bear no witness longer of his name

by oriflamme

Summary

Vos is the bloodiest of the names he wears to forget what he is.

Notes

As usual, the timeline and characterization involved is only as canon compliant as I can be bothered. I'm just winging it and living my life.

See the end of the work for more notes.

Before he earns the 'Vos' designation, he's thoroughly wrapped 'Dominus Ambus' under the anonymizing serial number of Agent 113, and buried both of those deeper still, under the designation of the frame he needs to wear for the duration of this operation. No one but It-in-Dominus-in-Agent 113-in-Spoiler needs to know that Spoiler died in the confusion of an orbital bombardment on Ceti 5. While everyone fled the epicenter of the blast, Spoiler took a single shot through the spark, leaving
behind a mostly intact body for Dominus to reformat into a load-bearer's chassis.

But it takes practice before he works his way onto the DJD's radar. Enough so that by the time he receives an ominous ping on Spoiler's comm link on the Decepticon network, he has privately come to consider it the Decepticon Justification Division. Getting recruited requires a unique combination of brutality, loyalty to the Cause (it must always take a capital C), and ruthless determination - and above all else, one must not hint that they're angling to join the DJD. Being flagged as a groupie (or worst still, a try-hard) sets you on the fast track to nowhere. Agent 113 isn't the first Autobot deep cover infiltrator to be ordered into the DJD, though he suspects that he isn't really the hundred and thirteenth. Prowl's sense of humor could curdle the innermost energon of the most stoic of sparks. Previous efforts have established the formula his Spoiler persona has to follow to avoid being unmasked, killed, or ignored; all he needs to do is bide his time and build a plump resume of carefully cultivated fanaticism and a smidgeon of self-control. To any of the former Spoiler's teammates or superiors who question the minor personality alterations that this act calls for, Agent 113-in-Spoiler feeds them the tale of how his near-death by giant space laser led him to a change of spark, complete with renewed devotion to the Cause. To a select few, he hints at something more personal - a whisper that one of Spoiler's dead comrades on Ceti 5 revealed himself to be an Autobot sympathizer, and that the betrayal cut him to the quick even as he snuffed the turncoat's spark himself -

Nothing like a slightly embellished anecdote of personal experience with a traitor to really round out one's curriculum vitae. He just can't overplay it; it has to stay subtle.

The ping arrives to inform him that he has been placed on Kaon's List, in cold, clinic terms.

It-in-Dominus nearly has a spark attack right there in the middle of the staging ground, before Dominus represses his...baser instincts with a well-practiced twist of self-loathing. Neither bestial terror nor the self-loathing are what he can afford to express in public; Agent 113 coolly compares the wording in the warning notification to that of prior agents' experiences, and keeps his Spoiler persona calm and unruffled for anyone who might be surveilling him. He allows a faint note of disquiet through; Spoiler has no reason to know this is how the DJD recruitment process works, after all.

They don't send warnings to traitors marked for execution.

And they don't namedrop unless it's a serious offer.

After three orns of waiting, Spoiler unsettled and distracted as he goes about his routine (no guilt, not a hint of it, not even once) because the delay itself is a test, and if he lets the anticipation get to him, he will be fragged on every single conceivable level.

He wakes up across the table from a mech with a Decepticon symbol for a faceplate. He's strapped into a chair that pulses with life - and spark-frying levels of electrical current - underneath him.

"Let's talk," Tarn says, with a engex-smooth voice that reaches down into the very center of the thing inside Dominus, intimate and honeyed, like the moment when one missteps and waits to fall down a flight of stairs.

Agent 113 forces Spoiler to the surface to take care of screaming, and sets himself to endure.
Once, Dominus Ambus spent a quarter of a million years laying low, collecting attention deflectors and networking with the dark underbelly of Cybertronian academia in the slow process of remaking himself. When he emerges from his self-imposed exile, his original form locked into the new, 'real' image of Dominus Ambus, memory has drifted enough that very few recall who - what he was, originally. He couldn't erase the memories of those he was closest to in House Ambus, but he could ask for their discretion, promise favors to those interested in being owed by a load-bearing spark, and bribe liberally when necessary.

It's for the best. As the world turns and functionism entrenches itself deeper, Dominus does what needs to be done to keep It buried. Staying undercover is second-nature. Given enough time, he comes close to convincing himself. There are those old enough in the Senate to remember, and disapprove of something like him putting on airs, but he builds his reputation, formulates his grand taxonomic project, and lives without thinking about the fact that -

"I hate myself," scrapes out of his vocalizer, static-ridden with agony. Tarn's voice sinks in like a fishhook, tugging on the underside of his spark for the secret he holds closest. The most he can do in his role as Agent 113, rolling over the pain with the last dregs of his control as the interview-interrogation keeps going on and on, is to manage how the confession is worded, and how much else he babbles as Spoiler before admitting his truest, most shameless secret.

Another orn before Tarn is satisfied that was the truth. The raw chunk of self-loathing sits out in the open, left to spoil between them on the table like something organic. At last, the chair releases him, and the mech it unfolds into catches Dominus with nimble fingers and a vicious grin as he sways. The frame that was Spoiler took the brunt of the torture and can no longer remain conscious - Dominus sags within, his load-bearing capacity taxed to the limit. It might have been easier on his spark to cut back to his...original form, rather than strain to support another chassis over his own.

But when he's as honest with himself as he has to be in this room, he knows that was never an option. All remaining power redirects to keeping the attention deflectors and stealth augments active; if they fail, it's over. Everything would be over.

