailbreaker, the black. They're my heavies. Those two can take down the biggest, meanest Crankbears and Cyberwolves you can find, and they barely have to snap their jaws. And the little yellow one there, that's Bumblebee. Got him to replace old Armourhide when a Crankbear crushed his spark case. Nasty accident that. He's not in his final upgrade yet, but so far he's proving an exceptional scout. Got the best olfactory unit on him that I've ever come across… second only to your Alpha there. I've heard all about what he can do tracking. They would certainly make a good pairing once Bumblebee is in his final frame."

Mirage looked appraisingly over at the young wolf-mech, who seemed to shift imperceptibly under his gaze, uncomfortable but fighting the urge to show it.

"I would love to see him in action. Do you not think our Alphas would make a better match though? Any pups from that littler would have an exceptional mix of traits. Plus, they are both of age. A covering could be done while we are here."

Thunderwing gave him an oily kind of smile.

"Ah, quite true. Although, we'd have to hope they only acquired Hound's tracking skills, rather than his temperament."

Mirage raised his orbital ridges and his expression became a little colder, voice loftier.

"Oh? What fault do you see in Hound's temperament?"

Thunderwing sneered slightly.

"Well, he is not the most disciplined of Wolf-mechs. I would not go as far as to imply that is your fault, by any means, but if it is not a training fault, then it is a temperament trait."

Mirage gave a titter and a piercing gaze towards the Lord.

"I can assure you, he has no temperament fault. My training methods differ to yours. If Hound were to be sparked, the pups training would not be your problem anyway."

"True, but it would reflect on my Alpha's flawless breeding record. However, I do not truly believe the union would produce bad offspring. If you have the credits you are willing to part with for it, then you may have Prowl cover your Alpha."

"We can negotiate such matters later, I'm sure, but thank you. I think Hound would enjoy carrying again, especially to such a strong specimen. It would be best to allow them to mingle a little and become accustomed to one another before breeding, in any case."

the Towers mech said, calm voice not belying how wary he was of Thunderwing and what he might let his pack do to Hound if he left
him alone with them.

"So, do they talk or anything'? I know it's not polite to guests to allow 'em to change to bipedal mode in our presence, but ahm jus' curious." Jazz's tone was genuine in his question, his gaze not leaving Prowl, the wolf-mech holding his optics the whole time.

It wasn't so much defiance as an acknowledgement of his intense scrutiny.

Prowl was also trying to read Jazz's expression. It was hard with that visor. He knew very few mechs who wore them. It was not the fashion among most Lords or Nobles. At least, none of the ones Thunderwing mingled with.

"Oh, they have voices, and they CAN talk to a degree, but it is not encouraged. It's useful for them to tell me directly what they see or do, or show understanding of a command. Beyond this, I do not allow them to voice opinions, or make statements or arguments. Such behaviour is above their station, and unnecessary in their role. They speak among themselves, but not very much. Really, as smart as they are, they do not have much to say. It's all in the body language."

The lord flexed his wings, making a gesture which Prowl read, breaking optic contact with Jazz as he leapt lightly and nimbly from the table, still not disturbing a single plate on it's surface.

A few more gestures from Thunderwing that looked like no more than ordinary movements, and the other Wolf-mechs got to their pedes and began to trot out of the hall in an orderly fashion. Prowl stayed by Thunderwing's side.

The Lord gave his guests an indulgent smirk. "They are tuned into my every movement, and read the subtle signs that tell them what I want them to do. To have to use words would make them an inefficient and inattentive team. However, I think it's time we retire for some high grade. Lord Mirage, would you care to allow Prowl here to show your Alpha to his temporary lodgings in the pack housing area?"

Mirage gave him a slightly wary look, a servo resting on Hound's head, the wolf-mech unmoving, but glancing over at the other Alpha unsurely.

"Do not worry, Prowl is a civilised wolf, he will take good care of his guest, as will the rest of his pack. You needn't fear for his safety. There is NO infighting among my charges."

Thunderwing rumbled placatingly, with an edge that suggested refusal or argument would be a severe insult to him.

Mirage gave in with a nod to Hound, the Wolf-mech tapping his nose against his master's hip before moving to Prowl's side.

Prowl glanced at his new charge before taking his cue from his master and leading the way out at a brisk trot.

"Now, if you'll follow me, gentlemechs. I have chosen some fine vintages for our enjoyment, and there are magnesium cygars if you'd care for one."

Thunderwing swept towards a large set of doors that were opened by a pair of unseen servants. Mirage and Jazz rose to follow, Jazz glancing back at the retreating Alpha Wolves.

It seemed Prowl sensed his optics somehow, and stopped, pausing to look around, catching his gaze with what Jazz could only describe as... a look of curiosity to match his own.
Hound stopped beside the other Alpha and glanced between them, but in three astroseconds, the moment was over, and Prowl carried on as if he had never stopped.

Jazz decided he wanted to know a whole lot more about that pack. He knew a sub-culture when he saw one. And it had him burning to learn all he could about it.

And about those curiously intelligent optics.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Warning for explicit sticky smut in this chapter

I must make a note. Sorry if random words near the end are missing R's or N's. My Laptop's keyboard is currently dying. The R key is the worst. It's not making writing any easier (actually its really slowing me the fuck down) so I apolgise for that too. I have a new keyboard, I just have to learn how to fit it.

Also, many thanks and a fair bit of credit goes to ~Zomgitsalaura, since she RP'd basically the whole storyline of this with me, and I've ended up using her characterisation and background canon for Jazz.

Anyway, hope you enjoy.

~Death Out.

Hound was silent and kept up with the other Alpha at a respectable distance.

The silence grew longer and more unnerving as they entered a service passage and travelled down into the lower levels of the mansion through hallways barely big enough for them.

In these tight spaces however, Hound noted that Prowl lost his rigid posture and moved with a much more fluid, graceful gait.

Naturally, travelling behind the other wolf-mech, he filled his olfactory unit with his smell so that he could catalogue the scent identity. As well as this, because of his enhanced olfactory capabilities, he could tell much more. How ready to mate the other was, how healthy they were, what minerals they required supplements of, if they required fresh joint oiling, how long ago they were cleaned, etc…

He was impressed by the fact Prowl was impeccably maintained. Well lubricated, trace element levels all optimum, armour spotless and gleaming, and ready to mate at any time the fancy so took him, or the order was given. If only his nose could read the bot's personality levels… so far he had very little to go on, and it made him a little nervous.

Just when he was beginning to think they must live in the deepest, darkest bowels of this mansion, he got a ping on his comm frequency from… Prowl?

He opened the channel curiously, audials flickering in uncertainty.

/We're nearly at the den. I apologise for my silence and cold manner with you, I was trying to scan for your frequency. As well as this, Master does not like us to vocalise outside of the Den, even in the service ways./

/Oh! Oh, that's quite alright… thankyou, um, I mean-/

Prowl glanced back at the green alpha, and the first flicker of personality shone through that Hound had seen, in the form of an amused little smile.
Relax, you are very welcome here. It is not often we get visitors. I warn you, my progeny and Bumblebee can be rather excitable things. They will probably smother you with attention the moment we arrive. Sideswipe and Sunstreaker are likely to go right ahead and offer interface as well. I have no problems with you accepting their offers if you wish.

Whoa… pretty forward huh? Sounds like Tracks when he's in the mood/ Hound chuckled over the line, relaxing visibly as he adjusted to the revelation of Prowl's kind nature.

I thank you greatly for your hospitality. Is your master always so… strict? Or was that all just a welcoming show?/

No, that's pretty much him. He has very strict ideas about the image he projects, and we are part of that image, so we must conform./ Prowl replied mildly, turning into a wider, pipe lined corridor where they could easily walk side by side.

What… what does he do if you don't conform?/ Hound asked hesitantly. Surely the repercussions couldn't be all that harsh? Mirage never did anything worse than make him sleep alone outside if he did something bad. Hound did not really have any concept of a truly cruel master.

You need not worry. As you are not his, he will not punish you for anything you do. Please be mindful of Bumblebee though. He is impressionable, and Master won't tolerate him picking up outside mannerisms/ Prowl said dodgingly, but his tone was perfectly pleasant.

Hound did not press. Clearly, it was not too bad if he didn't think it worth mentioning.

Prowl stopped and pressed a button beside a large door with his paw. A small laser swept his frame, and he pinged it an order to recognise Hound as 'guest', authorising him to come and go as he pleased.

The laser scanned Hound briefly, and then the door hissed open.

The moment it did, they were hit with the sounds of boisterous bots and wolves.

"Hey Prowl, he's given us the good stuff tonight!" Inferno called out happily to his alpha as he strode through the door and changed into his bipedal form, Hound following suit.

The green, stocky alpha thought he may have struck it absolutely lucky when he saw Prowl in mech form.

A prime specimen indeed, Thunderwing hadn't actually been exaggerating.

Prowl gave even Tracks a run for his money, albeit in a more understated way.

What had been long metal hackles in wolf form had become sweeping sensor wings, His broad chest was bright red barred with silver and accented with gold.

A round white helm framed a handsome silver faceplate, topped with a striking, authoritative red chevron.

Hound felt like he should offer himself for sparking right then and there, but he was distracted by two red and gold blurs who bounded over and circled him in a slightly predatory way, still in wolf form.

Hound may not be on his own territory, but he was still an alpha, and he did not flinch, or show any sign of intimidation.
"Sun, Sides, behave. Let him refuel first. Please Hound, feel free to come and make yourself comfortable, I'll get you a cube.

Hound nodded his thanks and moved to sit beside Inferno.

While Prowl went over to the dispenser, scratching Bumblebee in his mech form on the helm as he passed, the red and gold blurs did not cease their rambunctious activity.

Hound couldn't help but actually laugh when Sideswipe (was that the red one? Yea, it must have been, it suited him more) came over and assumed the position for mounting right in front of him, tail cocked to the side even though his valve cover was closed.

"Okay, I take it back Prowl. They're worse than Tracks." he chuckled, watching as Sunstreaker shoved his brother out of the way and assumed the same position.

Prowl stepped over the tussling bots easily as he returned, handing Hound a cube.

"I hope our fuel is to your liking. It's somewhat bland, but it has all the necessities to keep us in top condition. He's given us the flavoured kind tonight though, which is usually just whatever he's ordered for himself that he doesn't fancy, and he adds it to ours." Prowl's mannerisms were much milder than the green mech had expected, but he was not blind to the other alpha's subtle appraisal of his form.

He seemed to approve, settling on Hound's other side.

The walls of the room were lined with slightly cushioning material. Woven metal filled with aluminium shavings. The softest filling you could use outside of gels. It was not as high standard as Hound had expected (ALL Mirage's cushioning was gel or silicone), but it was not uncomfortable at all.

He sipped and watched with amusement as the brothers rolled around on the floor in a mock fight for mating rights.

Hound noted after a little while and some relaxed scans of the room, that it was in fact only ONE room.

There were no separate compartments for recharge or washing.

The wash rack was set in an alcove in the corner on the right of the door and had only three spigots. There was a concentrated pile of large cushions in the corner opposite the showers and the dispenser was situated between the two areas inset in the wall.

"So… This is your common area right? You have other private rooms somewhere to recharge?"

Trailbreaker, who was lounging on the cushions in wolf form and grooming a purring Bumblebee lying beside him, made a sort of chuckling sound.

/This is it. Communal everything. We fuel, recharge, wash and interface together./

Hound tried to hide how taken aback by the idea he was, but it wasn't easy, and another sound of amusement from the large black wolf-mech told him his surprise had been spotted.

"We are used to this way of living. We are a very close pack. I understand those with owners less focused on their pack's statistics and competitive ability tend to… provide greater amenities. To be honest, I'm not sure we'd be able to use more rooms if we had them, we're accustomed to close
quarters, it feels… comfortable.” Prowl explained.

Hound didn't find himself able to fully grasp the concept of being OK with having NO privacy from one's pack members, but then he was well aware of the differences between his master and Thunderwing.

"Well, I guess you like a break every now and then though, right? Get to sleep in the masters quarters now and then dontcha?"

The green mech knew instantly that he'd said something wrong. The tension that his question left in the air could have been cut with a claw tip.

There were glances shared between Inferno and Trailbreaker, and the younger pack members went quiet. Prowl himself went stony, but did not look angry.

"Sometimes." was all he said.

"Master is a loud recharger. Carrier never actually gets into stasis around him, his sensors can't power down around him." Sideswipe piped up, having changed into root mode while tousling with his brother.

The statement, while sounding to Hound like one huge-aft evasion of the truth, nevertheless cut through the tension effectively, and Prowl made a noise of assent, sipping from his cube.

"So Alpha. Are we gonna give our visitor a proper welcome once he's finished his cube?" Inferno asked with a cheeky glint to his optic.

It was interesting to the green mech to note the perk of Prowl's winglets and complete shift in his demeanour when Inferno initiated the idea of this 'proper welcome'.

"If Hound is so inclined to our brand of hospitality, I don't see why not."

Hound did not even realise his tail was up and wagging, but he finished his cube off in one big gulp eagerly (and he wasn't sure what 'flavour' the other wolf-mechs were talking about, because it was as bland as slag to his sensors, and he hated to think what their NORMAL energon was like).

"Is there a tradition here I should observe? Cause I like traditions." He said with a grin as Inferno took his empty cube and sat it out of the way.

"Only the usual fragging from the resident alpha." Snickered Sunstreaker, who seemed to be settling in on the floor, also now in mech mode and apparently expecting a good show.

"Oh good, I like that one. What's the preferred position?" the green bot asked cheerily, shivering slightly when Prowl pet his shoulder in initiation of pleasurable contact, allowing him to reach out and stroke his fingers curiously down the enticing red chest plates.

"However you feel most comfortable" Prowl purred in his most alluring tone.

Hound shivered just from the dulcet tones of implication that laced the mild voice.

True to his designation, Hound preferred the iconic pose of the anibot breed they were spliced with.

Prowl gave a growling purr of approval, quite happy to take up the dominant pose in wolf or mech mode.

He mock mounted the green alpha and ground their codpieces lightly together, servos travelling up
and down Hound's back, drawing shivers and whimpers of delight from him.

The green mech let out a low moan and arched into the floor when Prowl mouthed and nipped the back of his neck cables.

He snicked open his valve cover eagerly, keeping his spike sheathed until he was given permission to let it out. Assuming he would, because then again, he knew some alphas preferred the dominated partner to keep their cable locked down.

Prowl did not seem to be one of those mechs, as he slid a servo around Hound's hips and stroked at the panelling covering his spike housing.

Obligingly, Hound opened it, gasping when he heard the click of the other alpha's equipment being exposed.

He rocked into the mech above him as he felt a spike pressurising along the front of his pelvic gimble. His own cord didn't take much coaxing to come free and extend, especially with such gentle, talented claws teasing at it's tip and length.

Hound moaned again, answered with a deep, sensor tingling rumble from Prowl into his back-plating as their spikes rubbed together.

The servo playing with his cable dipped lower to test his valve.

Lubricant already trailed in a thin line from the opening, but Prowl teased a digit in gently anyway, receiving a whimper of pleasure.

Nuzzling Hound's neck plating, he thrust the digit a few times into the clenching but suitably sized port, adding another and scissoring a little just to get the mech beneath him to squirm some more.

He did so love making his partners writhe and pant before he even entered them.

Given he didn't get new partners for pure pleasure often, he was rather more impatient than normal, and withdrew the digits, licking them clean.

Prowl rocked gently as he did so, rubbing their pressurised cables against one another for the light charge and the little mewls of pleasure it coaxed out.

When he was done though, he slid the servo back around the shapely, dark green hip-plating and grasped the base of Hound's spike.

He lined up and slid himself slowly into the hot, slick port.

Prowl moaned with Hound as he seated himself fully and ground his hips a little, waiting for the slightly-too-tight valve to adjust.

Lapping at the other Alpha's neck and between his shoulders where the hackles transformed out from, he stroked Hound's spike languidly, the other mech whining and panting needily from the stimulation.

Once satisfied he wouldn't hurt anything, Prowl drew back and thrust swiftly, revving hard at the choked off cry of pleasure he received.

He could hear the purrs and revs of the rest of his pack. He may have been rather small for an Alpha, but one of the things that kept his place as pack leader was his unparalleled interfacing abilities.
He had the greatest stamina when it came to holding off or receiving overloads, his control was, at times, epic, and his technique was something else all together.

Inferno and Trailbreaker never felt cause to challenge him. His twins regarded him as their chief role-model and tutor. And Bumblebee… well, he was too young to be either contender or student, so he just enjoyed the sight of his Alpha and adopted sire figure showing off his abilities.

Hound was discovering those abilities for himself as he arched and whined and panted, wanting more and feeling unable to handle it at the same time.

The only other mech who had ever reduced him to such a wanton state had been his master, and really… he could not compare his master to one of his own kind (for one, their customs and systems were quite different), but of all those of his own kind he'd fragged, he couldn't remember any who'd done this without being twice Prowl's girth in the spike.

And they'd been a fair bit less accommodating with their touches.

Prowl's servos were like mercury… they slid across his plating and spike with heavy, gentle strokes, alighting sensors while causing only pleasure, mouth hot and sure over his neck-cables, satisfying every need in his wolfish programming, and then some.

He gasped and panted as the pace picked up, the resident Alpha's spike fairly working his valve over, hitting at a slightly different angle every time, triggering every sensor in turn.

It felt positively glorious when sharp denta bit into the back of his neck in a firm hold, nearly but not-quite piercing the fine micro-mesh armour.

Hound spread his knees a little for balance as hips pistoned against his own, building heat, friction and charge. His own lubricant made the sort of wet sounds that sent shivers of lust through his systems, and he whined loudly as he neared climax.

Prowl held off for as long as he could, systems humming with charge as his engine roared.

He grasped firmly around the base of Hound's spike and squeezed in time with his thrusts, until finally, he felt the buzz of his charge threaten to burst it's banks.

Prowl plunged his spike deep and magnetised, connecting with the other alpha as he felt the action trip Hound's overload.

He went with him, moaning around the neck plating as he felt his spike release his charge, filling his partner with his transfluid. The base of his cord swelled, knot forming to lock him in place, feeling Hound's spike do the same in his servo.

He rocked against the other alpha, using the friction to prolong the blissful haze of charge release, Hound's howl petering out into low, satisfied moans.

Massaging the base of the swollen knot in his servo, Prowl purred and lapped at the spot he'd bitten, leaving it for the other bot's nanites to fix.

A needy whine from his left had Hound rolling his helm to see both the twins pawing at each other, spikes out and pressurised.

A rumble above him seemed to be the signal they were waiting for from their carrier, and with wicked grins, they descended upon the green Alpha's pinned form.

Hound gasped and moaned as Sunstreaker slipped beneath him and wrapped his mouth around the tip of his spike.
Sideswipe came to his front and licked his lips playfully.

The green mech revved and pulled him in for a proper kiss, groaning as Prowl rocked against him gently, renewing his charge.

He couldn't quite believe the other Alpha was ready to go again so soon… but slag he wasn't complaining. Not many wolves could get off another overload while still knotted inside their partner, but the way the mech above him was moving, Hound didn't doubt he was capable of it.

"Well well, someone looks like they had fun with the meet and greet, at least"

Mirage's soft chuckle sent pleasant shivers through Hound's hackles as he slunk into his master's room.

The accommodations were Spartan compared to the showy grandeur of the rest of the palatial mansion, but the berth was large and looked comfortable.

Mirage patted it to beckon him up.

All too familiar with the private side of his noble owner, Hound transformed up and sprawled beside the white and blue mech smirking knowingly at him.

Refined servos ran over his reclined frame, tracing the paint scuffs that a quick wash had failed to remove.

Hound purred, knowing Mirage never begrudged him indulging in amicable welcoming rituals with his own kind. In fact he liked to watch when he was allowed to. His own pack was never shy about performing for him.

"Mmmmm so how were they? By the look on your faceplate and the way your tail is wagging, I'm guessing their steel façade hid soft sparks."

Hound grinned goofily and nodded, mirroring contentedly as he let the noble's deep vocals slide across his body like warm oil.

"The alpha, Prowl… well, he's… I mean… heh, I'm a little sore actually."

Mirage gave him a high optical ridge look of surprise. "Surely he's not packing THAT big of a girth?"

Hound chuckled, noting Mirage's engine hum in response to the sound.

"No, no he was average for his size, he was just… voracious… but in the best way. You wouldn't believe what he can do, while knotted! Oooooh he managed to pull out and hammer me with it before the third overload. No wolf I know his size can push their knot in and out like that. It stretched in the BEST way."

Mirage shivered in arousal as his imagination supplied him with an image of his alpha howling in pleasure as he was stuffed with the thickened base of a spike over and over.

He rubbed the back of Hound's neck cabling, feeling the marks of denta. It didn't bother him when Hound came back marked by other wolf-mechs.

They had been more than just master and pet for a long time now, albeit behind closed doors.
Mirage was well aware Hound was completely and utterly loyal to him. The noble himself was a liberal spark entrapped in a strict social structure he chaffed against, no matter how perfectly he played the part.

Outside of the public arena, he had somehow fallen for the bot he was supposed to call servant. If the way of their world was different, Mirage fantasised, he'd be free to love whom he whished, and display it as he desired.

As things stood, he'd be disgraced for claiming such affection for Hound openly.

And as much as he loved him, he respected his need to socialise the way his kind were programmed to.

He was always grateful that the programming included a simplistic sort of relationship measure.

Alphas were loyal to their masters. They were even more loyal to their mates, and mate was a much more preferable status, since the alpha would not only obey, but dote upon their lover.

In turn, Mirage had proven a very doting 'mate' himself, which sealed the bond.

Hound had flat out told him, when Mirage had first quizzed him on the ways of his wolf-mech culture, that he ranked him 'mate' in his mind.

The noble hadn't had much of a problem adapting to and accepting the status.

On top of Hound's beautiful temperament, charming personality and deep processor, Mirage had to admit he didn't think he could ever go back to interfacing with regular mechs.

It was like another level with his alpha. Quite apart from the unparalleled satisfaction he got from being knotted, Hound was the most considerate lover he'd ever had.

When they joined, the green mech never failed to make it clear to Mirage why he considered him 'mate' and not just master.

The tenderness and affection bled between them from their sparks, assuring both of the rightness of their coupling, despite whatever society decreed about the imbalance of their worth.

The blue and white lord didn't put much stock in wealth being the measure of a mech's worth.

He prized the kindness of a spark above everything else, and there was none kinder than Hound.

He traced his alpha's armour with reverent strokes, feeling the marks of his encounter with the local pack.

He gave a mock pout. "You've still got something in the tank, I hope. Thunderwing bored me so much, all I could think of was what I'd do to you when I finally got you to myself again."

Hound rumbled, the sound one of interest.

"Always got something left for you 'Raj." He rolled onto his side and nuzzled his mate.

"Mmmm good, because as fun as the residents are, I want to make sure they know you're mine" Mirage murmured, grinning.

The articulated tail wagged with renewed vigour, Hound lifting his helm to lick his master's lip-plates, requesting a kiss.
Mirage dragged him into a deep one without hesitation, servos sliding over his alpha's plating with more purpose now, tweaking sensitive wires and pressing nodes.

One cupped the scuffed black codpiece, which slid away without resistance, Hound's still very warm spike sliding eagerly into Mirage's grasp.

It didn't take them long to get down to business, Mirage taking up position beneath Hound, loving the feel of the powerful alpha above him, taking him, a posture of claiming that worked both ways with them. Hound would treat his master as if he were the one being taken, even when he was on top.

The noble gasped and groaned, relaxing and arching into the press of the thick spike filling his valve.

Callipers adjusted to the familiar girth, but when Hound began thrusting they spasmed from the delicious feed it delivered to his nodes.

Mirage writhed, Hound pinning him the way he knew he loved, kissing and licking at the kibble on his back.

Strong but gentle servos gripped blue hips firmly, working claws into delicate seams and teasing at wires with utmost care.

They both climaxed quickly, unable and unwilling to hold back their overloads. Mirage screamed around his clenched fist, not wanting to test the thickness of the walls in the strange place but unable to silence himself when Hound's knot pressed against every node it touched, making for a long, lingering overload.

"PROWL. LEFT, SPEARHEAD!"

The alpha did exactly as directed, sending out a series of short pings across the pack comm to coordinate the others.

They moved with unyielding precision, path directed by degrees, Thunderwing lazily swooping overhead to watch and bark orders.

The Petro-deer ran for their lives, typical herd mentality protocols directing them to take whatever route looked the fastest and clearest of predators.

Prowl got ahead of the rest of his pack, flanked by Sideswipe and Sunstreaker.

Inferno, Trailbreaker and Bumblebee drove the deer in a tight group towards the ambush point.

Prowl and the twins bedded in, Thunderwing watching with lazy anticipation.

His guests sat in the observation tower, watching the display with muted interest.

Mirage had seen enough hunts to not find a single tactic surprising, but the sheer precision of the pack, and the steel grip that the flier had on his wolf-mechs had not fully impressed him until this moment.

His own wolves were good, in their own way. When he hunted with them though, he trusted them to think for themselves and take initiative.

Thunderwing only allowed initiative out of Prowl, and half of his barked orders were manoeuvres the alpha was already carrying out.
If any of the others seemingly strayed, the jet was swift to verbally lash them back into place simply by calling their name and calling a single word command.

The speed with which they complied was what astounded Mirage.

His pack listened to him, but they got distracted, or responded at their own pace. And Mirage gave them the leeway to do so.

Thunderwing did not tolerate even a claw out of his control.

Jazz watched with undisguised fascination.

He had never seen a hunt before, let alone participated like Mirage had. His initial interpretation of Thunderwing's methods was that it was all militaristic.

This made sense to him, given the jet was a commander after all. But... the mechs he was commanding were not soldiers. They were pets.

Jazz hadn't realised that the only distinction Thunderwing made between the two was that Wolf-mechs belonged to him and had less rights.

Jazz found himself leaning forward against the glasteel as the ambush was sprung upon the petro-deer.

The sheer power and speed of Prowl and his twins as they attacked was astounding.

The silver and white mech was hypnotised by the sight, like a crash he couldn't look away from, attention riveted by some kind of morbid fascination.

Three bucks were down, two taken out by the twins, another crippled and now pinned under Inferno's bulk, which he'd snared as the herd scattered.

Prowl's target, the largest petro-deer, had managed to dodge his attack, and now the alpha was chasing him down.

Jazz thought nothing of this, but when he heard the snarl in Thunderwing's voice as he barked more orders, he realised Prowl seemed to have done something that displeased him.

The alpha responded by pushing himself harder to take down the errant buck.

All of the three spectator's attention was on the silver, red and gold alpha as he made his solo hunt.

Hound even made an impressed sounding rumble at the turn of speed and agility.

When Prowl leapt and latched onto the buck, it went wild, spinning and jumping like a rodeo drone to try and throw him off.

Prowl rode it out, clawing his way onto the creature's back and throwing his own weight to topple it sideways.

When he went to clamp it's spinal column in his jaws, it threw it's helm back, shining metallic prongs catching Prowl across the side of the face before he could jerk away.

Jazz hissed in sympathy, standing on the tips of his pedes and nearly pressing his faceplate against the window to try and see if he'd been badly hurt.
Prowl certainly didn't act like he was, claws lashing out to maim the creatures leg struts, snapping cables to immobilise the limbs.

Once it couldn't get up, the stag bellowed, throwing it's head again to try and protect it's neck.

Prowl didn't even attempt to hit that point again, much to Thunderwing's shouting displeasure.

Jazz watched, fascinated, as the alpha instead hooked his claws into the armour on the buck’s side, tearing it away as if it were tin foil. He then ripped open the proto-structure and plunged a paw in hard.

The buck immediately stopped moving, and Mirage made a small, somewhat undecided sound.

"He went for the laser core. Much safer with immobilised limbs. Not a lot of wolf mechs can fight the instinct to hit the cerebral fibre-optic cable to even think of going for that, let alone know exactly where to hit to get to it." the noble explained with an air of being extremely impressed.

They both made noises of surprise when Thunderwing landed next to his alpha and grasped him by the hackles, sending the wolf-mech to the ground as he crushed the sensitive extensions.

Hound made a shocked sounding whine, audial appendages laying back flat. He knew EXACTLY how painful that would be, but Prowl did not even seem to make a sound, nor did he struggle to free himself.

"That ain't right. TELL me that ain't right" Jazz murmured, sharing a glance with the noble at his side.

"No… it… well. Wolf mechs are essentially slaves, Jazz. Slave laws, as you know, are rather archaic. Technically, he can… do whatever he wants with his alpha, and is not accountable to the law."

Jazz turned a hard glare on Mirage, who raised his servos defensively.

"Don't look at me like that, I didn't MAKE the laws, and I don't agree with them, that's just… how they are."

Jazz turned back to the scene outside where Thunderwing had released Prowl, delivering a hard kick to his side before leaning down to say something that made Prowl cringe.

"Ah don't get it, he didn't do anything' wrong… he caught the buck without gettin' himself cut open too bad, why's Thunderwing even punishing him?"

"Because he didn't do what he was told, I assume. Even if a wolf mech knows there is a better way to do something that will cause himself less harm, if his master has given him orders, he is not supposed to use initiative. And Thundewing is big on control. He doesn't tolerate ANY kind of disobedience, least of all from his alpha." Mirage gave a frustrated huff and continued.

"The most infuriating thing is that I'm betting Prowl just became subject to his own instincts. That happens, wolf mechs can't help that, but Thunderwing does not seem to see that as an excuse." the blue and white noble curled his lip-plating in disgust.

They watched as the maddeningly smug looking Lord dragged Prowl's kill over to the others that the rest of the pack had piled together. Prowl trailed behind him, slowly but holding himself as if he had not been injured. Now he was facing them, they could see one of his optics had been damaged, a trail of optic lubricant and energon seeping from the shallow wound on his faceplate.
Hound gave a small growl, and Jazz answered with his own displeased rumble as Thunderwing gestured for them to come down and meet them on the hunting grounds.

"Ah hope we don't have to entertain this slagger for much longer, I have half a mind to drive straight back to Iacon and ask Prime why these laws still exist."

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Jazz Shenanigans and confused wolf-mechs. It's party time.

Chapter Notes

Sooo this story isn't dead it's just on a very, very, veeeeeeery long hiatus. Sorry bout that, this tends to be a thing with me, I play the ridiculously long game.

Also apologies on that front too because things may be weirdly inconsistent between the last chap and this one, but hopefully not. I kinda forgot a lot of the plot and had to try recall a lot, cause I'm an idiot who doesn't always make notes.

Relatively short chapter as far as mine usually go but yeah, a chunk was written years back and then i had the mother of all writers block and once I pushed through that the rest came out pretty quick. Aaaand then I sat on it a while for no reason other than I kept forgetting to review and post it. But yeah here ya go guys.

~Death out <3

“Hey guys… where’s Prowl?”

Hound had been excused to the Den while the Masters took their morning energon.

He hadn’t had a chance to speak to the resident pack since they had returned the previous day cycle.

Prowl had not looked well last he’d seen him. After the hunt, Thunderwing had wanted to see Hound and Mirage show off a little. In the name of diplomacy they had gone along with it.

Hound didn’t mind showing off his superior olfactory senses, but he had not been as into the hunt as he normally would be. They’d caught seven turbo-foxes, killing none and covering it with the excuse that they didn’t want to dent Thunderwing’s personal game stock.

Every time Hound had seen Prowl, he’d been looking worse for wear, being made to stand at attention while continuing to bleed energon steadily, damaged optic flickering, clearly causing him pain.
After that, he’d been stuck by Mirages side, sensing his mate’s need for his supporting presence.

He took comfort in the fact the other alpha had managed to get back to the mansion under his own power. Surely by now he’d been patched up by the resident vet on staff?

Yet all he got in response from the other wolf-mechs were a few terse looks between him and each other.

“Master’s Quarters.” Sunstreaker eventually grunted from where he was sat against a wall in mech form, using a claw to carve at what looked like a plate of copper.

“…Oh. So he’s… fixed and resting then?” Hound normally would have assumed that being in the master’s quarters after sustaining injuries was a good thing. It would mean your owner was taking good care of you, giving you the comfort of their room to heal in.

But after what he’d seen Thunderwing do to his alpha… and the way his pack was so very subdued, he concluded that, in this household, it was more akin to a form of punishment.

“Yesterday’s damage has likely been repaired.” Was Trailbreaker’s emotionless, dodging reply.

“Alignment is in two orns. You running with us?” Inferno asked, breaking the tension with a change of topic, for which Hound was grateful.

“Yeah, heh… It’s that or get locked in a room I guess. Where does he take you to run?”

“Take us? We just go outside and get locked out all night. Mansion is locked down so we don’t get in, and no staff are allowed out. We have the grounds to ourselves.” Sideswipe flapped his arms from where he was flopped across his brother’s pedes as he explained. Bumblebee nodded in confirmation, curled up beside Sunstreaker in wolf mode, half in the golden mech’s lap.

“Oh! That’s like Lord Magnus’ pack. I never got to run with them, but they told me all about their place when I met three of them.” Hound sidled over to Sunstreaker, who paused to look at him sideways. Hound made gestural cues in his stance and the flick of his ears to show his curiosity.
Deciding he was not being threatening, Sunstreaker relaxed and continued, the green alpha sitting down beside him.

“When did you meet Magnus’ pack? We know of them, but we’ve never met any of them in person. Master hates Lord Magnus.” Sideswipe commented flippantly, batting at Bumblebee’s tail while the small wolf thumped it playfully.

“Oh, he brought his alpha and two of his offspring along to Mirage’s household when Master held a party. Ironhide adores his master nearly as much as I do. But his two youngest, Springer and HotRod, they think he’s too strict. Those three together though, they’re a riot.”

Inferno rumbled a sigh. “I remember Ironhide. I ran in a pack with him for a while, under a trainer called Kup. He had a good sense of humour.”

“Yeah, well, his son HotRod, from what I’ve heard, will present to any other alpha he comes across shamelessly.” Sideswipe snickered.

“I thought the word was he presented to ANY mech he came across he isn’t related to shamelessly?” Sunstreaker piped up with a smirk.

“That’s… well… I don’t want to speak ill of him, he’s a good pup, but he is a little bit too… eager.” Hound chuckled.

“Yeah, well, best way to cure that is to give him what he wants until he realizes it’s NOT what he wants anymore.” Trailbreaker snickered, stretching.

Their conversation was broken rather suddenly by the sound of the door whooshing open, and a thick silence fell as Prowl padded through it in wolf mode. He had been repaired, but he moved as if he was still in a lot of pain and trying to hide it.

There was a tense silence, everyone looking but trying not to, as if there was some well observed rule that they mustn’t mention the state of their alpha or try to rush to his aid and ask what had happened.

That was Hound’s instinct, to offer assistance, but he observed the pack’s general behaviour and tried not to ruffle any hackles by overstepping his bounds.
Prowl padded slowly over to the wash racks and carefully turned them on with his muzzle, standing under the spray. Hound looked at the twins discreetly, both of them with intense, angry fires in their optics as they scowled at nothing in particular.

The two older members had sad, knowing looks as they scrutinized their alpha for familiar signs they must recognise that would tell them most of what had happened.

Bumblebee uncurled and wandered over timidly with his ears down and head and tail low.

He nuzzled at Prowl’s jaw, the alpha dipping his head slowly to nuzzle back with a very soft rumble. They exchanged some kind of silent conversation before Inferno got to his pedes and wandered over, grabbing a cleaning cloth and starting to wipe Prowl’s armour down.

Hound let out a vent he wasn’t aware he’d been holding, and though he tried to afford Prowl some privacy, he couldn’t help but scrutinize his frame to try and confirm his fears.

His ears pinned back when he saw the paint scuffs and the scratches around Prowl’s panel.

Surely this couldn’t be right. Surely his master didn’t use interface as punishment? Why would he have him fixed just so he could damage him again?

“Y’sure there ain't even ONE little loophole SOMEWHERE that makes this wrong?” Jazz paced in Mirage's room. They were supposed to be getting ready for the little 'party' Thunderwing was hosting that night.

It was more or less an excuse for him to show off his status and try to impress others with lavish fuel and extravagant wastes of credits.

It was also a networking exercise, and many other prominent military figures would be attending, as well as nobles in the business of bankrolling private military endeavors.

Neither of them were much looking forward to it, and really they didn't have much to do to be 'ready', so instead they used the time alone to talk frankly with one another.
“I'm sorry Jazz, but as far as the law is concerned, he's done nothing that you could legally hold against him. The law doesn't even recognise wolf-mechs as fully sentient.” Mirage sighed, sitting on the edge of his berth and polishing his arms distractedly.

“You and I know that ain't true. Which means there's gotta be more nobles out there that own 'em who know they're sentient too.” Jazz huffed, still pacing and gesturing aggravationally.

“Yes, I know, but... the way they work, their intelligence... it's not so easily quantifiable. They are inherently different to us, and that's embedded so deep in their coding it can't be changed. If you were to try and convince a high council court of their sentience, you'd need a lot more evidence than to just take one in there, ask it to transform and pose questions to it.”

“I know that. The council would probably be too scandalised by me gettin' one of em' in there in bot mode to even listen to mah argument. And then they'd claim programmin' over true intelligence. But there's gotta be a way 'Raj. They're sufferin' here, you can see it. How many other owners treat theirs like that? How was this underclass just forgotten about?”

Mirage opened his mouth to reply but fell silent as a hidden servants passage opened and Hound slipped into the room, looking rather down. The blue and white noble turned his attention to his alpha and opened his arms, noting the wolf-mech's body language.

“What is it Hound, what's upset you?”

Hound nuzzled into the embrace around his neck and gave Jazz a wary look from between his master's arms.

“It's alright Hound, Jazz isn't going to mind you changing in front of him.”

Hound gave him a brief lick and transformed in a kneeling position with his head and arms in his master's lap.

Jazz had never actually seen any of Mirage's pack transformed, except for the one time he'd snuck into the noble's quarters on another such trip to surprise him awake, only to find Hound sleeping in bipedal mode beside him.

He'd left so fast he hadn't gotten more than a glance. Now though, he couldn't help but study the
green and grey bot's intriguing frame.

He was like any other mech in his basic core structure, but his digitigrade legs ended in large paws. His servos were clawed, he still retained his tail, and his expressive audial dishes were perched oddly on his head, accommodated for by his helm. His back kibble was reminiscent of his hackles, but could really have been like any mech's excess alt-mode plating.

Hound looked between them, still anxious about revealing himself in front of someone other than Mirage, let alone speaking.

“Mech, s'alright, it's just me. I ain't gonna hurt ya for talkin'. What's got ya so disturbed?” Jazz plied gently. He couldn't help admitting to himself he was intensely curious about what the bot would SOUND like.

And he was surprised by how... ordinary the wolf-mech's voice was when he spoke. No animalistic growl, no simplistic lilt or affectation from his partially pointed denta. Just... normal.

“It's... I was down in the den. Prowl came back, but... it wasn't right, he wasn't fully repaired. I mean, his injuries from the hunt were. He'd been given... NEW ones. I don't know if I should be telling you this, it's really not my place, I'm sorry-”

“No no, Hound, sweetspark, it's good. It's OK, you should tell us. We were just talking about it.” Mirage soothed, petting his helm and sharing a look with Jazz that spoke volumes about how much he did care for the welfare of the wolf-mech class.

“When you say new injuries... what kinda injuries are we talkin'? Training, or disciplinary... or abusive?” Jazz asked, keeping his voice as calm as he could.

Hound's expression grew more anxious. “It was... part of his discipline, so far as I could tell. But it wasn't just a lashing, or brazing of his plating, he... I didn't ask, so I can't confirm, but I could smell it on him. His master... it seems like he uses... interface as a punishment.”

The look of disgusted horror on the green and grey mech's face told Jazz that this was a type of punishment he just couldn't fathom. And if Jazz's suspicions about the depth of Hound's relationship with his master were correct, it was no wonder he recoiled so strongly from the very thought.

Mirage hissed through his denta. “I knew he was a brute but THAT... that is disgusting behaviour.
We cannot ALLOW it... but I have no idea how to go about stopping it without provoking Thunderwing into a vendetta against my estate. I can't afford it, and frankly I'd fear for my safety. He's not known to be the most stable of air commanders.”

“That's where I come in. Ah don't HAVE an estate or a business to worry about. I DO have the Prime on my side to boot. I'm gonna make some calls... and WE gotta make some kinda plan to get Prowl and his pack outta harm’s way. All without tipping off Thunderwing.”

“He monitors them. They have chips and trackers, Sideswipe was telling me about them. Their master knows if they sneak out. They didn't say as much, but... I think Prowl is the only one punished when any of them do something wrong.” Hound piped up, his anxious look deepening.

Jazz rubbed at his chin and frowned. “If that's the case, ah can't have any of them come to me to talk to them.”

“Talk to them? You do realise they probably won't say a word to you out of fear of retribution? I wouldn't punish Hound for speaking to other nobles if he wanted to, but... he's known you for over a year now and you just saw how nervous he was talking around you, what makes you think any of Thunderwing's pack will dare? And why do you want them to talk to you anyway?” Mirage asked, brow knitting in concern.

“If ahm gonna do a jailbreak, then I gotta let the jailbirds know what's going on don't I?” he gave Mirage a wry half-grin. “Besides, I wanna know MORE.”

“About what?” the noble frowned slightly at him in confusion, petting the helm of an anxious looking Hound. Jazz gave him a full grin now.

“Everythin'. I wanna know EVERYTHIN’ about their class, what's it's like to BE one of them, what their life is like, how they deal with it... has anyone even DONE that before? Anyone even bothered with learnin' the ins and outs of their social structure among themselves? I'm bettin’ it ain't like anything else on Cybertron.”

Mirage and Hound both blinked at him and shared a look. “You realise you could just ask my pack and it would be far less risky?”

Jazz waved a servo at him with a dismissive noise. “Ah COULD, but where's the fun if there ain't any risks involved? Like I said... what have I got to lose to Thunderwing? He works for the military,
I work for the PRIME. He could try to touch me, but I doubt he'd even get close. Besides, I don't exactly plan on lettin' him know. How long d'you think we got until we're expected downstairs?“

“Jaaaaazz, what are you planning. Because you KNOW whatever you're doing you're probably going to need my help, and by my help I mean my electro-disruptor.” Mirage frowned at him slightly.

The visored mech's grin just got wider. “Well I WAS thinkin' of payin' a visit to the resident pack's quarters. How far from here is it Hound?”

The green and grey bot jumped slightly at being addressed. “Um... in bipedal mode... probably about... a breem and a half through the servants passages, maybe more if you're avoiding servants seeing you. If Master and I go with you, that won't be a problem, but... they may be alarmed. I don't think any non-wolf has ever been in their den.”

“We don't have the time right now either. Thunderwing is expecting us in the dining hall at 19:00, and it's already 18:40. Better to leave it until tonight. Alignment isn't until tomorrow, but even so, we should let Hound warn his pack we're coming. Wolf-mechs can get... jittery and snappy near alignment. The last thing you want is one of them accidentally attacking you.” the noble advised, scritching behind Hounds ear and making him go a little dopey looking.

Jazz tilted his helm with an amused look at the green and grey bot. “Noted. Tonight then. Hound can warn them while we endure what ahm guessin' is gonna be a pit-aweful 'party'.“

“Primus almighty if you're truly merciful, take my spark right now.” Jazz groaned as an aside to Mirage who hissed reprimandingly at him.

“Stop blaspheming, it's not that bad.”

“It iiiiiis, Mirage I am so bored and so very, very, VERY tired of these oily aft mechs tryin' to crawl up mah exhaust to get favour with the Prime. As if I don't know what game they're playin'. There's only so many times I can pretend I'm a saint who ain't got any idea what they're talking about. You know it's against my nature.”
Mirage sighed and patted him on the shoulder. “Only three or so cycles more and you can retire without offending anyone.”

Jazz made a soft whining noise. “Times like these make me wonder why ah ever said yes to Prime when he asked me to take this job. I ain't cut out for this façade slag. I mean I am but only when it’s FUN. One of these days I'm just gonna speak my mind, and land us BOTH in a pitload o’ trouble.”

“No, you aren't. You're too good for that. The 'Jazz Meister' never loses his cool, after all. I recall those being your first words to me.” Mirage smirked, swirling his high-grade and looking every bit at home in the given setting.

It made Jazz feel even more pressured to not slouch and not to gulp down his energon like it was mid-grade. Usually he liked putting on an act and fooling everyone into thinking he was of the highest breeding. But right now it just felt like a chore.

Probably because it was EXPECTED of him to be like this now. Before he would surprise bots who assumed he was one of the servants. He had too much of a reputation now as a Prime ambassador. It was just no fun when he couldn't put nobles in their place after they revealed their uglier sides.

“Ooooh joy of joys, Lord Octane is headed our way. At least he has his alpha with him. About the only topic of conversation I can stand to cover with him is that of his pack.” Mirage murmured to Jazz as the tall, beaming mech strode towards them.

“My dear Mirage! So pleased to see you here, surprised, but pleased! I didn’t think you much cared for masters of the military caste. And who’s this fine specimen you’ve brought with you?”

The large triple changer gave Mirage a deeply formal bow, and turned the same treatment on Jazz.

The silver and white mech didn’t miss the hungry look in the bot’s optics. That was the look of a mech who consumed endlessly without much thought. He made a note to remain wary of the noble as he returned the bow with a gracious nod and a smile.

“Lord Octane I presume? Ahm Jazz, I work for the Prime. Lord Mirage has been my guide of sorts, in matters of noble culture. And who would YOUR charming companion be?”

Octane’s wings fanned back and he beamed even wider when Jazz took notice of his wolf-mech.
“Ah, I see you have a keen eye for beauty? This would be no less than my alpha, Sundancer. An extremely handsome example of his kind, if I do say so myself. I would try to be humble about my beauties, but it’s hard when they’re all so obviously exemplary.”

Jazz gave a convincing chuckle when Octane tittered, but there was no real amusement beneath the façade. The mech was greedy, vain and pompous. Everything he detested in a noble, but with at least a charming enough veneer to dull the offensiveness.

Jazz focused in on the wolf-mech, who seemed to know exactly how beautiful he was. It was a surprising contrast to all the others of his kind he had seen. Hound and the rest of Mirage’s pack were very laid back, but they behaved themselves in mixed company.

Thunderwing’s pack didn’t move a cable or twitch an audial without their master’s command. Octane’s alpha was a stark contrast to both of his other experiences of the caste, holding himself regally and showing off every one of his best aesthetic lines.

He was the most aloof looking slave Jazz had ever seen, as if priding himself on how good looking a possession he was. Clearly Octane doted on him enough that he didn’t at all chafe at his position in life, much as Hound didn’t. He highly doubted however, that Sundancer meant as much to Octane as Hound did to Mirage.

“You can pet him if you like, he’s got the most wonderful temperament, try not to mar the polish though, just got him done up for tonight.” Octane laughed lightly, his alpha moving forward and posing as if being allowed to pet him was a gift to them.

Jazz gave a genuine grin of amusement and ran a servo along the golden and white neck, the plates fluffing out slightly when the pressure of his servos released them. The wolf-mech rumbled happily and exposed more of his neck for attention.

Jazz dared to scritch behind the perked audial dishes and that got him VIGOROUS tail wagging.

“Mmmm he LIKES you already, and you know he’s an excellent judge of character. I never befriend a bot he doesn’t trust.”

“Wish I had as reliable a method of pickin’ friends. I don’t do too bad on mah own, but still. Can’t hurt to have him around, huh?”
Jazz smoothed the fluffed out plating on the wolf-mech’s neck, amused by how it fluffed right back out again, the tail still wagging.

Octane puffed up as well. Jazz wasn’t bad at petting wolf-mechs, but he was better at stroking egos.

“Ah, well, if you’re in the market for your own lovely beast, I can certainly help you out THERE. Sundancer here has sired some *exceptional* examples of his breed. In fact, two of them live on this very estate.”

That caught Jazz’s genuine attention. “Oh? Didn’t know that. Mmmmm lemme guess… the Gold and Red ones?”

Octane beamed and clapped his servos together. “Their lineage does stick out clear as day against the other members of their pack, doesn’t it? Don’t get me wrong, Lord Thunderwing can’t have taste that’s all THAT bad, having matched his alpha to mine, but you have to admit, there’s a definite CONTRAST against the rest of his pack and Sideswipe and Sunstreaker.”

Jazz managed to plaster a very convincing fake smile and vague nod of interest as Octane began to waffle on about his pack and its lineage and superior breeding.

It was at least half a cycle before Mirage managed to cut in with something about business, and Octane was snapped from his starry-optic’d reverie over his pet slaves.

“Oh yes of course! You wanted to know more about that premium grade fuel I’ve started importing. It would certainly make improvements in your transport sector. Terribly sorry, ambassador Jazz, I know business talk is very dull-“

Jazz put his servos up and tried very hard not to look too relieved.

“Oh, no, by all means, don’t let me stop ya. Ah might go get myself some more energon though.”

Octane dismissed him nearly as quickly as he dismissed his alpha. Mirage did the same with Hound, shooting Jazz a subtle look.
Hound brushed by the silver and white bot, cluing him in with his own less subtle look, and Jazz followed along, petting the wolf-mech.

A quick glance around the room when they reached the energon bar area told him no one was paying him any attention.

Least of all Thunderwing, who was thankfully engrossed in conversation with a bunch of seekers.

Jazz slipped away with Hound, Sundancer nowhere to be seen as he’d gone on without them.

Once they reached the servant’s entrance, Jazz gave a sigh of relief. “Ugh. So what’s Sundancer’s deal? He actually believe his own hype, or was that a show for Octane’s benefit?”

Hound gave what Jazz could only class as a shrug, hackles flicking and head dipping momentarily.

“I don’t know him all that well, I think maybe a bit of both.”

They walked in silence through the passageways for a while, Hound checking his pace now and then to make sure Jazz was able to keep up.

Jazz, for his part, was fine with the pace and narrow passages. But he couldn’t deny his tank was doing flips in excitement at the prospect of learning new things about a cultural class he knew little to nothing about.

Hound stopped a few meters from a non-descript door in a dimly lit corridor, which was a little wider than the others. Jazz gave the green wolf-mech a quizzical look when he turned to him pointedly.

“I feel I should… not warn you, but let you know… my kind aren’t generally used to strangers who aren’t our masters entering our dens. They probably won’t hurt you, but they might… well, you’re a bot of high rank, they will feel the need to be presentable rather than relaxed.”

Jazz made a sound of consideration at that. He’d wondered if they might stop acting naturally at his presence.

“Would it help if you uuuh… announced me? And let ‘em know they don’t need to keep up the formalities for my sake?”
Hound nodded. “I can, but I don’t know that they’ll actually relax. I mean… I know you said you don’t mind me talking to you ‘normally’, but even I still feel kinda nervous about it. It’s ingrained.”

He gave Jazz an awkward grin and another of his odd shrugs and turned to pad over to the door, pushing the large switch button beside it. After a few moments, the door wooshed open softly, another bot having opened it from inside.

Jazz, who was hanging back a little behind Hound’s flank, didn’t recognize the mech. Until he caught the bright yellow plating, and realized it was the smallest of Thunderwing’s pack, Bumblebee.

“Hound! Come on in, we were wondering when- EEP!”

The little wolf-mech had caught sight of Jazz, who gave him a grin and wave. Bumblebee’s response was to transform down into wolf mode and scurry back off into the den.

Hound threw Jazz a ‘see?’ look over his shoulder, but a moment later, another mech was at the door. This one was bigger than Jazz, with deep red plating and big white audial dishes on his helm.

“Hi Inferno. Look, uuuh… my master’s friend, Ambassador Jazz, wanted to come down here and hang out with us. I know it’s probably not something you guys get here, but he doesn’t want us to act like he’s there. He’s uuuh… interested in finding out about our culture?”

Hound threw Jazz another look, making sure he’d said the right things. Jazz nodded, and met Inferno’s gaze with a friendly smile, noting the way the (much bigger than him) mech’s audial dishes flicked back for a moment warily.

“Oh. Okay. Um… come in, please, make yourself comfortable. I’ll let Prowl know, the others will take their cues from him, so long as he’s relaxed about you being here, everyone else will be.”

“Cheers mah mech.” Jazz grinned wider and followed Hound in, the green alpha promptly getting tackled and play-wrestled with by Sideswipe.

Jazz chuckled and sidled over against the wall near the door, trying to remain unobtrusive until he was sure he had the resident alpha’s approval to be there.
He found Prowl quickly with a glance around the room, stifling a noise of surprise. Well that was why he hadn’t come to the door himself.

The black and white mech was fairly wrapped around a bot he assumed was Sundancer. Seeing Octane’s alpha in mech mode, Jazz wouldn’t mind being wrapped around him either.

The lineage was immediately apparent between the two alphas and the twins Thunderwing had boasted about so much. Sundancer was a tall, slightly longer limbed version of Sunstreaker with white in the places Sunstreaker was black.

While the golden twin seemed to take after the brighter sire, Sideswipe most certainly had more of Prowl in him. Which in Jazz’s opinion, wasn’t exactly a drawback.

He noticed Inferno sidle up to the pair and tap Prowl on the shoulder. The black and white mech only seemed mildly annoyed at the interruption, and after a few muttered words from the larger bot, golden optics flicked to Jazz.

A shiver ran through his struts at the intensity of the gaze, but after a few moments where Prowl seemed to size him up, the alpha looked away again. His body language shifted from tense and alert to relaxed again and he dismissed Inferno.

The red bot, and every other wolf-mech in the room who had noticed him suddenly seemed to release a collective held breath. It astounded him how the atmosphere in the room depended so much on Prowl’s approval and… dare he say dismissal of his presence.

Pretty soon he found Sideswipe had finished roughing up Hound and came over to sniff him all over, tail wagging madly.

“Hey mech, wussup? You look like you’re havin’ way more fun in here than you do out there.”

Sideswipe looked up at him with big round optics, glancing between him and Prowl to check if his carrier was looking. He wasn’t. Sideswipe promptly shoved his head into Jazz’s hand, the black and white bot chuckling and commencing pets as directed.
“Not much of a talker huh?”

A bark of laughter came from somewhere to his left and he pinpointed the source as Sunstreaker, who was in bot mode and sitting with his back against the wall, scratching at a plate of oxidized copper.

“Don’t get him started or he’ll never shut up more like”.

“Well thank Primus one of you besides Hound is willin’ to talk to me.” Jazz grinned at him, sitting a little ways from the golden mech and promptly getting a lap full of Sideswipe.

He laughed and set about scratching the huge bot behind the ears.

“Don’t get too excited, I’m not the chatty type and you’re in OUR den. I’m not obliged to actually talk to you.”

“Awwww stop being so mean Sunny, he gives AMAZING pets. You give AMAZING pets by the way.” Sideswipe rumbled as he wriggled happily on Jazz’s lap.

“Well, I ain’t here to force you to talk to me. Ah just wanted to know what you guys do when you ain’t being turned into drones by Thunderwing. Didn’t even know ‘til recently that you guys are sentient. I ain’t exactly a fan of slavery.”

“Not all of us are though. Slaves, I mean.” Hound murmured as he came over and settled next to Jazz on the side nearer Sunstreaker, acting as a bit of a buffer for the golden mech.

“Naw Hound I know. But just cause you got it good with ‘Raj, doesn’t make it right the ones who have masters like Thunderwing have to put up with the slag he dishes out.”

Jazz was looking at Hound as he spoke, but noticed Sunstreaker pause in his scratching and glance over at him.

“Welp. You’d be the first noble I’ve ever heard say that. Good luck getting any of the others to listen.” Sideswipe quipped as he continued wriggling a bit, reaching out a paw to bap playfully at Hound’s snout, Hound nipping at him lazily.
The interaction made Jazz grin. Five kliks in the company of these bots and he could already feel himself getting hooked on figuring out their social structures and interpersonal rules. It fascinated him, and he made mental notes about their interactions and the rules around their ranks.

It seemed Alphas commanded a certain level of respect, but certainly weren’t above playing. Though maybe it depended on whether they were on home turf or not.

He was distracted from his musings by Sideswipe bapping at his servo slightly with a paw.

“Sooy you’re friends with Lord Mirage huh? Seen him bangin’ Hound yet?”

Hound hissed and swiped at the red bot as he rolled off Jazz and danced away a bit. Jazz, for his part, threw his head back and laughed.

“No, not yet, but ah kinda knew. Only realized it recently, mind you, but Hound’s a stud so I mean, how could ’Raj resist?”

Hounds ears flicked back and forth in slight embarrassment, and a snicker came from the golden bot on his other side.

“He’s kinda the opposite of a stud, Mirage has never let anyone buy a covering from him.”

“A what from him? A what from you?” Jazz tilted his head curiously, looking between the gold and green bots, Hound looking even more abashed.

“Y’know, covering. Breeding. Hound isn’t allowed to do the frickle frack with his own kind to make bitties. Normally our masters can pay or receive credits for loaning us out to each other to try and make better wolf mech offspring. That’s how me ‘n Sunny were made, but Thunderwing didn’t own Prowl yet when Sundancer sparked us with him, Quickgrip did.”

Sideswipe explained as he flopped on his side and plopped his head back in Jazz’s lap.
Jazz refreshed his visor as he resumed petting.

“How do you not know? I thought you were a noble?” Sideswipe chuffed, looking up at Jazz.

Hound gave him a lazy sort of warning boof. “Sides, don’t be rude.”

Jazz waved it off with a grin. “Eeeeh he’s fine Hound. Ah’m in your world here, no need to treat me special. Technically, I’m not a noble. Ah just work for the Prime, which affords me a high rank, and a title I barely use. M’not from the upper echelons, just managed to make the right friends somehow.”

“Wait, so… you can be MADE a noble even if you’re not from a high-sparked cadre?”

Jazz looked up at the new voice, surprised to find it was Bumblebee speaking from where he’d flopped over Sunstreaker’s legs in wolf mode.

“Y’sure can. Doesn’t happen much mind, well… it DIDN’T, but Optimus isn’t like the old Primes. He’s happy to elevate slums scum like me to positions of power. As much to slag off the old guard as to do bots like me a favour.”

Several pairs of optics widened, staring at him. It was actually Sunstreaker who spoke first.

“You’re ACTUALLY from the slums?”

Jazz just grinned wider and nodded. “Yup. No need for airs n’ graces around me. Only learnt how to do all that slag ‘cause it’s part of my job. I met Optimus when he arrested me and dragged my aft to Ratchet. Got me off stims and started me working for the Rodion enforcers as an informant. Then an investigator. When he became Prime, he wanted t’ keep me around cause he trusted me, but he already had a guard contingent assigned, so my job is upper-class liaison and official class investigator. I like the class investigator bit more’n the liason bit. Absorbing new cultures and learnin’ about them was always a hobby of mine.”
“So… how did he become Prime? I thought only nobles became Prime? Thunderwing hasn’t stopped complaining about him since he came to power.” Bumblebee piped up, ears perked forward in interest.

“Mmmmm that’s a loooong story. Might hafta find time to tell you later. Basically, he went against what he was told to do, before anyone could stop him, and well… he never PLANNED for it to happen, but I’m glad it did. Matrix hasn’t actually PICKED a Prime in Decavorns. It’s been bestowed upon bots decreed worthy. Higher ups were not happy, but they can’t do anything about a natural match between Matrix and Prime.”

“Explains why Mirage was so excited about him. He usually HATES Primes, but he keeps going on about how good it is to see him shutting down the aft-kissers.” Hound chuckled. “I’m starting to like him too if he’s taking bots from lower classes and raising them up. Gives me… well… y’know… makes me think maybe me and ‘Raj might have a chance together.”

Hounds voice was very quiet, but Jazz felt his spark swell for him.

“Hound, buddy, if that’s what you and ‘Raj want, that’s what I’ll be askin’ for. I highly doubt if Optimus knew ANYTHIN’ about your class and how clever y’all are, NONE of you would still be slaves.”

The green bot gave him wide, shining optics before he fairly pounced Jazz and started nuzzling all over his head.

Jazz laughed and pet at whatever plating was nearest. He heard Sideswipe chuffing with laughter in his lap before the red mech batted Hound off him.

“Geez don’t smother the bot, you’ll scuff each other and Mirage will think you’re cheating.”

Hound backed off, tail still wagging furiously.

“You’re serious though, right? You want to make it so we can be with normal mechs?”

“’Course ahm serious. Part of my job is to identify class areas that need more support and provide reports so we can go about fixin’ what the upper class has been ruining for so damn long.”
“I’m assuming that means de-classifying us as slaves too?” Sunstreaker’s gaze was so intense Jazz felt distinctly like a prey item that was likely to get eaten if he didn’t answer correctly.

“Well yeah, that’s the first step.”

All the bots in wolf mode started wagging their tails, and Sunstreaker actually cracked what looked something like a smile. Jazz felt a weird urge to pet them all, and quashed it quickly. These WERE sentient bots, not pets, but the urge to shower them with affection was a difficult one to suppress.

“So, when is it gonna happen? When are you gonna ask the Prime to free us? Where are we gonna go when we leave?” Bumblebee got off of Sunstreaker’s legs and bounced over, prancing about in front of Jazz.

“Woaaah bot, slow it down… it ain’t gonna be immediate, unfortunately. Even Optimus can’t brush off every kind of Red Tape. Also gotta keep it on the down-low. If ah go announcing I intend to dismantle a whole culture based on slavery, you guys might end up in serious danger. Nobles could start killing you to protect themselves. Think about it, how many of you know stuff about your ‘owners’ that could get them arrested? They’re not gonna give you guys up easy. You’re gonna hafta be a bit patient, I’m sorry.”

Bee’s audial dishes laid back and he visibly drooped. Sideswipe got up and donked his forehead against the smaller bot’s.

“Aww it’s okay Bee. At least we KNOW someone’s actually willing to make a case to the Prime to free us. Better than what we’ve had up ‘til now, eh?”

The yellow wolf nodded and whuffed softly. “Yeah, it is, but… I thought maybe he’d be able to get Prowl out of here. Sooner is better, Thunderwing’s been getting worse. He’s using ANY excuse to punish him now.”

Jazz’s expression turned serious and he glanced over at Prowl who was, uh…

The serious expression melted into a slightly flustered one when he realized Prowl was busy fragging the cogs off Sundancer.

“I… uh… yeah. That’s what’s makin’ you guys uh… high on my priority… list… do you all just go
at it in front of one another like that normally?” he murmured to Hound.

The green bot chuckled. “Some of us are a lil’ more discrete when we can be. Most’ve the time we don’t HAVE anywhere more private than a den to frag each other in. You’re the one who wanted to come in.”

“Can’t argue with that.” Jazz shrugged, still trying not to look over at them again.

“I can’t yet. M’not old enough” Bumblebee sighed, moving to try and discreetly sniff Jazz.

“Y’disappointed by that, or not old enough to really care yet?” Jazz offered a servo for him to sniff, the smaller bot doing so before tentatively pressing into it for scritches.

“Eh. Looks kinda fun but I’m not that bothered. Not that long ‘til I can, but… I don’t really want Thunderwing to be able to get me covered by someone else.” He murmured, curling up in front of Jazz’s legs.

A rumble came from the golden mech to Jazz’s left. “Not like he hasn’t TRIED. Thankfully, NO ONE’S wolf-mechs will touch him. WE ALL know he’s too young. And the wolf mechs who wouldn’t care are either not good enough for Thunderwing to try and get them for covering, or they’re not stupid enough to cross Prowl. Or the REST of us for that matter. Any other wolf-mech hurts him and we’d rip them apart.”

Jazz’s expression turned serious again hearing that Thunderwing was willing to try and force sparking in underage mechs. The fact he thought they were just pets be damned, it made his tank churn.

“Don’t you worry about it Bee. Ah’ll be well into campaigning for your release before you’re of age. Like ah said, it’ll take time, but I’m not gonna delay the process anymore than I have to.”

“They WHAT?”
Jazz winced and made shushing motions at his tiny holo-projector.

“Not so loud, I don’t want Thunderwing knowin’ I’m talking to ya right now.”

“Sorry… but I must not be hearing that right, sentient pets? And they FORCE them to injure themselves for entertainment and spark against their will? How was this hidden from everyone for so long?”

Optimus sounded much more horrified than Jazz had expected him to, and it was making him feel like he wasn’t appalled enough by the whole situation.

“It ain’t exactly kept secret, not so much as it’s just… become background noise for the nobles. They don’t talk about it much outside of their own ranks, or even with other nobles who don’t have wolf-mechs. They don’t even see it as a problem worth covering up.”

Optimus made incredulous hand motions and Jazz could hear his fans whirring with indignant rage across the line.

“They see no problem with perpetuating a serious condition to enslave SENTIENT bots? GENERATIONS of them!”

Jazz flapped a hand at him to keep it down again and Optimus gave him a small apology.

“That’s the thing OP, they don’t see ‘em as sentient. They think they’re slightly less dumb anibots. This is despite the fact they have bot modes mind you, so it’s a flimsy excuse and I ain’t defending it. But this is what we’re up against. Entitled bots that don’t see these guys as having any rights. We gotta come at this carefully.”

“Would banning ownership of them outright be careful enough?” Optimus grumbled, making the corner of Jazz’s mouth quirk.

“Not exactly the subtle approach, no. These bots are at risk of bein’ killed by owners who don’t want bots running free who have their secrets.”

The red and blue Prime huffed and his posture changed to indicate he was sitting back, mulling over the situation churlishly.
“Any ideas how to come at this then? I can tell by that look you’re giving me you have some sort of scheme cooking.”

Jazz’s quirked mouth stretched into a full grin.

“Y’know me too well. Matter o’ fact I DO have a plan brewing for this. Does involve you comin’ along and having as much fun as I am with our pal Thunderwing.”

Optimus tilted his helm at that. “Go on”.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Jazz still faces a slight hurdle to the start of his plans. To free the pack, and many others, he's going to need the local alpha on board. Naturally, Prowl has some concerns, but there's a good reason Jazz is the Prime's principal ambassador. He's got a multi-talented glossa, among other things.

Chapter Notes

This one's been sitting almost finished in my computer for a couple months. Had to leave it for a while to get past the writer's block I had on how to wrap this one. Basically get ready for more fucking XD DW it's consensual.

“He honestly said that?... Was there any hint of deception? Did his visor falter, did his servos twitch?”

Prowl watched Inferno’s face for any sign he wasn’t sure, but there was nothing to suggest he was at all suspicious of their odd guest as he shook his red and white head.

They climbed over a fallen metal spire, the rest of the pack trailing in a loose group. Cybertron’s moons shone in opposite corners of the sky, throwing double shadows through the branched crystal structures of bismuth, gypsum and copper that made up the forested patches of the estate.

“I’m telling you Prowl, if Mirage trusts him, then he’s not lying. He’s gonna free you, and he’s gonna make it so me and ‘Raj can be together.”

Hound trotted along on his other side, unable to stop grinning at the thought.

The resident alpha still seemed unconvinced. “Did he say exactly how he meant to go about it? Do we even know if he’s got the authority?”

“I got the impression from the way he and Mirage talk that he’s actually close to the Prime as a friend, not just working for him. That’s gotta work in our favour.” The green alpha perked his ears as he spoke and his snout followed the wind. He changed direction slightly and Prowl unconsciously followed suit.

“Petro-rabbits, couple hundred metres this way.” Hound announced, nose to the ground now as they continued trotting.

Sideswipe came bouncing up beside him with his glossa lolling out of his mouth eagerly. “Yeeeesss I love a good chase. How are you smelling them from so far away? I want a nose like yooours.”

Hound chuffed out a laugh. “You sure about that? I can smell a whoole lotta things at once, I can’t UN-smell them though. There’s some things you’re better off not smelling pup, not even from a
distance. TRUST me.”

Prowl half ignored the banter to his left as he stewed over the new information on their strange guest. First he sought to visit their den, apparently for no other reason than curiosity. Then he tells half the pack he’s going to end their enslavement. Add to that the fact he wasn’t a real noble who seemed to see them as equals to some degree and Prowl felt his tactical computer start to ache.

Something about the situation didn’t add up, no matter how genuinely Hound trusted him, or how much half the pack already liked him. It was too good to be true. There had to be a catch.

Had the bot considered the dangers? Thunderwing and several other noble mechs would sooner kill their wolf-mechs than see them free, or risk the threat to their private affairs. Prowl knew far too much about how Thunderwing conducted business, and he was sure most of it wasn’t legal.

Freedom wasn’t something he’d ever envisioned. This life was all he knew, all ANY of them knew, and it was all they were made for. What could they do with freedom?

Of course it would be nice not to have to suffer Thunderwing any further as a master. But where else would they go? What would they do? Energon came free to no one. Credits even less so. He might not have ever been a part of Cybertronian society, but he knew enough about it merely from observation to know there was no place for wolf-mechs outside of their current position.

Prowl found himself resenting the newcomer for inviting himself into their world and getting his pack’s hopes up so foolishly. He knew nothing of their world.

“You’re looking very introspective and moody there. What’s up?”

Trailbreaker rumbled as he took Inferno’s place at his right side, the red mech having fallen back a little to play tag with Bee and the Twins. Hound was still a little ways ahead, acting as tracker, but Prowl knew he could still hear them.

“The noble. Jazz. I’m sure he thinks he’s being helpful in some way, but he has no idea what he’s doing.”

Inferno rumbled thoughtfully. “You want to know his plans in detail before you let yourself get too excited?”

“I’m not excited, I’m worried. Bots with power and good intentions are just as dangerous as a stampeding cog-boar. He could make things worse for us. He doesn’t understand anything about us, where we come from, what we’re made for. His plans will fall apart without all the information to form them properly.” He scowled, noting Hound’s tail bobbing a little higher, signalling they were getting close to their prey.

“Well, if you’re that worried… why don’t you talk to him about it? He seems perfectly happy to listen to us.” The larger wolf canted his head towards Prowl with a sidelong look.

Prowl spared him an incredulous glance before looking forward again, pinning his audials back a little. He said nothing, but Trailbreaker grinned and whuffed. He knew the alpha was already planning how to get the noble alone without Thunderwing catching them.
Jazz donked his forehelm against the window, looking out on the grounds bathed with moonlight and seeing nothing.

“Y’sure they’re even out there?”

“Of course they are Jazz, he’s not going to have them in here with us. I trust Hound with my life, but I’m not stupid enough to think he could completely deny his base programming during alignment. I wouldn’t even ask it of him. Locking them out there and us in here is a pretty good system.”

Mirage stretched on his berth, popping a few of his joints and looking over at the other bot’s backplates. He knew Jazz hated confinement of any sort, even confinement within a huge building he was unlikely to leave during the night anyway.

“So what exactly HAPPENS to ‘em during alignment? What is it about their programming that makes ‘em dangerous right now?” Jazz turned from the window to look over at his companion, who sat up and crossed his slender legs.

“So far as I’m aware, it’s a hangover from the mechalycancy used to create them. Their code is edited severely when they’re first infected, so that they’re safe and trainable and don’t have urges to attack all bots on sight. But there’s… I’m not sure exactly, it’s like a core of instinctive coding so deeply embedded that it can’t be edited out. It’s an accepted part of owning one, we all have different methods of dealing with it.”

Jazz shifted, canting his helm with a slight frown. “Okay, but… what exactly does it DO. What’s mechalycancy anyway?”

Mirage laced his digits together and looked like he was trying to figure out the best way to explain. “Well, to start out with… it was a myth. Old stories of wild Cyberwolves with glitches that made them super aggressive towards sentient cybertronians. Supposedly the glitched code was a naturally occurring virus, which could be transmitted to us, messing with our transformation cog and base protocols, practically everything but our sparks. In Cyberwolves, it made them aggressive all the time. Transferred to us, it only surfaced with the magnetic alignment of Luna 1 and 2 with the planet.”

Jazz sat with his mouth slightly open, crossing his arms over his chestplate. “So someone found out it wasn’t a myth… not the hard way, I’d hope?”

