Starscream makes an offer that Blurr won't outright refuse. What comes after will alter the course of history. Or at least break a few berths.

Notes

A series of ficlets, oneshots, drabbles, what have you, all initially prompted on livejournal by ladydragon76. Fair warning, I have no idea where this is going, but it's proving to be a journey. :) Updates will be sporadic.

Diverges from canon during the course of events in Issue 20 of Robots in Disguise.
The First Offer

“I have a proposition for you.”

Blurr didn't look up from swiping the cloth over the bar top. “Not interested,” he said in a flat tone.

Of course, when did one refusal ever work on a Seeker?

“You haven't heard me out yet,” Starscream said, leaning against the bar, wings arched and flared with the intent to entice.

“Because I'm not interested,” Blurr repeated and narrowed his optics at Starscream. “Never was.”

Starscream grinned. “Oh, I'm not so sure about that. Because if I'm right, we'll both come out on top.”

Blurr barked a laugh, flashing Starscream an old smirk, dredged up from his racing orns. “I'm always on top.”

“You see, that's what I like about you, Blurr. Your confidence.” Starscream fluttered his wings as though trying to draw Blurr's attention toward them.

Blurr turned his back on the Seeker, his plating itching between his shoulders as it always did when there was a Decepticon behind him. Especially this one. It didn't matter that the war was “over.” Certain suspicions wouldn't end that easily.

“Oh, is that all?” he asked.

His comm system pinged, the ident code registering Jazz. Did he need help? Hardly. Blurr pinged back reassurance. He had this. Still, it was nice to know he had back up.

“I could go on but it might be considered inappropriate for such a public setting.”

Blurr put down his rag and tilted his helm toward his other server, letting the mech know he was stepping out for a klik. He turned back to Starscream and headed for the swinging panel to exit the bar. Starscream matched him step for step.

“Since when do you care about propriety?” Blurr asked, well aware that they were attracting attention. Oh, the former Autobots and Decepticons scattered around his bar were being unobtrusive, but it was obvious they were looking. It was rare for such tasty gossip to be put on display.

“Since that DJ of yours can't keep his optics off me,” Starscream replied, tilting his helm toward Jazz on stage. Of course he would notice. Jazz wasn't exactly subtle.

Blurr stepped out of the bar, door swinging shut behind him, and leaned against the exterior siding. Starscream moved closer, near-crowding him, but keeping his hands to himself at least. It was an intimidation tactic, not that Blurr was intimidated.

“It's not often that mechs as... popular as yourself come here,” Blurr said and folded his arms.
“What do you want, Starscream?”

Starscream tilted forward, his ex-vents washing over Blurr's frame. “What I've always wanted, my dear racer,” he purred, less screechy and more seductive.

Blurr scoffed. “Power?”

“Peace.”

His huffed a ventilation. “I don't believe you.”

“Well,” Starscream drawled, helm tilting left and right. “First comes one, then comes the other. It's a process.”

He wondered if that coy manner ever worked on the Decepticons. It certainly wasn't working on Blurr.

He ground his denta. “What do you want from me?”

Starscream's lips curled into a grin. “Your cooperation.”

“And?”

“Oh, we can discuss details later. And elsewhere.” Starscream gave him a sly look. “We are, after all, in public.”

Blurr was not impressed. Curious, but unimpressed. “I'm a busy mech, Starscream.”

“As am I.”

Sure he was, with his lofty plans of planet-wide domination and gaining leadership of a mostly defunct faction. Blurr barely kept himself from rolling his optics.

Starscream pulled back, but not before his field wafted a teasing caress. “I'll comm you the details at a later time, yes?”

“I'll try not to ignore it,” Blurr retorted, well aware that Jazz watched them more intently now.

Starscream laughed. “And I'll make sure to build an offer you can't refuse.”

“We'll see.”

Starscream left. Blurr watched him go, his backstrut itching. A sudden urge to run and keep on running nagged at the back of his processor. His legs jittered as though intending to follow through with the urge. Blurr cycled a ventilation and swallowed it down.

“Care to share?” Jazz asked, approaching from the shadows.

Blurr shook his helm. “I honestly don't know myself.”

“You gonna find out?”

His optics cycled down. “I might be that curious.”
Jazz patted him on the shoulder. “Just watch yourself,” he warned. “That Seeker loves to sink his claws in deep.”

Blurr grinned. “He can try.” He turned back toward his bar, his pride and joy. “But he'd have to catch me first.”
Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

Written as a birthday gift for ladydragon76.

He was not waiting for the comm. And he was not disappointed when it did not come. After all, Blurr had better things to do than involve himself in Starscream's machinations.

Curiosity would not be his downfall.

Blurr had cut ties with the past and with the Autobots. No mech was going to drag him back and especially not Starscream. Not when he'd worked so hard to recruit Blurr the first go round.

“So is there a certain degree of clean you're going for there or am I missing something?”

Blurr cycled his optics. “What?”

“That cup.” Jazz tilted his helm toward Blurr's hand. “You've been cleaning it for at least five minutes. I was beginning to think you'd glitched.”

Blurr looked down at the glass, sparkling clean. He'd been organizing the cabinet when he'd noticed a smudge. He'd only meant to wipe it clean while forming a reprimand for the new washer he'd hired.

Blurr scowled. “I was thinking.” He shoved the cup into the case and shut the door.

“Dare I ask the nature of your thoughts?” Jazz's vocals read teasing, but he hadn't abandoned his training as quickly as he'd cast out his badge. There was still something of Special Ops left in him.

Blurr ignored him, turning to rearrange the brightly lit bottles of flavored engex.

“A certain treacherous former second-in-command wouldn't have any influence, now would he?”

Blurr scowled. “Jazz?”

“Yes?” His tone was as innocent as innocent could be.

“Shut the frag up.”

Jazz had the gall to laugh. “Touch a wire, did I?”

He turned, slamming a bottle on the bar top, the contents sloshing around. “Like there isn't a part of you itching with curiosity.”
Jazz's visor glittered. He leaned forward, bracing his weight on the counter. “I admit nothing. And even if I did, I suspect our motivations differ.”

Blurr snorted and poured them each a cube. It was after hours. He'd finished cleaning and prepping for the next shift. He could indulge however the frag he wanted.

“I'm done with this slag. I like peace,” Blurr said. “I like this bar. I like your music. I like having something that's mine.” And, though he wouldn't admit it aloud just yet, he liked working hard. He enjoyed the value of it.

“Uh huh.”

“And the last thing I'm going to do is let him use me or this,” Blurr paused to gesture to the bar, his new life and future, “for his political slag and whatever game he thinks he's playing.”

Did he sound bitter? He hoped not. Because Jazz could sniff out bitter, pounce on it, and find some way to sweeten the cube.

Jazz's lips curved in a slow grin. “And you're sure that's all that he wanted.”

Blurr's vents hissed. He tossed back his engex, noticing that Jazz hadn't touched his. To keep a cool processor or prove a point? Starscream wasn't the only one playing head-games around here.

He thought about Starscream's smirk, the confident slant of his lips. The glitter of his Decepticon-red optics.

Blurr grabbed Jazz's cube and tossed it, too.

“Yeah,” he said. “I'm sure.”

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What the frag was he doing? Seeking out Starscream in the dark hours, not quite over-charged but not sober either.

The streets were as deserted as they could be here in Iacon. Blurr strode past dark alleys and makeshift shelters, and felt optics tracking him. Things shuffled in the dim, rattling armor, shuffling over piles of debris.

But no one protested. No one barred his way. Either Starscream had anticipated his arrival or no one cared enough to protect their self-proclaimed leader.

Should he be flattered or appalled?

Or maybe he should turn around, go back to his bar, and never make this mistake. He told himself this, but he still found himself outside what he thought was Starscream's door, pinging a request.

The door slid open. Blurr hesitated. What the frag was he thinking?

He went inside, Starscream sweeping into view with a cube of glittering high grade in each hand. His plating gleamed in the flickering overhead light, freshly cleaned, freshly waxed. He held his wings relaxed, at ease, as though lord of his domain.
Last time, Starscream had approached Blurr in his territory. Now, the situation had reversed itself, and still, Starscream held all the cards.

Starscream grinned, one hand gesturing toward him. “I see you’ve come to your senses.”

“That's debatable,” Blurr said. He tilted his helm, getting a good look around.

Starscream, unsurprisingly, lived in what would have been personal quarters for the mid-caste, back on the Cybertron-that-was. Now, it was considered luxurious. Two closed doorways probably led to a private berthroom and washrack. He had a receiving room and beyond it, a recreational room. Blurr caught a glimpse of a personal dispenser with at least two nozzles for taste additives. He'd had to take an elevator to even get here, to the penthouse, and he'd been surprised the security system gave him access. If Starscream even had one.

He probably did. This was Starscream after all.

Trust Starscream to surround himself with the finery Cybertron-that-was would have denied him. Finery that Blurr would have considered subpar, once upon a time.

“How so?” Starscream asked.

“I'm here.” Blurr traced the filigree on a decorative statue, one of a Seeker in flight, of course. “That doesn't say much about my sanity or sense of self-preservation.”

A noise of amusement rumbled in Starscream's chassis. He strode closer, field a flicker against the edge of Blurr's own, testing.

“Why Blurr,” he purred, offering a cube. “It's almost as if you don't trust me.”

Trust? Pah.

Blurr took the high grade, the scent of it floating to his olfactory sensors in an enticing wave. “You have a reputation.”

Starscream laughed. “But that was then. This is now. Circumstances have changed.”

“And some remain the same.”

Starscream's field hummed with invitation and promise. “Can I offer you a seat?”

He hadn't left yet and wasn't leaving still. There was no point in refusing for the sake of it. Not with Starscream watching him, perhaps trying to pinpoint weakness.

Blurr slid into a chair and sipped the high grade, a sweet crackle bursting over his glossa. It warmed his tanks, adding to the overcharge already swimming through his lines.

Starscream took his own chair and watched him. Waiting. Expecting.

Admiring.

Blurr didn't miss the lingering way optics traced his frame. He wondered what Starscream saw. A racer? A warrior? A bar owner?

He took another sip. The quiet should have been awkward, but it wasn't. Something simmered beneath the silence. He didn't know what name to give it.
Impatience won out.

“I'm here. I'm listening.” Blurr lowered his cube, meeting Starscream's gaze. “What's your proposition?”

Starscream's wings shivered, his lips sliding into that slow, confident smirk that had a strange effect on Blurr. “I thought you'd never ask.”

Blurr worked his intake, optics dimming. His spark fluttered. There was a creeping sense of danger, but something else as well. Something... intriguing.

He downed the rest of his high grade. Later, he might need the excuse.

One did not simply waltz into a Seeker's berth and expect to climb out without repercussions. Especially when that Seeker was Starscream.

But...

Blurr cycled a ventilation.

That was the risk he'd have to take.
Starscream's berth was as ostentatious as the rest of his suite of rooms. It was large enough for three mechs, and was both plush and heated.

Blurr gaped at it for longer than was logical before Starscream tugged him toward it. Then Blurr forgot the berth because their mouths crashed together, Starscream's hands mapping every micron of Blurr's plating within reach. Starscream's field was hot with charge as it drizzled over Blurr's frame.

He shivered, pawing at the Seeker like a half-starved mech. High grade simmered in his tanks. His higher processing functions had given way to lust, and Blurr's thoughts were less on interrogation and more on how he could get Starscream on that fragging berth.

And then Starscream had to ruin it all by talking.

“You never answered my question,” he said, nibbling on Blurr's crest.

“Nnn.” Not a reply, barely vocal.

Blurr arched up, pressing hard against Starscream, heat pooling in his array. His spark pulsed, his spike throbbed, and what fragging question was Starscream talking about?

The Seeker chuckled. “Well?”

Blurr huffed a ventilation and shoved Starscream back toward the berth. “Are politics all you think about?”

Starscream backed away willingly, because Blurr's push had little power behind it. All his strength was in his legs, his lower hydraulics, not his arms. And Starscream out-massed him. He moved because he wanted to.

“I have more than a one-track mind,” Starscream purred, optics glittering. “I can easily mix work with play.”

“Well, I don't.” Blurr leaned closer, hands skimming Starscream's thighs, the scent of the Seeker's fine polish invading his olfactory sensors. “At least not until I know whether it's worth it.”

A hum vibrated through Starscream's chassis. “I'm always worth it.”

“Prove it.”