"Not bad," Kaon muses, skimming his fingers over Spoiler's shoulders and namesake spoilers as Dominus crumples to his knees. Then even Agent 113's paranoid need to stay awake and aware gives out, and all of him drops into unconsciousness. The pain follows him, throbbing deep in his joints and protoform, but it means the DJD have chosen to keep him alive, even after passing out.

Which is as good as saying, "You're hired."

- Only one other agent has made it as far as this - Agent 56, according to his encrypted notes - and they died soon after their first attempt to pass information back to Autobot intelligence. Taking on an infiltration assignment dealing with the DJD necessitates a strong tolerance for carnage beyond what's typical of the battlefield, and an ability to set aside one's instinctive revulsion in the face of gleeful torture. 56 panicked after the third execution, tried to request extraction without checking his secure line was still, in fact, secure, and then suffered some of the Justice Division's most viscerally creative work before being left very deliberately alive for Autobot forces to find. Killing him had been the only mercy the medics could offer.

If there is one thing the DJD hate more than a traitor, it's a spy.

They allow for new recruits to purge their tanks after the first, though. As a courtesy. Helex pops a processor fresh from the traitor's cranium straight into his mouth like it's an energon goodie, and that's pretty much where Dominus draws the line on things he can witness without vomiting profusely in
protest. He watched old recordings of the DJD's past work in preparation for this, to inure himself to the reflexive horror of seeing mechs eviscerated, electrocuted, run through a portable smelter - but it's almost not enough. It's like the difference between viewing a horror film and snuff footage, but with even more moral dissonance because it's happening right in front of him. He's helping.

(His mind casts around for something safe to dwell on, but he can't afford to think of Rewind now. He would come undone.)

To his credit, Tarn doesn't repeat any lines of his speech from 56's ill-fated archival footage. This one is personalized for Spoiler, a sociopath's idea of a pep talk, lilting and silver-tongued: perfect for coaxing a new recruit past the rocky first mission and into the Decepticon Justice Division's arms. Dominus isn't Spoiler, but his persona has to buy into it, or he's lost. He feels better after he pushes himself up from all fours (that's nausea-inducing for Dominus, all on its own) and reasserts control. Up on one knee - swallow Its whimpers down - and another pede under him -

Upright, Spoiler wipes away a string of partially digested energon, straightening his shoulders and raising his chin. The harmonics of Tarn's conversational tone lure out loyalty, push for renewed devotion even in the face of the worst the DJD can unleash in their arsenal, and Spoiler obliges with a quiet nod and steady, sure hands as he goes back to work.

Tarn sweeps away, persuaded that Spoiler has met this last test. Helex and Tesarus couldn't care less about the outcome; neither of them has done more than blink and dismiss Spoiler as a boring and most likely temporary blip on their radar, waiting for him to prove he's going to stick it out long enough to earn the last available name of the First Five.

Kaon scrolls through a datapad - the datapad, Agent 113 knows - and strides back to the *Peaceful Tyranny* with measured steps, midway between Spoiler at the rear and the rest of the group.

-'Spoiler' is a shell, large enough to contain Dominus and able to be modified heavily, because integration-rejection is not an issue for a load-bearer's chassis. He augments the frame's hands and feet with hooks, cruelly sharp and able to be transformed back into something more dexterous as needed, and installs retractable chains.

Vos hooks onto traitors. Sometimes he secures the mech's other limbs to the nearest structure, and drives until he hears a scream and a sickening pop as the tension slacks off. Other times, after he's begun to fit into the group dynamic more, he dangles traitors over Tesarus's chest blender and lowers them in, inch by inch, at Tarn's behest. Each time they check off another mark on Kaon's lovingly tended list, he makes an effort to try something new, something worse, until the atrocities start to blur together. Dominus's internal screaming becomes white noise, a dull reverb of static that he learns to power through. He can't break here [he never told Rewind that he was going to -] because if he screams out loud, he won't be able to *stop* [but how long until he can't mute it anymore -] and there's *still* energon caked all over his regular servos when he folds the meticulously [obsessively -] cleaned hooks out of the way, but if he spends any more time in the washracks they'll suspect. If he *doesn't* clean this off, though, he'll curl into a ball and let out an *animal* wail -

"Vos. Having trouble?"

Kaon moves around the *Peaceful Tyranny* with uncanny grace; he slips up behind Vos and slides his hands along the underside of Vos's arms, stroking lines up and around before locking his fingers around the transformation seams of Vos's wrists. All the layers of Dominus go very still, because the potential for enough electricity to short out every one of his circuit and set his processor on fire hums through all the places where Kaon presses close along his back, and they're standing in a puddle of
solvent with more spray pouring down from above. Kaon gets handsy with everyone on the team - but this position in particular, with Kaon molded snugly against him and supporting Vos's hands like the arms of his altmode, takes Dominus right back to the interview room. Kaon hums a bar of low notes, one of the secondary cyber cello parts of the Empyrean Suite's fourth movement, and that does not help.

"No trouble," Dominus says as Vos, scrubbing everything but faint, abstract irritation from his voice. Irritation is acceptable; a mental breakdown, in present company, is not. "Simply reflecting on my poor cleaning routine choices. I think I've got energon in places that have never needed to be washed before."

Kaon smoothes a giggle at Vos's expense, thumbs dipping deeper into his wrist seams and stroking along cables still tacky with energon and solvent. He adjusts himself so his chin rests on one of Vos's shoulder spoilers, and the sudden, tickling brush of another mech venting along the side of his neck sends a sudden jolt through Dominus's frames. It could almost be mistaken for one of Kaon's warning pulses, but Kaon's electricity is never painless. That would defeat the point of it. "I recall one time we stretched someone open for a slow fillet, while he was still strapped in...Localizer! Of the Varas Centralus campaign - level 4 infraction, deliberate sabotage of his unit's operations, passage of intel to Autobot agents, and desertion." Kaon clicks his vocalizer in wordless disdain, and shifts his grip on Vos's wrists ever so slowly as he rattles off the charges. It takes Dominus a moment to realize that Kaon is rinsing his hands for him, foreign servos dipping in to massage deeper wires and cables clean. "He'd already gone through Tesarus a couple times, so he kept threatening to offline too early. Very inconvenient."