Mirage shook his helm and drew a long vent. “I don’t actually know the details on that. All I know is, they found real specimens with the virus. And I’m guessing some bright spark decided they could make some money out of it and reduce the number of poor cybertronians kicking around on the streets at the same time. There’s no official information on it, but I’ve been doing some research on the info-net since you’ve decided on your freedom campaign for them. There’s a definite correlation of numbers between the rise of wolf-mech creation and the fall of homelessness around Polyhex.”

Jazz winced. “Y’mean they snatched homeless bots right off the streets to experiment on?”

Mirage gave him a sombre nod. “That’s what it seems like. It might not be true, mind, but it would be a ridiculous coincidence if not. Either way, the mech who discovered it managed to hone the process of changing a regular Cybertronain into one of these mecha-lycans… wolf-mechs, as we know them now… and I’m assuming further experimentation led to the ability to edit their code to… domesticate them, in a way. But that insatiable urge to kill sentient Cybertronians is still buried in them, it only activates during magnetic alignment.”

“And the best way to avoid harm is to isolate them from ya huh?” Jazz looked out the window again,
finally spotting some movement among the metallic branches of copper.

“Pretty much. With Hound I have to make sure the room is air tight, so he can’t smell anyone. It aggravates them if they can smell us and not reach us, they can end up hurting themselves if the urges come on too strongly with no outlet.” The blue and white noble rose from the berth to wander over and look out the window beside Jazz.

“Ah… that’s a good example of a suitable outlet” he murmured, peering over Jazz’s shoulder.

They watched as the red blur of Sideswipe darted around by the edge of the forest, chasing the tiniest flash of silver.

“That a petro-rabbit?” Jazz quirked his mouth in amusement as he watched Sideswipe half shove himself in a hole when the rabbit darted down it.

“Hound probably found them a den. He doesn’t usually kill them, just hunts for fun. He might eat some tonight though. They can process most solid metals into useable base components. Their filters are also pretty amazing.”

Jazz whistled, making a little noise of triumph as Sideswipe emerged from the hole with the petro-rabbit in his mouth.

“Talk about tanks of cast iron, they must have an impressive internal setup. Seems like a lot of changes they gotta go through with that virus. That’s gotta be painful, surely?”

Mirage shrugged. “All of my pack were sparked, I’ve not spoken to a turned wolf-mech before. I don’t know the details of the process they undergo, and I imagine it’s done when they’re fairly young so they may not remember.”

They continued watching the grounds as a streak of gold raced towards Sideswipe, snatching his petro-rabbit and dancing away with it, starting a game of chase.

“So what about Prowl and his pack? D’you know if any of them were turned? Would it offend them if I asked?”

Mirage shrugged again. “I think the two larger wolf mechs were turned, no idea about Prowl himself. I don’t think they’d be offended, but you might want to step lightly. When exactly do you plan to ask them? Because we don’t have another party that I know of yet to cover you disappearing.”

Jazz gave him a self-assured grin. “Awww, Raj, y’know I don’t need a party to cover my tracks. But it might not hurt if ya came with me next time. Need your processor for the plannin’ stuff.”

The noble gave him a shrewd look. “I thought you said you already had a plan? And is it my processor you really want, or my electro-disruptor?”

It was Jazz’s turn to shrug, grinning as he did. “Ah got MOST of a plan. But you know your way around the pomp and circumstance better than me, and we’re gonna need to pomp the slag out of Thunderwing to really set the ball in motion. Inflating his ego means he ain’t gonna see past it to realise what we’re doin’. Also contrary to your own popular belief, ah don’t need your E.D. to be sneaky. But if you’re offerin’, it’d make things easy.”

“And what about the ‘jailbirds’. Did you manage to get them on board like you wanted?” Mirage looked out at the wolf-mechs chasing each other across the grounds.

Jazz drew a long ventilation. “They all seemed pretty eager to get out from under the tyrant’s heel…
but I didn’t get to talk to Prowl like I wanted. He was uuuh… otherwise occupied with an old friend.”

“He was interfacing with Sundancer the whole time you were there wasn’t he.”

Jazz tried to hide the heat in his face, pointedly looking out the window and not at his sly sounding companion.

“Yeah, he was. His pack told me they’re kinda mates? Didn’t wanna spoil what little time they had together, and well… BOY did they have a time together. Got kinda hard to ignore.”

Mirage laughed, patting him on the shoulder and wandering back over to the berth. “They do put on a show when they go at it. I thought you of all mechs would appreciate a culture that promotes free love like they do?”

“Ah never said I didn’t. Just, y’know… wasn’t really prepared for it.” He took one last look out of the window, seeing the colourful blurs disappear back into the forest. “Anyway, I still gotta talk to him. He’s gotta be in on the plan too.”

“We’ll figure it out tomorrow. It’s laaaaate, we spent all day following the wide load windbag around his airfields and I wanted to sleep THEN. Go back to your room and get some recharge, you might have endless energy to deal with this garbage, but I need my beauty sleep.”

Jazz laughed and waved a servo at his friend. “Okay okay ahm goin’. You ain’t the only one who’s looks depend on a decent night’s rest.”

Jazz woke with a gasp, feeling condensation run down his plating as he moved.

His fans buzzed on high, and he was honestly surprised his codpiece hadn’t popped open during recharge.

He cupped the metal over his equipment and hissed at how hot it was. Sliding off his berth, he headed for the washracks attached to his room.

He turned the spray on cool, steam rising from his frame, and leant his forehelm against the tiled wall with a long sigh.

What the SLAG had that been? Apart from one of the most vivid interface dreams he’d ever had, it was… not something he’d ever expected to be turned on by. But that didn’t change the fact he’d just imagined himself being pounded by Prowl as a wolf-bot out in the forest and enjoyed it.

Primus slagit all, the thought made his equipment twitch even NOW. How had his processor gone from wanting to free the wolf-mechs to wanting to frag them in zero astroseconds flat?

He shook his helm at himself and moved so he was leaning with his back against the wall, letting cool water cascade over his chestplates and still overwarm codpiece.

Honestly, he knew why he’d had that dream. He didn’t just admire Prowl, he thought he was attractive as all slag. It was more than just how he looked, though that was no small part. It was his authority, his understated power, the way he’d moved against Sundancer, the sounds he’d made…
He felt a little ashamed for having let himself watch, but then the alpha hadn’t had any problem with it, or he’d have been kicked out. Even Mirage had mentioned their free love mentality.

He’d managed to control himself, the same way every other bot in that room had at the time. But now, he felt if he was put in the same position, he might lose control of his panel locks.

With a grunt of frustration at the insistent pressure under said panel, he clicked it open. His spike sprung eagerly into his palm, and he slid his other servo down to tease at his valve.

Primus almighty he was so wet he felt his own hot lubricant slide down the inside of his thighs. He hadn’t been this wet at the mere prospect of ANY bot before. Sure, he’d been aroused like this before, by someone else’s physical touches, but not by a mere dream.

Jazz shut off his visor, feeling guilty even as he let the image of Prowl rise up in his processor again. His spike strained, aching with charge, and he squeezed it. Gasping, he slid two digits over the entrance of his valve, teasing himself and imagining it was the alpha’s skilled clawed servos touching him.

The thought of that powerful chest pressing against his and rumbling a growl through him had him biting at his bottom lip-plates and whining.

He teased at his outer node while stroking his spike. Pressing two digits into his valve, he slid down the wall and ended up on his knees.

The fantasy didn’t seem quite right. It wasn’t just the thought of Prowl touching him the way he had Sundancer that got him so aroused. It was how he’d taken him.

Carefully, Jazz arranged himself under the spray in the large shower recess. Knees spread, hips canted, chest to the floor, faceplate against the tiles and with both servos between his legs. One pounded at his valve, the other stroking the base of his spike furiously.

Jazz panted hard, trying not to make much noise. It was hard with the image of Prowl leaning over him and driving that long, thick spike into his tight, clenching port.

It didn’t take long for Jazz to overload, whining against the tiles as he tried to scissor himself and milk his spike to imitate what he’d seen. He so badly wanted to feel the stretch of that knot, the squeeze of that servo forcing his transfluid to spatter all over the floor.

The overload was intense, but short lived. He collapsed against the floor ungracefully with a groan, letting the water wash away his fluids and cool his overheated frame.

After a few kliks, he dragged himself up to sit against the wall, tucking away his equipment.

Damnit, he was never going to be able to simulate that experience. Normally shooting off a charge after a dream like that would clear his head of it, but he still wanted it as badly as he had before his overload.

Running a servo over his face, he thought over what Mirage had said again. The last thing he wanted was to exploit a slave class bot… but was participating in something that was culturally fully acceptable to them the same as exploitation?

Had the ‘free love’ thing come about because of an expectation by their masters that they serve in that way? Did it have its roots in the tampering that went on with their code to ‘domesticate’ them?

If any of that was the case, he could never in good conscience ask Prowl to frag him. He had to be
sure first. He HAD to talk to Prowl as it was… he just hoped he could suppress this sudden and intense thirst long enough to actually talk about the more important task of freeing the wolf-mechs from Thunderwing’s iron fist.

Well, at least the thought of Thunderwing was a very effective mood killer. So long as he kept him in the forefront of his mind, he should be fine.

He hoped.

Jazz couldn’t be happier when Thunderwing declared in the dining hall the next morning that he had an unforeseen incident to attend to at another of his training grounds.

He and Mirage had free run of the militaristic palace in his absence, to within certain limits. And the staff were to do all they could to please them.

It was the staff’s lucky day, Jazz thought, because pleasing him and Mirage consisted of leaving them be in their rooms. Or, more specifically, Mirage’s room, since Jazz kept sneaking through the servant’s passages from his own room to get there.

It didn’t matter whether the staff knew as much or not, so long as they weren’t listening in on their conversations, or at least so long as they didn’t care about what they were plotting, the two of them could conspire in peace.

“C’mooooo, Miraagge where is heeee? I gotta talk to him, is he just sleepin’ the night off in the den or something? Should I be sneakin’ down there now or do I have to wait til the afternoon?”

Jazz paced in front of the window, fiddling with a stylus by magnetising and de-magnetising it from his servos, tossing it between them.

The noble on the bed rolled from his front to his back and groaned. “Whyyyy do you have to be so excitable? I don’t know, sometimes he sleeps after, sometimes he doesn’t, I’m not Thunderwing I don’t have a tracker in him watching his every move Jazz. Hound will come whenever he’s ready.”

As if Jazz’s impatience had summoned him, the servant’s passage opened and Hound sauntered in, grinning lazily.

He yawned and climbed up on the berth, unceremoniously flopping over Mirage.

“OOF! See, told you. Hello sweetspark, have fun last night?” Mirage chuckled, scratching behind the large green wolf’s audials, making him rumble.

“MMmmhhmmmmmm caught lotsa rabbits. Good morning Jazz sir.” Hound murmured, optics shuttering in a way that suggested he was in heaven. “Was gonna sleep in the den but th’others got called out by Thunderwing for inspection n’ detailing, thought it would be silly to stay there on my own.”

“Inspection?” Jazz repeated curiously, wandering over to sit on the edge of the berth. “Ya don’t have to worry about the ‘sir’ part Hound, I’m just Jazz to you.”

Mirage stopped his petting and batted at Hound’s shoulder a bit, the wolf-mech getting off him so the
two of them could sit up.

“Oh… okay. Yeah, s’normal for them apparently. He makes sure none of them got too scratched up while they were out all night and has his servants clean and polish them to make sure they’re all back in top form. Doesn’t even let ‘em recharge a bit first. Seems a little rude, but I mean, I’m not surprised at this point.”

Mirage got out his own cleaning cloth as Hound spoke (and Jazz still couldn’t figure out how his diction was so good around all those denta) and started to buff out the scuffs the wolf-mech had gotten during his night-time escapades.

The blue and white noble hummed in response, “Yes, It is rude. You and the others need at least two days to get back into a regular rhythm after alignment. Typical of Thunderwing to expect his pack to snap back into regular time immediately, and totally unreasonable. Is he fuelling them properly afterwards at least? Have you eaten?”

Hound nodded and stretched out obligingly for his master so that Mirage could more easily reach all of his plating.

“Oh yeah, there was energon waiting when we were let back in but we got a good meal outside. Plenty of healthy petro-rabbits. Honestly they tasted better than the energon Thunderwing gave us. It’s sad what this pack considers to be flavoured, it’s all bland as borite.”

Jazz made an unhappy sound at that. “Ain’t like he can’t afford the nice stuff, slag, the things he’s been servin’ us have had too MUCH flavour. Tryin’ way too hard to impress. I’d offer to sneak some of it down to Prowl’s lot, but ah don’t think they’d like it either. If they’re used to bland, overpowered flavour might be way too much for ‘em. Speakin’ of Prowl though…”

The black and white bot slid a little closer, and Hound gave him what seemed to be a knowing look.

“Oh, yeah, I meant to tell you. He wants to meet up with ya. To talk about your plans for getting us all free.”

Jazz refreshed his visor in way of a blink. “Wow… and here I thought I was gonna hafta ask HIM if we could meet up. He seriously asked you to ask me?”

Hound nodded with a slight grin. “Yeah, and Thunderwing leaving on business today makes things a lil’ easier too. I’m s’posed to show you were to meet him, but the time he meant to meet ya might change.”

“Oh, okay.” Jazz shifted to settle with his legs crossed on the berth, facing hound. “Did he say why he wants to meet somewhere special? I mean with Thunderwing gone I could just wander down to the den so he doesn’t have to sneak out.”

Hound shook his head a little, distracted momentarily while Mirage polished his hackles. After a few rumbling purrs, he continued.

“He said he wants to talk to you in private, away from the rest of his pack. He doesn’t trust you yet, wants to suss you out for himself and make sure you’re not just blowing smoke. I told him you’re for real, but… well, he’s protective of his pack. He’s just thinking about what’s best for them. It’s what an alpha’s supposed to do.”

Hound gave a sort of shrug and melted again slightly as Mirage detailed between his hackles.

“Sounds like he’s a little smarter than the average wolf-mech, if he’s questioning your
thoroughness.” Mirage quirked a cheeky half grin at Jazz, who put his servos up in a sort of shrug.

“I mean hey, I’d question me too in his position. Ah know what’s at stake here, and if I gotta convince him, then I gotta convince him. I’m assuming he wants to see me alone?”

The green wolf nodded and stretched as Mirage gave him an ‘all-done’ pat. He stood and booped his snout against Mirage’s nasal ridge before hopping down off the bed and looking back at Jazz.

“Might as well show you where he wants to meet now. His pack isn’t entirely confined to their den at all times, there’s just limited places they can go that aren’t suspicious. Even when Thunderwing isn’t here, apparently he records their tracking data.”

Jazz got off the berth to follow and made a noise of disgust. “Geez, control freak much? Ah’d hate to think what’d happen if he was allowed to employ that kinda slag to track his troops. Pretty sure it wouldn’t take long for a mutiny to form.”

“You two have fun. I’m going to keep doing some research Jazz, I’ll let you know if I find out any more origin information useful to making a case.”

Jazz gave Mirage a thankful wave and followed Hound into the hidden passageways again.

It was easy to get a little lost in the small, winding service ways. Hound seemed to know exactly where he was going somehow, which made Jazz a little envious.

He’d mapped as much of the place as he could when they’d been given a tour, but the main halls and the servant’s passages didn’t seem to correlate. There were stairs and twists and turns that made it hard to know what floor he was on or in what direction they were oriented at any given time.

Eventually, Hound nosed open a doorway and looked around a bit before chuffing slightly and entering. Jazz followed, emerging into what looked like a mid-sized sparring room. Well… mid-sized for this palatial complex anyway.

“This is it. I can smell the pack’s scent on everything in here, it has to be their specific training room. Equipment makes sense for it.”

Once Hound pointed it out, Jazz noticed he was quite right. The dark room was strewn with large ramps, obstacles, and padded dummies that looked like they were made for quadrupedal training rather than bipedal.

Jazz wandered over to a low padded wall he supposed was used for balance training and sat on it, taking in his surroundings with a more critical eye, noting the equipment layout and the entry and exit points in detail.

Hound wandered over and sniffed at a nearby mannequin, pushing at it with a paw and making an amused noise when it proved to be on a spring base and wobbled about.

“Hey Hound…I uuuh…I have some slightly weird questions, and I was kiiiinda hoping I’d get a chance to ask you them without ‘Raj around.”

The green bot quit pushing at the dummy to turn an almost adorably curious look on him, helm cocked to the side.

“Oh?… Is it to do with Mirage?”

“Oh, no no, nothin’ to do with him…I mean not really, but, uh… maybe kinda more to do with
what you guys have um… done, together. Assuming you guys have… uh…” He rubbed at the back of his neck, heat rising to his faceplate as Hound’s curious expression continued with him cocking his head the other way.

“Ooookay? What we’ve done… like… how we hunt together?”

“Uuuh… nnnoo… more like um… ah mean I don’t wanna presume anything but I thought maaaybe you two were… y’know… bangin’ bumpers.”

“Banging wha- Oh! You mean interfacing?”

Jazz nodded a little sheepishly. “Yeah, that. Now I don’t want details or nothin’. I just wanted to know if it’s uh… Primus I don’t wanna know his habits or his kinks I swear but it doesn’t hurt him, does it?”

The look that passed Hound’s face almost made him wish he hadn’t asked. “No! Nooo I would never… I wouldn’t try if I thought it hurt him, no, he always… I mean he would tell me if it did, if he didn’t like it, unless he’s told you it does?”

“Naw mech nothing like that, it’s okay. I haven’t asked him about it ever, I’m DAMN sure he’d let you know if he didn’t like what you were doin’. That’s not why I’m askin’. It’s not about ‘Raj it’s um… it’s me.”

Jazz fiddled with his servos, not quite meeting Hound’s once again curious optics. “Since I visited the den and saw Prowl and Sundancer goin’ at it, I sorta… got wondering… ‘bout what that would feel like.”

There was a brief pause, Hound blinking and shifting a little awkwardly in place.

“Are you um… asking me if I’d… with you? Cause I’m not really sure Mirage-“

Jazz threw up his servos and waved them emphatically. “OH! Nonono nooo I didn’t mean… eheh, I mean, you’re a handsome bot, but I don’t wanna muscle in on Mirage’s territory. What ah meant was that I kinda, sorta, mmmmaaaybe started fantasizing about doin’ it with Prowl.”

He felt his face burning as he locked optics with Hound. The wolf-mech, rather than reflect his embarrassment, seemed to relax and take on a slightly sly expression.

“Well, heck. I don’t blame you. I can tell you from experience, he’s something else when it comes to fragging.”

It was Jazz’s turn to look confused, until something in his head clicked. “Wait, YOU already fragged him?”

Hound chuffed with laughter and moved to sit beside Jazz. “Well yeah, kinda customary to get a proper greeting from the resident alpha of any den you visit. If not the alpha, then at least one or two of the pack members. Prowl’s VERY hospitable when it comes to that tradition. But uuuuuh… not sure how he’d handle an offer from a non wolf-mech outsider.”

Jazz deflated slightly where he sat, still fiddling with his servos. “Hmmm. So… fragging is something you guys do freely with each other right? It’s not something you’re expected by your masters to do? They don’t… ah mean, with the exception of filthy slagger using it as a form of punishment on ya, your kind aren’t expected to interface with your masters as standard are you?”

“Oh, no, definitely not. I mean I know a fair few who say their master sometimes asks it of them, but
they’re not common, and it’s usually just a physical thing. I don’t know of any other of my kind who’ve formed a connection with their master like I have with ‘Raj. Either way, it’s not in our coding that we NEED to interface with our masters.” Hound explained, seeming to have caught on to Jazz’s train of thought.

The Silver and white mech slumped slightly in relief. “Good. So uuuuh… if I propositioned him, he’d be able to turn me down real easy? Cause I’m not forcing anyone to do anything against their will, especially not interfacing. Had to be sure he wasn’t obligated to say yes in any way.”

Hound leant against Jazz’s leg and twitched his tail slightly. “Nah, he’s not. Honestly couldn’t tell you if he’d say yes or no though. He’s as happy as most others to frag one of his own, but he might see you as off-limits. In the end, all you can do is ask. I don’t think it’d hurt either way.”

Jazz nodded, hanging his helm and humming in a non-committal sort of way.

Hound poked his forehead with his snout, making the bot look up at him curiously.

“Hey, if he says no and you’re still eager to know what it’s like interfacing with us, I’m sure some of my pack would be happy to show you.”

Jazz chuckled at that, patting at the green bot’s back-plates. “Thanks Hound, but I might take a raincheck on that. Ah honestly don’t know yet if I’m thirstin’ for Prowl specifically, or simply way too curious about your kind in general. Appreciate the offer though.”

He sat up a bit and looked around the room again, eager to change the subject and clear the embarrassed heat from his frame. “So uh… when IS he supposed to be meetin’ me here?”

“Well, he said tonight would be best when he thought of it LAST night. But this morning just before he left he said it might be earlier. With Thunderwing out, he might- oh, hangon, he’s pinging me.”

Hound looked ahead, optics unfocussed slightly as he conversed internally, and Jazz made a mental note to find out just how complex their comms systems were and whether he could tap their frequencies. It would certainly make co-ordinating MUCH easier.

After a few moments of Hound not moving save for a lazy swish of his tail, he finally snapped back to reality.

“Sorry, bit of an involved conversation. He says he can meet you here at 12:00 hours. He’s not just working around Thunderwing, he’s trying to make sure the servants are all occupied with duties away from here while you’re both here. Do I tell him yes from you?”

“Yeah, 12 is fine. Slag, it’s only 3 cycles away, and I don’t have any other plans.” Jazz snickered.

The wolf-mech nodded and tilted his helm slightly as he made his reply. When he turned back to Jazz, he had that sly twinkle in his optics again.

“I mean, no plans at all? You sure you’re not gonna be busy tryin’ to figure out how to ask him real nice if he’ll frag you?”

“Ooo now I see why you’re Mirage’s best friend. You’re just as cheeky as he is.” Jazz poked his snout, Hound whuffing and shaking his head with a grin.

The silver and white mech stood and stretched a bit, cycling his vents. “Y’right though, I mean it’s not ALL I’m gonna be planning, but it’s part of it. First priority is convincing him this is a good idea, and that I’m not going to do anything to endanger him or his pack. THEN I can worry about the
prospect of a casual frag.”

Hound snickered and stretched likewise, fluffing out his plating before letting it smooth down again. “Mmmmkay. Welp. Guess we’re going back to ‘Raj’s room for that, and while you scheme, I’m gonna recharge. Had a loooooong night.”

“Y’gonna hafta tell me about that long night later, I wanna know what you guys do when you’re running around out there all gleefully feral.” Jazz chuckled, following him back to the concealed door.

“You’re serious about this whole learning our ways stuff aren’tcha?” Hound gave him an amused look over his shoulder.

“Well yeah, it’s my job. And it’s my job ‘cause Optimus knows I love doin’ it” Jazz grinned back.

“Hmmm I better make sure you learn everything right then. Oh, hey, by the way, if you ask Prowl and he says yes?”

Jazz narrowed his optics behind his visor at the cheeky look Hound was giving him over his shoulder.

“I’ll bite… what should I do?”

Hound grinned, paused, and raised his aft in the air, chest and head down and tail flicked to the side.

“Y’gotta do this so he knows EXACTLY how you want it.”

Jazz felt the heat rise to his faceplate again, and he swatted at Hound’s haunch as the green wolf laughed and danced away.

“Y’better not be pullin’ my leg about that.” Jazz murmured, wondering to himself if that actually WAS the best way to go about it.

When Jazz arrived, he was surprised to find Prowl already there.

And not only was he there, but he was running the obstacle course in wolf mode.

More interested in watching than stopping him, Jazz sidled over to a support column along the wall and leant there in the shadows.

It was clear he’d done the course a million times over, it didn’t even look as if he was trying. He leapt up one wall, bouncing off it and up the one across from it, then jumping again atop the first wall. He navigated his way down a wire net on the other side, leaping onto a very narrow beam and practically running across it.

From there he jumped onto a large structure full of holes, climbing into one of them and weaving through the narrow spaces inside to come out at the bottom.

He then squeezed his way beneath what turned out to be a netting of live-wires, which crackled when his plating got a tiny bit too close. Without touching them, and not looking remotely hesitant, he scrambled under and up from that obstacle and ran up another narrow beam acting as a ramp.
This took him to a series of chain suspended barrels. He jumped from one to another, barely pausing to re-balance himself. Once across this, he descended into a pit of foam squares, cutting his way through them as fast as he could.

It looked deceptively easy for the large wolf-mech, but Jazz had trained in similar pits before and knew how difficult they could actually be to navigate. They were often a stand in for rust-pits, for bots training to deal with deep sands in the rust sea. And heavy bodies trying to move through them often sank down with nothing to push themselves up with.

Taking it in his stride and dragging himself out of the pit, Prowl managed to haul himself up a nearly vertical wall with only minimal grip attachments.

Once at the top, he stopped, and an alert sound pinging. A smooth metallic voice announced his time and how it ranked against his previous runs.

“Now this is what I call a course. Ah’ve seen easier enforcer training setups, how often d’you guys have to run this thing?”

Jazz wandered out of the shadows as Prowl, panting slightly, jumped down via a series of platforms to reach the ground. Before he spoke, the alpha transformed and drew himself to his full height.

Jazz tried his best not to show just what kind of an effect the display had on him. He was here for serious business, not to swoon.

“Four times a joor, at the very least.” Prowl said shortly. His tone wasn’t unfriendly, but there was an edge to it that told Jazz he was being deliberately blunt. It was a display meant to affirm his status. Jazz may have been on par with the noble class, but Prowl was on home turf, in his own element, and his priority was protecting his pack.

Jazz understood the display perfectly. And he knew if he was going to reassure Prowl, he needed to present himself just as seriously. Not as a threat, but as someone who understood what was at stake.

“If you appreciate you comin’ to meet me alone. I’m sorry if I was intruding on ya the other night, I was mostly just eager to meet more of your kind and find out how you’re bein’ treated. Turns out not too well.”

Prowl looked him over subtly as he spoke, reading every inch of his body to try and figure out his motives, but so far he was a closed book. The only effect his posturing had had on the ambassador was a slight shiver of the E.M field before it had been mirrored.

Reciprocated body language wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. It could be an attempt to show mutual respect. But it might also be an attempt to hide true motives. He would have to watch him very carefully.

“It was not an issue. You are a mech of high standing, it is my duty to welcome you. It is unfortunate that your visit coincided with Sundancer’s… It isn’t often I get to see him, and we had a lot to catch up on. Otherwise I would have given you my wholesparked attention.”

Prowl noted the subtle shift of Jazz’s frame, posture relaxing slightly at the mention of Sundancer. His own posture remained upright and still.

Jazz gave a short nod. “Completely understandable. Hound tells me you were clued into the conversation I had with the rest of your pack afterwards.” He never let his visor leave the piercing golden optics, noting them darting across his frame in quick little motions. He could take in Prowl’s body language cues without looking away, visor peripheral able to key in on any subtle movement
without him moving his head.

Both of them were keenly aware that they were having two conversations at once, the silent one possibly more important than the verbal.

Prowl’s tail twitched slightly. “Yes, that conversation is what I wanted to speak with you about.”

Jazz raised a servo placatingly, sensing the tension growing even though Prowl’s voice was still measured as ever.

“I want to clarify before you go on worrying, ah ain’t doing anything that might endanger you or your pack without full consultation with you first. I’m aware of what’s at stake here, if Thunderwing or any of the other less reputable owners of your kind find out we’re plannin’ on liberating your kind, they’re likely to try and kill the lot of ya. Not gonna let that happen. Not on my watch.”

Prowl was so taken aback by the blunt honesty and immediate addressal of his fears that his own posture now mirrored Jazz’s, tail twitching in surprise. He blinked at Jazz and made a low, thoughtful mirring sound before responding.

“I’m relieved to hear that. I feared you may be well meaning without knowing the risks.”

Jazz gave him a small grin “I’m a fast learner. Until I came on this trip, I knew nothin’ about your kind beyond the fact Mirage owned a few of ya. Between Mirage, Hound and the rest of your pack, I’ve already learnt enough to know that your kind are easily as sentient and intelligent as any other bots on Cybertron. NONE of ya should be enslaved like this.”

Ah. There was the mech’s true emotions. He had been putting up a mask, but Prowl wasn’t as prepared as he thought for what it had been concealing. The bot genuinely seemed indignant about their situation. Which confused him slightly, and he let it show.

“Slavery is what we were created for. We do not serve any purpose outside of the role we already fulfil. While I would rather not have a master as… strict, as Thunderwing, there isn’t exactly an alternative life to this one. We are sentient, but we are also dangerous, a fact we are well aware of. We need to be controlled.”

Jazz’s jaw hung open slightly at that, and it was a while before he could find his voice to reply, processor going a million miles a second to compute the factors that went into that kind of thinking.

“Mech, your kind is smart enough to control yourselves! If you can take on severe injuries and hold yourself upright at some tyrant’s command for over a cycle until he LETS you seek help… bot you and your kind have more control than most regular cybertronians. Your kind has every right to live as normal a life as everyone else. YOU have every right.”

Prowl frowned slightly, finding it hard to believe the mech. Had he been one of his own kind, he’d have dismissed his ideas as dangerous and looking to get himself killed.

But he was a noble, by decree of a true Prime no less. His words couldn’t possibly be without truth and substance of some measure.

Prowl mirred again, breaking eye contact and pacing slightly, the visored mech’s gaze following him. He had to make this bot understand the depth of the situation, it was clear he still didn’t know enough yet.

“We were not created from mechs of any high standing. Those of us not born to our own kind were taken as younglings from the lowest levels of society. I remember very little, but I know I came from
the gutters. The only thing that elevated my standing, that elevated the standing of any of us who were turned as younglings, was the fact we survived.”

He turned his optics on Jazz again, standing with a much more open posture. “If we were not taken, if we hadn’t become what we are, we’d be no more important in society, have no more equal of a place than we do now. This… in many ways is better. We have a measure of worth… albeit as possessions, but that is more in our favour than the alternative. We are fed, we are whole, and all that is required of us in return is to fulfil our master’s wishes.”

Jazz listened intently, processing every scrap of new information along with the emotional and practical implications. Suddenly, the fact the wolf-mechs seemed to so readily accept their lot in life made much more sense. His attention did not waiver as Prowl continued, tone leaning more towards plaintive than authoritative.

“I understand you want to help us… that our situation here, specifically, is not ideal. I would be lying if I said it was. But an attempt to uproot the entire system surrounding our kind… rather than be elevated, I fear we’re more likely to fall to the edges of society and loose whatever standing we currently have. You are the only mech I have ever known to see us as something beyond our station. The first to see us as more than drones or possessions. You would have to convince so many more of your class to see us that way before we could be treated as equals, and why would they see us that way now when they haven’t since we were first created?”

The silver and white mech stood very still, head slightly bowed, but gaze never breaking from the intense golden optics still staring as if they could see right through his visor.

There was a sinking feeling in his tank, and he crossed his arms loosely, shifting his weight to his other leg.

“You’re right. It’s not a small task at all… and t’be honest, ah hadn’t actually considered how hard it might be to bring the noble class… hell, any class, around to seeing you guys as equals. It’s obvious as slag to me, but that’s ME. Ah notice a lot more than the average bot. But you’re right, most bots ain’t like me, they’ve been blind this long, they’re not gonna want to see the truth.”

He watched Prowl’s sensor wings and tail twitch in response to him acknowledging his points. His slight grin returned a little to try and cheer the anxious looking mech up a bit.

“But thing is though, we also have a very powerful weapon on our side in that fight. We have the Prime. And he’s already mad as hell about you guys being kept as slaves.”

Prowl’s orbital ridges knitted anxiously, and his posture became a little more wary, plating fluffing slightly.

“Is he going to demand we are released before we can find a way to ensure the safety of packs under unkind masters?”

Jazz waved a hand at him “Nah, he’s way too smart for that. I already told him my plan for that, and now I gotta tell you. Mostly because when I told him, it was a half formed plan… I need YOUR input to complete it.”

The wolf-mech gave him a slightly wary look. “My input?... How exactly?”

“You know way more about the kind of events your masters like to centre around your kind than I do, and you’ll know exactly what nobles we need to target to ensure none of your kin are murdered.”

Prowl blinked at Jazz as the bot moved to sit on one of the padded mats beneath a high balance beam
apparatus, patting the space next to him.

The alpha moved obligingly and sat by him, taking up a comfortable cross-legged position in counterpoint to Jazz’s very relaxed half sprawl.

“Okay, so, here’s the idea… Ahm thinkin’ we can hold a hunting event in honour of the Prime, and he’ll be attending, obviously. The bots we invite will be ones you know are bad masters, ones most likely to try and kill their packs the moment they think they have to give ‘em up.”

Prowl switched his audials back and forth, a little uncertain. “I know most such packs and their nobles… but possibly not all. Our kind have a limited communication network. If our masters do not come into contact, neither do we. Sometimes we can know of or contact packs through one another, but there’s no certainty that every pack is within the reach of our network.”

“That’s okay. We know what we’re lookin’ for, ah have bots I can send into the field to seek out registries and check out just how many of you are out there. We’re gonna do this right, okay? I ain’t leaving any of you behind. For the moment, we’re concentrating on rough numbers. How many abused packs would you say there were?”

The wolf mech took a deep ventilation and focused inward for a moment before answering.

“Roughly eight that I know of. I can name all of their masters.”

Jazz grinned, “Good. We’ll invite ‘em all to the event, tell them to bring their entire packs, make it about showing off for the Prime. If they think it’s to gain his favour, they’ll be clamouring to get there. And once they are, we’ll be making sure there’s a very neat system for keeping their packs separate and safely tucked away when not competing. Saaay, during a fancy party for instance. Don’t wanna have you all runnin’ around in the same room when there’s schmoozing to be done with the Prime.”

Prowl squinted at Jazz slightly, tactical processor working overtime to figure out the details of the plan before Jazz even explained them. “You want to separate them all from their packs so you can smuggle us away?”

Jazz flashed him a wide smile and clicked his digits. “Exactly! And of course, there’ll be safety nets and contingencies involved. Gonna hafta have a decent amount of Prime’s people involved and ready to step in if someone catches on or tries to hurt any of ya. But it can be done, it’s the best first step, we know we can’t just blanket ban nobles from owning your kind. It’d be a mess. We start out with the sting to free the packs most at risk, paint it as cracking down on cruelty in the upper echelons. Then we gradually work at making your sentience public knowledge, start setting rights, get people educated on ya before they meet you all. Gotta take it in stages.”

Prowl nodded, giving Jazz an appreciative look at last. “You have been much more thorough with this than I expected. Especially considering how little information about us you’ve had to work with.”

Jazz felt his spark skip a beat at the sudden extra light in the golden optics when they looked at him. He cleared his vents softly to hide the reaction and grinned.

“Ah like to cover all my angles, even without all the information. S’what makes me good at my job. Speakin’ of jobs, back on the subject of you wonderin’ what your kind are gonna do once you’re out of the slave trade… you know we’re already workin’ on that right? There’ll be safety nets, support networks, all the help you’re gonna need. And haven’t you ever wondered what you might do if you had an actual choice?”
Prowl frowned slightly again, looking away as his audials and tail twitched.

“I… no… not really. My duty has always come first. As a progenitor and alpha. Those are primary, but pleasing my master is also important, and that takes up the rest of my energy. I never thought I’d be anything but what I am now, I have no idea what I would… what I might do… once we’re free. I never expected to BE free.” He shook his head slightly, optics a little unfocussed.

“Well, I can tell you one thing. You have a sharp mind on ya and an unmatched skill at obstacle courses. That paired with the fact you were already clued in to my plan before I finished explaining, and I’m thinkin’ you’d make a perfect enforcer. I’ve worked with Super-Intendants less tactically proficient than you. It’s an option that bears thinkin’ on.”

Jazz found himself subjected to that intense, bright gaze again, and had to stop himself biting at his lip-plate.

“Thank you. I don’t… I’ve never been told I had an aptitude for anything beyond what I am. It’s reassuring to think I could fulfil other roles. And thank you for being considerate of our needs, including us in these plans. I admit I did not expect to be… well… for my opinions to be so important to your decisions.”

“Aw heck, no need to thank me for that. I’d be a fool if I didn’t. Your opinions on this are more important than anyone else’s.”

Jazz felt heat rising to his faceplates a little at the sincerity in Prowl’s tone. Damnit, he was falling hard… the bot was intelligent, sincere, compassionate… and those optics, Primus damnit they seemed to stare right into his spark.

Prowl cocked his head slightly at Jazz in mild concern when he noticed the slight temperature increase. “Are you feeling alright?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, no, I’m fine. I just… would it be okay if I asked you some more questions about you? And your kind, I mean…”

Prowl shifted into a more relaxed position and nodded. “Of course. Anything I can do to assist in your knowledge base will help us overall. Was there something in particular to my pack you wanted to know?”

Jazz’s servo fiddled with the seam along the edge of the mat and he shifted slightly, hoping his nerves and processor didn’t fail him in this delicate operation.

“Yeah, kinda. Ahm not sure if it’s specific to you and your pack or not… Hound kinda implied it wasn’t. It’s got to do with you guys interacting with outsiders to the pack.”

Jazz tried to put on an air of casualness, and for now Prowl seemed to be buying it, so he continued.

“Hound mentioned you guys tend to welcome visiting wolf-mechs with a bit of friendly interfacing… is that the case with every pack?”

Prowl gave a light shrug, tail shifting thoughtfully. “Those of us who are acquainted with one another to some degree, yes, usually. It’s… fun, I suppose is the best word, when you have a different bot around to interact with. Packs can get a little bored with one another in terms of casual interface. We’ll always make offers to other friendly mechs allowed to pass through our den. Not all packs are afforded the offer though. Some of us do not get along well, or at all. There are some individuals barred from our den when they come. They are either too violent, careless or rude. Not all nobles encourage friendly behaviour among their packs… it is something you will need to be
wary of in the near future. Lord Onslaught’s pack is especially dangerous… NO other pack I know of willingly interacts with them.”

The shiver that ran through Prowl helped to bring Jazz back to sobriety, and he frowned. “Dangerous? How so?”

“They respect no other pack. They will attack and fight other wolf-mechs on sight for no reason other than they think it’s fun. Their general attitude is physical domination at every opportunity, they cannot be reasoned with and take ENJOYMENT from causing pain. Not even Thunderwing tries to socialise us with them, despite being friends with Onslaught.”

Jazz pulled a slightly horrified face. “Daaammn… are they like that because they were trained to be, or are they just… like that?”

Prowl shrugged again. “None of us are sure. We think it’s training, but then they seem to enjoy it so much we suspect they may all have been handpicked for natural proclivity towards violence.”

Jazz shuddered slightly. He knew of Lord Onslaught. He could just see him letting loose a terrifying mob of angry wolf-mechs ready and willing to kill. Remembering how Prowl had killed the huge buck during the hunt, it terrified him to think of others of his kind doing that to sentient Cybertronians.

The visored mech shook his helm and glanced back at Prowl, trying to get the subject back around to more pleasant things.

“Well, back on the subject of visitors and interfacing… Ah hope it’s not too personal of me to ask, but… how does it work for you and Sundancer? Being mates in different packs? Ah mean, I saw you guys are still pretty into each… other… oh ah’ve said something wrong, I’m sorry-”

Prowl, helm downcast and posture now slumped, shook his helm. “No, it’s alright. What you saw was genuine happiness at the time. We HAD missed one another… unfortunately, in my case it was physically AND emotionally… in Sundancer’s case, it turned out to only be physically. Honestly, I was naive to believe all this time that we held the same feelings.”

“Y’don’t have to talk about it if it makes you uncomfortable.” Jazz murmured softly, but Prowl shook his helm again.

“You… may be the only person I feel comfortable talking about this to. I don’t want to tell my pack… they will try and make more out of it than they need to. And I would not tell Hound because it would spread through all the packs in the network and mine would find out from someone other than me.”

Prowl sat up a little and drew a deep ventilation. “I don’t want pity, I just… if you don’t mind me getting it off my chest-plates, I would be grateful.”

Jazz nodded “S’fine mech, go ahead, talk it out.”

It was a few more moments before the handsome bot raised his helm and spoke again.

“The first pack I was in, under Quickgrip, I came into from the youngling crèche. I’d been in that crèche almost all the way to my final frame. Being one of the eldest there for quite some time, I’d been one of the proto-alphas… some of us display proclivity for leadership before we’re in a true pack. I’d been used to being a leader, and now I was once again an underling. I chafed a little, but Sundancer… he was also young, but already pack alpha, he pulled me into line gently. Thinking back on it, he used his charm to become alpha, not any real leadership skill. It worked though… I not
only fell into line, I became smitten.”

Enraptured by the freely given history, Jazz sat very still, fully attentive, and let Prowl speak uninterrupted.

“It worked in Quickgrip’s favour. The moment he put me in a final frame, he had the two of us spark. It wasn’t exactly safe, I should have been allowed to mature more before my first covering, but I wanted it so badly I didn’t care. I carried two pups for Sundancer, and when the Twins emerged I couldn’t have been happier. I thought that was it, I thought I was fulfilled and Sundancer and I were mated for life.”

Jazz felt his spark breaking even as he knew what was coming. It didn’t help that there were unhidden notes of bitterness and pain in Prowl’s voice now.

“The Twins were only second frame when Quickgrip sold the pack, splitting all of us up with the exception of me and the pups. He could have sold us separately, but he wasn’t completely sparkless. I was spark-broken to lose Sundancer, but I had to suppress my emotions quickly to appease Thunderwing. He didn’t care, my obedience and training were paramount.”

A slightly harder edge came into his tone, optics turning cold.

“The few times I got to see Sundancer again were the lights in the dark that kept me going until I found my footing. It was very stressful until I grew to understand Thunderwing and his expectations. I became comfortable in my role here, naturally gravitating to the Alpha position. Inferno relented it willingly, he hated the responsibility. No matter how well I adjusted here, I always missed Sundancer and my first pack. I assumed… even until now, that he felt the same way.”

Prowl’s sensory winglets were nearly flat against his back as he continued.

“The other night, after we had gotten our usual greetings out of the way, we washed and went outside to talk. I wanted to know how he was, how his pack was faring, how Octane was treating them. He told me. At length. Talked about how wonderful things were, kept going on about how much fun he was having with their newest member, Lightstep. When I tried to tell him how I was, he dismissed me. When he asked why I didn’t request more amenities of my master, I tried to explain… he wouldn’t listen. I realised that he had no idea… none WHATSOEVER of the conditions my pack live under. He has no idea how strict Thunderwing is, he’s never had a master like him. He’s been completely coddled by Octane… never wants for anything, free to beg for more, no training regimes, all his desires catered to…”

The sinking feeling in Jazz’s tank increased, and he automatically reached his E.M field out comfortably.

Prowl flinched slightly before the confused ripple in his field settled and he tentatively let it mesh with Jazz’s.

“I… confronted him about his attitude towards me and lack of compassion. I said mates were supposed to care about such things, that’s what makes us mates…”

Prowl swallowed dryly, unable to take the raw hurt from his voice.

“He told me he hadn’t considered us mates for vorns.”

Jazz couldn’t help himself, reaching a servo out to touch Prowl’s shoulder sympathetically. The bot once again flinched slightly before accepting the contact.
“Mech, that’s harsh. Not to mention uncalled for. What business did he have gettin’ amazing frags from you with an attitude like that?”

Prowl sighed and shrugged, audials as flat as his winglets. “I probably would still have interfaced with him if he’d told me sooner that he didn’t feel we should be mates anymore. He COULD have talked it out with me when he first felt that way and had an opportunity. He seemed to think I should have just gotten over him the moment we became separated. I asked him if he was ‘over’ Sideswipe and Sunstreaker.”

“What’d he say to that?” Jazz rubbed the shoulder reassuringly, noting the twitch upwards of Prowl’s winglets.

“He got VERY awkward and apologetic over that. He might not care for me, but he’d be damned by every wolf-mech he knew if he admitted to not caring about his own pups. It doesn’t matter how many pups we have, how many are taken from us before they even know us, we care about every one of them. It’s why I treat Bumblebee as if he were of my own spark.”

Jazz blinked at that, servo stilling. “Wooooah okay hold up… pups… get taken away from you? They make you have younglings and then they just take them?”

Prowl turned bemused optics on the visor now bright with fury. “Yes?... You must remember, we are property to our masters. Pets. They chose who we breed with, they chose which of us sparks and which carries, and in most cases the noble who approaches is the one to take ownership of the younglings produced. Sometimes not. I have carried two litters and sparked two more. The only ones I ever got to keep were my first which I was lucky for. It’s certainly not the norm… and should Thunderwing decide he didn’t want us anymore, he would not hesitate to separate me from the Twins.”

Jazz made a few incoherent noises and put his servos over his faceplates, flopping back against the mat with a concerned looking Prowl hovering over him.

After some very deep, calming ventilations, Jazz spoke coherently again, albeit muffled by his servos.

“Prime’s gonna kill em. Ah swear he’s gonna straight up murder the bots that put all this in place, they are snuffed sparks walkin’.”

Prowl shifted and poked Jazz’s shoulder lightly. “You’re not having a crash are you?”

Jazz drew his servos away from his face with a long vent. “Nah, mech, I’m good, I just… this slag gets more and more unbelievably not okay by the astrosecond.”

“If it makes you feel any better, most of our kind has made an informal pact to care for any youngling that comes to us as if they were our own, so our pups are never left wanting. We will kill our own kind if we ever find them neglecting or harming pups. It is abhorrent.”

“Mech, the fact you’re forced to have ‘em in the first place and then have them taken from ya is abhorrent. I won’t be able to tell Optimus about it until AFTER we’ve gotten you safe from your master’s reach, or he’ll straight up call every noble to Iacon and arrest every one of ‘em. Which is gonna leave a lot of confused and scared wolf-mechs. Can’t let him do that, gonna hafta keep it from him for a while, okay?”

Prowl nodded, looking bemused again. “This Prime sounds extremely… emotional. But emotional about injustice, rather than just being petulant like the others.”
Jazz sat up again and dragged a servo down his face, grinning slightly. “Yeah, that about sums him up. He’s what Primes are SUPPOSED to be like. The last few were fakers.”

The alpha made a thoughtful noise and sat back slightly, looking Jazz over. “I feel as though you were going in a different direction with your questions before we ended up on something of a tangent.”

“Ah… yeah, I sorta was” Jazz rubbed the back of his neck, looking sideways at Prowl and away again to keep his temperature in check.

Was now really the time to be chasing down his desires? It felt insensitive after the things they’d just talked about. But DAMN if he didn’t keep getting flustered by all the little details about the bot the longer they talked.

Well, it couldn’t hurt to ask ABOUT it, right? He could test the waters for later?

“Listen… I was asking about you guys interfacing with visitors of your own kind cause uh… have you ever… would you ever… consider… interfacing with a visitor who WASN’T one of your own kind?”

Jazz got a response very similar to Hound’s head tilt. The effect was no less adorable in mech form than wolf.

“I’m… not sure I follow?”

Jazz groaned internally and bit at his lip-plate.

“I mean… would you uuuh… ever be interested in, kinda… interfacing… with me?”

Wow. Yeah. REAL smooth, Jazz meister. Smooth as the jagged cliffs of the manganese mountains.

“Oh!… You mean, as payment for assisting us? I’ll admit that’s not something I expected you to ask, but amoung our own kind we sometimes seal agreements with-“

“No no, uh, not as part of anything to do with… this stuff. Definitely not as a payment, you don’t owe me ANYTHING. I meant just… casually? Like you do with your own kind? You can say no, it’s okay, Ah was just wondering if you might, y’know… be okay with it…”

Prowl looked the now fully sheepish and heat-flushed Jazz over with a cool expression, giving nothing away.

“Well, I know I can say no. Your station is above mine, but not being my master, you can’t order me to. But… if you only want to as a social gesture… I don’t see why not. Everything in here is easily cleanable, and this mat is adequately-“

“Oh, woah, I uh… I wasn’t… y’don’t have to say yes to it RIGHT NOW, I mean I admit I came here thinkin’ about it, but after the stuff we’ve been talking about, I feel like it’d be insensitive askin’ you to right now.” Jazz murmured, rubbing the back of his neck.

Prowl gave a soft whuff and moved a little closer, drawing in a long ventilation. Jazz looked up at him with slight confusion, and the alpha cocked an orbital ridge at him slightly.

“Thank you for being considerate, but I can smell you’re already well and truly ready to go. Seems little point in putting off something you want, it would be very physically frustrating for you. And to be honest, I could use a frag to lift my mood. My kind aren’t nearly as reserved with interface as I’ve
observed other Cybertronians to be.”

Jazz made a slightly strangled noise and stared at Prowl, denying a command prompt to open his panel just from the way the bot had looked at him.

“I… oh… we aren’t uh, gonna get caught in here are we?”

Prowl shook his helm, tail swishing freely now to show his amusement. “Servants are banned from entering while we train, and I requested my pack members leave me be until I’m done. There is no surveillance in here, we are quite free to interface. My question to you is what exactly you wanted to do?”

Jazz bit at his lip slightly, visor over-bright, and murmured, “I hope Hound wasn’t having me on… if he was, in my defence, he told me to do this.”

He shifted on the mat, moving to all fours and lowering his chest, turning his helm to look back at Prowl. “Tell me I’m not just doing somethin’ dumb?”

Prowl let out the first laugh Jazz had heard from him, a soft chuckle that sent shivers down his spinal struts. The alpha moved, kneeling beside him and running a tentative servo along his back.

“No, you’re not. Presenting is the most blaringly obvious way we have of saying ‘spike me’. It usually carries connotations of ‘hard’ and ‘now’, but those are cues given by tail motions, which you can’t give me.”

Jazz groaned softly and arched his back into the touches. “Take ‘em as given, that’s pretty much what a’hm askin’ for.”

Prowl nodded and scritched beneath his stubby winglets, making him shiver. “Alright, but I’ll have to start soft and work up to hard, I’ve never spiked someone outside my own caste… I’m not sure of your limits.”

Jazz revved and wiggled his hips a little. “Oh don’t worry too much about me, I can take a poundin’.”

Prowl’s response was his own, deep chested rumble as he moved to kneel behind Jazz, bringing his mouth down to lap at the mech’s panel seams.

It sprung open almost immediately, Jazz whining and gasping as the alpha began lapping at his valve without hesitation.

Jazz’s spike sprung free, pressurising quickly as lubricant ran down it’s underside from his once again already sopping port. It was ALMOST embarrassing how ready he was, but Prowl seemed pleased by the display if his rumbling was anything to go by.

The silver mech pawed at the mat beneath him, gasping and mewling as Prowl’s broad, slightly rough glossa swept over his valve entrance and outer node. His valve clenched eagerly in response, and after a few moments, he felt Prowl shift again.

His large, warm body gently pressed against Jazz’s backplates, sending that rumbling purr reverberating through him like he’d imagined. Even BETTER than he’d imagined.

Clawed servos gently slid over his hip-plates, one sitting in the junction between hip and thigh, the other dipping lower to massage around the base of his straining spike.
Jazz was already panting, and barely heard the click of Prowl’s own spike releasing, but he soon felt it sliding against his own. He moaned as Prowl slowly rocked his hips, rubbing their shafts together and moaning softly himself.

Their ridges caught against one another slightly, causing little bursts of pleasure that made them gasp. It didn’t take much of this for Jazz to whimper and squirm, prompting Prowl to pull back and line himself up.

Jazz stilled, at least as much as he could when his whole frame shivered in anticipation. The slender point of Prowl’s spike pressed into him, followed by the slight stretch of the shaft. Jazz leant back into the delicious press, but Prowl’s grip on his hip tightened slightly to still him, and the alpha vented warm air over his neck as he eased out and in again a few times.

Jazz whined but made no complaint, enjoying every slide of those ridges against his valve walls. Lubricant trailed steadily down the underside of his spike, mixing with the drip of his own pre-fluid.

He gasped and moaned when the servo massaging around the base of his spike suddenly wrapped around it, and Prowl drove all the way into him at last.

The alpha let out a soft growl, mouthing at Jazz’s neck gently as he ground their hips together, letting Jazz adjust to the full girth of his un-swollen knot. He gently squeezed the oddly shaped shaft in his servo, enjoying the way Jazz panted and moaned. He realised it only seemed like a strangely shaped spike because he was used to his own kind’s.

He had a surreal moment of realisation, that he was spiking a noble, that they had asked him and given him the option to refuse. Nothing like this had ever happened to him, and he wondered briefly if it would again, but he was snapped out of the weird reverie by Jazz whining rather loudly.

“Primus… ah… Prowl, Please…”

Always eager to please, he gave the neck cables he was mouthing a gentle nip and shifted his knees for better balance. He then began to thrust, drawing out nearly to the tip and hilting himself again quickly.

Jazz had a hard time staying quiet… not that he was sure he needed to, but all the same, he shoved a fisted servo in his mouth and moaned around it as he was pounded deliciously, a strong but careful servo stroking his spike in time with the thrusts.

He knew he wasn’t going to last long and if Prowl’s heavy panting was anything to go by, neither was he.

Prowl knew if he exercised his self-control, he could pound through the tightly clenching valve that he could feel was close to overload. But that probably wasn’t what Jazz wanted, so he let his own charge build unchecked and pulled Jazz’s hips tight against him.

Jazz came with a cry as the long, thick spike pounded his ceiling node, clawed servo squeezing at the base of his spike as if to milk him of his transfluid.

It worked, because the silvery fluids fairly jetted against his chestplates and the padded mat, but that wasn’t even half of it. Jazz gasped and keened as the spike ground deep within him, its base swelling to fill his entrance.

The next thing he knew, Jazz was filled with a rush of hot transfluid, feeling every pulse jet against his ceiling node, pushing his valve to its maximum capacity and sending him crashing into a second overload. He writhed beneath Prowl, moaning as he felt the hard rumble of the alpha’s growling and
the slight sting of denta on the back of his neck. It was better than anything he’d come up with in his dreams.

The overload seemed to go on forever, but Prowl eventually stilled and lapped at the superficial marks he’d made on Jazz’s neck. The way the visored mech shivered told him he’d liked the feel of it, otherwise he wouldn’t have dared.

“Mmmm I should probably have warned you… biting is a natural habit for us, but it’s not infectious outside of alignment… if the rest of my pack sees the marks though… they will likely start making offers to interface as well.”

Jazz, his face pressed against the cool mat as his fans roared to cool his frame, let out a muffled chuckle. “Figured y’knew what you were doin’. So uh… how long til you can uh… pull out?”

“Oh, are you uncomfortable? I can move-“

“Oh no, no it’s fine jus’ wonderin’. Feels pretty good right now t’be honest.” Jazz half purred, arching back into Prowl a little and moaning softly at the warm fullness buzzing in his valve nodes.

Prowl mirrored and nuzzled the back of his neck slightly. “Well… it depends. I can let it de-pressurise, and we can leave it there… or I can give you the same treatment I give most visitors.”

Jazz’s audial fins twitched and he tried to look over his shoulder at the other mech. “… Oh? I’m kinda liking the sound of the regular treatment. But what’s it got to do with how long you take to- OH! A-AH, oh PRIMUS!”

A strong arm had scooped Jazz around the chest, lifting him up and back so that his weight rested on the spike knotted within him. The tip was pressing against his ceiling node, which would have been enough to start up a new charge on its own. But Prowl’s other servo was still around his spike, and he began to move it too.

Jazz peered down his own front, watching as careful clawtips caressed his length, teasing at his tip, palm smearing his own fluid down his length.

“Hhnn frag please, YES, Prowl…” Jazz’s head fell back against the alpha’s shoulder as the powerful mech rolled his hips, shifting the knot inside him, transfluid leaking slightly as the seal was broken by the motions.

Jazz gave a choked noise of pleasure as the clawtips dancing down his spike moved to tease his outer node. His valve spasmed from the attention, making the knotted shaft within seem even bigger.

Prowl never stopped moving, using one arm to lift Jazz a little higher, giving him room to try and pull his spike free. Even the gentle motions from that drove Jazz wild, and while it was just on the edge of pain, Prowl never pulled too hard, extremely mindful of the tight fit.

The alpha knew exactly what he was doing, Jazz mused somewhere under his incoherent moans, because after a few more gentle tugs, the still half swollen knot came free. He gasped as warm transfluid poured from him, drenching Prowl’s hips and making a mess all over the mat.

Prowl was completely unconcerned, giving Jazz a moment, palming his spike slowly, before he lowered Jazz onto his own again.

“Oh frag… oooohfrag, ooooh fraaaaahhhgnnn!”

Jazz became incoherent once more as the knot stretched his entrance. He was so slick with fluid it
popped into him, making him keen. An explosion of pleasure swept through him at the feel, but then Prowl was pulling out again.

Pretty soon the alpha had started thrusting again, popping his knot in and out of Jazz and making him delirious with pleasure. Jazz’s legs twitched, spread wide by Prowl’s thighs, winglets quivering.

The reactions made Prowl rumble with satisfaction. Jazz was so very responsive, it wasn’t long before his knot swelled enough again that he could no longer pull out. When he reached that point, he bit lightly into Jazz’s shoulder and pounded upwards against the ceiling node, palming Jazz’s spike furiously.

“A-AGHN! AH-PROWL!”

Jazz saw stars. He overloaded hard, snapping his hips back against Prowl and feeling the rare sensation of his chamber valve giving way.

His vocaliser died as Prowl overloaded, another load of hot transfluid flooding beyond his valve and into the gestation chamber, knot assuring that both were quickly filled.

Jazz’s own transfluid was once again milked from him, jetting up over him and Prowl, though neither of them paid much attention to getting splattered by it.

By the time the overload finally began to ebb, Prowl had already carefully shifted so that he lay on his back with Jazz hugged against his chest.

Both of their fans were roaring, and metal pinged as it cooled, the air thick with ionisation. It took another klik or so before Jazz had fully regained his wits.

“That was… slaggin’… incredible. Sure explains the look on Hound’s face the other day. And the way he was walkin’” Jazz chuckled breathlessly.

Beneath him, Prowl rumbled, and his tail gave a few satisfied thumps against the mat. “I’m glad you enjoyed it.”

“More-n enjoyed it… not sure how I’m gonna repay that favour, that’s a tough act to follow.” He pat Prowl’s side, shifting a little just to feel the aftershocks in his valve from the spike still pressing against his walls. “S’been a loooong time since anyone managed to fill mah gestation tank.”

“Really? It’s a very common occurrence for us.” Prowl murmured, noticing some of the transfluid that had spattered them from Jazz’s spike and automatically licking it off the other bot’s shoulder. Cleanup for them usually involved glossas before wash-racks afterall. No point wasting the energon.

Jazz turned his helm to try and figure out why he was being licked and felt a twinge of heat return at the sight that greeted him. “Yeah… well… you guys have the right spikes for the job, most bot’s just have the standard, boring set-up.”

“I’m not terribly familiar with regular mech’s spikes. Yours seems perfectly adequate, it’s just a shame you cannot lock your transfluid within your partner. Apart from feeling rather nice, it increases the chance for more healthy sparks to take when sparking.”

Prowl had paused his licking to speak, looking up at Jazz’s face and noticing more splatter, which he promptly licked off when he was done talking.

Jazz made a small noise of surprise, but didn’t pull away. “What’re you doin?”
“Cleaning up? There are no washracks here, I don’t think you want to wander even the servants passages covered in fluids.”

“Oh. Ah’ve got cleanin’ cloths in my subspace if you’d rather use those.” Jazz made no move to get them, feeling heat rising in his frame again as Prowl lapped transfluid from his jaw.

The wolf-mech drew in a long ventilation again and looked into his visor, orbital ridge raised once more. “Do you really want me to use that? Forgive me if I’m wrong, but it does smell like you’re enjoying my usual method of cleaning up.”

Jazz rumbled his engine and pet at Prowl’s side again. “Y’gotta stop reading me like an open book here, it really ruins my whole mech-of-mystery thing.”

Prowl just gave him a sly little grin and continued lapping up what he could reach. When he was done, he carefully shifted Jazz against his chest, arching a little to test how far his knot had gone down.

Jazz panted slightly at the shiver of sensation it sent through his over-clocked valve, and gasped when Prowl shifted them both. He rolled carefully until he was atop Jazz again, but he held his weight off him so he could begin to pull out.

His knot wasn’t all the way down, and Jazz moaned as it audibly came free. Transfluid once again trailed thickly from his valve, but he could feel the majority of it still sitting hot and heavy in his gestation tank. The sensation was starting up yet another charge and he rumbled, rolling over and finding Prowl had shifted to wolf mode.

He gave him a confused look, but the alpha simply went back to licking him clean. Jazz realised fairly quickly that he’d changed for practical reasons. He could use his glossa much more efficiently in wolf mode.

It was giving Jazz ideas though, and before Prowl could get down to his pelvis, Jazz was scratching behind his audial to get the wolf’s attention.

“Before you go down there, how about I do some work on ya with my own glossa?”

Prowl blinked at him, head tilting slightly. “Ahh… okay? If you want to? Should I change back?”

“If ya would, please. M’sure it all feels the same for you no matter what form you’re in, but ah’m not so used to workin’ with equipment in uuu… that configuration.” Jazz chuckled, watching as Prowl shifted back and knelt in front of him with a slightly bemused expression.

Jazz guided him to sit back and parted his legs, Prowl’s look of confusion only deepening. At least, until Jazz settled on his front and began to lap at the mess on his thighs.

The alpha felt heat rise to his faceplate. The only time bots ever used their glossa on him in this way tended to be when he and they were in wolf mode, and they were preparing him for mounting. It did not happen often, and it certainly didn’t involve the kind of teasing he was getting now.

…Not that he was complaining. Actually, it felt nice in a strange sort of way to have the other mech’s arms and servos curl around his thighs as they drew a hot line up his spike with their glossa.

It was when Jazz wrapped his mouth around the tip of his spike that he actually realised the other bot intended to work him up to a full overload this way. It was hardly conducive to cleaning efforts…but if Jazz wanted to do it, how could he say no? He couldn’t deny he was excited by this unusual form of play.
His claws flexed against the mat and he shuddered, resisting the urge to jerk his hips as Jazz took more of him into his mouth. How he was doing it, Prowl wasn’t sure. The mech was smaller than him, and yet he just… kept taking MORE into his mouth and oh PRIMUS he was sucking now.

Prowl panted hard, whining when Jazz drew off his shaft and lapped his way down it’s underside again. It strained upwards, leaking, but Jazz didn’t clean up the new mess. His mouth and glossa had moved downwards, and Prowl actually yelped as he felt lip-plates seal around his outer node.

The sensation was utterly new to him and he quivered, exerting all his self-control to not buck. Jazz’s hot glossa teased and flicked against the node before sliding lower, entering his valve, wriggling as deep as it could go and thrusting.

His claws nearly punctured the mat as he pawed at it, squirming in Jazz’s hold as that glossa worked him over, thoroughly lapping up all the fluid it could reach before trailing back up his spike.

The arms curled around his thighs retreated, so that now it was Jazz’s shoulders keeping him spread while the visored mech brought his servos into play. Two digits slipped into Prowl’s valve to pump and scissor, a thumb rubbing at his node. The other servo wrapped around the base of his spike, palming up and down over the knot as the silvery mech bobbed his mouth over as much of the shaft as he could fit in it.

Prowl keened, unable to stop watching what was to him a bizarrely arousing spectacle. It didn’t take long for the hard sucking and thrashing glossa on his spike to tip him over.

Jazz had ample warning from the feel of the knot tightening and swelling, and he sealed his mouth over just the tip, milking at the base of the shaft the way he’s observed Prowl do for Sundancer.

Even as prepared as he was for the flood of transfluid, Jazz had a hard time swallowing it as fast as it came, pulling off and ending up with it jetting across both his and Prowl’s plating. The alpha was far, far too distracted by the intensity of an overload where spike and valve and outer node were all being stimulated simultaneously to care that they’d just gotten messy again.

By the time the overload was done, they were both panting. Jazz made to pull away so Prowl could relax his legs, but a clawed servo moved quickly to hold his servo where it was on the spike. Prowl gave a weak whine and looked at him a little helplessly down his transfluid splattered chassis.

“Please… keep the… the pressure below the knot a little longer… it’s terribly uncomfortable otherwise…”

Jazz nodded and settled where he was, keeping a firm hold on the base of Prowl’s spike. It was hard to keep himself from letting his charge build again when he could feel pulses of pressurisation fluid keeping the spike from softening.

It was nothing like any spike he’d known, and it intrigued him as much as everything else about these bots did.

“So uuuh… what happens if y’don’t get enough pressure on it post-overload?”

Prowl mirred and shifted slightly to get his wings in a less squashed position before answering.

“It’s a feeling like… it’s hard to describe… it’s like being on the edge of a charge release for cycles on end with no release. The sensors become far too receptive, you can’t actually achieve an overload so there’s no relief for several cycles. Just have to let it go down on its own. It’s not pleasant.”

“Primus, I can imagine it ain’t.” Jazz murmured. “That some kinda throwback to the mechalyancy
or a glitch from code meddlin’?”

The wolf-mech gave a sort of shrug, still panting slightly through his fans.

“Not sure. Probably mechalycancy, I believe it happens to pure Cyberwolves too. Also how do you
know the term mechalycancy?”

Jazz grinned up the bot’s chassis. “Mirage. He already knew a bunch about you guys, but he’s been
doin’ more research lately.”

“Oh I see… so… Lord Mirage is in agreement with you and the Prime?... He’s willing to free his
pack as well? Even Hound?”

The silver and white bot chuckled. “I mean, he’s gonna free them, but that doesn’t mean they hafta
leave him. When you’re free, y’can do what you want. That’s the point. And once Hound’s free, I’m
thinkin’ he’s gonna be askin’ Raj to be his Conjunx. The rest of his pack might just wanna stick
around ‘cause they like him, and I reckon he’s more’n happy to support them all living with him if
they want to.”

Prowl seemed to get lost in his own thoughts at this, so Jazz propped his chin in one servo while
admiring the spike still held firm in his other. It was slowly depressurising, the knot shrinking back
towards its regular size.

The knot itself was a fairly plain construct of interlocking plates that retained a smooth surface no
matter it’s size. The rest of the shaft had a more interesting texture, more interlocking plates creating
ridges which could flex and flare. He remembered with a pleasant twinge in his valve just what those
felt like inside him.

Jazz shook his head and tried to focus back on the conversation they’d been having so he didn’t end
up riling himself up again. They didn’t exactly have unlimited time, and he wasn’t going to push
Prowl for more right now. There was still clean-up to do. It was easier to clear it from his head when
Prowl spoke again.

“So… for those of us who are being liberated from unkind masters… where are we going to go,
exactly? I don’t imagine we’ll be welcomed with open arms immediately by the general populace.
We COULD survive in the wilds until a better solution was found I suppose-“

“Mech NO, Primus, we ain’t gonna shove you all out in the wild! Slag knows Optimus would pop a
gasket before he let that happen. Naw mech, there’ll be accommodation waiting. Prime’s estate owns
plenty of property we could put ya all up in for as long as you need.”

“Oh.” Prowl murmured, looking down past his own spike at Jazz, who grinned and tilted the spike
out of the way so he could see him properly.

The alpha gave him a slightly amused look. “You have ah… quite a bit of transfluid on your face.”

Jazz snorted “Oh I bet. You got enough to spark about a hundred pups in one sitting.”

It was Prowl’s turn to snort. “I doubt that, my record was 5. Thankfully the other wolf-mech was
larger than me and could carry 5 comfortably. You can let go now, it’s past the discomfort point”

Prowl murmured, rumbling when Jazz grinned and gave a parting stroke to the spike before releasing
him.

The alpha gave him another amused look. “You do seem to be rather taken with our anatomy. Are
regular mechs really that boring to you?”
Jazz chuckled, fishing around in his subspace and pulling out some cloths, passing one to Prowl. “I mean, don’t take me as a measure for ANYTHING normal, but by my tastes… yeah, they’re pretty damn boring by comparison.”

Prowl made a grumbling sort of noise as he cleaned himself up, making Jazz look over and note the disgruntled expression he wore.

“PLEASE don’t let the twins know that we’re possibly preferable to regular mechs as berth partners. They’ll try and take up a profession doing ONLY that.”

Jazz let out a loud laugh before he could stop himself, putting his cloth over his face to mute himself and still shaking with quieter laughter.

Once he had his giggles under control he took the cloth away, wiping transfluid off with it at the same time.

“But I will try not to encourage them, but y’know that profession don’t pay too badly, and they might just figure it out on their own. Don’t blame me if they do.”

Prowl’s expression had relaxed into one of mild surprise that he’d elicited such an amused response from Jazz. “I don’t actually think they will, well… Sideswipe MIGHT, but he’s not likely to follow it if Sunstreaker doesn’t, and I’m fairly sure Sunstreaker’s more interested in art. Is it… hard, to pursue that field? I mean we’ve seen artists among the nobles, offering to paint and etch for them, embellishing their armour and such. Is it difficult to find success in that?”

Jazz made a thoughtful noise. “I’m not much of an artist myself, so I might not be the bot to ask. Mirage would know better. I could ask for you, but I mean… Sunstreaker could always ask himself. ‘Raj is well ‘n truly used to talkin’ to you guys. He’s been doin’ it a lot longer than I have.”

Prowl nodded, efficiently wiping away the rest of the mess on his chassis before helping Jazz. It had gotten on parts of the silver and white mech that he was having trouble reaching.

“Thanks mech. I love a good messy frag, but usually there’s a washracks nearby for after.” He mumbled sheepishly.

Prowl nodded, carefully cleaning off the stubby winglets.

“It’s the same for us generally. Assuming we don’t just turn the shower on and do it underneath it. It’s more efficient sometimes, especially if we’re tired and know we won’t be bothered cleaning when we’re done.”

When they’d finished, Jazz took back the cloths and shoved them in his ‘dirties’ subspace. He ran a curious servo over the slight marks on his neck and shoulder, grinning.

“So uh, if I don’t wanna be jumped by your whole pack next time I come t’visit, I better buff these out huh?”

“I mean, if you’re sure you don’t want to, yes. Of course you could always proposition them without the marks anyway, you don’t need them per say.” Prowl gave him a sly look, making him laugh again.

“But you are somethin’ else. I better buff it, more so the great tyrant doesn’t notice anythin’ suspicious. Oh, that reminds me, am I able to get your comm frequency, or does he monitor that too?”
Prowl gave a harsh bark of a laugh. “Thankfully no, he doesn’t. He tried once and said almost immediately that he couldn’t stand the ‘inane babble’ of us.” He explained as he offered up a port on his wrist.

Jazz gave him a curious look as he pulled one of the connectors in his own wrist out and plugged it in. “I’m assuming since y’not just pinging it to me that your comms don’t work the same way as mine?”

Prowl shook his helm slightly as he pushed a small data-packet through the connection. “Our comms work on very different frequencies. Drivers are required to mesh them with those of regular bots. Small inconvenience at least. Also makes it a little difficult for our owners to try and wireless hack us for anything.”

“Mmmm. Speakin’ of which” he put a servo on Prowl’s before the mech could disconnect them, getting a slightly confused look. Jazz met the intense golden gaze, flicking his visor up to expose his own white optics. He didn’t expect the mech to trust him with their systems connected unless he could see his optics.

The significance was certainly not lost on Prowl, who’s audials perked forward.

“Y’mind if I do a quick systems scan? Check what kinda firewalls they’ve given you? I get the feeling they ain’t given you much, if they want to be able to get into your code and mess with it.”

The alpha gave him a slightly uncertain, wary look. But apparently being able to look directly into his optics was enough reassurance that he nodded, lowering his primary data shielding.

Jazz gave his servo a reassuring squeeze and dipped below the surface level to brush over Prowl’s systems.

He was wary of his presence being picked up by whatever tracker Thunderwing had installed, and so he ghosted through as if he were infiltrating high security systems.