The challenge hung in the air between them, waiting. Starscream's optics brightened; Blurr's
ventilations stalled.

He was not disappointed.

Starscream grabbed him and Blurr responded in kind. They half-stumbled, half-wrestled to the berth. It was easy for the Seeker to pick Blurr up and toss him onto the cushioned surface. But Blurr had only to lay the bait as Starscream climbed after him, gaze sharp like a predator thinking its prey cornered.

Blurr smirked, legs splaying invitingly, finger crooked.

“You have no shame,” Starscream said, wings cocked above him, field a sensuous press of desire. “I like that.”

Blurr rolled his shoulders. “Why bother? We both know why I'm here.”

“Actually, I'm not too sure.” Starscream crawled over him, knees bracketing Blurr's hips, hands to either side of his shoulders. “But don't think that means I'm not going to take advantage.”

Blurr hooked his fingers in Starscream's chestplate, right on those helpful handholds. “I wouldn't expect anything less,” he said, and surged upward, executing a takedown that would have made Kup proud, especially with interfacing applications.

In a flash, their positions were reversed, Starscream's back against the berth and Blurr triumphant above him, his powerful legs locked in place. His fingers encircled Starscream's wrists and pressed against nerve lines that rendered his hands useless.

“After all,” Blurr said with a grin, circling his hips atop Starscream's pelvic array, metal gliding against metal in a hot purr. His panel snapped open, lubricant dripping with a plip-plop. “I always come out on top.”

“I'm impressed.” Starscream's vents surged to life with enough force to rattle the berth. “Though you can't think to hold this for long.”

“I don't have to.” Blurr ground down, feeling the heat in the panel beneath him and knowing it matched the heat in his circuits. “Open up, flyboy.”

Starscream chuckled, but he obeyed, spike pressuring immediately and teasing the rim of Blurr's valve. “In the end, I'm still getting what I want.”

Blurr circled his hips, caught the head of Starscream's spike, and then sank down, ever so slowly, relishing the stretch and rub of his internal sensors. “So you think.” He shuddered, pleasure lighting up his sensory net.

It had been far too long since he indulged like this. He intended to take this moment for everything it was worth.

“Mm. Does that mean you'll listen to my proposal?”

Blurr managed a chuckle, his fingers tightening around Starscream's wrists as he circled his hips. “Your persistence is impressive.”

Starscream, movement limited as it was, managed an aborted push upward, spike stirring deep
within Blurr's valve. “Impressive enough?”

Blurr leaned closer, near enough that their lips could brush. “We’ll see.”

Starscream smirked.
Fire Up

Chapter Summary

The morning after. The cast grows.

Blurr onlined with a tackiness between his thighs, a crimp in the lines of his backstrut, and shame warring with satisfaction. He groaned, rolled over, and right off the berth, landing with a clang on the floor.

Even more humiliating.

He forced his optics into a reboot. His sensors sluggishly stirred. Too much high grade. Too many overloads. Too much...

He was alone.

Blurr pushed himself upright, looking blearily around the berthroom. No Starscream. Nothing but rumpled padding and a cube of pale energon on a nearby shelf.

Blurr dragged himself to his pedes and slumped against the berth, rubbing a palm down his faceplate. He wished he could claim last night was a mystery. But he remembered it all, every overload, every kiss, every slick glide of Starscream's spike and the sharp buzz of connected ports and then more high grade.

What in the Pit had he been thinking?

Short answer. He hadn't been.

Blurr stood up, staggered over to the cube, and popped it open. He drank it down, grimacing at the strange aftertaste. It couldn't be tainted. But when it hit his tanks, a rush of good feelings chased away some of the lingering doldrums of overcharge.

He might be able to start processing at his normal speed again.

Blurr slouched out of the berthroom and into the silent apartment, half expecting Starscream to be smirking at him from some corner. Well, he was only half-right. He didn't get Starscream. Instead, he got the Lackey.

“Some bots jes can't handle dere high grade,” Rattrap said from where lounged against a wall, arms crossed.

Blurr grimaced. “And some bots could use a trip to the washracks. Not to point any fingers.”

“What wuz dat about glass houses and rocks?” Rattrap gave a pointed look to Blurr's frame.

He didn't have to look down to know that he was covered in scratches, scrapes, dings, and splatters of transfluid and lubricant. But at least he didn't reek of whatever hole Rattrap had
“Starscream got a washrack in this place?”

“Do I look like his servant?”

Blurr smirked, crossing his arms. The energon warmed his tanks like high grade but with none of the aftereffect. “Do you really want me to answer that?”

Red optics dimmed. Rattrap jerked his helm. “Through dat door.” He held up a hand, a small chip tucked between two fingers. “Got a message fer ya. Unless ya don't want it.”

“Oh, so you’re not a servant. You’re a delivery bot.” Blurr dared step closer to the reeking mech. “Give it.”

Rattrap chuckled. “He got a way wit words, don't he? Gets right under yer platin’.” He smirked. “In more ways than one.”

Blurr snatched the chip out of his hands, tucking it into an arm compartment. “You done?”

“Are ya?”

Rattrap pushed off the wall and turned away, flicking a hand over his shoulder.

Blurr frowned. Starscream had gone and left his lackey in place with a message? Curiosity compelled him.

He pulled out the chip and a datapad to read it even as he went through a doorway, in search of washracks. His comm system pinged him a message. From Jazz. Not a surprise. He put it in queue, the focus on Starscream’s message.

It was brief. It was an invitation. One Blurr was no longer disinclined to accept. Starscream wanted his assistance? His opinion? His regard?

Well, he would get it. But Blurr wanted something, too. Something more than just a night of multiple overloads and Starscream evasively hinting to his grand plan. Blurr wanted answers.

He would join Starscream for mid-orn energon.

He tucked the chip back into his arm compartment and spaced the datapad.

First, a bath. And then, reality.

Then he would see exactly who was playing who.
He wasn't two steps out of the building that Starscream called home when his comm chirped an incoming message at him. Blurr half-expected it to be Starscream, confirming that Blurr had received the datapad. Starscream was nothing if not determined.

The sender, however, was equally expected. “How goes the walk of shame?” Jazz asked without any preamble. Blurr could all but hear the smirk in his voice.

“You have excellent timing, as always,” Blurr replied as he plunged into the trudging mass of Cybertronians, all going their various ways in pursuit of rebuilding their home world.

“It's a special gift. Can I safely assume you're on your way back here? Being that your bar needs attention before you can open in two hours.”

Blurr gnawed on his lower lip plate. “I have a stop to make first.” He resisted the urge to tap his arm, where Starscream's datapad was a negligible but noticeable weight.

“A stop.” Jazz's tone was perfectly neutral, but Blurr had worked with the former Spec Ops mech to not know how Jazz's mind worked.

“I'll let you know when I'm on my way.” Blurr said, and ended the comm, perhaps a tad impolitely. He would deal with rampant speculation later. Right now, he needed to concentrate on outwitting Starscream.

Though it would help if he knew exactly what the treacherous Seeker wanted in the first place.

He waded through the thickening crowds to the closest thing New Iacon had to an energon dispensary. Someone had taken it upon themselves to turn it into a restaurant that served various grades of energon. Rumor had it rust sticks were in their future, if they could stop squabbling long enough to remember the recipe.

Blurr was far from surprised that Starscream wanted to meet here. It was the second most public place outside of Blurr's bar. Starscream wanted an alliance. He wanted mechs to see him with Blurr. He wanted the publicity.

By coming here, Blurr was already playing into Starscream's hands. He was at the disadvantage.
Hopefully, it would not remain so for long.

Blurr pushed through the NAILs in the doorway and scanned the crowd inside for Starscream. At first he didn't see the Seeker, until he noticed the clutch of mechs at the far corner. Starscream, holding court with his admirers, what few there were that still carried confidence in him. Rattrap, curiously, was not among them.

Perhaps he was a secret Lackey. Blurr laughed and then steeled himself. Games of subterfuge were more Jazz's area of expertise, but he could do this. He'd been a Wrecker. There was little that could frighten him and a politically overzealous Seeker was not one of them.

Even when said Seeker brightened upon seeing Blurr, his optics blazing with pleasure as he pushed through his court and spread his arms in welcome.

“There you are!” he said, loud enough to capture all optics in the establishment, thrusting Blurr into the limelight. If he hadn't spent most of his function already in the spotlight, he would have cringed.

Frag Starscream and the shuttle he rode in on.

“No problem,” Blurr agreed gamely, enduring the full-framed embrace that Starscream planted on him.

Starscream drew back, his hands placing themselves on Blurr's shoulders, his energy field a drizzle of affection against Blurr's own. “I'm glad you came,” he said with a cheerful tone that was just this shade of insincere, but only because Blurr was looking for it. “Come. Join me. We have much to discuss.”

“Yes, we do.” Aware of the optics on them, watching and judging, Blurr followed Starscream to his table, where he shooed away his admirers, giving them a measure of privacy.

That was, if Blurr didn't count the dozens of pairs of optics that kept sneaking glances their direction.

The table was already laden with energon cubes of various shades and blends. Blurr recognized no few of them, though none of his own recipes. At least those had managed to stay his.

“I offer you first choice,” Starscream said as he settled into his chair and gestured to the variety of energon before them.

Blurr selected one that was a pale blue. “Hoping that I'll get overcharged?”

Starscream chuckled. “If I was, we're in the wrong place.” He picked up a cube that was a dark, shimmering pink. “Besides, you can't blame that particular outcome on me.”

“Can and will.” Blurr took a cautious sip, unwilling to admit that it was actually palatable. “What do you want, Starscream?”

“Such hostility.” Starscream clicked his glossa. “You'd think I was the enemy here. You came of your own free will, Blurr.”

“So you keep reminding me.” He put down his energon, refusing to lift it again until he received
some answers. “And since I'm here, it's time you tell me what role I have in this game of yours.”

Starscream shook his helm. “It's not a game.” He leaned closer, vocals dipping into a soft purr that shouldn't carry too far beyond their table. “I told you what I wanted. You. As my ally.”

“I'm a bartender and retired Wrecker. How could I possibly be of use to you?” Blurr made a gesture to the entourage of sycophants that waited nearby, for a chance to dote on Starscream once more. “Don't you have enough flunkies?”

“I don't want another flunky. I want a partner, someone who can stand by my side and help me maintain this peace.” Starscream's lips curved in something resembling a genuine smile. “This very, very fragile peace.”

Blurr tilted his helm. “So you want an Autobot. Maybe you should have thought of that before you did your fragging best to discredit Bumblebee.” Not that he's the universe's biggest fan of the yellow mech, but hey, there was a built-in ally right there, and Starscream had spurned him, for whatever reason.

“Bumblebee and I disagreed on.... many things. He wasn't suitable.”

“And Metalhawk?”

Something flickered in Starscream's field, too fast to identify before it was gone. “He is missed,” Starscream murmured. “He would have been my first choice.”

“Nice to see that I'm a back up plan.” Was that hurt in his vocals? Because Blurr couldn't imagine why it would be present. Wasn't he trying to get out of Starscream's manipulations?

“That's not what I meant.” Starscream reached across the table, his hand coming within inches of Blurr's but not closing the gap. “We are far more compatible, Blurr. Our interests align.”

Blurr cycled a ventilation. “What makes you say that?”

“Because we are more alike than you think.” Starscream leaned back and hid behind a cube of energon. “And I think that together, we can save this planet.”

“I've never known you to be one to share glory.” Blurr replied, his spark giving an odd flip-flop in his chassis. Dare he think Starscream genuine?

Starscream's optics burned a little brighter. “War has a way of changing your perspective. And your priorities.”

This was something Blurr knew all too well. “Is your berth included in the deal?”

“Included, not required.” Now Starscream's field extended, carrying with it a stroke of desire. “But it would be a shame to leave out the best part.”

Blurr's faceplate heated and he worked his intake. “I'll keep that in mind then.” He rose to his pedes, pushing his chair back. “Is there a time limit?”

“No. I'm willing to wait.” Starscream's optics held all kinds of promise, or was that simply Blurr's hope?
“Then I'll guess you'll find out my answer when I comm you.” Blurr backed away from the table and left without waiting for Starscream to reply. He was sure it would have been smug and manipulative anyway.

It was time he did some serious thinking.
Blurr makes his choice and strikes a deal.


Reevaluate his life.

Check. Check. Check. Check.

“Check.”

Blurr fumbled his data pad and nearly leapt out of his plating. “I thought you were busy,” he accused, wondering how to get his spark rate back to a normal rhythm. Fragging Spec Ops mechs!