"I'm sure," Vos says, while Dominus-in-Vos very carefully doesn't throw up. Kaon's ministrations are disturbingly gentle; he crooks fingers to skim the underside of Vos's armor plating so deftly that it doesn't register as the threat it should.

Kaon snorts and shakes his head, slipping his servos between Vos's to splay them out and let solvent drip between them. "Helex was most particular about removing each organ separately, with his bare hands. Tarn and I had to coax him back five times before it was done, and ohhh. By then I was absolutely drenched. Dripping everywhere. Sometimes I think I still find old flakes of his energon left in the seams, even after all these vorns." He shivers too agreeably against Vos, drawing a finger down the center of each of his palms. "Mm."

Every single persona in Dominus's head is suddenly feeling extremely out of his depth. Kaon's pitch black, hollow optic sockets regard him with unreadable intent as Vos stammers out his excuses and extricates his hands. Paperwork, there's always paperwork to fill out to Tarn's exacting standards after a raid, and he really needs to get to it -

Dominus shudders to himself as a slow smirk plays on Kaon's mouth. Kaon cocks his head to the side and waves Vos off.

- The war lingers and drags on, and with each passing vorn, it feels like it takes up more and more of Dominus's memories. A larger percentage of his functioning feels like it's been spent in war than out of it, though he knows objectively that's not true. Not yet. There are so many mechs out there now who really have known nothing else, and he can't afford to dwell on the implications of that anymore.

Sometimes, when Tarn is in a more practical than eloquent mood, he calls their work 'extreme performance management.' For the Justice Division, direct encounters with Autobots are few and far between - Kaon keeps them scrupulously on task - and Agent 113 can only pass on a fraction of the
information he gathers on Decepticon troops movements, supplies lines, and internal schisms via data chips embedded in bullets. Past infiltration efforts have proven no level of comm encryption is strong enough to conceal the signal from Kaon's monitoring, and Agent 113 has every reason to be paranoid. He struggles to worm more strategically viable intel out of the DJD's resources, but they move laterally through the war, shooting traitors rather than Autobots, and so what he learns about the actual progress of the war is often fragmented.

No matter what he sends off, the only acknowledgement he ever receives comes in the form of disguised pings on his Spoiler's persona's tag, in cold, calculating, anonymized glyphs.

Noted.

Sometimes Dominus aches to see Extraction imminent, or some mention of Rew-

There isn't an extraction planned. Not for this operation. He knew that going in.

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The Decepticon salient cuts deep into Autobot space, and shows no signs of over-extension or slowing down; the commander prefers bold pushes and high Autobot casualty counts on file over entrenching and fortifying his new holdings. While they're on one of the planets both sides are actively clashing on, Agent 113 shoots an Autobot pointblank in the badge - one of the MTOs with a template faceplate; he wishes he recognized the face to put a name to it, but this mech may only have been born yesterday - and then knocks the mech the rest of the way unconscious so he can rejoin the hunt before one of the others realizes he's taking too long. His datachip gun gets stored directly in one of his deepest pockets of subspace, within his innermost root mode, and he leaves behind the intel that should allow Prowl to encircle and pinch off the salient from the sides, strangling the Decepticon supply lines and turning the active front of the war in this sector from a slow grind of attrition to a pocket of annihilation.

It won't end the war. Primus, it might not even end the salient's incursion, depending on how much the Autobots can invest in the assault. Dominus isn't sure anything can end the war, these days. Neither side has the resources to overwhelm and finish off the other, so they just continue to pour themselves into slow, mutual destruction.

He makes a weary note of his flagging morale, and puts these thoughts out of processor. Vos of the DJD has no concern for the state of the war effort, so long as no one betrays the Cause significantly enough in this region of space to warrant getting bumped to the top of the List. Kaon explained the algorithms he uses to determine List priority, once, beckoning Vos over with a crook of his finger and linking their arms together so he could explain the ~ATH code strings right in Vos's audials, but the programming language used was ineffably obscure and paradoxically circular in its logic.

In other words, Kaon continues to be...disconcerting.

Shaking his head and flaring out plates of Spoiler's armor layer to resettle himself as he shifts into alt mode, Vos crests the ridge of a collapsed skyway and scans through the DJD's private chat on his visor to figure out where their quarry headed while he shrugged off the Autobot stragglers. This city is so much slag, and now that the main Autobot occupying force has been forced out, the DJD can hunt without worrying about camping snipers. All the subterranean mines blew days ago, leaving the roads a safe but pitted mess.

VS: I'm heading back southwest, current city grid coordinates +0062, -0914. No more stragglers in my rearview.
KA: Grindhammer is at +0059, -0910. He attempted a burn to outrun me, and should no longer have
the fuel necessary to reach the city perimeter.
TR: Foolish of him. Tesarus, shore up your flank.
TE: mmmysir.
TR: Use your words, Tesarus.
TE: yeah, on it, boss.
KA: He's trying to cut around me on the eastern loop. If he claws his way down into the subsurface it'll take orns to triangulate his energy signature again.
VS: I have him.

He doesn't yet. But he's on track to intercept before he finishes firing off the text, swinging down into an underpass and weaving around more fallen debris as he picks up speed to beat the traitor to the loop's exit point. Loosening the chains, Vos scopes out a suitable anchor point.