He noted Prowl trying and failing to track his data-trail, seeing his audials switching back and forth in slight alarm. He petted the servo beneath his.

“It’s alright mech, I’m makin’ sure Thunderwing doesn’t know I’ve hooked up to you. It’s not looking great though, there’s stuff in here locked away from YOU, looks like it’s got a passcode I’m assuming only Thunderwing has. That kinda controlling of another bot’s internal setup is a class A felony unless performed for medical reasons. I’m guessing it doesn’t count for bots not considered fully sentient, but once we change that law we’ve got a charge to slam some of these aflholes with.”

Prowl relaxed slightly, nodding. “I don’t know the exact nature of the locked off file paths, but my assumption is that it has to do with tracking and mechalycancy control imperatives.”

Jazz nodded, pulling back after finishing his systems scan. He gently disconnected, downloading the comms drivers and making note of how strange they were.

“Well, as I thought, your security setup is pretty weak. They don’t want you to be able to fight them off if they get in there. We’re gonna hafta factor in systems upgrades for all of you when we start with liberating. Not really difficult, but we might encounter more unlawful packets in other wolf-mech’s systems. I’m hoping not but we gotta plan for everything.”

Prowl nodded, audials perking when he got an internal ping and realised it was Jazz making sure he was now on the pack’s comm network.
Jazz grinned, heading for the servant’s passage door, Prowl following. “Excellent. When it comes to rebellions, communication is key after all.”

Prowl canted his helm slightly “Rebellion? I don’t know that I’d call it that, that implies we’re looking to attack and overthrow our masters. Honestly I think most of us just want to get away from them.” He murmured. “Also did you have any stipulations as to comm etiquette? You’re free to ping me at any time, but I may not always be in a position where I can answer.”

“Same for me bot, any time of day, I don’t mind.” He held the door open for Prowl, who gave a nod in thanks and transformed down, padding ahead as Jazz closed it behind them.

//You know// the alpha came through the comm as they walked // the more I think about it, the more I realise how much happier my pack will be out of here. All of them will have a chance to do the things they’ve always wished they could, if we weren’t made pets. I’m not sure how we’ll ever be able to show our gratitude to the Prime, if we manage this//.

//Mech, Optimus’ll be happy so long as he sees that you are. Upholding the right of all sentient beings is all the gratification he needs//.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Jazz falls deeper down the rabbit hole and finds things he almost wished he hadn't.
Mirage gets dragged with him and isn't any happier about it.
Shockwave of course, is Shockwave.

Chapter Notes

Ya'll need to thank Zomgitsalaura for this chapter coming out so soon, short though it is.
She's been cracking the whip on me cause she wants more. What bae wants, bae gets.

Happy Valentines and warnings for violence! ':\o/:' *confetti*

“No. I was a little like that when I first interfaced with Hound.”

The blue and white noble gazed down at Jazz with amusement, orbital ridge raised.

Jazz just continued on with his silly grin, lying flat on his back on the other bot’s guest berth. His E.M field radiated satisfaction.

Hound chuffed a laugh from where he was curled up half dozing on one corner of the bed. “Didja do what I suggested?”

“Yuuuuup.”

“Told’ja it would work.”

“Didn’t tell me I needed a tail for it.”

“I mean, you don’t though, really, cause it WORKED.”

Jazz chuckled and rolled to sit up and reach out, booping Hound on the snout.

“You’re a cheeky fragger and I owe ya one.”

Hound responded with a wolvish grin and stuck the tip off his glossa out at him.

“So, on to the less important matter of whether or not he liked what you proposed?…” Mirage commented coolly, sitting on the edge of the berth beside Hound.

Jazz nodded, flopping onto his back again. “Well yeah, I wasn’t about to ask him for a frag if he didn’t like what ah had planned. Once everythin’ was explained, he was on board. He’s a good bot, his main concern was the safety of his pack and the other wolf mechs in the same position. He’s gonna give me all the owner names he’s got once he double checks with Inferno and ‘Breaker. Doesn’t wanna miss a trick, gotta give it to the mech, he’s thorough.”
“In more ways than one” Hound snickered, earning an optic-roll from Mirage and a wider grin from Jazz.

“Damn straight. Oh, I got his number too. How come you never told me about the drivers needed to link in to these guys ‘Raj’?”

The noble blinked at him bemusedly. “I didn’t? Sorry, I honestly don’t think it came to mind. It’s been so long since I installed them myself I forgot I even had. I’d have passed them onto you otherwise.”

Jazz waved a servo lazily “S’fine mech, Prowl gave me a copy of his. Managed to check his systems setup at the same time, after asking of course. I’m guessing you’re not so stupid as to leave your pack with firewalls as paltry as the tyrant does?”

Jazz levelled Mirage with a stern look, the noble returning a mildly affronted one in return.

“Of COURSE I have, honestly, the fact you’d even ASK. I’m no fool, I know exactly what kind of things other members of my caste get up to in pursuit of tripping up competitors. I make sure their security is up to date every orn.”

Jazz nodded in approval. “Thunderwing hasn’t bothered with more than the most basic firewalls for his. He’s locked down SOMETHING in Prowl, but we ain’t sure what.”

“Oh good, something illegal to pin him with.” Mirage quipped, smoothing down Hound’s hackles and making him rumble-purr.

The silver and white bot hummed in non-committal agreement.

“There is that, yeah…but I worry that there’s something more insidious than trackers embedded in their laser cores. Thunderwing is a nasty character. I wouldn’t put it past him to have some kind of remote termination code shunted into their systems. And what if he ain’t the only one? I’m thinking…”

Jazz frowned, Mirage giving him a very sober look and Hound’s audials pricking in uncertainty, looking between them.

“You want to do a full dive into his systems? That would take consent AND time, and we’d need to make absolutely sure Thunderwing didn’t detect you doing it through Prowl’s systems. Surely he’d have his highest alarms on his alpha?” Mirage murmured.

Jazz nodded, rolling back into a sitting position with a sigh.

“That’s why ahm thinkin’ I won’t do it on Prowl. Might have to ask one of the other pack members, one Thunderwing would have the same stuff on, but not be monitoring as closely.”

Mirage frowned, and Hound’s ears went flat. The green wolf-mech rumbled unhappily.

“Are you talking about hacking one of them?”

Jazz shook his head. “Hacking implies I’d do it whether they wanted me to or not. I ain’t doing anything without them agreeing to it first. But essentially… code diving and hacking are the same action, it’s just one is with consent and the other isn’t. Code diving can still be invasive, but the point of it is to figure out what danger there is to the wolf-mechs under controlling masters. If I can find out what kinda nasty slag they got buried in their code, I can make patches to protect them and any others with similar installations. But I can’t fight what I can’t see.”
“So… who else in the pack do you think would be coded like Prowl?” Mirage asked, looking as if he might already know the answer.

Jazz whuffed a long ventilation. “Best guess would be Sunstreaker. The one bot in that pack that seems to trust me the least. But Sunny is probably the one pack member after Prowl that Thunderwing prizes the most. He’s a pseudo-seeker, vain as all hell, of course he’s gonna prize the prettiest as highly as he does his alpha.”

“Good luck getting a yes from Sunny. I don’t think even I would have any sway if I tried to help convince him.” Hound murmured.

“Mmmm. That’s why ahm gonna be asking Prowl about it first. He’s the only bot who could convince him, and if he ain’t okay with it either, then we’ll have to find some other solution. Unfortunately, time and options are things we’re short on right now.”

Jazz was nervous.

Jazz did not like being nervous.

And it was a very rare occasion that someone could get him antsy, but Thunderwing had managed it. There was just something about the large flyer showing back up at his mansion with an enormous grin that set the silver and white mech’s alarm bells off.

Being bustled into a shuttle for a ‘surprise’ really finished off the whole putting his plating on edge thing. Nevertheless, he kept his poker face up, sharing an extremely wary look with Mirage (who had only shrugged at him, looking just as alarmed as he’d felt).

They’d been in the shuttle for almost a cycle, Jazz looking out at the night-lights of Cybertron. They were flying at such a speed that he’d lost track of where exactly they probably were. Somewhere near Polyhex he guessed, possibly nearer to Tarn or Kaon.

Either way, he’d had to listen to Thunderwing prattle about his work emergency at the base, keeping up the pretence that he cared. He felt slightly relieved when the shuttle finally began descending towards some sort of warehouse on the outskirts of what definitely looked like Tarn.

“I have QUITE the treat for the two of you. I’m having a lot of trouble keeping this one under wraps, I only found out today that it was back on… I shan’t spoil the surprise though, you’re in for a night you won’t forget in a hurry, I do hope you have some betting credits on you, I feel a little remiss to not have asked you before we left. Nevermind, you can enjoy with or without a flutter.”

Jazz shared an extremely uneasy look with Mirage behind the flyer’s back when he exited before them on touchdown. They schooled their faces before following, taking in their surroundings much more like operatives in some sort of sting rather than guests.

Before them stood a massive warehouse, with only one of its two massive sliding hangar doors partly opened. Light poured out from inside, and Jazz’s sensitive audials picked up the muffled sounds of a few hundred mechs inside.

He shared another glance with Mirage, neither of them quite sure still of just what they were in for. Beside Mirage, Hound’s audials switched back and forth restlessly and he seemed to get even tenser than he’d already been on the shuttle.
"Raj, Jazz, I’m picking up the smell of other wolf-mechs. Several. And energon. High grade and part-processed both."

Jazz spared a glance with the anxious green alpha and gave a slight nod of acknowledgement. Thunderwing was busy puffing himself up to look impressive as they reached a huge mech standing outside the doors.

A few bots were milling about outside, throwing them one or two glances without showing any real interest in their presence. Jazz almost expected the bouncer to challenge them, but was mildly surprised when the enormous tank-former just bowed and formally gestured them in with a murmured ‘M’lords’.

Thunderwing threw them an oily, smug look. “I’m part owner in this little organisation. We’ll have some of the best seats in the house. I can order you any kind of drinks you like, we truck in a fully stocked bar, even at short notice.”

Mirage politely requested a glass of mercury splashed coolant, while Jazz declined. He noted Hound’s audials were lying flat now, and the unsettled feeling in his tank got worse as the sound coming from past a huge partition wall in the building swelled.

It sounded like some kind of sport match was going on. Racing perhaps? No, Hound would have smelled exhaust. Spent energon and wolf-mechs… were they having some kind of indoor sport hunting event?

They moved through the initial open atrium where servers and high-class looking punters milled around, heading straight for the noise. Thunderwing diverted before they reached the main doors though, taking them up a flight of stairs along the same wall.

It led to another door, where a much smaller and smarter looking servant bowed them through. Thunderwing led them into a corridor which sounded as if it ran right beneath some bleachers. Voices swelled and pedes stomped overhead. Jazz had no hope of hearing anything else through them.

Finally, Thunderwing led them through another set of doors, and Jazz hadn’t even realised how much soundproofing had been in the walls between them and the arena until the wall of noise hit him full force. Wincing, he tuned down his audials and moved into what was a semi-private viewing box.

His carefully maintained poker face fell away the moment his visor adjusted to the bright lights and he processed just what he was seeing.

The warehouse had been modified into a small stadium-like arena. Bots, mostly upper to wealthy middle class, filled the graduated stands. There was an oval shaped floor to the arena, and it was recessed deep to make sure those within it didn’t leap out.

In it, two hulking wolf-mechs circled one another, both streaked with energon.

It hit Jazz very suddenly, the realisation that of COURSE there would be some kind of wolf-mech fight club. How he hadn’t expected it now he saw it was beyond him. Thunderwing being an instrumental player in it wasn’t something he’d seen coming though.

Even so, now that he saw it, he couldn’t say he was all that surprised.

“Ah, good, I didn’t give too much away if the look on your face is anything to go by ambassador!” Thunderwing clapped Jazz on the shoulder, making his plating crawl. He didn’t respond though, sinking into a chair instead while his processor tried to play catch up and process the full implications
of this new revelation. Thunderwing continued talking, oblivious, as Mirage sat beside Jazz, Hound sticking close to the noble’s legs.

“You seemed so fascinated by the hunting demonstration, I thought you’d appreciate this, the FINEST of sports for us owners of such fine beasts. Pitting them against nature is one thing. Pitting them against each OTHER is the TRUE tell of a great beast!”

Even as he spoke, Jazz had to lock his joints so he didn’t turn away in horror and retch as he saw the larger of the two wolf mechs dive forward and catch it’s opponent’s hackles, shaking the other viciously until the appendages came off.

The smaller wolf-mech made a spark-shuddering yelping sound and cowered on the floor, bleeding profusely. The crowd roared its approval, and the victorious wolf-mech spat the parts out, looking every bit the proud victor.

//Mirage, tell me you never knew about this. Ah swear if you did and you didn’t think to say anything-//

//Primus NO! I heard talk, a long time ago, of nobles who were thinking of setting up something like this. But that was small-scale, and I thought they’d scrapped the idea due to lack of interest.//

The sideways look of wide-optic’d horror the noble shot him was enough to convince Jazz that his friend was every bit as shocked by this as him.

//Looks like they found plenty of interest elsewhere and kept everyone who wasn’t into it out of the loop//

Thunderwing sat heavily beside Jazz, optics fixed on the pit where clean-up crews were picking up debris and throwing down a new layer of absorbent sand to soak up the spilt energon.

“We’re just in time, I almost thought we’d miss my matches. I might be part owner here, but I don’t like to mess up the running schedule too much. It reflects poorly. You’re in for a REAL treat. I hardly ever bring my own in, but the other owners were BEGGING me. Senator Shockwave has a new challenge for me, but first we have a grudge match. Onslaught is still sore about the LAST time our wolves met in the ring.”

Jazz became fixated on the ring too as the crowd swelled with sound, and he’d have been deafened if he hadn’t turned his audials down already. Into the ring, from the left, stepped Sunstreaker and Sideswipe. Neither spared him a glance (they probably didn’t even know he was there), their entire focus on the doors at the other end of the pit.

Through those doors stepped two of the most colossal looking wolf-mechs Jazz had yet seen. The announcer identified them as Brawl and Bonecrusher. The twins weren’t exactly small, but these two were almost twice their size, and built more like cog-bears than cyberwolves.

Almost unable to believe what he was seeing, Jazz pinged Prowl’s comm link, only to find it blocked.

The rush of cold dread that ran down his spinal strut was nearly enough to break his façade of mild interest in the spectacle. Curbing the urge to garrotte Thunderwing and bring the whole Iacon police force down on the place, Jazz centred himself.

It was not going to help the wolf-mechs in the long run if he snapped now. He needed to think fast and fall back on information gathering.
“So, these fights… are you tellin’ them what to do by comm? Like in the hunts?”

Thunderwing spared him a pleased looking glance, apparently glad he was taking interest.

“No, not this time. Fighting as a sport pits our wolves against one another as they are. We sit back and let them do what they were born to do. It’s far more Primal, and makes it much harder to fix matches” he gave him a nasty smile at that, focus returning to the ring as a blaring alarm signalled the match to start.

So, he couldn’t reach Prowl because their comms were blocked while they were here to participate. Which meant Prowl was probably slewed for a match as well.

“Ya got your whole pack here for matches? How’d you get e’em here so fast, ah didn’t see you load em into the shuttles?”

“Goodness no, I had the servants fly them over a few cycles ago when I was first informed the matches were back on.” Thunderwing barely spared him any attention as he spoke now, too focussed on the movement of his wolves as they dodged their bulky foe’s attempts at ramming them.

Jazz too became fixated. As much because he couldn’t believe just how agile the twins were as he was sick with anxiety over their safety.

After a few kliks of watching the match, anxiety gave way more to awe. He’d seen them move in a hunt, but it was nothing like how they moved now. Both could change direction on a chit, flanking the larger wolves effortlessly. It soon became clear they were in fact TAUNTING their opponents, making them angrier.

Jazz could pick up the whooshing sound of air as massive paws swiped at red and gold hides. Always too slow, always too far to the right or left. Meanwhile smaller paws darted in and landed, making singing sounds as they scratched paint down to base metal.

It didn’t seem to hurt the larger wolves so much as infuriate them. The crowd only cheered harder with every frustrated bellow and snarl.

Eventually though, something had to give with the building tension. Brawl seemed to be the one to tip over first. The snarl he let loose sent a ripple of disturbing excitement through the crowd as he twisted around and snapped his jaws wildly.

Sideswipe didn’t quite dance away fast enough, the huge wolves’ denta sinking into one of his smaller hackles further down his back.

The sound he made set Jazz’s plating on edge, but before the crowd could even respond, before Bonecrusher could even move in to start tearing the red twin apart, a flash of gold entered the fray.

The ferocity with which Sunstreaker attacked was enough to make Jazz’s tank churn. The golden wolf-mech’s optics were practically indigo as he tore into Brawl’s hackles with brutal accuracy and efficiency.

Brawl didn’t so much release Sideswipe as forget all about him while howling in rage and pain. Before the massive mech could throw himself to the ground to dislodge his attacker, Sunstreaker had already torn off three heavily armoured appendages and leapt away.

Brawl scrabbled on the ground, disorientated, but Bonecrusher didn’t miss a beat. The massive off-white and khaki coloured wolf threw himself at the twins, jaws open wide. Neither twin moved, and Jazz felt his tank practically dropping out of him in panic until, at the last minute, red and gold
sidestepped and slashed at the passing flanks.

Sunstreaker’s blow was glancing, but Sideswipe managed to snag claws between armour plates. The moment the Red twin knew he’d snagged cables, he went in almost as hard as Sunstreaker had done. Jazz discovered just how easily teeth and claws could dismantle an ankle joint, in real time, with all the accompanying sound effects.

Too heavily armoured and inflexible to turn and assault his attacker, Bonecrusher ended up lame, dragging himself from Sideswipe’s grasp as Brawl came barrelling back again. The purple and khaki wolf, bleeding profusely from the hackles, rammed Sideswipe and attempted to carry him bodily into the wall.

Sunstreaker threw his entire weight at the behemoth, toppling all three of them. Sunstreaker was faster to his feet than the larger wolf, but Sideswipe was still worryingly close to massive jaws. The golden bot’s answer to this was to lunge, grabbing Brawl’s audial and ripping it clean off.

Brawl howled again, scrabbling, but Sunstreaker had no mercy. The other audial came off, and claws gouged at optics and neck plating. Massive paws batted at Sunstreaker, but he merely took the poorly executed swipes and their dents and manoeuvred on top of the giant mech, all his weight on Brawl’s head.

The strategy proved effective, Brawl’s flailing becoming even less accurate and effective. Bonecrusher made an attempt to break into the fight, but Sideswipe was on him quickly enough. The red mech literally ran circles around his lamed opponent, who’s own weight crippled him. Pretty soon Sideswipe had managed to snag Bonecrusher’s good hind leg and mangle his paw.

The sound of rending metal and braying wolf-mechs whipped the crowd into a frenzy of energon-thirsty cheers.

But then a bellow rang out across the crowd, causing a slight hush. Across the arena, Jazz spotted the source. Senator Onslaught stood, visor bright with rage and fixed on Thunderwing.

“CALL HIM OFF! YOU KNOW KILLS ARE ILLEGAL, UNLESS YOU’RE WILLING TO PAY ME, THUNDERWING!”

The huge tank-former was gesturing down at Brawl and Sunstreaker, who had managed to get all the armour off Brawl’s neck and looked ready to rip out his throat tubing and a few major energon lines.

But the golden wolf-mech was frozen in place, Jaws around the vital lines, indigo optics fixed on Thunderwing. For all the feral fury in his attack, it seemed he was still in control enough to wait for orders.

Thunderwing took his time standing, a smug look plastered all over his face.

“I MIGHT JUST PAY YOU WHAT HE’S WORTH ANYWAY SO YOU CAN GET A BETTER ALPHA!”

Hoots and jeers rang out across the stadium, and Onslaught looked ready to level his canon barrel at Thunderwing, but instead he sat back down and crossed his arms. Without even a gesture from his master, Sunstreaker released Brawl, and the alarm sounded again.

The match was over. Sunstreaker and Sideswipe were declared victorious.

Jazz didn’t even realise he was standing, clutching the railing at the edge of their box, until Hound nosed at his elbow. The silver and white mech looked around at the green alpha and back at the
twins. He realised they were both staring at him, but the optic contact was lost within moments as they were ushered off the field by what looked like more bouncers.

//I’ve never seen any of this, but I’ve heard rumours from other wolf-mechs. I didn’t want to believe it happened. Please don’t judge our kind by this… especially not the twins, they’re doing what they need to survive//

//Hound I would never judge your kind by what ya masters force you to do. I just… I feel STUPID for not expecting this. Slag, there’s a version of this that REGULAR cybertronians compete in, but that’s by choice. That’s different. This… this is torture. Makin’ ya fight each other for sport, it’s disgustin’./

Jazz sat back down, Hound moving to sit between his and Mirage’s seats. Jazz gave him a reassuring scratch behind the audials, still feeling a little awkward about it despite Hound relaxing and pressing into the touch.

//I ain’t judging your kind on any of this, but it does tell me that we gotta be careful about which of you come into contact with one another. If that was a grudge match, I doubt Brawl or Bonecrusher are gonna hold back if they see the twins again when they’re free.//

Hound responded with a rumble and slight nod, the noise barely perceptible as the next competitors entered and were announced.

Jazz struggled for the better part of a cycle with keeping his face schooled as the matches went on. The fights ranged from reluctant body slamming matches to all out vicious scraps. Some wolf-mechs had to be carried out by what he assumed were specialised paramedics… or did they consider them vets? Either way, it was brutal.

There was a protracted pause between matches where he looked over at Mirage, who had effected a stony look to keep the horror from his face. Beyond him though, Jazz could see the glint of excitement back in Thunderwing’s optics.

The pseudo-seeker caught Jazz’s optic and gave him a nasty looking smile. “We’ve come to the best part of the night. Shockwave made a proposition to me, I believe it will generate a LOT more profit than the regular matches.”

Despite the leaden feeling of dread in his tank, Jazz took the bait in an effort to get more information out of Thunderwing. “Oh? What’s he got planned?”

The flier’s optics narrowed in dangerous glee. “Prowl has not fought here in a long time. The reason, of course, is that he had no one left to fight. He was the top wolf. None could beat him. Everyone loves a champion, but after a while it gets boring.”

Jazz tilted his helm slightly “That why the fights got shut down for so long?”

“Oh, nonono, that had nothing to do with my wolves. That was an unfortunate incident, the offending noble had his whole pack banned. No, but the thing is, wolf-mechs fighting each other is entertaining on a fundamental level, no one really tires of it. But the top wolf-mech needs a NEW opponent. Shockwave assured me he has just the thing to present a REAL challenge. It’s the whole reason all these mechs have come…”

He made a sweeping gesture over the crowd, who Jazz realised suddenly had begun a murmuring chant. It got louder every moment, and he noticed Hound stand nervously to look over the edge of the box into the Arena.
They were chanting Prowl’s name. The feeling of dread only churned Jazz’s tanks more, but he let none of it show. He turned back to Thunderwing with a cant of his helm, prompting him to continue.

“They have come to watch my alpha rise to a new challenge. The identity of the challenger is a mystery even to me, all I know is it’s not a wolf-mech. It’s one of Shockwave’s NEW pets.”

Jazz looked away, back at the arena, and forced himself not to frown. That sounded bad. Incredibly bad. Shockwave was not a popular senator. He was even LESS popular in the scientific community for his questionable ethics. Had he been the one to create wolf-mechs in the first place?... If so, was this ‘new pet’ another experiment in altering low-class cybertronians into playthings for nobles?

He made a mental note to dig deeper later. For now, his focus was on the wolf-mech stepping out into the arena below. Prowl had been polished, and looked more commanding than ever. Primus, he looked more commanding than half the nobles in the stands, in his wolf mode no less.

The alpha looked up the stands at their box, optics glancing over his own master before locking with Jazz’s visor.

The look was charged with many things, even though neither of them changed their expression. Jazz wished the other’s comm wasn’t blocked, there was a lot he wanted to say. There was also a lot he wanted to do to help, but he couldn’t.

Prowl looked away as sounds came from behind the other door to the pit. The heavy thuds of pedefalls began to penetrate the sounds of the arena. Cheering died down as stands began to reverberate with the force of the thuds.

The doors swung open, and silence suddenly reigned supreme as a kind of disbeliefing awe swept the room.

Through the doors came something most definitely not wolvish. An enormous snout preceded a head and neck that stood higher off the ground than Jazz could even reach. It lead to a thickly armoured chest with small, clawed forearms, followed by massive hind quarters and clawed pedes. The behemoth was balanced forward by a thick, long, tapered tail. It’s spine was studded all the way along with blunt spines.

It was like a bipedal tank, and as it entered the arena fully, it raised its head high, drew a massive intake of air, and opened its maw to bellow an echoing roar, revealing a mouth full of razor sharp denta.

The stands erupted in cheering, crowds going wild. The creature swung it’s head around, zeroing in on Prowl’s figure. Overhead the announcer shouted into their speaker system the behemoth’s name. Grimlock.

Somewhere in the back of Jazz’s mind he recognised the creature’s form, something ancient and extinct. Definitely what he’d expect of Shockwave, reconstructing a predacon as a plaything.

Jazz glanced in Thunderwing’s direction and noted, with no small amount of worry, that the cocksure grin was gone and there was a definite note of ‘what the hell is this’ in his expression.

He clearly hadn’t expected THIS much of a challenge for Prowl to face, or he may not have agreed. Prowl, on the other hand, gave absolutely nothing away. He did not twitch, did not move at all, gave no sign he was in any way phased by this opponent.

The crowd was cheering so loudly that Jazz only barely heard the announcements and the starting
siren, but the competitors seemed to hear it.

The moment it sounded, Grimlock was lunging at Prowl.

Prowl had not been expecting a foe like this. He didn’t even know what it WAS. Some sort of cobbled together mess of a creature? No, it smelt like nothing he’d ever come across…

It’s first move was predictable. Posturing to intimidate, to gauge his response. He did nothing. The best thing to do was make an opponent angry, angry enemies made mistakes more. Typically they then tried to posture harder to force a reaction.

Not this one though. The moment the starting noise sounded, Grimlock was bearing down on him.

The arena was big, but the mech was so large it only took him a few strides to come close. Prowl tensed, ready to move, waited for the last moment when he saw the head reel back to strike… he sprung away to the creature’s left.

Prowl ran in a tight circle around his massive opponent, judging it’s flexibility, getting a measure on its most dangerous areas. It’s head twisted to follow him, body following.

Prowl weaved a bit as the huge clawed pedes shook the ground beneath him with every step. He was certainly faster, but the animal had quick reflexes and was a lot more agile than it appeared. Before he knew it, Prowl was dodging the massive jaws again.

This was the hardest opponent he’d ever had to face… armour that looked thicker than any he’d ever seen, far larger than he was, bigger even than Thunderwing, and extremely well equipped to hurt him. Slag, all it had to do was pin and sit on him and he’d be out for the count.

That was another question… how well did this creature know the rules? Would it abide by the no kill rule? By the way it was snapping it’s jaws at him, he doubted it.

Prowl continued to dodge and weave, evading and analysing all at the same time. Noting as the crowd jeered more that his opponent seemed more frustrated, lashed out harder. All the while Prowl’s battle computer worked furiously, making his fans whirr despite the fact he was barely exerting himself physically compared to what he was used to.

Just as Prowl realised where the most likely weak spot was, the creature pivoted around unexpectedly, it’s tail slamming into him and sending him across the arena to hit the wall.

Prowl yelped, the crowd went wild. He had no time to gather his thoughts, the ground shook as his enemy closed in. Moving more on instinct than anything, the alpha sprung to his feet and sprinted across the arena, Grimlock pivoting again and following.

Prowl leapt at the wall he was running towards and scrabbled up as far as he could before launching off it and twisting in the air.

Grimlock was right behind him, and so surprised by the move he didn’t manage to catch the wolf-mech before it landed on his back.

Wasting no time, Prowl tore into the metal of the monster’s hyper-flexible neck. The armour was thinner but tightly interlocked. Denta and claws had to work hard to get anywhere, and before he could really do some damage, the world beneath him was spinning.
Prowl dug claws in deep and locked his jaw as Grimlock swung his head around in a frenzy, roaring in pain and anger. His back legs scrambled for purchase on smooth plating and found none. Swung by the momentum, Grimlock snapped his head around and caught a flailing rear leg in his jaws.

Prowl howled through his mouthful of metal but refused to let go. Instead he bit down harder, feeling plating giving way. Frantically he continued his efforts to expose Grimlock’s neck-column and wiring. All the while his leg was wrenched.

He realised thankfully that Grimlock didn’t actually have the leverage in this position to tear his limb off, only to crunch down on it. Which, honestly, was bad enough.

Prowl managed to get a full plate of armour away from internal structures, and immediately tore at exposed wires before the world was suddenly spinning again.

Grimlock was dropping to the ground, jaws releasing him to roar in pain. Prowl sprung away before the behemoth could crush him under his weight. It was difficult to get away with any speed on 3 legs, but he’d been in this sort of position before.

One of his few advantages here was that he was a seasoned fighter, and so far as they knew, this was Grimlock’s first real fight.

It was a very small advantage though. The massive bot rolled and staggered to his pedes, baring denta and snarling at Prowl, before lunging again.

Unable to really run anymore, Prowl waited, crouching, until the head was close enough. He sprung up to meet Grimlock’s Jaws, vaulting over them and clinging to his snout.

The predacon was momentarily confused enough that Prowl had a chance to pull himself up onto his head properly and practically punch at an optic with his paw.

Grimlock threw his head up in agony, screeching, but the alpha did not relent, gouging at the optic with his claws. Energon splattered across the arena, and Prowl hung on with all his strength as Grimlock shook his head vigorously.

Prowl would have gone after the other optic if he had the chance, but he was forced to leap off again as Grimlock rolled in another attempt to pin him.

Unfortunately for him, he didn’t manage to hop far enough away before snapping jaws managed to snag his tail. The screaming yelp of pain that escaped him was energon curdling as half the appendage was torn off with a jerk of the massive jaws.

The alpha scrabbled away, watching Grimlock carefully as the predacon flailed to right itself from its roll. Now was the time to attack again, he knew it, before the beast had a chance to regroup itself. While it felt confident crunching the metal of half his tail in its mouth.

Prowl leapt, going for Grimlock’s neck again, sinking denta and claw into the hole he’d made and wrenching free more of the protective plating.

The behemoth was so shocked he flailed more, equilibrium thrown slightly by the sudden and vicious attack on his blind side. It took him longer to stand, and by the time he did, he could already feel system errors as control lines in his neck were severed and hot energon ran from the wound.

Grimlock once again flailed, unable to reach his head around and grab the wolf as he now straddled his neck. Grimlock shook viciously, making himself dizzy. Processing was becoming harder, and in a fit of blinding rage he merely threw himself at the nearest wall, disorientating himself further.
He heard a yelp, but the damage and pain was still happening, so he did it again, and again, hearing more cries but still not making him stop.

Prowl felt armour on his right side crumpling with each crushing impact against the wall. It didn’t deter him, he was in too deep now, he couldn’t afford to let go.

Before him was now the exposed spinal column, and he wrenched at it with his jaws. Metal squealed and warped beneath his denta, and Grimlock shrieked and had a full body twitch.

But he wasn’t out for the count yet.

The predacon reared back, shaking his head so viciously that Prowl was only holding on by his jaws at one point.

He nearly had it… he’d nearly severed the spinal control cables, and that would end it for sure.

He felt his denta pierce a little deeper, warm fluids rushing over his teeth. Grimlock screeched, and then the world was tipping the wrong way.

Prowl scrabbled for purchase, but the beast fell backwards hard.

The force with which the weight of just the neck slamming him into the ground was enough to knock Prowl out for a few astroseconds. The moment he was conscious again, damage reports flooded his processor. He gasped against the pain, but Grimlock was still moving.

The weight was lifted off him, giving a measure of relief, but Prowl knew he only had moments to get away. He rolled over and scrabbled.

He wasn’t fast enough.

Jaws clamped down on his hackles. He screamed, the sound cut short as Grimlock shook him.

The force was enough that the appendages soon ripped free.

Prowl’s processor urged him to move even though the pain threatened to blind and cripple him for good.

He scrambled up from where he’d been thrown, in time to see Grimlock lunging again. It was a clumsy lunge, head low to the ground, and Prowl threw himself to the side as Grimlock skidded onto his front, shaking the ground with the force of his body slamming into the floor.

Before the alpha could re-collect himself, the mountain of armour suddenly rolled towards him. He scrabbled away, but Grimlock’s head moved to pin his lower body, slamming down on his legs hard enough that Prowl felt something give way.

Howling in pain, he lashed out at the nearest plating, realising it was the damaged neck. Without a second thought, he lunged, denta sinking into the spinal column once more and tearing viciously.

Grimlock tried to move his head to crush more of Prowl, but the movement only further weakened his spinal struts, one almost giving way completely.

Prowl finished the job, finally tearing away all protection around the spinal cable and snapping his jaws around it.

The behemoth tensed and made a horrible feedback-like whine before going limp.
Possibly the hardest thing Jazz had ever had to do was watch that match and remain seated when it was over.

Prowl was declared the winner. Against all the odds, strategic and gambling alike, he had done it. But couldn’t they see he was DYING down there? Why weren’t they moving FASTER, why weren’t they racing to stop the energon loss? Why was Thunderwing just standing there looking so damn SMUG?

Beside him, Mirage looked like he was trying very hard not to purge his tanks and staring unseeing at the opposite side of the stadium. Hound was making low whining noises just audible to Jazz and staring down into the stadium with his ears all the way back.

It was agonising, watching the slow, almost lazy progress of the bots in the arena hefting Grimlock’s body off the alpha. Prowl’s hind legs were facing completely the wrong way than what they should, and it was obvious to Jazz his lower spinal strut was broken.

Golden eyes flickered dimly as the wolf-mech fought for consciousness, denta bared in a snarl of pain. The vets or medics or whatever they were, darted and muzzled him, but Prowl made no move to attack or resist.

Why the slag would he? His spine is broken, his sensory kibble’s been torn off and he’s probably got severe circuit trauma. And everyone is slagging CHEERING?

“Something the matter, ambassador? You look extremely put-out. I thought you liked my alpha!”

Thunderwing was giving him a wickedly gleeful look. Realising he was letting some of his true emotions show through, Jazz warped them into a look more disappointed than angry.

“Ah do. But t’be honest, I really thought the big one was gonna win.”

Thunderwing gave a booming laugh. “Just as well you didn’t make any bets then, eh? Feel free to order yourselves whatever you like from the bar, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve spotted senator Shockwave and I have some serious GLOATING to do!”

Jazz watched him go with a humourless expression, attention turning back to the team doing field repairs on Prowl.

//Mirage we are moving the timetable for this plan up. Ah don’t want those bots in Thunderwing’s hold any longer than they absolutely have to be. We gotta end this, we gotta end it NOW.//
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Plans proceed slowly, Jazz does the sneak, and Prowl's pack gets a little more desperate every day.

Chapter Notes

Kind of filler, but like a fucking long filler that wasn't meant to be this long. Eh. You'll probably like it anyway there's smut. I even forgot i did the smut and then when re-reading for editing on the train i came across it and it was a pleasant surprise, thanks past me.

"You HAVE to promise me y'not gonna flip out and be loud. Slag is hitting the fan now OP, this ain't a chess game anymore, it's all-out war we're declarin'".

On the miniature holovid screen, Optimus gave him a concerned look as he nodded. "What's happened to escalate matters?"

"Ah'm sending you a video, don't watch it now, better to wait 'til after I've hung up. Last night Thunderwing took us to a... Primus, I don't even know what I'd call it" Jazz dragged a servo over his face, voice low and sombre. "It was the equivalent of the Kaon gladitorial pits, except the participants are wolf-mechs and they ain't got a choice."

The alarm on the Prime's face was expected, but nevertheless Jazz was proud of Optimus for keeping his outrage to silent seething.

"Are you telling me they force them to KILL one another?" he rumbled, sounding as if he was almost ready to murder someone himself.

"No, they have rules against it, but some of 'em come close. Thunderwing was tellin' us the event ain't been held for quite a while due to 'incidents' that resulted in deaths last time. After diggin' a bit with one or two patrons in the after party, ah found out two wolf-mechs went kinda feral and killed not only their two opponents, but two of the clean-up crew who usually re-sand the arena between matches. Slag almighty ah thought PROWL was gonna die tonight."
The way Jazz said this had Optimus zeroing in on his expression and giving him a searching look. "I thought you said Thunderwing was more protective of Prowl than any of the others?"

The look on the visored mech's face soured. "Yeah, I thought he was. Turns out his concern only goes as far as Prowl's ability to make him look good. They pit him up against some ancient monstrosity Shockwave has woken from extinction, like some kinda giant rotoraptor. Nearly slaggin' killed him, an' all Thunderwing cared about was the fact he managed to win. And THAT'S a whole other thing in itself-"

Jazz looked away, voice low and visor dim. "Until tonight I didn't fully appreciate what we're dealing with here... the wolf-mechs, they're intelligent for sure, but... every single one of them is a weapon. They're not necessarily all dangerous, but they all... they're still half cyberwolf. Not all of them WANT to be more bot than wolf. If we free 'em, and even ONE of the rogues decides to go nuts, the whole lot of 'em will be damned in the public eye. Slag, if even one of the bots who attended those matches decided to spill footage of it, we'd face the same problem."

Prime rumbled thoughtfully. "You're thinking any effort to integrate them into normal society could be thwarted before it even begins?"

"Exactly" Jazz grimaced, noting that the look in Optimus' optics suggested he was doing the same behind his mask.

"Well... there's only so many contingency plans we can make. For now I think our focus needs to be on getting them free. At least start the process of liberation, even if it means quarantining the freed ones by confining them to private grounds. I hate to take them from one prison and place them in another, but at least they'd be afforded assistance and respect. I've been working on the arrangements, I've already secretly allocated three different complexes on the edge of Iacon, they're closely situated to one another."

"How many d'you think we can house straight off the bat?"

Optimus looked thoughtful, sitting back in his chair slightly. "Assuming an average pack size of about 6, roughly 300 at this point."

Jazz nodded "Should be enough to get us started. I don't think there's gonna be that many from the initial raid. Speakin' of raids though..."
Jazz’s visor light narrowed as he tapped a few buttons on the communication projector, sending some files through to the Prime. Optimus opened them on the console his end, frown deepening the more he read them.

“Are you SURE you should be attempting this now? How can you be sure this facility is the right one?”

Jazz leant forward, sensors doing a quick pulse-sweep to make absolutely sure there were no devices or bots around listening in. “I did some digging the moment I got back, It wasn’t hard, Thunderwing’s security setup is a joke. I narrowed down several of his contacts and geo-searched against known research facilities under Shockwave’s control. I’ve been meaning to check out that shady fragger way before any of this came up, something about him sets alarms off every time I see him. I know he had a servo in the creation of the wolf-mechs, but if he’s still makin’ em I gotta sabotage the operations. You know I do. Not t’mention it’s probably the only way I’ll be able to find out exactly how many bots are involved in supplyin’ this slave market.”

Optimus sighed, optics fixed worriedly on him. “I hate when you’re right, but hold off a little longer. I wouldn’t be hitting that facility until we’re closer to the event, or we might put our marks on edge. Timing is going to be critical.”

“Yeah, I know. It can wait. We can’t even put that event on ‘til Prowl’s well enough to be a competitor either.”

“How is he? And how DID he take down a… rotoraptor you said? Find out how the slag Shockwave managed to resurrect one when you raid that place, that’s some serious misuse of technological advancement in SOME way, I’m sure.” Optimus’ brow was pinched with disapproval at the whole business.

Jazz shrugged, folding his arms in just as much disapproval. “It was bigger’n a raptor, ah dunno what it was. Nearly tore him to shreds though, got no idea how he’s doin’ but I intend to find out as soon as I’m off this call with you. Twins too, they got some nasty injuries as well, nothin’ as bad though. S’all on that video I sent through anyway, you’ll see.”

Optimus rumbled an acknowledgement. “I better let you get to it then, it’s getting close enough to the on cycle where you are that I doubt you’ll get much chance to recharge.”

“Honestly don’t think I could after tonight, not for a while. It’s…” He ran a servo over his faceplate
again and whuffed a sigh out his vents. “Seein’ ‘em go savage on each other isn’t something y’get out of your head easy. Might wanna bolster y’self before you watch the vid. Even though I know they’re forced into it, I KNOW they’re just regular mechs trapped in a bad situation… that anibot part of them is still there, under the surface, it’s hard to reconcile the two. And we can’t afford to ignore it either.”

“I’m about as bolstered as I can be. I’ve been doing my own research, to my horror I discovered that not only did my predecessor have an enormous pack of 26 wolf-mechs… but he had a standing order in his will to have them all killed and their bodies melted down to form his memorial statue upon his passing. That will was carried out. I can’t look at that statue anymore, I’d have it torn down if I didn’t know there’d be uproar in the upper classes.” Optimus’ tone was bitter, optics dark and solemn.

Jazz’s expression matched the one the Prime had worn when he’d first found that particular fact out. Optimus continued when it was clear Jazz had no words for the disgust he felt.

“As it stands, your experience is likely to be that of the rest of Cybertron if bots see what wolf-mechs are capable of. I think our best bet is to have an appointed ambassador among them. One of them to publicly speak on behalf of their kind, act as a model for the best in them. If bots can relate to one of them, it will help with their interactions with the rest.”

Jazz gave a low, hollow laugh. “Organising an election among them ain’t gonna be that easy. They’re so spread out, it may take a while to do all that properly. Unless…” the ambassador tilted his helm thoughtfully. “They already have a well-defined social structure. Alphas are already chosen leaders. We may only need to get an idea of which alphas are considered the highest ranked, then we’d have candidates at least. I’ll ask ‘em about it. When d’you want me to contact you again?”

“Whenever you can, with whatever extra information you can gather. And… would it be possible to set it up so that I may meet Prowl at the same time? From what you’ve told me, I feel that his input into the further planning of the liberation would be highly valuable.”

Jazz nodded slowly “Ah think I can manage it. I’ll let you know.”

The den was about as subdued as he’d expected when Jazz got there. A quick visual sweep made his tank drop though. Prowl wasn’t there.

Inferno got up to greet him solemnly, Jazz running a servo over the red mech’s helm and following
him over to where Trailbraker sat beside the Twins. The red and gold mechs were curled into one another, with Bumblebee wedged in by their heads. All audials were laid flat. Something was wrong.

Jazz didn’t even have to ask before the answer to his silent question was offered up by Trailbreaker.

“He’s not here. Master’s keeping him in his room… no painkillers and he’s not got the strength to block the bond. The twins are too damn stubborn to do it on their end, they WANT to feel it…” The large black wolf-mech whuffed in half-sparked exasperation.

Sunstreaker rumbled in response, words muffled from having his snout shoved next to Sideswipe’s shoulder. “We’re not letting him suffer alone. It’s not right. He did what Thunderwing asked and he’s STILL being punished.”

“Master doesn’t SEE it as a punishment though, you know that” Inferno murmured.

“Doesn’t stop it being one” Sideswipe rumbled, helm resting on the yellow form of Bumblebee, who’s head popped out to look up balefully at Jazz.

“When are you going to get him out of there?”

The quiet pleading in Bumblebee’s voice nearly broke Jazz’s spark. The large, bright blue optics staring up at him didn’t help either. He sighed softly and sat cross-legged in front of the smallest wolf-mech, smoothing the plating down on the back of his neck.

“Soon as ah can lil’ bot. Came to talk to him some more about the plans, didn’t realise Thunderwing would have him locked away. Prime wants to talk to him too, y’know, he’s worried about all of ya. Which is nothin’ on how worried I am after this little display Thunderwing’s put on. How come none of ya mentioned the fighting arena before?”

“He hasn’t dragged us in there in a long time. We didn’t think it’d ever be on again, not after what Vortex and Wildrider did.” Sideswipe rumbled through clenched denta. “Too much to hope for apparently.”

Jazz’s visor darkened slightly. “They the ones that did the killing?”
Bumblebee nodded under his servo, Sunstreaker growling low in his throat and shifting his head to get an optic on Jazz.

“Thunderwing nearly caused another death. He nearly KILLED our carrier with that stunt, all for the sake of his ego. If I didn’t have code stopping me, I would have scaled the Arena walls to kill him myself.”

“You know, I don’t doubt that one bit.” Jazz murmured quietly, giving Sunstreaker a sad, if not wary look. “Are you sure it’s only code? Is there anything else Thunderwing might’ve installed in you as a failsafe?”

Sunstreaker frowned at him slightly in confusion, the expression oddly easy to read even on a wolvish faceplate. “Anything else?... What, you think… you think he’s got a… a shock device in me or something?”

Jazz grimaced. “That, possibly… or a killswitch. I’m not trying to be alarmist, but you already know what he’s like. I don’t wanna take the risk that he’s put somethin’ like that in you, or Sideswipe, or Prowl. He might use them the moment we try and take you all away.”

There was a new stillness and tension within the room now, the optics of every wolf-mech in the room fixed on him. The feeling was a distinctly uncomfortable one, even if Jazz knew they weren’t going to attack. There was a visceral something in his base coding telling him he should run when that many sets of predatory optics were on him, and he was glad he could supress it.

“How… how would we know? How do we find out? How do we even remove something like that?” Sideswipe’s voice sounded strained, as though he was fighting panic and pain all at once (which, Jazz realised, he probably was).

“Ah can find out, but it’s not… easy. It means deep diving into your code. It’s invasive, and there’s no guarantee ah could disable any devices but at least we’d know they were there. We could work on a way to nullify them.”

Sunstreaker flinched slightly at the mention of deep-diving, but made no comment, staring unfocussed at the wall instead as he digested the information. Beside him, Sideswipe didn’t look any less anxious.

“I volunteer. If you need to do it to make sure we all survive, then you can rifle through everything. I
don’t mind.” Inferno stood, shuffling forward and looking as if he sort of did mind but was willing to make the sacrifice.

Jazz gave him a kind look and pat his shoulder. “Thanks for volunteering ‘Ferno, but ah don’t think you have a high chance of having the dangerous stuff installed. That kinda thing ain’t cheap, and Thunderwing was only likely to put it in those of ya he considers most at risk of either turning on him or being stolen by envious mechs.”

Inferno blinked at him before plopping his aft down with a soft ‘Oh’. “That… makes sense, yeah. But then…”

The red wolf-mech frowned slightly and looked at the twins. Sunstreaker and Sideswipe shared a look with him, Bumblebee looking between all of them with mild confusion and piping up. “But then that would be Prowl wouldn’t it? Prowl’s most likely to have all that stuff.”

Jazz nodded slowly. “He is… ahm willin’ to bet he has even more’n that. I don’t dare deep-dive him, it’s too risky. Thunderwing is as likely to have something in him that’ll tell him when someone’s trying to breech the partitions installed as he is to have a kill switch in him.”

Sideswipe mirred unhappily. “So then how are you going to-“

“It’s us, Sides. We’re the next most likely. That’s where you’re going with this, isn’t it?” Sunstreaker was staring at Jazz with that unnervingly predatory gaze again, but Jazz didn’t shy from it. He held Sunstreaker’s gaze steadily as he retracted his visor.

“Yes, Sunstreaker. In fact I’m talkin’ about you specifically. Listen… no disrespect to Sideswipe, as far as I’m concerned you’re all equally important as individuals. But you an’ I know that ain’t how Thunderwing’s mind works. In market value, you’re the one after Prowl he’d be lookin’ to put the most safeguards on, but likely with the exception of hack-tracking. He doesn’t tell you anything, does he? Not anything personal. Not the kinda stuff he lets Prowl hear.”

Sunstreaker shook his head, optics still fixed on Jazz’s. The Silver and white mech could see the thought processes working overtime behind the nearly indigo optics, weighing up his options.

Sideswipe gave another unhappy mirr, looking at his brother rather than Jazz. After a few moments, Sunstreaker’s optics switched from Jazz to meet his twins’. The two had some kind of silent conversation, of which the only indication was the twitching of their audials.
The conversation was only broken when both flinched and rumbled. Bumblebee whined and nosed at Sunstreaker’s jaw in what seemed to be both an anxious and reassuring gesture.

When whatever it was they were feeling from Prowl passed, Sunstreaker looked up at Jazz again. “When do you need to do it?”

“Sooner is better. Gives us time to find solutions if I find stuff I can’t turn off, we can work on installations to disable devices before the competitive event. But it doesn’t have to be right now, I don’t know what Thunderwing’s doing an’ if he’ll be callin on you, it can wait til I’ve talked to Prowl-”

“No point in waiting. Thunderwing is about to be in a dead recharge according to carrier and I can block the bond for this. Prowl won’t be happy if we wait and you can’t ask him now ‘cause his comm is still blocked. It’s for his sake anyway… and Sideswipe’s. Anyone else is just a bonus.” Sunstreaker murmured, uncurling and standing in front of Jazz.

The silver and white mech couldn’t quite keep the base-code deep flash of fear from his optics as the golden wolf-mech towered over his sitting form, but that only seemed to put Sunstreaker at ease a little more. Putting the fear into him was likely a deliberate tactic.

“How do you need me for this?”

Jazz had to restart his vocaliser to make it co-operate, shuffling back a bit and getting on his knees. He hadn’t exactly been planning on this happening tonight, but he’d worked under worse conditions. “Uh… root mode is best. Mostly cause ah know where the ports are then. Lying down is also good, just make yourself comfortable, don’t know how long it’ll take.”

The golden bot complied without a word, towering even more over Jazz when he changed before carefully arranging himself on the floor, facing upwards. As Jazz moved to sit against the wall by Sunstreaker’s head, Bumblebee quietly laid himself over Sunstreaker’s midriff.

Jazz noted the golden mech’s tension easing a little, a large servo moving to rest on Bumblebee’s back. Jazz tapped a helm port cover lightly, Sunstreaker opening it for him.

“This shouldn’t hurt, unless something is rigged in there to cause pain if a hack is detected. Ah can’t
promise it won’t be, but I’m no amateur at this. I should be able to work around any of that stuff. Just… wanna make sure you’re aware I might not be able to. M’not sure what to expect in there, I’ll be going slow and cautious the whole way.”

Sunstreaker’s optics flicked up to meet his upside down. “You’ve already seen that I can take a bit of pain. Sides will be standing by in-case I accidentally try to maul you though. Can’t really make any promises.”

The tiny smirk playing on Sunstreaker’s lip-plates as he spoke didn’t help Jazz decide if he should be amused or worried. Instead he just nodded, plugging his wrist cable into the exposed port and beginning the deep-dive.

The process was long and exhaustive. To everyone’s relief there were no hitches or disasters, no security codes triggered or pain felt by Sunstreaker, though the golden mech was very fidgety by the end.

Jazz didn’t speak for the duration, and didn’t really catch much of the short conversations that took place over comms or out loud. When he was finally done, some 3 cycles later, he carefully pulled out of Sunstreaker’s systems, now much more intimately familiar with the bot’s head than he thought the golden mech was comfortable with.

“So what’s the verdict?” Sunstreaker murmured, optics opening to stare up at Jazz with that predatory intensity again.

Jazz, for his part, was now too tired to be much intimidated by it, and gently pet the side of the bot’s helm once he unplugged. “Looks t’be what ah expected. Not as much partitioning as Prowl, but what he’s got in there is nasty. Three different disabling mechanisms from what I can tell, could only shut off one of them. Put a false operational status on it to cover up that it ain’t workin’. That’s just the pain module though.”

Sideswipe, who was laying beside his brother in wolf mode, pricked his ears forward anxiously. “What are the other two modules?”

Jazz scrubbed the servo not idly petting Sunstreaker over his own faceplate, flicking his visor down to filter the light now giving him a processor ache. “One’s an immobiliser. Straight up halts ya motor
functions, like stasis cuffs do. Couldn’t touch that one, if I’d set it off ah wouldn’t be able to undo it before the alarm brought Thunderwing down on us.”

Sunstreaker, who hadn’t tried to move away from Jazz’s petting, rumbled softly. “Third is a kill switch, isn’t it?”

Jazz nodded, Sideswipe giving a low whine beside them. “Slag that means I’ve probably got one too.”

“Y’probably have all three s’well. Not sure ‘bout ‘Ferno or ‘Breaker. Bee probably don’t have more’n the immobiliser, wouldn’t need more than that. S’Alright though. Ah got the schematics on all three, I c’n send ‘em to my bot in Polyhex, he’ll be able to rig up remote deactivators. Gonna use ‘em on the day. Gonna hafta chase up mah theory on who supplies these modules, ‘cause if it’s who ah think it is, we can be sure the disablers will work on everyone.”

“It’s probably Shockwave.” A small voice murmured tiredly, and Jazz found himself blinking up at Bumblebee, who he’d thought was asleep.

“You know about Shockwave?”

The yellow bot nodded, optics half shuttered and dim, not looking at him. He was still sprawled over Sunstreaker’s midriff in wolf mode, and it struck Jazz that he’d never seen the smallest bot in root mode yet.

“He ran tests on me n’ my brother. Tried to find out why we’d stayed so small. HATE that bot, he’s who we always get taken to for ‘upgrades’ or major fixes. He makes us. Everyone takes their wolf-mechs to him.”

Jazz looked groggily between Bumblebee and the other pack members for a few moments, eventually pointing to the small mech. “How come he knows this and none o’ y’all mentioned it before?”

Trailbreaker chuffed softly from where he’d sprawled against the other wall. “He’s been in contact with Shockwave more than the rest of us, and more recently. I don’t remember any of my time there. Same with Inferno, we’re either too old or we weren’t in the crèche long. Twins would’ve been knocked out before being taken to see him, he doesn’t deal with us awake if we’re the least bit aggressive towards him. I don’t know what Prowl remembers of him. He doesn’t speak of his time in
the crèche.”

Jazz gave them a baleful sort of look. “…Okay, y’gonna hafta bear with me here, deep-dives throw my processor into first gear, I don’t know if any of ya ever explained the crèche t’mee or not?”

“It really brings out your accent too” Sunstreaker murmured with amusement where he was now pressing his helm into the servo that was half petting him mindlessly.

Inferno canted his helm at Jazz, “I… don’t know that we did, if Hound never explained it? The crèche is where infected sparklings are raised. The ones that don’t make it are taken away, the ones that do remain in one big group housing until someone buys ‘em. Sometimes they get snatched up quick, other times they’re there until second or third frame. I’m honestly not sure if it still exists anymore… most pups I hear of are born from couplings, all the first-generation wolf-mechs I know are adults. But that’s where me and Trailbreaker came from, and Prowl. Bee was a sparked pup.”

“Sssssoooo why was he with Shockwave?” He gave Bee a confused look, the little mech not looking at him.

“My Sparker and their owner died in an accident. Then something went wrong with my carrier, and she extinguished after she had an early separation. Cliffjumper and I came out too small, so carrier’s master didn’t want us, and we got sent to Shockwave. There was a crèche, but it was small, and I don’t remember if any of the other pups there were first gen or just unwanted like us. Shockwave separated us out a lot to run tests. HATED it. In the end he just said something along the lines of ‘underdeveloped’ and classified us as having minibot-derivative code. Thunderwing bought me off him cause I was cheap, not a lot of sale value and I don’t take as much fuel as a regular wolf-mech.”

Despite the flat tone, Jazz could tell there was a lot of bitterness behind Bumblebee’s story. Sunstreaker smoothed a large servo down the small wolf’s back, Bee mirring in appreciation.

“Do you have any idea where his main facility is?” Jazz murmured, trying to force his slow processor back into working order.

“No. We don’t really have GPS, we’re loaded in the back of transports with no windows and taken where he wants to take us. All I know is it smells like copper smelts near that place.” Bee murmured, optics flicking over to Jazz’s. “Y’not thinking of going there are you?”
“I mean, ahm gonna be raiding ONE of his facilities to stop him makin’ more of ya, sure. M’just hopin’ the one I have targeted is the RIGHT one. I’ll keep my olfactory to the air for the copper smelting scent. And uuuh... keep that info to y'selves okay? Really shouldn't be talkin' about my missions openly.”

"That a regular thing for you? Going on missions for the Prime?" Sideswipe asked curiously.

"Shhhh, y'not s'posed to know." Jazz gave him a crooked grin, getting a wag of the red bot's tail. "Now... ahm assuming I won't get to sneak in to Thunderwing's quarters tonight, when would y'all recommend ah try?"

"Uuuh... never? If he catches you in there-"

Jazz waved a servo at Trailbreaker "I know what he'd do, s'why I wanna make sure he ain't gonna be around, and you guys know his schedule way better'n I do."

"At the moment his schedule is out the window because of you and Lord Mirage being here, so it's hard to say." Bumblebee shrugged before stretching and yawning.

"Mmmm. Guess I better play it by audial then."

Prowl took long, slow ventilations to try and manage the pain. Thunderwing didn't seem to think spinal control cable damage was a good enough excuse not to use him as a fragtoy, and it had been all he could do just to try and block the majority of the agony from the bond with the twins.

He was glad at least that it wasn't as strong as the bond the two of them shared and there was already a limit to what they could feel. They may have wanted to take on his pain in solidarity but he'd rather spare them.

The worst of the stabbing pains were abating now, and he ignored the servant Thunderwing had called in to clean him up (since he couldn't walk again yet, so showering himself was out of the question, and Thunderwing sure as slag wasn't going to do it for him).
Thunderwing was pacing slowly, stretching and making pleased grunting sounds as he basked in his afterglow and mulled things over. After a few moments he shoo'd away the servant, leaving Prowl alone with his master once more.

"What ARE we going to do about this ambassador, hmmm?"

Prowl stared blankly at the blue and yellow pseudo-seeker from where he lay, carefully concealing any emotions he had regarding said ambassador. "What do you mean master?"

Thunderwing made a motion with his servo as if waving at an insecticon. "He wants for nothing as one of Primes favourites! You can't grease a mech's palm with credits to gain their favour when they aren't in want of credits."

Prowl said nothing, tuned enough to his master's mannerisms to know when an answer was or wasn't expected of him. After a brief pause and more pacing, the mech continued.

"It doesn't help that he's friends with that liberal Mirage. He's clearly not going to be easy to get on-side. But dammit-all I can't afford to fall out with the Prime's ambassador. There HAS to be a way... once I have him oiled up, I can work on getting a budget increase for my sector. If this new Prime is as reasonable as they keep saying, surely he'll see the need for more military support. All the last one was interested in was the financial sector."

The flier scoffed as if offended by the mere thought of the business oriented mechs and all the money they'd earned under Sentinel. "Mirage being one of those benefactors only makes me all the more rankled to host him. Then again, if I can gain HIS favour as well, I might have an even better in-road. Tch, if I thought he cared much for credits I'd be trying to buy that alpha off him as well... imagine the offspring you could have with that one! Your offensive capabilities and an olfactory like that, no one could EVER beat such a wolf at hunting."

Prowl continued to keep his expression neutral, making a small plaintive sort of agreement despite the sentiment irking him slightly. Having pups with Hound wasn't a thought that bothered him, but the way Thunderwing would treat them certainly did.

His master continued on, talking more to himself than Prowl. "Wolf with his capabilities is so wasted on that weakling. Maybe when I've simpered enough i'll get a covering. At the moment though, I must focus on Jazz. What do you give a mech that wants for nothing... where are his weaknesses, he’s not a gambler, he’s not much of a drinker, he clearly doesn’t care much about fancy paint or finishing products... if I tried energon confections on him he might think I was trying to court him, and I doubt he’d be too pleased about that when he keeps company like Mirage. Primus, the last
thing I want is anyone thinking I was actually interested in a mech like him!"

As the flight mech talked, a plan hatched in Prowl’s mind, strategic processor running at full speed.

“Master… might I make a suggestion?”

Thunderwing blinked over at him, as if surprised he was there. Probably more surprised he was actually involving himself in the problem. “Oh? You think you know where his weakness lies? Smell something on him, did you?”

“Nothing but the usual sorts of things, no… but he has shown a very keen interest in me and my pack. Perhaps that could be the in-road you can utilise?”

The blue and yellow mech gave him a shrewd look. “Are you suggesting I gift him one of my pack? You must have taken a harder hit to the processors than I thought—”

“No Master, forgive me. I did not clarify… I meant that perhaps you could gift him his own, a single wolf-mech. One from the owner’s forum market perhaps, there are always a few who the experienced owners don’t want. He has a covetous look in his optic whenever he sees myself and the rest of the pack, I feel his desire for one of us is greater than perhaps he lets on.”

Prowl knew his words were a gamble. But if he played their cards just right here, he could trick Thunderwing into buying Jazz another ally for them. Of course, there would be the added benefit of whoever got gifted being practically freed from their enslavement.

If he thought Thunderwing would have agreed he’d have suggested he gift Bumblebee and buy a new pack member, but he knew his master was too clever to give up such a powerful tool of control over him.

Thunderwing gave him a long, considering look as he mulled the suggestion over. His wings twitched on his back, cunning processor weighing the price against the gains. The wicked grin that spread on his face was at least a small relief to see. “You know, I think you might just be onto something. I’ll make the arrangements as soon as possible. You may have to help me whip whatever I buy into shape after we hand it over and while he’s still here, but then he’s not exactly a conisseur. Something pretty and practical ought to be enough. Nothing too insulting but not anywhere near as powerful as anything I own.”
The pseudo-seeker’s words turned from conversational to introverted as he spoke, telling Prowl his job was done and he was once more expected to be silent until further notice. He didn’t have a problem with this. He was satisfied at least to have managed to help, even a little.

Much as Jazz disliked this part of the job, it was the whole reason he was even staying with Thunderwing, so he had to put his full attention and processing power into what he was doing.

The whole day was spent on the military base Thunderwing oversaw, and for the most part it involved the mech showing off their capabilities and spouting a lot of numbers. Jazz was at least amused by the way the blue and yellow pseudo-seeker tried to both be proud of his base and play as if they were hard-done-by and needed more funding.

It was truly impressive how much of a ‘leading force’ they were in Cybertron’s aerial defense network, while simultaneously not having enough credits to hold any sort of leading position.

Supposedly.

Jazz felt he deserved a large amount of very strong high grade for how long he had to keep up his façade of giving-a-frag about any of it. From what he could tell, Thunderwing ran a very ordinary, averagely competent air-force. It didn’t seem particularly critical to Cybertron’s defense network, if anything it was surplus.

Jazz wondered if Thunderwing was aware just how much more powerful and impressive the main Vossian air force was. He was careful not to mention it, being fairly certain Thunderwing was both well aware and extremely bitter about it. How could he not be? Any hint of Lord Starscream’s name put a sour look on his face and an angry tilt to his wings.

Instead, Jazz made sure to present a neutrally polite attitude about the whole place, erring on the positive side to keep the air commander happy. He did manage to sneak Mirage a few long-suffering glances. The blue and white lord was about the only thing making the trip mostly bearable.

Much as Jazz pretended to be positive about the tour, his report to Optimus later would be scathing. At least the Prime would get a laugh out of it.
Blessedly, after 8 grueling cycles of pleasantry, they headed back to Thunderwing’s compound. Jazz didn’t bother going to his own room to prepare for the evening fueling, following Mirage to his and complaining over his comm link the whole way. He broke into regular conversation the moment the door locked behind them and he’d done his usual pulse-sweep for bugging devices.

“And ah STILL can’t get onto Prowl. If Sunny and Sides weren’t able to tell me he’s okay I’d be tryin’ to sneak in while Thunderwing recharged to check for myself—“

“You’re NOT going to try that though, surely?”

“No of course not. I said if they COULDN’T tell me, but they can, they just did. They’re pretty sour about his comms still being blocked too, they can’t get into the room to talk to him either, all doors are locked.” Jazz huffed, following Mirage into his washracks.

It wasn’t the first, nor would it be the last time they washed together. Neither even needed to ask for specific assistance as they went through the motions of helping each other clear the dust and grit out of back-kibble.

“By the way, Ah liked how you made that subtle jab about how he could always buy his base more equipment with his generous salary.” Jazz snickered.

Mirage gave a small shrug and a smirk, leaning so that Jazz could more easily access the wheels on his back. His engine idled loudly as the silver and white bot carefully cleared grime away from around the axels.

“I liked the look on his face when I mentioned how much of my own money I end up feeding back into my business. I mean, it’s common sense, if it’s going to help improve the company growth, I can certainly do without a few luxuries for a while to help it along.”

Jazz snorted. “Do without luxuries, says the bot now rich enough that he never has to go without a single luxury to pay for anything, ever.”

“Filthy lies. Just last stellar cycle I decided not to buy another pleasure cruiser in order to up the wage of my lowest level employees.” Mirage huffed in mock indignance.

“Oh no, whatever will you do without a second pleasure cruiser? Those workers better appreciate
how much you sacrifice for them, might as well be taking the energon from your lines” Jazz deadpanned, the two of them snickering as they swapped places, Mirage getting to work on Jazz’s stubby door-wings.

There was a slight noise at the entryway to the washracks, and Hound’s head popped around the corner. He’d evidently been told by the twins that they were back and returned from the den.

“So how’d it go?”

Jazz made a long groaning noise in response.

“Wow, that bad huh?”

The green wolf-mech snickered, padding in and patting a paw on Jazz’s pede in a show of sympathy. “At least the mood would have been cheerier than it was here. The den’s in a somber state with Prowl being locked away. I really don’t understand Thunderwing leaving him without any pain medication, but the twins said it wasn’t as bad today at least.”

Jazz frowned and nodded. “Need to find time to get into that room and give him some, always carry a med-kit on me. S’not much, but it should be better than nothing- nh, ‘Raj y’gotta be careful with those sensors, they’re edgy from all the sensory sweeping ah had to do on that base.”

“Oh I know. After a day like today though, I thought you could use a little relief before having to go back to schmoozing with the great oilstain himself.” Mirage replied smoothly, still rubbing canny circles on his winglets.

Jazz groaned and pressed into them. “Y’know… ah wasn’t sure if we were actually AT that point in the friendship yet. Y’know I don’t like pushing, and y’never really indicated like you wanted us to make it THAT kinda thing.”

Mirage scoffed “You mean that one time we were both blind drunk after that party at the Prime compound wasn’t indication enough for you?”

Jazz’s winglets flicked slightly. “Uuuh… didn’t think you remembered that, y’never mentioned it.”

“I didn’t mention it because YOU never mentioned it and I thought that meant you didn’t intend for
“Ah mean… you sayin’ you want to make it a thing now?”

“Well I’m not groping your wings just to be funny.” Mirage drawled, half exasperated, half amused.

Hound chuffed and shook his head. “Will you two bang already? I can smell you both want to, and honestly I think you could do with the stress relief. Hell I could do with the stress relief” The last part was muttered, but it served to break the tension, Jazz laughing.

“Oh mean, with Hound’s blessing, how can I say no… also, he gets to join in, right?” Jazz threw Mirage a cheeky look over his shoulder.

“Well I WAS going to suggest you let us sandwich you.” Mirage answered as though it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Hound transformed, grinning and moving to press himself against Jazz’ front at the same time Mirage pressed against his back. Jazz’s engine revved, temperature immediately spiking. “Now this sounds like a plan ah can get behind.”

“Speaking of who’s behind, Hound I think we should be switching places.” Mirage murmured.

The green bot shrugged, grinning at Jazz. The smaller mech gave him a quizzical look before he was bodily lifted and turned around. He let out a laugh, servos landing on Mirage’s shoulders once he was facing him. “Well ah mean that’s the easy way t’do it. Smart mech your Hound.”

“I know he is.” Mirage grinned just as widely as Hound did, hooking Jazz’s legs around his waist.

All three knew they were on a time constraint, Thunderwing expecting them at dinner in 3 quarters of a cycle. Under the sounds of the running water and solvent, three panels clicked open, and Jazz eagerly ground his extending spike against Mirage’s.

The noble’s face pinched in pleasure as he grunted, adjusting his balance slightly before grinding back. Behind Jazz, Hound pressed close again, and the silver and white bot shivered as the tip of the
green mech’s spike teased at his valve.

With an unsatisfied rumble though, Hound shifted. His weight and warmth was gone from Jazz’s back, but he didn’t even have time to make a sound of disappointment before a different warmth and pressure was being applied to his valve.

Jazz gave a full body twitch and cried out as a hot glossa lapped at his platelets and outer node. Apparently the wolf-mech hadn’t been satisfied that he was fully prepared, but it didn’t take him long to make sure he was.

“Mmmmm going to enjoy watching you while he spikes you.” Mirage murmured, grinning slyly and backing up so he could lean against the wall. Hound had stood again, and quickly lined himself up.

“Y’get to see it once, then you gotta let me see you. Can’t promise ah won’t be playin’ with ya while he does. S’long as he’s okay with that.”

“Oh more than. Been asking Mirage when he was going to invite you to play with us.” Hound quipped from behind him. Before Jazz could answer, he was crying out in pleasure as Hound pressed into him.

His motions were swift, but shallow, pulling all the way out each time to really coat Jazz’s entrance in lubricant before he began pressing deeper. Jazz groped at Mirage’s back kibble in response, the noble moaning in his audial before licking it.

Well supported by the two of them, Jazz relaxed into their hold and canted his hips into Hound’s thrusting. He could feel the unswollen knot now pushing in on each thrust, until Hound was suddenly hilting every time.

One of Mirage’s servos snuck between them to press and stroke their spikes together, increasing the friction between them. Jazz nipped and sucked at the blue and white mech’s neck cables in response, moaning loudly as Hound began to really pound into him.

It didn’t take long for the three of them to come undone, Hound’s knot swelling as he felt Jazz contract around him in overload. Mirage’s transfluid mingled with Jazz’s as charge jumped between them. Hound’s sat hot and heavy within Jazz as the knot stopped it’s escape, spike stretching him deliciously.
The three stood under the spray, fans loud as they rode out their afterglow. Hound was the first to move, now taking all of Jazz’s weight and moving back to sink to the floor with the silver and white mech clutched against his chest. His spike was still stuck in Jazz, and they both made small noises of pleasure as the movement caused some transfluid to escape.

Mirage, looking at them both with smouldering optics, remained leaning against the wall, spreading his legs a little to reach down and tease his own valve, putting on a show. He was clearly already keen for round two, lubricant running down his thighs into the diluting stream of the shower spray.

Hound rumbled a deep purr, making Jazz shiver and voice his own sound of appreciation. “S’pose y’want me to pop off this spike once it’s gone down enough huh?”

“Mmmm not necessarily. You can always watch him take me later, we do it often enough… I have other plans now since you’re both positioned so conveniently~”

“Oh?…OH” Jazz tilted his helm in curiosity, understanding when Hound began rearranging him so his legs were outside of the green bot’s, Mirage moving to crouch in front of him and stroking his spike back to full pressure.

It didn’t take very long, and Hound shifted so he was fully seated on the tiled floor, Jazz still impaled on his spike with legs spread by Hound’s. Mirage, a little impatiently, lowered himself over Jazz’s spike and lined up. He sank down and moaned in relief, immediately starting up a rhythm.

Jazz was no negligent lover, and his servos quickly got to work on teasing Mirage’s spike. He squirmed against Hound, valve clenching in response to Mirage’s valve on his spike. The green mech whuffed and moaned, nibbling at his shoulder.

It took a little longer for the three of them to get their charges up again, but once they were, Hound moved to grasp Mirage’s thighs, holding his lover down on Jazz’s spike and jerking his hips up roughly.

Jazz cried out, palming Mirage’s spike furiously as he felt Hound smacking his ceiling node and forcing his own to hit Mirage’s.

The three once again peaked together, Jazz keening loudly as the extra transfluid was forced out of his valve around the knot by pressure alone. His own flowed freely from Mirage’s valve as the noble squirmed against him.
Hound released Mirage’s thighs to lean back on his servos and pant hard through his vents. Mirage, not much inclined to actually get up yet, groped up behind him to change the water temperature. The cool water steamed on their plating, but it was a welcome relief.