Behind him, Jazz melted from the shadows, a grin on his lips. “Still am.” He circled Blurr with an incisive scan that probably cut through all the buffing layers to the scratches that had been there. “Have a good time I take it?”

Blurr scowled. “Get to the point.”

“Starscream's dangerous.”

Blurr rolled his optics and consulted his datapad. “Tell me something I don't know.”

“He came to me first.”

Blurr stiffened, pausing his opening checklist. “What do you mean?” First choice in Autobot? Or first choice period? Where did Metalhawk fit in it?

Jazz folded his arms and tilted his helm. “Is that jealousy I hear?”

“Curiosity.”

“Sure it is.” Jazz smirked. “Starscream wanted an ally. We have a history. He thought I was on his side because I stayed. It wasn't a stretch. But unlike you, I turned him down flat.”

“Why?”

Jazz rolled his shoulders in a shrug. “For reasons. And because he's Starscream.”

Blurr frowned and clamped his datapad to his forearm. He had to open soon and there were still a few things he needed to do. “A history?”
“None of your business. But it's got nothing to do with the war.” Jazz lowered his arms and started moving stools around, back into place since Blurr had swept. “You gonna tell me why you're even considering his offer?”

Blurr's engine rumbled. “None of your business,” he replied, and he tossed Jazz the grin he'd given countless newsbots when they bombarded him after a race. “Are you going to help me finish setting up or not?”

“I'm here, aren't I?” Jazz hopped behind the counter, searching the hidden shelves for the various paraphernalia they'd need. “And I'm just looking out for ya Blurr. It's a habit.”

“I know.” The smile this time was more genuine. Jazz, for all that he'd exclaimed abandoning his brand, would always be one of their leaders.

Even if Blurr did suspect Jazz had ulterior motives. Many of them. One could never be sure with Jazz when it came to intentions.

In fact, he and Starscream were a lot alike in retrospect. Both of them constantly schemed and manipulated mechs for their own purposes, whether personal or grander schemes.

Which wasn't to say that he didn't like Jazz, because he did. Blurr trusted Jazz, too. But that didn't mean he wasn't also fully aware of his friend's capabilities.

Trust but verify.

They worked in silence, Jazz thinking Jazzy things and Blurr ruminating on Starscream's offer. To take or not to take. All he wanted was peace and to run his bar in relative anonymity, but even Blurr knew that was a pipe dream. Not with their political climate so unstable and everyone in the city looking for a leader to trust.

Blurr didn't trust Bumblebee. Not that he trusted Starscream either, but with Prowl also stirring the pot and threats lingering on the horizon, trying to hide didn't seem much of an option. Even if they were out in the wilds, they weren't out of the picture.

Blurr figured he was going to be dragged back into the thick of things, whether he liked it or not. Maybe this time he should choose the manner of his involvement, rather than be swayed by whatever sob story wandered his direction.

And if he had even the slimmest chance in the Pit of getting Starscream to listen to him, to somehow convince the Seeker of the better course, than it was worth it.

“I'm going to accept Starscream's offer,” Blurr said into the silence, a few moments before he was due to open the doors.

Jazz didn't act the least bit surprised. “All of his offer?”

Should he be shocked that Jazz knew there was more than a few layers to it?

Blurr planted his hands on his hips and gave his bar a long look. “We'll see,” he allowed, and manually unlocked the doors. These days, electronic locks were no more reliable than manual ones.

The first couple customers trickled in as though they'd been waiting outside, and they probably
had. Blurr greeted them and hopped behind the counter.

It was time to get to work. He would worry about contacting Starscream later.

As it turned out, later was a matter of opinion. Because no sooner had he opened then Starscream came strolling inside, entourage included, as though they had been sitting at the restaurant waiting for Maccadam’s to open. Apparently, waiting for Blurr’s comm required patience Starscream did not have.

Starscream smiled, he waved, he blithely ignored the hostile looks he received from half of Blurr’s patrons. A fourth ignored him. The rest called out cheerful greetings.

Jazz sidled up to Blurr and spoke out the side of his mouth, even as he mixed a couple spritzers for two patrons on the other side of the bar. “Well, look who's come to call.”

“Jazz. Shut up.”

He laughed and edged away, to deliver the drinks before returning to the stage. He only jumped behind the counter when Blurr was overwhelmed.

This, of course, left plenty of room for Starscream to walk right up to the counter and surprise Blurr. “Well, hello,” he purred, his very presence scaring three customers out of their chairs, leaving them free for the Seeker to appropriate. “Fancy meeting you here.”

“Yes,” Blurr drawled, sending out the last of the drinks he'd needed to prepare. “Imagine I should be here, in my bar, working.”

“Imagine.” Starscream grinned and tilted his helm, his lackeys choosing not to sit but take up position on either side, preventing anyone else from taking the empty stools. “What would you recommend?”

“Discretion.” Blurr flattened his palms on the counter, shifting his weight. He was more than aware that they were being watched. Scrutinized.

Starscream chuckled. “You say that as though I'm propositioning you in public.”

“Aren't you?”

“Not for the fun bits.”

Blurr cracked a grin. “Isn't it all fun?”

Starscream chuckled and his field slid out in a pinpoint caress against Blurr’s. “I take it that means you have good news for me?”

Blurr inclined his helm and fought back a shiver. “With caveats.”

“I'm listening.”

“Good.” He leaned close until they almost shared ventilations. “Then keep listening. Because the moment I think I'm just an ornament is the moment you remember what I used to be.”

“Fast?” Starscream popped an orbital ridge.
“A Wrecker,” Blurr corrected with a growl.

Starscream's fingers rapped a staccato on the countertop. “Fair enough.” His concession was easy, almost scarily so.

Was Starscream that desperate for an ally?

“Good.” Blurr swallowed down his suspicion so it wouldn't show in his field or on his face. “When do we start?”

“Tonight.” Starscream's lips curled. “That is, if you're accepting my entire offer.”

Down the counter, someone signaled for a refill. Blurr nodded, acknowledging the request. The time for was chatting gone. Not that it had been there in the first place. Trust Starscream to corner him when he was too busy to give adequate time to his thoughts.

“Yeah.” Blurr turned away from Starscream to tend to his customer. “I'll be there.”

He felt Starscream's satisfaction like a warmth across the embrace of their fields before Starscream withdrew his. “See you then.”

He did not watch as Starscream left, taking his entourage with him. Though the atmosphere in his bar did improve. Conversation upticked from a low murmur to a dull roar. Well, this would fuel the rumors for weeks to come.

Blurr attended to his customer with a smile, relieved when the mech didn’t ask questions and quietly accepted his drink. This gave Blurr time to catch Jazz's visor across the length of the bar, but Jazz's expression betrayed nothing.

“We do what we gotta do, Speedy,” Jazz transmitted over Blurr's comm.

“Good.” Blurr smiled at the next customer as his hands worked busily, but most of his focus was on the conversation. “Then find me everything you can on Starscream's crew, yeah?”

Jazz purred amusement. “You want I should let Bee know he's got a mech on the inside?”

“Not just yet. Not until I know something.”

And not until Blurr was sure he wanted to trust Bumblebee again. Not to mention that the less Prowl knew the better. He didn't trust what Decepticon nest had taken root in Prowl's processor.

“Whatsoever you say, boss.” Jazz winked half his visor and then cut the comm, returning full attention to his electro-bass.

Blurr returned to his own work. Tonight would be the real challenge.

He was more than ready for it.
Fireworks

Chapter Summary

Starscream invites himself into Blurr's apartment for the sake of negotiations.

Chapter Notes

For ladydragon76's flash fiction prompt of “seal the deal”

Rowdy fights that caused property damage were not the way Blurr enjoyed ending a business day. His only consolation was that it wasn't an interfactional dispute but rather a matter of romantic entanglement.

Ugh.

Blurr tossed all three mechs on their afts and banned them from returning until they paid for what they'd broken. None of this came cheap! What couldn't be built had to be imported from what few planets were still willing to do business with Cybertronians. Blurr struggled, even with Swindle's discounts.

Worse, Jazz was out doing shadowy Jazz business and hadn't been around to help deal with the aftermath. True, his business had been Blurr's, but frag it, Blurr could have used the extra hands. Maybe it was time to look into hiring more help? Sky-Byte was always offering to do more than provide musical back-up for Jazz.

Blurr blamed Starscream. If that Seeker hadn't come strutting into his bar and announcing to the biggest group of gossips that he and Blurr were sympatico then everything could have remained quiet. But Starscream was like a force of nature, affecting everything around him, even if only tangentially.

Blurr scraped a hand down his face, left the rest of the cleaning for tomorrow, and dragged his tired frame upstairs to his apartment. He thought only of a quick wipedown and then collapsing onto his berth, perhaps not even in that order.

He was exhausted.

Which meant when he found Starscream lounging on his berth, lying in wait, Blurr was equally surprised and frustrated.

Starscream smirked.

Blurr didn't give him a second glance. “How'd you get in here?”

“Oh, I have my ways.”
Blurr sighed. Why did he bother asking?

“Go home, Starscream. I don't have the energy to do this with you.”

“Do what?” The Seeker portrayed fake innocence with well-posed wings. “I'm only here to negotiate the terms of our agreement. Draw boundaries. Et cetera.” One hand flicked through the air.

Blurr eyed Starscream around a cabinet door. “What would you know of boundaries?” He pulled out a damp washrag, too tired to even think of hitting the communal washracks. Some day, he hoped to install a private rack.

Someday.

Starscream chuckled and stretched out, unsurprisingly hitting all the right angles to make his freshly waxed plating gleam. “They have their uses. Rough night?” There wasn't an ounce of sympathy in his tone.

Blurr swiped the rag over his frame in quick, efficient strokes. “What makes you say that?”

The lights flickered and both of them paused, waiting to see if it would hold. The fluctuations were getting more frequent, Blurr noticed with a pang of sadness. If only Wheeljack were still alive...

“Oh, I don't know,” Starscream said once the moment had passed. “Your less than welcoming attitude?”

Blurr treated Starscream to a glare.

The Seeker smirked. “You know, I've always found a little romp on the berth works wonders for my disposition.”

Blurr tossed the rag back into the cabinet and approached his berth, planting his hands on his hips. “Do you play this desperate with all your toys? Or am I just special because I was your third choice?”

He didn't get so much as a flinch from Starscream, though the self-proclaimed ruler popped an orbital ridge. “Are you offended or jealous?”

“Neither. Jazz is a hot piece of aft.”

Starscream outright laughed. “Mmm. Yes, he is. And politically the better choice.” He paused and tilted his helm. “But I think you and I are more compatible.”

Right. Like Blurr was going to fall for that one in a sparkbeat.

He folded his arms and tapped a pede, staring at Starscream who decided now was the perfect time to slide off the berth. His field slinked against Blurr's with hot anticipation, like a caress, and Blurr's own plating flared as though inviting Starscream deeper.

His frame betrayed him.
Starscream's fingers slid down the side of his helm, tickling his helm vents. “I could beg if you like,” he murmured.

Blurr snorted a ventilation. “I hear you're good at it.”

Starscream's lips curled ever so slowly and heat sizzled between them.

Gone was the exhaustion, replaced by spark-throbbing want. Oh, the irritation lingered, but Blurr figured that was par for the course when it came to Starscream.

“There are many things at which I excel,” Starscream purred and then he lowered himself to his knees, ex-venting heat over Blurr's panel. “Open.”

His panel clicked aside with a speed that would have been embarrassing if he wasn't too tired to care. His spike pressurized just as quickly, pushing toward Starscream's mouth as though magnetically drawn.

Any taunt he could have formed died in his vocalizer as Starscream swallowed his spike down to the base in one fell swoop, intake flexing against the sensor-rich head. Blurr made a strangled noise, arms uncrossing and hands groping for something and settling on Starscream's shoulders.

Starscream made an amused noise, his glossa flickering at Blurr's spike in long sweeps that drew arcs of charge. Blurr moaned, fingers curling into a gap in Starscream's armor and holding on.

“Primus,” he groaned, hips rocking into the wet warmth of Starscream's mouth.

Hands gripped Blurr's hips, holding him in place. Starscream withdrew, a long heated slide of glossa and denta, teasing at the tip of his spike.

Starscream was on his knees, doing all the work, but somehow Blurr felt as though he were the one at Starscream's service.