Poor, unfortunate Grindhammer takes the exit as fast as his smoking engine can handle. He hits the first chain at top speed and flips instantly, his half-shredded wheels screaming as they grasp for traction that's not coming. Then Vos fires off another hook to yank the tumbling mech back with a firm wrench that slams him down onto the blown out shell of a personnel carrier with a sickening crunch. Personnel carriers are built like tanks.

Telling himself it's a Decepticon, not an Autobot, has yet to make any of this easier to bear. So much for justifications. But it's his job, his choice, and as Vos he drives circles around Grindhammer's unnaturally contorted frame until the traitor's trussed up, then waits for the other DJD members to arrive. Tesarus and Helex are slow moving by nature and by virtue of sheer mass, respectively; Tarn is less so, but once Vos pings actual confirmation of the capture to the chat, he knows Tarn will take the opportunity to indulge in a few unnecessary turns of his transformation cog before arriving, despite the fact that the route to cross the ruined skeleton of the city should be a straight line rather than an obstacle course for a tank of his weight class. His indulgences have yet to resolve themselves into a viable weakness for Agent 113 to report back to Prowl to exploit; the leader of the DJD has been around since the group's inception, and is well practiced at balancing his consumption of luxuries with his grotesque mission, under Megatron's aegis.

Something tweaks his innermost form's sensors; Dominus dodges before he's fully aware that he's being shot at, hauling Grindhammer along with a bit too much force as he churns up the road to find cover. Shots ricochet off the overturned carrier and greyed out frames that strew the streets as Dominus skids back down onto the underpass and zigzags between the support pylons. Most of his hooks are tied up in Grindhammer, at the moment, and transforming would still mean releasing a chain to free up a hand so Vos can return fire. He tries to get a lock on who's firing at him, and from where; if it's a Decepticon - well, the DJD tend to treat attempts on their unit members as wholehearted treason, even when the offender in question just turns out to be a mech firing in a blind panic at anything that moves. If it's an Autobot -

In his time with Rewind, searching for Luna-1 (far from anyone in the Senate who might try to lean on Dominus's old, shameful secret to pry a member of the disposable class out from the protection of House Ambus) they stumbled over plenty of worlds with thunderstorms - his personal favorite had been the swirling, massive cells of Andor. They'd observed them through transparent tourist platforms before visiting the Andorians' stellar cartography archives, and Rewind had elbowed his way to the front of the viewing panes to record the branching lightning with intense focus.

The electricity that shoots out from the far side of the loop is nothing so grand; Kaon's electric shocks are less controlled when used at range, and perfectly tuned to incapacitate a Cybertronian with splitting agony. Vos skids to a near stop, dropping out of altmode as he turns to pinpoint where the ensuing scream of agony rips through the dusty air, and feels a brief flicker of irritation as he waits for Grindhammer's body to stop slewing around and slam into one last pylon with the last of his
momentum. If it's another Autobot, he'll have to quietly log it with the rest weighing on Dominus's conscience.

Kaon strides past just as Vos hauls the traitor back out onto the main road. For now, Vos distracts himself by stringing Grindhammer up properly, freeing up one of his hooks while Kaon unerringly skips over a crumbling barricade and starts rummaging around for the shooter's fallen body.

KA: With Vos.
HX: Heh. I'm a coupla klicks out now.
TE: XT
TR: Tesarus.
TR: We've discussed this. It sets bad precedent.
TE: four klicks out.

"Autobots," Kaon says aloud, disdainful, confirming Dominus's sad suspicions. Kaon hops back out of the wreckage of the building where the Autobot fell and heads back to Vos with his hands dripping fresh pink energon. "Don't they know when they're inconsequential?"

If Dominus doesn't see the mech's face, he can't put a designation to it. Kaon doesn't appear to be dragging the body with him, anyway, and even if he had, there are just so many new faces, many of them repeated with different paint jobs, made to order and launched right on the battlefield with the bare minimum needed to get them mature enough to fight. Both sides do it, these days.

He, as Vos, has no reason to go check. So he can't. Kaon slinks over to bump his elbow against Vos's, and there's something glossy with wet energon cupped in the palm of his hand. Leftover electricity fizzes down Kaon's shoulder coils as he tucks his free hand slyly into the crook of Vos's arm. "Here. For you," Kaon says, sickly sweet, offering up the object like an organic flower with a sharp-edged, sidelong grin.

Just the other orn Vos fed a hook down a traitor's throat and removed their main tank the hard way - there's very little of the Cybertronian anatomy he hasn't become personally familiar with over the vorns, so he steels himself and accepts the object without a flinch. It's that unknown Autobot's vocalizer. Plus a good, wet chunk of the protoform where such a deep-wired component integrates with one's internals. "Thank you," he says gravely, registering his own voice from a distance, and stores it in an outer subspace compartment as Kaon looks on, expectant. Once it's out of sight, Kaon cuddles close, a dreamy, giddy look spreading across his face as he turns to regard the strung up Grindhammer, who's finally returning to awareness. A hand slips around Vos's waist and rubs energon in circles around the jut of his hip, still tingling with excess charge where Kaon threw lightning.

Dominus has some inkling of what Kaon is angling for. He'd have to be protoform-new not to notice, no matter that Kaon couches his odd flirtations and intimacies in hip-deep gore. The problem is that Spoiler-in-Vos is rapidly running short on ways to gracefully avoid the conversation and sidle out of Kaon's grip without being painfully obvious. Thankfully, Helex arrives with a knowing smirk to break the tension. Then Tarn rolls up in tank mode, and Kaon whisks himself over to Tarn's side at once, sparing only a moment to level an eager grin at Tarn before whipping out his datapad and readying himself for business, smile snapping off so that all that remains when Grindhammer lifts his head are those dead, hollow black sockets.