After a few moments more of basking in their shared overloads, Mirage carefully pulled himself up and un-straddled the two of them. Jazz leant forward to pop some of his joints back into place a bit, grunting at the over-stuffed feeling in his valve.

It seemed the cold water helped with getting Hound’s knot to go down faster, because Jazz was able to pull himself free within a klik or so. The two of them did end up getting lovely aftershocks from the hot transfluid that practically flooded from Jazz’s valve, but they had to clean up quickly.

“You two really know the trick to getting’ this done quick huh?” Jazz snickered as he stood (a little bow-legged) and helped the other two clean and buff out scuffs.

Mirage shrugged “It wouldn’t be the first time we’ve fit a quick ‘face in between engagements.”

Thankfully the dinner did not drag on too much. It seemed Thunderwing was at least somewhat tired by their day as well, though he was acting strangely distracted. He was only half-involved in any conversation, even on topics he’d started.

Just when Jazz thought the meal was over and they could excuse themselves, Thunderwing stood, clasping his servos together and plastering on a big grin.

“My dear ambassador, before we all retire… I admit I have been somewhat pre-occupied over my comms, and I apologise. If you would bear with me however, I have been organizing something a little special… as a token of my gratitude, for you coming to stay here and see the work I am doing, I have gotten you a small gift. Well… I say SMALL…”

There was a flick of the flier’s wings and he gestured to the main entrance. Confused and a little wary, Jazz and Mirage turned to watch the doors open.

Through them came a servant with a wolf-mech neither had seen before, being led on a chain leash
by a servant. It was rather sleek, smaller than Hound or Prowl, with a well polished red and white
paintjob.

*Oh Primus, what's he playin’ at with this?* A thousand different and unpleasant possibilities flitted
through Jazz’s mind… all of them coming to a halt when the servant stopped in front of him and
offered him the leash.

Jazz looked between the leash and Thunderwing quizzically.

“You seemed so intrigued by my pack, and the sports we compete in… I thought perhaps you’d like
to have a wolf-mech of your own. The starter for a pack perhaps, or just a trustworthy bodyguard.
They have many uses, I’m sure you’ll find it good for something.” Thunderwing chuckled, and the
unspoken meaning was not lost on Jazz.

He took the leash, servant bowing and leaving, and looked down at the wolf-mech. Blue optics
averted their gaze downward, audials back and tail slightly tucked. Jazz hadn’t been around them
particularly long but he knew enough to recognize submissive behavior.

Realising Thunderwing was waiting for a positive reaction, Jazz forced a natural enough sounding
chuckle and gave the wolf-mech a genuinely reassuring scritch on the neck.

“How kind of you. And here I thought I was hiding my jealousy so well. I’m sure he will be useful
somehow, and even if he ain’t, he’s pretty enough to look at all day.”

Jazz wanted to retch at his own words, but it was all for show. Thunderwing was clearly trying to
bribe him, and if he could convince the bot he’d managed it, he’d be better poised to strike when the
time came to bring him down.

“Excellent! If you need any help whipping him into shape, don’t hesitate to ask. Now, I shall let you
both retire, we’ve all had a long and productive day. And I’m sure you’re eager to imprint upon your
new pet.”

It was damn near physically painful for Jazz to force the smile he did, but he managed, quick to urge
the wolf-mech to move with him as he and Mirage left the dining hall. Jazz pulled a face at his friend
the moment they were out of Thunderwing’s sight.
He honestly thinks ahm gonna take this poor mech straight to berth? Primus I wish I didn’t have to crawl so far up his tailpipe. This poor bot looks like he’s expectin’ it and all// Jazz looked down sympathetically at the wolf-mech who’s lead he held. THAT was coming off the moment they were in private.

//I’m wondering where he got the idea to give you a wolf-mech as a bribe. He doesn’t seem observant enough to me to have thought it up himself. Then again, perhaps he pays more attention than normal when it comes to finding ways to schmooze// Mirage drawled slightly over the comm, giving the red and white wolf a curious glance himself. //Poor thing can’t be a very highly rated one though. I don’t imagine he’d spend top dollar on one, he LOOKS lovely but it’s likely he’s got a temperament that’s made him less attractive to buyers. There’s lots of bots like that on the internal market//.

//Y’talkin’ about him like he ain’t a person// Jazz commented, giving Mirage a disapproving look and getting an apologetic glyph in return.

//Sorry, I don’t mean to. It’s sort of ingrained habit… I don’t talk about mine that way, but wolf-mechs I don’t know personally sort of… well, I’ll try my best to stop. I tend to fall in with how others talk of them through code switching.// Mirage admitted sheepishly.

When they reached Mirage’s rooms, Jazz followed his friend in, Hound doing a double take where he was sprawled on the berth in bot mode. He sat up, ears flicking back and forth curiously. “Hellooo, who’s this?”

“Not sure. ’Bout to ask him. Here bot, lemme get this chain off ya. Don’t know why they bothered buffin’ your neck plating when they let this scuff it all up again.” Jazz murmured, kneeling in front of the wolf-mech.

The red and white bot seemed somewhat confused, and still extremely wary of them. Jazz tossed the chain off towards the corner and rubbed at some of the scuffs the chain had left. “S’alright mech, I ain’t gonna treat ya the way Thunderwing expects. You can transform, talk, tell me what’s on your mind, ahm’ not gonna keep you as a slave.”

The disbelief and suspicion in the blue optics told Jazz the mech was not only unconvinced, but extremely confused. Maybe he thought it was a lie? A trap? How badly had his previous owner treated him?

Hound slid off the berth and changed to wolf mode, padding over and giving all the positive body-language of ‘friend’. Jazz watched the red and white stiffen before he relaxed a little, reaching his
muzzle out to sniff at Hound when the green mech chuffed and lowered his head.

//Hey, I’m Hound. I’m Mirage’s Alpha, he’s the blue and white one. Jazz is the other one, he’s the Prime’s ambassador, you can trust him. What’s ya name?//

//I’m Red Alert… are you… are you SURE he doesn’t want to mark me? Discipline me?// the bright red audials twitched up a little before lying flat again.

Hound chuffed again softly. //Nah he doesn’t do any of that. He thinks it’s aweful, he’s making plans to free us all. We’re not going to be slaves much longer/. Hound’s tail wagged harder as he spoke, radiating cheerful enthusiasm. It seemed to be working on the bot, who’s posture relaxed a little more, tail no longer curled beneath him. //You can talk to him y’know, just like you are to me. He sees us as equals//.

Red’s gaze shifted to Jazz’s visor, still anxious, but also searching. “Is that… is it true? You don’t want to keep me as a slave?”

Jazz grinned once the bot actually addressed him and shook his helm. “Nope. No slavery for you. You can be my friend though, if you want. We’ll have to fake the master and pet thing in front of other nobles, but I don’t expect you to take orders from me in private. Got a name, friend?”

“I… it’s Red Alert. My name was given to me by my first owner. None have changed it since because it… well, I am… I’m very alert… and mostly red.” He murmured sheepishly, looking away again.

“Alert huh? Got a heightened sensory suite or something? Cause ah know the feelin.” Jazz sat on the ground so he was relaxing at the bot’s optic height to put him at ease a little more. The unconscious effect was obvious, and Red’s gaze came back to his curiously.

“Oh… yes, I do. It’s TOO sensitive, always has been. It helps me keep track of a lot of moving objects around me at once, but the input gets overwhelming easily. I also get anxious when I can’t process all the data at once and can’t tell if any one of the presences around me might pose a threat.”

“Oooh, yeah, I’ve been there. I’ve got programming to help with that. I can share if y’want? It sure helps with the headaches.” Jazz held out his wrist, offering up a cable.

Red Alert gave him another wary look before carefully transforming to bot mode and offering his own wrist, port exposed. Jazz was very careful with plugging in, keeping it formal and polite,
making sure the mech had plenty of personal space. The bot was only about Mirage’s size, if that. A little stockier than Jazz expected, but otherwise like most other wolf-mechs he’d met so far.

“Y’mind if I do a quick scan of ya systems? I just wanna make sure Thunderwing hasn’t put anything nasty in you before giving you over to me. That and I wanna make sure these code patches are actually compatible with your systems.”

“I, um… no, I don’t mind. I don’t believe he put anything in me? I don’t think he could have if he tried… one of the frustrations of my former masters was that I build firewalls. All the time. And they could never get through them. It’s not… I mean I tend to do it unconsciously but I don’t really like taking them down.”

Jazz actually made an intruiged sound at that, doing a basic, top level sweep and coming across said Firewalls. “So you just concoct these in ya spare time? These are impressive bot. Ah don’t even know that many educated bots who c’n code their internals like this. You got real skills, ahm willin’ to bet this is a sigma ability.”

Red Alert seemed too flabbergasted by the praise to answer, but Mirage made a sound of disbelief behind him. “Jazz, you know how rare Sigma abilities are. Beyond you and Me, I’ve met maybe a handful of mechs who have them.”

“What about Hound?” Jazz looked over at him, cocking his head.

Mirage just gave him a confused look. “Uhm… what ABOUT Hound? I mean unless he’s been hiding something extraordinary from me-“

The ambassador chuckled, Seeing Hound looking just as confused and tilting his own head back and forth. “Y’mean to tell me you don’t think his super sniffery ain’t a sigma ability?”

“Well I mean… if you compare it to the abilities of regular Cybertronians, maybe. But It’s also a trait of his kind, they ALL have better senses of smell than regular Cybertronians, and his is just another level above that. I sort of just thought it was breeding?”

“Come to think of it though… neither my carrier or sparker had particularly great senses of smell though?... maybe it IS a Sigma ability?” Hound mumbled, looking very thoughtful.
Jazz grinned at him as he started sending patch packets to Red for him to install. The firewalls had certainly made it hard to get a good read on the bot’s systems with a regular sweep, but a broader one had done the trick. The bot’s problems weren’t exactly the same as his, but the patches would do the right job anyway. “Don’t worry Hound, we think ya special either way. And I’m tellin’ ya ‘Raj, Red here has Sigma. His sensory setup isn’t far off mine at all.”

Finishing the transfer fairly quickly, Jazz disconnected and pet the bot’s servo reassuringly. “Those’ll definitely help, they’ll let you wind back and dull sensitivity when you need to. The secondary packets help you process certain inputs faster so you don’t get that backlog fuzzing up and whiting out your arrays.”

Red Alert blinked, installing the packets and going wide-optic’d as he tested them. “Ohhh… thankyou, this is… I’ve never… oh my, I’ve never… everything feels so much QUIETER now, is this what it’s like for normal bots?”

Jazz beamed at him. “Ah mean, I’m not the best judge of normal, but yeah, I think so. It’s sure as slag more comfortable, huh?”

Red Alert nodded, looking at him and twitching his tail slightly. “I… may I… hug you?”

Jazz only beamed wider. “Slag mech, course y’can.”

The silver and white bot gave Mirage a beaming grin over Red Alert’s shoulder. //If this is how most of them react when we start freein’ em, I’m gonna end up a pro at bear-hugs//.

//Probably. If you run out of stamina I’m sure Optimus would happily take over for you in that department//.

//Oh primus you SO owe me for this// Mirage fairly hissed across the comm.

//It’s for a good cause, you’ve done worse schmoozing in your time// Jazz sent back almost sympathetically. Almost.
They’d hatched a plan in the morning for Mirage to ask Thunderwing for some hunting pointers. The look of egotistical glee on Thunderwing’s face was almost enough to make Mirage back out, but it was too late.

The plan to get him out of the mansion and where one of them could keep an eye on him was in motion. Mirage and Hound were both distraction and lookout, and the rest of Prowl’s pack were out there too, which was another layer of optics and audials. Red Alert was back in Jazz’s room, guarding it against any servants who might try and get in to check where Jazz was.

All this meant Jazz could sneak into the flier’s quarters and speak to Prowl without worrying that Thunderwing would return unexpectedly. The only real victim was Mirage’s Pride.

Jazz meanwhile had the unenviable task of breaking into the more than likely silently alarmed and monitored room. Jazz was less worried about hacking the building systems than he was about servants wanting to get in the room while he was in there and raising an issue when they couldn’t.

There were contingency plans though. It was fine, he reassured himself, the most important thing was to make sure Prowl was okay. If he had to throw a knockout dart at one or two servants, well…it wasn’t going to cause lasting damage.

It only took half a breem for Jazz to crack the locks and feed a loop through the surveillance systems. Paultry. Just as well, but he wasn’t sure if he wanted to celebrate or chew out the bot that had installed such a weak system.

When he got in through the servant’s entrance, he still crept around carefully. He didn’t spot Prowl immediately, having to go around the enormous main berth until he saw the smaller, lower one in the corner. Prowl lay still on it, and didn’t move until he was very close.

The way he twitched and his vents hitched suggested he hadn’t entirely been aware of his presence until he was within smelling distance. “Jazz? You shouldn’t-”

“Shhhh it’s alright. Mirage has him occupied and he can let me know if he heads back. Had to find a way to come see you, brought you somethin’”. Jazz knelt by the berthside, fishing some supplies from his subspace. He took one of the little tubes and uncapped it, holding it to a line in Prowl’s neck and injecting the fluid inside via micro-needle.

Prowl rumbled very softly, voice sounding strained when he spoke. “What is that?”
“Painkiller. Ah’ve been told Thunderwing is a ginormous atrhole that won’t give ya any.”

Prowl’s dim optics lit up slightly at that, pre-emptive relief making his expression less tight. “Thankyou… I have delt with long periods of pain before but this is… I have not been able to recharge properly, and Thunderwing won’t take me seriously when I try to impress on him the severity of it.”

“That atrhole is going down hard the moment we can corner him. Right now though, ah’m gonna give you somethin’ else that should help. You okay if I turn you on your side? Gonna inject a nanite boost into your spinal struts.” He wiggled the silvery tube as he spoke.

Prowl nodded stiffly and steeled himself as Jazz got his arms around the larger mech’s torso and carefully lifted him. He was mindful of the sensor wings that needed to shift before he could lay Prowl back down on his side, but shifting him still caused the alpha to give a low, thready whine.

When Jazz settled him on his side, Prowl was taking shallow panting ventilations as he rode out the shooting pains. Jazz pet his helm in apology and an attempt to soothe the aches, and Prowl soon relaxed again, stiff posture easing slightly.

“Sorry mech. Ah know spinal injuries are no fun, this should speed up the recovery.” Jazz murmured, looking down the black and white’s back to find the recently repaired plating. Carefully, he eased his digits between some of the plates near the injury and slid in the injector.

When he pushed the nanite-gel into the area around the spinal strut, Prowl shivered slightly, but made no sound. Jazz re-subspaced the tube and flexed his palms before laying both around the wound. Very carefully, he eased on his magnetic field generators and pulsed them around the freshly welded plating.

Prowl’s ventilations hitched before he let out a long, shaky ex-vent that turned into a groan.

“That helpin’ any?”

“Immeasurably”
Jazz grinned even though the other mech couldn’t see it. “Thought it might. Should help realign everythin’ and get your nanites and the fresh ones workin’ faster.”

“What are you actually doing?” Unable to turn his helm to see, Prowl couldn’t identify the sensations. He’d never experienced anything quite like them, and desperately hoped Jazz didn’t stop anytime soon.

“Usin’ magnetic fields. Ah have generators in my servos, always have. Usually I’d use em to climb stuff or carry more stuff than I can actually grip. But they have great therapeutic uses too, like foolin’ pain sensors into turnin’ down fer a bit.”

“Wish I had something like those” Prowl murmured, posture finally beginning to fully relax. Jazz hadn’t realized just how stiffly the larger bot had been holding himself until the combined treatments took effect.

He looked over Prowl’s frame to assess the rest of the repairs, optics catching on his thighs and making a sound of alarm before he could stop himself. Prowl’s audials flicked back towards him and he turned his head slightly.

“What is it?”

“He’s just… LEFT you in a STATE. Does he not even have the decency to clean ya up when he’s done?” Jazz’s tone was full of disgust, but it was all directed at Thunderwing. He’d only just noticed the scratches, scuffs and dried fluid splatters across Prowl’s thighs and pelvic plating.

The alpha’s audials laid flat. “I think he forgot. He normally calls in a servant for that. Or he forgot I can’t walk to the washracks myself” Prowl murmured quietly. It sounded to Jazz as if he were ashamed now that he’d been found in this state, and the thought made his spark ache.

“C’mon, ah’ll get ya sorted out. Where’s the washracks? I can help ya over there while you’re dosed up on painkillers.”

Prowl nodded, mostly disappointed that the magnetic massaging had stopped. The ache that returned in his lower back was much duller though, and far more tolerable.

It was a little awkward for Jazz to help him walk, since he was a tad too short in comparison to help
him stay at full height. They managed well enough to get across the room to the, as far as Jazz was concerned, FAR too opulent washroom. And it was indeed much more a room than just a washrack.

Regular bots just had a cubicle of sorts attached to their room, big enough to comfortably wash in under a spray-head. Extra room was for storing supplies, but little else. Thunderwing had what was essentially a small berthroom attached to his own, except it didn’t contain a berth so much as a triple-sized washrack, a buffing station, a drying station, and a set of full-length mirrors.

Paranoid as ever, Jazz did a sensor sweep to be sure the mirrors were only one way (who knew with this ridiculous mech) and there were no other closed-loop surveillance cameras or devices he’d missed on his initial hack.

Satisfied that it was clear, he hobbled Prowl over to the shower and laid him on the expansive bench there. He knew enough about spinal injury to know the mech shouldn’t be sitting up. It wasn’t that it would do more damage, but the extra pressure on the spinal column would cause more pain later.

The injury was essentially a wiring one, rather than a parts one. Even repairing all the solid strutwork around the sensory cabling couldn’t fix the micro-fracture damage within the lines. That took time, nanites and plenty of rest and restricted movement.

And Jazz had to admit to himself that Prowl was a model patient by Ratchet’s standards. Shame it was because he’d been trained not to complain or lash out in any way when injured, not because he didn’t have the urge to.

The silver and white mech grabbed a cleaning sponge and some solvent, turning the water on and immediately getting to work cleaning away the evidence of interface.

Prowl stayed still, trying not to hinder him, but felt awful about Jazz of all mechs being the one to have to clean HIM up. The mech was much, MUCH too high of a rank for this sort of thing. Even though he tried to remind himself where Jazz had COME from, and what his opinion was of the whole master and slave status… it still felt wrong to just lie there and be cleaned by a noble.

Jazz seemed to pick up on his awkwardness and cocked his helm slightly as he rubbed away paint transfers on his thighs. “Y’not embarrassed are you? Ah mean I thought you wouldn’t be, seein’ as I’ve already seen all your bits down here.”

“It isn’t that” the alpha murmured, averting his optics down from Jazz’s slightly. “I… you should not
have to lower yourself to a task like this.”

“Lower m’self? Nah, mech, this ain’t a low job, this is what happens when bots are equals, they help each other out however they can and ranks be damned. Don’t look at it like somethin’ only the servants do, ah’d do this for any bot in your position. It’s just easier to do it for you cause you’re mah friend. At least…that’s how I see it.”

Prowl blinked owlishly down his own torso at Jazz, noting the slight elevation in temperature from the other bot even under the warmth of the water. He said nothing, but he wasn’t blind, or inexperienced. When Jazz said friend, he meant something else. But what exactly?... and how did HE see Jazz, really?

The mech was… friend really couldn’t encompass all that Jazz was to him and his pack. Right now, it certainly didn’t seem to fit what he felt. The bot was showing him a kindness he’d NEVER gotten from bots above his own class.

Not only did he show HIM this kindness, but it extended out to his pack, and beyond. Prowl knew Jazz was more than a mere friend the moment he realized he was serious about protecting them all while working to free them.

Both felt something there, but neither could find the words to address it yet.

The awkwardness between them seemed to ease at least, Prowl calmly opening his panels when Jazz asked and keeping still as the other bot carefully went about cleaning up his slightly battered valve. Thunderwing was never gentle, but Prowl had taken him enough times that the damage was superficial at this point. He’d been far more worried by the pain it caused his back than anything else.

When Jazz was done on Prowl’s valve, he got a fresh cloth and went about giving the rest of him a wipe down. “Huh. Either they did an impeccable job on this leg or they gave ya a new one.”

“New one. Thunderwing stores spares at the arena that are custom made for us. He only ever takes myself and the twins in there, so he only ever has spare limbs made for us anyway.”

Jazz made a face, but didn’t say anything, continuing with his careful but speedy cleaning.

“So uh… last time ah talked to him, just after we came back from that arena, Optimus told me he
wants to speak with ya. He wants your input on the plans for coordinating the event we’re staging to separate owners from slaves. Not right now, of course, but we wanna tee it up one night when he’s gonna be free to take the call.”

Prowl’s optics were wide with disbelief, and he gave Jazz a look as if he were trying to figure out whether he was joking or not.

“I… are you sure he wants MY input? He’s the Prime, surely he doesn’t need my help?”

Jazz just grinned at him “Why WOULDN’T he need your help? You know more about these kinds of events than either of us do. Or even Mirage, he doesn’t compete in as many as you do.”

“Yes but… I already tell you everything, why would he want to talk to me when you could provide him everything he needs to know?”

Jazz shrugged, putting the cleaning cloth in the laundry chute and turning off the water. “Cause he wants to. He wants to get to know you and your kind, you’re a totally foreign entity to him. Apart from the fact he feels it’s his job, he’s straight up just curious.”

Prowl was quiet as he mulled that answer over, trying to sit himself up when Jazz came back with a towel to dry him off. “I’m not sure when we’ll next get the chance to actually have such a meeting… or WHERE… how is he going to get out HERE without being seen?”

The visored mech gave him a puzzled look before the lightbulb sort of flicked on in his processor and he laughed. “Oh, my bad, nono… he ain’t coming here PERSONALLY, ah meant a meeting over the networks. That’s how ah’ve been reporting in to him, got a portable console.”

“Oh, of course. Ngh, give me a moment, I can-”

“UH-uh, nope, lay back down or Ratch will have my aft later. No sitting up for you or you’ll aggravate the injury. Just lay there an’ let me work okay? Y’not makin’ the job harder by relaxing, trust me.” Jazz grinned, pressing gently on his chestplates to make him settle.

Prowl did as he was told with a soft whuffing noise. He wouldn’t admit it now, but it did feel extremely nice to be fussed over. Despite the constant nagging voice in the back of his helm telling him it was wrong. He rumbled a soft sort of purr as Jazz went about swiping a drying cloth over him.
“I meant to ask… how is the wolf Thunderwing got for you?”

Jazz pushed his visor up to blink at Prowl, a little perplexed. “And how do YOU know about that with the radio silence still being forced on ya?”

“It was my idea.”

Jazz paused his toweling a moment to gape at the alpha. “You… wait… what?”

“Thunderwing was thinking out loud about how to bribe you when you don’t need credits. I suggested he get you your own wolf-mech. I figured he’d see it as a legitimate plan, but I knew it just meant an extra ally for us… not to mention a quick way to free at least ONE of our kind.”

“…Well slag me, Mirage was right. He did say he didn’t think Thunderwing coulda come up with that on his own. Your plan was genius, Red Alert is great, pretty sure he’s got a sigma ability an’ all. Don’t s’pose you know him?”

Prowl shook his helm slightly, but his optics showed how pleased he was at the news. “I’ve not heard of him, but I didn’t expect I’d know whoever he got. I did suggest he get one from the internal owner’s market. There’s a forum on the networks where owners sell us, and there’s always some of us listed there forever that no one wants. Usually it’s those of us who’ve been badly mistreated and don’t have good temperaments, or just don’t have anything extraordinary going for us. Those bots are always cheap, and Thunderwing likes any solution that doesn’t cost him much.”

“Well, Red is a good lookin’ bot as far as you guys go, so he was probably hangin’ on that market cause he’s not very obedient by most noble’s standards apparently. Frankly ah couldn’t be happier, he ain’t a bad bot he just had sensory overload issues. Ah used to get ‘em myself, gave him the codes I use to manage the problem and he perked right up.”

Jazz threw the drying towel into the laundry chute and grabbed one of the buffing loofahs, rubbing soothing circles on Prowl’s plating. Prowl’s engine purred deeper, and he practically melted under the attention.

“I’m glad to hear it. I used to worry Sunstreaker had sensory overload problems, but it was just bad wiring in his third frame. He’s still got more sensory circuitry than Sideswipe, but the inputs are like mine, they’re manageable. On the hunt, our sensory arrays are invaluable.”
“Mmmm, speakin’ of the hunt, how do you think we should be runnin’ this event we got planned?”

“I have been thinking on that. I believe the best option would be a two stage event. First stage is pack hunting. Second should be pairs.”

“Pairs?”

Prowl nodded, going on to explain when he noted the slightly confused look in Jazz’s optics.

“Pairs is when a noble goes out with only one member of their pack to hunt. Similar rules apply to pack hunts, some prey do become higher value items, and owners are able to employ some methods of assistance in the actual take-downs. They are very restricted though, Thunderwing isn’t a huge fan of pairs because he’s not allowed to fly.”

Jazz nodded in understanding “Ah think that’s the kind Mirage does sometimes… only ever hear him talk about hunting with Hound, not his other pack members. Y’sure Thunderwing would agree to compete in that one then, if he don’t like it?”

Prowl nodded, “Oh yes, any competition in front of the Prime he would enter. He has too big of an ego not to show me off like that. The benefit of having pairs after pack would be that packs would be housed away from the main hunting area, and all their owners would likely be too busy to keep tabs on them. Perfect opportunity to get them to safety.”

Jazz’s optics lit up with understanding, and he nodded. “Daaaman bot, that’s a good plan… ah don’t know if Sunny was able to tell you through that bond ya have with the twins, but he agreed to me deep-diving his systems to check for embedded stuff-”

“I felt the gist of something like that, yes. I’m guessing you found the kill switches and reprimand units.”

“You know about them?”

“I’ve suspected he’d implanted things like that for a long time. He makes a lot of threats against my pack to get me to obey him… it works.” Prowl murmured, optics dimming slightly in shame.
“Well he ain’t gonna be able to soon enough. Ah sent copies of the code schematics and snapshots ah took to my guy in Polyhex. If anyone can reverse engineer and find ways to nullify them, it’s him. With your plan, we could set ‘em during the secondary event. We’d even have time to make sure it works on every wolf-mech in the holding area. The only issue is hopin’ it works on those of ya out in the field at the time.”

“It should do. There is only one supplier of parts for that, and that’s Shockwave. All devices in us are likely to have come from him.”

Jazz’s engine rumbled, making Prowl prick his audials at him in bemusement.

“Good. That only solidifies mah plans to raid that aftholes’ place.”

Prowl frowned at him anxiously. “You’re planning on raiding one of Shockwave’s buildings? I’d be very, VERY careful… he is not as lax with security as Thunderwing. I’m not even sure he has a normal spark, he is… wrong. SOMETHING in him is wrong, I have always felt that when I’ve been near him. He is dangerous, be as cautious as you can.”

Jazz nodded, working his way down Prowl’s legs methodically. “Don’t worry, this ain’t mah first rodeo. But like I told the rest of your pack, ya heard nothin’, ya know nothin’, and as far as you’re concerned my ONLY job is as the Prime’s ambassador.” He snickered.

Prowl canted his helm slightly before he caught on and gave an amused rumble. “Of course.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Unthinkable complications arise, but Prowl isn’t one to give up when the going gets tough. No matter HOW tough.

Chapter Notes

Bleh. I got writers block on this for quite a while in one section. I’m tired and need to sleep so not much in the way of notes beyond this warning: Get ready for more whump :V

Prowl half-lay shaking beneath the spray of water.

He was alone, left to his own devices and wishing desperately that he could do more than drag himself around. Wishing he could have fought harder, wasn’t trapped in his own body by codes and injuries and all the different bindings in which Thunderwing held him.

He couldn’t even be afforded the peace of opening his spark and letting his rage and anguish consume him. He had to clamp it all down hard, keep it from the twins, they couldn’t know… he couldn’t let any of them know.

What was he going to do?

His back twinged again and he whined. A shaking servo groped around the plating that concealed one of his shallow subspace pockets. All wolfmechs had them, though few of them had much to carry in them. It was mainly useful trinkets, spare energon cubes and supplies their masters made them carry.

He drew out one of the three injectors of pain relief agent Jazz had left him. It took all his control to press it steady against his neck and activate the injector. Relief was not immediate, though he could feel the cool fluid making its way towards his pump.

He carefully stashed the empty cylinder back in his subspace and shifted from his half reclined position to lay on his side under the spray.

He wanted the warm water to wash all evidence of Thunderwing from his frame, teeth clamping painfully hard on the gag of the muzzle that had been strapped over his helm and face. The device was a humiliation, and wholly undeserved. But it still wasn’t the worst of the offenses Thunderwing had committed against him.

He’d lashed out. Startled and in pain, what had his master expected? Wanting to frag him again so soon, use his still sore port while his back continued to radiate with angry signals. Prowl hadn’t been conscious enough to stop himself, instincts telling him to claw his attacker.
Thunderwing hadn’t taken kindly to that, and he winced at the memory of the backhanding. He’d had the muzzle forced onto him as roughly as possible, even as he pleaded and apologised and tried to explain.

He’d lain seething and fighting to close the bond off so the Twins didn’t have to suffer his reprimands on top of the constant ache in his spinal struts.

Keeping that bond shut had been his one priority with what had come next.

Why… why had Thunderwing gotten that horrific idea in his head? WHERE had he gotten the idea?

Prowl almost wished he was slated to go up against Grimlock again in every subsequent arena event rather than accept the fate his Master had decided on for him.

To be told he would be nothing more than a carrier and sire for the rest of his functioning was one thing… creating all those lives that would be taken from him, all those pups he would never be allowed to keep…

And then Thunderwing had decided that the first thing he should do was carry his own master’s…

Prowl clamped down harder still on the bond as he rolled over and purged. The sickness in his tank was not relieved, even of the agonising pain was beginning to subside at last. The rubbery bar gagging him got in the way and he had to twist his helm to let water into his mouth the clean it away.

Never had he felt so violated. Not even in forced merges with wolf-mechs he didn’t know, none of them had hurt quite like that. None had been TRYING to hurt or dominate him. They’d been just as helpless in their fate as him, but Thunderwing had been very much in control…

If he thought he had the spark for it, Prowl would be opening his own spark chamber and destroying the sparklings before they had a chance to suffer existence. Not only did he know he didn’t have that in him, but his own chestplates had been locked off from his control. He couldn’t open them. No one but Thunderwing could.

And Jazz had been right. He most definitely had a paralysing module installed. It was what prevented him from clawing at Thunderwing in protest against the forced merge. His master had hissed that he was lucky he was being lenient and not activating the pain modules. Though it was very obvious that the act of pounding into him without minding his injuries had done the same job anyway.

Prowl still felt energon trickling from his valve, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Thunderwing wasn’t about to risk a medvet discovering that a noble had sparked their pet. It would be scandalous. Prowl had heard rumours of other masters sparking their pack members now and then, and either the pack member was killed or the sparklings were terminated.

Thunderwing wanted neither of those things though. Thunderwing wanted to expand his pack with bots he was sure would listen to him. Bots that would be ‘prime examples of the perfect hunter’. He would replace his imperfect pack with a perfect one, wolf-mechs made in his image, what could be better?

No one would tell the difference, his master figured. He’d claim it was Trailbreaker who sired them and that he’d have them modified specially. Customised.

Prowl did not know whether that would work or not, and he didn’t care. The plan, according to his master, was that once he had given birth to these perfect pups, he was going to be rented out as a stud. And that was it. His lot in life.
And Thunderwing had expected him to be GRATEFUL. No more Arena fighting, no need to prove his worth since he’d already come out on top. There was no wolf-mech to match him, according to Thunderwing. Of COURSE the next best thing was to make him breeding stock.

Prowl shuddered and curled into himself, ignoring the now dulled twinge in his back. He still felt sick but he had nothing left to purge. The feel of that rage and cruelty filled spark burning against his own still ghosted through his systems.

How could he tell his pack? How could he face them with this? If they knew, Sunstreaker and Sideswipe would rebel, and for that they’d be punished. Primus forbid, he might decide to sell them… Inferno and Trailbreaker would be in no better position, nor Bumblebee.

They couldn’t know.

He’d have to find a way to conceal it, for as long as possible. Thunderwing didn’t care enough about the rest of the pack to be bothered sharing such information, he left that up to Prowl.

Their freedom couldn’t come fast enough… but how, HOW was he going to deal with this any better when free? He’d have no excuse to hide his need for extra energon and interfacing, pretty much every wolf-mech knew the signs of carrying. And his pack would know he hadn’t been bought for a covering.

The alpha clutched at his helm, giving a low, thready keen as despair filled him and he focussed harder on keeping it from the twins. He raged internally. Raged against his position, against Primus, against Thunderwing, against his own need to block everything from the only bots he loved.

Out of the turmoil of emotions and thoughts, one feeling struck him hard. He wanted Jazz by his side. He wanted him there so badly it ached, and he didn’t know why.

Perhaps it was because he knew the mech was sympathetic to their cause, or perhaps he missed the one bot outside his own caste who had ever physically taken care of him out of no obligation beyond friendship.

It didn’t matter… his comms were still blocked, and Thunderwing was whisking the ambassador away for more sightseeing and relations talk where he would attempt to oil-talk his way into Jazz’s favour.

It was cold comfort that Prowl knew his master’s efforts were fruitless. Even colder comfort to imagine how his face would look when they were taken from him.

The victory felt as though it would be hollow now. He could see Thunderwing’s gloating face already. It didn’t matter if he got free of the mech… he was bound to him by the sparklings he could already feel forming within him.

Prowl shuddered and curled further into himself, ignoring the twinge in his back, trying to ignore the turmoil within him by focussing intently on keeping his bonds closed.

---

Jazz was antsy. He didn’t know how to get Thunderwing away from his quarters, and it had been 4 busy days since he’d been able to see and treat Prowl.
The Alpha’s comms remained blocked, and the Twins reported a worrying amount of silence across the bond. They seemed both confident he was stronger if he could close the bond, but anxious about why he had to do it for such huge lengths at a time.

They knew Thunderwing was using him. All of them did. But none could remember a time their master had locked him away and been so frequent about it. It might have indicated higher stress levels, but it also may just have been an upswing in his libido, none of them could tell.

Just when Jazz was seriously contemplating breaking into Thunderwing’s chambers with Mirage while the flier slept, he got wind that Prowl had finally been allowed to return to the den.

Having been out all day at another lengthy negotiation with Thunderwing at a high class energon bar (exactly the kind Jazz detested most) he wasted no time slipping away to his quarters, and from there went through the servant passages to the den.

He was extremely careful now not to be seen by any staff, going full stealth mode until he was all the way there and slipping through the door that was opened by Bumblebee.

The little yellow wolf-mech smooshed his face into Jazz’s chest for a brief petting before rushing out the door and down the corridor, no explanation given.

Jazz looked after him curiously before turning his attention to the den proper...

Only to find it empty of all but Hound and Prowl. Before he could ask where the rest of the pack had gone, several things registered that made the words die on Jazz’s glossa.

For starters, Prowl was lying in his wolf mode in a nest made of all the scarce cushions and blankets in the room, and he had some kind of… THING around his muzzle. Every part of his body language was low level hostile, but his focus wasn’t on Jazz. It was on Hound.

Who sat across the room looking both alarmed and unsure, as if he wanted very much to go to Prowl and help but was afraid to. The tension between them was thick enough Jazz could have cut it with a knife, and he made sure to approach Prowl cautiously, in case the ire was also directed at him.

Prowl’s optics darted to him, ears switching back and forth slightly to acknowledge him before he gave Hound another look as if expecting him to attack. Hound whuffed and whined low, the sound turning into a grumble.

//Prowl, he should KNOW. You NEED to tell SOMEONE//

//Don’t you DARE. I don’t care if I have a muzzle on and my back legs barely work, I swear to you I will disable your vocaliser if you try//

Jazz settled carefully by Prowl’s head, realising the two seemed to be having a silent and very tense conversation. It didn’t seem like something he should attempt to intervene in. He had no idea what was causing it, and his understanding of their dispute settling tactics wasn’t strong enough that he felt confident attempting to mediate.

//Okay, okay, I won’t tell him… at the very LEAST you should let me help though. Someone has to look out for you, no carrier should bear a burden alone. If you need extra energon or discrete donations of transfuid, comm me. I don’t know how long we’re going to be here, I still think you should consider telling at least Inferno or Trailbreaker//

Hound sighed and gave Jazz a nod before he stood and left, Prowl watching him leave with a look somewhere between anger and grief.
Once the green alpha was gone, Jazz dared to reach out and put a servo on Prowl’s shoulder. The tension in his frame seemed to ease a little, and Jazz could see Prowl shoving away whatever emotions Hound had conjured to compose himself better. Or at least as well as he could given the monstrosity attached to his face.

“Dare I ask what that was about?” Jazz murmured, giving the shoulder a light pet and earning a tired sounding rumble, Prowl putting his helm down.

//Better not to. Hound offers far too much advice on situations he’s not qualified to comment on//

Prowl was trying his best not to look shaken, not sure how well he was doing. Hound had smelled the sparklings on him the moment he’d gotten to the den. He’d watched the thought processes on the other alpha’s face, the realisation of where those sparklings had to have come from, and he’d been very quick… and possibly a little too harsh… telling Hound to keep his mouth shut.

Hound hadn’t liked that, not understanding his reasons for keeping it to himself. Not understanding that it wasn’t that he thought his pack would be disgusted, but that they’d put themselves in danger fighting their master.

Hound had good intentions, and he respected and appreciated his offer for help more than he’d made clear… but the mech had no idea what it was like, being in his position. It was just as well Hound respected him enough to do as he asked and say nothing. Many alphas would have enforced their own rank and done whatever they wanted. Hound was one of the better of their kind, he never seemed to force his will by any means beyond persuasion.

It hadn’t stopped the rest of his pack from being confused and questioning over his behaviour towards Hound though. They had received no answer to their confusion, and Prowl had dealt with it by ordering them all to go to the training room.

Jazz’s arrival, however distressed and emotionally unstable he felt, was a relief he hadn’t realised would hit him so strongly. He leant into the petting greedily and whuffed a long sigh.

He hated that the silver and white mech had to see him in the primus-forsaken muzzle though.

“So uh… am I allowed to ask what the hell this thing is Thunderwing has put on ya?”

Prowl rumbled again, biting against the rubbery bit-gag in frustration.

//I have not been able to control my defence response against Thunderwing when he has been inclined to make use of me. The pain it causes makes me lash out, this is both his precaution and his punishment for my lack of self-control//

“Slag me” Jazz murmured, frowning and looking the device over with a grimace. “ Y’want me to try and get it off? Does it stop you transforming?”

//Unfortunately it has the wonderful trick of being able to transform WITH me, and no… It would be unwise to try, it’s wired straight to my cortex and delivers a shock if I or any of my pack mates attempt to remove it. In all likelihood it’s rigged to give the same response if a hack is attempted//

Jazz winced at that and rubbed a lower hackle sympathetically, making Prowl relax a little more, offlining his optics.

Primus, it would be so easy to just blurt it out… let him know exactly what new horrors Thunderwing had unleashed on him… but Jazz didn’t need the extra worry, nor the incentive to blow the whole plan to hell by immediately trying to extract him from the situation.
It wasn’t just his life and freedom at stake. He had a good deal of packs riding on their plans… even if they didn’t know it, their freedom relied on his ability to cope until they could pull off the whole operation.

He’d held out this long, what was a few more deca-orns…

“How’s your spinal cabling holding up? I’ve got another couple o’ nanite boosters, managed to pick them up on the sly when Thunderwing took us through Kalis.”

//I can walk, but only in wolf mode, and not well… it would be very appreciated, thankyou// Prowl touched the edge of the muzzle cage to Jazz’s knee to show his gratitude, the ambassador smoothing the ruffled plating of his neck in response before shifting to pet along his spine.

Prowl shifted to make access to the injury easier, flaring the plating a little. It sat much tighter and sleeker in wolf mode, and he hoped the gaps were big enough for Jazz to work with.

It became evident quickly that they weren’t.

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It became evident quickly that they weren’t.
“Mech I’d be a hypocritical piece of slag if ah didn’t say yes to helping you wind down with a few overloads. Least I can do. I do wanna have another look at your valve while I’m at it, I can apply nanites there too if he really scratched you up.” Jazz answered softly, going back to his steady rhythm of pulses with his servos.

Prowl looked as if he wanted to sob in relief if his winglets were anything to go by. There was a pang of sympathy in Jazz’s spark as he heard the alpha’s denta squeezing against the rubber bit of the muzzle. He focussed on lighting up more of the pleasurable node centres around the wolf-mech’s hips with his magnetics.

The moment he found some sort of bizarre sweet-spot above the base of Prowl’s tail, he carefully worked at it. Prowl was panting and twitching in abortive motions of pleasure, moans turning into needy whines. There was nothing to grind against, and his injury left his hips stiff to boot, so most of his reactions translated into violent wing and tail twitches.

Jazz sending a few pulses into the base of said winglet hinges undid him, the alpha stiffening and keening as overload washed through him.

Jazz vented hard to try and cool himself off a bit. Not only did running his magnetics push up his core temperature, but the sounds Prowl made did SOMETHING to a deep part of him that he couldn’t ignore.

He stroked along Prowl’s back gently to dissipate the charge and stop it sitting in node clusters uncomfortably long. The alpha panted hard as he came down from the stimulation, spark singing as hungry embers sucked up the excess energy.

But soon enough the embers wanted more, and Prowl felt heat pooling in his pelvis. He whuffed and snapped open his panel, hissing the moment cool air touched his raw port.

Jazz rumbled softly and pet his hip. “Want me to take a look now?”

Prowl nodded in response, ears flicking back as he shifted stiffly so he was lying on his back, legs spread. The position was not one he was fond of at the moment, and the moment he assumed it he couldn’t stop the groan of pain at the ache in his hip joints.

Thunderwing was a broad-hipped mech, and every time he’d held him by the thighs and slammed into him carelessly, he’d distended Prowl’s hip joints. Normally it was damage he could recover from quickly, but not when everything below his spinal break had become harder to control.

Nevertheless, Prowl held the position calmly as Jazz got down low between his legs and examined him. The look on his face said enough about how displeased he was with what he found.

“Pit spawned son-of-a-glitch is getting LIFE imprisonment, I swear on my spark. I’ve seen seasoned pleasure-bots with less damage than you, I am SO sorry he’s been allowed to do this to you for so long.” The silver and white mech murmured, petting a thigh sympathetically.

//Will nanites help it to heal faster?... How do you even apply them for that sort of damage?//

Jazz gave him the smallest of grins, leaning up on an elbow as he fished another tube from his subspace.

“Ah, well, see, that at least is the good news. Applying nanites to valve damage should not only help this patch up twice as fast, but it’s a very pleasant application experience to boot. Only question is, do you prefer the gel warm or cold?”
Prowl’s ears switched upward at that and he gave it serious thought, tail twitching a little as he thought about just what this pleasant application would entail.

//Depends… does it go on the outside and get spread inward, or is it applied like transfluid?//

Jazz tilted his head from side to side. “Mmm bit of both. Goes in like transfluid and then gets manually spread around.”

Prowl’s tail rattled lightly against Jazz’s chestplates at that, the ambassador grinning in slight amusement and petting it lightly.

//…Cold then, please. It might help ease the sting a little more//

Jazz nodded, uncapping the tube and carefully holding the tip to Prowl’s battered platelets. He squeezed a little out on the edges of his entrance, using his thumb to rub it around and a little ways in.

Prowl’s pedes and tail twitched and he gasped around the gag. The cold was bliss on the damaged components, and he focussed harder on that spot of pleasure as Jazz carefully eased the tube into him with the lubrication he’d applied.

It stung more going in than he’d expected, but it was nowhere near as bad as when Thunderwing forced his way in.

Very quickly the pain was once again only a memory. He gave a full body shudder and twitch as the contents of the tube were squeezed out into his port. It was very much like cold transfluid flooding his passage, an odd sensation in itself but extremely relieving.

Jazz slid the tube as deep as he could and emptied the rest of the contents, drawing a high pitched keen from Prowl. Once he was sure it was a sound of pleasure and not pain, Jazz began sliding the empty tube back and forth like a false spike.

It was mostly to make sure the nanites spread evenly throughout Prowl’s port, but it also worked them into tears and abraded areas where they were most needed.

An overload usually helped to fully activate the nanite activity too, so Jazz was happily doing what he could to push Prowl into another one of those. The servo not sliding the nanite tube through his port was spreading the gel liberally around the outer rim of platelets, giving the primary outer node plenty of attention to boot.

It wasn’t long before Prowl’s spike clicked free, and Jazz was hardly going to ignore that. He licked up its length, taking the tip into his mouth and sucking lightly.

Prowl wanted to watch him, but trying to hold his torso up was too exhausting, and he writhed flat on his back instead, pedes quivering and twitching as he clawed at the blankets beneath him again. If his tail hadn’t been half pinned beneath Jazz’s chestplates, it would be thrashing, but Prowl hardly minded the restriction. Not when that mouth was sliding down his shaft again, and those clever digits now rubbed the base of his knot while still thumbing his node.

Prowl came undone quickly, arching weakly, cries muffled around the gag as he felt Jazz mouth his knot and milk the base as if he’d been doing it his whole life. His valve clenched down against the unyielding, smooth plastic of the injector tube, but it provided little stimulation since Jazz had stilled it.

The lack of motion in his valve meant Prowl felt immediately hungry for another overload as soon as
his spike stopped spattering his own transfluid across his chestplates.

//Ple-ease Jazz… spike me, please?//

The servo gently rubbing his outer node paused and he noticed Jazz stiffen. He made an effort to prop himself up enough to look down his torso at the mech. His expression was far more worried than he’d expected.

“Prowl I Don’t know that that’s such a good idea… the nanites will help, but they won’t be as efficient if I go stickin’ my spike in. Ah don’t wanna cause MORE damage either.”

Prowl let his helm fall back and gave a low whining rumble. //I’m sorry, I just… it feels as if I didn’t even… there is still so much charge in my valve//

“Is it cause you’re used to being knotted?” Jazz asked curiously, going back to rubbing the node while making sure his grip on the base of the spike was still firm.

//Possibly… right now I think my systems are just… out of sync. Especially below the damage//

He hoped the lie was good enough. He hoped even more that Jazz had no idea how hungry carriers became for valve overloads, how spike overloads never did quite enough for them. By the sound the other mech made, it seemed like he was unaware and had bought the lie.

“Hmmmm… I still don’t wanna cause more damage. I’d use a toy if I had a decent one on me, but mine ain’t really gonna cut it… do ya really NEED something inside, or is it more node stimulation?”

Prowl rumbled softly, vents panting still. //Unfortunately something inside. It’s more about transfluid though… I don’t think you’d hurt me, you’re not large enough to cause me damage even if you were rough//

Jazz burst out laughing. “Okay I uh… ehe, I get the sentiment, but wow, make a mech feel inadequate much?”

Prowl’s audials went flat, and he whined //I’m sorry, that’s not at all what I meant-//

Jazz cut him off with another laugh and a pat to his thigh. “Mech s’alright, ah know y’didn’t. Listen, if you really need it that bad… don’t EVER tell Ratchet about this, whatever you do. We’ll both be offline.”

Prowl’s audials switched back and forward in confusion, even as his tail tip thumped against the ground in delight at Jazz agreeing. //Who’s Ratchet?//

“Grumpiest damn medbot you’ll ever meet. When you meet him. Which isn’t for a while. Now, what’s more comfortable for you, you want to stay like this or prefer a different position?”

Prowl contemplated that for longer than he probably should have. On the one servo, wolf-mechs NEVER usually fragged face-to-face unless they were intimately close to one another. Which made Thunderwing’s abuse even worse, since he’d forced him on his back every time to watch his face, and of course force himself on his spark.

Prowl quickly shoved those thoughts into the back of his mind. Something about asking Jazz to spike him from behind felt… insulting. He was sure Jazz wouldn’t mind either way, he doubted the mech knew about the nuanced hang-ups his kind had around positions…

But even despite Thunderwing’s abuse of the position, Prowl LIKED Jazz… he liked him in ways
he didn’t even quite understand, and even if it meant nothing to Jazz, he’d rather offer him the respect and closeness of face-to-face.

//This way is fine//

Jazz wondered slightly at why the decision had taken so long, but didn’t question Prowl. He tried to keep his own anxieties in check. Not only did he not want to harm Prowl… he didn’t want to disappoint him either.

Performance anxiety had always been practically non-existent for Jazz. Interface was something he both enjoyed and excelled at. But Wolf-mechs… these guys were a whole other level of interface. One he wasn’t sure he could stand up to.

It was ridiculous how quickly his spike extended, but Prowl was already reaching eagerly for him, wanting him to lie chest-chest.

Jazz’s E.M field shivered against Prowl’s unable to hide the spike of arousal he felt just pressing himself to the broad, warm chassis of the larger bot. There was a spike of what could have been amusement or delight on Prowl’s end, before arousal took over and they were grinding their spikes against one another.

Jazz gasped and moaned at the feel of flared ridges and smooth, solid knot sliding against his own ridged shaft.

Very carefully, Jazz lined himself up, rubbing the underside of his spike over the entrance, slicking it with a mixture of nanite gel and natural lubricant. Slowly, Jazz pressed and eased himself in.

Prowl rumbled, deep and powerful beneath him, servos scratching lightly and impatiently against his sides. His arousal spiked again, seemingly out of nowhere, until he realised it was the feel of those claws delicately sliding over his plating that was doing it.

Jazz took a moment to regain himself from the wave of heat before he resumed sliding deeper into Prowl. The alpha gave no sign that there was any pain, just wriggling slightly to try and encourage him to go faster.

Jazz could not oblige him though, making each of his movements careful and measured, sliding in to the hilt and out again at a maddeningly slow pace. Prowl was whining low and wriggling his hips more, but his claws remained ever so gentle. They teased along his back plating, finding and playing over his stubby winglets.

This got more of the reaction Prowl wanted, Jazz gasping and moaning, falling into a slightly faster rhythm.

Still not fast enough for the alpha, who went expertly for the winglet hinges, clenching his valve tightly around Jazz and ignoring the sting in favour of the pleasure that came after. He wanted so desperately for Jazz to fill him, but the slowness did provide an intoxicating kind of build-up.

Jazz’s worries over being inadequate were wiped away by the guttural, rumbling moans he drew from Prowl. Each one thrummed through his chest and straight to his spark, driving his own charge higher.

He tried not to dwell on the anger and frustration of the muzzle that prevented him from offering Prowl his mouth. It felt right, to kiss a bot while ‘facing this way, but the cage across his lower face and gag between his denta were both ruling that out completely.
To compensate, Jazz kissed and mouthed hotly at Prowl’s collar and neck, the larger mech exposing both readily with a throaty purr of approval. They fell into a slow, easy rhythm. Jazz rocking against Prowl, the battered valve slicked enough with nanites and lubricant that the damage didn’t overcome pleasurable sensations.

Carefully, Prowl hitched his own legs higher, getting their weight above his hips so his valve was at an angle that let Jazz deeper. And deeper Jazz pressed, still at that slow and steady pace.

Prowl keened and bit against the gag, desperately wishing he could use his mouth on Jazz.  

//Ahm not hurtin ya am I?//
//Primus no!//

Jazz chuckled softly, kissing at the only exposed part of Prowl’s jaw he could reach before he shifted slightly, pressing deep and grinding against Prowl’s ceiling node. At the same time, he slid a servo between them and grasped the base of Prowl’s spike, squeezing.

Prowl gave a garbled cry around the gag, bucking weakly as he came again. Hot transfluid slicked their chestplates, and with a grunt and a few hard grinds, Jazz’s spike flared and emptied into Prowl’s clutching valve.

Prowl moaned long and loud at the feel of hot transfluid flooding against his ceiling node. His gestation chamber, already greedy for material, cycled up as much as it could get, drawing a surprised sound from Jazz.

He hadn’t expected to be THAT satisfactory. Maybe Wolf-mechs had more sensitive gestation chambers? It didn’t really matter, so long as it meant Prowl was satisfied, and by the sound of it he was.

The alpha leant his helm up to press against Jazz’s, his whole frame shivering before he went limp, fans roaring as he panted. The urge to open up his chestplates and admit what Thunderwing had done to him was so strong… he was fully prepared to beg Jazz to add his spark energy to the bitlets to try and erase his master’s influence on them, give them a chance to be better…

But he couldn’t do any of it, not since Thunderwing had his chestplates locked against his control. The wave of bitterness he felt towards his master took the pleasant edge off his afterglow and he rumbled softly, arms wrapping around Jazz.

The smaller mech responded by nuzzling against his neck, field a little curious, rippling against his own.

“Did ah do somethin’ wrong? Y’don’t feel happy.”

//It’s not you… you were perfect, I just… the longer I have to wait until we can leave this place the more impatient I become to escape. I know we need to hold out, we CAN hold out… but the promise of freedom makes the enslavement harder to bear//

“Ahm sorry we can’t get you out sooner.” Jazz murmured, voice and field so sincere that Prowl nearly whined in frustration at not being able to tell him about the bitlets. He managed to keep it to a sigh, enjoying and returning the nuzzling against his jaw.

Jazz made a displeased noise, touching his free servo carefully to the cage around Prowl’s lower face (his other hand was still attentively cinched around the base of Prowl’s spike).
"This thing is slaggin’ me off the more I look at it. Can’t believe they’d make somethin’ like this, it’s wrong on SO many levels. Can only imagine how much you hate it” He rumbled, poking digits through the holes of the cage mesh as far as he could to stroke Prowl’s cheek-arch.

The alpha offlined his optics and sighed softly this time, turning his face into the contact. It sent tingles across his haptic net.

There were a few moments of peace between them where Jazz continued this petting, neither of them speaking as the ambassador trailed digits over the lip-plates held open by the bit-gag.

Despite the device being used as punishment and borderline torture, Prowl could not remember a more erotic sensation than this in his life. He hated EVERYTHING about the muzzle… except this… whatever Jazz was doing to him.

For his part, Jazz didn’t quite understand his own actions. He had always been a creature of instinct, and tactile sensation. On top of that, he always tended to want what he couldn’t have. Right now, he wanted Prowl’s mouth against his own, and he couldn’t have it. So he was going to get whatever contact he could with the parts of Prowl that had been caged off.

Prowl certainly seemed to enjoy it, If the steady, thrumming purr of the chestplates beneath him were anything to go by. Jazz continued, almost hypnotised by the feel of tracing the contours through that cage, until a ping on his comms broke him from his trance.

//Hound is very agitated and upset, are you okay down there?//

Jazz withdrew his servo and sighed, resting his helm beside Prowl’s.

//Yeah mech, s’all fine. Well… fine as it ever is here, best not to push him for details. I’ll be a lil’ while though.//

Mirage acknowledged and the line went quiet again. Beneath him, Prowl squirmed a little, and Jazz realised he was still gripping the now mostly depressurised spike quite firmly. He released it, shifting carefully so it could retract and moving to slowly ease out of Prowl.

The alpha made no complaint, but Jazz could tell that he still had a fair amount of discomfort from the way he stiffened. He checked the valve once he’d pulled out, glad at least that not only was there no trace of energon, but not much of his transfluid or the nanites had escaped.

He gave Prowl a quick clean-up, though he left the gel-lubricant mix coating the outer platelets and node. The alpha didn’t seem to mind in the least, closing his panels and shifting carefully onto his side with a quiet rumble.

//Thankyou. You are far, far too kind to me and my pack. I’m still not sure how we are going to repay you//

“Keep tellin’ you y’don’t need to worry about that. We’re not… I’M not doin’ this to make you owe me, I’m doin’ it cause it’s right.”

//Until you came here, I couldn’t have said with any certainty that it was wrong// Prowl murmured, giving him an almost ashamed look.

Jazz frowned a bit, petting Prowl’s shoulder. “I guess it’s a lot harder to see the rust for the sea when you’ve been stuck in it your whole life… Did you really never feel like it wasn’t fair? Like you shouldn’t be treated the way he treats you?”
Well… yes, I knew it wasn’t the same treatment other wolf-mechs received. But it’s always been understood among our kind that our fate is a luck-of-the-draw scenario. We have no agency in how cruel or kind our masters are, you just… you cope. It’s all you can do when escape is never something considered an option.

Jazz sighed and nodded, sitting with Prowl for a few moments in silence, petting over his helm and listening to the steadying of his engine.

“Ah meant to come talk to you about Optimus’ newest plan idea. Seem to have gotten a bit side-tracked, but it’s fine… he still wants to talk to you. Ah know that ain’t gonna happen until the muzzle is gone, but his last message was a text one anyway.”

Prowl pricked his audials forward and turned his helm up to Jazz slightly. //OH? What’s his new plan?//

“He wants to throw a party and invite all the bots he’s gonna tell about the hunt competition thing. Reckons it’ll be a really good way to both suss out the bots we need to watch out for and inform their pack alphas of what’s going to happen at the same time. He wanted your opinion specifically though, and also the names of the nobles you think he should invite.”

Prowl blinked up at him, clearly surprised that the Prime was that interested in what he thought.

//I… yes, that WOULD be a very good way to give them a heads up on the plans. Does he realise he will have to invite good nobles as well as bad? I don’t think it will work if he doesn’t invite the main participants of the hunting competition circuit.//

Jazz nodded as he shifted so that he was sat behind Prowl, resuming his gentle magnetic therapy over the injured spinal area. “That’s a good point… might have a bunch of offended nobles making their displeasure known if they ain’t invited. If you know all their names, would it be easier for you to tell or should I just plug in and you can quickline them to me?”

Prowl, purring and finding it a little difficult to concentrate through the wonderful relief of the magnetics, took a moment to answer.

//Ah… I will have to provide them later… manually is best, I need to consult with the others to make sure I don’t forget anyone.//

He noted Jazz nodding from the corner of his optic and gave a small internal sigh of relief. He knew a linkup would be the fastest and most efficient way of transferring a list of names and everything he knew about each noble, but he didn’t want to risk Jazz plugging in anymore. Thunderwing had already fiddled with his code to lock his chestplates, he had no idea what else he might have done.

There was too much at stake now. He wanted to take no chances of blowing Jazz’s cover. And some small part of him was now paranoid about Jazz figuring out he was sparked. Now that the post-overload haze was clearing from his processor, it felt all the more important not to let him know.

Jazz was the most compassionate spark Prowl had ever met. There was no way he wouldn’t end up derailing the plans somehow to prioritise him in this state, and Prowl didn’t want…

Well… no, that was a lie. Prowl couldn’t deny that on a personal level, he absolutely wanted that. He would like nothing more than a bot to prioritise him and his sparklings and their safety over all else… but even though his spark whispered how ideal that was, his processor immediately denied it.

Not because it made no sense, but because he was an alpha. You could NOT be selfish as an alpha, or you were unworthy of the rank. His physical wellbeing, while important, was never his first
priority. His pack’s was.

True, there was a conflict when he carried, because even his instincts told him sparklings took priority over everything… but he could easily prioritise their immediate health without ALSO endangering everyone else. He could hold out. For the sake of every wolf-mech, for the sake of the freedom of his kind, there WAS no choice. Not to him.

But Primus almighty there was NO way he was going to turn down any offer Jazz ever made to give him more of these magnetic massages. If he ever indulged in something selfish, this would have to be it.

And from the amused tickle of Jazz’s field against his, it seemed the other mech didn’t at all mind indulging him. Certainly not when it made the alpha’s tail flop lazily.

“Y’seem real anxious Red, what’s up?”

Jazz paused in his packing of the communicator equipment to look over at the red and white wolf-mech pacing in his room.

Red Alert’s audials switched back and forth and he looked almost embarrassed to be caught in his fretting. “Ah, it’s… nothing, it’s nothing I’m just… thinking about some things…”

“He doesn’t know how to flirt back at Inferno”

“Hound!”

Jazz looked between Red Alert and the green, snickering lump stretched out on his berth. The green lump had a wicked grin on his face, discernible even in wolf mode.

For his part, the silver and white mech just tilted his helm at them, amused. “Pardon? You tellin’ me Inferno’s been waggin’ his tail in your direction and you don’t know how to wag back?”

Red Alert sputtered at that, tail high and plating bushed out indignantly at Jazz for joining Hound’s side. “Of course I know how to- that’s not even something we say to one another! Who is even teaching you this stuff?”

“No-one, I made it up myself.” Jazz grinned, standing and putting his servos on his hips proudly. On the berth, Hound snickered.

“I might just start using that one. Seriously though Red, why DON’T you wag your tail back? He spent all day yesterday tryin’ to charm it off you. And I know damn well by the smell of you that you liked it. Don’t know WHY you gave him the cold shoulder.”

Red only seemed to get more flustered, audials going flat as he shifted his weight from side to side and twitched his tail. “Are you seriously suggesting I should have just presented for mounting right then and there? Listen I’m all for communal shows of affection but that doesn’t mean I want to partake in them.”

“So you’re saying you do want him to bang your bolts off, but in private?” Hound rolled over and grinned at Red upside-down. Red glared back.
“How is it any of your business?”

“If I have to smell how much you want it from all the way across that training room and then hear you deny it, then it’s my business.”

“Back at it again with the match-making Hound?” Mirage sighed as he entered through the servant’s passage, carrying some of his own equipment.

“Red, y’mind if I ask ya somethin’?” Jazz moved to take the equipment from Mirage, Red Alert’s stance becoming a little less offended and more unsure as his attention switched to Jazz.

“Depends on what you want to ask?”

Jazz gave him a reassuring grin as he walked past again and sat at the small desk he’d packed his equipment on.

“When was the last time ya fragged anyone?”

The Red and White wolf-mech looked even more sheepish, deliberately not looking at any of them.

“… A fair while ago. Can’t remember exactly how long.”

“Was it a pleasant experience?”

“…Not exactly.”

“Was that ‘cause your partner was careless, or cause your haptic net was too blown out for it to feel good?”

Red opened his mouth to reply, paused, then shut it again looking very thoughtful. Several seconds passed where his plating de-fluffed and he looked very pensive.

Hound, for his part, looked suitably sheepish for having teased Red so much.

“That’s not going to be a problem anymore with those codes you gave me, is it?”

Jazz grinned widely. “You’re gonna want to take Inferno up on his offer, especially If he’s anything like Prowl in the ‘facing department. You can probably slip off with him when we get to the den. FYI, the training room mats are easy to clean and pretty comfortable.”

Hound chuffed in amusement at that, but Red Alert just gave him a slightly shrewd look. “Wait… are you telling me you actually fragged Prowl in the training room?”

“Weeeell… more like he fragged ME, but semantics.” Jazz shrugged, grinning and plugging a few cables from Mirage’s tools into his communicator’s casing. “C’mon, we better go. Optimus is expecting me to call within the next two breems or so.”

Jazz wandered over to Mirage, the blue and white shaking his head at him with a grin. He put his servo on Jazz’s shoulder and activated his electro-disruptor, waiting for Hound and Red to precede them through the corridor.

//Is that what Mirage meant by you matchmaking again? Did YOU encourage Prowl to interface with him? I wouldn’t have thought Prowl the type// Red Alert murmured to Hound over comms.

Hound loped along just ahead of him and threw him a cheeky wink over his shoulder. //Jazz was the one who wanted Prowl to bang him. I just gave him some pointers on offering correctly//
//So… what exactly were those pointers?//

//Oh, heh, nothing I think you don’t already know. You’re gonna want to take a different approach. Either explain to Inferno why you fobbed him off yesterday, or just pretend you were playing hard to get. Either way I doubt he’ll have lost interest//

//Primus I hope he hasn’t//

//yeah me too, you’re musky as all slag right now and I wouldn’t mind if I could have some private time with ‘Raj, but I’m gonna be waiting a while//

---

Prowl was nervous. It wasn’t a feeling he felt often, and it certainly wasn’t one he liked.

But this was the PRIME for frag’s sake, even his own MASTER couldn’t get an audience with him, and here he was, a slave, sitting in a den and waiting for Jazz to finish setting up the equipment so he could talk to the most important mech on Cybertron.

//Carrier you know you’ll be fine right? You’re well-spoken AND you know what you’re talking about, he’s not going to think you’re an idiot or anything.//

Sideswipe’s words of encouragement were a little hard to take seriously when the red mech was lying on his back with his glossa partly sticking out and his biggest, goofiest optics shining up at him.

Prowl felt reassured nonetheless and sent affection across their link.

//Thankyou. But it’s not that I think I’ll make a fool of myself… honestly I’m not sure WHAT exactly is making me nervous. Other than the fact he’s the Prime… I feel like that’s enough reason to be nervous, he’s supposed to be the vessel of Primus himself…//

Prowl looked away from the red twin and went back to fiddling with his plating. He’d washed for the occasion, but had needed help from both the twins and Trailbreaker. His injuries, while improved, still prevented him from doing most things for himself.

Even sitting upright for long periods hurt too much to sustain, so he was leant up against the stable and comforting bulk of Trailbreaker.

Sunstreaker had suggested the solution, and had then proceeded to detail the both of them as best he could. They might be slaves, but they had pride. Thunderwing normally had them all shine and wax themselves for presentation at special events, and Sunstreaker was their unofficial-official expert at getting just the right gloss. Which was quite a feat considering the cheap products Thunderwing provided them with.

Trailbreaker gave a soft, sub-sonic rumble and nudged Prowl’s servo away from where it fussed with shoulder armour.

//Sideswipe is right. You’ll be fine. Don’t get me wrong, I’m feeling a little giddy myself, and I only have to be furniture, but if he wants to talk to you it’s because he thinks you’re worth talking to. That has to count for something right?//
Prowl whuffed shortly and nodded. "I suppose so. My biggest worry is that I’ll say something… out of line, I suppose, without knowing it. He wants my knowledge, not necessarily my opinion. He’s the LAST mech I want to inadvertently offend."

"Alright, all done, let’s see if we can’t get this ball rolling." Jazz placed the comm screen carefully and fiddled with a few settings on the console it attached to. They’d carefully pulled away a wall panel and hacked into the building’s main power. Though Prowl and the others had worried Thunderwing might be able to trace the power drain, the silver and white mech assured them he had means of avoiding it. He’d performed some kind of wizardry with a little power converter that made the power drain look like it was coming from other systems in the compound. Not only that, it blocked anyone from connecting through the building’s mainframe, assuring their call was secure.

Prowl and his pack were suitably impressed by this. Bumblebee had actually watched the process in utter fascination and asked if Jazz could teach him to do that sort of thing when they were free. Prowl had expected him to politely decline, but instead he’d promised Bee he would do just that.

Despite his general mistrust of bots in power and the things they promised, Prowl had no doubt Jazz meant every word. Whether or not there would be time for Bumblebee to learn tricks of the trade from the ambassador was another matter though.

His attention was soon brought back to focus on the communicator screen as it flickered to life. Jazz’s head and shoulders mostly obscured it, and there was a very soft chiming sound as he entered the correct comm frequency and number.

Prowl tensed. The call had connected almost immediately, meaning the Prime had been waiting. He sincerely hoped that hadn’t ticked him off.

"Eyyy, looks like we’re live! How’s things Optimus?"

Prowl was so taken aback by the casualness of tone and the informal address that he had to refresh his optics to make sure he hadn’t passed out. The chuckle that came over the line was just as surprising, and when Jazz moved to sit beside him on the opposite side to Trailbreaker, he was too bewildered to feel much of his nerves anymore.

"Took you a while to get the equipment working down there I take it?"

Optimus looked… surprisingly NORMAL to Prowl. He SOUNDED normal, and suddenly his nerves felt a little silly. After all, Jazz had told them he’d been an ordinary bot before the Matrix chose him, and being chosen didn’t seem to have made him any less like a regular mech. He relaxed into Trailbreaker slightly and let Jazz steer the conversation to start with.

"Yeah, had to change the power feed off the cables running by this room. They ain’t made for plugging equipment like this into, needed to adjust the adapter. Not to mention re-set the blocks, but hey, it’s working at least. My main concern was weather we’d even get signal down here, room’s near the foundations."

"If anyone can make it work, it’s you. Or Blaster. But second choice isn’t bad.” Optimus wore a cheeky grin, eliciting a scandalised sound from Jazz.

“You WOUND me. How DARE you insinuate a communications EXPERT would be better than ME? A bonefide streetbot with glorified hacking skills?” Jazz snickered, noting the way Optimus’ gaze flickered curiously between him, Prowl and Trailbreaker.

“My apologies, sir glorified street-mech hacker. Care to introduce me to your new friends?”
“This is Prowl, and this is one of his pack members, Trailbreaker. He’s helpin’ out cause the spinal injury is still not great. Prowl, Trailbreaker, meet Optimus. The goofiest Prime that ever Primed.”

“Greetings, sir.” Prowl bowed his head as far as he was able, reverting to formal mode while unsure of where he stood with the Prime. Beside him, Trailbreaker gave a silent but just as formal bow of the head.

“It’s nice to finally meet you both. Please don’t feel the need to address me formally, Optimus is fine. If you prefer Prime I don’t mind, but I don’t insist on it.”

Prowl refreshed his optics again and gave a nod of bewildered acknowledgement. “…Thankyou, Optimus… sir. I apologise, it’s hard to drop the formal titles. We would normally get in trouble for doing it.”

Optimus gave him an understanding nod and Prowl noted his optics flick to his left with a quirk to his mouth. “I take it the rest of your pack is there with you currently?”

Prowl tilted his head slightly before following Optimus’ gaze and finding Sideswipe had belly-slid into frame, still in wolf mode, and peeked his head just into view of the camera while trying to get a better look at Optimus.

Prowl sighed. “Yes, sir, they’re all here. This is one of my twins, Sideswipe. His brother Sunstreaker is behaving himself off screen, the way HE should be.”

Sideswipe looked up at him with wide, guilty optics, meeting Prowl’s disapproving glare with a cheeky thump of his tail.

Over the communicator, Optimus chuckled. “It would be great to meet the rest of them, but I think we ought to discuss our plans first. If they can wait a little longer.”

“They certainly CAN, thankyou Sunstreaker- “ he focussed back on Optimus as the golden twin physically dragged his brother out of the screen’s view, “- I believe you required the names of all the noblemechs we should be inviting to the party.”

The formal part of the conversation went on quite smoothly and efficiently, Prowl finding that all of his misconceptions of the Prime were unfounded. He was neither very formal nor very authoritarian, despite the fact Jazz had told him he was an ex-enforcer.

Trailbreaker had been quite helpful in reminding him of all the extra bots they would need to invite, such as Octane. The noblemech didn’t hunt, but he would absolutely throw a fit if he wasn’t invited anyway, and he was still a danger to the pack he pampered so much. He saw them as objects, and would undoubtedly discard them however was most convenient for him once they were ruled free. If they knew anything about his less scrupulous dealings, they might well all be killed immediately.

This was true of a few other non-hunting mechs, and they had to devise plans to keep them occupied if they showed up but didn’t participate in the events. Competitive showing and a straight-line race were options, since both were the other major pass-times of wolf-mech owners.

During the pre-party in which they would reveal the contest event, they planned to request all nobles bring their alphas, which would be escorted to a separate room where they would be ‘catered’ to. Once they were separated, Prowl would be able to announce their plans to all present alphas in order for them to inform and prepare their pack members.

“What if they do not all believe me? I know most of them, and many trust me but some dislike me greatly. They may either refuse to tell their packs, or they will tell their masters and blow the whole
The very thought of Thunderwing finding out that he was a key conspirator in their emancipation terrified him. Not because of what he’d do to HIM, but what he’d likely try and do to his pack. Prime could rule them free at any time, but it wouldn’t make them any safer. It was the one element of the whole plan that worried him most, but they could not afford to keep the other wolf-mechs in the dark about it.

“Do not worry about that. I will be excusing myself from the main party at some point to come and talk to them myself. If anyone can convince them, I’m sure I can. And if not me, possibly the matrix. It’s turned out to be a very handy negotiating tool so far.”