His other panel popped, lubricant leaking from his valve and trickling down his thighs. His calipers cycled restlessly, remembering all too well how good Starscream's spike had felt in him.

Starscream hummed around his spike, and then there was a brush of fingers around the sensor-rich rim of Blurr's valve. Blurr's engine revved, heat flushing his entire system as his knees wobbled.

Two fingers plunged into his valve, curling against the interior nodes. Blurr's vocalizer spat static.

Starscream chuckled around his mouthful before drawing back with a lewd slurp. “So,” he said, glossa flicking against the tip of Blurr's spike. “Shall we move this to the berth or do you still lack the energy?” His fingers crooked again, lubricant soaking them. “I can leave, if you like.”

Blurr affixed the Seeker with a glare, his grip on Starscream's shoulders tightening. “Don't you fragging dare,” he growled and bucked his hips. “You better finish what you started.”

“I always do.” Starscream withdrew his fingers and popped them into his mouth, noisily cleaning them of Blurr's lubricant as he locked gazes with Blurr.

Fragging sexy-aft Seekers.

Blurr growled and hauled Starscream up, sealing their lips together with a near-violent kiss. He
could taste himself on Starscream's glossa, and he moaned into the kiss. Starscream's engine raced, vibrating himself and Blurr and Blurr's spike rubbed against the Seeker's thighs, leaving a streak of fluid behind.

Hands grabbed him, hauling him backward, and Blurr went willingly. Starscream bumped into the berth and with a muffled laugh, tossed Blurr atop it in a splay of limbs. Starscream crawled after him, red optics glittering with heat.

“This doesn't feel like a negotiation to me,” Blurr said.

Starscream smirked and dipped his helm, mouth painting a hot trail up Blurr's ventral armor, tonguing the vent slats. He crouched over Blurr like a bird of prey, wings arched and trembling behind him.

“It's the preliminaries,” Starscream purred and those fingers returned to Blurr's valve, pushing through the mess of lubricant to rub the mesh.

He groaned and arched his hips, gripping the berth covering. “Then I'm not impressed yet.”

Starscream's answer was to swallow his spike again, intake working the sensitive head. Dear Primus. Blurr shuttered his optics, thrusting up into Starscream's mouth, his vents snapping open and blasting heat.

Starscream nipped at his spike and then pulled back. “Perhaps I can change your mind,” he said, gripping Blurr's hips, his panel snapping open.

Blurr locked his legs around Starscream's waist, urging him onward with a press of his heels. “Doubt it,” he argued and then tossed his helm back as Starscream rolled his hips and pushed home.

The Seeker chuckled and bottomed out, grinding their arrays together. He bent over Blurr, nipping at his finials. “This,” he murmured, “is not part of the deal.”

“Of course it isn't,” Blurr said and gripped Starscream's side, hooking his fingers on thick armor paneling to keep the Seeker in place. He rolled his hips upward, spike bumping against Starscream's armor in a slick slide.

“So long as that's clear,” Starscream said and closed his mouth over Blurr's, a kiss that held more violence than tenderness and was all the better for it.

Blurr moaned into Starscream's mouth as the Seeker picked up the pace, withdrawing only to slam into him, as though he planned to frag Blurr straight through the berth.

Metal rattled beneath them. The berth shook. Heat swept Blurr up in a mind-dizzying flurry. He clenched down on Starscream's spike, felt the ridges rake against every node within his valve. The Seeker's weight pinned him down against the berth and he groaned into the kiss, hearing the sloppy push of their frames together.

Need built inside of him with a speed that was almost alarming. And Starscream fared little better, his thrusts increasing with earnest, his frame venting heat into the room.

Overload struck with all the subtlety of a plasma bolt. Blurr arched up beneath Starscream, hands clutching any available hold, his spike spurting and his valve squeezing down hard. Electricity
crawled out from beneath his plating, snapping sharply against Starscream's, drawing something like a whine from the Seeker's vocalizer.

He broke off the kiss, tossed his helm back, and followed Blurr over the edge, the wet splash of transfluid joining the mess of lubricant soaking Blurr's array. Starscream's field blanketed his, heavy with satiation and approval.

Blurr gave Starscream the count of three kliks before he heaved upward, tipping the Seeker on his side. Starscream squawked, of all noises, and flailed, giving Blurr ample time to pin him down with well-placed hands and knees.

“My turn,” he declared.

Starscream parted his thighs and arched his backstrut. “Do you see me complaining?” he purred.

Blurr smirked. They might break the berth after all.
Blurr and Starscream discuss the particulars of their agreement.

Afterward, they shared a quick scrub down with a damp washrag. Starscream took the opportunity to complain about the amenities offered because Blurr didn't have his own private facilities. Blurr ignored him.

He figured he'd be doing a lot of that in the future. Not all of what Starscream said was important, especially if he was whining.

They passed a decanter of coolant between themselves before Blurr was ready to get down to business. They sat on the berth, and Blurr pushed the limits by taking up the most space and shoving his pedes into Starscream's lap.

Starscream did not complain. A first.

“No more games, fun as they are,” he said as Starscream's fingers fiddled around his pedes, tracing the edges of each armor plate as though they were fascinating. “How's this going to work?”

Starscream smirked. “I'm as flexible as you are. Spike. Valve. So long as you're screaming, I'm for it.”

Blurr huffed and wiggled his pede. “Don't be obtuse, Starscream. You want an Autobot trophy, you got one. But I want to know what you think I'm going to do.”

One talon nudged against a tire, idly spinning it, which shouldn't have provoked a reaction in Blurr, except that it did. He shivered.

“I wish to hold rallies. Debates. Discussion panels. You know the type.” Starscream explored every inch of Blurr's tire with the tip of his talon. “We can host smaller ones here to start. And when I make a statement, I want you standing beside me.”

“A silent trophy, I would assume.”

Starscream chuckled low in his chassis. “Oh, you can speak. In fact, I'd prefer it.”

“Scripted?”

“No. The public would see through that.” Starscream's optics burned brighter, his grip on Blurr's tire tightening. “I came to you because I want you, Blurr.”

Try as he might, he was unable to keep the bloom of desire from bursting within his spark.

Blurr was used to being desired. It came with the territory of being a famous entity on Cybertron.
He'd had many a mech throw themselves at him. He wasn't ashamed to admit that he took them up on their offers. He loved pleasure as much as he loved racing. Especially if it was freely given.

Starscream's statement should have provoked a smirk at best. After all, how often had he heard something similar before?

But it didn't. It actually came off as sincere which meant Starscream was either a fantastic actor or he actually meant it.

Blurr wasn't sure which one was the safer bet.

“I see,” Blurr said and pushed his pede closer to Starscream, encouraging the delicate touches. “I assume you have a plan.”

“I always do.” Starscream's grip eased but only because his hand moved up Blurr's pede to his ankle struts, his lower leg, and then the complicated gears of his knee.

The lights flickered. Blurr looked up as though that would keep them on. His apartment hummed. There was a click in the distance.

“You might want to make that your first issue,” Blurr pointed out.

Starscream's free hand waved dismissively. “It's on the list of numerous complaints I have been fielding from ungrateful residents.”

“Well, those same ungrateful residents did just barely survive a Megatron-led uprising which is what they left Cybertron to escape in the first place.”

“Tch. Cowards.”

Blurr tipped his ankle, the tip of his pede tapping against Starscream's chestplate and right over the repaired glass of his cockpit. “You're one to talk.”

“My cowardice is of a different nature, should it exist it all.” Starscream's hand rested on his pede but did not push it away. His field, however, rang with disdain. “Do not compare me to those who consider themselves pacifists.”

He spoke the word pacifist with the sort of scorn he typically reserved for Megatron. Well, if there was one thing that had almost united the Autobots and Decepticons, it was their mutual dislike of the NAILS, though Blurr was of the opinion that he couldn't blame them. He hadn't wanted to join the war and get scrapped either.

But look where he'd ended up anyway.

Blurr popped an orbital ridge. “Did I pluck a wire or something? That sounded a bit offended to me.”

The hand on his knee moved further still, prickling over the thinner armor of his thigh vents. Talons slipped beneath the overlapping plates, teasing the delicate circuitry beneath. “Statements such as those were a surefire way to a quick offlineing in the Decepticons.”

“You aren't a Decepticon anymore.”
Red optics narrow at him. “Neither are you an Autobot.”

Well, that was a matter up for debate. But Blurr would let him have it for now. Sure he had, for all intents and purposes, cast aside his factional allegiance in the wake of Megatron's attack. Sure he had, by saying nothing, claimed himself Neutral. But he was not so naive to believe that there were no faction lines that quickly.

Blurr was an Autobot. Would always be an Autobot.

But he wasn't sure if Starscream was ever truly a Decepticon.

Blurr tilted his helm. “What's first on the agenda?”

“I want to announce our partnership.”

“Is that what we're calling it?”

Starscream smirked, fingers pushing deeper and causing a sharp spike of pleasure. “I could go into all the gritty details but I suspect my subjects aren't interested in who I'm 'facing.”

Blurr's ankle twitched despite himself. Whether by coincidence or design, Starscream had his fingers in a very erogenous zone. But to pull away would be to admit a weakness. And that Blurr couldn't abide.

“They'll figure it out,” he said. “You haven't been subtle.”

Starscream dismissed his concerns with another wave of his hand. “If they're gossiping about who's warming my berth than they aren't paying attention to what else I'm doing.”

“Sneaky.”

“Individually, the average mech is intelligent and reasonable,” Starscream retorted, and his field licked out, teasing the edges of Blurr's own. “As a mob, they are destructive fools that can't begin to understand what I must do for their own good.”

Blurr loosed a noncommittal noise. It sounded like an excuse to him but what did he know? He was a racer turned Autobot turned bar owner. Politics were not his thing. He wasn't out there to campaign on his own. He was here to try and rein Starscream in and if it came down to it, serve as advanced warning for anything malicious Starscream might have planned.

“You should listen to the individual then,” Blurr said.

“I don't have time for that.” Starscream's fingers removed themselves from his vents only to push higher, skimming the heat of his interfacing panel. He smirked. “That's what I have you for.”

“You have a spy,” Blurr said flatly.

Starscream ex-vented. “Rattrap has his uses. He hears the whispers. You are the friendly face that the mechs can come to should I intimidate them.”

Blurr wasn't sure intimidate was the right word.

“You want me to serve as go-between.”
“In a sense. You will be the voice of the people.” Starscream's primary finger drew circles on Blurr's panel, a soft scritch-scritch of metal on metal that sent a ring of vibrations through Blurr's array.

And how quickly would he take the fall, Blurr wondered. How quickly would Starscream turn on him?

“But enough business,” Starscream said, his vocals turning into a rolling purr. “We match it equally with pleasure, yes?"

“Yes,” Blurr agreed.

This, at least, did not require so much thought.

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Starscream was gone by the time Blurr onlined, sneaking out of Blurr's apartment as though he had been trained in stealth by Soundwave himself. He debated for all of a moment on changing his locks but figured it wouldn't do much good. Starscream would find his way in regardless.

He'd opened his door to the Chaos Bringer. He shouldn't be surprised to find the Pit waiting on his couch.

Blurr rolled out of the berth, evidence of the night's activities sticky on his frame. Today was not a day he could go without a wash. In fact, he would have to invest in a professional wax and polish if he was going to stand at Starscream's side to declare their “partnership.”

He strolled into the main room and drew up short.

“Seriously?” Blurr asked.

Jazz, lounging on his couch as though he owned the place, grinned and winked half his visor. “You aren't happy to see me?”

Blurr sighed and headed for his private stash of midgrade. “You're the second mech to break into my apartment in less than a day.”

“I spose I'll only need one guess.” Jazz propped his pedes up on the table, crossing one over the other. “You look like you had fun.”

“What was your first clue?”

Jazz tilted his helm and held up a datapad. “Got something for you.”

Blurr circled the couch and reached for it, only for Jazz to tilt it just out of his reach. “Nuh-uh,” Jazz said. “Not until you tell me what that means.” He tipped his helm toward something on the low table.

Blurr frowned. And realized it was a message from Starscream. He must have scribbled it down right before he snuck out of the apartment. It was little more than a time, a place, and an
admonition “don't be late.”

He slumped onto the chair opposite Jazz. “The next step.” Blurr cracked open the cube and took a long drink of it, though part of him longed for engex instead. “Formally declaring my association with Starscream.”

Jazz winced. “Sure that's wise?”

“It's part of the deal.” Blurr shrugged.