Dominus can't think of Rewind for comfort when all the team is here, as they set to work on the mech dangling from Vos's hooks and chains. He clears everything away until all that's left is Vos and a distant fragment of Agent 113, and then starts to dip and tear the traitor like a poorly strung marionette at Tarn's silken direction. No points for innovation on this review, but sometimes going
through the motions is the only way to safeguard what sanity he has left. 

He cannot close his eyes. He must not close his eyes -

There is no extraction planned.

The tension between him and Kaon lasts another vorn before snapping. They've circled back to the DJD's headquarters after finishing their tour of the now-dead salient, just in time for the Autobot forces to close in like a pincer and start to eradicate whoever's unfortunate enough to be left behind on that front. All of that time and expense and fleet strength lost, only for a return to the status quo. In the grand scheme of the war? It barely puts a dent in the Decepticon war machine. For the DJD, it means little more than a slight uptick in the desertion statistics, each diligently added to the List and sorted so they can be made examples of once higher priority targets have been dealt with.

The List really is Kaon's personal pride.

These days Dominus has to shut himself in his quarters if he wants any modicum of privacy, but the opportunities are rare. Each member of the DJD can furnish their rooms to their liking - perks of a well-oiled bureaucracy, in this twilight world of Tarn's sociopathic logic - but they don't tend to lock doors on each other. Vos carved out some leeway on that front as the still standoffish new recruit, but after the first few thousand years he's had to adapt to the team's dynamics. Allowing Kaon in was his initial concession to socializing back at the start, and now Kaon lounges idly in Vos's quarters during down time whenever they're at leisure, trading stories and offering him fizzy energon gushers as though eventually plying Vos with treats will cause him to reveal his own vice to indulge in.

Clinically, Agent 113 has put some thought into it, but the best idea Dominus has come up with is to start accumulating films or something similar. He knows what motivates that thought, starting with the fact that he's heard through word of mouth that there's an archivist making a name for himself on the other side of the war, with an unmatched selection of archival footage to draw on as he creates campaign videos to boost Autobot morale and document the war's progress -

Obtaining Autobot propaganda just to glimpse Rewind's designation in the credits would not be worth the scrutiny he'd rightfully earn from Tarn. Agent 113 can't allow this to affect his cover. He just can't. Shutting down that avenue doesn't make the ache go away; it just leaves a lingering haze over his thoughts whenever he brainstorms other options for his cover identity's approved addiction. He needs something that matches Spoiler's old personality more than Dominus's. High quality waxes and paints might work - he's developed a reputation for following strict health and safety standards for hygiene after each mission, and Dominus can gloomily infer what that implies about the state of his psyche profile.

Kaon slips off the edge of the berth with a tap, and for a second, absorbed in his thoughts and filling out the last of this latest mission report for Tarn via linkup on autopilot, Dominus hopes Kaon has grown bored with his silent company and has decided to go cajole Helex or Tesarus into a round of Hax. Absently, Vos's optics track toward the door of the room, expecting to follow Kaon's exit trajectory - but then Dominus blinks back to alertness, lifting his chin off his steepled hands as he sees Kaon slinking toward him. "You're heading out?" he tries, but he knows better.

Kaon hums noncommittally as he reaches Vos's desk, stooping to fold his servos on one of Vos's shoulders and rest his face on the spoiler, leaning more of his weight on Vos than he needs to.
Dominus ends the linkup connection and unhooks the cable; this is going to need his full attention. There's something hot and heavy and tight in his tank that could be anxiety or worse, anticipation. If Kaon pushes this, he doesn't have any excuses left between any of his personas to keep rebuffing Kaon's hints. He's walked the shaky line of neutrality whenever the subject comes up, because denying Kaon outright might raise questions - Spoiler engaged in interface with his old teammates before his ignominious end, so Vos can't plead inactive or uninstalled interface protocols and component parts. The thought of complying with Kaon's desires to placate him and add another layer of permanence to Agent 113's deep cover is -

Far too appealing. If one set the anticipation he feels on a set of scales with his underlying, instinctive no, Dominus doesn't know which would win.

"You're done with that report," Kaon says, an idle statement of a fact; Vos doesn't have the chance or inclination to pretend to delete the file data and start over. Kaon traces one finger in a pattern along the wheelwell of Vos's upper arm, doodling nonsense between the extra spines and fins that arch up and back when he's in root mode to make room for the chains and their mechanisms. There's no risk of Kaon delving deep enough to brush against Dominus (let alone the thing at his core) but of course the whole chassis feeds sensation back to Dominus, and the jolt he feels is both startling and nauseating at the same time.

He has a conjunx, he wants to plea - wants to draw himself up in just his Dominus frame, and with impeccable dignity inform Kaon and all the world that yes, this is his partner, and no, he will not -

The words don't even clog up his vocalizer's queue. His Agent 113 persona mutes such thoughts before they get anywhere near the frontal gyrus region of his processor. Rewind can't exist, here, in this space. As far as this operation is concerned, he can't have a conjunx endura; can't even hint at that kind of emotional connection, or he'll risk far more than his own life. He knows some black ops agents undergo extensive memory alteration or outright deletion to perfect their cover, but he had refused on the grounds that it wouldn't be worth the possibility of processor-spark desynchronization in the field, with such a morally dissonant assignment.

No matter how Dominus's insides crawl with sour, twisting guilt, as he allows Kaon's hands to dip further down the front of his frame. "Your reports?" he asks, clipped, as he closes his optics behind his visor to try to center himself.