“Well, I would say ‘who is going to argue with Primus’, but considering the life many of my kind have lived, it won’t surprise me if many of them don’t believe in him. It’s alright though, you still hold the ultimate rank of Prime, and if there is one thing that my kind understand it’s rank.”

“Don’t forget, you also beat Grimlock. Even if some of them don’t like you, there’s no WAY they won’t know about that by now. That should be enough alone for them to respect your word.” Trailbreaker rumbled at Prowl, who’s ears flicked a little, back twinging at the memory.

Optimus made his own rumble, but it sounded more troubled than reassuring. “Jazz sent me the footage of that. For starters… I have NO idea HOW you even took that bot down, because I’m not even sure I could… and secondly, I don’t EVER want you or any of your kind to have to go through that sort of abhorrent nightmare again.”

“But… when we’re free, we can still make our own wolf-mech fight club… right?” Sideswipe chimed in, having slid his way into view once more.

Prowl’s ears went back and he rumbled warningly. “Sideswipe-“

“It’s okay if it’s because WE want to do it and no one is making us, right?”

“Sideswipe I don’t think the Prime wants to have to answer the question of whether he’s okay with us fighting each other, can you control yourself for at LEAST five breems.”

Sunstreaker murmured off-screen, attempting once more to drag his brother away and getting kicked at this time.

Prowl dragged a servo down his face in a long-suffering gesture, but noted Optimus looked as if he was trying extremely hard not to laugh.

“Sorry about this. Sideswipe’s attention span is a little short closer to alignments.”

Optimus made a throat clearing sound to try and cover his chuckle and waved a servo. “That’s quite alright. I think we’ve gotten all of the formal details out of the way… perhaps Sideswipe should make room for his brother to be visible on the screen so I can meet them both properly?”

Prowl felt far more at ease about their upcoming plans now he’d actually spoken to the Prime. The
rest of the pack were still feeling a little star-struck a day or so later, and they had a job hiding their chipper moods from Thunderwing.

Well… all but Prowl did, since he still couldn’t walk far, let alone present with the rest of the pack when Thunderwing decided to show them off in the training room for Jazz and Mirage.

He was still THERE, but he remained sitting extremely still in wolf mode by Thunderwing’s side, trying not to show emotion at the spectacle before him. It was difficult, because as much as he liked Hound, and Now Red Alert… neither had a HOPE of keeping up with his pack members and it was unfortunately very funny to watch them try.

He felt a little mean for being so amused at the way they fumbled across the obstacles that even Bumblebee had no trouble with. It did show just how hard they’d been trained compared to most other wolf-mechs. Hound was neither lazy nor untrained, and Red had told them he’d had more than one master put him through varied training regimes.

Neither had had quite the right motivation though, which sobered him thoroughly. They didn’t have to worry about being beaten or raped for their mistakes. Which, while it was the worst way to motivate a group, was unfortunately very effective.

His pack had gotten as good as they had to spare HIM any excess pain, for which he was extremely grateful. Having the side effect of making them a phenomenal hunting team was a nice bonus, but not necessarily worth all they’d been through.

All the same, Prowl knew Thunderwing would be demanding this of them daily once he was aware of the upcoming contest.

“Yes, they’re quite impressive eh? You know Ambassador, I could put you onto the crew I had build this for me, they’re VERY good. With the right training techniques, I’m sure your new pet could start to achieve results like this in oh, say, a few vorns?”

Jazz feigned actual interest in Thunderwing’s offer as he sent an apologetic comm to Red Alert where he was struggling to climb a nearly sheer wall that was five times his height. Even as he watched, Bumblebee took a running leap at said wall and scrabbled as high as he could before leaping off it, bouncing off an adjacent support pole, and leapt back onto the top edge of the wall.

Red Alert whuffed and fairly POUTED at Jazz. Who tried not to laugh as he sent more apologies.

“Y’know, I might take you up on that. Could be good for me too, I like a bit of obstacle training now and then. You ever run this one without thrusters or anything?”

Thunderwing let out a bellowing laugh. “Primus no! This is designed for ground based quadrupeds! I have my own aerial training arena at the base, I was saving it to show you a little later, before you leave here. It is a pity though, that you don’t get to see my Alpha run this course. He’s been drilled the most, he can do it in the fastest time.”

The flier sent Prowl an accusatory glare, as if he’d injured himself gravely on purpose just to thwart his plans to brag. Prowl set his ears back and tucked his tail tight in a sign of attrition. That look told him there’d be a rough interface later as punishment.

“I don’t feel as if we’re missing much. After all, what the rest of your pack can do is impressive enough, and we DID get to see that legendary fight. Don’t feel as if we aren’t suitably impressed with your alpha.” Mirage tittered lightly, trying to help Prowl’s situation a little.

Thunderwing didn’t seem to be much reassured though, crossing his arms and giving the course a
calculating look before he squinted back at Prowl. “True, that WAS an impressive fight, even by MY standards. But I know my alpha is capable of better. I EXPECT better of him. If I didn’t, he would not be able to do things such as bring down behemoths like Grimlock.”

The flier gave a flick of his wings and a whistle, and soon the rest of his pack had stopped whatever they were doing to come down and stand at attention before him. Hound and Red followed them with bemused expressions, standing much less formally in front of Jazz and Mirage.

Another whistle and Prowl, despite the ache that had settled in his back from sitting at attention so long, stood and moved into place at the start of the course.

“Lord Thunderwing I really don’t think he should be-“

“What you must understand, my good fellows, is that they will put on as much of a show as they can if they think it gets them special attention. If he can stand, he can run the course. Lord Mirage I don’t expect you to have run into such an issue since your wolf-mechs are, as a baseline somewhat more… pampered.”

Jazz gave Mirage a subtle look of panic, receiving one in return. Prowl didn’t avert his gaze from the course, and his body language said nothing of how he felt, but Hound’s body read anxiety all over.

//Prowl there’s no WAY you can do that course in your current state, right?//

//Not without injuring myself further, no// Prowl responded to Jazz in a very quiet, very tense tone.

He had to think of something fast, before Thunderwing gave the order to go.

He didn’t have a lot of options at this point…

“Lord Thunderwing, y’might wanna ease up on him this ONE time. Ah know he probably CAN do that course for us, but the risk of him hurting himself more probably isn’t worth what it might cost ya.”

Thunderwing, who had raised his arm to give the downward signal to start, paused and looked at him in confusion. “COST me? What exactly do you mean by that?”

Prowl had a perfectly still, perfectly calm looking explosion of terror. Was Jazz about to ATTACK their master? Was he THREATENING Thunderwing over his health? The possibility both terrified and thrilled him. But still he didn’t move.

“Well, I ain’t reeeeeally supposed to be telling you about this… but it’s probably best you conserve your alpha’s strength and make sure he’s good and healed just in case the Prime maybe plans some kinda competition he might be eligible for entering. But y’didn’t hear that from me.”

Prowl almost felt disappointed. Relief was probably the better word, since he wasn’t sure Jazz would have come off better in an enclosed space against his master, but it had been nice for one nanoklik to think the ambassador was willing to throw down at a moment’s notice for his sake.

However, revealing their plan a little early to Thunderwing, even in this way, made him somewhat anxious. They hadn’t accounted for this, for him having extra planning time… they didn’t know what repercussions it might have. Perhaps none, perhaps it would help them if he thought he was getting special treatment… but they had no way of knowing, and Jazz couldn’t have found a better way to stop Thunderwing from damaging him further.

“Ooooh, is that so? And this… hypothetical contest I might be able to enter my pack in… when do
you think that might maybe be held?”

“Can’t say for sure. But what I CAN say is that you’ll hear all the details at the party the Prime is throwing. Ah hate to spoil a good surprise, but your invite is proooobably being written up as we speak.”

Jazz was no more comfortable with sharing details with Thunderwing early than Prowl was. But it was a fair trade off, and the gamble looked to be paying off. “You can always show us what your alpha is REALLY capable of later, when he’s at peak condition. Wouldn’t wanna risk an injury hanging on from pushing too hard too quick, not when you might be performing for the Prime.”

Prowl had been ordered back to the den, supported by Inferno and Trailbreaker at his own request. He’d also managed to engineer it so that Hound and Red Alert stayed back in the training room with the twins and Bee.

Jazz and Mirage were led off by Thunderwing, who wanted to wheedle more information out of them. Prowl had an opportunity he knew he couldn’t afford to miss, and the moment he was back in the den he transformed and eased himself down onto his pillow-nest (which Jazz had added to with things from his guest room, much to Prowl’s surprised delight.

“I need to tell the two of you something, and you must swear to me it does not go beyond the two of you and Hound.”

Inferno and Trailbreaker both gave him startled looks, glancing at one another before they both transformed as well. They crouched at his side, looking concerned.

“Okay… is this to do with the plans coming up?” Inferno tilted his head slightly, frowning. He couldn’t think of what the three of them would have to know that the Twins and Bumblebee wouldn’t.

“To a degree, yes. It’s about my… condition. It has nothing to do with the spinal injury, but it might complicate it a little.” Prowl murmured. He’d been warring with himself in every quiet moment he had over whether he should tell them.

In the end, logic had won out. There was a point that came in carrying where the need for Transfluid was extremely insistent. Hound had offered his help, but Prowl knew he couldn’t handle it alone. It took a pack to raise sparklings, even before they were in their frames… ESPECIALLY before they were in their frames.

Prowl took a deep ventilation, the black and red mechs both waiting patiently for him to speak, with no idea what was coming.

“I’m Carrying. Thunderwing forced me to spark with him. Hound knows because he smelt it on me not because I told him. Trailbreaker, he said he’ll be telling people you’re the sire.”

Both mechs stared at him in alarm, not saying anything. There was a long, heavy silence before either spoke.
“So… wait… why? WHY did he do this to you, what on EARTH does he want to make hybrid sparklings with you for? Is that… legal?” Trailbreaker rumbled, unsettled.

“More like is it ethical? Primus what are they going to be? Flying wolf-mechs? Is THAT what he wants?” Inferno sounded more angry than disturbed.

Prowl sighed and gave a soft rumble of his own. “He wants pack members he can have tighter control over. He wants what he thinks will be the perfect slaves. He’s not going to have them though, not with the dates we set. All the same, I… I didn’t want to tell you. I didn’t want to tell ANYONE… “

Before he really knew what was happening, Prowl was being scooped into a huge, gentle bear hug by Trailbreaker. He didn’t protest. The comfort of the larger mech’s strong E.M field enveloped him, and he let himself relax into it. It took him a moment to realise he was actually shaking.

Inferno sat by his helm, running gentle claws across it and between his audials. They stayed like this for several, silent kliks.

When Inferno spoke, his voice was soft, but it still carried anger. Not against Prowl, but their master. “Are you planning on telling Jazz? Or the rest of the pack?”

It took Prowl a moment to gather his thoughts and reset his vocaliser. “I can’t. If I tell Jazz, he’ll call off the plan, and I won’t have him dismantle a chance for so many of us to break free just because of me. If the twins know, they might well try to attack Thunderwing… and I want to spare Bumblebee as much anxiety as I can.”

“We understand. We’ll do what we can… if Thunderwing doesn’t give you the extra rations you need, I can cut some of mine for you, He doesn’t need me fast, just heavy, and I’m already that.” Trailbreaker murmured.

“Are we… able to see them?” Inferno asked a little timidly, audials flicked forward in a hopeful gesture. They flicked back sadly when Prowl shook his head.

“He’s locked my chestplates. Only he can get in.” He explained bitterly.

“Well, he hasn’t locked your valve, so we can still give you all the transfluid you need for frame building. That along with the nanite stuff Jazz has been giving you should stop the frame making from slowing your healing.”

Prowl nodded. “Thankyou. I’m not sure what I’d do without the two of you here.”

“Hump a lot of trees in the garden probably” Inferno snickered, making Prowl snort.

“Still be a better frag than Thunderwing.” He murmured.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Jazz has to subtly save Prowl from permanent injury while frantically planning for the emancipation event. Absence makes the spark grow fonder, and then there's the pressure of party time.

Chapter Notes

Thiiis one is long and i got a bit of writers block at one point. It's a very long chap so *shrug* IDK I'm having trouble thinking of anything else i wanted to say other than be prepped for lots of smut sprinkled throughout. Hope you're ready for it my sweet dudes. *EDIT* Shit you guys i totally forgot, for the party part of the fic you should listen to these tracks from the Outlander Season 2 soundtrack:
- Versaille - Wrath of the Comte - Into Paris (this one most especially) - Baroque Chess Match - and to a lesser extent Honey Pot and Apothecary.
OK THATS ALL.

About two days after his first meeting with the Prime, Prowl had another conference. This one was much more unexpected, and a lot more unusual.

Jazz had come down in the late evening, once he was sure Thunderwing was in recharge (he’d apparently managed to plant a small bug somewhere in the flier’s room that told him when he was in his berth) and set up the comms console again.

Prowl had watched him rather bemused, listening as Jazz explained why he’d come back with it.

“It’s hard enough to catch him off duty, but ah think Optimus got in his audio. I just sorta ended up a facilitator, he wants to take a look at you and see if he can’t recommend a treatment. I ain’t ever known Ratchet to go to these lengths to set up a consultation, which tells me he thinks it’s real serious. I mean, I wouldn’t worry TOO much, Thunderwing is gonna do whatever it takes to fix you up for the event. But whatever we can do to fix you RIGHT before he tries some dodgy shortcut is gonna be better.”

Prowl just nodded, audials switching back and forth a little nervously. “Has he ever treated our kind before?”

“Nope, but he said if you’re mechs with infections, there’s not gonna be enough differences internally that he can’t tell what’s going on. Well, according to him anyway.” Jazz gave a half shrug and tapped at the keyboard, authenticating his connection. “And I’d trust him on that. He’s a prodigy and then some as far as medics go. There’s a good reason he’s medic to the Prime, and it has nothing to do with his personality or temperament.”

The rest of Prowl’s pack were hovering out of the line of the camera’s sight. They’d been told the Prime’s chief medic needed to have a clear view of Prowl, and there was no way any of them
wanted to impede the treatment in any way.

Prowl’s back hadn’t shown much sign of improvement, and they weren’t sure if the slowdown was because there was a complication with the injury, or Thunderwing was just making him move too much.

As with Optimus, Ratchet had been waiting, and appeared almost instantly when Jazz got the connection up.

“Hey Ratch, line good on your end?”

“Yes. No Problems on yours?”

“Nope. Let’s get this done then yeah? You sounded in the message like you were squeezing this in between some other stuff.”

Ratchet waved a servo, looking past Jazz and acknowledging Prowl with a nod of the head. “We’re not in that much of a rush, don’t worry. I had a last minute cancellation. Now, Prowl, Jazz tells me you’ve had a severe spinal trauma. Are you able to describe for me the physical motions that caused it? It helps me to know the direction of spinal torsion.”

Prowl nodded back, somewhat relieved that the mech was more interested in getting down to business than in pleasantries.

“I was holding onto Grimlock’s head with my foreclaws… he was my opponent. He had a considerable weight to him, and when his head pinned my lower half, my hips were twisted too far to the right. The spinal joints, from what I understood, became de-coupled, and the control cable was sharply twisted.”

The alpha noted Jazz flinching slightly as he described the injury. On the screen, Ratchet grimaced and nodded. “Are you aware if there was any cable shearing, or did it remain mostly intact?”

“Intact as far as I’m aware. I know they opened up my back-plating to re-couple the spinal joints and replaced two. Otherwise, I’m not sure what else they might have done.”

Ratchet nodded again and sighed. “Okay, I’m gonna need to see it myself to find out then. Are you okay with Jazz following my instructions and opening up some of your back-plating?”

Prowl glanced between Jazz and the medic and nodded. He carefully rolled himself over so that his back was exposed to the screen, and he felt Jazz shift to settle behind him. He hoped it wouldn’t hurt, but said nothing. He trusted Jazz.

Sunstreaker came into his line of vision, padding over and transforming, holding one of his servos and giving a soft, sub-sonic rumble. It was a protective gesture. He was wary of this unknown medic.

Prowl sent reassurance through their link, and soon had Sideswipe shuffling over to offer his presence as further buffer.

Jazz’s servos moved lightly and carefully over his plating, following verbal instructions from Ratchet on how to safely remove plating and expose his spinal struts. The medic made a disgusted sound once Jazz was done and he could see the handiwork of the repair mechs.

“Slaggers look like they practically shoved the coupling links back together. I can see the scarring and scratches even from here. I’m assuming they were about as gentle with their correction of your cable torsion. I am going to need a look at it… Prowl, you can back out now if you’re not
comfortable with this. Jazz has very steady hands, he knows how to disassemble bombs, he’s as close to a medic as we’re ever going to get. Still, if you don’t want us going further—"

“It’s alright. I trust him.” Prowl murmured over his shoulder, able to only just make out the red and white face on the screen while craning his neck.

Ratchet nodded and set his mouth back to its determined grimace. “Alright then. Those two there with you… yes, gold and red bots, we’ll need you to help. One of you will have to hold his hips steady, the other needs to hold his shoulders. We want to keep his back straight and still. Can you do that for me?”

Both twins were a little shocked that they were even acknowledged, but both complied immediately. Normally they’d scoff if a bot other than their owner or the Prime tried telling them what to do. This bot though… it wasn’t just that he was helping their carrier. He carried authority the same way Prowl did. There WAS no arguing.

Once the two were in place, Jazz got down to the fiddly business of following the complex sequence required to uncouple spinal segments. And Primus did it make him glad that it wasn’t his job.

It was the worst kind of disassembly. Remove all complex interlocking parts without touching the cable in the centre. Jazz went slowly, Ratchet very patient with him, far more than he would normally be with anyone. But this wasn’t an ordinary patient, and as competent as he knew Jazz to be, he didn’t want to pressure him in an environment where the patient’s closest family was present. It would only create extra tension in the room.

After about two breems of very careful work, Jazz pulled back the last pieces of metal covering the main spinal cord. The sound Ratchet made when he saw what was underneath didn’t exactly fill Jazz with confidence.

“PRIMUS almighty, Prowl you’ve been WALKING with it like that? No wonder it isn’t healing, the damn thing’s nearly severed through. If that tear wasn’t spiralled, I daresay it would be.”

Prowl felt cold dread settle in his tanks. His head turned to try and project his voice so that the medic could hear him. He couldn’t see the screen past Sideswipe, but it didn’t really matter, it just meant he couldn’t read Ratchet’s expressions. “What does that mean for my ability to compete in the tournament?”

There was huffing and grumbling noises over the line, and though Prowl couldn’t see it, Ratchet was scrubbing a servo over his face as if trying very hard not to have conniptions. “If I had my way, you wouldn’t compete for a VORN after an injury like that. Since you have no choice… the best we can do is move the date back a little more… and do some emergency repair work right now. Which would be much easier if I was there, but that’s not an option so we’ll just have to work with what we’ve got. It’s not going to be fun for you… This kind of treatment would normally be performed with you knocked out. Unless Jazz carries medical grade anaesthetics, we don’t have the means to do that.”

The medic threw Jazz a look as if half expecting he might, but Jazz just held up his servos and shook his head. “Most illegal substance on me is stims, and they’re only for emergencies.”

“So it’s painful?” Prowl asked, but his tone was more resigned than anything else. Of course it would hurt. It was his spinal cable. One of the few parts of a bot that didn’t change in transformation. The spinal cable had to remain intact while other things moved around it. Breaking it entirely could result in permanent damage of all components below the damage. Slower, more pained transformations, loss of dexterity, loss of haptic feedback, chronic pain… it was a terrible thing to
suffer, and he’d do anything to avoid it.

“Extremely. Spinal cables aren’t meant to be touched by anything. That’s why they’re so hard to get to. Your twins there will need to hold you very still, no matter what. The best we can do for that damage right now is to apply nanite gel directly, and very carefully. Excess contact against that cord can cause systems to go into purge mode, and that’ll only make things worse.”

Everyone but Prowl looked at one another in alarm and uncertainty. Jazz was the other exception, a stony look of resignation on his face as he pulled another gel tube from subspace.

“Tell me how I should be doing that Ratch. You need something to bite down on Prowl?”

“No. Just warn me before you do it.”

Sunstreaker and Sideswipe leant more of their weight on him in preparation, both seeming rather dubious about the whole thing, while wondering how the pit the medic knew they were twins.

Ratchet gave Jazz his instructions on exactly where and how to apply the nanites. Even without much medical training, Jazz could see just how severe the damage was. The cabling was like no other found on Cybertron. Spinal cords were almost as mysterious in their construction as sparks, acting like a mix of metal and fibre-optic, they looked like glass but flexed like silicone. They were extremely tough, and only broke like this under immense pressure or from use of energon-charged weapons.

The only time you could sustain torsion like this was having an alt or root mode that locked the flexibility of the spinal struts around the cable. Most root modes didn’t do this, meaning bots could turn their own hips 360 degrees without their spine spinning as well. Alt modes were another matter. Wolf-mechs, it seemed, had locking struts, which meant the sharp twisting of Prowl’s hips had caused a spiralling tear the length of Jazz’s thumb.

Primus only knew how Prowl hadn’t been howling in pain every cycle he was awake.

When Jazz was ready, he gave Prowl a countdown. The alpha tensed in anticipation, twins doing the same.

The moment the gel hit his spinal cabling, Prowl knew. He had a full body spasm, most of it negated and absorbed by the twins. He choked out a sound somewhere between pained and shocked. Jazz paused a moment until the Twins had stilled Prowl as much as they could, following Ratchet’s evenly voiced instructions even as Prowl shook.

The cool gel on his spinal cable felt like waves of ice and fire surging through Prowl, he could suddenly feel far, FAR too much. It wasn’t just pain. It was EVERYTHING. His senses were inundated with too much indecipherable information. It whited out everything and made it hard to think.

Sunstreaker and Sideswipe leant all their weight on him to keep him still as Jazz carefully worked the nanite gel into the spiralling break. It wasn’t easy, even injured Prowl was almost as big as them and had just as much power in his core cables.

The alpha forced himself to pull back into consciousness when his processor threatened to do a hard shut-down. A crash wouldn’t help him right now, and it sure as slag wouldn’t help his sparklings. He forced his neural network into tolerance. He forced the haptic feedback through his tactical processor to allow him thinking room and shut down his vocaliser.

It had been hard trained into him to be silent when in pain, both for safety in hunting and because
Thunderwing saw it as a weakness to cry out. The rest of his concentration went into trying to stop shaking and channelling the overload of feedback.

Jazz clenched his jaw hard, trying to detach his emotions from his actions. He HATED that he was hurting Prowl. But he HAD to perform this treatment to help him, and he had to concentrate so he got it right. He needed steady servos and a clear head, and shut down all lines of thought about how Prowl didn’t deserve more torture.

With Ratchet’s guidance, he applied the gel as far into the tears as he could get it with only syringe pressure. Making sure it got into the parts that did not face outward was the hardest, made harder by Prowl arching away from the contact instinctively. Sunstreaker, who was straddling his carrier’s legs and leaning on his hips, shifted an arm to press against Prowl’s midriff and straighten his posture again.

At this point, the twins were both making more noise than Prowl in their efforts to hold him still. It worked though, Jazz able to slip the syringe a little deeper and feed the nanites all the way around the cable.

“Okay… now comes the tricky part. You need to get that gel to start working right into the cracks, and the only suitable tool you have is your magnetics. Get as close as you can with them without touching, and manipulate what you can without taking the gel out of the tear.”

Jazz gave Ratchet a slightly incredulous look. Normally he needed to touch a surface to feel exactly how his magnetics were affecting it. He never usually hovered them over things to manipulate them unless they were just styluses or bolts he was playing with.

He put down the nanite syringe and drew in a deep, steadying ventilation. He flexed his servos, grinding his denta unconsciously as he narrowed his focus. He held his palms as if holding an invisible cup over the opening in Prowl’s back.

The first pulse was very gentle, him feeling out what kind of force would start to move the nanites. The gel didn’t react, but Prowl did, letting out a long hiss of static and giving an abortive jerk. Clearly he could feel SOMETHING, but Jazz had no idea what.

“Talk to me Prowl. Ah need some feedback, I’m not feeling much here.”

It took a few moments for Prowl to get the overflow of sensation under control enough to turn his vocaliser back on.

“Too much… feel too much, don’t know…”

Jazz worried at his lip-plating with his denta and adjusted his servos, moving them a little closer together and upping the pulses a little. “Can ya feel the core of the sensations where ahm workin’ at least?”

“Ye-es…” Prowl’s vocaliser broke with static and he stiffened. He most certainly felt a shift in the feedback. It narrowed down to a sharper point, becoming less like a mix of every sensation and more just pain and pleasure. It was like scratching an itch far too hard. Both satisfying and awful.

“Ah can see it moving now… it’s supposed to be sorta flattening into the tear, right Ratch?”

“Yes. It should almost set into it like solder, but it will remain liquid. Those nanites are a patch, meant to encourage the frame’s own repair systems to take over. They’re a support network in this instance, they can’t replace spinal cord material, just help it rebuild faster.”
Prowl swallowed the whine that threatened to leave him as Jazz continued manipulating the gel into the wound. The pain became far more acute, still mixed with that bizarre itch-scratch satisfaction. It was at least easier to process than the initial sensations, but he still couldn’t stop himself from shaking.

Prowl couldn’t see the deep grimace of concern Ratchet wore as he watched Jazz work intently. After a breem, Jazz lowered his servos with a whuff from his vents. “I think that’s it, it doesn’t seem to be moving any deeper into the cracks.”

“Move me closer so I can get a better look.” Ratchet murmured, Jazz nodding and lifting the whole comms console with a grunt, getting it close as he could to Prowl’s back.

The twins held their positions, Prowl silent and still shaking beneath them. Ratchet tried to angle his head this way and that to look around the cord. After a few tense moments, he sat back and grunted.

“I think you’ve done the best you can with what you’ve got. Need me to take you through close up?”

“Yes please. This slag is complex as pit.” Jazz murmured, putting the console back where it had been and settling by Prowl again. “Not long now, you’ll be able to sleep this off.”

Prowl didn’t reply beyond a twitch of his helm in acknowledgement. He had to keep his vocaliser locked down or he’d make more involuntary sounds.

As gentle as Jazz’ servos were on his back, he could now feel the slide of every plate and component, his sensor net so blown out it was picking up everything. Not flinching was impossible, and the twins still had a job keeping him mostly still.

The procedure felt agonisingly slow, and when Jazz was done, Prowl was disappointed by the lack of relief he felt. The twin’s weight lifted off him, but neither broke contact, petting his still shivering form to try and soothe his jarred sensors.

“I have never, EVER, in all my decavorns, seen a patient go through a field spinal procedure silently.” Ratchet murmured quietly, shaking his helm.

“It’s training. Thunderwing says we’re weak if we express our pain. It lets opponents know when they’re beating you. He punishes us if we don’t bear our injuries silently.” Sunstreaker answered, voice low and hard.

Ratchet gave an angry rumble across the line. “Like to see how silent that walking windbag would be if I stuck a probe into his wing hinges. I’m telling you right now he’d absolutely make a hypocrite of himself immediately.”

Jazz whuffed and sat back, a servo moving to rest on the back of Prowl’s helm, where he gently pulsed his magnetics. The alpha pressing into the touch told him he was okay to continue. “Have to get in line Ratch, I got a lot of choice payback planned for our friend Thunderwing. Stickin’ probes in his hinges is the least of it. Ain’t his hinges I’m stickin’ things in first.”

“Speaking of which…” Prowl rasped, trying to turn himself over and getting grabbed by both Sideswipe and Sunstreaker to stop him.

“It’s alright, you can help him onto his other side. I don’t recommend lying on your back or front for a while though, and definitely get assistance when you need to move, I want you keeping that spine as straight and horizontal as you can for as long as you can. The less moving the better.” Ratchet instructed as the twins helped their carrier to lie facing the console.
Prowl whuffed air through his vents as he suppressed the sharp pangs of pain it caused. He was grateful when Jazz went back to his magnetic helm pets.

“What should I do when Thunderwing decides he wants to use me again?”

Ratchet’s optics flashed with hot rage, but he tempered it before speaking, engine rumble the only giveaway as to what he thought of that whole situation. “Remind him you cannot perform at your peak if he keeps delaying your healing. Jazz, if you can impress upon him subtly how serious spine injuries are that might help. Otherwise… all I can suggest Prowl is try to keep your back straight, as much as you possibly can. There isn’t much else you can do, not in your position.”

Prowl nodded. “Is interfacing in general going to slow healing?”

“You mean, do overloads impede it? No. I don’t imagine you get any of those from Thunderwing, but as far as what you engage in willingly… I’d advise against any interfacing for the sake of physical strain. Overloads themselves though shouldn’t harm the process, if you absolutely NEED one, just go carefully, try to move as little as possible.”

The alpha nodded, frame finally beginning to still and relax as the pain of surgery ebbed.

“By the way… how did you know we were twins?” Sideswipe piped up from where he was smoothing his carrier’s upper back-plating.

Ratchet tilted his helm slightly, motioning it at Jazz. “He’s been sending me all the information he can get on the lot of you, for when you’re finally freed from that place. I need some kind of idea of what I’ll be dealing with in terms of future treatments. Filing new patient details now just saves time. To be honest though, it wouldn’t have taken much of a guess for me, you both move like Twins.”

“Move like twins? Didn’t realise that was a thing” the red mech replied, sharing a look with Sunstreaker, who merely arched an orbital ridge.

“Well yes. There’s a constant synchronisation of movement and silent communications going on between you, you anticipate each other’s actions. You only ever see that between bonded mechs and Twins, and the two of you have too much familial similarity to be just a bonded pair.”

“Wait wait wait… you’re telling me you’ve seen enough of each to tell the difference? You mean there’s OTHER Twins out there?”

Ratchet gave Sideswipe a slightly bemused look, as if wondering whether he was joking or not, and seeming alarmed to realise he wasn’t. “Of course. I mean, it’s not common, but there’s enough of you-“

Prowl tuned out of the conversation, finding it too difficult to engage and offlineing his optics. He leant his helm further into Jazz’s ministrations and felt him lean a little closer.

“Y’should sleep Prowl. Give your frame a rest after that, it’ll help the repairs get goin’”.

“I’m alright I just… I shouldn’t recharge while Ratchet might need to give me more instructions…” even as he spoke, Prowl was fighting the darkness at the edges of his processor tempting him with shut-down.

Jazz rubbed at an audial and made it all the more difficult to resist. “Nah, y’fine. He can leave instructions with the others, they’ll make sure you follow ‘em. Ahm’ stayin as long as I can too. Rest, Prowler.”
Prowl would have questioned the odd affectation Jazz added to his name, but he was far too keen to follow the order being given, and let himself slip into stasis.

For three cycles, Prowl couldn’t move. Most of it he spent unconscious, waking up only enough to be fed by his pack-mates now and then. Trailbreaker and Inferno were extremely diligent about it, both glad the Twins and Bumblebee didn’t question it.

Thunderwing, who had been visibly angered by Prowl’s failure to answer his call, was placated by Jazz. “Y’know he DID nearly get torn in two, that takes like 4 or 5 megacycles for self-repair to really take care of, happened to me once a long time ago. How much of a break has he had to recover?”

Thunderwing had given him a slightly surprised look. “Megacycles? Surely not… I don’t like my hounds slacking, he was walking after a few cycles, he should be fine.”

“Nooo Primus no, he shouldn’t have been walkin’ around, that just makes it worse. Extends the amount of time it takes to heal too, I did the EXACT same thing. Thought I was fine, went walkin’ around, ended up nearly permanently damaging myself. I mean it was serious, got chewed out by the head medic, I can’t imagine he’d be fit in time for the Prime’s party if he doesn’t get enough rest. Last thing y’want is for him to have a permanent injury going into a big competition.”

The flier’s wings twitched in horror at the prospect. Jazz knew he’d made the severity sink in enough to buy Prowl the recovery time he needed.

“Was there not any sort of treatments to speed up the process? I need him fully presentable by that party. I can’t walk in there with a limping alpha and hold my head up! Especially not when he’s got a title to defend.”

“Hmmmm… Ah mean, his own repair nanites will have to deal with the deepest damage… but I know a mech I can pull strings to get to look at him-“

“Oh no no, I’m not going to take him to any other repair mech than Shockwave. He has far too many customisations, I don’t want to risk it. I meant is there some sort of physical remedy that can be applied here to speed things up?”

Jazz grimaced internally. Well, he’d wanted to make it so that Ratchet could perform proper surgery, but it seemed like that had been a vain hope. Onto plan B…

“Weeeell… I never got the benefit of it myself, but ah’ve heard a lot of great things about magnetic therapy. And I happen to have the right mods for it. Couldn’t really perform it on myself, but I can do it for others, could give it a shot if you want?”

He made sure to layer his tone with a light, believable amount of schmoozing. If Thunderwing saw his offer as an attempt to return favour for his earlier ‘gift’ of Red Alert, he’d get into an even better position to manipulate the flier.

The calculating look and slow nod of agreement from Thunderwing was the win he’d hoped for.

//Trust you to get him to LET you pet Prowl IN FRONT of him// Mirage ever so subtly raised an orbital ridge at him across the table.

//Just cause I hate this slag, doesn’t mean I’m bad at it// he grinned ever so slightly at Mirage over his
cube. //Besides, it’s not petting, it’s genuine therapy. I’m mostly hoping Prowl sleeps through it, it’ll be easier for both of us//.

Jazz had been glad when Thunderwing had led him to the Den with the air of someone who had no idea he’d been this way plenty of times before. He was very apologetic for the ‘state’ of that part of the manor. Jazz had brushed it all off as nothing he hadn’t seen before in the Prime’s palace, which had the desired effect of swelling Thunderwing’s ego.

Jazz would never understand why nobles liked to know that the Prime compound had dingy little halls and passageways like any other palatial place, but any comparison seemed to flatter most nobles. It was ridiculous and he exploited the slag out of it.

Prowl had been practically where Jazz had last left him, still recharging and pretty much dead to the world. Seeing him in that state while the rest of his wolf-mechs sat at attention seemed to really drive the point home to Thunderwing.

“I see they’ve even stolen some extra bedding to accommodate him. I suppose he’s earned it, the servants can just purchase some more. He’s absolutely out of it… I’ve NEVER seen him like this.” He frowned as he knelt by his alpha, but Jazz wasn’t fooled. That frown held no concern for Prowl. Only concern for his own plans and what it meant for his reputation. “So how do you perform this… magnetic therapy?”

“It’s pretty simple. They uuuuh… they’re not gonna attack me in here for getting too close to him are they?” Jazz gestured at the rest of the pack, Sunstreaker looking menacing for effect, Sideswipe growling to enhance it. Even Bumblebee fluffed out his plating to try and look more menacing… unfortunately it had the opposite effect, but Jazz was a good enough actor to look convincingly unnerved.

“No, not while I’m here. I certainly wouldn’t recommend trying to come here without me though. This is the apex of their territory, they might well attack you if I’m not around. It’s an instinctive thing, they can’t help it.” The flier waved a servo at them, and they went back to being stone still and silent.

Jazz moved to sit by Prowl’s back, flexing his servos and rubbing them together to generate a little extra heat. Before he could lay them on Prowl’s back however, Thunderwing held out a servo, grimacing.

“Before you start… he may startle, and I know from experience he can be snappy. I’ll muzzle him first.”

Jazz’s tank dropped, and he tried not to wince sympathetically when Thunderwing extracted the pit-spawned device from his subspace. He practically shoved it onto Prowl’s face, forcing it into place roughly.

It woke Prowl, but he was so sluggish that there was zero violence in his response, and one hundred percent confusion.

//Sorry Prowl, convinced him to let me ‘treat’ you, didn’t know he was gonna put that thing on you again. Try and go back into recharge, ahm just gonna be using magnetics on you again//

Prowl could barely lift his helm to see him, but his stiff posture relaxed when his processor caught up with what was happening. He rumbled softly and offline his optics, finding it far easier to do what
he was told than think too hard on the situation.

“This really is quite strange for him. I mean I’m sure you’re not particularly shocked by his appearance… you’ve got your own now, you know they have this form… not ONCE before have I come here and had him do any less than stand at attention.”

“Like I said, spinal injuries always mess you up more than you think they will. Don’t worry too much, the more rest he gets, the faster he’ll heal.” Jazz rambled in a matter-of-fact tone as he got to work.

Even unconscious, Prowl tensed at the sensations, and he could feel cables shift and relax beneath the armour as he worked. Once or twice Prowl would twitch, or he’d move his head and rumble as if waking before he’d lie still again.

Jazz was keenly aware of Thunderwing watching him work, and tried to look as if he’d never done this for the alpha before. The rest of the pack were doing a good job putting on an air of discomfort with his presence. Their restlessness was more to do with Thunderwing being there, but it worked in their favour anyway.

“So how exactly does this magnetic stuff help?”

“Well, the more recent studies ah’ve heard about have somethin’ to do with stimulating nanite productivity in the area. I’m not entirely sure where the worst damage is here, so I’m bein’ pretty broad with my treatment. But magnetics are also great for making components sit back into their proper places, so if nothin’ else it should align everything back where it’s supposed to be.”

The flier nodded and made a noise of mild interest. “I may have to find someone to employ on my base who has skills in this area. Lord knows most seekers are finicky enough to repair, if their parts can be pulled back into position with magnets it would certainly save a lot of time and effort.”

Jazz hummed a vague sound of agreement, not sure the seekers under his command would feel too confident about getting back in the air without traditional repairs. He was no medic, but he was pretty certain there was more to it than that.

They, however, were free mechs. They could leave Thunderwing’s air base if they felt they were being mistreated. The wolf-mechs didn’t have that kind of choice.

When Prowl began to rumble and twitch a little more, Jazz eased off. “I think that should do it for now. Don’t wanna overclock his sensors. If he shows some improvement, I can do that once a day for the rest of my stay if you want. It’s pretty easy.”

Jazz stood as he spoke, flexing his servos and shaking them to dispel the weird pulling sensations left over. Thunderwing gave him a satisfied looking nod, reaching down to remove the muzzle and storing it back in subspace.

“Considering it’s not an illegal form of treatment in the hunting manuals, I’m all for it. Now, I have some rather fine vintage vossian high-grade I think should be more than enough repayment for your efforts…”

Prowl knew it wasn’t Jazz’s fault, but it didn’t mean he wasn’t entirely too exhausted for what his body was forcing him to do. The magnetic massage had helped TOO much, going past the point of relieving his pain and straight into triggering his carrier instincts.
According to his body, it didn’t matter how injured or tired he was, it wanted transfluid for the sparklings and it wanted it yesterday. Until Jazz’s treatment, his frame hadn’t had a chance to make the demands, but now it was insistent.

Trailbreaker and Inferno had noticed the signs and sent the younger mechs off to the training room so they could tend Prowl in peace. It wasn’t exactly something the Twins or Bee wanted to be around for, seeing their alpha interface with visitors was quite different to when he ‘faced with his own pack mates.

They certainly didn’t need to witness the distressing reality of a carrying heat. Prowl lay panting on his side, trying to stop himself from writhing as Trailbreaker held him from behind and drove his spike deep. His girth was always satisfying, but his hungry gestation chamber was telling him it wasn’t enough.

Inferno knelt in front of him, supporting his leg so Trailbreaker was unimpeded and Prowl wasn’t straining in any way. His free servo pet at the alpha’s chestplates carefully, trying to stimulate the nodes that were more receptive during this kind of heat.

It worked, Prowl whining as his charge was pushed up. It still wasn’t quite enough to give him a release, but it got him closer. That was the problem with carrier heats… his body wanted to get as much transfluid as it could while expending as little energy as possible. Which meant it took three or four overloads from his pack mates to give him even one in return.

Trailbreaker and Inferno had both already given him transfluid, and after a few more careful thrusts from Trailbreaker, another load surged into his tanks.

The swell of the larger mech’s knot made Prowl keen, but it still wasn’t enough to tip him over… until clever claws danced around the stretched platelets of his valve entrance and his outer node was rubbed hard.

Prowl was prevented from jerking too hard by Trailbreaker’s arms wrapped around his torso. The alpha keened and quivered as overload finally crashed through him. The afterglow didn’t last very long though, fading into a bodily ache that made him groan.

By the time Trailbreaker’s knot had depressurised enough to slip out of him, he was already desperate for more. Inferno shifted, wordlessly sliding against his front so that he was sandwiched between the two. The red mech’s spike slipped into him, making him moan.

Prowl just wanted to recharge more, but it was going to be a while before his body was going to let him.

Jazz turned his magnetics off again, glad he’d managed to get another chance to come to the Den alone while Mirage occupied Thunderwing. Prowl had been asleep again, but had woken halfway through treatment. Neither had really spoken until Jazz was done.

“I have to leave in three days. My stay was always planned to be up by then, I’d extend it if Optimus didn’t need me so much back in Iacon. I gotta help organise everything for the event, so the next time I see you will be then.”

Jazz’s voice sounded much sadder than Prowl expected it to. He shifted himself onto his other side so he could face the silver and white mech. There was no schooling his features, he had no reason not to let Jazz see how disappointed he was to hear when he was leaving.
“You should be okay to heal without the magnetic help by then. Honestly you’ve probably had enough by now that it’d be fine to leave it but ah know you like the feeling.” A little smile tugged at the corner of Jazz’s mouth, and Prowl gave a guilty sort of rumble.

“It does feel a pitload better than before Ratchet talked you through that patch up. Not having to walk around probably helped, thankyou for convincing Thunderwing to actually let me be for a while.”

Prowl tugged at Jazz’s servo to get him to join him on his blanket nest. Jazz did without protest, even though he seemed a little surprised.

They were alone in the den, the rest of the pack running drills in the training room since Thunderwing had set them new quotas to prep for the upcoming competition.

“How long is it between when you leave and the new party dates?”

“’Bout four and half megacycles. M’gonna worry boutcha… I’d leave the communicator but it’d take more training than I can give any of ya to set it up on the sly and keep it undetected. I’ll ask Thunderwing to let me know if you get better or worse but I mean… not sure I even trust his word.” Jazz sighed, letting Prowl take his servo and lace their digits slightly.

“I’ll miss you as well. Not just because of the magnets” Prowl murmured, “You’ve been more a friend to me and my pack than any other mech in our collective lives. There isn’t enough I can do to thank you… nothing here is going to feel the same when you leave, I’ll be counting the cycles until I can talk with you again… and until we can end all this and leave.”

Jazz rumbled and closed his other servo around the one entwined with his own. “You won’t know yourselves when you get out of here. Ah think freedom will agree with you though. Plus once you’re free, I can visit you whenever and give you more massages just for the sake of it.” He grinned, noting Prowl’s tail thump against the blankets eagerly at that suggestion.

Prowl regretted not asking Jazz to interface with him again before he left. Everything felt empty and grey when there was no expectation of the silver and white mech coming to the den to visit them.

All of them missed his presence. He was sure he didn’t imagine Thunderwing seeming rather lacklustre as well. No guests around to boast to, or impress, or keep him from his work. At the very least Prowl was pleased Thunderwing did throw himself back into his actual job for the first two megacycles after Jazz and Mirage’s departure.

Even though he knew he needed to rest and let his body fix itself unimpeded as much as possible, Prowl couldn’t help dragging himself to the training room with the others when Thunderwing was away.

He didn’t run the course at all, instead just doing slow laps around the room and stretching carefully. His spinal cabling was improving quickly though, not only could he walk in wolf mode, but it was barely painful.

Root mode was still another matter. He tried it once or twice and decided to swear off it for as long as he could. Horizontal pressure was very different to Vertical. His spinal struts locking in wolf mode helped support everything, but they unlocked when he was bipedal and the difference was significant.
Thunderwing being away a lot had another advantage. Prowl didn’t have to deal with him trying to berth him. He was able to keep his interface exclusively to Trailbreaker and Inferno, which was just as well since they were far better at satisfying his needs. Which were getting a little more insistent.

Which made him all the more annoyed at himself for not asking Jazz or even Hound for a frag or three before they’d gone. Hound had even OFFERED, but at the time his back had been aching and he’d had to decline.

If the Twins or Bumblebee thought his increased interface drive was odd, none of them made comment. Of course they knew by smell alone he was fragging more often, there wasn’t anything to be done about that in close quarter living. All the same, he was grateful for their shrugging it off.

“You seem far more excited for this party than I expected. I thought you hated dealing with nobles, especially most of the ones we’ve invited.” Optimus gave Jazz a quizzical look from the doorway, watching him as he paced and bounced on his pedes a little.

“I ain’t excited, I’m anxious. I want this to go off without a hitch but there’s so many variables and possibilities for an information leak… we gotta trust the alphas Prowl picked out to be in on this are actually gonna get on-board. We can’t exactly silence any of them, once they know it’ll be totally out of our servos.”

Optimus made a rumbling sound of agreement. “True… but I’m still feeling a definite note of excitement, and if I’m not mistaken, there was one very specific word in there that cranked it up a notch.”

Jazz gave the Prime a half flustered, half sheepish look. “Okay, so I might be a little keen to see Prowl again. It’s been driving me nuts not being able to check on him, ah have no idea if Thunderwing’s lied about how much better he is. Last I heard from him, he’s still not walking in anything but wolf mode.”

Optimus nodded sagely and neglected to push further about how those feelings were also related to his anxiety and didn’t explain the excitement part. He supposed he’d understand a little better once he saw the two together. Though he had a sneaking suspicion (it might have been less suspicion and more Matrix telling him but he couldn’t really tell) that he knew why Jazz was anticipating Prowl’s presence.

He also had a feeling Jazz didn’t even realise that reason himself yet. He kept his silence for now.

Prowl expected the Prime’s estate to be big. But he wasn’t prepared for just HOW big it was.

He was no minibot, but he certainly FELT like one, dwarfed by the entry gates alone. They had arrived in Thunderwing’s private cargo transport, but since no non-sentient aircraft were allowed to fly into and land in the Prime compound, they had to travel on pede from the entrance.

As it was, transport vehicles also weren’t allowed to just drive up to the doors. So they were not alone in their journey, and open-topped shuttles were ready and waiting to ferry them the rest of the way.

He probably should have guessed there would be something like that organised. Nobles being
expected to walk anywhere for practical reasons was an offense to them. It stood to reason the Prime of all mechs would have something civilised like hover-shuttles ready to ferry them about.

Prowl sat at attention by Thunderwing’s pedes when they got in, waiting as the transport was boarded by two other nobles and their alphas. Prowl acknowledged them with a look and nothing else. One was Brawl, who was excluded from the trusted list. The other he was familiar with but hadn’t spoken to much. Inferno had vouched for him, so he’d be hearing about the plan later anyway. Both alphas gave him what looked like an extremely wary stare before looking away. He didn’t think much of it.

Prowl was of course expected in public to maintain militaristic composure, so it wasn’t as if he could have greeted the other two more warmly. Especially around other nobles. Despite the fact nobles barely acknowledged him as anything more than an ornament before chatting with his master about other things entirely, he’d be scolded for moving. The other two didn’t have any such restrictions, and looked around freely, throwing more wary glances his way.

He hardly minded being conversational furniture though. He was used to it, and far more interested in taking in the sight of the gardens as the transport passed through them. It was frustrating not to be able to turn and focus on anything, but even with his head kept forward he could appreciate the giant crystal formations and ore trees as they went by.

Even as ingrained as his training was, he couldn’t stop himself looking upwards as they finally approached the palace. To say the place was enormous was an understatement. It was like a mountain built of shining metal and glass. The difference between Thunderwing’s compound and this palatial structure was incredible. It made Thunderwing’s place look like a dingy old bunker.

Guards lined the entrance, standing at attention much as Prowl and his pack did when visitors came. These guards were all employed Cybertronians though, not slaves. Prowl followed Thunderwing out of the transport behind the other two, both of which seemed as in awe of the place as he was.

Thunderwing paused to speak with what seemed to be the door-mech, the other nobles and their alphas going on without them. It gave Prowl a chance to glance back the way they’d come, realising just how enormous the grounds were by the fact he couldn’t even see the entry gates.

A twitch from his master’s wings had Prowl at his heel again in an instant, and the two of them ascended the front stairs. The amount of shining golden and silver surfaces that glittered at him nearly broke Prowl from his attentive stance again, but he did his best to ignore it.

You’ll be able to look all you want later, when you’re free.

The thought brought him a lot of comfort, more each time it occurred to him. All the things he and his pack could do once they were free… It both exhilarated and terrified him. So many possibilities, so much more they could do with their lives… all of it riding on this plan. All of it a vain daydream that might crush their spirits if it failed… might end in their deaths, or worse. But if it succeeded…

Prowl had been waiting on the threats. They hadn’t come yet, but they would. They always did. Thunderwing motivated by fear. Before any competition Prowl was told how his Twins would be sold, how Inferno and Thunderwing would be turned into labourers or interface slaves, how Bumblebee…

All of the horrors Thunderwing would inflict if they didn’t win were laid out before him. Every time. They had to win. The stakes were always too high to afford losing. They had never been higher than now.
Prowl clenched his jaw and cycled a deep, quieted ventilation. Not this time. Thunderwing could make his threats. Failure was NOT an option. He would MAKE this plan work.

It was a lot easier to go through the motions of standing and waiting at attention by Thunderwing when he was sobering himself with thoughts of how he was going to convince the other alphas that this was the best thing for them as well. He didn’t expect it to be easy after all. He’d needed convincing from Jazz in the beginning, now it was his turn to do the convincing.

He vaguely noted the other attendees as they arrived, ticking them off the list in his mind. They had been guided by the guards dotted throughout the hallways to a huge vaulted dining hall. Nobles milled about, making their usual conversation… veiled boasts, political small talk, little deals and partnerships and wheedling and social manoeuvring.

Prowl understood and loathed all of it. It was so much cloak and dagger, no one ever speaking plainly, no one ever being open or honest. Motives always hidden beneath layers of veneer. The noble class hardly lived up to their name, there was very little about them that was in any way ‘noble’.

With a few exceptions of course…

Prowl’s tail twitched before he could stop it, head turning ever so slightly in the direction of the three bots he had waited and wanted to see most.

Hound perked up without any kind of restriction, tail wagging madly as he nudged at Mirage to point Prowl out. Mirage, accompanied by Jazz, made excuses to the huge tank-looking bot they had been talking to, and made their way over.

“Aaaah Ambassador! It’s been four megacycles too long, how has Iacon been treating you, hmm? I hear they’ve piled you with extra work! You may have to return to my compound for another holiday soon, eh? And of course, Lord Mirage is always welcome as well.”

Prowl fought hard not to roll his optics at the oiled pleasantries Thunderwing laid on them. Externally he remained as still as ever, internally he felt his spark swell with joy to see them again. And then the little responsive swell of excitement from the sparklings.

//How’s the back Prowler?//

//Much improved. Only hurts if I’m doing too much, and even then it’s just an ache//

//Excellent. Ratch is gonna take a look at it later to make sure it’s all good//

Prowl stood a little taller and more attentively just from Jazz’s presence, having to viciously suppress the urge to wag his tail.

Hound sidled up to him while Jazz and Mirage were swept up into more small talk with Thunderwing, sniffing him subtly.

//Bitlets are coming along well. Seems you’re getting enough transfluid, offer to help still stands while I’m around and your back is feeling better//

Prowl raised an orbital ridge ever so slightly and sent an amused glyph across the line.

//=I might just take you up on that offer later, if we get a chance. Regretted not being able to before. Inferno and Trailbreaker are very good producers, but there’s still only two of them. Spreading the workload around doesn’t hurt, certainly helps to make strong frames//
Hound’s tail wagged unabashedly and he fluffed out his plating.

//Noticed Brawl here, they’ve been channelling all the untrusteds off to their holding room pretty quickly, Jazz said they’ll start leading away the others soon. We might be going soon too, just to give time between you being gone and Jazz excusing himself, so it doesn’t seem suspicious at all.//

Prowl gave the barest nod of acknowledgement. Within a breem, a tall, well-polished attendant in uniform colours came over and graciously explained to Thunderwing and Mirage that he would lead their alphas to the special area set up just for them.

Thunderwing had been buttered up enough by Jazz to not give a slag. Mirage gave Hound a quick ‘be a good boy and don’t cause too much trouble’, to which the green alpha responded with a whuff and shaking out of his plating.

They followed the attendant obediently, entering one of the servant’s passages. It was nowhere near as dingy or utilitarian as the ones at Thunderwing’s compound. The walls were bright and clean, there were no visible pipes or cables, and there was even decorative etching along the walls.

Once they were far enough away from the hall that they couldn’t hear the music anymore, the servant led them both into a small storage room off the corridor, checking the hall outside and closing the door.

“Sorry for the pretence, I’m Shadowstep. I work for Ambassador Jazz, he tells me he’s not had a chance to brief you, so he’s asked me to do it.”

Prowl finally relaxed his taut posture and sat, nodding. “What does he need me to do?”

“There’s not really anything extra he wants, it’s just details he hasn’t had a chance to let you in on yet. Now, Red Alert is currently in the hall where the trusted mechs are being led, just keeping an eye on everything, letting the other alphas know about what they’ll be doing in there. Optimus organised some pampering, you’re all getting polished up, some very nice energon selections, all that sort of thing. That’s going to happen BEFORE you give them your talk. You’ll be prompted when Jazz makes his way over, and if he can’t make it for whatever reason, he said he’ll comm you and you can start without him.”

Prowl nodded, rumbling slightly. “I’m hoping he makes it. He’s done this before, convincing us we should be free. I’m only going to be trying to repeat his sentiments. I might not do it as well as him, I’m not exactly practiced in public speaking.”

“You’ll be fine. All you have to do is that military walk up to the front of the room and everyone in it will sit at attention. I don’t think you realise how intimidating you are when you do that y’know.” Hound snickered.

Prowl gave him a slightly surprised look. “Oh. Well, whatever works I suppose. So… has he said what his contingency is if none of them agree to the plan?” he turned back to Shadowstep, looking apprehensive.

“Oh yeah, Optimus will be making his way there too. The excuse will be that the thing Jazz gets called away for is something he has to call Optimus away for. And the excuse is some Seeker noble throwing a massive hissy fit about not being invited and demanding entry. The seeker in question is Optimus’ friend, so he’ll be around just for show and to make it seem legit. And I mean, if Optimus can’t convince them… I think his plan was to just kidnap the lot of you and kick the nobles out of the palace with the guard force. The only reason that isn’t the MAIN plan is because your other pack members are all still at risk.”
“We couldn’t have just invited all the nobles to bring their packs tonight and do that anyway?”
Hound humphed. Shadowstep shook his head and crossed his arms.

“Listen, that’s what I said, but apparently Jazz has done the research and it would be A; super weird because no one throws ‘bring your whole pack’ parties because it’s a huge hassle to do it and B; there would still be a dangerous conflict, which they’d rather avoid.”

Prowl nodded. That sounded pretty reasonable, considering they could take away the packs on the sly during the hunting contest, and set up an ambush arrest more easily at a hunting lodge than in the palace.

“Was there anything else Jazz needed me to know?”

“No, I don’t think… wait, I lie, he did mention something about finding some time to talk with you privately before they took you back out to the main party. So there’s that. But I’m sure he’ll work that one out with you. Now then, I better show you to the right room.”

Prowl nodded, Hound doing the same but sending a quiet comm to him. //Damn… that means Jazz is probably going to be doing the donating huh?//

Prowl schooled his features carefully, trying not to make it obvious just how much he would like that. //Possibly. It’s going to be a long party, don’t despair too much//

As Shadowstep led them out of the storage room and back into the corridor, Hound threw Prowl a cheeky grin.

When they reached the hall, Prowl was surprised to find most alphas had already been brought in. Apparently the Prime’s staff ran like a well-oiled machine, and during their brief aside had herded in all the ones that had already arrived. Prowl and Hound padded in together, looking around and giving acknowledgements. It didn’t take long before most optics were on Prowl, expressions ranging from awe to apprehension to fear.

Prowl frowned slightly. //…Why am I getting the feeling everyone is suddenly in on something that I’m not? I thought that was supposed to be US.//

Hound looked about, slightly confused himself. //Not sure… oh, here comes Sundancer, you can ask him, he’s usually up on the gossip//

Prowl spotted his golden ex-mate and gave him a rather cold nod of acknowledgement. Despite this, Sundancer fairly pranced up, ears back and tail down slightly in submission, none of which hid his excitement.

“You ARE here! I hoped it was true that you’d be coming, I’ve been DESPERATE to know if it’s true, You DID take down a behemoth on your own, didn’t you?”

Prowl blinked, helm tilting slightly to the side. “I… yes? I suppose behemoth fits. His name was Grimlock.” Something clicked in his head and he glanced around again, noting the eager audials and optics trained on him. “Is THAT why everyone is acting so oddly about me?”

“Well of COURSE it is, Primus Prowl! No one’s ever heard of such a battle, there was even rumours circling that it’d killed you! I mean, CLEARLY those were exaggerated” Sundancer snickered, straightening up a bit as Prowl’s posture relaxed.

“I was there. It nearly did kill him.” Hound murmured soberly. It was clear from the look on his face that he wasn’t too fond of those memories.
“Yes, he did. I’m still recovering from the spinal injury I got in the fight.” Prowl added quietly, not particularly comfortable with all the other alphas standing around trying to listen in on the conversation. “I’m sure if you asked Octane he’d provide you with footage of the event, there’s no way he wouldn’t have obtained some. After all he does love to dote on you.” He added coolly, making it clear to Sundancer that he was still displeased about their last meeting.

In his spark he didn’t hate Sundancer. He was hurt that the other bot had essentially led him on, but he would forgive him… eventually. It was much easier to see him for what he was once the haze of enamour was gone, and it honestly didn’t surprise Prowl one bit that he’d been emotionally discarded.

Sundancer was, well… he loved easily. And he was easy to love. You just couldn’t count on him to keep loving back.

The golden bot took the hint and toned down his perkiness a bit, becoming a little more serious. “You’re going to be alright though, right? You got repairs and everything?”

“Recovery has been slow. If it wasn’t for Ambassador Jazz impressing upon Thunderwing how serious the injury was, It’s likely my spine would’ve broken in a more permanent way.” Prowl murmured, “And by the way the Twins are doing well, thanks for asking. Glad they’re still a top priority of yours.”

That last remark made even Hound wince slightly. Sundancer got the message and went back into a more submissive pose. “Good, yes, good to hear. I mean those two, they get a lot of their constitution from you so I don’t worry about them so much. They’re stronger than me, that’s for sure, which is just as well. Honestly I’m not sure why I’m here… Octane barely ever bothers going in hunting contests, isn’t this party for the hunting pack owners?”

“Yes, primarily, but they didn’t want to leave out the nobles who might be offended by not being invited.” Prowl explained, tone a little kinder now he’d satisfied himself with stinging Sundancer to his satisfaction.

The golden bot gave him a slightly curious look. “You seem to know more about this party than you’re letting on.”

“I do, but it will all be explained later. For now, I think Red Alert wants to talk to me.” He’d spotted the other bot looking flustered from across the room, glancing between him and some other mech Prowl couldn’t see.

“Yes ABOUT him… everyone I’ve spoken to says he isn’t an alpha, HE says he isn’t an alpha, so why is he here? He mentioned something about being employed, but our kind can’t BE employed…” Sundancer walked on his other side to Hound as they crossed a room that parted for them easily.

Prowl’s orbital ridges raised in surprise when he found what Red Alert was so anxious about.

“Hot Rod… what are you doing here? You’re not the alpha of your pack, where’s Magnus?”

Hot Rod’s plating fluffed up immediately, and he swung around with an indignant look that deflated slightly the moment he recognised who was talking to him.

“Yeah, well… I am now! My master brought me because he wanted ME to be alpha. I’m younger, faster, better looking… there’s no reason I shouldn’t be my pack’s alpha. And it’s RICH coming from THAT one, he’s not even got a PACK!”
The red and gold wolf jerked his head at Red Alert, who fluffed indignantly.

Prowl rumbled.

“Do not disrespect him, he was gifted to ambassador Jazz, and Jazz has employed him. For all intents and purposes, he is no longer a slave. Which means you can no more disrespect him without consequence than you could any servant working for the Prime.”

There was a lot of whispering after this statement, and Hot Rod looked utterly bewildered.

“It’s true.” Hound piped up, “Prowl manipulated Thunderwing into buying Red as a gift for Jazz, knowing Jazz would never enslave one of us. They both keep up appearances the same way Mirage and I do. You all KNOW Mirage hasn’t considered me a slave for vorns. Jazz has a payroll account for Red and everything.”

“Yeah, well… that’s NICE and all, but it doesn’t change the fact that everyone is treating me like I don’t have a right to be here!” Hot Rod huffed loudly, plating fluffing out again.

Prowl frowned. “You aren’t supposed to be here because Magnus is the one I know, the one I TRUST. You cannot call yourself an alpha just because your master has arbitrarily decided that-“

“You want to FIGHT me over it? Because I will! I’ll prove myself RIGHT now, behemoth killer! I’ll show you what kind of an alpha I am!”

A hush fell over the crowd of wolves, and a few backed up. But they weren’t looking at the posturing Hot Rod, their optics were fixed on the very calm, very rigid Prowl. Who was still just frowning.

Hound was the one who gave a low, calming rumble. “Pup you don’t wanna do that-“

“Don’t call me PUP! I’ve as much right to be here as you! MORE even, your master barely takes you hunting, too busy doing OTHER things with you I expect.”

“There is no need to try and insult others to prove yourself.” Prowl scolded quietly, and Hot Rod’s defiance turned on him again.

“I don’t need to insult I need to fight! None of you will take me seriously until I do, will you?”

“I’m not going to fight you.”

“Oh yeah? Why not? Scared I’ll win? That behemoth break your back too hard huh? Is that what you’re trying to hide, that you can’t keep your title anymore because you’re too old and your back’s given out?”

“You are testing my patience Hot Rod. It’s abundantly clear without you fighting ANYONE that you’re not yet fit to-“

“Test THIS!”

In a moment, the puffed up red and gold wolf leapt at Prowl. What happened next was too fast for most of the others there to follow. Hound leapt to the side just in time to not get hit himself.

There was a snarl, a yelp, and then deep, unhappy rumbling. HotRod was on his front, on the ground, neck pinned under one paw, Prowl’s other pressing down on his hackles, one back leg planted in the small of Hot Rod’s back.
Prowl’s head was down by the red and gold wolf’s audial, murmuring as Hot Rod made to struggle. He stopped with a yelp as claws dug into his hackles lightly.

“You need to stop. I am not going to hurt you, but if you continue to act like a pup I will ask Red to put you in time out, and you will not be joining the rest of us for the rest of the night, do you understand?”

Hot Rod growled defiantly before Prowl rested a little more of his weight on his hackles and he stilled. “M’NOT a pup.”

“Well then stop acting like one. This is not what alphas do. Do you KNOW what alphas do? They put their packs first. That is what this meeting is all about, that is why I would prefer Magnus was here, but instead your master has brought you. If you truly want to take up the mantle of alpha, fighting is not your priority. Your priority is learning from the other alphas here just what it is they do. The title is not given by a noble, it is earned amoung your own kind. It is earned by respecting your peers and knowing how to take the lead and make the best decisions for your pack. Do you understand?”

Hot Rod rumbled before squirming his head in the semblance of a nod. Prowl gave a whuff and released the slightly smaller bot, who staggered to his feet looking very dishevelled and sulky. The rest of the alphas standing around either looked shell-shocked, approving, or amused.

“I suggest, Hot Rod, that you listen to any advice Magnus has to give you. While he’s absent, I’m expecting you to be very attentive to what happens here tonight. It will be extremely important for you to listen and pass on information to the rest of your pack. It’s important that EVERYONE here does the same when the time comes.” Prowl spoke quietly, but there wasn’t a mech in the room that didn’t hear.

Looking very cowed, Hot Rod nonetheless presented himself submissively and nodded in acknowledgement.

“Right, well, now that you’ve sorted that out… everyone on the list is here, we can serve dinner.” Red Alert announced briskly, trotting off to the door that led to one of the servant’s passages and disappearing through it once he’d transformed to mech mode.

Sundance tilted his helm at the disappearing bot’s backplates. “Wait… did he just…”

“Yes. You can too if you’d like, no one’s going to mind. They’ll probably ask us to later when they do all the polishing and things.” Prowl answered distractedly, checking one of the fancy looking chronometers dotted about the hall. He’d barely been here two breems, it felt like a lot longer.

The crowd that had formed was dispersing now as the rest of the alphas settled down and finally decided they would like to give Prowl a bit of a wide berth for the moment.

“So what exactly did you mean by Magnus was supposed to be here because YOU trust him? It’s sounding an awful lot like you hand-picked us all to be here…” a cool, quiet voice piped up behind Prowl, who turned to find Chromia looking him up and down.

He inclined his head to her politely. “Long time no see. That’s because I did. Everyone in this room is here because I trust them.”

“Trust them to do what exactly? And since when does your master give you this much licence.”

“He doesn’t know anything about this. My trust is that neither will your master, or anyone else’s.”
Chromia looked a little taken aback by that, glancing about and shifting slightly closer. “And what is it you want to tell us all that our masters mustn’t know?”

“I’m going to tell you, but later. It will be an announcement, otherwise I’ll be wandering around the room repeating myself constantly, and I want to make sure everyone gets the same information all at once.”

Chromia looked slightly disappointed, but nodded in understanding. “So you won’t tell me how it was you got to hand-pick us either?”

Prowl flicked his audials in thought and tilted his helm from side to side. “It’s not that you can’t know, it’s just that it’ll all become clear when I explain it anyway. Otherwise it’s a long story. You’ll just have to trust me that it’s worth the wait.”

Chromia chuckled. “Well, you trusted us enough to get us in this room, suppose it’s only fair I trust you back. Oh, and by the way, I admire your restraint. If HotRod had cheek-talked me like that he’d have more than just dented pride and hackles.”

“Well, you know… his master would have thrown a fit if I’d really scratched him up.” Prowl murmured with a slight smirk. “In all seriousness though, he needs far more experience to make the level of alpha necessary to reign in Springer. Honestly, don’t know what his master is thinking.”

“Probably that he can frag his pack into line” Hound murmured beside them, getting a snort out of Chromia.

Movement caught Prowl’s optic, and he turned to see a mech waving at him from a servant’s passage. “That might not be too far from the truth… ah… if you’ll excuse me, I think I have an appointment with that bot…”

Chromia’s head tilted and she glanced between Hound and the mech Prowl headed towards. “Appointment? How does he have an- you know what, I’m not going to bother asking. The mech’s a mystery and if I don’t find out during his big reveal, it’s probably not worth me even knowing.”

Hound snickered, “It’s all part of that long story. He’s not willing to tell it more than once but I can give you what I know. I mean I was THERE the whole time, I’m just not privy to all the conversations Prowl had with Jazz.”

“Having fun in there? Noticed on the monitors you had to diffuse one of the other alphas, should we be getting him out of there and into time-out?”

“No, he’s alright. He’s not supposed to be here, his master’s made leadership decisions about that pack I wasn’t aware of. I’ve brought him into line, the only thing that worries me is he won’t pass on information properly.”

Ratchet gave a concerned hum at that. “Well, it looked like you schooled him pretty well. I know I’d be towing the line if someone did that to me. Anyway, how’s the back? You seem to be moving well, not feeling too stiff are you?”

The medic opened the door to a small room, this one a private sitting room of some sort, and ushered Prowl in. 

“It’s not bad. Pain has decreased significantly, it bothers me a lot less, though I haven’t tried any
serious training yet.”

“If I had my way you wouldn’t be doing ANY training, but I’m aware of our deadline. Can you walk in root mode yet? I would hope so but the less you do the better. I’ll need you to transform for me anyway so I can get into your back-plates.”

Prowl nodded, changing and lying on the long, plush lounge with his back to the medic. “It hurts to stand for long periods in bipedal mode, I’ve been remaining in wolf-mode as much as possible, per your instructions.”

“I wish more of my patients were like you. ESPECIALLY Prime. Bot would defy my instruction even if he were on the verge of joining the well.” Ratchet chuckled, servo resting on Prowl’s shoulder and grunting softly as he knelt down to get level with his spinal plating.

Prowl hadn’t actually realised until he’d met Ratchet in the alloy just how old he must be. His plating was pristine, but the tell was in his field. Prowl had started life with a very old owner, and had learnt to tell the difference between young to mid age sparks and those with more age very quickly.

As skilled, gentle servos began to open up his plating, Prowl wondered if he dared to ask questions of the medic. Considering he seemed to be on Jazz’s side in his opinion of their treatment, he supposed the mech was not averse to him breaking the usual slave rules.

“How long have you been the Prime’s medic?”

“I was ‘promoted’ to it against my will about three decavorn ago, back when Sentinel was still Prime. Before that I was quite happy running two practices out in Rodion, that’s where I knew Optimus from before he was Prime. One was my official practice, the other was by night fixing bots who couldn’t afford to be fixed.”

Prowl’s interest was piqued by the last statement, and he paid no attention to the strange pulse applied to his back that stopped him feeling anything that was going on around that area. “How did you meet Optimus there?”

“He used to bring me bots who needed fixing. Usually drug addicts who he thought could get clean with a little help. It wasn’t glamorous work, but it was far more helpful than pandering to the dings and scrapes on the paintjobs of the rich who swanned around my day hospital. That’s also how I met Jazz, Optimus brought him to me and we got him fixed up. I’m sure he mentioned telling you he was on the streets, I don’t know how much he told you exactly. Better off hearing how THAT whole first encounter went from him.”

There was a lilt of grumpy amusement as Ratchet spoke, and Prowl found himself growing fonder of this medic. “I’ll certainly have to ask. So, how did Sentinel force you out of that and into service for him?”

“Well, you can’t really refuse an order from the Prime. That kinda thing gets your practice shut down and your name disgraced, and I can’t continue fighting the good fight like that, so there wasn’t really much choice involved at all. I took the position and used the extra money to keep that free clinic running on the sly. Since Optimus received the matrix, I’ve had the freedom to go back and continue that work, but only occasionally. These day’s I’ve found a whole lot of problems I can spend my time chasing up in terms of improving Cybertronian healthcare planet-wide. There are perks to being friends with Optimus. And now—” Prowl was only aware of the exposing of his spinal cable because of the slight movement of air across it from Ratchet’s vents.

“-My current focus is making sure you and all of your kind receive the medical attention you need.
Which is going to be no small feat. This is looking good though, more advanced than I expected… do you know if your mechalycancy affords you any kind of self-healing boost?”

“I think so, to a small degree. It helps that Thunderwing has not been asking anything of me since Jazz left. The only incident since his absence has been a trip to one of Shockwave’s labs. I have no idea what was done, I was sedated for the whole thing. I’m assuming it was a general tune up and possibly a detailed repair on the area around my spinal injury. Oh, and probably updates to our control modules.”

Ratchet rumbled angrily. “Ah, yes, THOSE. I got a look at the specs Jazz sent to Wheeljack. Nasty stuff, and extremely illegal on regular bots. They’ll be illegal on the lot of you once we’re done with all this cloak and dagger nonsense. I can’t tell you how angry I am that I can’t even do so much as a scan on you to check your overall health. Jazz warned me about the probability of detectors planted in your systems. Still find it ridiculous that Thunderwing focuses on digitally locking you down but not doing anything to prevent me opening up your plating physically. Just as well in this case I suppose.”

Prowl mirred, tail twitching slightly as he felt the vague sensations of Ratchet administering some kind of cold substance on his back. “I’m mostly grateful this hurts a lot less than last time. Also he does have parts of me physically locked down. Chestplates specifically, he worries mostly about digital tampering, it’s more common. The spark is a precaution most nobles take to stop us making unauthorised sparklings.”

“Wh- are you serious? Primus almighty I didn’t think Jazz was serious about that, I figured it was hyperbole when he talked about forcing you to… no wonder Optimus has been so anxious about all this. I don’t mean to delve into upsetting topics but, does that mean he’s forced you to have sparklings before?”