“Hm.” Jazz's reply was noncommittal but at least he tossed the datapad to Blurr. “Here.”

“What is it?”

“A list of all of Starscream's known associates, their previous faction alliance, and what purpose I think they serve now.”

Blurr's optical ridges crawl upward. “That was fast.”

“I have my resources.” Jazz grinned that salacious grin that had won him many trips to many berths.

Blurr would know.

He turned his attention to the list, skimming the designations. There were more than he would have expected, but less than Starscream wanted no doubt. Many were former Decepticons, the rest were Neutrals. There was not a single Autobot among them.

Blurr did not recognize any of them. Save one.

“Fasttrack's dead,” he said.

“Then someone else is using his designation. But you should know as well as anyone that mechs don't stay dead around here.”

Blurr pressed his lipplates together. This would merit further investigation, though on his own.

“Mech, you still sure you want to do this?”

Blurr flicked off the datapad and looked Jazz in the visor. “Yes.” Now more than ever as a matter of fact.

Starscream was too sneaky and self-serving for anyone's good. And Blurr was the best one to do this. Why? Because while Jazz was more famous with the Autobots, Blurr was liked by the Neutrals. And they outnumbered Autobots and Decepticons.

Should something happen to him that was in the least bit suspicious, there would be the Pit to pay. And Starscream attaching himself to Blurr went both ways. Starscream would be number one on their list of suspects.

Sure, Blurr might lose some face by openly throwing in his lot with Starscream, but it would be far less than Jazz suspected. After all, most of the mechs who truly loathed Starscream had left the city.
“Are you going to help me?” Blurr asked.

Jazz leaned back against the couch, folding his arms behind his helm. “Sure thing. And mebbe if we're both lucky, Starscream's on the level and peace is in sight.”

Blurr's optics dropped to the list again, lingering on Fasttrack's name.

He hoped Jazz was right.
Trouble brews in New Iacon as Starscream and Blurr announce their partnership.

The crowd was larger than Blurr expected, but many had probably come out of curiosity rather than support. Starscream had become something of entertainment for them. And given the current state of their living conditions, any entertainment was good entertainment.

Blurr ignored the tension in his legs and tried not to shift. He was used to standing before a crowd, that wasn't what made him tense. It was the fact that he stood on stage next to Starscream and was about to announce their alliance. He was putting himself out there, probably risking his spark.

He wasn't just having second thoughts. He was having third and fourth thoughts. What the frag was he doing? How had he let Starscream convince him this far? What did he think he was going to accomplish?

Blurr flexed his fingers. Too late to turn back now. If he did, Starscream would brand him a coward. Blurr was many things, but he hadn't run from a fight in millennia. He was a Wrecker. He wasn't afraid of Starscream.

His optics searched the crowd, trying to match names to faces. One of the mechs in Starscream's entourage was the one purporting to be Fasttrack. None of them resembled the racer Blurr had known. Fasttrack was dead and someone was stealing his name.

And then Starscream stepped forward and Blurr had to concentrate. He had to at least look like he was interested.

“My fellow Cybertronians,” Starscream began with a little smirk, and then he tilted his helm, “for that is what we all are, yes? Cybertronians. Not Autobots or Decepticons because we are above those brands. We are one, a united people with the same interests, the same goal – restoration of our home.”

He paused and if he was waiting for applause, he waited in vain. The gathered mechs watched with guarded interest. Only those in the front row – Starscream's fervent supporters – had anything resembling support in their optics.

“And to that end I have reached out to those that we trust most. I have reached out to those that will make our future flourish. I have gathered a group of mechs dedicated to rebuilding Cybertron and dedicated to our unification.”

Starscream stepped back and gestured to his left, where Blurr stood beside him. “One such mech is very familiar to you,” Starscream continued, his hand falling behind Blurr and resting on the base of his backstrut, leaving behind a heavy warmth that had more weight than the physical. “Blurr has kindly offered his bar as a gathering place, an open forum for discussion of all grievances.”
And there it was. Out there for all and sundry to hear and acknowledge. An open statement of their alliance.

The crowd shifted, began whispering to each other, but nothing Blurr could pick out. Their expressions were still guarded.

Tonight would show the true ramifications of his actions. He hoped that his regulars would understand. He hoped that his friends and allies would see the logic.

He hoped that Bumblebee and the Autobots, and Soundwave and the Decepticons, did not return to frag it all. He hoped Megatron stayed in chains where he belonged.

He hoped--

The lights went out.

Well. That was unfortunate.

Starscream went still next to him, his field going flat. The murmurs in the crowd grew louder. Blurr could see, by looking out, that all of New Iacon was dark. He waited, as they all did, for the power to return. The flickers had come lately, but they were brief.

Several seconds dragged toward a minute. The crowd grew restless and started to murmur. Energy fields spiked. All that could be seen was the various shades of biolighting. More than a few mechs with vehicle modes flicked on their headlights.

Starscream's impatience flattened into annoyance. “Everyone, please stay calm,” he said as he strode to the edge of the stage, holding up his hands. “I will get to the bottom of this. I promise. New Iacon will see power restored as soon as possible.”

The murmurs got louder, not that Starscream gave them the opportunity to voice their opinions. He whirled away from the stage and stalked toward Blurr, his optics flat and narrowed.

“The timing of this is rather convenient, don't you think?” he hissed.

Blurr crossed his arms, but was careful to keep his vocals low. “You think I had something to do with it?”

“I was only making an observation.” Starscream grabbed his elbow, but his grip was light as he guided Blurr away from the stage and down the stairs in the back. “Rattrap!”

Starscream's smelly lackey melted out of the shadows. “I didn't do it.”

Starscream huffed. “Of course you didn't. What happened and why?”

“Best guess is the relays blew. Scoop's on it.”

“Scoop,” Starscream repeated, tilting his helm, sounding contemplative.

“Yeah. Since Wheeljack ain't around 'n all that.”

Starscream went still. His grip tightened. Curious. Blurr looked at the Seeker, but Starscream's optics had narrowed and he was still staring at Starscream.
“Tell this Scoop I want to talk to him when he's done,” Starscream said. No doubt he hated that someone else would come out the hero but then, what did Starscream know about engineering?

“Sure thing, boss,” Rattrap drawled, his gaze flicking to Blurr before it focused on Starscream again. “Now?”

“Yes, now, you miserable little--”

“Wow, if you treat all your friends like this, I can see what I'm in for,” Blurr interrupted, raising both orbital ridges. Starscream still had a grip on Blurr's arm and he was interested in knowing why. Did he think Blurr was going to run off, shouting to all who would listen about how much he'd changed his mind?

Rattrap took the opportunity to scamper away.

“Rattrap is a tool,” Starscream corrected and finally, loosed his hold.

Blurr took his arm back, resisting the urge to rub his elbow. “And what am I?”

Some of the irritation melted away from Starscream's face. He stepped closer, his field reaching out to tap against Blurr's in a distinctly intimate manner. “My partner,” he purred. In the dim, his biolights were almost menacing.

Blurr shifted his weight and grasped for professionalism. “Well, this was obviously a bust. How long before we get the power back on?”

“I wish I knew. I don't know this Scoop.” Starscream pulled back, a frown on his lips. “But I intend to meet him.”

Blurr inclined his helm. “Wish it were Wheeljack instead,” he muttered. He hadn't been particularly close to the engineer, but he'd been a force to be reckoned with. Not to mention a friend to everyone.

He was missed, and not just by the Autobots.

“What?” Starscream demanded.

Blurr cycled his optics. That had sounded a touch sharp. He tilted his helm, giving Starscream a sidelong look. “Wheeljack,” he repeated. “He would have been better than whoever this Scoop is. Probably more trustworthy, too.”

“Indeed.” Starscream was staring at him as though he'd never seen him before. “You truly don't know what caused it?”

“Do I look like an engineer?” He paused and reconsidered, anger flushing his features. “And it wasn't Jazz either.”

Starscream made a noncommittal noise. “I didn't say it was.” He turned his helm, gaze focused on the far distance, the flat plains beyond New Iacon, the direction the Decepticons had gone.

“What didn't I do?”
To his credit, Blurr wasn't the only who jumped. Especially when Jazz melted out the shadows, a Cheshire grin on his face and his visor gradually lighting up. He must have shielded all of his biolighting because neither Blurr nor Starscream had seen him coming.

“What are you doing here?” Starscream demanded, his wings sweeping up and back, his words nearly a shriek.

Jazz sidled up to Blurr's side and leaned an arm on Blurr's shoulder. “Investigatin'. City went dark. Thought I'd find out why.”

Starscream's optics flicked between them. “Curiosity,” he said.

“That's what I said.” Jazz smiled his most winning smile.

Blurr had the feeling that there was something under the surface here that he wasn't getting. Did it have to do with the reason why Jazz had turned down Starscream's offer the first time around?

Starscream's optics narrowed. “Right. I'll leave you to it then.” His attention shifted to Blurr with a nod of his helm. “Blurr, I'll comm you later as to our next move. We'll have to reschedule the announcement.”

“Pretty sure everybody knows.”

“Even so.” Starscream looked at them again and then whirled on a heel, kicking on his thrusters and taking off into the sky.

Blurr was quite certain he had missed something. But he waited until Starscream was out of sight before he shrugged Jazz off his shoulder.

“All right,” he said, turning toward the closest thing he had to a friend right now. “What in Primus' rusty undergarments was that about?”

“Don't know what you mean, mech.” Jazz grinned at him but there was a dark flash in his visor.

Blurr ground his gears and held up a hand. “Whatever. I'm going back to my bar.” He turned his back on Jazz and hopped down from the stage.

He glanced back toward the crowd but the majority of it had dispersed. A few mechs lingered, likely Starscream's entourage.

Jazz hopped down beside him, matching his stride. “I saw the blackout. Knew it started in this direction. Was worried.”

“I appreciate your concern, but you do know I can take care of myself.”

“Against that mech? Wantin' some backup ain't a bad thing, Blurr. It's why we're doing this together, right?”

Blurr sighed. “Right.”
Interlude

Chapter Summary

Motivations are called into question and unsurprisingly, both Blurr and Starscream are less than forthcoming with the truth.

Chapter Notes

For ladydragon76's flash fiction prompt: BlurrxStarscream, “how do you really feel?” from last month

“So.”

Blurr looked up from the counter and a particularly sticky stain. “So,” he repeated, staring at Jazz who was supposed to be cleaning but was instead kicking back in a chair, his pedes propped up on a table.

Yeah, Jazz said, leaning back and folding his arms behind his helm. “So. As in, what's the deal with you and Screamer?”

He narrowed his optics and Jazz grinned at him. There was more in the casual question than met the optics, however, and Blurr knew it. He dropped his gaze, focusing on the sticky stain.

“Business partners,” Blurr said.

“Business,” Jazz repeated, his glossa tasting each glyph for truth. “Right. That's what they're calling it nowadays. Pleasure ain't got nothing to do with it.”

Blurr pressed his lips together and scrubbed a little harder. Jazz was trying to bait him. For what purpose?

Starscream was... Starscream. Annoying. Full of himself. A total slagger. So what if he was attractive? So what if that coy smirk of his inspired dirty thoughts? So what if he knew how to use his glossa for things other than talking?

So what?

“Ya know your silence is telling me just as much, right?”

Blurr ex-vented and lifted his helm, purposefully keeping his expression neutral. “I'm guessing you have a point buried in there somewhere.”

Jazz shrugged. “You and Screamer looked mighty cozy up on that stage.”
Ah. So that touch hadn't gone unnoticed. It hadn't been scripted either. Blurr didn't know what Starscream meant by it, but he suspected there was a purpose behind it.

“We all have our parts to play,” Blurr said and turned away from Jazz, surveying the bottles lined up neatly behind his bar. He would have to make contact with Swindle soon. He was running low on some ingredients.

“Mech, I know acting. And that up there? Wasn't all pretend.”

The bar was as clean as it was going to be tonight. Especially since Blurr had a long day scheduled tomorrow, including a meet and greet later in the evening. But at least some of the air of tension hanging around New Iacon had fizzled.

“Starscream is a means to an end,” Blurr said and he tossed a look over his shoulder. “If you're not going to do some work around here, can you at least go do some out there?” And by that he meant for Jazz to poke his nose into whatever was really going on with their utilities instead of sniffing around Blurr's personal business.

“Sure, sure.” Jazz pushed to his pedes, holding up his arms in surrender. “Guess we gotta lie to ourselves as much as we lie to each other, yeah?”