"Done. You've not been paying attention, Vos," Kaon says, nudging the chair back from the desk with a knee as he smiles. "And the energy signature scans are running as we speak. The List won't need re-ordering until the new tracking data comes in." Once there's enough space, his knee scrapes over Dominus's lap, creating deliberate friction as he straddles him. Dom- Vos's hand comes up to - perhaps, reflexively, to push Kaon away in self-defense (he can't forget that he's watched this mech crack open spark casings and mutilate other Cybertronians with that same smile) - but he presses it against Kaon's chest generator, then his Decepticon symbol, rather than pushing.

If he hadn't trusted in his ability to see this mission through, knowing what it could cost him, Dominus would not have infiltrated the DJD. Primus knows how many war crimes and sentient's rights violations he has actively participated in or initiated to maintain his cover. No one in this war has much of a clear conscience, no matter which side they fight for, and Dominus accepted long ago that his hands can never be clean again. He already hates himself, down to the core. Better he take on this than anyone else.

(He couldn't tell Rewind he was leaving to do work like - this. None of his assignments for Autobot Black Ops have been something Rewind needs to bear. Regardless of how this ends for Dominus - death or an impossible escape, or anything in between - Rewind shouldn't have to see Vos in his
archives and know it was Dominus all along.)

He can see this through. Vent in, and out, and back in, and before he can choke out a flat 'no' or succumb to the widening pit in his tank, he draws Kaon in by the chin to kiss him.

Kaon clamps down on him in a rush, crowding Vos against the back of the chair and pressing his legs tighter on either side of Vos's thighs, pinning one of his wrists with a startling, firm grip. All the while he takes advantage of the kiss to nestle closer. Dominus's vocalizer erks out a noise that is entirely beyond his voluntary control, and fresh shame leaks through his internals as Kaon's mouth starts to quirk into a grin against his. If he were someone else, maybe he could offline his optics and try to persuade himself it's a small, blockier frame kneeling up in his lap and stretching to reach his mouth, but he needs to be Agent 113-in-Vos right now, more than he needs to wallow in Dominus's guilty conscience. There's no salve for that.

"Is this a chair thing?" he asks, voice dry and clear, when Kaon's growing smirk finally widens too far to keep the kiss going. Vos tries to move his hand, to prove his point, but Kaon keeps it secured, toying with his wrist seams.

The triumphant smile gives way momentarily, and Kaon gives him a reproving look. "You can't just ask someone if they have a chair thing," he says, reproachfully. Then he smiles again with more dentae peeking through, rolling his hips and grinding along Vos's armor just - so -

Vos groans, and can't stifle it. Doesn't really want to. Kaon's smile ticks wider as he plucks Vos's free hand from his chin, laces their fingers together, and rocks his hips again. "We should've done this ages ago," Kaon says, one final admonishment, and moves to mouth at the cords of Vos's neck. He cycles vents over the damp spots left behind until he finds a suitable place to bite down, hard.

Dominus identifies the jolt low in his gut as a throb of arousal; he can't really deny it this time. His armor flares as his vents begin to speed up in earnest, but he can't free his hands from Kaon's grip to try to act on it, either. One justification after another presents itself in his mind - well, it's not as though he has anyone to share them with. He can't pretend this is Rewind when Kaon's already crackling with static electricity distinct from built up charge, arcing from his frame to Vos's with bright points of stimulation.

He wouldn't want Rewind here, in this place.

"What - about Tarn?" he asks; it's not even a proper protest at this stage, not when Kaon's lapping at the sensitive wires in his shoulder seam, along the sharp jut of his collar.

He knows the answer - he's heard the answer. The DJD don't tend to lock their doors here. "We share," Kaon murmurs into Vos's neck. "You'll see."

Well. That's a horror for another day. For now, Dominus tilts his head back, and enjoys this one.

- He accidentally begins a collection of vocalizers. Most of them come courtesy of Kaon's whim, more like having a pet leave gory presents at one's doorstep than receiving flowers, but occasionally Helex will contribute to the horrible cause, too, picking relatively intact globs of people out of Tesarus's teeth and flicking them at Vos over that night's fuel. The two largest mechs of the DJD keep more to themselves, but sometimes they still...participate. And apparently everyone is some form of voyeur, a lesson Dominus learns when Kaon doesn't bother to drag Vos out of sight before interfacing him in a puddle of ankle-deep energon. The only thing Tesarus has to say by way of commentary is, "Nice," while beside him Helex wipes cranial fluid off on his armor.
There are times when Dominus forgets to feel disgusted by all this. It's hard to keep up constant revulsion after the first million years; sometimes it takes all his mental fortitude just to wake up and go through their monstrous daily routine without collapsing. He can't afford to think righteous thoughts around the clock anymore while he's concentrating on how best to thread a Genericon through Tesarus's blender without nicking his chains on the whirling blades.

The war's still not stopping. Would he even know if it was? The DJD are often out of touch with the bulk of the war effort for entire stellar cycles at a time while they hunt down more elusive traitors. Agent 113 can barely keep tabs on where each faction's leaders are, let alone one small archivist who isn't high profile enough to be a common topic of conversation and cursing among Decepticon sources.

(Rewind could be dead, and they wouldn't give an agent notice in the middle of a deep cover operation when it would inevitably compromise him emotionally. Rewind could be dead and maybe no one knows - this war is a rusty sieve with too many greyed out frames for anyone to keep count.)

He takes comfort in Kaon; at least the guilt over that is a constant reassurance that he still has some kind of conscience. Every time he arches into Kaon's hands, he's betraying his conjunx; worse, he's liking it. Successfully checking a name off the List fires Kaon up with charge, and as Vos he can't help but succumb to it. Sleeping around with one of the Decepticons' most heinous, voracious torturers right on the heels of a grotesque execution slowly changes from a reluctant task to something he looks forward to. This, and vocalizers - his vices.