“Yes. I told Jazz all about it the first time we spoke. I’ve had a few litters, to different mechs each time. The alpha I was speaking to before, Chromia, I sparked her many vorns ago. Neither of us know where any of those offspring are now, they were sold as soon as they reached second frame. That’s common… for us… should I be telling you any of this while you’re working on my spinal cord?”

Prowl was looking over his shoulder at Ratchet, who had stopped what he was doing and raised his hands away from Prowl’s back. He looked absolutely livid.

“I just… need a moment. I’ve finished the delicate work, I’ve set some special solder into what’s left of the cracks, that should help with the micro-fracture damage… Right now I’m just trying to remind myself why I can’t go on an interface equipment removal spree through that room of nobles out there.”

“Would it help if I emphasised how important it is that the plan go ahead smoothly so that all of our packs are removed from harm? After that you can remove as many interfaces as you like, most of them will be arrested, it should make it easier. Jazz already said he can help us track all our wayward sparklings once this is over. He believes there’s records of all of it somewhere, even if it’s fractured between different owners.”

“You’re right, yes… my wrath can wait. Right now I need to close this up and let you get back in there. I honestly thought Jazz was just making predictions about how far those aftholes might go if we didn’t put an end to this, I didn’t realise he was talking about something that’s already been happening to you.”

Prowl nodded. “I take it he’s prone to exaggeration then, I can assure you he’s dead serious in this
“Yes, well, there won’t be any more of THAT going on once this is all over. You make sure and take care of yourself until then. If he makes you train, try and keep the strenuous activity to a minimum. No twisting motions or jerky movements if you can help it. Low level exercise for longer periods should help improve the area rather than impede its repair.”

The alpha nodded and they sat in silence for a few moments as Ratchet finished closing up the complex back-plating. When he was done he sent some heat into his palm and laid it over the area for a few moments. “Do you have free access to a shower with hot water?”

“Yes, we have one in the den.”

“Good. I’d recommend sitting with your back to the spray for ten minutes a day with the water as hot as you can stand. That should make sure the repairs and area around it sets properly. Sometimes with injuries like this you get lasting pain with components misaligning ever so slightly. Ends up in a domino effect and chronic pain. That should do you for now… are you getting extra energon or has Thunderwing denied you? You can sit up again by the way.”

Prowl pushed himself up and turned so he was sat facing the medic. “Yes, he’s still providing me with extra. He tends to leading up to competitions anyway.”

He felt bad for lying to the mech. He was honestly relieved Jazz had thought scanning too dangerous for Ratchet to attempt. The medic would know immediately that he was carrying and take the information back to both Jazz and Prime, he was sure of it. But no scans meant no way of knowing… unless he could read it in his field, and so far he’d made no indication that he had.

“Just as well, thought I’d have to load up your subspace with medgrade cubes or something… wait do you even have subspace pockets?”

“Yes, just three. Most of us do, mainly for carrying things for our owners.”

Ratchet rolled his optics “I suppose we should be grateful at least for their utterly aft-headed laziness in that regard. That at least makes Wheeljack’s job easier, he can expand existing subspace faster than he can install new ones. And as much as I would love to keep asking you more, I should really let you get back in there, I think they’ve started serving the energon. You won’t want to miss that, Jazz and Optimus picked out some special blends for you lot.”

Prowl nodded, but before he transformed, a thought occurred to him. “Thankyou for all your help, again… I do have a question though. Am I able to use this room again throughout the night?”

Ratchet nodded. “Absolutely, if you need somewhere to go to lie down for a while, no one is going to mind you coming in here.”

It wasn’t exactly deception, so he really shouldn’t feel bad about it. This wasn’t exactly resting, but it was for his health… so to speak.

More the health of the sparklings. Still a valid excuse. At least that’s what he told himself as Hound teased himself into his valve and began to thrust carefully. Prowl moaned low and deep, tail twitching as he tried to press back into the green mech’s hips. He couldn’t really move much, but that
was probably better for his back.

Hound had suggested he bend over the back of the lounge, hips supported by the top of it so his weight wasn’t resting on his spine. It was working too, he could hold his torso up on his arms, supported on the seat of the lounge, without his spine taking much weight at all.

It did mean he had limited hip control, but Hound was doing a good job of taking care of that anyway. If the position wasn’t interesting enough, the fact they were both in root mode was. Prowl hadn’t experienced Hound’s skill with his servos yet, and he ended up pressing a fisted servo to his mouth to stifle his moans as one found his spike.

It didn’t take long before the deep rutting and strong strokes along his shaft set him off, Hound going with him and nuzzling at a winglet. The hot ventilations against his sensors made Prowl keen, legs quivering as deliciously hot transfluid flooded him. It was very quickly taken up by his gestation chamber, making him hungry for the next overload before his first had even ebbed.

Because it wasn’t a carrying heat, and he’d just ingested extremely good quality energon, Prowl’s overloads would be easily obtained. Much to his relief.

“Ready to go again huh?” Hound chuckled as he felt Prowl squirming for more friction.

“Please”

“Always ready to”

The servo holding the base of Prowl’s spike shifted, two digits still holding the base firm while the others began to massage his knot. Prowl groaned and tried to shift his pedes to get a better footing, legs spread a little wide to get much purchase.

Hound’s other servo, which had been on his hip, slid around his waist and front. The green alpha mouthed at a winglet as he lifted Prowl by the waist slightly and ground against him. Prowl choked out another keen around his fist, valve fluttering around the thick, knotted spike buried in him.

Hound had all the length necessary to tease his valve terminus endlessly, but much the way Prowl had when they first met, he pulled back more than he pushed, until his spike popped free.

Very little satisfied Prowl as much as being penetrated by a partially knotted spike. Having it done with an almost fully knotted spike was even better. Having Trailbreaker as a berth partner was the main reason he could even take such a stretch, since he was a much larger than average wolf.

Hound went slowly despite the fact Prowl was very clearly able to take it, even whining to encourage him to speed up. But the other alpha knew what he was doing, and continued to press in and pull out slowly, glossa lapping its way towards a winglet hinge.

The moment he reached it, he delved his glossa in and went back to grinding against Prowl’s ceiling node, squeezing and palming the other alphas’ barely deflated knot.

Prowl came again, loudly, and stiffened. His winglets quivered as he felt Hound fill him once more, his own transfluid running down the back of the lounge. This time though, Hound did not stop grinding against him.

The glossa teasing at his winglet hinge moved to mouth the underside of the other one, servo on his spike angling it so the head rubbed against the lounge back.

Prowl panted and moaned, hips jerking as much as they could into the ministrations as his overload
rolled straight into another build-up of charge. Without warning, the arm around his waist shifted, servo moving over his chestplates and arm supporting much of his midriff. Hound’s mouth left his winglet before the green mech hoisted Prowl upright.

Prowl got his pedes under him as much as he could but Hound didn’t make him stand, instead carefully sinking onto his knees on the floor with Prowl straddling his thighs, other servo still firmly grasping the base of Prowl’s spike.

The arm supporting his chest held him tight, Hound still grinding up against his ceiling node until the tip of his spike nudged into the gestation tank uptake valve. Once it did, Hound bit down on the top of a winglet lightly and overloaded into Prowl again.

The black and white alpha gasped, vocaliser glitching to silence from the sudden and intense overload triggered by hot transfluid going straight into his tank. The winglet bite certainly helped, and by the time Hound was done, he was a weak-kneed mess. Quite literally a mess since he was now covered in his own transfluid.

Hound managed to sink to fully sit without jarring Prowl at all, and leant back enough that he could release the other alpha’s chest and support them both on that arm. The black and white mech remained leaning against him, fans whirring hard. Transfluid was still leaking hot down Hound’s servo where it held the other’s spike, and he gave it a few more milking motions. It drew a low groan from Prowl, who quivered but didn’t try to incite another charge build-up.

“That hit the spot?”

Hound rumbled in amusement when Prowl merely responded with a gurgling sort of noise and twitched his tail and winglets.

“Good. Maybe now you can relax a bit. You’re way too high-strung, I mean I don’t blame you but I’m still happy to help you unwind.”

Prowl rumbled and shifted his legs slightly to get them in a less awkward splay. “I appreciate it… immensely.”

“So do I, unwinding you is fun.” Hound licked at the spot on the winglet he’d nipped, making it quiver again.

Prowl gave another rumble and whuffed. “Thankyou for being careful with me. Ratchet only told me two cycles ago not to make any jerking motions and here I am ignoring him like a fool. Thank primus one of us has restraint.”

Hound laughed loudly at that. “ME? The restrained one? I don’t think you know how funny that is coming from you. My restraint was as much about driving you nuts and getting you off quicker as it was me trying to avoid making your back hurt. To be honest, id’ve done it even if you were in perfect health, I’m just a huge tease in the berth.”

Prowl chuckled as well, a servo patting at Hound’s thigh. “Well, that’s not so bad. Inferno and Trailbreaker are very good partners, but they’re not very practiced in the art of denying me things. Good to know there’s someone who can take me in servo when I need it.”

“Aaaanytime. Well, anytime that I’m not doing it for ‘Raj. Mates come first after all. I’m sure he wouldn’t refuse extending an invitation to you to join our berth jointly some time, but honestly I’m not sure Jazz would be pleased unless he was present too. Eeeeven then…” Hound tilted his head from side to side in a ‘not so sure’ gesture.
Prowl looked over his shoulder at him with a little confusion. “Why do you say that?”

A raised orbital ridge was the first response he got. “Mech… you can’t tell me you haven’t noticed Jazz making optics at you? He is interested in you in SO many more ways than just as a friend.”

They sat in silence for a few moments as Prowl ruminated on that. It wasn’t exactly a revelation… but to hear it from someone else certainly confirmed that he hadn’t just been imagining something where there was nothing.

“Are you sure that it’s more than just… well… a personal interest in my wellbeing?”

“Listen, I haven’t been speaking freely with Jazz for most of the time I’ve known him. I only started doing that around the time he wanted me to get him in your den. But I have known him long enough to gauge his moods, and I am telling you right now he is interested in far more than just your wellbeing. Whether he wants to admit it or not, and he probably has a guilt complex over it, but all the same… he wants to be with you and I don’t think he knows how.”

Prowl cycled a long ventilation, head thunking back against Hound’s shoulder. “I don’t think I know how either. I think… we may have to wait until this is all over to figure it out. For starters… he’s not going to be happy about me not telling him about the sparklings.”

“No, probably not, but I don’t think it’s going to put that big of a dent in his desire. Might even increase it” Hound murmured the last part, and Prowl could hear the cheeky little grin, even if he couldn’t see it.

“Alright, enough speculation about how much Jazz may or may not want to be my mate. I still need your advice on how to address everyone.”

By the time Jazz sent Prowl the glyph signalling that he would be coming soon, every wolf-mech in the room had already been shined to the highest presentation standard. With the exception of Prowl and Hound, who were amoung the last after their little sojourn to the private room.

The frag and advice had both helped to calm his nerves significantly, even the cleanup afterward had helped to ground him and get his thoughts in order. They had ended up cleaning the room a lot more thoroughly than themselves, because Prowl would be dead before he left a room in the Prime compound with any trace of his transfluid in it.

The mech who did their detailing was thankfully very discreet, making no mention of the scuffs they both sported in each other’s colours. And none of the other alphas in the room were going to care much because casual fragging between all of them was common as copper trees.

Not only had Hound helped him prepare, but so had the buffing to his surprise. He’d never had a detailing session that was so relaxing, he almost didn’t want to move from under the soft mop working the wax across his plating when the text came.

Nevertheless, he thanked the bot and stood, already in root mode. Every other alpha had changed back to wolf mode when their buffing was done, so when he strode through the room, it was very obvious. And very attention grabbing for more than just the height difference.

He’d been intimidating enough the first time he’d walked in. Now that he was relaxed and polished, Prowl looked less like a slave and more like a noble himself. The loosely militaristic walk Hound had suggested only helped to give him the air of a master.
When he reached the dias-like raised walkway at the head of the room, he didn’t even have to ask for attention. In fact he was surprised when he turned to see that every alpha in the room had moved to stand at attention, all optics on him.

It was as unnerving as it was relieving. Outwardly, Prowl looked as authoritative as he ever did. Inwardly, he was just hoping that he was going to be enough to convince them of their duty.

“I know you’re all wondering what I was talking about before, when I said you are here because I trust you. You were all chosen to be in this room for a very specific reason, and it has to do with the future of all our kind.”

Prowl moved his gaze around the small crowd, optics meeting those of the bots he was addressing without hesitation. “I want to get to the point of this meeting, but I must first ask that none of you reveal anything that is said here to your masters. NONE of it. Any one of you letting slip what we have planned will jeopardise the safety of every single pack on Cybertron. I know that sounds like an exaggeration, but I have never been more serious. Many of us will die if our masters know what we are doing. This is where my trust of you comes in.”

He paused to scan the faces turned to him, to see if there was hesitation in any of their optics. When he found only alarmed curiosity, he continued.

“The Prime is making preparations so that we will no longer be slaves. We will be free. As I’m sure many of you will be wondering, how we will do that without several of our masters attempting to kill us is what this whole plan is about.”

“Waaaait wait wait… you’re dead serious?... US? Free mechs? There is no WAY! We’re… we’re animals, we have to be controlled… does the Prime not realise we’ll be turned out into the wilderness by other cybertronians? They’re NEVER going to see us as equals!”

The mech who had spoken, Windcharger, looked panicked and disbelieving. He was looking around at the other alphas, seemingly to find support for his protest, and a few of them nodded, looking back to Prowl.

The black and white mech raised his servo for quiet, and despite their apparent fear, they gave it to him.

“That was the same question I asked when Ambassador Jazz told me that he wanted to free us. The Prime is not so callous as to expect us to fend for ourselves when he puts this order through. Nor is he foolish enough to leave us to the mercy of our masters. Before the plan to get us safely away from them was fully conceived, Optimus worked on providing us with accommodation, and allowances. He already has the support structures well under way.”

“How can we trust him? The last Prime killed and melted every single one o’ his pack down when he died. What guarantee do we have that this one ain’t trying to hoard us away from our masters and do the same? What if he’s tryin’ to one-up the last one?” Ironhide rumbled.

He was one of the larger bots there, and possibly the oldest. His voice carried a lot of weight among the alphas, and right now a good deal of them looked as if they sided with his speculation.

Prowl respected Ironhide a great deal, even if they didn’t often speak. He met his optics unflinchingly as he spoke, knowing the other bot would be reading him for any sign of a lie.

“When Jazz first came to my den, I thought he was nothing more than a tourist. A noble outside the circle of owners, someone who only saw us as a novelty. When he met with me the first time, I came
to learn that he was actually far more interested in our kind and our ways than he was in anything my master had to show him. The longer he stayed at my master’s compound, the more involved he became with my pack, and with myself. Everything he did was in the interest of helping us. He is the only reason I stand here to talk to you now... Who of you saw recordings of my fight with Grimlock?"

A few paws raised, Hound and Chromia’s waving highest since both had actually been at the arena. Ironhide’s was as well, much to Prowl’s relief.

“Then most of you saw the damage that was done. The torsion nearly severed my spinal cord. Jazz was the one thing that stopped Thunderwing making my injury a permanent disability. He didn’t just convince him to let me rest, he came into my den and performed surgery with instructions from the Prime’s medic. HE is the reason I am standing here and he is the reason we may finally have a chance to escape the prisons they have made for us, not just in their mansions, but in our own frames and sparks. And Jazz isn’t the only one willing to help us, some of you saw me disappear earlier with a red and white mech… that was Ratchet, Prime’s medic. He is not only kind, but he treats us with respect. He sees us as people, not animals. He was making sure my spine is healing the way it should. He cares, the same way Jazz and Optimus do.”

Prowl’s focus was on Ironhide as he spoke, and he watched the expression behind his optics change. What he didn’t see was the way the rest of the alpha’s expressions changed with him.

There was a moment of silence before Hound stepped forward, changing to root mode and addressing the crowd. “I’ve known Jazz longer than Prowl has, and he has never gone back on his word. Optimus has known him since before he was Prime, Optimus pulled him off the streets himself. Jazz is like US, he didn’t start out life as a noble, and he knows slavery when he sees it… because of the rules of etiquette we’re forced to observe, it was a while before he knew we were more than anibots. Up until he saw Prowl’s pack and got suspicious. The MOMENT he realised we were sentient, he began devising a way to free us. If you trust Prowl and I, then you can trust Jazz. He has gone above and beyond for Prowl and his pack, he is ready to do the same for all of us.”

“But what about the Prime? How do we know he ISN’T trying to use this ambassador and his medic to collect us, like Ironhide said?” This time it was Highbrow who spoke.

“Prime isn’t like that. He’s the real thing, a true Matrix bearer, and beyond that he was an enforcer. He has no interest in the things nobles do, he doesn’t want to own us, he wants to help us.” Hound responded calmly, but he could see the doubt still in many faces.

Prowl drew his winglets up. “I have spoken with the Prime. While it was on a communicator, and I couldn’t read his field, it became obvious to me very quickly that he is nothing like our masters. This Prime treated me and my pack with nothing but respect… something no other Prime has done, no other Prime would even DREAM of. The importance of this is critical, all of you need to realise that we are not going to get another chance at this. This is it. We have the most powerful bots on Cybertron willing to help us, something that has never happened before and may not happen again. If we don’t take this chance, all that is left for us is pain, and death.”

The frankness with which Prowl spoke silenced and sobered the other alphas again, and they shared looks of comprehension. Prowl decided to ram home the point.

“I know not all of you have cruel owners. The reason you are all here, and some of the other alphas who are decent mechs are not, is because some of them love their masters too much. Those with kind masters do not understand what it is to live under the threat of pain every cycle. For those of you here who also do not live this way, I need to make this very clear... I am not the only one who is threatened with having their pack members sold if they fail to please. I am not the only one who’s
offspring are held ransom to gain compliance in all matters. I am not the only one used and abused for their master’s pleasure. Some of us have the threat of our masters inflicting that on our pack members, on our offspring… Too many of us. And until now, we never had the chance to escape this.”

He let the reality sink in, looking at every alpha he knew had not faced these problems. Even some of those who’s masters were known to be cruel were giving him horrified looks. He wasn’t exactly sure why, but he didn’t dwell on it.

“We do not deserve this. It does not matter if we have never known another life. That doesn’t mean this is right. You all know that, whether consciously or not. We have never had a choice, there has been no structure to help us overcome our exploitation, until now.”

“So how are we doing this? What’s the plan?”

Prowl was both surprised and approving when he realised Hot Rod was the one speaking. He acknowledged him, inclining his head. “I’m not sure how many of you know the details of the upcoming competition, but it’s a cover for the operation to get us away from our owners so that Prime can announce the new law. Whatever events end up going ahead, pairs hunting will be last. It is during the pairs hunt that Prime’s people will evacuate all the packs to safety. The grand hunting range is being used, but the place is being renovated to accommodate both the amount of contestants and the plans.”

“What about those of us in the field or kept by our master’s side during spectating? How will they keep us from getting killed by our owner in a blind rage?”

Prowl was not surprised to hear Chromedome ask that question. He knew the orange and tan alpha’s master was a sadist, and it wouldn’t surprise him if Trepan tried to kill his entire pack immediately after hearing the law put into place. He also knew Trepan was more of a watcher than a participant, it was unlikely he’d enter the pairs contest. Before Prowl could answer, a voice piped up behind him.

“For starters, my special taskforce is gonna be in the room when the law gets enacted. Secondly, we’re gonna have all the alphas lined up for ‘display’ in the awards hall, physically distanced from your masters. On top of that, Prime’s guard will be in the same room, ready to arrest every noble in there. We’re not gonna leave any of you exposed.”

Prowl was surprised by the flood of joy and relief at hearing Jazz’s voice. He turned to find him walking to his side from the exit Red Alert had been flitting in and out of all night.

The rest of the alphas went quiet, clearly unsure of how much leeway they had around this mech. He was so highly ranked, and despite Prowl speaking of him as trustworthy, many of them couldn’t help the ingrained reaction of averting their eyes and acting submissive.

“Everyone, this is Jazz. Please feel free to treat him as if he were one of us.” Prowl tried to ease the tension that had sprung up, hoping his own very welcoming demeanour towards the ambassador would show the rest of them they didn’t need to worry.

“What… what about if we don’t want to leave our owners? If you’re arresting all of them… do we not have a choice?” Sundancer’s voice was quiet, and sounded almost betrayed. He was almost completely ignoring Jazz, looking at Prowl as if he’d personally done this to hurt him.

Jazz looked to Prowl, deferring the question to him. He was glad to know the history between them, because it meant he knew full well that that was a question not meant for him.
“We have to get everyone out for safety reasons. Just because every noble will be taken into custody, it does not mean they will all be prosecuted. Those of you who wish to return to your masters can tell us so. We will make a note, your masters will be investigated and educated. If they are found to be innocent of severe mistreatment, then they will merely be told what they can and cannot ask of you under the law, and you will be able to return to them. But you won’t be living with them as slaves anymore. You will be employed, appropriately housed, and treated with the same rights as regular cybertronians.”

The look of anguish on Sundancer’s face eased, until Prowl made a sound indicating he wasn’t done. “You need to be prepared for the eventuality that your masters may not WANT to take you back under the new conditions. You cannot live with a noble if they do not wish to comply, or if they refuse to take you back… even if you want to stay with them.”

“So what happens to those of us who won’t be going back? You said the Prime has our accommodation sorted out… are we supposed to come live here? What happens during alignment?” It was Chromedome speaking again, still sounding anxious.

Jazz glanced at Prowl, who gave him a slight nod. “You won’t be staying here. Prime’s set aside a small compound of apartments he’s acquired just for you guys to live in. Right now the layout is one floor to a pack, and the compound is being renovated to make it self-contained. There will be lockdowns during alignments. We don’t want it to be a prison, and we’re not entirely sure yet how we’ll deal with making sure you’re all inside the compound before alignments take effect, but we want to hire a team dedicated to working with you on that. That’s what we have on the agenda for after the law goes into effect. That, and going to liberate packs in non-threatening households. All the ones not at this party basically. Oh, and we’ll be workin’ on compiling a database of where the pit all your pups got sent off to so you can all re-unite with lost sparklings.”

Prowl actually turned to look at Jazz in surprise at the last part. That wasn’t something they’d covered in any of their meetings, but to be fair, a lot of planning had gone on without him during their time apart.

Jazz gave him a grin and a half shrug “Sorry I didn’t mention that one earlier. Optimus and I only got as far as projected plans for all this in the last megacycle or so.”

“Where are the apartments?” Rodimus chimed in excitedly. Clearly he was very much for the whole idea if his tone was anything to go by.

“Outer suburbs of Iacon, right on one of the major transport routes. Makes gettin’ around pretty easy.”

“What about our control modules? Can’t our masters just set them off even when we’re not next to them?” Windcharger’s question was followed by several noises of agreement.

“And those of us with kill switches.”

Chromedome’s addition was met with less agreement and more alarm. Apparently several of the other alphas didn’t even know those were a thing.

“We’re workin’ on it. Wheeljack’s got a patch to disable the pain and immobility modules, kill switch is a little tougher but he says it can be done. We’ll be administering the patches on the day under the guise of Ratchet doing all the anti-cheat checks. Patches won’t be effective immediately, you’ll have to turn them on just before the announcement is made, otherwise any of the nobles might get wise to something being wrong.”
“Woah, wait, how in the pit didja get enough specs on those modules to make blocking patches for 'em? I’ve known bots who tried to hack their own code to turn those things off. None of ‘em could even isolate the units in their own systems to try.” Warpath chimed in, giving Jazz a slightly dubious look.

Prowl flicked his winglets, Jazz looking to him and remaining silent. “Sunstreaker graciously allowed Jazz to deep-dive his code in order to obtain them—“

Prowl was cut off by several mechs going “HE WHAT?” He waited a moment with a look of slight disapproval until they let him continue.

“-Yes, Sunstreaker did, voluntarily. And as you’re all perfectly aware, Sunstreaker does not trust easily. He certainly doesn’t let just anyone plug into him. The fact I was in danger did play a part, as did the factor that it was too dangerous to attempt it on my systems as they are most likely monitored and full of code tripwires. Thunderwing is eternally paranoid about the possibility of rivals tampering with me in some way—“

“But if he got the specs for a kill module from Sunstreaker…”

Prowl turned understanding optics to Sundancer, who looked far more horrified than Prowl had ever seen him.

“Yes. Sideswipe probably has one as well, and I most certainly do. We’re applying the patches broadly, everyone will get all three whether you have any of them or not. Some of you may find later that you had one or more installed in you when you weren’t aware of it. No matter how kind your masters are, alignments mean we are all of us capable of killing against our own control. Modules are life insurance policies to our owners. Though for some of us they are also just tools of oppression.”

He glanced at Chromedome sympathetically, the other mech’s expression saying enough before he looked away to tell Prowl he knew exactly what he went through.

“Alright, so you an’ your pack all trust Jazz and Ratchet and Prime with yer lives. You’ve clearly had time to get to know em an’ all that slag, but as for the rest of us… it’s a tall order, Prowl, askin’ us to trust our entire pack’s wellbein’ to total strangers while we stand in a room with the bots who could turn on us the moment they know they don’t own us anymore.” Ironhide rumbled, many of the others nodding in agreement.

Prowl’s voice was soft when he answered. “I know. I know I am asking a lot. This isn’t the perfect plan, but it’s the best we can do considering the scale of what we’re attempting. If we manage to pull this off… how many of your pack members are stifled by being kept as nothing but pets? I can name any number of wolf-mechs right now who could excel in other fields if they weren’t enslaved. And the risk involved in trusting Prime and his people with their safety is comparatively much smaller than just announcing that keeping us is illegal and hoping our masters won’t kill us all for knowing too much. Or simply out of spite.”

“If it helps, I’m part of the co-ordination plan too. Just saying. I’m part of the screening process for bots who will be directly responsible for escorting and transporting packs to the new residences.” Red Alert stepped up beside Jazz, currently in wolf mode again. “We are not excluded from this process. We are being given the chance to help ourselves, not just being mech-handled out of slavery and into a new kind of entrapment. We have to start self-governing to some degree, we’ll need to organise a means of getting un-informed packs to tag along with the plan on the day. We also have to deal with the threat posed by hostile packs, because Prime’s people are never going to be able to deal with that as well as we are.”
“Yeah, well, speakin’ of leadership and organisin’… right now we’re a bunch of bickerin’ alphas. We aren’t exactly a full representative of our whole caste, but I reckon for the purposes o’ this plan, we’re gonna need to elect a head of this pack… some kinda, PRIME alpha, or somethin’.” Ironhide whuffed, locking eyes with Prowl and inclining his head to him. “And I know where I’m placin’ my trust and my vote.”

Prowl was taken aback slightly, “I… that wasn’t something we had intended on, but-“

“I vote Prowl too. If he can trust us… we should be able to trust him” Chromia piped up.

“I’m gonna have to second that motion.” Hound grinned, Prowl giving him a slightly helpless look.

He had not at all expected a leadership vote to be taken, let alone for himself to be nominated. He looked on a little helplessly as every other alpha looked to one another and nodded.

“All those in favour, say aye” Red Alert quipped.

The room was filled with a chorus of ayes.

“All those against, nay?”

The room was silent.

Red Alert nodded and turned to Prowl. “Looks like you’re the Prime Alpha on this operation.”

Prowl whuffed, winglets and tail twitching slightly as he assessed what kind of a situation he was in here. It didn’t take him long to square up and look back to Ironhide. “I will do my best for all of you. We are no longer a collection of family units trying to co-ordinate. We’re a people, and we’ll need to work like one huge pack to get through this. Everyone here has a responsibility to our caste now, for the sake of our future. More importantly… for the futures of our packs and our pups.”

“It seems my endorsement may not be necessary then?”

Prowl had completely forgotten the Prime was supposed to be coming, but he turned with a welcoming wag of his tail as he recognised the voice. The greeting that he received in return was bizarre… it wasn’t just the smile and nod from Optimus, it came through his field in a particularly strong wave. As if he was brushing against the field of an old friend, even though he’d never met Optimus in the alloy.

The Prime was also far taller than he had realised, moving to stand on his other side to Jazz and laying a servo on his shoulder gently. Prowl felt a tingle run through his systems at the contact, plating fluffing out slightly before he smoothed it. He realised after a moment that it was probably something to do with the matrix.

“My apologies for taking so long to get here, I had to extricate myself from a rather tedious conversation. I wanted to make sure you all knew that you have my full support. I did not come from the system that currently runs most of Cybertron, and I have no intension of upholding any part of it that relies on slavery. Jazz short-waved me that you’re all on board with the plan, but I want to allay any other worries you might have. Feel free to ask me any questions, my time here is short, but I will answer as many as I can.”

Prowl pressed himself to Jazz, mouth seeking the slightly smaller mech’s and tasting him desperately.
They had so little time, and he had missed him so much more than he could even articulate.

Jazz didn’t seem at all surprised by his eagerness. If anything, he was just as eager, servos sliding up Prowl’s sides as the alpha’s claws traced carefully over seams in Jazz’s shoulders. Prowl pressed him to sit on the very lounge he had been bent over by Hound not so long ago. He had no idea if Jazz knew about that, but he didn’t really mind either way.

He didn’t want to interface with his back to Jazz, whether the smaller mech knew the significance or not. He straddled Jazz’s lap, not breaking their kiss, careful with his sharp denta against the soft lip-plates. Jazz seemed intent on teasing his glossa against Prowl’s lower incisors, flirting with the danger of cutting himself on them.

It wasn’t until Prowl broke the kiss to pant and fix Jazz with smouldering optics that the ambassador seemed to realise the position they were in.

“You uh… already got this planned out huh?”

“Mmmm. If you’d prefer something else- “

“No, this is fine, if it’s what you want. Just kinda… surprised my spike does it for ya.” Jazz gave an almost embarrassed chuckle, but Prowl leant his helm forward to touch his, tail swaying eagerly.

“It is MORE than satisfactory. But if you are keen for mine, I’m sure I can oblige before I ride you. We have enough time if we’re quick.”

“If you’re sure, I’m less worried about the time limit and more about not makin’ you strain your back.” Jazz murmured, but Prowl could feel the sudden increase in heat coming from the frame beneath his at his suggestion.

Prowl narrowed his optics in thought, audials switching back and forth in thought. “Well… the best way to ease the strain is if I spike you while transformed. If you don’t feel too uncomfortable with tha-“

“Just tell me where you want me.” Jazz’s engine revved and he pawed at Prowl’s hip-plates lightly, making the alpha chuckle.

Prowl got off his lap and guided Jazz to kneel in front of the couch with his torso on the seat. He then transformed and lapped at Jazz’s panel, which snicked open immediately, accompanied by a soft groan.

Prowl wasted no time on teasing, dragging his glossa across the interface array a few times before plunging it into the already lubricant streaked valve. He rumbled his approval, spreading the lubricant around as his spike released in tandem with Jazz’s own.

He withdrew his glossa and moved so his forelegs rested on the seat either side of Jazz’s chest. The lounge effectively held most of his weight, making it easier to manoeuvre his hips. He lined up and pressed the leaking tip of his spike into the warm, welcoming heat. He bowed his head to nuzzle Jazz’s neck, the silver and white mech moaning as Prowl carefully pressed deeper, stretching him with a delicious familiarity.

Pretty soon, he was hilting himself, holding still just long enough to feel the valve relax before he rolled his hips in a shallow thrust. Jazz panted, a servo finding and caressing a forepaw as he canted his hips back, desperate for more.

Prowl obliged, deepening his thrusts and going a little faster. He didn’t feel very inclined to hold
back, but he also didn’t want to hurt himself. It was something of a mood killer. To compensate for
the lack of speed, he ground against Jazz’s ceiling node a little more with each thrust. The keens and
gasps he received in response told him this was a satisfactory trade off.

He mouthed at Jazz’s neck, denta running carefully over the interlocking plates, not wanting to leave
a mark but wishing he could, instincts telling him it was right… he wasn’t stupid enough to tempt
fate like that when any of the other nobles might see and recognise the marks. The last thing he
wanted was to cause a scandal around Jazz letting a wolf-mech dominate him. The other nobles
would be savage about it.

He satisfied himself with lapping at a helm finial instead, surprised by the moan and shiver it drew
from Jazz. Zeroing in on the sensitivity, Prowl pressed Jazz into the lounge with his own weight and
bucked and ground deep into his slick, clenching valve. All the while he lapped and vented over the
finial.

Jazz came with a loud cry, setting Prowl off almost immediately. Prowl felt the valve constrict
around his swollen knot, the tip of his spike pressing into the gestation uptake as it cycled open and
took every drop of transfluid he gave it.

Jazz gave a few panting keens as he felt the hot fluid jet into his tank, his own splattering against the
lounge front that his spike was pressed up against. The weight pressing down on him, the hot
ventilations over his audial, the rumbling growl Prowl released in overload, all of it served to draw
out his release. It was a while before his valve stopped spasming around the hot, thick length that
filled him.

Jazz felt slightly dizzy from the force of his release, and was totally limp beneath Prowl, enjoying the
laps across his neck and helm in the afterglow.

“Did that hit the spot?”

Jazz chuckled at the question that was murmured with amusement.

“Slaaaaag yeah. Soon as you can pull out, I’m gonna have to hit YOUR spot.”

The alpha rumbled, sending more tingles through his frame. “Yes please.”

It was about half a breem before Prowl shifted his hips and started to attempt to pull out. His knot
was still partly pressurised, but Jazz sured up his footing, moaning at the feel of the swell of the shaft
stretching his entrance as it slowly left him. The pop was audible when it finally came free, and no
sooner had Prowl fully pulled out and transformed than Jazz was turning and pulling him up to settle
over his lap on the lounge again.

Prowl’s spike still stood proud, as did Jazz’s, and without hesitation, the alpha arranged himself and
sank down onto Jazz, groaning. He held the back of the lounge over Jazz’s shoulders, one of Jazz’s
servos quickly finding its way to the base of his spike and milking him.

Prowl grunted and fought the urge to buck, trying to get into a steady rhythm. Jazz’s other servo
found its way around his hip to the base of his tail, lightly scratching over the plating there. Prowl
whined and sank right down on Jazz’s hips, grinding over the spike. It’s ridges flared inside him, and
he rolled his hips to get more sensation.

Jazz was soon stroking his length and bucking up to meet him, both of them knowing this round
wouldn’t last long. The moment Jazz pulled him into a deep kiss and squeezed his knot, Prowl was
gone.
He moaned throatily and ground down against Jazz, tank cycling up the transfluid as fast as Jazz could give it, his own messying their chestplates, neither of them paying it any mind. Prowl was far too intent on the kiss and the flaring warmth in his spark. For the second time, he wanted nothing more than to expose his spark to Jazz and ask that he contribute to the sparklings...

He let himself have the fantasy, but he kept his silence. They were so close now to achieving their goal. And this was enough... that he could share this much with Jazz was more than he’d hoped, and he slumped against the other mech purring.

Their kiss broken, Jazz trailed his lip-plates along Prowl’s jaw as the alpha rested his helm on his shoulder. Jazz shifted his own helm so that the servo not occupied with Prowl’s spike could trace delicate digits across the alpha’s lip-plates. Prowl shivered and let them fall open, enjoying the caresses.

They stayed like this for a breem or more, frames ticking and humming as they cooled, sparks winding down and falling into sync. Prowl would have stayed that way if his back hadn’t twinged, and grudgingly he moved, sliding off of Jazz as his spike retracted and laying sideways with his helm on the arm-rest.

Jazz gave him a look of concern, pulling cleaning cloths from his subspace and deftly wiping transfluid off them both. “Too much for your back?”

“I think it was more the standing speech that pushed it, this was probably just the last straw. Worth it, mind you.” Prowl gave him a sly sort of grin, making Jazz chuckle.

“Ah’ll give ya a bit of the old magnetic maintenance before you go. Honestly wish I didn’t have to get back to that party, you’re much nicer company than any o’ them.”

“Mmmm...I don’t mind the other alphas at all, but I’d be lying if I said I wouldn’t rather just stay in here with you too.” Prowl murmured, catching Jazz’s servo where it ran a cloth over his chestplates.

They shared a long look, neither putting words to that feeling that rose up again. There was something going on between them, and neither was sure how to express it.

Jazz hadn’t been able to stop thinking about this meeting... he hadn’t meant for it to jump immediately to interfacing, but when Prowl’s field had met his and he felt the desire, he couldn’t refuse. Clearly Prowl had wanted it... wanted HIM. In what capacity exactly, he wasn’t sure... but they were close to embarking on a very dangerous mission, and it wouldn’t be much use ignoring it only to regret saying nothing if one of them...

It didn’t bear thinking about. He hated regret. Better to TRY and figure this out now.

“Prowl... I missed you. I practically don’t know you, not as much as ah want to, but I... Primus I feel like I’m not SUPPOSED to want you like this, I feel like I’m... taking advantage somehow, like it’s wrong and ah should be waiting until you’re free-“

Prowl tugged at Jazz’s servo, rolling a little more onto his back and pulling the only slightly resisting Jazz into a kiss. It was unhurried, Prowl’s movements so tender that Jazz was reluctant to pull away when he did.

“It’s not taking advantage. You know I don’t have to do anything for OR with you that I don’t want to, remember? I told you that in the beginning. I’m here because I want to be... I want to be with you. If you’re worried others will see it as you only trying to liberate us so you could openly court me, then we can keep it quiet. I’m no stranger to the politics of high society, I know what you’re
worried about.”

Jazz moved a servo to caress the side of Prowl’s face, unable to suppress a giddy little grin. “This is why ah like you so much. Y’know me better than I do already. I keep thinkin’ about all the things I’d do for you… WITH you, if you weren’t trapped. All the things I want to do when you’re free. You sure you’re ready for me to court you?”

It was Prowl’s turn to grin, though his was a little more predatory. “Only if you’re ready for me to do so right back. It’s not always a one-way street with my kind, you know.”

Prowl stood carefully still by Thunderwing’s side, glad at least to be in Wolf mode so that his back ached less. He shone as if he hadn’t even touched another bot since he’d been polished, thanks to Jazz having touch-up wax on him. Thunderwing was none-the-wiser to his activities during the night, in fact the flier seemed extremely and obliviously smug, standing close to the front where his table was situated.

Prowl knew he was visually gloating both about how close to the Prime’s table he was, and the fact that every noble in the room had a view of his alpha. Prowl honestly couldn’t care less if they eyed him with wonder or envy. He knew those looks would change the moment he was no longer property.

He didn’t need to listen to Optimus’ speech, since he already knew everything the Prime was saying. He’d helped plan the event, he’d even helped with how to word some of the rules Optimus wanted to put in place. It was still nice to let the soothing voice wash over him. He’d become very fond of the Prime in a very short period, the bot was very likeable.

More to the point, he very clearly had all the signs of an excellent alpha, even if he wasn’t one of their kind.

He glanced subtly along the head table, Jazz and Red Alert comfortably in view. Jazz had asked him if he could give Red some pointers before he’d had to return to the party. Prowl had been surprised when Jazz mentioned he and Red would be competing in the pairs tournament.

“I gotta be out there to keep an optic on ya, and the rest of the alphas in it. Don’t care how well we do, entering just helps to make the other nobles think we’re really into the whole thing. But I mean… if you can give him some solid training tips, it wouldn’t go astray. Gotta seem like we’re at least TRYING.”

Red wasn’t exactly reluctant to compete, he just didn’t think much of his skills as a hunter. He’d admitted that while a previous owner had taken him on pack hunts, he’d only been any good as a scout. He couldn’t take down anything bigger than a petrorabbit without the contact maxing out his sensors.

“I thought Jazz sorted out that over-stimulation issue you were having?”

“Oh, he did, yes.”

“… Then you can tackle larger prey without it jarring your sensor array?”

Red Alert had given him a puzzled look at that.

“I’ve never DONE anything like that. I have no idea HOW to take down something larger than a
petrorabbit.”

Prowl had taken him through a few manoeuvres and advised he try and catch lots of small prey quickly rather than go for fewer, larger targets like Thunderwing had him do. It seemed to boost his confidence, since the poor bot hadn’t realised that was a legitimate tactic.

Prowl’s musing optics flicked up from the shining red and white plating to Jazz. He probably shouldn’t have been surprised to find the blue visor already turned on him, but it made his spark swell all the same.

Fantasies began to pop up in his mind. The things he would do when he was free, ways he might court the mech… and the sparklings, he’d FINALLY be able to tell him… he’d be able to offer him the chance to contribute, it wouldn’t be too late yet. The sparkling’s acceptance of code donation didn’t end until the frames finished forming. The window would probably be narrow, maybe a megacycle or two, but it was enough time.

Prowl caught himself before his tail could start wagging. He had far too many optics on him to let his stance slip. Thunderwing would not be pleased.

Just a little longer, and then I won’t have to worry about what Thunderwing wants. Ever.

That thought only made keeping his tail still even harder.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The clock ticks down towards the event where every wolfmech's fate will be decided. But in the meantime, Jazz has a whole lot of work to do, and a whole lot of discoveries to make... one of which is going to change him forever.

Chapter Notes

Thiiiis took a long time to write. Mainly because writers block and needing very specific music to get into the headspace for writing the raid. Aaand then the word count went mental, as it always does for me.

But yeah, not a lot to say, but three important notes: 1) Listen to this during the raid https://youtu.be/lN11iQ0ClI0
2) listen to this when they reach the mystery box https://youtu.be/1e-0sqPdEJU
3) listen to this near the end when Jazz is getting ready to leave https://youtu.be/BF1DQr5dKW8

That is all. Enjoy ~

“Run it again. Faster. You know what I need out of you I shouldn’t have to say it.”

Sunstreaker laid his ears flat but made no other sign of acknowledgement, lining up at the start and waiting for the automatic timing system to signal him to go.

Prowl watched as he made his own measured laps around the room. No obstacles, just constant, low level running to get his stamina up. He’d been going for about a cycle and a half now and was still feeling alright. He kept an optic on the others, making tiny suggestions across their comms to help them shave more time off their obstacle routes.

The course had been modified in order to step-up the difficulty. Thunderwing clearly wanted to take no chances, and the new course meant figuring out new ways to run it. Except their master expected them to do it in a FASTER time than the old route, without any leeway for learning the new configuration.

This wasn’t particularly new or unusual for him. It was still irritating, and Prowl had to project a lot of soothing waves Sunstreaker’s way as he ran it over and over. Sideswipe was already dreading his own turn, since he didn’t think he’d do as well even with the benefit of feeling the route out through his twin.

//You will be fine. Feel your way through, don’t think your way through, your instincts always prove more efficient// Prowl reassured him, feeling Sunstreaker trying to take the advice while pushing his frame to its upper limits.
Thunderwing watched the golden twin like a hawk, scrutinising every move and narrowing his optics at the timer now and then. When Sunstreaker reached the end platform and the clock stopped, the flier’s wings twitched upwards.

“BETTER. Alright, switch out with Sideswipe. I expect you to do just as good in half the time.”

Sunstreaker rumbled softly as he leapt down off the final platform and trotted over to run with his carrier. The rest of the pack was following Prowl, keeping themselves warmed up between their turns. Their master was yet to call on the alpha, but Prowl had a feeling he would.

//So when we’re free, will I be allowed to rip his vocaliser out or what?// the golden twin murmured through their comms. Prowl threw him a sideways glance before looking over at Thunderwing, who was intently focussed on Sideswipe’s run.

//While I wish the answer was yes, I highly doubt it. Besides, any throat ripping or mutilation will be mine first. I will certainly leave you the wings if the chance arises//

Sunstreaker threw him a sharp looking grin, and over the bond Prowl felt Sideswipe’s amusement. //You’re the best carrier a bot could ask for//.

“What are we gonna do about this next alignment, hmm?” Jazz sighed, sitting down beside Red Alert in their shared quarters, running a servo over his faceplate.

Red Alert paused his data-pad perusing and looked up with mild surprise. “Oh… right, yes… I’d forgotten about that. But good question… there’s plenty of unused rooms around the palace you could lock me in. I mean it wouldn’t be terribly interesting, but I’ve been through worse.”

“Mech I ain’t lockin’ you in a room alone with nothin’ to do. We gotta have a better solution available than that, surely.”

Red Alert frowned thoughtfully and tapped the stylus he was holding against his lower-lip plate. “It’s not for another two and a half megaycles at least, so we have some time to think of something. In the meantime, what are your plans leading up to the hunt? We still need to train, I have no idea WHERE because I think we might frighten the slag out of the guardsmechs and any other resident nobles if we try and do so in the gardens. I’m not even sure I’m legally allowed to kill petrorabbits on the Prime estate…”

“Oh course you can, Optimus ain’t gonna care so long as he doesn’t have to watch you do it.” Jazz chuckled. “There’s no law saying all petrorabbits on site are property of the Prime and harm to any will invoke the death penalty.”

“Uhm… if he doesn’t like seeing us kill petrorabbits in front of him, how is he going to handle watching an entire hunt? Does he not realise how… well… gory, hunts can be? You’ve seen one, didn’t you tell him?”

“Yeah he knows. He’s not squeamish, it’s the matrix that makes a deal outta stuff like that. Listen, he saw some nasty slag when he was an enforcer. Nastier than half the stuff I saw in that fighting pit, the problem is that now he has the matrix, it kinda… I dunno, hard to explain… I guess it ‘flinches’ when life-forms get snuffed around it, and it makes him feel weird. He said it ain’t a huge deal when it’s anibots, their sparks aren’t really, y’know, fully formed. They’re just lil embers.” Jazz showed his forefinger and thumb close together to emphasise.
Red gave him an odd look. “So that’s what nobles have been figuring about us this whole time? We’re just ember powered drones who can transform?”

Jazz shrugged. “Probably? I can’t say I ever thought about it when I first came across your kind. Only ever saw any of ya in wolf mode, so I guess I assumed you were just really big cyberwolves with altered programming to make you domestic? Wasn’t til I saw you had mech forms that somethin’ flagged in my head as bein’ off about the whole deal.”

“And when was it you first saw that? When you visited Thunderwing’s compound?”

Jazz rubbed at the back of his neck and looked a little uneasy. “Well… no, not quite. That was when I got to see it up close, properly, and while they were… awake. The first time was actually when I uuuh… caught sight of Hound in mech form sleepin’ with Mirage. I was so focussed on not wanting to embarrass him by letting him know I’d seen it that I didn’t immediately think about the implications of Hound actually HAVING a mech form. So technically, I didn’t REALISE it was weird until I saw Prowl’s lot. Then things started to click into place and I got properly curious.”

Red Alert nodded, his expression non-judgemental. “Had any other bot but you seen them, I’m not sure if it would have caused scandal or just been shrugged off. Depends who saw and how much they liked or hated lord Mirage. Masters lying with their wolf-mechs in root mode is not exactly uncommon, it’s just… passé to talk about it openly.”

Jazz gave him a slightly hesitant look before deciding to ask. “Did uh… any of your masters force you to do that?”

The wolf mech gave him a surprised look, as if wondering why he’d even bother asking. “Of course. I had several households, most masters will ‘try out’ their new pack acquisitions, we’re honestly as much pleasure-bots to them as we are pets. Again, that’s the side of things they don’t talk about openly, but it’s very much the reality. To be totally honest though, most nobles are mediocre to downright disappointing in berth.”

The flat flippancy with which Red made his statement surprised Jazz, who reset his visor while trying to fully process it all. “Primus… I mean… well, I’m assuming you mean bad in comparison to wolf-mech interfacing because, yeah… TOTALLY understand.”

“Well of course. Though you know, very occasionally a staff member at a household will take advantage, if they can get away with it. The ones that force themselves are usually security personnel, but I’ve known wolf-mechs who’ve had trysts with kitchen staff and chamber-servants willingly. Some are probably likely to carry those on once they’re free.”

“I don’t know why I haven’t tapped your wellspring of knowledge yet, I should have known you’d have a broader experience than the others. Prowl’s lot know plenty about other pack’s they’ve been in contact with, but you’ve actually been shunted around to a bunch of different ones huh?”

Red didn’t seem at all bothered by the subject matter, tail twitching contently as he nodded. “Oh yes. I think it was 9? Yes, 9 households I’ve been through. Didn’t really stay in any of them beyond a decavorn. I was usually a ‘filler’ purchase I think. Just to add numbers to the pack, make the nobles who bought me feel better about themselves because they had a larger pack than their friends. Large packs are terrible for the alphas that have to control them, but better for bots like me with problems, I got singled out less for my issues. In smaller packs my problems tended to stand out, became more prominent and problematic. I spent less time in those households.”

“Y’talk about being treated like property so casually… aren’t you at all bitter about it?”
Red Alert did seem slightly uncomfortable at that question, fiddling with the datapad in his servos. “I… suppose so, yes… to a degree. But I don’t have to worry about any of it now. And my experiences were hardly the worst any of my kind has been through. Prowl has it far worse than I ever have.” He murmured.

Jazz frowned slightly at that. “Y’know, you don’t have to wait until the laws are made official if you want a professional to talk about your experiences with. Just cause it’s been your life, doesn’t mean you have to carry it without complaint. You know what hurt you… there are bots to help with that stuff. I could talk to a few I know, if you want me to?”

Red gave him a sidelong look that was both a little confused and anxious, audials flicking back and forth a bit. “I’m not… I mean, others have been through much worse than me, I don’t know that I need that…”

“Red, it ain’t about who’s done it worse. Trauma is trauma, any way ya look at it. I get it if you ain’t comfortable with the idea of talkin’ about it with a stranger yet, I’m the same about… I didn’t exactly have a great time of it before Prime pulled me out of the gutter. And I still haven’t had more than two sessions with a professional about it, but you’re carrying some very particular baggage. Just think about it for later maybe? Let yourself adjust to free life first.”

The red and white mech nodded, ears pinned back as he frowned slightly. “Yes… it’s not as hard as I thought though, you know. Adjusting to not being a slave… it feels like a weight off my shoulders. Honestly I get lightheaded just thinking about it sometimes. But the prospect of talking to someone about what it’s been like… I don’t know, I don’t feel like any therapists could actually understand what it’s like. How can they? Our situation is completely unique. How am I supposed to explain alignments to them, and pack dynamics, ranks… I’m not even sure there ARE any therapists on Cybertron who can help us when we’re free.”

It was Jazz’s turn to frown slightly, visor dim with thought as he mulled it over. “Y’know, you’re right… it might take some doing to find a bot with enough experience to even come close to being qualified. And even then, one mech can hardly service the whole of your caste. I’ll have to add that to mine and Ratchet’s list of ‘slag we have to organise pre-emancipation.’ As far as the near future goes though, there’s still the matter of next alignment. And I think I might have an idea for that”.

Once again, Jazz had managed to engineer time at Thunderwing’s compound before the contest. Unfortunately, it was more for Red Alert’s benefit than his or Prowl’s.

As he’d hoped, the flier had graciously hosted Jazz and his new hound for alignment. Jazz pretended he was at a loss for places to keep Red during his transformation. In truth he knew several places he could probably have taken him, but this worked far better for their plans.

Not only did Jazz get to ingratiate himself further with Thunderwing, but Red got the benefit of a hunting lesson with the best pack on the competitive circuit. Not that they expected to win, but Jazz couldn’t go into a contest without at least TRYING to take it seriously to some degree. He did have his pride, and Red seemed keener with the promise of servos-on instruction from Prowl. The verbal tips he’d gotten at the party were all well and good, but they couldn’t compare to actually getting to run and hunt with the pack.

It was unfortunate Mirage and Hound couldn’t make it, since Mirage was having to host his creators for the orn. Jazz was so glad he’d turned down the offer to attend and bunk Red with Mirage’s pack. It wasn’t the pack that would be a problem… he just hated being around Mirage’s creators.
They seemed to think he was Mirage’s suitor, and neither approved. Sure, he was a high ranking ambassador NOW, with strong connections to the Prime… but they knew he hadn’t COME from money, and they REALLY didn’t think he was suitable for their precious creation and all his wealth and charm.

Much as Jazz was happy to dissuade them of the idea he was Mirage’s lover, his friend had other plans. He LOVED to taunt his parents with the idea. Jazz couldn’t stop him if he wasn’t there, but he also wouldn’t back his friend in his creator-torturing endeavours.

Although dealing with the wealthy pair seemed a far more attractive prospect while he was stuck sipping high grade with Thunderwing. If he had to listen to the blue and yellow flier drone on about how jealous Onslaught was of him and his air force for much longer he just might fake a high-grade induced coma.

Then again, he didn’t really trust Thunderwing with his unconscious body. He nodded and made all the right noises to get the flier to carry on the conversation practically on his own. When Thunderwing finally ran out of hot air to billow, he was finally able to excuse himself to his guest quarters.

He may have wanted voluntary unconsciousness when in Thunderwing’s company, but once he was free of it, recharge was the last thing on his mind. He knew he couldn’t see Prowl face-to-face, but he wanted to at least try to see him from afar… maybe he could talk over coms during alignment? He wished he’d asked Hound earlier.

Jazz knew if Mirage was there he’d tell him not to even attempt what he was planning, but no Mirage meant Jazz’s inhibitions were critically low. Besides, it couldn’t be THAT dangerous to be outside, so long as he was somewhere elevated that the wolf-mechs couldn’t scale, right?

That’s what he told himself at least, as he hacked the locks on his window and scaled the outside of the building, mindful of the security cameras covering areas around the compound. Once he reached the roof, he was able to get a good view of the grounds, and began to search for moving shapes between the metallic tree-like formations.

It took him a good three breems to actually spot ANYTHING, and even then he had to squint at the flash of yellow. It got closer to the building, and he managed to make out Bumblebee’s form. Assuming that they tended to roam together, Jazz made his way carefully and silently down the outside of the building again. He perched on a second storey windowsill, craning his neck to try and see through the trees and spot the pack.

He nearly fell off the narrow sill when a voice came from directly below him.

“Jazz what are you DOING out here? Didn’t Hound tell you how dangerous we are during alignment?”

The words were half hissed, as if the scout was scared of being overheard. Once he’d caught himself, Jazz peered down at him with slight confusion.

“Uh… yeah but I figured if I was out of reach… wait why aren’t YOU trying to attack me? Also how the slag did you sneak up on me like that? You have no business being that sneaky when you’re that yellow.”

Bumblebee did what Jazz could only describe as roll his optics at him.

“If they get one WHIFF of you, they’ll come running, and they can definitely reach you where you
are now, didn’t you watch us train?”

“Doesn’t answer why you ain’t comin’ after me.”

Bumblebee switched his weight from side to side, looking around nervously. “You REALLY need to get back inside Jazz, they’re not close right now but it wouldn’t take them long-“

“I’ll go back inside if you come with me.”

The yellow bot gave him a startled look, hackles flicking down. “I… I can’t, I’m too dangerous to you…”

“If what Hound told me was true, and I’d assume it was because he wouldn’t have joked about that kinda thing, you’d already be trying to attack me by now if you were actually under the influence of the magnetic fields. But you’re not. So, I’m gonna assume that for whatever reason, you’re safe to be around, even if the rest of your pack ain’t.”

Bumblebee’s audials continued to switch back and forth in indecision. He looked up at Jazz and back out at the grounds, rumbling unhappily.

“You’ll have to follow me around to the groundskeeper’s tool shed. I can’t go inside the main compound, Thunderwing will see my tracker in there, slag will hit the fan. But he won’t care why or how I got in the shed.”

Jazz nodded, making his way along the outside walls of the building, following the flashes of yellow from below. When Bumblebee stopped by a low structure that was built against the back wall of the compound, Jazz dropped onto its roof. He leant his helm over the side as Bumblebee tried to push the door open, gearing up to ram it.

“Hey woah wait, I can just pick the lock. First though, y’gonna tell me if this is some kinda clever ruse to get me cornered so you can eat me?” He grinned at the yellow wolf, getting another optic-roll in response.

“No, we’re not capable of reasoning with bots that aren’t wolfmechs when we’re under influence. Strategizing while hunting bots, probably, but not talking to them.”

“Except you.” Jazz murmured curiously as he dropped down and got to work picking the lock, which was ridiculously old-fashioned and flimsy.

“…Yeah. Well… that’s a whole thing and you’re not supposed to know.” Bumblebee murmured as he went in ahead at Jazz’s invitation.

The silver and white mech followed him in and locked the door behind them, turning on the dim light and settling in against a set of shelves. Bumblebee hesitated slightly before curling up next to him.

“So, why am I not supposed to know?” Jazz asked softly, not presuming to touch the bot until his servo was nudged by a snout very subtly.

The yellow bot gave a long sigh as if resigning himself, leaning into Jazz’s careful petting on his helm. “No one is supposed to. The only ones who know are Prowl and the Twins, the less people know the less likely it can get back to Shockwave. It was hard enough hiding it from him when I lived in his labs. Sometimes I think maybe Inferno and ‘Breaker know, but they’ve never said anything.”
“Well, secrets are definitely something I’m good at keeping. But I’m still kinda curious about HOW you don’t have the killer instinct thing. And why it’s so important Shockwave doesn’t know.”

“Prowl told you what we were always meant to be, right? Trainable, controllable soldiers?”

Jazz nodded, stroking down Bumblebee’s fluffed-up neck plates as the small wolfmech continued.

“The reason we were scrapped for that is the alignment thing. Can’t afford all your soldiers to go insane and turn on you once every so often. Do you know how much Shockwave would kill to find out how to turn that off? He did so many experiments to try and turn it off in other wolfmechs, but he couldn’t do it. Me and my brother might be the one key to him finding out and we don’t EVER want that happening.”

Jazz made a noise of understanding, demeanour sobering substantially. “That is absolutely not something we want. So… do you have any idea WHY the two of you have no killer instinct?”

Bumblebee shrugged with his hackles, a gesture Jazz had gotten quite used to in this pack’s presence. “I always just assumed it had something to do with the fact we’re both smaller than other wolfmechs too. There’s not a lot of minibot-size wolves. All the ones I know of were either turned as sparklings or one of their progenitors was one. Neither of my progenitors had minibot in them as far as I know, but then… I don’t know much at all about them. Shockwave isn’t exactly the sentimental type. He told me nothing that wasn’t relevant to what he wanted from me, and he didn’t want much from me. Except, y’know, go along with the tests and don’t complain or struggle.”

Jazz made a sympathetic noise, something in his mind pulling at the mention of Shockwave and tests, but it was such a vague feeling he brushed it off as intense empathy.

“Well, if I can data-mine deep enough, I might be able to pull whatever records he has for you when I do my raid.”

Bumblebee shifted his helm under the petting servo to look up at Jazz intently. “You’re not doing it alone, right?”

“Uuuuh… that was the plan, it’s the usual modus operandi, why?”

The yellow mech’s audials laid flat. “Nooononono you have to take someone else with you, two more if you can. Shockwave is cocky, even if he doesn’t show it, but you can’t count on that making him sloppy. He just has SO MANY safeguards in place he thinks no one could get through them. He has drones guarding everything and performing all his menial tasks. When one of them gets damaged, he knows immediately. I know you can hack really well, but that’s a slagload of bots to hack… isn’t there anyone you can take to help you?”

Jazz scratched behind one of the audials to make Bumblebee relax. “As a matter of fact, I do know a guy… two actually.”

Bumblebee stared at him a little longer, gaze scrutinizing. “It’s Mirage and Hound isn’t it?”

Jazz’s petting faltered. “How the slag… bot you got an uncanny ability to read me, and I can’t decide if it’s a good thing or a bad thing. Yes, they’re my guys.”

The yellow bot plopped his head back down on Jazz’s lap with a small whuff. “Good. Should probably take Red too, if he’s got sensors like yours he’ll be able to scout.”

Jazz hummed, unsure. “I dunno… his sensors would be useful, but he ain’t trained in stealth. I could give him a crash course, but if this op is as dangerous as you say, I’d rather not ask him to take the
“Are you telling me Hound has done this sort of thing before?” Bumblebee rolled on his side and pushed his forehead into Jazz’s abdomen, purring as he got jaw scratches.

“I shouldn’t be telling you that… but considering you’re not likely to go blabbing my secrets around, yes. He has. Not much mind, and always with Mirage. Their skills together are pretty invaluable. Truth be told, I wouldn’t mind having you on the op, but for one thing that’s straight up not possible, and for another I think Prowl might kill me if you got so much as a scratch.”

“Mmmmmmnah. Prowl wouldn’t kill you. Twins would do it before he could. I would LIKE to go, ‘cause I probably know that place and you definitely don’t, but at the same time… I’d rather not have to go back into ANY of Shockwave’s labs… EVER.” Bee murmured, leaning more into the scratches. “Point’s moot anyway, Thunderwing wouldn’t lend me out to anyone for anything”.

“Understandable” Jazz nodded, feeling rather privileged that Bumblebee was letting him touch him and being so familiar. He hadn’t actually been quite this friendly with Jazz in the presence of the rest of his pack. He hadn’t exactly been stand-offish, but there’d been a distance. A barrier of protectiveness that separated the two of them. It felt good to be trusted enough by the young bot for him to relax like this in his presence.

“So, you feel ready for this sham of a contest?” he murmured as Bumblebee ended up squirming his whole torso into his lap.

The yellow bot rumbled and whuffed. “I slagging hope so after the drills Thunderwing has been putting us through. UuuuuUuuugh, he’s gone mental about the whole thing. I can barely feel my paws after the training sessions these orns.”

“Awwww. Maybe I should be offering your whole pack some magnetic maintenance after it’s all over. Heck I could give you some now if you want.”

To his surprise, Bumblebee gave him a wary look and pulled away from him slightly. “You’re not trying to get me lubed up so you can frag me, are you?”

Jazz pulled a horrified face. “SLAG no where did you get that idea? Mech you’re not even old enough, primus, NO.”

The yellow mech relaxed slightly, audials still pinned back. “I mean, you kept giving Prowl those massages and then he kept wanting to frag afterwards, I thought it must be a thing.”

Jazz couldn’t help letting out a chuckle at that. “Primus bot no, noooonono that was a side effect because of his injuries… and possibly also because we just… I dunno, we can’t help ourselves really, if that didn’t trigger it somethin’ else probably would anyway. But no, magnetic massages don’t automatically make you wanna frag a bot. Mostly they just help with pain.”

The chuckling took the tension out of the yellow wolf-mech, who shifted around, giving Jazz a curious look before holding up a forepaw. “Okay then… if you don’t mind?”

“Course ah don’t mind. Why would I, I’ve already practically adopted you.” He snickered, noting the thump of Bee’s tail at that and grinning as he took the paw in his servo.

Jazz got to work rubbing his thumb against the strangely textured pads of the paws, pulsing low magnetic waves as he gently pushed each digit out to its full extent, stretching over-taut cables. Bee squirmed slightly and rumbled before relaxing again. “That feels REALLY weird but also good.”
“Honestly the heat and stretching is probably ninety percent of what you need, the magnetics just make sure everything sits where it should.” Jazz explained as he continued, leaning his helm down and sideways a little to check out the paw pads a little more closely. “Huh. I haven’t seen any bot with this material on their frame other than me. Not that I look real close at most bot’s pedes, but still. Not sure why ah’ve got it, for you it must help a lot with gripping smoother surfaces, it’s like rubber but not, right?”

Bumblebee gave the verbal equivalent of a shrug. “I guess? It helps us stay quiet too. We all have paws like that, they kinda stay in root mode but not so springy on the servos. I don’t think I’ve ever seen any bots with them either, well, other than anibots. I’m guessing you mean sentient bots.”

Jazz hummed an affirmative, continuing his extending of the clawed digits before flexing the wrist and then moving onto the other paw. He might take the mystery up with Ratchet and Wheeljack later.

“So how’s Red been doin out there tonight? Learning anything new? Getting the hang of takin’ on bigger stuff?”

“Mmmm he’s doing okay from what I saw. I don’t think he’s got the right…frame of mind, to be a hunter, really. He doesn’t WANT to kill anibots, at least not ones he isn’t going to eat.”

“You guys usually eat what you kill?” Jazz asked, genuinely curious. He hadn’t thought of the possibility of them actually hunting for reasons beyond instinct.

“Oh yeah, usually just during alignment. Get a lot of extra trace and base minerals that way, also it kinda feels good to have solid food for a change sometimes. Liquid energon is fine in enough quantity, but when we’re pushed harder in training it’s just not enough, y’know?”

“Actually, I do know. But all I ever got were Glitchmice and Rotorats. Didn’t have a lot of choice back then though, energon was real hard to come by before I figured out the best places to steal it from. I say steal, but the bots I took from had more’n enough, thought it was only fair considering they were also criminals.”

“So you really lived on the streets?” Bumblebee murmured, looking up at him curiously.

Jazz nodded, flexing Bee’s other wrist. “Can’t remember what ah did before that, if I did anything at all. No records of me, no memories that ain’t corrupted to slag. I run mostly under the assumption I was a made-to-order and I wasn’t what they ordered. Wouldn’t be the first thrown out in the cold for that, just kinda lucky I had a grab-bag of skills that meant I could survive it.”

“Most bots can’t break down solid metal chunks in their tanks though, how did you find out you could? Also what kinda job do you think you were made for?”

Jazz put down the paw he’d been flexing tilted his helm down at the innocent little questioning face. “Concept of personal questions really doesn’t exist much amoung your kind huh?” he snickered.

Bee’s audials flicked back apologetically. “Sorry… got carried away. Don’t get to ask a lot of bots outside our caste about the kind of lives they live.”

“So alright. Considering Prowl seems keen on absorbin’ me into your pack, it can’t hurt for you to get to know me at some point. Honestly, I’m not one hundred percent sure WHAT ah was made for. But I got an iron cast tank and filters that can handle most mild poisons and toxins without me getting’ more than a bit tipsy. Glitchmice and Rotorats went down easy once I was desperate enough to find out I could eat them. Chances are I was made to work in a harsh environment and they rejected me
for bein’ too small. Most bots made for extremes are twice my size or bigger, with much thicker plating. Y’want me to do the back ones too?”

Bumblebee cocked his helm before realising the last part referred to his pedes. “OH, uuuuh… I guess? Might as well keep them all even.”

The yellow wolf squirmed the rest of the way into Jazz’s lap, making the silver and white bot whuff and chuckle, and stuck one of his back paws in the air.

Jazz took it and got to work, Bee chuffing and grinning when his toes were tickled in retaliation.

The acrid smell of the copper smelts fairly burned Jazz’s olfactory receptors as he got into the vents. He hoped the air in the facility was filtered, because he was going to have a hard time concentrating if it was just as bad in there. He felt especially bad for poor Hound, who was almost beside himself with the strength of the stench. It whitened almost everything else for him.

He was waiting with Mirage at one of the rear entrances, the plan being for Jazz to get in and disable all the security systems necessary to let them in undetected. It was normally one of the most dangerous aspects of a mission, but in the case of this one, the whole thing was high risk. He had to be alert at all times, ready to pull one of a dozen contingencies out of his aft at any given moment.

Jazz cycled slow, steady gulps of clean air into his vents as he got deeper into the building. He wanted to hurry for Hound’s sake, but he knew rushing this would blow the whole thing. So he crept slowly, doing constant sensor sweeps, pausing whenever he heard something in the corridors beneath him.

Slowly, agonisingly slowly, and so quietly… he finally reached his destination. The main power hub of the facility was easy to find, it was a massive electromagnetic beacon on his sensors. He had no idea what kind of equipment needed to draw that much power, but it was thirsty, whatever it was.

Jazz plugged in to one of the more innocuous inlets and got to work. It was almost painful how slowly he had to go, wary of any kind of booby trap or alarm he might trigger. One firewall was slipped past… then a second… he had to mentally army crawl his way under the third, which was so dense and thorny he wondered how long it had taken Shockwave to compile.

After another two slightly easier firewalls, he finally reached the core of the systems. From there it was still difficult to do what he needed to without detection. It had been three breems already, and still he wasn’t sure how much longer it would take. Neither Hound nor Mirage had dared to try and ping his comms, but he felt the pressure in the back of his mind to get them inside as fast as possible. Hopefully Hound hadn’t passed out yet.

After another two breems of dancing his way around complex security set-ups and learning the patterns he would have to emulate and fake, Jazz finally managed to open the door for Mirage and Hound.

//Primus it’s about time, Hound looks ready to offline//

Mirage’s terse reply made Jazz wince. He knew the noble well enough to detect when he was angry, even if his friend hid it.

//Sorry about that, Bumblebee wasn’t kidding. This place is riveted tighter than a prison ship. Don’t move outta that corridor you’re in yet, I gotta figure out where all these security droids are and make
sure they don’t see us. Then I gotta make sure the non-security ones don’t see us either. Place is
crawlin’ with his little minions, every single one of ’em could be a set of audials and optics for him/

Mirage sent back an acknowledgement glyph with a slight inflection of apology. It seemed he hadn’t
really understood the scope of the job Jazz was performing. It was followed fairly quickly by a
grateful glyph from Hound.

Jazz worked away in the little invisible bubble he’d built for himself in Shockwave’s systems. He’d
never actually hacked anything this big or complex before, and he was extremely wary of missing
something important.

Mirage and Hound waited patiently and invisibly in the corridor, happy at least to be drawing clean
air through their vents. The longer they waited, the more anxious they became about just how
dangerous this undertaking was.

Neither dared disturb Jazz, unsure how sensitive his work was at any given moment. After almost a
whole cycle had passed of tense waiting, he broke the silence on their comms.

//Okay, it’s safe for you to move through to the room beyond that corridor now. I’ve faked a loop of
every routine, the system reads everything as normal but all security droids are inoperable. Regular
duty droids are still doin’ whatever they do, but none of them will register our presence or make any
record of us. Just don’t touch them, I can’t hack their on-board sensors from here.//

//I’m not sure how you do it, and I’m not sure I’m glad you do, but Primus damnit I’m impressed
anyway// Mirage murmured as he moved with Hound into the next room, finding two large sentinel
drones standing motionless. //Where to from here?//

//Short-waving you a schematic now. This place is multi-level, goes down underground way deeper
than I thought before. And there’s gotta be important stuff here, cause he’s not likely to lay this much
security on a few useless test-tubes. I’ll rendezvous with you in the main atrium where the elevator
is//.

Mirage and Hound both pinged affirmatives and made their way as quietly as possible through the
facility. Both had become experts at stealth when hunting for sport, and that never included use of
Mirage’s Electro-disruptor. With it, they were nigh-on undetectable.

They passed more of the frozen sentinels on their way, and more still of the active drones. They were
a lot harder to not touch than anticipated, since some of them travelled in packs, little spindly arms
full of containers with unknown contents.

After hugging the walls, it was nice to get into the open atrium. They spotted Jazz waiting next to an
elevator, blue visor trained on a gaggle of droids as they exited one of the two lifts. His head snapped
around to their position before Mirage had even de-cloaked them, and he gestured for them to stand
close.

//Don’t talk aloud, no idea how many sound recording devices there are anywhere here. I’ve been
watching these things, they seem to have a fairly regular pattern. Not sure what they’re transporting
around… you two see anything that clued you in so far?//

//I smell something like energon but I’m not sure// Hound answered, audials switching as he kept
alert for any change in the droid’s behaviour. None of them seemed to see them, but they made him
extremely nervous. //There’s something familiar about these drones I don’t like. I think… I don’t
know but I might have BEEN here before//
//If this is where Shockwave used to have the major crèche, then you probably were. You were infected, not sparked a wolfmech, right?// Jazz asked.

Hound nodded, audials laying flat. //Yeah I think so… not a lot of memories of it, don’t think I was in the crèche long. Did Prowl tell you about it?//

//Inferno and Trailbreaker told me most of it actually. Prowl remembers pretty well, he says he was there a fair while. C’mon, we’re going down with this lot// Jazz jerked his head at a gaggle of drones heading for the lift beside them. When it opened to admit them, the three slipped in and hugged the wall, making sure not to touch them.

They said nothing as the lift descended, Mirage and Hound waiting on Jazz’s signal to leave as it stopped at different floors. They got off when it finally went to the floor just under the one they’d been on, and hurried down the one corridor that led into the bunker-like level.