Blurr glared.

Jazz grinned. “Just sayin’,” he said, backing toward the door. “If you can get past the snark, that's one fine piece of Seeker aft.”

He skedaddled on that high note, before Blurr could form anything like a reasonable retort. Not that it would have mattered. Jazz could see straight through slag.

Blurr ex-vented and rubbed his faceplate.

Complications. He hadn't wanted any of those.

Damn you, Starscream.

0o0o0

He smelled Rattrap long before he saw the little weasel. Some spy.

Starscream didn't deign to turn and acknowledge Rattrap. He leaned against the balcony railing and looked down at the half-dark city. Another blackout of all things. Just what he needed right now. Where in the Pit was Scoop and why wasn't he fixing it?

“What do you have for me?”

Rattrap transformed with the rattling schlep of rusty gears. The stink worsened.

“Scoop ain't lyin'. Circuits were overloaded. But it weren't no accident.”

Hm. How unsurprising. Sabotage? There were too many potential enemies to name. Though it was certainly nothing Bumblebee, in all his moral righteousness, would sanction. He might not
like Decepticons, but he wouldn't countenance causing distress to everyone just to get back at Starscream. Bumblebee actually wanted peace between Autobots and Decepticons.

That decent nature was what kept making Bumblebee end up on the losing side.

“Sniff around. Maybe one of Soundwave's brats snuck back in.”

Now Soundwave he wouldn't put it past to linger just to cause trouble. There was no love lost between them and Soundwave didn't care a whit about political image. All Soundwave would want would be the return of his lord and master. Come to think of it... Starscream made a mental note to increase security around Megatron.

One little cassette could make the future very, very unpleasant.

“Yeah, whatever.” Rattrap snuffled a ventilation, sounding offended. “Ya sure ya trust dat Autobot?”

Starscream's fingers tightened on the railing. “There are no Autobots in my city. Just like there aren't any Decepticons.”

“Keep tellin' yerself that. Mebbe it'll actually come true.”

Starscream frowned, though Rattrap could not see it. “Blurr had nothing to do with it.”

“Mebbe he did, mebbe he didn't. I'm just sayin' ya know who his friends are.”

Starscream tilted his helm. He suspected Rattrap did not mean Bumblebee and his exiled Autobots, or those former Autobots remaining in the city. He meant Jazz specifically, the most dangerous of those who remained. Starscream doubted Jazz followed Blurr's orders, but that didn't mean Jazz wasn't acting on his own.

Sabotaging the power grid would certainly be a good start toward undermining Starscream's leadership. But somehow, Starscream didn't believe it of Jazz. The once Spec Ops Commander had turned him down, but it hadn't been with ill will.

No. Starscream suspected the identity of the saboteur was something a lot more complicated than the obvious.

“I'm aware,” Starscream acknowledged, and his engines growled with warning. “Blurr's interests align with mine. He wants Cybertron to be home, not tear it apart.”

“Ya sure?”

“Quite.” Starscream turned to look at him. “Why the interrogation?” And why so curious, he also wondered, but it wouldn't do to give Rattrap too much information. He would use the little weasel; it didn't mean he trusted him.

Rattrap grinned at him, something sharp in his optics. “Just a few questions, mech. A few questions is all. Seems like more ta me than jes business but what do I know?”

“Indeed. What do you know.” It was more statement than question and they both knew it. Starscream drew closer to Rattrap, deactivating his olfactory sensors as he did so. “Blurr is a means to an end, as I'm quite certain he is using me as well.”
“Course, course.” Rattrap nodded, folding his arms over his chestplate. That he subtly shrank away from Starscream was all the more amusing. “Just, yanno, gotta be careful about Autobots. They tend to get attached. Soft sparks ‘n all.”

Starscream stared at his informant, but Rattrap grinned back up at him as though he'd stumbled upon some fantastic secret. “His attachment would work in my favor.”

“Sure it would.” Rattrap backed up a pace and pointed a thumb over his shoulder. “So I should jes get to investigatin’, right?”

“Right.” Starscream's optics narrowed. “And bring proof. If I'm going to stand in front of the newsbots, I need something concrete.”

Rattrap smirked. “I live ta serve.” He sketched a salute and vanished into the shadows, though his stink lingered as it was known to do.

Starscream returned to the balcony and the view of his city. He gave no more thought to whatever implications Rattrap had in mind.

Below him, the lights winked back on. At least someone around here was doing their job.

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Rumor Has It

Chapter Summary

Swindle fishes for information and Blurr comes out feeling a bit cheated. All in a day's work.

Chapter Notes

For ladydragon76's flash fiction prompt, TIA, Star/Blurr, mystery wrapped in an enigma and it's giving me a fragging headache

Blurr knew, by the grin on Swindle's face, that he wasn't going to walk out of here without a helmache.

“Blurr!” Swindle greeted, throwing his arms out wide. “A pleasure to see you, my fine racing friend. Here for the usual?”

“I am,” Blurr replied, leaning against the counter. “I'm low on magnesium, too.”

Swindle winked his visor. “Whatever you say. Coming right up!” He turned away from Blurr and stepped into the room behind him, though his voice was still audible. “Speed and quality, that's the name of the game.”

“Uh-huh.” Blurr drummed his fingers on the counter, looking around the little space Swindle had carved out for himself.

Compared to what he'd had before the riots and Megatron, this was pathetic, but that particular building had been burned and smashed beyond all hopes of rebuilding, taking a good portion of Swindle's stock with it. Luckily, Swindle had been in business long enough to know better than to keep all of his goods in one location.

“How's business?” Swindle asked.

“As busy as ever. Mechs gotta drink no matter what's going on in the rest of the world.”

Swindle's helm popped into view, but only his helm. It was a somewhat disconcerting effect. “It helps that you're something of a Neutral party, yes?”

Blurr tilted his helm. “Yes.” He narrowed his optics but Swindle vanished out of view again, the noise of rummaging following his disappearance. “And you?”

“You know me. I bounce back.” Swindle chuckled. “Everyone needs something. They know if they want the best, they come to me.”
Blurr made a noncommittal noise. It was that very monopoly which made Swindle capable of charging whatever he frag well pleased. Though he'd given Blurr something of a discount as of late – for Swindle.

“What about the black outs?” Swindle asked, his vocals floating out to Blurr. “They haven't been upsetting your business.”

“Most mechs have running lights, headlights, or biolights.”

“Yes, but it's still inconvenient.” Swindle – full frame this time – walked back into view, arms laden with a box that he set on the counter in front of Blurr. He leaned an elbow atop said box. “So I heard a rumor.”

Blurr put a hand on the container, attempting to pull it toward him, but it wouldn't budge.

“A rumor,” Blurr repeated.

Swindle grinned. “Well, less a rumor and more a truth considering it was splashed over the news feed. What's this about you and Starscream?”

And there it was.

Blurr braced his elbows on the counter. There'd be no leaving out of here without a conversation. He should have guessed Swindle was working up toward it.

“Not that it's a bad deal or anything,” Swindle continued, still with that damnable smile. “It's good for business. For me anyway. Got the strangest uptick in requests for vids of your races.”

“Huh,” Blurr said.

Swindle's visor brightened. “Huh. That's all you have to say.”

Blurr rolled his shoulders in a shrug. It was going to come out anyway. Might as well control the distribution. “Huh. As in, yeah, we're fragging. So what?”

“Ever heard of the phrase not mixing business with pleasure?”

“With Starscream, they're kind of the same thing.”

Swindle burst into laughter. Strut-shaking, vent-heaving laughter. It had the effect of loosening his grip on the box though so Blurr took the opportunity to drag his supplies closer and poke through them. Swindle was the best of the best, but you couldn't trust him. Sometimes, he miscounted. On purpose.

“Aren't they though?” Swindle's shoulder shook as he chuckled and pretend-wiped at the corners of his purple optics. “So tell me, Blurr my friend buddy and pal, inquiring minds have to know. What's it like?”

“A helmache,” Blurr said flatly, and he rummaged through the packets of magnesium. “Where's my silicate?”

“At the bottom,” Swindle said, without breaking stride. “I'm not talking about his voice, Blurr. What's he like in the berth?”
“No difference. I don't see it, Swindle.”

Swindle rolled his optics and leaned over the counter, adding his own hand to help the search. “That's because it's, uh hm, not here.”

“Right. So go get it.” Blurr shooed him back toward the storage room.

Swindle didn't argue, at least, and disappeared into the back. “So this alliance,” he called out, voice almost lost to a rather sudden amount of banging, “what's in it for you?”

That's what Blurr was still trying to figure out. Other than the fantastic interfacing, Starscream was already proving to be a lot of trouble. And getting a straight answer out of that mech was the largest challenge.

“A stable Cybertron,” Blurr answered, because it was the answer he was going to give anyone who asked. Jazz might know better but who cared?

“Right,” Swindle drawled as he strolled back into view, tossing the packet of silicate toward Blurr. “Because you're just that selfless.”

“Maybe I am.”

Swindle crossed his arms on the counter and stared at Blurr. “I don't believe you. He's a fine piece of Seeker aft, but you have to know how often he lies.”

Blurr arched an orbital ridge. “Like you're one to talk.”

“Yeah, but when I do it, it's business.” Swindle waved a hand. “Isn't a mech on this planet right now who knows Starscream's true motives. The only one that might come close is stuck in prison with a bonafide Wheeljack device strapped around his waist.”

Megatron. Ugh. Blurr shuddered. He hadn't touched that particular relationship yet and frankly, he didn't want to. There had been a lot of speculation. He didn't believe any of it especially since half contradicted the other half.

“You almost sound concerned,” Blurr said, tossing the silicate into his box. He lifted it off the counter, setting it against his hip.

Swindle grinned. “What would I do without my favorite customer?” he asked, a purr in his vocals. Not this time, Swin. Not this time.

“Find another one, I'm sure.” Blurr moved to turn away, only to pause, tilting his helm to the side. “You'll let me know if you hear anything useful, right?”

Swindle wriggled his jaw. “Useful, how?”

“Useful to me.” Blurr flattened his orbital ridge and swept a hand over his helm. “About Starscream. About the blackouts. About anything.”

“Ahhh.” A dawning understanding lit Swindle's face and he leaned back upon the counter, offering Blurr a conspiratorial wink. “What's in it for me?”
“My gratitude.”


Blurr's vents blasted. “You're there every night!”

Swindle shrugged. “The price you pay for doing business.”

Argh. “Fine,” Blurr ground out. “But not until you bring me something of worth.”

“Deal.” They didn't have to shake on it. “Always a pleasure, Blurr.”

He wasn't sure he could say the same. So he huffed his vents again and whirled on a heel, stalking out of Swindle's Shop. Somehow, he still felt he'd come out holding the short stick.

Fragging Swindle.

This was all Starscream's fault.

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Priorities

Chapter Summary

An agitated Starscream drops by for a visit and Blurr is nominated to, ahem, deal with him.

The lights hadn't flickered in several cycles. Blurr supposed that meant someone, somewhere was doing their job. Why the power had been inconsistent in the first place, well, they were still trying to figure that out.

Everyone suspected sabotage. Everyone pointed fingers. But no one had any proof. Or if they did, they weren't offering it.

Blurr had the feeling Starscream had all kinds of evidence. He wasn't sharing it though. Because Starscream was a hoarder of secrets. Especially if he could use them for his own purposes or as leverage later.

Therefore, when the power stabilized and the outcries devolved to mutterings, Blurr wasn't surprised to look up from a sudden rush of construction workers to see Starscream in the corner of his bar. It was a surprise, however, that Starscream was being rather unobtrusive. He was tucked into a back corner, almost in the shadows, without his crowd of sycophants.

Mechs recognized him, of course. But the baleful look in the Seeker's optics must have kept them from approaching him. There was a bubble of solitude around him. Even with the bar as crowded as it was, no one sat in the seats surrounding Starscream.

To others, he probably looked angry.

To Blurr, Starscream looked like he was, of all things, sulking.

Blurr shook his helm. Seekers and their mood shifts. Whatever. He had work to do. But he did keep an optic on Starscream, always a wise move. And he didn't miss when Starscream's odorous spy crept in, offered something to the Seeker, and then crept back out.

Whatever it was propelled Starscream from a sulk into irritation. Even better, Blurr thought with much sarcasm. It was arguable which was truly worse.