He's lost track of which persona he's using to sustain this, but he hates himself still more for it. Kaon kisses him with Tarn narrating every action from the far end of the berth, and Dominus-in-Vos gasps for more without a moment's hesitation.

Rewind deserves better than to be tied to someone so easily sucked into this. Let him think Dominus dead, and be as happy as anyone can be in this nightmare of a war.

- 

It tumbles down around him, over the course of a too quick thousand years after he stops receiving acknowledgements from Prowl, or whoever was in charge of sending confirmation. He fires off reports into the right eye of the nearest Autobot badge whenever he scrapes together something worth knowing, but the black and white text pings just - stop. Either no one's getting his reports, or they can no longer safely communicate with him, or the messages are being intercepted somehow by a third party. And once Agent 113 stumbles he knows, with a slow nausea, that it's only a matter of time. He needs to - he has to - he thought he'd have more time -

Kaon catches him cold, before Dominus is ready for it.

"Oh, Vos," Kaon murmurs, waltzing through the locked door with codes that melt through the security like acid rain through thin armor. "Darling, what are you doing, poking around Autobot net space?"

Looking for Rewind, he doesn't say. The population of both sides of the war has plummeted dramatically since the heyday of MTO campaigns; he had hoped to find the name he was looking for without searching for it directly (please let him have survived), without straying too far from acceptable Decepticon network use parameters. The slow realization that no one was listening inspired incredible stupidity, apparently. He sits frozen on the edge of the berth, his browsing window blacked out in the corner of his visor. His head sinks forward of its own accord, heavy and sluggish with shock chilling his processor.
Lie. It might not save his life, but he has to try to produce a suitable story as a distraction. No matter what, he must not give away that he was -

"Looking for someone. Something," his traitor mouth says. "It's - ah -" what the frag is he doing" - an old problem." The nausea in his tank twists into stabbing cramps, and he wants to purge all over the floor. Why did he say that.

"Oh?" And then Kaon swings up onto the desk, the computer terminal's screen fizzling as he leans forward, hands on his knees, electricity crackling along his shoulders. "Do tell." Something malicious and accusing burns in his optic sockets, and his grin is unearthly in the light of enough electricity to fry Dominus's every circuit. The last thing a traitor might see before -

Kaon has no compelling talent in his voice, but that doesn't stop Dominus's possessed vocalizer as it pours out the oddest mix of half-truth and babble he's ever spewed as an undercover agent. It would almost be impressive, if half his processor wasn't horrified. "Before the war, there was someone who assisted me in obtaining a critical component for my - form. I - at the time, the Senate was not well disposed towards things like me, and I've made an effort to keep those who know the truth to a minimum. Unfortunately, I know the mech did not become a Decepticon."

"And so you're searching through Autobot records? A bit tasteless." Kaon's face scrunches up, like he's tasted something foul. But there's no sign of the others barging in to help interrogate Dominus - no indication of chatter on the private relay, though they could easily be excluding him. "Wait. A component for your form? Your frame?"

Dominus cringes, protoform deep. "Yes."

Something visibly clicks for Kaon. "This is not you. You've been keeping secrets, Vos..."

"Don't we all?" Dominus says, terse. Whatever fate he's talked himself into, he has to own it. "Decepticons, Kaon."

Kaon sneers; it's not a pretty sight. But his electricity generator whirs to a slow stop, and he rises from the desk to saunter toward Dominus. He can't afford to flinch away; his processor's catching up with his mouth, scrambling for a throwaway designation he can feed Kaon without putting a specific Autobot under scrutiny. A neutral, maybe, he knew a few who chose to eschew the war and who wouldn't be easy for the DJD to locate.

But Kaon doesn't ask. He crawls right up on Dominus, fingers tapping up Dominus's armor and finishing with a careless flick of reproach that dents the metal. "Then show me," Kaon says, voice low, his smile two parts challenge to one part coaxing. "Who are you, Vos?"

"What." Dominus doesn't recognize his own crackling, ragged voice as he corrects that one word. He knows now what his desperate babble has won for him, and this is the price he's going to have to pay to survive. If he doesn't follow through, Kaon has him by the throat. "What am I. You'll want to move back."

A long, considering pause, and then Kaon steps back. And waits.

'Dominus Ambus' was a well-known figure, and later a known Autobot before he fell off the radar. He removed the old badge before settling into Spoiler's hollowed out chassis, but his face is distinctively that of Dominus Ambus. The only option available is...well. He can't judge whether the joint-deep pain shooting through him comes from the strain of forcing both of his outer frames to transform open at the same time, too fast for anyone watching to catch a glimpse of the Dominus chassis within, or from the fact that he hasn't emerged from the Dominus armor since before he met
Rewind. He's done most maintenance from within all these millennia, and the cold chill of the air hitting his real body for the first time in so long makes him squirm and whine.

Damn his vocalizer. It - he slides free from both the Dominus and Vos armor, landing light on his misshapen pedes with lithe (animal) grace. As light as his irreducible root mode is, he barely makes a sound. When he looks down at his arms with a shudder, he sees the paint has gone faded and flaking with sheer age and long neglect; he flexes his claws and waits, stewing in hot self-loathing as old as he is. He learned early how most Cybertronians viewed those with a beast mode.

There's an...odd lack of response from Kaon. Dominus blinks and tears his gaze away from his claws, and dark humor bubbles up in him with a note of burgeoning hysteria as he sees Kaon's hollow optics directed over Dominus's head, his other senses presumably scanning for someone...taller. The true secret of House Ambus - they run small, particularly those with load-bearing sparks. "Down here," he says, feeling horrifically exposed as Kaon finally catches on. Not even Rewind has seen him like this. He's never wanted to be seen like this.