//I’ve been doing ping sweeps across each level, there’s life signs on the lower ones but I want to go through this place from top to bottom. We need to fan out and see what’s here, if it’s wolf-mechs or regular mechs we’re getting them out. If not, well… we’ll figure out exactly what we’re dealing with and try to break any controls Shockwave has over it. I’m not expecting anything on this level because I’m not getting any pings, but we need to be sure anyway//.

Mirage and Hound nodded, the two of them heading to the centre and left of the facility while Jazz went right. He continued to ping as he came to the right wing corridor, off which several doors led into windowed rooms.

They seemed like ordinary labs. Jazz wasn’t convinced, and watched drones puttering about before managing to follow one into the first lab. There were no de-contaminators, so it probably wasn’t anything major. When he glanced at the benches he passed, peering around drones as they performed monotonous tasks with test tubes and drippers and centrifuges, he couldn’t work out what exactly they were doing. It all looked like weak forms of energon going through some kind of testing.

Glancing around, he noted what looked like raw samples being held in a container in the centre of the lab. The drones occasionally plucked one of the tiny rocks inside it out and got to work reducing it to a liquid.

Very carefully, Jazz transformed out a pair of tweezers from his middle finger and got a small plastic canister from his subspace. He put a few of the rocks in it and stowed the container. He did a quick visual sweep to see if there was anything else in the room before leaving.

He checked the other labs on his side of the level, all of them doing the exact same thing. He took samples of the rocks from each of them before heading back to the elevators to rendezvous with the others.

Hound and Mirage reported the same thing across all labs on that floor. The two of them had also collected samples of the stuff being tested. After waiting for another gaggle of drones, they made their way down to the next level.

Here there were just stores of equipment, all of it seemingly not in use. It was one giant store room… and Hound seemed extremely irked by some of the dormant machinery setups. He couldn’t even explain why. Jazz didn’t feel that he needed to… it all looked suspiciously like surgical equipment for procedures no bot ever wanted to undergo.

The next level down was much worse. The corridor arrangement was a little different, stretching to their left and right, and this time they did not split up. They went left, keeping to the walls even
though no drones patrolled the level. When the corridor turned at ninety degrees to the right, they came across rooms. All of them were just small cubes with glass-steel doors the same width as them. The doors had sliding hatches in the bottom, as if they were meant for occupants, and the hatches for delivering energon.

Jazz felt a cold shiver run up his spinal strut. They reminded him of smaller versions of enforcer station cells. Overnight incarceration pods for bots arrested and awaiting transport to a proper jailhouse. Worse still, he noticed that each cell had air-tight seals around the doors and hatches. Small vents lined the tops of them, meaning bots could be gassed inside with anything.

The corridor held about 16 of these cells, and when they came to another right turn, there were more. The entire floor seemed to consist of the one connected corridor that encircled a large, square room on the centre. The room had no windows in, and once they went halfway down the rear corridor, they came to the double doors that led in. They didn’t have windows either, and were heavily shielded.

//I’ve been here. I have to of been here I can’t stop shaking, I HATE this place but I don’t REMEMBER it so I don’t know WHY// Hound murmured over comms as Jazz plugged into a wall panel and started hacking the door. Mirage rubbed behind his audials in a soothing gesture, concerned by the fact that his usually unshakeable lover was trembling involuntarily. It didn’t take long to get the doors open, and when they saw what was inside, it became immediately apparent why Hound was so upset by the place.

The dark room lit up to bright, almost garish white when the doors opened. Inside there was a large slab of a table, right in the centre of the room… no… not a table, a berth. A surgical berth. Machinery lined its edges, as did anchors with chains and adjustable titanium-mesh cuffs.

Jazz felt sick to his tanks. //Don’t go in Hound, stay out here, keep your optics and audials open for anyone or anything comin’ this way//

Hound gave an affirmative glyph, sitting by the door with his back to the wall and trying not to shake so much. He didn’t remember being on that medical berth but he knew… he knew he had been at some point.

Jazz and Mirage carefully tip-toed their way in, giving the slab a wide berth and concentrating on the benches and terminals lining the walls. Tools and equipment were lined up all neat and clean along their surfaces. Terminals were on stand-by, the place looked like it had never been used… except for the scratches lining the edges of the med-berth. Deep gouges in the metal, showing exactly what Shockwave’s patients thought of being strapped to it.

It dawned on Jazz that all of the cells that had lined the corridors were meant for those ‘patients’. Wolf mechs awaiting surgery of one sort or another, probably brought along by their owners for mods to be fitted or control modules to be installed. Primus only knew what else, Jazz wasn’t sure he wanted to…

But he had to. He stared at the terminal in front of him, gritting his denta before getting down to the task of finding an appropriate access port to hack it from. Mirage stalked about the room pulling horrified faces as he worked. This terminal was on a separate server to the rest of the building, and he wondered how many other closed systems there were here. Probably several, it was certainly safer than having it all linked up, if not somewhat inconvenient.

Hacking it was harder than he expected, but he made progress. After four or five breems, he managed to get in, and browsed the files to see how he could package and dump the lot on a memory bank.
He soon realised exactly how valuable this server was. It contained the medical information of every wolf mech that had crossed the surgical slab. Unfortunately, a lot of the information was coded such that Jazz couldn’t read it. The glyphs were a nonsensical form of short-hand, probably one Shockwave had developed himself. It might take decacycles to decode, but he took the lot anyway. Ratchet would probably be able to make half of it out without even needing Shockwave’s notes. The other half he might be able to pass by Wheeljack and maybe get some answers.

When he was finally done, the three of them couldn’t get out of there fast enough. Hound was still shaking a little when they got back to the lift, Mirage petting his audials soothingly and giving Jazz a meaningful look.

/I’m sorry he had to see that… but we knew this wasn’t gonna be a walk in the park// Jazz short-waved him grimly as he popped a wall panel and started hacking the lift. He’d realised they’d be waiting forever if he didn’t call it and force it to go where they wanted.

/I know. But I can tell you right now, I REALLY don’t want to make a habit out of this. Whatever your next stealth mission is, you’ll have to do it on your own//

/Fair enough/

They slipped in beside the gaggle of drones waiting for their stops, and got out on the next level down. The corridors here were much more open, lined with windows and doors leading off to different spacious rooms.

The main corridor simply ran straight from the elevator to the other side of the facility, and even though the last level’s layout had made its size hard to judge, Jazz knew it had been oddly much smaller. Maybe the facility was actually pyramid shaped? Each level down getting bigger would mean more work than he’d anticipated.

The three of them walked carefully down the central corridor, keeping to the walls as drones passed by in ones and twos. Jazz was on the opposite side to Hound and Mirage, all of them peering into the windows of large, sunken rooms. Hound put his snout to the ground and followed whatever scent he’d picked up, audials perking.

/Wolfmechs down here… can’t tell how many, there’s a few different smells but they’re not very distinct, might be siblings?/

/Okay, you’re with me Hound, Mirage can you scout this place and figure out what these rooms are for? I’m seein’ what looks like trainin’ setups in some but they’re dark. Don’t go into any of them if you can’t see what’s in there/

Mirage nodded as Hound slipped across the hall to Jazz and continued trying to follow the scent trail. Jazz kept on his flank, watching their surroundings carefully so he could warn the green wolfmech if something popped up while he was occupied. The longer they were down here, the more on edge Jazz felt.

A fuzzy feeling in the back of his processor was trying to tell him something, but he couldn’t make it out. This place feeling familiar to Hound was one thing. The problem was, Jazz couldn’t shake the feeling he’d been here too.

In all likelihood it was just triggering memories of Ratchet’s clinic. It hadn’t been so dissimilar really, and he’d LOATHED the place when Optimus first caught and dragged him there. It was like a prison, except his wardens had been genuinely concerned with helping him. Of course, that hadn’t stopped it feeling like a prison of the pits when he was locked into a room and forced to go cold on
the stim addiction.

Shaking off the distracting chain of thought, he touched Hound’s flank to make him stop. They’d come to an intersection of corridors, stretching to their right and left. They were slightly narrower than the main one, and Hound peered down both, drawing in huge drafts of air through his olfactory sensors.

//Scent goes right. We can just follow this wall around//

Jazz nodded, following the green bot’s lead. He continued to look around, noticing the amount of cameras on this level alone was four times as much as the one above. They weren’t a threat, since he’d disabled the feeds and looped yesterday’s entire record of footage into the system. All the same, they irked him.

Jazz perked up when Hound came to a stop by a door to a lit room. The window set into the wall showed it was not particularly large, but the walls were lined with more of the glass-box cages like the surgical level had.

He couldn’t see any signs of occupants from the angle he was at, but Jazz got to work hacking the door anyway. If there was even a shred of evidence that wolfmechs had been kept in there, it was worth collecting.

He noticed Hound sort of dancing in place at his side, trying to see SOMETHING through the window and snuffling around near the floor again.

//What’s up, something smell wrong?//

//No, not exactly… I mean, well… I’m worried. They smell young. Not sparkling young but still pretty new//

//There’s a smell to that?//

Hound looked at him as if he were a dullard, and he was briefly reminded of Mirage. //There’s a smell to EVERYTHING Jazz. Including the stims you still carry around. Yeah, I DO know about those, but I don’t tell ‘Raj because I’m not willing to start a fight between you//

Jazz stared at him with something between a grin and a grimace.

//Knew there was a reason I liked you so much// He scratched Hound’s head briefly before popping the door open. The moment he did, Hound slipped in ahead of him. Jazz would have chided him for not doing a trap-check first, except he’d already done one with a sensor sweep. Following the green bot in, he quickly focussed in on something else.

There WERE other wolfmechs in here.

He knew the moment Hound let out a high pitched soft whine and nosed at the first glass door. A confused sounding yip answered from the other side. Jazz quickly tapped Hound’s hip and put a digit to his mouth. Even if they’d found bots, they couldn’t afford to speak. Wolfish noises at least could be passed off as the occupants, but it was better not to draw attention.

He crouched in front of the glass cage and looked at the wolfmech inside. He was HUGE, all pale blue with red accents, and looking at them like they were ghosts. Jazz did a frequency scan around the same band he used to talk to Prowl’s pack, and pinged to see if he could get on the bot’s comm.

A head tilt from the huge wolf told him when he’d found it, getting a query ping in return.
I’m Jazz, this is Hound. We’re here to get you out. Please don’t make a load of noise, ah don’t know how many independent recording devices Shockwave has, and I can’t block them all without blocking ALL comms in the area//

Jazz was slightly confused when the large wolf looked between him and the right wall of his cage, then back again a few times.

//That’s… uh… not Hotspot’s comm link, it’s mine//

Jazz blinked and looked around, spotting a small white and red wolfmech one cage along to his right, staring at him. //Yeah it’s mine. They don’t have working comms, only me//

Jazz gave the large one, Hotspot, a slightly confused look before moving down to crouch in front of the other wolfmech’s cage. //Sooo how come he reacted when I found the frequency?////

//He felt it through the bond// the bot replied simply, as if it should have been obvious.

//You’re bonded and he keeps you in separate cages?// Hound replied, looking and sounding horrified.

The red and white wolf just blinked at him //Uh, yes. We all are.//

//Bonded?// Jazz hated to sound stupid but it was a lot to wrap anyone’s processor around. Group bonds were not exactly common… unless-

//Yes, all five of us, we’re siblings//

Jazz looked around briefly at the other bots peering owlishly at him out of their cells. //Aaaand Hotspot is the core spark huh?//

The red and white wolf’s tail wagged, as if pleased Jazz had finally caught on. //Yes, we’re a sibling gestalt//

Hound looked between the two, still confused even as Jazz nodded in understanding. //I’ll explain it later Hound. Figures Shockwave would keep you lot down here, so why’s he left you a comm and not the others?//

//I need it for my training, they don’t. Between us we just use the bond to speak. You said you were here to get us out? What do you mean, did you… did you buy us? I never thought he’d sell us, he never mentioned planning to or anything//

//Nah mech, I didn’t buy you. I’m here to get you OUT. As in free, not property, what Shockwave’s doing here? Completely not legal, or at least it won’t be soon enough. What are your names?///

The small wolf mech just stared at him in answer for a few moments before turning to Hound. //Is he… is he serious? I figured he was your master?///

Hound gave him a wolfish grin and a head tilt. //Nope. Friend, not master. Even my master isn’t really my master. He’s here too, checking out the rest of this level//

The smaller wolfmech’s optics went very wide, and there were shifting sounds in his sibling’s cells.

They all seemed to be having a rapid and intense conversation between them, and Jazz was reminded briefly of the twins.

The red and white mech focussed in on Jazz again after a moment and stood up //My name is
Firstaid. The console near the door controls all our cage locks/

Jazz gave him a small salute. //On it. I need you and your siblings not to make any noise while we get you out of here, okay? I’ve made it so the cameras and drones don’t record us, but I don’t know how many independent recording devices there are. Can’t touch the drones either, you guys think you can manage it?//

//…Blades says he’ll strangle any of us that mess this up so that’s a yes. Blades hates this place the most// Aid responded, putting his face against the door of his cage so he could watch Jazz work. Jazz assumed the mid-sized red wolfmech that whuffed and nodded his head was Blades, and he gave him a wave.

Hound stayed by the cage door, looking Aid over as if to check he wasn’t hurt. //Are there more of you here? Other Wolfmechs in this facility?//

//Not that I’m aware of, he doesn’t keep any in here with us. Usually he keeps any non-permanent residents upstairs in the surgical suite. Might be some on this level somewhere… he had some other… bots… here for a while, but they weren’t wolfmechs. They kinda weren’t… mechs, really? But they were? He didn’t make me work on them but I saw them briefly//

//Wait he makes you work on bots? How?// Hound cocked his helm, noting Aid’s expression turn uncertain as if he wasn’t sure he should answer.

//I… it’s my training. I don’t know how he could tell but Shockwave said I was sparked a medic. He’s used me as an assistant in a lot of his… it’s mostly just installing things in other wolfmechs. Mods and stuff, or basic repairs. Sometimes… sometimes autopsies…//

Jazz, who had been listening in while he worked, looked back over his shoulder with a pang of sympathy. //Don’t worry bot, we’ll get you out and Ratchet can take you on. He’ll be happy for a new helper, especially if you know a lot about wolfmech anatomy. Ratchet is a great medic, he’s not gonna make you do anything you ain’t comfortable with, okay?//

This seemed to perk up the red and white wolf, who startled slightly as his and his sibling’s cage doors opened simultaneously. When he stepped out, Hound sniffed him lightly and pulled a bit of a face. //Oh, you’re the one who smells of medical cleaning solvent//

Aid just gave him a small nod as the others stepped uncertainly out of their cells, looking around as if afraid Shockwave would come bursting in to catch them. Hound went about sniffing all of them in greeting, tail wagging a little despite trying to supress it. //Oh… how old are you all? You look full frame but you can’t have been for long?//

//Yyyeaaah… about that… we don’t know. We’ve always been in these frames. We don’t remember having a sparker or a carrier or anything, we’ve only known other wolfmechs that’ve been here and Shockwave… and some of the other weird bots sometimes, but we don’t have much to do with them// Aid explained, standing still as the smallest of their group walked up and rubbed themselves all over him, presumably to improve his smell. Hound nearly died from how adorable it was, but the gesture seemed totally lost on Jazz as he came back over.

//Aid, do y’know if your siblings have comms at all? Are they just locked down, or were they never installed?//

//Oh no, they have them, they’re just deactivated//

//Good, y’mind if I switch ‘em all on? Make getting’ out of here safer if we can all talk//
Aid gave his consent, and the siblings all sat in a line, ready for him to make the adjustments. It irked the visored mech a little that they were falling into line for him so easily when he was a stranger, even if he WAS there to free them.

As Jazz worked and Hound kept a lookout, he decided to probe a little more into who the other residents had been. //Aid, when y’say there were weird mechs here… what were their alt modes like? Bipedal? Quad? Recognisably animalistic?//

//Most of them were in mech form when I saw them, they’ve been gone from here a few orns. They just seemed to act more like anibots… the one I saw in anibot mode, he was huge. Bipedal, long tail, BIG head with LOTS of denta-//

//Wouldn’t happen to be called ‘Grimlock’ would he?// Jazz knew the answer even before wide, surprised optics turned to him from the young medic wolf.

//Yeah how’d you know?//

Jazz grimaced as he finished up on Hotspot and moved to Blades. //I saw him too. Shockwave used him in a fight against another wolfmech I know… wolfmech won but the price was high//

Aid seemed horrified by the news, but Hound gave him a reassuring nudge with his snout. //Prowl’s fine, Jazz treated him when his owner wouldn’t do it properly. Spine’s fixing up nicely//

Aid blinked at him owlishly // You know Prowl? I know Prowl. I mean, only as a patient… I’ve seen him come through, he wouldn’t know me since Shockwave keeps most owned mechs in stasis when they’re here. But he used him to show me complex tacnet systems and how to interface with them during mod installation. Prowl has a really neat processor setup//

Jazz nearly laughed at that, //You’re tellin’ me… Prowl’s using that neat processor of his to help free your whole kind. Now, your comms should all work, wanna sound off with your names?//

Each of them chimed into the comm channel with their names in an orderly fashion, and Jazz beamed. Before he could address how they were going to manage getting them all out stealthily, Mirage appeared at the door and beckoned him over.

//I couldn’t find any other bots on this level, but… there are some extremely worrying signs that he’s been keeping more than wolfmechs down here. Down the other corridor mirroring this one are massive cells, the scratches and claw marks in them look huge//

Jazz nodded grimly, //He was keeping Grimlock down here before the fight. I’m assuming afterwards that he sent him to another location for repairs or to snuff and dissect the bot or whatever it was he planned to do. Whatever other bots of a similar nature he had here are gone too. They ain’t wolfmechs//

Mirage gave him a slightly horrified look. //So… I see you’ve found the life-signs, Hound sent me some basic details on our private channel, what’s the plan for getting them out safely?//

Jazz made a motion like he wanted to sigh, but couldn’t because he was trying to be silent. //Just wondering that myself. We gotta sweep the rest of the facility, but I wanna get them out as soon as possible. Five is a big group, but I don’t like the thought of tryin’ to break up siblings into smaller units to escort out. So we either take them all out together, or they stay here until we’re done and leave with us at the end//

Mirage looked between Jazz and the gaggle of wolfmechs (not at all surprised to see Hound was already coddling them). He considered the options Jazz had presented and looked back out at the
corridors they had come through. The drones were all still going about their business, but there weren't so many on this level. The lift might be a cramped affair though… and the atrium could turn into a disaster.

//How many levels are left in this place?/

//Three//

Mirage worried at his bottom lip with his denta a bit. //What if Hound and I escort them as a spread out group while you scout the last three levels? If you find anything or anyone else down there, we can finish getting them into the shuttle and then come back to help//

Jazz gave him a stony grimace //If someone sets off an alarm, we’re not gonna get to finish this raid. What if we end up leaving some bots here? I don’t think I could live with that ‘Raj//

//Yes, but if we don’t get them out before we’re done and WE end up setting something off, we might ALL of us get caught and killed. It’s a compromise Jazz, I don’t think we have a better alternative. And Hound says these kids are smart. They can take instruction and they know this place. We should be able to manage//

Jazz made another abortive sigh motion and ran a servo over his faceplate. //Yeah, yeah you’re right. OK, do it, I’ll do my sweeps and I’ll try to be fast to come help you if there’s nothing down there. Chances are you’ll have to come down for me though, I’m anticipating databanks I’ll need to hack, you already KNOW how long that’s gonna take with all the other slag I’ve hacked so far//.

Mirage nodded, giving him a squeeze on the shoulder before slipping into the room to introduce himself to the new wolfmechs.

Jazz gave them a wave before he left, knowing Mirage or Hound would fill them in on the plan. At least on his own he could sneak around way faster than when he moved with the others. He reached the lift quickly and crossed wires enough to get him to the next level as fast as possible.

The moment he was there, he wanted to leave. He didn’t need Hound’s sense of smell to know that there were bodies here. The corridors were spaced like a library… the room was more of a storage warehouse than anything else, with huge storage shelves in neat lines. They were encased in metal cages that stopped their contents from falling out.

Jazz dreaded investigating, but he had no choice… this was all part of his collection of evidence, he HAD to know what was in those storage cages. The smell of decaying energon, solvent and dead metal quickly tainted the back of his olfactory sensors, coating them like rancid oil.

Surely enough, the first bins he looked in were just… parts. Body parts. Very clearly used, not all cleanly severed. He took still images as he wandered the rows, disgusted by how orderly the carnage was… one shelf contained only arms of different sizes, one of legs, one of hip gimbles… it went on like this, but he only really figured out who the body parts all belonged to when he reached the bin of tails.

Wolfmechs. All of these bots had been wolfmechs. Jazz felt sick to his tanks, but he continued on through the next row of even more parts, now broken down into smaller, more specific components… shoulder joints, transform cogs, pumps, actuators, tension cables, optics…

This… THIS was the horror show he’d actually been expecting all along. The worst part though… the worst part was reaching the back of the room and coming to a large caged off storage area. It was just a flat expanse of floor… and strewn across it, piled carelessly over one another, where whole...
bodies. Some had been mutilated before death, some were whole but grey, lifeless. Some were in root mode, others in wolf mode, some… completely unrecognisable as either.

Jazz found himself on his knees in front of the cage for a good breem or two. Time didn’t seem to matter in the face of this nightmare… but eventually, something in his processor told him it was time to move. That he couldn’t afford to grieve for these strangers right now… that he needed to shut off his emotions and do his duty to record this monstrosity.

It felt wrong to leave without performing some kind of… some gesture to cleanse these deaths of the darkness and unrest, but Jazz was no acolyte of Prima. He couldn’t do anything but make sure he got the evidence out and into the right servos. That was what he would do to lay these mechs to rest. When the full raid party came, maybe Elita would go with them to do what he couldn’t.

Despite the overwhelming sense of horror and disgust, Jazz noticed something when he passed back by the bin of tails to leave.

They weren’t all wolfmech tails.

He crouched by the metal bin in the semi-darkness and shone his headlights into it, shifting his weight from pede to pede to try and catch the contents in different light angles. He flicked his visor to a different setting, trying to distinguish shapes without touching or moving the contents.

There were definitely other tails in there. Some looked like smaller versions of Grimlock’s… the rest all looked long, and thin, like tentacles or something… something…

The fuzz in the back of his processor got louder and he scowled. He KNEW what those were, knew they were significant, but couldn’t for the life of him place them.

Jazz took more image stills and then left as quickly as he could. The place had every one of his sensors on edge, not just because of its contents and the dimness of the room, but for the quiet… the lack of drones… it was far too much like being in a crypt.

When Jazz got back in the lift he suppressed the urge to take deep cycles of air, keeping his fans level and ventilations as quiet as possible. His spark felt like it was clenching inside of him, hardening against the barbarity he’d witnessed. He needed to focus. He needed to keep his head in the game here or he’d screw up the mission, and he couldn’t afford that. Prowl and his whole caste couldn’t afford that.

He wanted to check on Mirage, but at the same time didn’t want to distract him from what was a difficult and risky task, so he kept radio silence. He got out on the second last level and breathed an internal sigh of relief when he recognised it as a server farm.

He hadn’t been wrong about there being more independent systems. This low down, the room was about twice the size of the one they’d found the gestalt siblings in. Unlike the one above though, this was not an open space with banks arranged like a library. This was laid out far more like the surgical suite, with one circular corridor, a room in the middle, and several around the outside walls.

As he stalked past these rooms carefully, avoiding the little drones ferrying datapads and data-slugs about, he noted that each little room with its half clear walls had a server bank in it. They all had temperature and humidity gauges on the doors, along with static electricity meters. He immediately turned his electrical dampers up to full so he wouldn’t add to the readings and give himself away.

There was NO WAY he had time to hack every single one of the fifty or so servers in the room. He realised his initial idea of this being a server farm was probably incorrect… a farm would mean they
were all connected, but knowing Shockwave he’d have them all running completely independently of one another.

However…

He MIGHT have a system that linked them up so he COULD use them as a farm when he needed that much raw processing for whatever sick experiment or calculation he was doing. Which meant there might be a central terminal that could hook them up.

And if this layout was anything like the one upstairs…

*Bingo.*

If Shockwave had one failing, it was that his love of order made him predictable. The main terminal was in the same place as the main surgical room had been. The lock on the door here however was a touch harder to crack.

He was at it for two breems before he managed to open it, breathing an internal sigh of relief when he detected no silent alarms. He practically tip-toed into the control hub, doing constant low level sensor sweeps and pings, wanting to pick up any potential traps while not wanting to set them off either. He picked up an odd EM field, but it was small enough he assumed it was one of the systems, and it wasn’t pinging on any broadcasting frequencies.

This was a higher risk mission than anything else he’d done so far… EVER. Jazz knew on some deep, undecipherable level that THIS was exactly what he’d been created to do… there was no other explanation for why he was so good at it. He didn’t just have the tools and the knowledge, he was able to LEARN and MAKE tools on the fly.

And right now he needed all of them, because he was staring at a massive, multi-screen, multi input terminal. Just deciding where he should plug in was a pit of a task.

In the end, the safe bet was always to plug in where there were no plugs. He got under the console and carefully unscrewed a few panels until he found some suitable circuitry he could jack into. The experience was never pleasant, considering he was basically making his own digital doorway and currents weren’t regulated here for user comfort.

Once in, he carefully slid around the edge of the computer’s digital mass, scoping and prying to see how it all worked.

The answer, which was not at all surprising, was that it was entirely logic based. The whole thing orderly to within a one hundredth of a micromechanometre. It made it incredibly easy to see how all the systems hooked up, how they were isolated, how they all fit together and how they functioned independently. If he wasn’t still so appalled by the carnage from upstairs, he might find it beautiful.

Jazz did the mental equivalent of cracking his knuckles and dove into the grid, setting to working around the safeties and firewalls so he could connect all the databanks and start drawing down everything there.

Before he got very far though, he noticed something odd. Amongst the order there was a tiny spot of… not exactly chaos… more like organic movement.

Jazz stopped in his digital tracks and started to concentrate on the area it occupied… and to his mixed surprise and dread, it seemed to notice him back.

Was Shockwave using… had he installed AI to run this database, or had he dumped an actual
MECH into the systems?

///…You’re not Shockwave? Did he get a new assistant?///

///Uh… I’m maintenance, he had a connectivity problem, needed me to fix it. Didn’t tell me anything about you though…///

Jazz could not have been tensing his frame any tighter, fight or flight responses locked and ready to fire the moment he was busted. Even if he sounded confident, he was fighting to keep his fans from clicking on from the stress. Stress which tinged with confusion when the immediate response he received was the digital equivalent of a sigh.

///Yeah I think he forgot me in here again. Ignore me, I’m just a data-slug. If you need me out of the system you’ll have to remove me manually though, I can’t do it myself///

It took Jazz a moment to process that, and slowly he leant out from under the console, looking up at the surface where the input panels were. //Uuuh sure but… where ARE you?//

///What? I’m right there, on the far right end. Big black box sticking out the side of the input panel, can’t miss me///

Jazz did a double take. //OH, I thought that was… thought you were just an extension of the panel, sorry// he moved carefully, unspooling some of his uplink cable so it wouldn’t pull free. He peered at the plug where the data-slug bot was poking out from, wary of a trap. Was it just playing along to catch him out?

///Is there any kind of code I gotta input before removing you? Ah know Shockwave likes to lock down most of his info terminals///

///Oh, right, yeah it’s a physical lock. Numpad beside me, 280773473 then star //

Jazz, still tensed up for fight or flight in case he was entering in a lockdown code instead, pressed the numbers and the star key, a tiny red light by the numpad going blue when he was done. He then shuffled over and carefully pulled the large data-slug from the console, setting him down gently on the floor.

It did nothing for a moment, then it cracked, and a teeny mech slowly unfolded in its place. When they stood straight, they were no higher than Jazz’s waist. He tilted his helm slightly as the bot stretched and groaned.

“Uuuuuugh I have been in there for daaaays- WOAH” The bot online'd their visor and did a double take at Jazz. “You… sure you’re not one of Shockwave’s bots turned helper?... If you’re from outside the facility then that’s… weird.”

Jazz tilted his helm, now not only wary but a little confused. “Uuuuh yeah, no, I’m not from in here… y’got a name bot?”

The data bot just stared at him a little longer before refreshing their visor and shaking their helm as if to clear it of static. “Um, yeah it’s… it’s Rewind, listen, are you SURE? I mean, I’m not sure why I feel like you are but… I guess you just look like something he would make.”

“Well did he make you?” Jazz crossed his arms and gave the bot a half-grin, trying to make it look like he wasn’t still freaking out internally.

“Well, yeah, kinda… I’m one of the experiments, I wasn’t sparked that way but here we are.
Surprised you actually care enough to ask, most bots couldn’t give a slag, they just… yknow, use me as a tool.” Rewind shrugged, “I’ll just get out of your way if you don’t need me in the systems.”

Jazz wasn’t exactly sure what he should do with this bot… he was contemplating knocking them out with a dart, but unsure if the doses he had were too strong for such a tiny mech… but then he noticed something rather important about the tiny mech.

“Hang on a klik, wait… are you a wolfmech?” the question seemed redundant now he’d spotted the tiny stubby audials and the short twitchy tail.

Rewind canted his helm at him. “Well duh, Shockwave loves turning anything he can into one just to see if it’s possible. Mind I’m the only disposable class mech that’s survived the process, don’t ask me how.” The tiny black and red bot gave him a more scrutinizing look. “Are you… really here because Shockwave sent you? You just don’t seem his uuuuh, type, for hired outside help.”

Jazz weighed his options quickly and bit the bullet. “No, actually… I broke in to get you and any of your kind out. This was a rescue op… of sorts… I’m also tryin’ to get all the info and evidence I can pull while I’m here. Name’s Jazz by the way.”

It was a pit of a gamble to hope this tiny mech would turn against Shockwave immediately and help him, but by the way the tiny mech perked up, he was fairly confident it had paid off. “Slag YEAH, I fragging HATE him, I HATE this place… who are you working with? Jilted noble? Iaconian Science Guild? The copper smelt owners? I can just keep naming his enemies, we could be here a while.”

Jazz actually chuckled at that, “Oddly enough, I’m here on behalf of the Prime. Aaaand I don’t suppose you know how to pull the data off all these separate banks collectively, do you?”

The tiny bot’s body language told him what his visored and masked face couldn’t.

“Plug me back into my slot and give me a breem. I’ve been doing nothing but backing it all up to pass the time, all I need to do is compress and package… you were trying to hack the system into connecting up to get it, yeah? Would’ve taken way too long. Still, if you can ghost through Shockwave’s systems, you can clear up my data trails so he has no idea I copied everything, right?”

Jazz gave him a sly grin, “Not a problem.” He picked Rewind up once the bot had changed back and plugged him into his slot, standing and watching the readouts as he worked internally to track the mech’s progress.

Primus almighty, he might be tiny but his storage space was INSANE. Jazz didn’t think he’d ever seen that level of storage capacity in such a concentrated form before, and he was able to geek out over it a bit while running clean-up in the background. The task was so much easier than what he’d been trying to do that it barely needed his attention to accomplish, and Rewind worked like lightning with all his access and system familiarity.

//So uh, were you sparked with all that storage or was that a mod?//

//It’s the only useful thing Shockwave has ever done to me. TO me, notice I said that, because I never asked him, he just does whatever he wants to his experiments… speaking of, when we’re done here, we gotta go downstairs. Are you POSITIVE you’ve never been here and you knew nothing of this place until you got in here?//

Jazz frowned slightly and canted his helm, //Pretty sure, yeah? Ah’ve never had anything to do with Shockwave, very deliberately. Hate the mech. Everything I knew about this place, I was told by Bumblebee pretty much-//
OH you know Bee? I liked Bee… never got to talk to him but I watched him through the feeds and I have all the experiment records, not that I can read them, but still-/

So he WAS kept in this facility?/

Yes of course. All Wolfmechs have been in here at some point, it’s the place he first created them/

Shockwave made them on his own then? There’s no-one else involved?/

Well kind of… he’s worked on some aspects with other bots, for very specific things he couldn’t do on his own, but the core project was always his. Also if you’re here on behalf of the Prime, does that mean he’s finally going to get arrested?/

That’s the plan, this is the evidence gathering part so we can slam him with enough that he can’t wheedle his way out of prison using his rich benefactors/

Yeah, well, evidence is all here but… I hope you have a killer code-breaker on your team, I don’t even know how to read most of it. And I’ve been here decavors/

Yikes, mech… and he keeps you down here the whole time?/

Oh, nono, just MOST of the time. When he doesn’t really need me I can wander around SOME of the other levels. I’m done by the way, are you? Can you pull me out now?/

Jazz gave a glyph of acknowledgement as he finished up the trail sweeping. He input the code again and got Rewind out, the bot not waiting to be set down and instead transforming in his arms. Jazz pulled a surprised grimace as he tried not to drop the bot, who ended up hanging off his forearm, swinging his little legs, tail wagging.

“Right… downstairs. You’ve been through the rest of this place to get down here already, yeah?”

“Uh… yeah. You’re REAL KEEN on me getting down there, what IS down there? And why do you keep askin’ if I’m one of Shockwave’s experiments?” He pulled the little bot up to get him to settle on his shoulder rather than hang off his arm, Rewind obliging as if he was entirely used to riding around on other bots. Which, Jazz supposed he probably was.

“MMmm… don’t really know to be honest. I asked about whether you’d swept the upper levels cause I want to know if you’ve gotten everyone else out already. Also have you been hacking your way through this entire building? I have a connection to the security feeds and I noticed absolutely nothing.”

Jazz paused at the door to the control room as he plugged into the panel to pick the lock again. “Yes, me and my bots have been sweeping, we only found the gestalt siblings. D’you know if there’s more?”

“Shouldn’t be, unless he brought back any of the dinobot experiments but as far as I know they should ALL be at his testing facility in Kaon. If you got the gestalt, then the only bots possibly left to get free would be downstairs… aaaand I have no idea what’s still down there. He very rarely takes me down, and when he’s done using me to ferry info between those banks and these ones, he has me wiped. I’m not allowed to remember what’s down there, but I DO remember that I WANT to know. I managed to embed in my code that I need to find out, that’s the only reason I have to go with you, or I’d just ask you to get me the slag out of here ASAP.”

Jazz nodded, giving the tiny bot a curious look out of the corner of his visor. “Welp, I was gonna go down anyway. Think you’ll be able to copy everything down there if I hack those isolated servers
“Absolutely. I don’t expect to be able to read a damn bit of it, but there’s more down there than just info. We should be able to find out some kind of dark, dirty secrets to use against him” Rewind’s tone had become rather harder and more vindictive, and Jazz rumbled in agreement as he continued working on the door.

“Okay, before we get out of this room though, y’gonna need a rundown on stealth 101. Don’t talk out loud, talk t’mee over comms, you’ve got my frequency from talkin’ to me through the console. You probably won’t have to worry about dampening your EM field because it’s already so small even I missed it on the way in, but try not to get too excited or anything in case somethin’ picks it up, OK? And don’t touch any drones wanderin’ around, I only managed to hack the base systems and remote relays. If we touch the drones they’re gonna alert somethin’.”

Rewind nodded, tilting his head with some amusement. //Got it. But I already knew about the drones. I’ve been here a loooong time, remember? I already know how the security set-up works. So long as you can hack the systems, I can copy them, and I won’t make a sound// he mimed zipping his lip-plates over his facemask and settled in a little more comfortably on Jazz’s shoulder.

Jazz got the doors open and slipped through, creeping past the server banks and staying as far from the doors and their sensors as possible. It didn’t take long to get back to the elevator and tweak the panel to get it down to them.

//So how many other bots do you have with you? Are they still upstairs?// Rewind fiddled with the side of his own helm as he asked, Jazz unsure what he was doing but not paying it much mind.

//Two others, one’s a wolfmech as well. They’re getting’ the siblings out while I finish goin’ through this place//

Rewind just nodded, leaving his helm alone and shifting so he had a view of the room they’d be going into right over Jazz’s helm. When the doors opened, Jazz crept out into Darkness. There were no lights on down here save for the dim strip lighting marking the edges of the corridor floors.

Jazz altered the settings on his visor until he could see through the darkness and make out the shapes of partitions and pylons… glancing either side of him showed what seemed like endless walkways in both directions. This floor was the biggest yet… it seemed as large as the hangar that the wolfmech fights had been held in, minus the stands and bloodthirsty patrons.

Rewind fiddled with his helm again, and Jazz noticed the faint red light coming off the other bot over his shoulder. //Is that… do you have a camera? Are you recording this?//

//You bet your aft I am. Indecipherable notes on illegal experiments aren’t going to lock him up but visual evidence will//

//You… are a natural born enforcer, you’re gonna be a hit with Optimus, lemme tell ya// Jazz grinned, padding silently down the central corridor and trying to piece together what the layout of the Hangar sized room was. The shapes appearing out of the gloom of blackness looked like plain boxes, rooms within the giant room, sectioning off different areas but for what, he didn’t know.

He wandered silently until he reached a huge wall, it ran right and left to the ends of the room, and seemed to have only one door and no windows. Even though the door was in front of him, Jazz turned left instead, intent on mapping the open area first.

He moved a little faster, noticing a distinct lack of drones and noise. Some of the rooms hummed
with power, cables ran along the roof and down into the boxes, but there were no terminals around
the edges of the floor. He searched as thoroughly as he could before he started in on the box rooms.

The first one had windows, and he shone a torch through. Inside were empty regen tanks. In the next
box room over, he found exactly the same thing. And again in the third.

The fourth was in a seemingly different ‘section’, and only had windows in the doors. Shining light
through them, he made out what looked like… if he wasn’t much mistaken, it was a corpse.
Mutilated, dissected, and animalistic… the only clue as to what it USED to be was the long, tapered
tail. A Dinobot of some kind, possibly a rotoraptor.

Jazz shuddered, dreading what he would find in the next room. On his shoulder, Rewind made a
very soft humming sound that he realised was the tiny bot’s form of rumbling. Apparently the
mannerism was shared by pretty much all wolfmechs… even ones too small to make the
reverberating sound.

Unfortunately, in the next room over, there was another corpse… unmistakeably a wolfmech, and
Rewind’s tiny clawed digits clutched a little tighter on his collar.

Jazz moved on quickly, glad to find the sixth room empty of bodies, though it looked to also be a
dissecting slab.

The next lot of boxes was on the right hand side of the room, and configured quite differently. The
first one he came across was a huge glasteel cage with various machines installed around the outside
that had functions on the inside of the walls. Finally, Jazz managed to find a console attached to this
room and went about plugging straight into circuitry. Once he’d wormed his way in, he shut off any
alarms or notifiers that would tell Shockwave this console had been accessed or turned on, and he
made his way into the systems that controlled lighting.

He gave Rewind a quick warning before illuminating the cage, his own visor handling the
adjustment for him. He peered in, grimacing at the scratches and energon stains all over the floor
inside. The size of the scratches varied wildly, telling him the occupants must have as well. Maybe it
was some kind of testing room for the various experiment victims he’d held down here… or possibly
still WAS holding down here…

The light from this one cage was enough to let him make out most of that side of the room. It didn’t
take long to ascertain that the other rooms were experiment chambers as well… one seemed to be for
administering gasses to the occupant. Another had all kinds of restraining apparatus, Primus only
knew what for and Jazz wasn’t going to ask him.

Another box nearby looked like a holding pen, with what seemed to be the docking station for an
enormous Cryo-pod… except the cryo-pod wasn’t there. Jazz could only assume it had been for
Grimlock, which meant he was on ice, and had likely been taken to the Kaon facility, as Rewind has
said.

In the furthest corner was a massive area walled off with scaffolding and glassteel that held a training
room setup not unlike Thunderwing’s own… except the equipment seemed mechanical, so it
probably moved or could be made to alter itself as part of the obstacle. Something about it made his
spark rate increase. In fact, something about the SMELL of the room was putting him on edge, and
he couldn’t pinpoint what it was exactly, or why.

Steeling himself, and with neither urging nor protest from his tiny passenger, Jazz headed for the
door that led into the back half of the level.
The illumination from the large cage showed that the walls were made of thick, smooth metal. Shockwave clearly didn’t want anything getting in or out of this section, and Jazz was willing to bet what he was seeing was actually the side of a huge, sealed box, rather than just a partition wall. A fully encapsulated space protecting what was likely the least ethical, or most dangerous, of his experiments.

Jazz started hacking the wall panel by the door. //Rewind… ah have no idea what’s in here, or how dangerous it is, but ah think y’should go start downloading what you can off that console at the cage. I already got it so it won’t know you’re plugged in or pullin’ data. If I find Grimlock in here, or his sibling or somethin’… some other monstrosity like it, you’ll have a head-start to get the frag outta here, okay?//

Clearly knowing what Jazz was getting at, even if he didn’t know what Grimlock was, Rewind responded with an emphatic glyph of agreement and hopped down, trotting back over to the cage. Jazz wasn’t at all surprised at how long it took him to bypass the door’s security. It was the highest level in the whole building, and it felt… as weird as it seemed, it felt like it had been made SPECIFICALLY to try and thwart him. It was as if it were designed to predict the paths he’d take to go around it and continuously block him.

About halfway through, Jazz got an unwanted shock of adrenalin from his comm pinging him.

//PrimusalmightyRaj, y’timing is atrocious//

//Sorry. Letting you know we got them all safely on the shuttle. Can you talk now or-//

//Stay put where y’are n gimmie a couple breems I’m ball-bearings deep here//

Mirage acknowledged with a glyph, and Jazz immersed himself once more in his task. After what felt like a whole cycle, but his chronometer told him was only two more breems, he finally cracked the door.

//Slaaaaaaag me I ain’t ever wanna deal with a door that locked ever again. Ahm not gonna like whatever the frag is in here//

//Where are you? Do you need me to come help? Have you found any more bots?//

//Bottom level, maybe, and just one. If Hound can stay with the bots in the shuttle and stay ready to burn fuel outta there, ah could use the backup down here. It’s dark and ominous and I’m fully expectin’ monsters that we’ll need t’bust out and detain. Not lookin’ forward to it.//

//Right, on my way. Might take a while, I’m nowhere near as fast with hacking the lift as you. Also who did you find and how are they?//

//S’fine, just be ready to haul aft out if there’s trouble down here. He’s a teeny data-slug who’s also a wolf mech an’ he’s bein a real help at the moment//

Jazz sent the command for the door to open, stalking into the corridor that presented itself, trying to make as little sound as possible. All his sensors were tuned up to catch the slightest sound or movement. Lighting in here was a little better than outside the mystery box… ambient strip lights lined the floor and ceiling, bouncing off the darkened glass of rooms that looked very much like a mix between cells and hospital cubicles.

The cells were arranged so that they stood individually, not one touching another, with three sides opaque and one clear. All faced forward. All had their own console inside. Most seemed empty, but
as they had what seemed to be cryo-chambers rather than berths, it was hard to tell without more light.

Jazz wandered around the outside, moving along the wall and realising there was a bigger room situated at the far left end. Hacking in was far easier than the door to access the mystery box (as he’d taken to calling it in his helm). Once inside, the lights seemed to be automatic, and he had to quickly adjust his visor so as not to be blinded. The place was white and brushed steel, clinical… something between an operating suite and a laboratory. Recognisable elements like medberths sat beside odd glass chamber setups with mechanical arms. In one corner was a pile of grey husks… they had once been klikats, so far as he could tell.

Klikat tails... that was what he'd seen in the parts bin upstairs that made him feel weird...

Suddenly he felt sick to his tanks, crouching and drawing huge ventilations to steady himself. Something about this place was not right. This place was BAD… it was the worst, he couldn’t be in here, in here was pain, and too much light, and…

Jazz scrambled from the room and knelt outside, waiting for his spark oscillations to slow and his fans to calm down. What the slag was THAT? WHY was he going to pieces, he’d never BEEN there… why was that room affecting him so badly where the room of body parts hadn’t even made him squeamish? And why did he want to purge his tanks so badly?

//You okay?//

Jazz jumped and clutched at his chestplates when he noticed Rewind standing not three mechanometres away from him.

//Not… not really. This isn’t normal for me, I don’t… I’ll be fine, I just… I need a klik//

Rewind wandered over and peered into the room, making another low humming sound. //Is there a console in there?//

Jazz shrugged. //Probably… didn’t see so ah haven’t hacked it yet//

//You don’t have to go back in if it makes you-//

//No… we gotta do this now, there’s no other time. I’ll cope, c’mon//

Jazz gathered himself together, shutting out emotional inputs and narrowing his focus to get the job done. He snuck back into the room, refusing to look at the bodies or berths and honing in on the large console. He and Rewind scuttled over to it and he got to work. Pretty soon, he’d opened the system up and let Rewind plug in so he could gleefully start drawing down all the data.

//Gonna sweep the rest of this box t’make sure I don’t miss anything. Lemme know when you’re done, okay? And keep an audial out//

//Will do. Be careful//

Jazz nodded, getting out of the room as fast as he could and starting to stalk amongst the cells. He managed to click his fans back off, but his spark continued to oscillate higher than was comfortable. He was anxious, twitchy, and his tanks still churned. He’d NEVER felt like this on a mission before, of course he’d had nerves and there’d been some really close calls, but this… this was something else entirely, and he wished he knew what.

Maybe it was part of an experiment left over? Residue of some gas used to send a victim into a
panic? But then why hadn’t Rewind had the same reaction? Perhaps he’d picked up a bug while hacking, something insidious he’d missed used as a safeguard… something slowly killing or immobilising him…

He did a quick systems sweep, coming up clean. Okay, wasn’t that. Primus almighty, he needed to just concentrate and get this over with as fast as possible.

Some of the cells he passed looked like they’d been occupied until very recently. There were still substances in injectors that lined the sides of the cryo-tubes. He scanned each one as he went, trying to pick up life signs. Nothing. They were all emp-

He turned into the corridor of cells at the very back of the box and something caught his optic. Jazz stalked down the line, still sweeping cells he passed while his optics remained fixated on the lights. It was the only cell that seemed to have equipment inside running live instead of being on standby.

Sure enough, a sensor sweep turned up a lifeform… of sorts. The reading was fuzzy, probably due to the… whatever it was being in a cryo-pod. Which was ON.

Jazz started hacking the cell door.

This one was similar to the mystery box’s main door, but now he knew the tricks a little better, it didn’t take as long. It popped open silently and he crept in, trying to look into the pod, but finding the glass was frosted on the inside as well. He stared at it, spark telling him that this… whatever it was… he KNEW this creature. How? How could he POSSIBLY know them? Unless they were a bot he had met a long time ago that Shockwave had snatched and experimented on, but…

Some tiny voice inside was saying no. No that wasn’t it. It was something else entirely. But he wasn’t going to find anything out staring at iced up glass.

Jazz went to the console and plugged in. It didn’t take long at all to tap into the files for the ‘specimen’ in this little cell.

There was something so strange about this data… it took Jazz a moment to figure out what it was, but then he realised it wasn’t encrypted- wait… no… no it WAS… but he could already decipher it… without any memory of having come across it before…

Jazz didn’t immediately download the information, too intent on the contents. He opened the file, the files displaying on the screens, medical information and history scrolling but not what jazz was focussed on.

It was as if someone had replaced his energon with ice.

The schematics were his… his own frame, his own mods, but… no, no the alt mode wasn’t the same, this couldn’t be right, the programming was off, the… the spark signature…

Jazz’s body felt like it was made of rusted iron, joints stiff, every motion almost painful as he turned from the console and started the opening sequence for the cryo-chamber.

Impatiently, he wrenched the lid away the moment it cracked open, steam pouring out to fill the room and obscuring the bot inside. He wafted it away impatiently and stared at the face inside. It was both his and not.

It was his twin.

//Jazz! I found it, I found why I thought you’d come from here// Rewind’s comm came just before
two bright yellow optics came online and Jazz’s world went upside-down.

He caught himself before he could crash into the door-frame, twisting to see the other mech thrashing and tearing out connectors and tubes to free themselves of the pod.

“Wait, WAIT-DON’T G-“ Jazz was cut off as the bot transformed and leapt down upon him. It paused before striking a blow probably meant to kill him, seemingly only just now taking in the fact he looked the same…

There was a long, still, agonising moment before Jazz retracted his visor and they locked optics properly.

Both were stock still, tensed, in shock…

The faint sound of claws on metal flooring broke the frieze, and before Jazz could do anything, the humungous klikcat spring-boarded off him and out the door, disappearing through the cells and into the darkness.

“NO! DON’T, COME BA-“

“Jazz!” Rewind fairly yelped at him, coming to a skidding halt at the door and looking between him and the direction the other bot had gone “Why did you let her out!”

“I needed… I had to… Rewind what the slag is going on, how is my Twin here, how am I NOT here, how… just… HOW???”

Rewind was still looking between Jazz and the darkness, tail tucked and ears switching back and forth nervously. “I don’t know, it might be on that console, but if you’re going to get it you might want to hurry. She could trip any one of twenty alarms just trying to leave this level.”

The part of Jazz’s processor not freaking out was sharpening as confusion turned to anger. Rewind was right… he needed answers, and he needed them fast. “You’re right. But don’t wait for me, go, now, find Mirage and tell him to take you back to the shuttle.”

He plugged back into the console in the cell and started pulling data ruthlessly, not waiting to see if Rewind was leaving, but hearing him when he did. He skimmed the files as he went, face drawing taught with more horror as the mystery started to unfold. The moment he had everything he needed from that console, he unplugged and moved to the cell beside it, hacking the much less guarded door and drawing from that console before the systems had even finished booting all the way up.

This room hadn’t been touched in decavorns… none of the files had been moved. It was just as he’d left it… every detail of his frame, his modifications, the experiments, the training… and an entry regarding his escape.

Jazz took everything, and the moment he was done, he pulled a small box out of subspace and stuck it to the underside of the computer terminal.

//Rewind, did you pull the files related to all of these cells from that torture chamber?//

//Yeah, it’s all there, all centralised from each cell so far as I could tell//

//Have you met up with Mirage?//

//Yes, he was in the elevator when it came down, we’re headed back up now. No sign of your twin//
//And are you POSITIVE that every bot we can save is out of here?/

//Absolutely, Mirage says Hound did another sweep before they all left for the shuttle/

//Good. Tell him to get in the shuttle and get ready to haul aft, I’m not gonna be too far behind but I
gotta do somethin’ real quick/

He was so glad to be asking Rewind to pass his messages on. If he’d been talking to Mirage directly,
his friend might have cottoned on to what his tone meant. He might have tried to stop him. Some tiny
voice in the back of his mind was telling him it was a really bad idea and could jeopardise
everything…

But a check of his chronometer begged to differ. Shockwave wouldn’t have the time to get back here
before attending the event that started in only 12 cycles. And he would have no reason to if Jazz
manipulated his system communications properly…

Jazz pulled out of the computer, having ignored Mirage’s pings for the last klik or so. He opened the
channel as he stuck another of his tiny boxes on the computer bank.

//Jazz what the slag are you doing in there? Rewind won’t tell me what you found on the bottom
level, he says it’s not his place, are you alright? Hound and the other wolfmechs are getting really
antsy, please tell me you’re not trying to pull more information, we have MORE than enough, we
need to get out of here-/

//Chill Raj, it’s fine, I’m done, I’m coming/

The systems showed him the data that was now stuck in the nearest comms beacon on a loop,
broadcasting to Shockwave that all was well. He wouldn’t know anything was wrong until he
recognised the same 25 cycle data patterns were looping and came to see what was wrong. By which
time it would be far, far too late.

Jazz would have hesitated… if he hadn’t spotted his erstwhile Twin streaking away from the facility
on one of the outer perimeter camera feeds. Now there was nothing holding him back. No one left in
danger from his plan.

//Do you need me to come back and bring you out under my cloak?/

//Don’t worry ‘bout it Raj, he ain’t gonna see me/

//Are you… are you alright, you sound off…/

//Trust me, soon as I’m outta here, I’ll be a whole lot better. Keep those engines ready for lift off, I’m
only gonna be five kliks/

He crawled out of the maintenance shaft and made his way through the corridors they’d come in.
Anger still had his senses focussed to an intensity he’d never felt before. He thumbed the tiny device
in his palm, striding out of the facility and making his way to the road.

There was no glancing back as he input the code and transformed down, tearing away as a series of
thumps preceded an almighty rumbling. The building behind him crumbled into a fiery pit, sending
out a cloud of dust and shrapnel. A column of slag filled fire and ash shot up to finish off the effect.
The heatwave singed Jazz’s bumper, but he didn’t care.
He drove as fast as he could towards the shuttle, ignoring Mirage’s pings since he knew he’d get the yelling anyway once he reached the ship.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Time to initiate the plan.

Chapter Notes

This is it folks, beginning of the main part of the story :V
I have NO IDEA if this is going to be in two or three parts, but let's assume 3 because I can't control myself or my word count.

Now, *****!!!IMPORTANT THING I MUST NOTE AND YOU NEED TO READ THIS OR I AM NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR GETTING SQUICKED.!!!***** THERE IS SOME HARDCORE FORCED SEX IN A PART OF THIS CHAPTER. MY BETA INFORMED ME I NEEDED TO PUT A BIG FAT WARNING FOR IT SO THIS IS YOUR BIG FAT WARNING. I AM NOT GOING TO PUT A WARNING INSIDE THE CHAPTER BODY BECAUSE I DON'T LIKE BREAKING THE FLOW BUT IF YOU'RE REAL NERVOUS ABOUT BEING TRIGGERED BY THE RAPE FACTOR, IT IS IN THE SECTION AFTER THE THIRD PAGEBREAK, I WILL PUT THREE EXCLAMATIONS IN BRACKETS (!!!) AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PART CONTAINING IT. THIS IS YOUR WARNING YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED. There is also a soft lead in to the part so you'll see it coming if you want to avoid it in-paragraph. It will not sneak up on you.

Now, onto the more fun stuff.
MUSIC! I am going to list the pieces recommended for certain parts and then put their number in brackets at the beginning of the sections they apply to, much like the bracketed warning stated above. Of course you don't HAVE to listen to any of them but most of the parts were written TO them and add atmosphere.

1) Outlander season3 - track 9 (Willie)
2) Tron: Legacy - Recognizer (And then like... can use a bunch of the music from this album to background other parts if you want)
3) Safri Duo - Played-A-Live (Wicked dance album version)
4) Public Domain - Rock Da Funky beats (Also Wicked dance album)
5) Voodoo & Serano - Blood Is Pumpin (ALSO Wicked dance album)
6) Swedish House Mafia - Greyhound (You knew this one was coming and you need to start the music from the first beat drop when Bee STARTS his third run. You'll understand when you get there).

Other ambient music includes Wolf Hall Soundtrack and a bunch of stuff by Crywolf. Yeah I'm sensing a theme too it's not intentional I swear XD. Hope you enjoy binches I'm gonna be busy trying to get a game ready for publishing at the end of march so don't expect more chapter any time soon, sorry TuT.

And as always:
// - Comms
“WHAT do you expect me to do about it, Raj? I just found out I’m not even a real Cybertronian! I’m a slagging… *abomination*, Shockwave PIECED me together out of Klikats! *KLIKATS MIRAGE.*”

Jazz gestured emphatically as he paced, the blue and white noble looking slightly distressed. A deep engine rumble came from the corner of the room.

“Jazz, come here.”

“Why?”

“Just do it Jazz” Optimus sighed, optics fixed on him with an unreadable expression.

The silver and white mech went, scowling, and stood in front of the Prime looking both defiant and ashamed. It was an awkward look, his body tense and hunched, arms crossed, but Optimus didn’t seem concerned by it. He gently reached out and pried one of Jazz’s servos out so he could tug him a little closer.

Jazz gave only a token resistance, scowl deepening nonetheless. “Y’sure y’wanna be touching me? Now we know what I actually am?”

Optimus rumbled again, and there was a click and hiss that made Jazz tense up even more. Optimus was opening his chestplates, and before Jazz could protest, he was caught in the light of the Matrix like a rotodeer in headlights.

“Look at it Jazz. You look into the Matrix and you tell me it doesn’t recognise you for what you are. You’re as much a fully formed Cybertronian as I am.”

Jazz didn’t move. Didn’t say anything. Optimus sighed and suddenly it was like his EM field was swallowing Jazz whole. The smaller mech’s visor retracted without his conscious control, and he felt as if Optimus had just dragged him into another dimension. Within that dimension, something… he was loath to say Primus, but SOMETHING was looking back at him and…

“It doesn’t matter how you were made. As far as the allspark is concerned, you’re a part of it, and it’s where you’ll return with the rest of us… as will your sister.”

Jazz let out a shaky ventilation he hadn’t realised he’d been holding and nodded, almost collapsing into Optimus’ embrace as he closed his chestplates and the Matrix’s spell on him was broken.

“…It doesn’t change the fact spark amalgamations are illegal. *I’m* illegal.”

Optimus made a noise of uncertainty. “Well… technically, spark amalgamations of sentient bots is what’s illegal. There are no specific laws governing the amalgamation of anibot sparks. Presumably because no one thought it would result in a sentient mech… or two, as the case stands.”

Jazz shifted to look up at Optimus with a grimace “You sound like you’re followin’ Shockwave’s reasoning. And you can’t tell me the council would’na outlawed it if they knew he was tryin’ it. You definitely can’t tell me they wouldn’t be after my energon if they found out what I was.”

“There’s no reason for them to find out. Your history doesn’t have to be public knowledge, they have no right to more than what they know, which is as much as you knew up until now.”
Jazz’s shoulders slumped as he conceded defeat at Optimus’ soothing tones. He was right. He was pretty much ALWAYS right. It was probably why the Matrix had chosen him to begin with.

“Our main concern right now, as far as your history goes, is finding and assisting your twin.” Mirage supplied gently from where he still sat on one of the chairs beside Optimus’ desk.

Jazz shook his helm, pulling away from Optimus reluctantly to start pacing again. “No… Ah know it’s important, it is, but… if she’s like me, and the specs in her file says that Shockwave certainly intended her to be… she’ll cope out there on her own for as long as she has to—“

Mirage opened his mouth to protest, but Jazz held up a servo, “- Mirage our main priority right now is goin’ ahead with the plan. We can’t back out now, it’s way too late for that. Everythin’ is in motion, we gotta get our heads back in the game. My personal problems would have to wait regardless.”

Mirage sighed and leant against the desk, forehead tipping into his servo as he rubbed at his temples. “Yes, but what if that plan is already completely jeopardised by your… your scorched earth policy you pulled at the labs? SOMEONE is going to notice, SOMEONE is going to inform Shockwave, no matter how well you rigged the comms loop.”

Jazz stopped pacing again to throw him a cool look, optics still exposed and over-bright with the emotional turmoil he was holding back. “Y’mean someone’s gonna tell Shockwave his secret lab got blown up when all the bots who woulda been meetin’ him there are otherwise pre-occupied with our event and all the bots livin’ in the area hate the place and are probably glad it’s been cratered?”

Mirage gave him a slightly annoyed look. “How do YOU know no-one in the area liked the place?”

“Rewind listed the copper smelters as bots with a grudge. Apparently they’ve wanted the land he’s on for vorn, but he won’t sell, and they can’t bribe or threaten him. Light digging shows Shockwave’s clients have been tryin’ to threaten the smelters themselves to get off Shockwave’s case. They’re the only mechs within range to notice the explosion, and I don’t think they’re keen to pass the message on, so who’s left to do it? Besides… destroying the place means leaving no evidence of who was there and what they were doing, why would he automatically link his facility getting cratered to the event today?”

Mirage pressed his lip-plates together in a thin line, unwilling to concede Jazz’s point because of the nagging sense of worry that SOMEONE might still tell on them. “It was still reckless. And if we want to prosecute him for what was down here the only evidence we now have is what we gathered. What you did won’t go down well in a trial.”

“Yeah? Well maybe cut me a little slack, considerin’ I just found out that was where ah was born via some unholy experiment that cost a load of anibots their lives.” Jazz spat bitterly, dropping his visor and resuming his pacing.

“Besides, no one can prove WE took the place down. Could say Shockwave blew it up himself to prevent anyone findin’ out more about what was goin’ on down there. Don't care if it's lying, he deserves to go down... all the bodies in there... they needed to be buried. They didn't deserve all that... mutilation, bein' used for parts like they were nothin’ but product. Slagger just had klikat bodies lyin’ around in that lab at the bottom. What if... what if they were the ones he used to make me, huh? I couldn't have just left ‘em like that.”

“I did… I did always wonder why you kinda smelt like a cat” Hound mumbled almost inaudibly from where he lay by Mirage’s pedes.
Jazz turned to give him an incredulous look. Mirage nudged him with a pede. “Hound, some tact, please.”

In the corner Optimus couldn’t contain himself, making a sound like a backfiring truck and rubbing a hand over his face to hide his grin.

“Hound, y’lucky ahm feelin solidarity with you over turning out to be another one o’ Shockwave’s projects, or I’d deck you for that.”

“Sorry… just making an observation.” He murmured, body language nothing but apologetic. Even though Jazz could swear that wolfy green muzzle was grinning.

Jazz grumbled, “Ahm more concerned with how the slag he changed me from bein’ a cat to a car. Ain’t a trace of a feline alt in my code that I can find. Files show he kept my twin in storage while workin’ on me…. like some kinda backup. Even though my memories of all of it have been corrupted, I guessed right on one thing. I was made for the slag I’ve been doin’ this whole time. He was buildin’ me to be a custom espionage agent, but ah don’t think he counted on the difference in trainability between Klikcats and Cyberwolves.”

“You saying we could have solved our slavery problem by being disobedient this whole time?” Hound snorted.

“No, that’s not what makes the difference. Magnets, ridiculous flexibility and giving my processor the tools to hack my way through anything makes the difference. But ah mean I never met a Klikat WILLIN’ to follow orders for a reward, have you?”

“Gotta admit, they’re one of the harder prey items to catch during hun- uuuuh…” Hound shrunk down again at the look Jazz levelled him.

“Hey, NO huntin’ me. Or Klikats, not after all this slag. You want points in the pairs hunt go after cogboars or rotodeer or somethin’ I WASN’T made out of.”

“Honestly Jazz, I don’t think you could be classified as all THAT closely related to them at this point.” Mirage pointed out, chin resting tiredly on his palm. Just watching Jazz pace was wearing him out. “Would it really make a difference now where it didn’t before?”

“Is it really that hard to honour a simple request not to kill the things ahm made of?”

 “…Fair point. No killing Klikats.”

“OR photovoltaicats”

Mirage levelled him with a blank, tired look.

“Really Jazz-“

“Ahm not playin, you wanna test me on this?”

“Fine, FINE! NO Photovoltaicats either, but you realise those aren’t even a prey item used in hunts?”

“Ah meant EVER”

Mirage threw up his servos and offline his optics. “Primus, give me strength, Jazz, I PROMISE not to have Hound or ANY of my pack kill ANYTHING that is REMOTELY cat-like. Are you happy?”
“What about you?”

“Well OBVIOUSLY I promise not to shoot any, except maybe you if you don’t calm the slag down about this and focus on the actual task at hand. We have nine and a half cycles before we have to be at the hunting grounds, and I don’t know about you, but I actually function on recharge. Which I’m running out of time to get. And I know your helm is swimming with all this new… stuff, about where you actually came from, but we can’t afford for you to be off your game tomorrow either. You ARE the one saying we need to set what we’ve found aside and get this job done right, after all.”

Jazz stopped pacing and leant his hip against the desk, crossing his arms and frowning. There was a long pause before he cycled a deep ventilation and nodded. “Y’right. I know… I’ll be on the ball for this, ah promise, but…” He took another deep ventilation and refreshed his optics. “Yeah. It’s fine, I’ll be fine.”

“No, you won’t” Optimus rumbled, standing and moving to scoop Jazz up in one fluid motion, the smaller bot not resisting even as he continued to frown with his arms crossed. “You’re staying with me, I know if I let you do your own thing you’ll be up all night dwelling on the information. Give your processor a chance to regroup and you’ll be able to actually compartmentalise properly in the morning.”

As he spoke, Optimus washed his field gently over Jazz’s, feeling the bot slowly loosen up until Jazz was basically a grumpy ragdoll in his arms.

“Fine. Whatever.”

That response was the best he was going to get from Jazz and he could live with that.

“Mirage, I’ve organised a transport for you, it’s waiting out the back to take you home. Give your pack my regards Hound, I look forward to meeting them all tomorrow”

Hound stood as Mirage did and nodded, making a small whuffing sound in acknowledgement. He and Mirage moved to leave, but Jazz called out to them at the door.

“Hey, Hound… I don’t know exactly what she smells like, but… keep a nostril out for me, yeah?”

The green wolf most definitely grinned at him this time, tail wagging. “I’ll keep both out, don’t worry”.

“So kid, how much have you actually been taught? Assistant level only, or did he actually give you decent theoretical downloads?”

FirstAid fidgeted with his servos, tail twitching nervously. “Ah, well… he gave me very specific downloads on the work he wanted me to do? I can’t give you the packets, they’re coded to corrupt if I attempt a transfer. It was his way of keeping procedures confidential in case I was stolen or hacked. He never really trusted any of his clients.”

“That’s alright… did he account for you orally recounting the basics of them?”
FirstAid’s visor blinked off and on again, audials perking forward. “Huh… no. No he didn’t. I think he believes I would be too scared of the consequences to try. I don’t think he thought the rest of my siblings would ever be stolen with me. Usually he just threatened harm to them if I didn’t comply. Can’t really do that now we’re all here and you’ve disabled the control units.”

Ratchet rumbled angrily at that and scowled “I BET he did… seems to be a common tactic amoung the bots keeping your kind enslaved. Anyway, regardless, I’m mostly interested in what you know about your own kind’s physical and processing differences to regular Cybertronians. Since all I have to go off right now are cursory examinations of Hound and Red Alert. I do have some information from Jazz that he got when deep diving Sunstreaker, but again it’s only partial. Not a lot for me to go off when trying to administer general treatment.”

The young wolfmech medic brightened considerably, “Oh yes! I know all about that, that was the basics.”

Ratchet grinned, patting the young mech on the shoulder lightly. “Excellent. How do you feel about giving me a crash course so I don’t accidentally harm any of my patients tomorrow? I’d love to take you with me, to be honest, but apart from the fact Shockwave will BE there, I don’t want to stress you out.”

First Aid tilted his head slightly “I um… really don’t think you could stress us out more than Shockwave did. Or that whole, uh, escape thing. We’re not really used to being stealthy… playing keep away with the drones wasn’t fun but it was definitely better than staying in the labs.”

The older medic nodded, “Yes, well, that brings me to something else… Rewind says he downloaded all of Shockwave’s databases for Jazz, but he can’t read all of it. Are you familiar with the code Shockwave used for his medical records?”

FirstAid’s audials flicked back and he slumped slightly. “No, not all of it. He kept a lot of medical information secret from me as well. Procedures, installations, modifications… he only used me to work on the basic ones. Anything higher level he handled himself.”

“That’s alright, Wheeljack says he might be able to decipher some of it. At this point I’m just happy for any hints that mean I don’t do something like get myself infected with mechalycancy or trigger latent code related to it that I don’t know about.”

“Well, unless you try working on one of us during alignment, or somehow artificially simulate magnetic conditions of an alignment around us, you won’t be able to catch it. It’s a very weird virus, very few similar naturally occurring viruses exist. I know all the technicalities of it, if you want me to explain?”

“Kid, you better be ready to re-iterate everything you know on that more than once, ’cause once this is all done and dusted I don’t doubt Perceptor is gonna wanna steal you and pick your processors clean of everythin’ Shockwave knew on the subject.”

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(1)

What would they do, when they had all the space they could ever want? All the space they needed? Would they still recharge like this? Would they waste an apartment by using only one room, like they were used to? Would they adapt and find use for other rooms? Separate showers would be nice, definitely, but…
Prowl didn’t think he ever wanted to recharge without being surrounded by the warm weight of pack-mates pressing into him. The soft sounds of ventilation and the whisper of plating against plating when anyone shifted. The overlapping of fields melting into one another, making one harmonious hum of energy enveloping them.

With the option to go where they pleased and recharge alone… would any of them want to? Perhaps the younger ones… perhaps Sideswipe and Sunstreaker would drift away… attract others, start their own pack. Perhaps Bumblebee would go with them, enjoy the company of mechs more their own ages.

Was that the natural order of things? Something they wouldn’t discover until they were no longer forced into non-familial units and adapted to cope? It seemed logical… the twins were well and truly capable of looking after themselves, and both had the makings of alphas. He had no doubt others would be ASKING to follow them. But it felt… painful, to consider that freedom for all of them meant a breaking down of their pack.

Without masters forming packs by ownership, they would logically reform in more natural ways. Bots that liked one another more would gravitate together… bots that never felt they fitted would drift away to find kin or pack-mates they’d prefer.

It was exciting, and worrying, and it would be chaos but… it would be so much better than what they had now.

Prowl drew in a long ventilation, hissing it gently out of his snout before tucking a little closer to Trailbreaker’s back. The larger mech rumbled softly in recharge, EM field flaring briefly to mesh more with his.

He knew Trailbreaker and Inferno wouldn’t leave him. But there was no doubt other bots would flock to them… Red Alert was already clearly intent on courting Inferno, and Prowl was under no illusion that other bots were eager to get close to him simply because of his reputation.

He did not like the idea of having to turn bots away, but he knew once this was all over he’d be far too occupied with pups to deal with bots wanting to court their way into his graces.

And what about Jazz?

Was the mech serious about his intent to court? Or would the business of organising their freedom draw him away. Perhaps their mutual interest in one another wouldn’t last beyond this event… the thought that it might continue made his spark flare with an odd sort of excitement, but he had to temper it with logic. He didn’t want to be hurt again… and logic told him that their current relationship was more circumstantial than anything.

He knew he’d developed feelings based on no more than Jazz’s extreme kindness, but there was no doubt in his mind Jazz would have extended that same level of kindness to any bot in his situation. The real test of their feelings would come when he was free.

As much as he didn’t want to get his own hopes up… part of him hoped desperately that it wasn’t just lust and gratitude fuelling their relationship. He WANTED something more with Jazz. He respected the bot, desired him for his personality, and couldn’t deny the appeal of his frame either.

A pang of worry over the mission he knew the mech was on right now stirred his sparklings up, and he had to smooth out his EM field to calm them down again.

It wasn’t just worry over the mission succeeding that was nagging at the back of his processor. It was
not knowing how Jazz would react when he revealed he was sparked… and that he’d hidden it from him deliberately.

He wanted to believe Jazz would be understanding, but he also had to acknowledge that he hadn’t known the bot long enough to be able to predict how he’d take it.

Primus help him, only he would be nervous about something other than the biggest hunt of his life the night before it. There was so much at stake, so much riding on the plan going off smoothly, and here he was angsting over whether his crush would be angry about him being sparked and not mentioning it.

When had his life turned so bizarre?

A paw was slung over his neck by Sideswipe, who made a soft rumbling noise. //Carrier I can hear your processor whirring, stop thinking and recharge/

Prowl squirmed slightly, a little guilty, and sent a glyph of apology. Sideswipe made a pleased chuffing sound and Prowl made the monumental effort to actually shut down.

(!!!) (2)

Jazz wasn’t really sure what he’d been expecting. He’d seen the layout, helped plan the building renovations, overseen the setup through his specialist bots, but he’d never actually been on site.

The magnitude of the event only really sunk in as their transport crested the lip of the giant crater. The sheer-sided edges were dotted with observation towers, the circumference of the indentation so large it could swallow a small city-state. The other end was shrouded in haze in the morning mist, condensation glittering on the thick formations of copper and silver trees.

He peered down with his face against the glass as they passed over the forest, trees and crystal clusters thinning as they got closer to the centre of the crater, land going from steep slope, to gentler gradients, and then completely flat and clear in the middle.