So he let Starscream stew, nursing the same drink he'd apparently started his evening with, and tended to his customers. Jazz took the stage, entertained the crowd, and gave Blurr some breathing room. He had just enough time to clean a mess or two and restock a few things from the back room before another rush hit.

By the time business died enough that he was able to give Starscream a second look, Starscream hadn't moved. Blurr would have laid a bet that he still had the same glass of engex. Part of him was surprised that the Seeker continued to linger.

Business slowed. A recording crackled through the speakers. Time ticked toward closing and all
those who remained were the dedicated customers. Those that had been nursing their cubes all
night, or those that were so sotted their friends would have to drag them back to whatever berth
they called home.

Jazz took up a post behind the bar, tilting his helm toward Starscream as though Blurr hadn't
noticed him.

“Best tend to yon dark cloud of Seeker over there,” Jazz said. “He's your responsibility now.”

Blurr would have liked nothing more than to refute that statement but frag it, Jazz was right. He'd
let Starscream into his berth and his bar. He had only himself to blame.

Blurr sighed, signed off, and grabbed something of his own to drink. It was mid-grade, but
flavored to his liking. He'd found a new distaste for engex as of late. Maybe because he spent all
day serving it.

Starscream didn't look up as he approached, and there was barely acknowledgment when Blurr sat
down across from him.

“Well,” Blurr said, slumping into the booth. “Nice to see you, too. How was your cycle? Mine
was busy, as you can see, but I'm sure yours was full of parties and laughter.”

Red optics narrowed. “Sarcasm doesn't become you,” Starscream finally said. He tapped a finger
on the edge of his engex glass.

Blurr smirked. “I thought that was how we communicated. I don't know any other language.” He
sipped at his midgrade, relaxing into the booth as the energon hit his tanks. He was getting antsy,
the urge to go for a race crawling through his circuits.

But he couldn't leave a brooding Starscream in the corner of his bar. Someone might inadvertently
offend him, and then Blurr would have a bar to repair again, and he'd just finished fixing it from
the last riot.

Starscream tilted his helm. “You are not as charming as you think you are.”

“Of course I am.” Blurr leaned against the edge of the table and grinned. “Managed to charm you,
didn't I?”

A smirk tugged at Starscream's lipplates. He leaned forward, bracing his elbows on the table.
“And yet you're the one who has yet to say 'no'."

Touche.

Blurr huffed a laugh. “You caught me there. I still don't know what I was thinking.”

“I have an idea,” Starscream purred and Blurr had to bite back a groan.

There was something sinful about Starscream's vocals when he dropped them like that. The sound
seemed to travel straight to Blurr's backstrut, pinging his interfacing array. His grip tightened on
his cube.

He rebooted his vocalizer and tried to steer the conversation somewhere a little less arousing. “I
take it you didn't come here to flirt with me.”
“Actually, I did.” Starscream leaned back in the booth, flicking his wings to make them comfortable. “I've had enough business for today. I'm sick of it. I just want the pleasure.”

“So now I'm your personal frag toy?”

Starscream popped an orbital ridge. “Are you objecting?”

Primus but Blurr wished he could. Wouldn't that make everything so much simpler if he cut that part out of their arrangement?

“No, but I am the owner of this establishment.” He made a broad gesture to his bar which he suddenly noticed was a lot emptier than before. “And I do have responsibilities.”

“Delegate, Blurr,” Starscream said. He lifted his engex and drained the glass all at once, his glossa flicking over his lips to clean them. “That's what all great leaders learn to do.”

Blurr, suddenly, couldn't think of a good reason not to do so. “You are a bad influence.”

“The very worst.” Starscream rose to his pedes, wings flicking out behind him as he inched out of the booth. “I'll be waiting upstairs. Whether or not I'm still online depends on how fast you join me.”

He all but strutted across the bar, showing off for what few patrons remained, and making sure that all of them saw him go through the door that led up to Blurr's loft. Putting on a show, even now, so that there was no doubt he and Blurr were aligned.

Blurr finished off his energon and abandoned the booth as well. No matter how enticing Starscream could be, Blurr did have responsibilities. He needed to be behind the bar.

No sooner had he walked toward it, however, did Jazz wave him off. “I got this, boss,” he drawled with a half-lit wink of his visor. “Trust me, keepin' Starscream waitin' is in nobody's best interest.”

He set the empty cup on the counter, narrowing his optics. “Are you telling me that I have to frag Starscream for the sake of Cybertron?”

Jazz burst into laughter and almost dropped the bottle of engex he was holding. “Oh, Primus. Please let me be there when you tell Starscream I said that.”

Blurr grinned. “No thanks. I like my spike where it is.” Meaning attached, because Starscream would probably claw it off. And then his optics. And his finials. And his thigh vents. And whatever else he thought was delicate and sensitive and could make Blurr beg for mercy.


Blurr half-saluted in appreciation and made a beeline for the door, well aware that the last few of his patrons were paying attention. He was sure it was all part of Starscream's plan. Besides, maybe in the relative privacy of the apartment, Blurr could figure out whatever it was that had the Seeker's wires in a twist. Not to mention what Rattrap had given him.

Upstairs, all of the lights were dimmed, but through the open door to his berth, Blurr could see Starscream's biolights. The Seeker sprawled upon Blurr's berth as though it belonged to him.
Which really was par for the course with Starscream.

“About time,” Starscream admonished.

“Do you expect me to drop everything any time you feel like stopping by?” Blurr retorted.

He eyed his berth. Starscream hadn't left much room for him. He'd also rearranged the covers and the mesh pillows for his personal comfort. One leg was drawn up, knee bent, and one hand palmed the panel protecting his interfacing equipment. There was nothing of shame in his field.

Blurr doubted Starscream knew what shame felt like.

Starscream grinned. “Do I really need to answer that?” His free hand lifted and a finger crooked at Blurr. “Get up here.”

“You're lucky you're good in the berth, you know that?” Blurr grumbled because frag it all, he obeyed. Hard to resist that kind of frank invitation.

“There are many things at which I excel,” Starscream replied with a grin.

Blurr made as if to straddle Starscream's waist, but a leg wrapped around his torso and pulled. He tilted forward, hips notching between Starscream's thighs as he caught himself with his palms to either side of Starscream's helm.

“Huh,” Blurr said. “I take it you want to be spiked.”

“That was the idea,” Starscream purred. His hips rolled upward in a move that had to be illegal, their armor rasping together. “I've been doing all the work so far. It's time you earned your keep.”

“He says while drinking my product and laying in my berth above my bar,” Blurr muttered, but Starscream's hand wrapped around his helm and dragged him down for a kiss and well, arguing seemed least important at the moment.

Especially when Starscream's panels slid open and he ground his valve against Blurr's array, leaving a smear of wetness behind. Their glossas tangled as Starscream's free hand pushed between their bodies, fingers sliding through the folds and wetness of his valve before pawing at Blurr's panel.

It sprang open beneath Starscream's touch, unsurprising, and Blurr moaned as Starscream guided his spike to the Seeker's wet opening. He had every intention of taking it slow, of enjoying the steady push and the greedy clutch of Starscream's valve. But legs wrapped around his waist and tugged him down, forcing him deep.

Blurr broke off the kiss with a gasp, pleasure zinging down his backstrut. For all that he was the one doing the spiking, it still felt like Starscream was in control.

“And here I am, still doing all the work,” Starscream purred.

Both arms wrapped around Blurr's neck as Starscream arched up against him, hips circling in a manner that ground Blurr's spike deep within his valve. Starscream's calipers rippled up and down the length of his unit. Blurr panted, his helm tilting forward. His forehelm rested against Starscream's, his fingers kneading the berth.
“You are exasperating,” Blurr retorted as he shifted his weight just enough to grant him some leverage. He rocked into Starscream and was rewarded with a full frame shiver from the Seeker.

“And yet, here you are.” Starscream grinned with a flash of sharpened denta, which seemed to be a Decepticon standard.

“Guess I just can't stay away,” Blurr gasped and ground into Starscream, pleasure flushing through his systems in a blaze of need.

Starscream tilted his helm up and dragged Blurr's back down for another kiss, his denta nibbling at Blurr's lips. He greedily licked at Blurr's mouth, his hips rolling and rocking against Blurr's. His valve clutched and grasped at Blurr's spike, as if determined to pull the overload right out of him.

It worked.

Blurr was helpless to the pleasure as Starscream's valve milked his spike and sent him moaning into the fastest, sharpest overload he'd had in quite some time. His engine raced, shaking the berth, and Starscream writhed beneath him as he overloaded as well. Starscream bit Blurr's lip before tossing his helm back and screaming. His valve convulsed, lubricant soaking the space between them.

Blurr groaned, his sensitive spike twitching within Starscream's valve. “Primus,” he muttered.

Starscream's thighs tightened around his waist. “Don't recharge on me yet,” the Seeker purred. “That was only round one.”

“Round one?” Blurr yelped as his world was abruptly upended.

Starscream had them flipped in short order, pinning Blurr beneath him on the berth, still firmly seated upon Blurr's spike.

“I'm rather frustrated, my dear accomplice,” Starscream said as his spike emerged and he wrapped fingers around it. “And I've been told interfacing is a more acceptable means of working out my frustrations. Yes?”

Blurr's hands found Starscream's waist as Starscream's calipers rippled up and down his spike once again. “Now I'm just an available spike for you to use?”

Starscream thumbed the head of his spike and gave Blurr a wicked smirk. “Not just,” he said. “But my favorite.”

He wasn't sure if he should take that as a compliment or not.

“I'm honored,” Blurr drawled.

Starscream chuckled. “As well you should be.” He rolled his hips, squeezing down on Blurr's valve. “Now why don't you make yourself useful and frag me?”

Never let it be said that Blurr ignored an opportunity when it knocked.

He supposed he would just have to ask Starscream about Rattrap later.
Morning After

Chapter Summary

Blurr and Starscream slept together. Literally.

Chapter Notes

For MysteryArtAnon's prompt of BlurrxStarscream, Lazerhawk’s “Electric Groove”

Blurr onlined the next morning feeling overheated and heavy. He groaned in protest and tried to roll over. He flared all his vents, but something pinned him down. His optics onlined in a startled burst. What the frag?

“Stop squirming,” came a muffled order. The weight above him didn't so much as shift. Warm ex- vents puffed down on him, adding to the heat.

“Hot,” Blurr complained, shoving at the weight.

“You are an impossible bedmate,” his partner complained but mercifully, the weight shifted and Blurr was able to slip off to the side. Not that there was much room left on the berth.

Clarity gradually returned. Blurr slung an arm over his helm as his internal temperature cycled back into normal degrees. He slanted a glance to the side, unsurprised to find that Starscream had slipped back into recharge.

Starscream rarely stayed the entire cycle. In fact, Blurr was pretty sure he never had. For all that they’d fragged on all available surfaces, they’d never shared a berth in recharge. That implied things Blurr wasn't sure he was ready to examine. And damn, but Starscream still had a leg slung over his. Clingy Seeker, wasn't he?

Blurr poked him in the side. What was the expression about sleeping Predacons? Oh, well. Blurr couldn't be trapped under an amorous Seeker all day.

“Oy,” he said, slim fingers getting into a seam and poking at Starscream's protoform. “Don't you have work to do?”

Quick as a flash, Blurr's hand was snatched up and slammed into the berth. His optics cycled wide in shock. Starscream was half-asleep! And clearly he'd lost none of his battle time reflexes.

Also. Ow. Blurr was not too ashamed to admit that Starscream was stronger than him.

“Starscream,” he hissed, tugging on his arm. “Let go. And wake up!”

The Seeker huffed a ventilation at him, pede hooking on Blurr's leg and trying to drag him closer.
“Have you no sense of proper berth behavior?”

Blurr squinted at him. “If you're awake then act like it.”

Starscream's lips curled in a smirk. “You're in such a hurry to go. Did I exhaust you that much?”

“That question is a trap and I'm not going to answer it,” Blurr declared.

Starscream chuckled. He squeezed Blurr's hand and finally, his optics onlined, a dim glow of red full of self-satisfaction. He tried to drag Blurr close again with his leg, only partially succeeding.

“Shouldn't you be in a better mood given last night?” Starscream asked, tilting his frame enough to prop his helm on his other arm.

Blurr snorted. “Not when you're smothering me.”

“Testy, testy.” Starscream shuffled closer, an almost ungainly scoot across the berth, but it succeeded in nudging his knee right between Blurr's legs, notching it up higher against his groin plating. “Come a little bit closer and I can fix that sour disposition.”