Kaon puts out a hand. It's - his instincts set his armor bristling out defensively, because all his original sensors are on high alert after so long having all his sensory input filtered through thick layers of armor. The trailing coattails that would transform into a tail lash unconsciously, free of armor restraints at long last. With an odd expression Kaon sets his hand flat on Dominus's head, then the sensitive line of his altmode's long audial sensors. "...What is your altmode?" Kaon asks, nonplussed.

Saying it feels like swallowing acid. "Turbofox. No. 113 in the taxonomy," he adds for good measure, with a self-deprecating smile. He wants to crawl under the berth or desk because in his irreducible form, either would be an acceptable den to hide out in. More than that, he wants to rip off the audial kibble and force his root mode to look somewhat more normal, like a person, before Kaon's other senses finish mapping out the shape of his shame.

"Functionist thinking," is all Kaon says, dismissive. His hand comes back to Dominus's bare face. Compared to the size of his Vos armor, it feels different; Kaon's hand now covers most of Dominus's faceplate, tracing his features with a single servo. "You've allowed that to influence you this long? I see. So this is why you hate yourself."

It's been so long since Tarn and Kaon plucked that out of him that Dominus shudders like it's a new blow. "Force of habit," he says, turning his head away.

Kaon stops him with an unyielding hand. "We'll work on it." It doesn't parse for Dominus - work on what? - and then Kaon spins them around so that he's between Dominus and the open armor shells. He shoves the empty frames of Dominus-in-Vos onto the floor with an unceremonious clatter. "Forget the maybe Autobot. We can fix whatever's wrong far better, if you insist on wearing all that," Kaon continues, with a bite of flat warning in his otherwise casual tone - don't slip again. Dominus casts his eyes low, contrite.

"He knows" Kaon, yet somehow the servo that strokes over his mouth comes as a minor shock. "It would look odd if you switched out the hooks for something so different, now. People speculated that we'd replaced Helex for centuries after he stopped compacting traitors and installed the smelting pool. Not that it matters." Kaon scoops Dominus up, reclining along the berth.

Being manhandled with so little warning reminds Dominus of the fact that his paint is crawling at being so exposed. He doesn't want to be out of armor like this - he wants the safe, real Ambus armor around him again. Twitching, he tries to ease out of Kaon's hold before he winds up pinned, as usual. "Just - ah, let me get back in -"

Like flipping a switch, Kaon locks a hand around both of Dominus's wrists and pulls Dominus full
out along his frame. "Come here," Kaon says, the last of the suspicion drained from his voice. "Sit on me."

Dominus's tail lashes furiously as his anxiety spikes. "Like this?" he asks, ashamed and disgusted at himself, even as Kaon splay a hand over the small of his back to draw him further up along the larger mech's frame. "I'm not -"

Kaon yanks on his wrists, hooks his arm under Dominus's thigh, and nips at sensitive wiring once it's in reach. "Sit. On. Me," he says, leaving no room for Dominus to argue.

Would Rewind have accepted this?

Dominus will never know for sure.

But it ends half a century later. He fires one last report into the shoulder badge of a minibot he hopes - please - is stationed at the Kimia Facility, someone unfortunate enough to stumble on the DJD in the middle of an execution. Something's wrong at Garrus 9, and a high level weapons inventor has turned out to be a Decepticon mole, and they need to know before that entire station becomes a death trap, or worse. Agent 113 doesn't even know if anyone's reading these reports anymore, but he has to try. He finally cracks and admits that he has been compromised, before loading the slug into the datachip gun.

There is no extraction planned, because the forced delay between him filing his reports and their heavily belated recovery ensures that he'll be dead long before anyone would know to come rescue him.

Of course they catch him.

They torture him layer by layer, and then peel him out to start again from the top. He's been Vos for so long that he thought he knew what would happen to him when he was caught. He thought he'd seen the worst of what the DJD has to offer.

He forgot. He's worse than a traitor; he's a spy. By the time they hit his irreducible form, Dominus has collapsed into a small, closed in point within his own processor, unable to see or think beyond the claustrophobic tunnel eating up his vision, but it still isn't over. Tesarus or Helex could have annihilated him with ease by now, but Tarn directs the DJD about their work like a symphony so that Dominus doesn't even have the sweet luxury of offlining from the pain.

When the others leave, and it's just him and Kaon left in the tiny, dark room, Dominus barely has the strength to wonder at it. Kaon squats in front of him, and it's even odds whether he's wiped all expression from his face or if Dominus has just lost the presence of mind to be able to interpret faceplate cues. He's lost a lot of things. At least most of his intel on Autobot movements and codes was several million years out of date. It's a cold, stunted comfort because he knows the DJD don't torture for information, and yet he told them anyway, despite knowing it wouldn't make the pain stop.

He looks at Kaon through the crack in one optic, exhausted almost beyond words, and wants Rewind almost as much as he wants a spark attack to shut him down ahead of schedule. "Let me die," his vocalizer asks, without his permission. Begging doesn't work. Nothing works. Nothing will ever work. Of all the people to be tortured by, he's fallen for the worst.
"Oh, darling. Oh pet," Kaon says, his voice deadly flat. There's something cold, pricking the very back of Dominus's helm, but he doesn't have the strength to lift his head or try to shake it away. "Spies don't get to die."

One last foolish, impossible thought, then -

DA: Rew- ___ _ _____ ___

End Notes

Spoiler alert, Kaon does, in fact, have a chair thing >B]

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