Smack bang in the middle of this grand formation was the hunting lodge. It seemed like a pretty misleading title now he saw the place. The top-down and profile plans never did it justice. It was layers of concentric circles, five levels of them, like a circular grand-stand made entirely of private viewing boxes. Off to one side was a huge, rectangular building which housed wolfmech penning and treatment facilities. On the other side was an entirely new set of buildings dedicated to the racing and showing events they’d had to include.

Many more nobles had voiced displeasure at the Prime holding an event only centred around hunting. They’d expanded the plans, reasoning that the more nobles’ packs they could seize now, the better. It was pushing it though, and Optimus had had to call on some old friends in the enforcers to get the mech-power needed to pull off the plan.

They couldn’t well arrest them all if the nobles outnumbered the royal guard. The guard was how they were excusing the huge number of staff they’d brought in. Enforcer decals had been covered in the royal guard colours or serving staff uniforms, and they just had to hope none of the bots were known or recognised by the attending elite. The plan in that instance was for any bot caught out to say they’d simply changed profession.
Half of the overall guards and staff were already here, preparing everything from Wolfmech facilities to medical stations to fully stocked energon bars and special delicacies for the attending nobility. Another building appeared as the shuttle came about to land, a hangar large enough to store at least 40 private aircraft.

“Glad I topped off on energon and brought spare, ahm gonna be burnin’ through a whole tank just gettin’ around this place before any of ‘em even arrive. What a ridiculous amount of space to set aside for nothin’ but violent sport” Jazz murmured.

Optimus rumbled his agreement. “I have plans to turn it into a free-roaming space for the wolfmechs to come during alignment. And other times when they wish to hunt of their own accord. It will require installing even more new facilities here but I feel it’s a worthy expense.”

Jazz nodded in approval, standing as they touched down and stretching before moving out ahead of Optimus. His official title might be as an ambassador and head of cultural affairs, but unofficially he acted as a bodyguard, going ahead of Optimus to check everything was clear. You could never be too careful, given the number of recorded assassination attempts on former Primes.

He was honestly surprised how few there had been to thwart so far, given Optimus hadn’t exactly entered his title in the usual fashion… and hadn’t made the greatest effort to kowtow to the upper classes initially. His acting was getting a lot better, thankfully, but he had a long way to go. Which was why Jazz was still very nervous about situations where assassins would have the upper servo.

The first thing he noticed was that there were already other private aircraft in the hangar that had arrived before them. Nobles were not supposed to start arriving for another cycle… and they were not vehicles he recognised.

Great. First five kliks here and I’m already being put on edge by these fraggers.

A few quick comms to his security bots on site confirmed it was Lord Octane and a mech named Swindle… a bot who could not exactly be called a noble, but who frequently rubbed shoulders with them due to his ridiculous wealth. His business was barely legal and extremely broad and vague, so it didn’t exactly surprise him that the bot would have wolfmechs.

What his bots told them they were doing there DID surprise him though, and not in a good way.

He gave Optimus a face as they crossed the tarmac and entered the lower grand hall. //Primus almighty… we got two early birds here with their bots enacting a covering transaction… they’re slagging forcing their wolf-mechs to frag and make bitlets, I did NOT anticipate this and ah have no idea if I can even stop it at this point//

Optimus mirrored his look of disturbed concern. //I would certainly TRY. Where exactly are they doing that? The stabling yards?//

//Nah my bots say they went to a room we didn’t touch cause it wasn’t in an area we needed to do anythin’ to. It’s on this level, not far, might as well see if we can dissuade them from doin’ it now//

He pinged the location he was given to Optimus’ internal map of the grounds. Within a klik they’d made it across the main hall and into a corridor that led to some private rooms towards the back of the building. It was on the same side as the stabling yards, and Jazz had assumed due to the basic setups that they were day-bed rooms or overnight lodgings for staff or something.

He nodded to his bot outside the door and knocked, Optimus trying his best to compose his face and EM field before the bots answered.
It was Octane who opened the door, doing a double take before his wings fluttered and face split into a smile.

“Ambassadooooor! It’s been too lo- oh my word, I’m so terribly sorry my Prime!” He bowed deeply the moment he realised Optimus was standing right behind Jazz. “Please, come in! I hear you’re intensely curious about our little hobby, you’re just in time! My Alpha is covering right now, have you ever had the pleasure of witnessing a covering? No? It’s a little dull but the results should be fantastic.”

He ushered them in as he prattled, Jazz unable to even get a word in anyway as he complied. To his dismay, they were already too late, and he felt a sick churn in his tanks as his optics fell on the low berth in the middle of the room. He wished intensely that he’d known what these rooms were for when he’d had the opportunity to lock them off.

Two wolfmechs were atop the odd surface, not like a normal berth but rather some two-level custom apparatus. The one lying on its back on the higher surface had their legs fixed up in stirrups, wrists also strapped to the sides of the berth. The one on top had their wrists strapped to the head of the berth, kneeling on the lower part between the stirrups. The golden bot glanced sideways at him and Optimus as they entered, having stilled in his motions.

Jazz hated that he recognised Sundancer, and even if he didn’t know the blue and white bot beneath him it felt like a violation the moment their gazes met.

He let none of his discomfort show on his faceplate, and noted gladly when he glanced back at Optimus that he’d engaged his battlemask before they entered to hide his own face.

Swindle made some kind of oily sounding platitudes before muttering some sort of aside to Octane, who made an impatient gesture at Sundancer. “Come on why’ve you stopped, you’re not there yet. My goodness, I hope their appearance doesn’t alarm you my lord Prime, don’t fret. I’m sure Ambassador Jazz has explained they’re only sparked drones, I mean really it’s the same as breeding fancy Klikats.” Octane tittered, missing Jazz’s full body twitch.

“I admit I am… a little surprised by this, I wasn’t aware this was something you could do. I did not expect any of my guests to be here before me. Had I known that you had planned this I would have encouraged that it be done later in the day, after all the activities. After all your Alpha is competing in one of the early events, isn’t he?” Optimus rumbled calmly.

So much for remaining the silent icon of power while Jazz did all the talking… Jazz was just glad Optimus wasn’t giving away just how furious he was, even though he could pick it up in his friend’s field. It was enough of an undertone he doubted the others in the room knew.

“Oh, no, he’ll be fine for that. PLENTY of time to get him in show condition, and Swindle isn’t competing he’s just here to watch, so we figured we’d get business out of the way first to leave the rest of the day for pleasure! Although it’s sort of the other way around for our wolfmechs” Octane tittered, optics fixing back on the bots on the berth.

Sundancer had gotten back into a rhythm, rocking into the bot beneath him, who looked bored, if not a little flustered. Jazz didn’t think he’d seen anything less arousing, even though Swindle’s optics watched with obvious hunger. That only served to make Jazz’s tanks churn more.
“Ambassador I’m so glad you brought the Prime along to see this, I imagine this is your first too, unless Thunderwing let you watch his pack go at it?” Octane gave him a sly look, Jazz shooting him back an empty grin.

“Heh, yeah, no… this is my first, Thunderwing’s pack doesn’t even seem to HAVE an interface drive, not with how exhausted they are after all the trainin’ he makes ‘em do.”

He kept his face turned to the berth, even though his optics were focussed on Octane and Swindle, who both snickered at his statement.

//The matrix is making all kinds of noises I have not heard it make before… I wish we could stop this, this is wrong, neither of these bots wants to be making sparklings with the other//

The distress was evident in Optimus’ voice over comms, and Jazz sent him back a sympathetic glyph.

“Oh curious though… why y’ gotta strap ‘em down like that? Surely they don’t try an’ hurt each other when they’re interfacin’?”

“No, not really. I mean, with some of them they get a bit claw-happy when they frag, but mostly it’s to keep them on task. Easily distractible things, wolfmechs. If you strap them down, they can’t really do much else BUT frag, so it’s just easier that way. I mean, for the more high-strung ones we’d be using muzzles, but these two are pretty docile. We’re going for pups that have a lot of looks here, not a strong hunting instinct. Pretty pups go for quite a high price now more nobles in Crystal city are lookin’ to buy. They’re turning into fashion statements, y’know? I mean Breakdown here sure doesn’t do a lot besides lookin’ pretty” Swindle explained with his slight drawl, making it especially obvious that he didn’t even try to talk like most nobles.

Optimus had to try very hard not to inhale angrily. Hearing bots reduce sentient beings to commodities and fashion items was not helping with the matrix and it’s aggravated buzzing.

He wasn’t sure how thankful he was when they were all distracted by dancing light illuminating the room as both wolf-mechs opened their chestplates and spark cases. Both looked resigned rather than eager. It pained Optimus to realise they were treating this like it was merely business the same way their owners were.

It offended Optimus on a spiritual level that these nobles had managed to reduce something as sacred as spark-merging to nothing more than a transaction. That they were doing so by forcing others to undergo the ritual for their own amusement only added insult to injury.

The two nobles seemed to read the uncontainable flare of righteous indignation from the matrix as him getting worked up by the spectacle, and threw him and Jazz sly grins.

In truth Optimus didn’t want to watch, he felt as if he were violating the two mechs on the berth by doing so… but he couldn’t look away, when he’d tried the matrix had locked his joints. He frowned, trying to contain his overwhelming mess of emotions as he watched the two sparks meet.

Up until that point, the two wolfmechs had been rather quiet, only huffing through their vents, the muffled slide of spike in valve and armour on armour easy enough to ignore. But when their sparks met, both whined and rumbled at one another, Sundancer’s pace picking up and the other bot squirming against their restraints, arching into him.

Jazz was no more comfortable with it than Optimus, but he was able to look away from their slowly twining sparks, watch their faces to see the complex, subtle interplay of emotions as they forced
themselves to accept each other.

Immediately his processor wondered if that’s how Prowl had looked, every time he’d been forced into this position. His spark contracted to think of the litters he’d spoken of, the bitlets he’d been forced to bear, the times he’d been forced to spark others… was it always like this? Mutually trying to make a merge work without pain, even though their sparks wouldn’t always be compatible? Did mechalycancy change it so it wasn’t so difficult for them?

Before he knew it, the two were climaxing, filling the room with ozone and groaning. Sundancer bucked against the other bot, helm dipping to bite Breakdown’s shoulder. He didn’t fail to notice Octane and Swindle’s engines revving in response to the spectacle while he and Optimus remained stone cold.

Before the two were even done coming down from their overload, Octane was striding forward and tapping Sundancer’s helm to make him release Breakdown’s shoulder. Slowly but obediently, the golden mech let go, and Octane grasped his shoulder, lifting him off the other wolfmech.

Jazz suppressed a gasp, reignign in the urge to ask what the slag he was doing as the triple-changer peered at the still joined sparks even as he was forcing them to separate.

“Hmmmm looks like you got two out of him, not as much as I’d hoped he’d give you, but you can still make a tidy profit off that. After all, less fees from me.” He released Sundancer’s shoulder once he’d made sure the two sparks had separated fully, walking back over to Swindle as the shorter mech produced some credit chits out of subspace and handed them over.

“Always a pleasure doing business with you though, Lord Octane. Few of my wolfmech clients make such pleasant company. Oh, you’re leaving us so soon Prime?”

“Yes, most… regrettably, I cannot stay longer. I have a lot to oversee before the rest of the nobility arrive. I’m sure you’ll understand.” Optimus inclined his helm as he let Jazz usher him towards the door.

“Thanks gents, for the ah, enlightenin’ experience here” Jazz added with an entirely fake grin he hoped looked at least partly real as he followed Optimus out, mostly deaf to the responses as he met optics with Sundancer one more time before they left.

The moment he was out the door, the golden wolfmech was pinging his comm.

//The plan is still going ahead, right?//

//Oh you bet your AFT it is. I am so, SO sorry we weren’t here in time to stop that… truly Sundancer, ah don’t know what to say-//-

//Please, no, don’t be worried about this… Breakdown already knows, I told him through the merge. He’s fine with having sparklings so long as he can raise them as a free mech//

//Well tell ‘im we’re doin’ everythin’ we can today to make sure that’s a reality. Just… hang in there a little longer. Okay?//

//It’s fine, Lord Jazz. I trust any plan Prowl helped to make//

Jazz, who had opened his comm to Optimus’ channel the moment it came through, shared a glance with the larger mech. //You and me both ‘Dancer//.
He’d missed this place. It was a sprawling section of wilderness just outside Kalis, and beside him walked Quickgrip looking his usual scruffy, cheery self.

He watched Sunstreaker and Sideswipe gambolling about, running off ahead. Primus he’d forgotten how small they were in second frame. He’d never have guessed at how big they’d get in their third and fourth at that point.

His spark felt so light and content, even with the skies overcast and winds barely blowing. The twins had run out of sight, over the next hill along the path, but he could feel them through the bond so he wasn’t worried.

Quickgrip pet his helm as they walked, Prowl occasionally wandering away a little to sniff around, see if there were any petrorabbits to chase. When he found none he’d go back to Quickgrip’s side and walk in companionable silence.

A shrieking cry split the air at the same moment the bond erupted with panic and pain. Prowl felt his whole body tense with a sick lurch before his instincts kicked in and he shot forward. Never in his life had he run so fast, bolting through the metallic tree formations and huge crystalline spires towards the sound.

Coming over the ridge he saw a scene that turned his energon cold. Sunstreaker and Sideswipe, both splattered with energon, surrounded by a pack of wild cyberwolves. Sideswipe was missing a hackle and Sunstreaker had an open slash across his muzzle. They crouched back to back, watching the encircling pack while their fear permeated the bond.

Prowl hadn’t smelt or heard them, of course, not in the still air… there were six or seven of them but Prowl didn’t hesitate, COULDN’T hesitate. Everything else faded away as he ran down that slope. There was no planning, no strategies, he had no idea how to fight really... he’d not done more than play fighting or dominance tussles before.

The Cyberwolves didn’t spot him, too focussed on their prey, unable to see him over the lip of the ridge he’d crested. By the time they heard him it was too late, he was already leaping on one, snarling like a feral thing.

Nothing quite compared to protective instincts when it came to motivation for Prowl. He tore into the first wolf, unsure what exactly he’d removed before leaping off at another one.

Denta and claws sank into plating, wrenched at bodies, drew energon, every action a desperate move to defend his only sparklings. None of the Cyberwolves had time enough to coordinate a defence, and by the time Prowl had ripped open the neck of the fourth, the rest decided retreat was probably the best option.

Prowl stood between their retreating forms and the twins, ventilations heaving and lip-plates pulled back in a snarl. The tang of energon was seemingly everywhere, but once he was certain the threat was dealt with, he turned to inspect his younglings.

They were half crouched, pressed into one another and stock still, staring at their carrier. The look in their optics was far from fear though… it was awe.

Over the crest of the hill Quickgrip was calling, probably running after him. But that’s not what drew
Prowl’s attention… to the right, at some distance, a figure stood on a higher ridge, looking down at them. Why hadn’t he noticed them the first time? That was CLEARLY Thunderwing’s silhouette-

“Carrier, c’mon… gotta get up”

Prowl’s helm jerked, snapping out of the memory playback very suddenly and looking up, dazed, into Sunstreaker’s concerned optics.

The frame was much bigger, but the optics hadn’t changed.

“Yes… yes, I’m up, what’s happened?”

“Nothing, we’re just coming in to land. Were you replaying another hunt in your recharge or something?” Sunstreaker asked curiously as Prowl got up and stretched.

“Mmm. Sort of.”

The golden twin moved to rub against his side as they felt the transport descending, and Prowl sighed, nuzzling back. He didn’t want to think about the implications of recognising Thunderwing in his memory purges… especially not in the memory of the first time he’d had to fight so viciously for any reason.

Had that been real? Or had he corrupted the memory with anxiety? If Thunderwing HAD been there that day… had seen them from that ridge, then maybe that’s where it had all started… perhaps he hadn’t chanced upon Quickgrip’s sale notice, perhaps he’d been watching, or… what if he’d caused it? Had found ways to ruin Quickgrip in order to make him sell his pack, so that he could buy himself and the twins…

Prowl shook his helm. Conspiracy theories didn’t mean much right now, he needed to focus on the plan… to focus on making sure everything went the way it should. He could dwell on his memory purges when they were free and safe.

“Uuuugh why did he decide to enter us in all these extra events. He never cared for this slag before” Sideswipe groaned, frowning at the uneven sheen on the golden armour plate he was tasked with waxing.

“Because he thinks he has to dominate in all fields in front of the Prime to get on his good side.” Sunstreaker mumbled, working over his own arms expertly, sitting on a low stool in the middle of their stall. Behind him, Prowl took the polishing cloth from his twin and attempted to even out the wax.

“Honestly I'm surprised he didn't enter you in these competitions more often, but I think he may have been trying not to burn bridges with too many other nobles. It would be excessively greedy to constantly win all hunting tournaments AND best in breed shows.”

Sunstreaker glanced over his shoulder at his carrier. “You seem pretty confident I'll win. I'm up against my own sparker here, and so far as I'm aware, he's the reigning champion.”

Prowl couldn't help a small smirk. “Call it bias, but I don't think there's any real contest there.”
Sideswipe chuffed out a laugh beside him and stretched, plating fluffing and smoothing again. “I am also probably biased but I agree. You're going to walk it in, meanwhile IM going to be doing all the HARD work in the stupid agility division.”

“Talk about walking it in 'Sides, with the drilling we've been going through you're not going to have any competition either.” Bumblebee yawned, still diligently detailing Sunstreaker's pedes for him. None of them could get right in between the joints as well as him, not even Sunstreaker himself.

“Not necessarily, Blurr's in that category too, he's not just racing, and he's fast at EVERYTHING. I might be energetic but that bot is in a league of his own.”

“Oh NO, whatever shall you do if you don’t dominate in ONE event?” a voice chimed sarcastically at them, making them all perk up immediately. Hound poked his wolfish head over the partition between their stall and his and grinned. “Long time no see.”

Prowl immediately put down his cloth and moved to stand and hug Hound’s head over the wall, Hound chuckling and licking at his chin. “I see I was missed, it hasn’t really been THAT long.”

“Wow, you like him more than WE do. You can keep him if you want.” Moonracer snickered, wandering into the stall and wagging her tail in greeting, followed by the rest of Hound’s pack. Prowl released Hound, not missing how the green mech sniffed at him and gave him an approving nod. Apparently he was satisfied with his and the sparkling’s condition then.

“Where’s Mirage?” Trailbreaker asked, also coming over to the partition to greet the others.

“Meeting up with Jazz, they’ll be over here soon” Red Alert replied as he trotted up behind Hound’s last pack member and gave Prowl a meaningful look “Jazz is… pretty stressed out but he still wants to talk to you soon. Optimus will be distracting Thunderwing when he does.”

Prowl nodded as Hound transformed and stretched. He looked the green mech over, noting his optics seemed a little pale.

//How did the mission go? You look tired, are you alright? Is Mirage?//

Hound gave him a wan grin //I'm fine, so's 'Raj… Jazz is uuuh… we found some weird slag in the bottom of the labs… I'll let him explain, it’s not really my place//.

Prowl frowned slightly but nodded “I'd love to catch up more now but I need to help Sunstreaker get ready, he’s very serious about his competition. We can talk more in the lull period, none of yours are in the races are they?”

“Rude! Of COURSE I’m going to be racing Prowl, just because I’m not gonna beat Blurr doesn’t mean I can’t fight someone else for second!” Velocity piped up, plating fluffing in mock indignance.

Hound just grinned, “Yeah Prowl, rude, should have known better. So he’s not even putting Sideswipe in to race? I know how much the red hellion likes going fast.”

“He put me in agility instead” Sideswipe pouted from the floor where he was back to polishing Sunstreaker’s hip panelling.

“Ah, of course, Sideswipe’s OTHER speciality. Jumping around off walls like a lunatic.” Moonracer nodded sagely, transforming up to wave at them over the wall, Sideswipe going straight from his frown to a grin and winking at her.

“Aaah… actually, there’s been a last minute change to that roster for your lot Prowl.” Red Alert
piped up, moving out of Hound’s stall and into the corridor, head and paws appearing on the gate.

“Thunderwing HAS put Sideswipe in the races. He’s replaced him with Bumblebee in the agility course.”

“He WHAT?” Bumblebee fairly squeaked, head whipping around to give Red Alert an incredulous grimace.

The red and white bot just gave him an apologetic shrug. “I only just found out myself. We put nothing in the rules about last minute sign ups and substitutions, except for in the hunts because of limited running areas.”

“I don’t know why you’re worried Bee, you can take Blurr, you just need to channel your inner me” Sideswipe teased. “You’re a sure winner then. Besides weren’t you telling me I’d walk it in with all the drilling? You were put through EXACTLY the same drilling.”

Bumblebee whuffed at him. “Yeah, sure, I can beat Blurr with my tiny frame and short legs. Next you’ll be telling me Hot Rod could make Alpha.”

Hound choked on a laugh, trying to turn it into a cough. Prowl bit at his bottom lip and crossed his arms. Bumblebee looked between them, confused.

“I uhm… may have forgot to recount something to the rest of you from the grand party a few orns ago related to that.”

“He’s NOT?” Sunstreaker piped up with a look of horror, staring at his carrier and making Hound cover his mouth to try and stifle his laughter.

Prowl sighed. “According to himself and Lord Magnus, he is now. And he’s had a slight name change, he’s now ‘Rodimus’.”

“So wait his master just deposed Ironhide? Just like that?” Sideswipe piped up indignantly.

“Ah… no? He deposed Ultra Magnus… I thought you knew about Ironhide being sold back to Kup? It happened not long after Lord Magnus changed Ambus’ name to Ultra Magnus... which is STILL confusing the slag out of everyone, not that Lord Magnus cares.”

The twins and Bumblebee stared up at him. Prowl stared at Inferno and Trailbreaker, who looked a little sheepish.

“Ah… yyyeah… we found out about that when we were discussing the plan and who was supposed to come here initially and may have ALSO forgotten to pass all that on to you three.” Inferno admitted, rubbing the back of his helm.

“Prowl, my mech, for the best hunting pack anyone has ever seen, you all somehow have really terrible communication skills off the field.” Moonracer grinned, patting the black and white bot on the shoulder.

Sunstreaker huffed, frowning. “I saw slagging Springer at the fights in the holding pens and he didn’t say ANYTHING about ANY of this. Was going on about his match with Impactor instead, wouldn’t shut up about it. Forget bad communications within our pack, try bad communication between packs in general.”

“Yes, well, that will have to change today” Prowl murmured, throwing Hound and his pack meaningful looks and getting affirmative body language from all of them.
“So, what I’m getting from all this is that Hot Rod- sorry, Rodimus, is going to be EVEN MORE insufferable than usual now, right?” Sideswipe deadpanned, a little confused when Hound’s response to that was a wide grin and a cheeky look over at Prowl.

“I would hope not after the lesson I had to teach him at the party, but if he steps out of line again I’ll just have to re-introduce him to the floor. Unless Magnus does first, which would be preferable.”

“Oh, PLEASE tell me there is footage of that.” Bumblebee grinned, ears pricking when a more distant and less familiar voice answered.

“Sure is. I had to watch it a few times to work out what exactly you did to put him down, mostly because I want to learn how to do that with uncooperative patients,” Ratchet grumbled as he wandered up the aisle, grinning. “Good morning everyone, ready for your cruelty free inoculations? Figured I should get an early start since you’re here, and I’m going to be flat out when everyone else starts arriving.”

“How’s the spine feeling? I can take another look when everything is over today. I’d prefer to now, but there’s just not enough time or guarantee of privacy” The medic murmured to Prowl once he got around to him.

He’d already uploaded all of his pack members with the codes to offline the control modules. Now that he’d reached him, Prowl offered up his own neck port freely, despite his spark clenching with nerves. It was only a data pack transfer, but he was praying that Ratchet didn’t have any systems that would somehow detect his sparklings merely from plugging in.

He kept a completely cool façade despite his anxiety. “Much better. Barely get any pain from it now, except when I over exert. I won’t really be able to help that today, but it won’t matter by the end.”

Ratchet grunted in a sound that could have been agreement or disgruntlement or both.

“I’m glad to hear that, but for both our sakes try not to push it TOO much. I might be in a position to actually treat you if you damage it again but if you do, it may not heal as well. Spines are difficult things to treat at the best of times, layering damage is bad in any case.” He plugged in, noticing Prowl stiffen but attributing it to bad experiences with being plugged into by anyone not of his own caste. Transferring the data packet was extremely quick and painless though, and he pulled his connector out quickly.

Prowl relaxed immediately, noting no changes in the medic’s demeanour to suggest he was any the wiser. “So, we don’t integrate this until after the final event, correct?”

Ratchet nodded, looking around as an attendant ushered in another noble’s pack. He wasn’t worried about any of the handlers overhearing them, since they were all in on the plan and helping to keep nobles out of the stables as much as possible. He was more wary of the new pack, unsure if they were one of the ones in the loop.

“Correct. I mean, I’d prefer if you could all just do it now and not have to worry about those damn modules but-“

“It could jeopardise the plan if a noble tries to activate one and it doesn’t work.” Prowl nodded with a sigh. “It’s fine. We’ve lived with them for this long, a few more cycles isn’t going to make much
difference.”

“I’d argue it would if it’s a kill switch someone decides to use. I know normal mechs would see it as an over-reaction to do something like that over a lost contest in front of a Prime, but I know most of the nobles here, and I’m well aware that plenty of them are capable and willing to throw tantrums like that. Which is why I’m advising everyone I’m giving this to that if their owners are showing signs like they might do that sort of thing to just go ahead and initiate the codes anyway.”

Prowl rumbled, a little worried by the prospect of their careful plans falling to one owner throwing a murderous tantrum, but Ratchet was right. And what was more, he was acutely aware he fell into the category of having an owner who might just be willing to kill him over failure in front of the Prime.

The prospect scared him less than the thought he might do it to Sunstreaker or Sideswipe instead in order to punish him.

Prowl shuddered and shook his helm, drawing the attention of the medic who had been glancing over at the newly arrived pack again. “You’re right. We’ll just have to hope there isn’t a cascade of owners trying to activate modules if one ends up doing so and finding they don’t work.”

Ratchet nodded, reaching out a servo to pat Prowl’s shoulder lightly. “Even if they find out earlier than they should, Optimus and Jazz have backup plans. Plenty of excuses to cover anything weird and smooth it over. As long as we can get them through the last event, we should be okay. Now… that lot over there, do they know anything yet, or are they one of the blind packs? I don’t want to be giving away too much and setting off alarms before the day has even started.”

“Yes, that’s Kup’s pack, Ironhide is the alpha. Unlikely to be in any real danger, but still… they know what’s happening- Oh, there’s Jazz” Prowl perked up immediately, straightening from where he was knelt to watch the ambassador stride quickly towards them. His tail would have started wagging if it weren’t for the look on Jazz’s face.

Ratchet made another of his difficult to decipher sounds and stood up. “Ah, yes… I’ll leave you two to that and get on with my work then. Don’t hesitate to call me if something happens, I can handle that tyrant of yours just fine if you’re in need.” He stood and pat Prowl’s shoulder again before he levelled the arriving Jazz with a stern look.

//You better call me too if you start getting twitchy and feeling like you need to revert back to old habits to cope. Can’t afford you to be on anything today// Ratchet shortwaved to Jazz, who looked affronted before narrowed optics saw through his bluff and he deflated slightly.

//Sure Ratch, sure… ah’m not that desperate though, to be honest, but ah might need some o’ the stronger energon if you got it. Primus knows I’m already burnin’ through it//

Ratchet nodded and went on his way, leaving Jazz to slip into the stall and greet Prowl’s pack briefly before beckoning Prowl to kneel with him in a corner out of sight of anyone outside the stall. Before Prowl could speak, Jazz was in his personal space and… hugging him. Prowl was so shocked he just automatically hugged back, nuzzling the helm that had thunked onto his shoulder.

//I’m glad to see you again, so don’t take this the wrong way, but you look… bad. Hound told me you found some nasty things on your mission?// Prowl could smell fatigue in Jazz’s joints. It wasn’t that his plating was anything less than pristine, but his body language told Prowl far more than the state of his polish, and his field was a shambles.

//S’worse n’ that. Ah didn’t… I mean, ah knew what to expect, for the most part. And I found that, but I found a lot WORSE than I wanted to, and I…// Jazz drew in a deep vent, pulling back from
Prowl crouched facing him, winglets low and EM field held close and rippling worryingly.

Prowl rumbled, reaching his own field out to offer comfort, but Jazz seemed incapable of reaching back, looking slightly torn as he ran a servo over his own helm, grimacing. //I wasn’t sure I should… tell you what I found out down there. I thought about holding onto it until all this was over but… ah don’t think I can keep it in, m’ havin a hard enough time just keepin’ up mah façade out there with the nobles…//

Prowl fluffed his plating slightly and shuffled closer until he was in contact with Jazz again, unable to catch the smaller mech’s visor to get him to look up. //Tell me Jazz. If it helps you get through the day better then just tell me, I’m hardly going to judge.//

Jazz cycled a long ventilation and reached a servo up to push his visor out of the way, locking his white optics on Prowl’s concerned amber ones.

//He made me Prowl… same way he made you and every other wolfmech, he made me but… it wasn’t the same… ah’m not some sparkling who got infected and messed with… he amalgamated my spark from… from Klikats. A whole lot of them, he took their life forces out and forced them together into a… Don’t ask me how, ah can’t understand most of the lab logs and ah haven’t even had a chance to try yet. All I know is… my existence is probably even less legal than yours, and I’m not even the only one. I have a twin…//

Prowl looked at him with alarm, mouth falling open. It took him a few astroseconds to really process the information, but when it sunk in just how personal of a secret Jazz was sharing with him, he flared his field entirely around the other mech and drew him back into a hug.

They were both silent, Prowl not really sure what he could say to comfort Jazz about his revelation, Jazz unable to process much beyond how he didn’t want to have to leave Prowl’s arms for several cycles.

Eventually though, enough of the information settled in Prowl’s processor that questions started to form.

//Where is your twin? And HOW have you survived this long without knowing them? Or merging with them?//

Jazz was a little thrown by the question, and it took him a moment to answer. //Ahm… not sure? I sort of… set her free when I was down there, I wanted to talk to her, figured she’d be sentient and as eager for answers as me but she kinda… woke up, went on the attack, and then ran off when she realised who I was. I don’t know if she actually KNOWS me or not. As to the survival without merges… wasn’t aware that was even a thing? Ah guess our bond ain’t the same as your twins.//

Jazz pulled back, but didn’t push Prowl away, just creating enough space between them to let him make optic contact again.

Prowl’s audials twitched back and forth a little as he thought of the implications of this revelation. //So… she’s just roaming free?... Is there anything to stop her finding Shockwave and telling him what you did? And how on Cybertron did you get away from him without remembering it? Primus, what if YOU have control modules in you still? Have you integrated the codes?//

Jazz put a calming servo on Prowl’s chest and rumbled his engine //One at a time mech, but I’m SURE I don’t have modules. Whatever he had in me I destroyed a LONG time ago, and I’m pretty sure that’s what corrupted my memories of the whole thing. The kinda failsafe he’d make, wipe the memory of your weapon if it manages to escape you, y’know?//
That does sound like him, but how can you be sure? Prowl rumbled back, tail twitching anxiously.

Jazz tapped the side of his helm lightly. Had Wheeljack take a quick look. He’s the next best code whiz ah know besides me, he made the codes that cancel out those modules. Far as he could see, the traces of control codes had other stuff woven in. Ah never cleaned up that slag… hard enough to get that far down in my code without it hurtin’ anyway, easier for someone else to do, but he’s fairly sure when I fragged the controls he’d placed in mah code, it triggered that failsafe. Sure explains everything ah DO remember.

Prowl frowned and glanced at his pack, who all looked away from them as if they hadn’t been looking on in concern. His optics went back to Jazz’s as his other burning question returned. And what about your twin?… do you think she’ll undergo the same process as you, or will she still be loyal to Shockwave?

Jazz gave him a wan looking grin. Ah have only the vaguest idea how twin stuff is supposed to work from when Sunny let me in his code, but… since last night ah keep gettin’ weird tugs and odd feelin’s that don’t seem to be mine. Optimus was the one who suggested it was whatever was left of our bond waking up. M’guessin’ cause we were some kinda abomination that our spark split didn’t happen like a normal bot’s… but ah got a feelin’ from her files too. Ah really don’t think she’s gonna be tryin’ to get anywhere near Shockwave to tell him anythin’. She was probably just waitin’ for the first chance she could get to escape, same as ah did. Primus almighty she took it too, nearly took my head off in the process; he rubbed at his neck, remembering her claws and how close they’d come to ripping him open.

You should probably talk to the twins about it… feeling across the bond I mean. My bond to them is different, they’d probably be able to offer better advice. But if you think she’s on our side, I’ll believe you.

Jazz gave the bot a genuine smile, leaning forward a little to bring their forehelms together. At this point ah think Ricochet’s probably on her OWN team, but… yeah, I’m gonna be on a mission to find her soon as this is all over. Don’t want her makin’ the same mistakes ah did with self-rejiggering code and gettin’ hooked on stims to cope when that doesn’t go so well.

Prowl nuzzled Jazz slightly, glad when he felt Jazz’s field finally smoothing and meshing with his own a little. Am I actually allowed to tell the twins? Or should I be keeping this from my pack until you approach them later?

Jazz seemed to seriously consider that for a moment, taking in a long cycle through his vents. You can tell them, but… make sure they know not to tell anyone else. And ah mean ANYONE. Only about a dozen bots know so far, and I’m not keen on it goin’ any further than that. Already nervous that a buncha wolfmechs m’not even familiar with already know, but… well, Ratch has them now at least, and they seem like good kids.

Prowl perked up at that, audials switching forward. Kids? You found sparklings in that lab?

Jazz chuckled out loud and pat Prowl’s chestplate where his servo still rested, unaware it caused the bitlets beneath the plating to dance about happily. Hound had pretty much the same reaction when he smelt them. Don’t get too excited, they’re full frame, age wise Ratch estimated they’d be about third frame if they were developing normally. Real weird case, but the weirdest part is they’re a gestalt. Definitely DON’T go talking about them to anyone, Shockwave doesn’t know they’re missin’ yet.

Prowl tilted his helm at that, making a confused noise. Gestalt?
//Yeah, it’s like twins except there’s five of them and they have an overmind consciousness. Like ah said. Reeeeal weird. And really, REALLY rare.// Jazz’s gaze unfocused slightly as he got a ping on his comm. Prowl stiffened slightly, wondering if it was a message that Thunderwing was coming.

After a moment, Jazz sighed and leant his helm against Prowl’s again. //Gotta go. More nobles are arriving now and I gotta do more prep and schmoozing and all that slag. You’re gonna be okay here, We’re tryin’ to make sure nobles don’t come in here, and if they do they gotta be accompanied by one of our bots for ‘security against tampering’. Which is true, but it’s also just general bodyguardin’ to stop them abusin’ ya/.

Prowl nuzzled his helm against Jazz’s again and rumbled. //Try not to worry over what you found out… or about your twin, if she’s like you I’m sure she’ll be fine. Focussing on the contests will probably help you centre yourself…I know it does for me//

Jazz gave him a genuine, full smile. //Yeah, I’ll be fine once ah get to watch you n’ your pack workin’ it. You guys are pretty good distractions//

//Yes, well, don’t get TOO distracted, the overall plan is still the most important thing// Prowl grinned back, quietly very much enjoying Jazz’s compliment.

//I’ll try, but y’know, you’re hard for me to take mah optics off at the best of times. With this new paintjob ya sportin’ and the fresh wax, ah mean… it’ll be a struggle but I’ll manage I guess// he snickered, seemingly hesitating a moment before pecking Prowl on the lips and leaning back, winglets wiggling cheekily.

Prowl blinked at him, tail plates flaring out before he thumped it against the ground and leant forward to plant a proper kiss on the ambassador. It wasn’t a long one, but when Prowl pulled back, Jazz was looking a lot less heavy sparked and far more floaty than when he’d walked in.

//I, uh… heh… yeah… I’ll see ya out there later// Jazz stood, wobbling a tiny bit with a goofy grin, and practically hovering out of the stall and back down the stables.

“Hhnnnnnffraaaaag why are you two so damn CUTE around each other” Hound whined from where he’d been peeking at them over the stall divider.

Prowl chuffed at him, standing up and stretching. “I don’t think anyone has EVER referred to me as cute since Quickgrip first got me.”

“He’s right though you two are adorable together” Sideswipe sing-songed from where he was laying on his front, chin propped up in his servos as he grinned.

//He talk to you about last night?// Hound shortwaved as Prowl moved back to help Sunstreaker finish his preparations for the upcoming event.

//Yes… he told me all about what he found out about himself. I didn’t say anything but… it did solve the mystery about why he smelt a bit like a klikat//

//RIGHT? That’s what I said! He didn’t really take it well though, but that might’ve been bad timing on my part… might be just as well you didn’t mention it. But on that note, he made me and Raj promise not to kill any kind of cat-bot on the field or…well… ever. Touchy subject now it seems, but you should probably know so you don’t accidentally kill any either//

//Ah, yes, noted. But I haven’t seen a klikat out this way in a long, long time, so I’d be surprised if we found any. Just to be safe I’ll pass the message on to the rest of my lot... along with the reason, since he’s going to have to get twin advice from Sunstreaker and Sideswipe soon//
Jazz was glad every event was being recorded, because he only got to glance at the first event before he was being comm’d away by one of his shadow ops team leaders about difficult late arrival nobles causing a fuss by the stables.

What he saw of Sunstreaker though was something he wouldn’t forget. He’d managed to lock optics with the golden twin as he was paraded across the show arena by Thunderwing, and he could SEE the knowing smirk even at a distance. Sunstreaker knew full well what he was doing to Jazz AND the rest of the audience.

It seemed to Jazz the other wolfmechs might as well have not bothered competing, because none of them lit up like the golden bot, including his sparker, and none of them seemed capable of keeping a semblance of proper conformation around him. Which, of course, lost them points.

Primus almighty, the bot was winning purely on distracting his competition into making mistakes. At least in Sundancer’s case he seemed genuinely too proud to care that he was losing.

By the time Jazz was done with the noble who had been insisting on touring the stables until Jazz had smooth talked him into moving on, the showing event was over. He was not surprised, but still extremely proud to hear Sunstreaker had won. According to a quick comm from Mirage it had had a lot more to do with his ability to follow orders like a soldier on parade than just how good he’d looked.

Jazz was fairly sure there’d be a riot of some sort if Sunstreaker HADN’T won looking like that though. He couldn’t be sure the judges were impartial, since they were from the small wolfmech show society that existed in the Crystal towers, but no one seemed to be contesting their decision, which was just as well because they wanted Thunderwing kept in good spirits today.

The event wasn’t particularly long, and the moment it was over and stewards were leading the contestant wolfmechs back to the stables, others were already guiding guests to the stands to the east to watch the racing event.

Sideswipe was practically beaming in wolf mode when he passed Sunstreaker outside the stables. ~TOLD you there’d be no contest~

~Yeah well… have fun chasing Blurr’s tail, don’t push it TOO hard though, still got two hunts to go yet~ He but heads affectionately with his twin on the way past, not missing the little optic roll from Sideswipe after.

~Oh c’mon, race like this is just a warm-up for hunting. You’re better off channelling your energy into making sure Bumblebee stretches enough before his event, higher risk of injury in that~

Sunstreaker nodded, even though they’d passed one another and weren’t in direct optic contact anymore, they could ‘see’ each other’s reactions over the bond anyway. ~I guess it never hurts to try and keep Blurr on his toes, give that cocky slagger something to run for~

(3)
“Holy SLAG ah had no idea he was that fast when he opened up” Jazz murmured, watching the track with a half open mouth from Optimus’ box seat.

The Prime made a noise of agreement beside him, neither of them able to take their optics off the spectacle. Primus Prowl hadn’t been kidding about them being competitive. They might not have a choice in what event they were in, but they all seemed pretty keen to participate anyway.

Blurr’s initial speed had already floored Jazz, who just couldn’t seem to understand how the slag someone without wheels could move that fast and Primus almighty did that beg the question of what would happen if he GOT wheels.

But the Blue wolfmech was something he’d been warned about… What he HADN’T expected was to see Sideswipe practically flying across the ground, gaining on the Blue wolf like some kind of juggernaut. Not to mention that close on his heels was Mirage’s own purple femme Velocity, giving it everything she had.

And now he was wishing he’d been to more events with Mirage before, because he’d never had the pleasure of watching his friend stand half out of his seat, fists clenched and waving as he called encouragements to his pack member.

Jazz was so swept up in the energy and the suspense of the race he momentarily forgot all the niggling worries plaguing the back of his processor. The rush through his spark when Sideswipe juuuust overtook Blurr on a turn was the same as when he himself was racing other bots, and suddenly he was hollering support for Sideswipe from the edge of the box, Mirage throwing him a mock scandalised look.

On the long stretch before the finish though, Blurr tore ahead once more, though it looked like he was pushing his upper limit to do it. In the end it got him first, Sideswipe barrelling through in second with Velocity not half a body length behind.

//I’m starting to see why so many of these nobles got into owning wolfmechs now… not that I condone it, but the motivation is a lot clearer// Optimus rumbled, having managed to clamp down on his urge to cheer, instead effecting the reserved, mild mannered Prime appearance… even though his spark was also oscillating a lot faster from the excitement.

//Ya tellin’ ME. Can you Imagine if these guys set up their own league for this when they’re out? They’ll make a fragload of credits just charging admission, assumin’ they wanna set their own races up//

//Oh you bet your aft they will, they LOVE racing. Aaaand I think you may have endeared Thunderwing to you a little more then, he saw you cheering on HIS wolfmech instead of mine and just gave me THE smarmiest look over it// Mirage huffed, half amused and half annoyed.

Jazz just grinned at him and winked half his visor. //No hard feelin’s but y’know… gotta cheer for my adopted bots//

Bumblebee picked out a corner of the corralling yard and continued the stretches he’d started in the stables, keeping a subtle optic on the other contestants as they were brought in.

He was still a little nervous. Not because he thought he’d do terribly, but because of the strategy
Prowl had recommended he use. In theory, it was a damn solid play, especially now he could see the obstacle course they’d be running.

His main concern was Thunderwing’s opinion of the strategy. He could see their master taking his place up in the stands, wings high and tense, optics fixed to him and steely with the promise he’d given when he’d relayed Prowl’s advice.

Out in public like this, he hadn’t been able to do anything physical to threaten him, but Thunderwing didn’t really need to at this point. There had been enough of that in the past that Bumblebee knew exactly what was likely to happen if he failed.

All the same he’d received that cold, hissed explanation of exactly what the consequences of failure were. His age be damned, the flier would stop waiting until his upgrade and take him as he was, his mental and emotional health weren’t worth anything to the flyer if he embarrassed him in front of the Prime. NOTHING mattered more to Thunderwing than this chance to get in good with the Prime.

Bumblebee scoffed mentally. Thank Primus the seeker wannabe had no idea what was going down at the end of the day. Unfortunately, it was less his own health he had to worry about and more Prowls… because the threats ALWAYS involved Prowl. And Thunderwing was still entirely capable of activating Prowl’s pain module from a distance the moment he was displeased.

So there was much more riding on this strategy than he’d like, and he was NEVER put in these events. He knew how they worked, having watched the twins AND Prowl compete in them before, a long time ago. And looking over the course, it seemed pretty much the same level of difficulty as their home courses…

But Prowl’s tactics meant wasting the first of his three timed runs on going slow and analysing the course, plotting the fastest route for his other two runs and hoping he managed it in one of them. A tall order for his first time in real competition.

Thunderwing REALLY didn’t like the idea of him wasting ANY of his runs on a sub-par performance. But, at the same time, he trusted Prowl’s tactics more often than not, and had allowed the strategy before offering his motivational threats.

“Oh, my poor sweet spark, what on CYBERTRON was your owner thinking putting you in here?”

The haughty tone was a micro-mechanometre from sounding snide, but Bumblebee could feel the sincerity in Track’s EM field. The bot just had a lot of trouble not sounding like he was being nasty most of the time.

Well… also because he WAS being nasty a lot of the time, but never to Bumblebee.

The yellow and black wolfmech stood out of his forward stretch and plonked into a sitting position with a pathetic sort of cuteness and a grin. “Yeah, I know right? I mean, better this than the race… Blurr would have wiped the floor with me there.”

“Yeah, I would, but it’s not your fault your legs are that short.” Blurr trotted over, beginning his own stretches and fluffing his plating, tail wagging in a friendly way. The blue bot was also aloof and could be very nasty… but also never spoke with any heat towards Bumblebee. Even when he sounded as if he was deliberately giving a backhanded compliment, it was far more likely he just wasn’t filtering his words before blurting them out.

The yellow wolfling had the advantage of never having been in a competition against either of them until now, and they CLEARLY didn’t consider him a threat. The part of his spark that had absorbed
Sideswipe’s mischievous aura kicked into high gear and he grinned, optics bright and innocent.

“I think they might get a LITTLE bit longer when I get my final upgrade, but since I’ve been classified as a minibot I guess I can’t really hope for much.” He sighed, looking over Blurr’s long, slender limbs wistfully.

Behind them he could see Arcee, Rodimus and Moonracer snickering. All three had been around him enough in Hunting matches to know when he was playing up the cute puppy act, but thankfully none of them seemed inclined to out him just yet. And Skids, on the opposite side of the pen, seemed off in his own world.

“Are you sure you’ll be able to actually… you know, FINISH this course? It’s AWFULLY big, and I know you’ve got good stamina, but I mean…” Tracks gestured at the track and whuffed, “those walls are SO high… even I might have to try a little harder.”

“Oh, I’ll figure it out. I have three whole attempts, and I mean it’s all for fun right?” Bee thumped his tail, really pushing the cute factor with a head tilt and lolling his glossa out the side of his mouth.

Behind Arcee he saw Rodimus attempting to stifle a laugh, burying his head between his pedes and pretending to stretch. Neither Tracks nor Blurr seemed to be paying the fresh alpha any attention, both looking dewy optic’d at Bumblebee.

Oh yeah. They were DEEP in the puppy haze now. Bumblebee decided he might as well keep entertaining the other mechs in the pen by getting really ridiculous with it. “I better get more stretching in, don’t want to pull anything out of alignment before the hunts!”

He proceeded to roll onto his back and wriggle around before stretching all four limbs in the air, still affecting the goofiest grin possible.

Tracks actually *crooned* like a broody carrier and booped Bumblebee’s nose. “That’s the spirit Bee… don’t get too bogged down in the competition aspect yeah? Just have fun with it.”

Bumblebee was so very glad the announcement came on to call the first contestant up to the starting pad at that moment. The look of fond pity on Blurr’s face nearly made him break out cackling.

Instead he rolled over and got to his pedes to watch as the blue racer moved to start his first run. When the start buzzer went off, Blurr was off like a bullet, bouncing his way across the course with all the energy of a mech who HADN’T just been in a serious race half a cycle earlier.

“ARE you gonna be okay with this course Bee? I mean, I know your master can’t POSSIBLY be expecting you to WIN this event, but I thought he was a bit… y’know… a bit of a brute.” Tracks drawled with a snide sideways look.

Bumblebee just sighed “Yeah, well… there’s always punishments, but I’m used to it. As long as I TRY my absolute hardest, he can never be TOO mad at me.” He could only glance up briefly at Tracks, turning his helm away and pretending he was being cagey about it rather than trying to hide his amusement. The look Tracks had on his face was more than he could handle right now.

On his other side, Rodimus appeared and rumbled, watching the blue wolfmech zip about the course. “Well, he’s definitely throwing down the gauntlet. Damn, it’s like… we GET it, you’re FAST, but do you HAVE to rub it in like that?”

“Scared of a little challenge Roddy? I mean, it’s fair if you are, since you never had to make one to become an alpha, so I guess it would be hard for you to know what beating an opponent of great skill is like” Tracks drawled with a snide sideways look.
The red and gold bot fluffed his armour and growled, narrowing his optics at the dark blue and white wolfmech. “I’ll challenge you right here and now if you want Tracks, we can turn this event into a pit fight category and I doubt you’ll come off better THEN”.

Bumblebee rolled his optics subtly before making himself look as pathetic as possible and whining “GUuuuUUUyyyy this is supposed to be for FUN, c’moooon!”

Behind him Moonracer was very nearly losing it, and he flicked his tail to thwap her in the nose. Rodimus and Tracks however both laid their audials back and smoothed their armour down. “Yeah… yeah Bee you’re right, it is.” The red and gold bot sighed, papping the smaller bot on the helm until he got his tail wagging, making Moonracer back up a bit to stop her chest getting thwapped by it and streaked with yellow.

The siren sounded to announce that Blurr had hit the button at the end of the course, clocking his first time, and the time the rest of them now had to beat.

Next in the running order was Tracks, who pranced away excitedly as Bumblebee yipped out a “Good Luck!”

Rodimus shook his helm at the younger bot with a fond look on his face, Bumblebee just turned to his right where Moonracer had taken Track’s spot and rolled his optics again. The pastel green femme just gave him a cheeky grin and watched as the start buzzer sounded.

One after the other, the contestants took their turns, and Bumblebee congratulated each one in the same cheery way when they returned. Since he’d been a last minute swap out, he’d been put on the end of the roster, and when his designation was finally called, he gave them a nervous look and a “Well, wish me luck!”

“I’m sure you’ll ah, finish! Don’t try to get too caught up about the time, just do your best!” Blurr encouraged, Tracks nodding beside him.

Bumblebee just glanced up at Thunderwing as he stood on the starting platform, getting a wing flick and a glare that told him he better not fail.

Well, now he’d set up his prank so well, he had his OWN reputation to defend. It was just that he had to play a bit of a longer game than he’d like, but the payoff would be SO worth it.

The buzzer sounded and he took off, streaking across the flat ground to the first obstacle. He took each one at a leisurely pace, measuring out distances before scaling each part, putting in a few false hesitancies he used to image capture terrain and plot pede-falls, grips, turns and leaps.

He was methodical, even if he was most definitely about to get the slowest time. Even slower than Skids, who had seemed so vacant during the event Bee wondered how he’d even gotten through the course at ALL. The bot was usually a bit brighter than that, but maybe he’d only just learned about the plan for the end of the day and was feeling a little shell-shocked. Who knew.

Bumblebee pushed the odd behaviour (or non-behaviour as it were) out of his processor and went about pretending he didn’t quite know how to get up the highest vertical walls, prancing a bit before making his way up, pretending to struggle to get up the last little bit and then hitting the button.
Back in the stables, Inferno was groaning and dragging his paws down the sides of his face. //WHAT is he DOING???? That course isn’t even as hard as the one we’ve been practicing on for the past orn! I know he was meant to be taking the first round to assess the route but… what is with all the CLOWNING, Thunderwing is gonna tear him to shreds over that!==

//CALM DOWN Inferno// Sunstreaker huffed, bonking the large red mech with his shoulder where they sat side-by-side in wolf mode, watching the monitors above the stable walkway, showing them feeds of the events.

Sideswipe was quite literally rolling on the floor with glee, cackling and making Inferno huff and bat at him in aggravation. //WHAT is so funny Sideswipe? He’s practically BEGGING Thunderwing to come in here after and beat the slag out of him!//

Sides rolled onto his front and tried to suppress his giggles. //You… you mean you didn’t see him? In the holding pen? Ooooh he is stringing half those bots along and they have NO idea… he’s BEGUILED them with his puppy-like charms”

//He’s what?// Trailbreaker asked bemusedly, sat behind them and frowning in concern. Beside him Prowl snickered.

//Most of the bots in there have never seen him run a course like that… he’s never competed in that field officially, he’s barely even had any contact with Blurr or Tracks, and the other three seem to just be playing along but I doubt they even know what he’s fully capable of. Bumblebee is using that to his advantage// the alpha stated calmly, apparently completely unfazed by Bumblebee’s behaviour.

Trailbreaker cocked an orbital ridge. //Okay but… how is floundering through a perfectly doable course using all that to his advantage?//=

//BeeecAAAaaUUUSe// Sideswipe piped up on the shared comm, //he’s making them think he’s not a threat. And he’s putting on the BIG round optics and the dopey look and the nicey nice, the WHOLE shebang, luring them all into a false sense of security… and they’re all gonna get the THRASHING of a lifetime from him next round. I mean, the strat is Prowl’s, but the messing with bots… ooooh that is ALL me, I have taught him WELL//.

//Possibly a little TOO well// Sunstreaker snorted, looking at the feed of the other wolfmechs in the pen trying to console a perfectly cheery looking Bumblebee as he returned. //He better really lap that up ‘cause after this, no one’s gonna be fooled by it again//=

“Ooooh, Sweetspark, you did so good finishing the whole thing!” Tracks was prancing in place with an almost pained look as Bumblebee got let back into the holding pen.

He kept his faceplates schooled only by virtue of practice, putting on a big dopey smile, glossa lolling out again and plating fluffed proudly. “Yeah, I know! Mech that last wall though, WHOOF, that’s a killer huh?”

Blurr nodded sagely, having also moved to greet and possibly console him, looking relieved that he was so chipper and not the moping mess he’d been expecting.

Rodimus, Arcee and Moonracer were very deliberately sitting together on the other side of the pen so that Tracks and Blurr didn’t see them suppressing their laughter.
“You sure you’re gonna be okay running that two more times Bee?” Blurr asked with entirely sincere concern.

“Oh yeah, I’ve got plenty of stamina, you know what they say about minibots, we’re like little dynamos. Anyway, now I’ve got a feel for the course, I bet I’ll be able to shave some more time off next run. Hey, I might not even come last by the end!”

There was deep disbelief in their optics, but they grinned indulgently at him and nodded.

“Aaah Jazz… we ummm… we may have something of a situation here”

Jazz, who had been fixated on the holding pen trying to figure out Bumblebee’s game, turned a worried visor on Mirage as he came up close to his side, speaking low. His mouth pulled into a frown //What, what is it, is it gonna screw with the plan?//

“Primus no, it’s got nothing to do with that. It’s just that… well, okay, first, don’t be mad at me, alright-“

“That never bodes well” Optimus murmured quietly beside them, looking sideways at the little exchange with a spark of curiosity in his optics.

Mirage just seemed to get more flustered by the comment, and Mirage flustered was not something Jazz saw often. His own curiosity was now making him impatient. “Alright what is it, what did you do?”

“Well… you know how I had that evening with my creators the other orn? During the last alignment?”

“Yyyyyeeehh, what about it?”

“So I didn’t tell you this because we didn’t really have time for a ‘debrief’ between then and now over that whole night, but Lord Magnus was there too. And he was hitting on me something fierce.”

“YIKES, surprised you didn’t even send me any texts about that” Jazz chuckled, but Mirage’s face just went stony.

“Indeed, he didn’t really give me enough ventilating space to do as much as that. Anyway, despite my best attempts to show ZERO interest, my creators seemed to have taken the event as being a successful matchmaking attempt. They just tried to set me up with him on a FAR more serious engagement… one where he can formally announce courting me.”

Jazz pulled a face, Optimus looking like he was pulling a similar one behind his mask. “Yyyyyiiiiikkes, that’s… and ya can’t get out of it?”

Mirage’s face now returned to looking guilty. “Aaaah… I may have done so, yes…”

Jazz shared a confused and wary look with Optimus over Mirage’s shoulder. “Raj, what did you do?"

The noble cycled in a large ventilation, fixing him with a determined, if not apologetic stare, and spoke in a rush.
“I sort of told them I was already involved with you and that you’d already proposed to me and I’d said yes.”

Jazz just stared at Mirage in silence for a good half a klik, processing what he’d just said. Optimus was also silent, before he subtly turned as if he’d never taken his attention off the event going on below.

Mirage was now at the point of wringing his servos, optics not leaving the visor as he tried to read his friend’s blank, startled face.

Jazz’s expression didn’t change when he finally responded.

“You. Did. What?”

“Don’t be mad! I just need you to pretend you’ve been courting me and that we got spur of the moment engaged last night!... Think of it as paying me back for all that time at Thunderwing’s where I kept him occupied for you.”

Jazz cycled a long, deep ventilation and turned off his visor. “Raj, ah swear t’Primus, you are LUCKY I like to mess with your creators… but how long exactly are ya plannin’ for this charade to last? Cause it ain’t as if we can just break it off post event.”

Mirage seemed at least a little relieved that Jazz wasn’t blowing up at him, but at the same time it seemed he hadn’t thought that far ahead, and was once again flustered.

“I don’t know… a vorn maybe?

Optimus couldn’t stifle a snort, completely failing to stifle his snickering even as Jazz turned to glare up at him.

“Yeah LAUGH IT UP Optimus, maybe ah’ll go talk to that senator again who was so keen to find you a harem.”

The Prime quickly cleared his vocaliser and threw him a cheeky look over his battlemask. “You have to admit Jazz, it’s not exactly going to be hard for you to keep up that charade. The two of you already hang out enough that you could pass for courting mechs.”

“That ain’t the point and you KNOW it.” Jazz rumbled, slumping in his chair and raising a servo to rub at his temples. “I really don’t have the processor space t’be dealin’ with this right now.”

“We can try and avoid my creators as much as possible between events if I make excuses for you running around doing event hosting duties. You don’t really have to deal with it RIGHT now, but… I couldn’t exactly hold off telling you.” Mirage murmured apologetically.

Jazz huffed at him and rumbled his engine. “Yeah, THANKS for the consideration.”

“Look on the bright side Jazz,” Optimus piped up cheerily, “at least if all the other nobles know you two are engaged, most of them will stop hitting on you every chance they get. Now, put it from your processor, Bumblebee is about to start his second round and I want to see what he’s going to do.”

Bumblebee stepped up to the starting block again with another cheery ‘wish me luck!’ thrown at
Tracks and Blurr. Both just gave him sympathetic looks.

He glanced up at the stands, noting Thunderwing’s posture had grown more tense. He didn’t do more than grin before the starting buzzer went off and he shot out of the gate.

This time there was NO holding back. He streaked towards the first obstacle again, not shedding any speed before leaping clean across the long pool of mercury studded with footholds. He didn’t need any of them.

The next obstacle was a series of rotating cylinders set up like stairs. He shot up them so fast they barely moved, it was one of the areas his lighter weight was a clear advantage. When he reached the platform at the top, he twisted, paws encircling the sides of the ladder that every other wolfmech had gone down headfirst. He slid down backwards without touching the rails and jumped off the last few mechanometres to twist again and make a running landing, streaking towards the tubes.

The slippery surfaces inside were easy enough to dig his claws into, making his way up the twisting pipe to another platform and picking up speed as he leapt for the parallel vertical poles. They were suspended with only tiny foothold platforms at their bases, but he just jumped between them, using his momentum to gain more speed.

On the other end there was an extended platform before a long set of staggered balance rails. He dug his claws into the platform and leapt, hitting the first horizontal rail at a slight angle and sliding along its length, then pushing off to reach the next one to the left, then again at the end of that off to the right.

When he came to the end of that pole he simply dropped to the ground and kept running. He tried not to lose speed in the track curve, heading for the next obstacle which was a perfectly horizontal wall with another shorter one bisecting it at a right angle in the middle. He had to use the bigger wall to make a u-turn, but he had to clear the bisecting wall without touching it.

He tried to gain back all the speed lost in his turn before leaping straight up the flat wall, scrabbling up as high as he could and leaping off, twisting clear over the partition wall and landing hard on the other side.

He’d done obstacles like that enough times that he knew how to land without hurting himself, and he was off like a spring again, shooting towards the agility poles. He wove between them with armour pressed as flat to his body as he could. At this speed he couldn’t afford any stray armour to snag one of the thin, bendy poles and bring him up short. Not to mention it would be a penalty.

Within astoseconds he was through the thirty poles and running up the thin ramp on the other side. He leapt off the platform at the top without hesitation, tail windmilling for balance as he twisted to land on the first tiny platform. He bounced off to the next, and then the next, each bringing him closer to the ground again.

Once there, he took another sharp turn as fast as he dare, thankful as ever for being so close to the ground and able to keep his gravity down. He streaked along another straight piece of the track and screwed up his energy, leaping and ducking the closely positioned hurdles.

Finally, he was on the home stretch, taking a wide turn and completing the slanted wall-run along it before coming to the last straight. He picked up as much speed as he could, stretching and compacting his frame as far as it would go on each galloping stride.

His spark was in his throat, energon roaring in his audials, and his world narrowed down to the huge chevron wall before him. He curved his approach, taking an almighty leap at the left side of the right
angled wall, bouncing up between the angled surfaces and losing speed the whole way, until he finally scrambled onto the last platform and slammed his paws down on the huge button there.

His gyros were spinning from the sudden stop after such explosive movement, but he ignored the dizziness, looking up at the score board expectantly. When the results flashed up he grinned wickedly.

“You little slagging CHEAT.”

Bumblebee grinned, vents still panting as he trot back into the pen. But this time the innocent grin was accompanied with optics too full of mischief to be innocent. And neither tracks nor Blurr looked at ALL sympathetic.

Actually, they looked EXTREMELY flustered, plating ruffled and EM fields bristling. Bumblebee’s grin only widened. “I’m pretty sure I didn’t break any rules.”

“What about the rule of sportsmanship?? What was THAT huh? You TRYING to make a fool of me, hmm? I thought you were better than that red hellion of a packmate of yours but it seems you’ve been more tainted by him than I thought!” Blurr huffed indignantly.

Bumblebee just laughed and gave them an absolutely impish look. “Come on guys, it’s all in good fun.”

“FUN my AFT. You just took out first on the leaderboard, that’s a challenge and I am not only accepting, I am promising that I will obliterate your time. You want to play with the big bots, then we’re gonna play.” Blurr rumbled, glaring at him.

Bumblebee wagged his tail, plating fluffing, and looked to Tracks, who was standing there glaring at him as if he’d been betrayed. “What about you Tracks, you going to play too, or are you throwing it in?”

The Blue wolfmech scoffed and threw his head as if deeply offended. “As IF I’m going to lie down and take it that easily!”

“Oh good, someone has to take third place.” Bee snickered, getting an even more offended look from Tracks before he threw them both another cheery ‘good luck!’ and trot over to Rodimus, Moonracer and Arcee, who were staring at him wide-optic’d.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say you were Sideswipe’s twin rather than Sunstreaker. Primus almighty I knew you were holding back but frag me that was… that was something else.” Rodimus murmured, shaking his head with an awestruck expression.

“Well, I’m NOT gonna frag you cause I’m not old enough, but get back to me in like a vorn yeah?” Bee gave him a wink and Moonracer made a noise somewhere between a yelp and a whine.

“Hey! I thought I’d be higher up your future frag list than HIM!”

Bumblebee laughed, moving to head-butt her lightly. “Of COURSE you are, but I’ve gotta put Roddy in his place some other way when I’m done doing it in competition.”
“Hey!”

“Don’t worry Bee, I’ll cover that for now.” Arcee snickered heartily, flaring her hackles at Rodimus, who took up a submissive posture without even thinking about it, making Moonracer and Bumblebee snicker.

“Thanks Arcee, I’ll hold you to it.”

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“He’s sure as slag not playin’ anymore” Jazz murmured, visor trained both on the blue wolfmech that had just started his last run and the yellow form of Bumblebee watching intently from the pen.

“Moonracer is still making noises at me over the comm for not warning her about Bumblebee, but honestly, she should know better by now with Thunderwing’s whole pack.” Mirage huffed, optics also trained on Blurr as he lived up to his namesake.

“Indeed… I on the other servo still can’t work out HOW he jumps that far when he’s that tiny” Optimus muttered, leaned forward in his seat and just as enraptured by the event as the other two.

“Y’can ask him later- Ooooo that’s gonna cost him!” Jazz sat up a little straighter when Blurr attempted to slide along the horizontal rails the way Bumblebee had and ended up half falling off the last one and stumbling badly before he got back on track.

“Little too fast there, I HOPED his speed might hinder him in this event. Moonracer says he’s FURIOUS about Bumblebee, even if he was holding his temper in the pen. She knows him well enough now to read him.”

Jazz just laughed at that, visor flashing slightly when he thought the racer might come off on the second sharp corner, but the blue bot managed to apex it sharply without losing his grip.

They were all three silent up until he approached the last obstacle, going so fast he barely had to bounce between the walls of the chevron to get up them. When he hit the button, the stands erupted.

“Half a second! PRIMUS it don’t seem like much but Bee’ll really have to pull it out to beat that. Ah don’t know how he’s gonna shave that much time.” Jazz shook his helm, watching the yellow wolfmech for his reaction and noting he seemed completely unfazed. Was he just putting it on for show, or did he actually have a plan brewing?

Or more importantly, did PROWL have a plan that he’d already fed him for gaining that extra half-second?

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Tracks came back into the pen with his helm held high, but his last time was hardly anything to write home about. He was most definitely in third place right now, with a very real risk of being overtaken by Rodimus or Moonracer. Arcee didn’t actually seem to care about her time, apparently the only one besides Skids who wasn’t invested in actually competing.
Bumblebee had gone back to stretching once Blurr’s last round was over, and wagged his tail cheerily at both Blurr and Tracks when they’d returned to the pen. Both had glared and turned their noses up at him. It gave him a little thrill of impish glee both times.

But now he had to focus. As smug as Thunderwing’s body language was up in those stands, he was now under more pressure than ever to go for the win. Half a second was inexcusable to the flier. And after Blurr’s stumble, it was a matter of pride to the Blue jet that his wolfmech exploit the moment of weakness and emerge with the victory.

Second place might as well be a fail to Thunderwing at this point, and Bumblebee knew it.

Prowl, of course, had already finished his analysis for saving time on the last run the moment Bumblebee had finished his second. Which was why he was now stretching before the final.

He’d have to pull off some risky moves to win, and still remain in good shape for the hunts later. At least he could be confident he knew what he was doing, Primus knew he’d practiced weirder manoeuvres in hunts. But hunts weren’t based on speed trials, and that was what really made him nervous about it.

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(6)

“Bee shoulda told poor Roddy not to attempt those moves. Grindin’ the rails is for pros only” Jazz snickered, watching the pride-hurt red and gold alpha limp off the course and down the little corridor that took him back to the pen.

Before Bumblebee’s name was even called, a palpable tension rose in the stands. None of the other contestants had come close to matching Blurr’s time, even though Moonracer had managed to run Tracks into fourth place.

All optics were on the small yellow wolfmech as he took his place on the starting pad. It felt like an age before that buzzer sounded, and Jazz had his visor’s motion tracking speed on its highest to keep the bot clearly in focus.

Bumblebee streaked across the track, once again clearing the pool without a hitch and making his way up the rotating cylinders as if they were fixed objects. On the ladder he didn’t bother swinging himself to go down backwards, instead riding the sides down head first and leaping sooner than the last time…

And then he played his trump card. Jazz hadn’t failed to notice on his last run that he lost momentum whenever he landed, even when he made a running landing. Bee’s solution to this, apparently, was to slick down his plating and tuck into a forward roll when he hit the ground, leaping out of the roll to continue his run and barely losing any momentum at all.

Jazz watched with open mouth as he attacked the rest of the course with this new strategy. He began to notice that not only was this landing technique shaving time, but Bumblebee had also tightened up every pede placement on every obstacle. He knew exactly where each of his pedes was going to be before they got there, he was running the course five paces ahead of himself the whole way. And Jazz could, barring any misstep, already predict what it meant for the outcome of the contest.

Of course, the rest of the onlookers didn’t have a high tech visor to let them see all this in real time, so they were all on the edges of their seats… quite literally.
Bumblebee’s new technique also meant, Jazz’s visor told him, that the bot was averaging higher speeds coming into subsequent obstacles. Which would probably be making them more dangerous, if it wasn’t for the fact Bumblebee seemed to be used to doing this kind of thing at these speeds.

The hanging columns might as well have been placed with Bumblebee’s own body length in mind, he made them look so easy and natural. The horizontal poles were the same, and he slid down them so fast he threw sparks.

He practically flew over the bisecting wall u-turn, changed up his pede placement for the weave-sticks too by using only two opposing paws to turn between each one. The tiny descending platforms he simply ran down, the path so well plotted in the bot’s processor that he didn’t misplace a single paw.

The alternating hurdles he took at such a speed he simply bounced over and then slid under and then bounced over. And the vertical wall run was barely even registered before he was coming up on the last obstacle.

Jazz made a noise of disbelief, visor picking up even more speed than he’d seen on the rest of the course from Bee, who bounced up the chevron walls so fast he leapt onto the last platform in an arc, landing directly on the button.

There was a moment of silence that seemed to stretch for cycles. And then the time flashed up on the leaderboard.

“HE SLAGGING DID IT! HE BEAT BLURR BY A WHOLE QUARTER OF A SECOND! THAT SMARMY BLUE AFTHOLE IS NEVER GONNA LIVE THIS ONE DOWN!”

Sideswipe whooped and hollered, jumping around the stall like a lunatic. Hardly anyone batted a shutter at the behaviour, all of them too busy losing their own minds at the outcome.

Even Sunstreaker was dancing about on his hind legs at the victory, Inferno joining him while Trailbreaker pranced on the spot with his tail wagging madly.

Prowl had moved to lean on the stall gate to watch the whole event and couldn’t help his own tail from wagging madly, beaming at the screen as he watched Bumblebee calmly trotting his way back to the holding pen.

He didn’t think he could feel more pride for his adopted pup if he tried, it felt like even the sparklings were cheering him on as they zoomed about excitedly in his casing. He actually let out a laugh when the camera view switched to the Prime’s box to show Jazz doing a victory dance with Mirage, who seemed just as pleased despite the fact Bee wasn’t technically his pack member.

It made his spark flip when Jazz dipped Mirage and kissed him hard. His processor stalled, and he let out a displeased rumble before he could stop himself. The only thing that really brought him to his senses was hearing another rumbling growl mirroring his own.

He looked over at Hound in the stall beside him, slightly startled. Hound did the same back. And then they both flicked their audials sheepishly.

“Ah… don’t mind that… bit of an automatic reaction since… I mean well I should have expected it,
they do have to keep up a façade now…”

Prowl tilted his helm with a slight frown, “What do you mean exactly? They have to… pretend to be lovers?”

Hound couldn’t seem to suppress a grin. “Eheh… yeah, actually… ‘Raj just told me over the… y’know, over comms. He told his progenitors that he was engaged to Jazz maybe three breems ago to get out of a really awkward match-making situation. Now they gotta pretend they’re involved like that.”

Prowl made no comment on Hound’s odd turns of phrase, but noted them, his curiosity drawing the attention of the twins very subtly. “So they’re not involved like that but they have to make it look like they are for the benefit of Mirage’s creators? How long is THAT supposed to last?”

Hound shrugged, grin fading a bit. “We’re not sure… he thinks a vorn, tops, maybe less if they can play it off as a bad decision and they really just want to stay friends but… I was kinda looking forward to us finally being able to go public with our relationship, y’know? Since we’re… anyway, we both were excited about it… and then today he just got cornered and it was the only excuse he could think of. So now we’re stuck with a new reason for hiding our…” he whuffed, shaking his helm and looking up at the screens.

“Anyway you must be REALLY proud of Bee, that was a PIT of a performance. Didn’t know he had anything like THAT in him, shoulda guessed though given what you and yours are like.” Hound threw another grin at him, the pride in his voice and optics genuine and sincere.

Prowl beamed back with equal amounts of pride. “It’s skill bourne from intense pressure, but it’s still skill. And I think it’ll definitely boost his confidence.”

They both turned back to the screens as the placements were called and the mini award ceremony for the event played out.

“That blue sash goes well with his plating don’t you think?” Sunstreaker commented nonchalantly, coming up on Prowl’s right and beaming. Sideswipe pranced up beside his twin and nodded vigorously. “Honestly glad we got switched out, blue looks good on me but I don’t really think I’d have managed it. I’m too big for all that sliding under hurdles and I don’t do ladders as well as him.”

//So you want us to watch Hound and Mirage to check?// Sunstreaker shortwaved to Prowl quietly, glancing sideways past his carrier at the slightly forlorn looking green alpha.

Prowl nodded imperceptibly. //It’s only a suspicion, and it’s not really… important, per-se, but I’m curious to know if I’m right//.

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