“Really?” Blurr arched an orbital ridge. “You want more?”

“Today is a new day.” Starscream's grip on Blurr's hand was just enough to wind him closer, within reach of Starscream's lips. “What better way to start the morning?”

Blurr groaned, but it wasn't all exasperation as Starscream's knee scraped a titillating vibration across his panel. “Are you always this friendly when you first online?”

“Are you always this grumpy?” Starscream nipped at his audial, glossa flicking over the sensitive component. He let go of Blurr's hand and dragged his palm down Blurr's chassis, fingers pulling up curls of shiver-inducing static. “Open up, Blurr. I have an intense need to be inside you right now.”

“Wow. And they say romance is dead.” Blurr rolled his optics but obliged.

He moaned as Starscream immediately sank two fingers into his valve, fingers curling up and in, mercilessly stoking the bundle of sensors just behind his anterior nub. Blurr's hips canted upward, helm tossing back with a cry of pleasure.

Starscream nibbled on his audial. “Got a meeting soon. Don't have time for romance.”

A meeting? Clarity fought against the rising fog of pleasure. Blurr gripped at Starscream's shoulders, hips working against Starscream's fingers. But he felt like there was something important. Something he should be remembering.

“Meeting?”

Starscream kissed him, his glossa plunging into Blurr's mouth, and Blurr moaned. His thighs pushed further apart, heat winding in his pelvis as Starscream's fingers stroked him. Starscream's thumb pressed his valve nub, a light pressure that sent tingles through his sensor net. It was ridiculous how quickly Starscream could rev him up.

Blurr broke off the kiss, tilting his helm away to avoid the return of Starscream's lips. “What about
“Is this something I need to go to?”

“Nope. Not important.” Starscream attacked his intake, nipping and sucking.

Blurr's fingers curled, scraping Starscream's armor. His valve clenched, lubricant seeping free. “I think it is.”

“You want to discuss business now?” Starscream demanded.

He finally hauled himself up properly, but only so he could fit his frame between Blurr's legs. His hands curled around Blurr's thighs, thumbs stroking his vents.

“I have a feeling I ought to.” Blurr braced himself against the wall above his helm as his lower half was hauled into Starscream's lap, the Seeker's online spike already nudging at the rim.

Starscream rubbed the head of his spike through Blurr's lubricant, teasing him. “That's not necessarily the same thing as wanting to.” His thumbs stroked distracting patterns on Blurr's thigh vents. “But I can stop.”

Blurr's pede kicked Starscream's aft, not nearly enough to dent but enough to make a point. “Don't you dare!” he snapped. His internal temperature rose again, riding the wake of his surging pleasure. Only way to be rid of it was to disperse the charge.

Which Starscream probably knew, frag it.


Blurr moaned and bucked his hips, gripping the berth tighter. “Just frag me already!”

“Well, since you asked so nicely.” Starscream snapped his hips forward, filling Blurr in a single thrust.

He tossed his helm back, spinal strut arching as pleasure lanced through his sensor net. His cooling fans kicked on, vibrating the berth, as his valve cycled down on the thick spike.

Starscream didn't give him a chance to rest, setting up a fast, fierce rhythm that rattled the berth and sent clanging echoes throughout the room. Blurr sucked in a ventilation, giving himself over to the pleasure pinging through his system. Starscream's grip shifted to his hips, pulling him onto Starscream's spike with each thrust. The head of it struck at Blurr's ceiling node, a relentless bombardment of pleasure that flooded him with heat.

Overload struck him all at once, like a lightning bolt to his interface. Blurr shouted as he clamped down on Starscream's spike, his array throbbing. Starscream followed him over, spurts of transfluid coating the inside of Blurr's valve.

“That was... fast,” Starscream panted as he leaned over Blurr, his spike settling into a low throb in Blurr's valve.

“Ha, ha.” Blurr rolled his optics. “You didn't have much stamina yourself, oh lord of the skies.”

Starscream smirked, more amused than offended. Luckily. The Pit hath no fury like a Starscream offended.
He rolled his hips forward, rocking his still pressurized spike within Blurr's warmed valve. “Could go for round two.”

“Don't you have a meeting to go to?”

“They can wait,” Starscream purred and he tilted forward, hands planting to either side of Blurr's helm, his face within inches of Blurr’s. This changed the angle of his spike in Blurr's valve, striking previously untouched sensors.

He shivered. “Well, maybe I have work to do.”

Starscream leaned closer, nipping at his lips. “Do you?”

“That's--” He broke off with a shudder as Starscream circled his hips, the base of his spike rubbing against Blurr's anterior nub. “That's not the point.”

“Isn't it?” Starscream ex-vented hotly, licking over Blurr's lips and teasing him relentlessly. His hips rocked again, rubbing quite nicely over Blurr's nub.

“Okay, fine! I don't have work to do!” He lifted his helm and stole Starscream's mouth for another kiss, arms wrapping around the Seeker's shoulders to keep him there.

He wanted another overload and he wanted it now, responsibilities be damned. Frag Starscream and his fragging irresistible self.

Blurr would have to worry about the rest later.
Disagreement

Chapter Summary

Starscream is evasive, Blurr gets angry, and Jazz delivers a warning. Things just got a lot more complicated.

Chapter Notes

For Ladydragon76's flash prompt, BlurrxStarscream “Not as dumb as you think I am. Probably twice as lost though.”

The washrack was filled with the patter of cleanser and rising steam. Blurr's hands moved professionally over Starscream's frame, doing his best not to encourage other things. Starscream might have come in and promptly booted out all the other patrons, but their privacy in the washracks wouldn’t last for long.

Not to mention they were both already late for their respective responsibilities. And besides, he had questions.

“Tell me about this meeting,” Blurr said as he scrubbed Starscream's back.

The Seeker purred his pleasure, kneading the wall of the rack with his fingers like an Earth feline. “What meeting?”

Blurr's optics narrowed. “The meeting you claimed you were going to be late for earlier.”

“Oh, that meeting.” Starscream rolled his shoulders, one wing flicking and splattering Blurr with cleanser. “It's not important. Just a little chat between friends.”

“Friends,” Blurr repeated flatly. “You don't have friends.”

Starscream turned to face him, affecting an expression of disappointment. “Blurr, I'm hurt. What are we if not friends?” He grabbed the scrubber and spun his finger in a circle. “Turn around so I can return the favor.”

Blurr sighed but did as Starscream asked. He was sticky from a night in the berth with an amorous Seeker who apparently turned into a clingy Seeker in his recharge. And Blurr had recharged in the wet spot.

“We're business partners,” Blurr answered, but he clenched his jaw. Starscream was evasive, and that usually meant Starscream was hiding something. But then, when wasn't he?

“The two aren't mutually exclusive,” Starscream retorted.

The soft sweep of the brush against Blurr's plating was heavenly, but he tried not to give in to the
comfort. Because Blurr certainly believed otherwise. One couldn't be both friends and business partners with Starscream. That was a recipe for disaster.

"Fine," Blurr said. "The meeting's not important. But I'm sure whatever Rattrap gave you last night is. So why don't you tell me about that. And whatever you've found out regarding our electrical issues. I'm supposed to be the voice of the people, and I don't know anything."

Starscream hummed. "Rattrap gave me nothing save information and useless information at that. I may have to find a better informer if he keeps up this poor performance."

Blurr tossed a glare over his shoulder, not that Starscream noticed. He pretended a complete focus in scrubbing the back of Blurr's legs.

"Funny how I don't believe you," Blurr said.

"You're not laughing so I'm rather certain you don't find it amusing," Starscream set the scrubber aside and claimed the sprayer instead. "Tell me what this mysterious object you seem to think I possess looks like and perhaps then I'll be able to tell you what it was."

Blurr turned and barely kept himself from snatching the sprayer from Starscream's hand. He didn't particularly care for Starscream's tone.

"Stop being evasive," he snapped. "What the frag is going on, Starscream? You can't keep me in the dark."

The sprayer shut off and was left dangling from the ceiling. Starscream folded his arms, his face a mask, betraying nothing. The drip-drip of the leaky faucet seemed all the louder for the sudden silence.

"There are some things," Starscream began, and it was clear he was choosing his words carefully, which might have been a first for Starscream, "that you do not need to know. Where ignorance is a better protection than knowledge."

Blurr's internal temperature ticked upward, matching the low-grade anger settling in his lines. He frowned.

"Protection from what?"

"It doesn't matter." Starscream waved a dismissing hand and turned away from Blurr, grabbing one of several folded drying cloths stacked nearby. "What's important is that you need to be careful. There's something beneath the surface here that doesn't bode well for you or me or even Bumblebee out there in the wilderness."

"And you're not going to tell me."

"You don't need to know."

Starscream shrugged and headed for the door. Blurr intercepted him easily enough, stepping between the Seeker and the exit. He tilted his helm. Looking up at Starscream had never made him feel inferior, but the ability to loom would have been useful right now. It was an effective intimidation technique.

Blurr cycled a ventilation. "That is not an acceptable answer."
Starscream arched an orbital ridge, an action which only served to double Blurr's rising ire. “More's the pity as it is the answer I'm giving you.”

Blurr twitched.

So. Starscream could stride into his bar, use Blurr for stress relief, distract him with interfacing, and then blow off his concerns? No, that was unacceptable. In fact, it was more than a little offensive.

Blurr stepped to the side, freeing up the door. “Fine,” he bit out. “Leave.” He might not be able to make Starscream talk, but he damn sure didn't have to stand here and look at Starscream either. He'd just remember this the next time Starscream came by and wanted something.

Starscream's optics narrowed. “You do realize you sound like a sparkling who didn't get his way.”

“Maybe I just don't have time for your secrets.” Blurr jerked his helm toward the door. “Go.” He crossed his arms and made a point to make his field as unwelcome as possible.

There was a tense moment when he felt Starscream would stay just to be contrary, but then Starscream tossed down the towel. He harrumphed and swept from the room as though it had been his choice all along and he was only humoring Blurr's request. He took with him his storm of a field, which Blurr only belatedly realized had been like razorwire against his own the whole time.

He heard the distinctive sound of a door opening and shutting with a slam that somehow sounded offended. Starscream certainly had a flair for the dramatic.

In his absence, Blurr ventilated a slow sigh of relief and unfolded his arms. Still dripping, he sought his own cloth and wiped himself down before picking up Starscream's discarded towel as well. Trust Starscream to leave a mess behind.

His comm pinged and Blurr sighed, accepting the call.

“So,” Jazz said, his vocals coming through clearly, “wanna tell me why Starscream just stormed past me in a huff?”

Blurr rolled his optics. “Maybe because he thinks he can manipulate me all he wants and I won't call him out on it.”

Jazz laughed. “I see. Well, you can't say I didn't warn you.”

“Right. Because 'I told you so' is exactly what I want to hear right now.” Blurr dumped the damp towels into the bin and departed as well. “Want to tell me what the frag is going on?” he demanded as he stepped into a bright, Cybertronian morning.

“You'll have to be more specific.”

Blurr startled, whirling to the right where Jazz leaned on the outside of the building, propped against the sign. “Did you come looking for me?”

“Might have been a little worried.” Jazz shrugged and straightened, stretching his arms over his helm. “Ya slipped out the back so ya didn't see what was left for ya in the front.”
“Left for me?”

Jazz pulled out a datapad and wiggled it, the tiny device little more than a messenger system as opposed to a multi-purpose pad. “Popped through the mail slot and everything. Had just enough of a tint of threat to it that I was concerned.”

Blurr’s optics narrowed, but he took the messenger from Jazz and flicked it on. There was a message on it, short and to the point, not that the words made much sense. Something about death coming to those who wanted to lead Cybertron back to ruin. The glyphs were disjointed and some of them illegible. It was like trying to translate Cybertronian into English and then back again. Meaning was lost in between.

“What's this about?” Blurr asked.

“I dunno. If I had ta guess, I'd say Starscream was to blame.”

“Isn't he always?” Blurr muttered, and he read the message again.

Something icy slithered into his spark. This symbol at the bottom. He peered at it, the multiple parallel lines with capped loops. There was something familiar about it but he couldn't seem to come up with a match in his databanks. Not that it mattered. It had been a long war. It could mean just about anything.

“Starscream didn't do this, though. It's not his style,” Blurr added.

Jazz waved a hand of dismissal. “Oh, I know that. But ya can be damn sure ya got it because ya made the fool choice to align yourself with him.”

“Who sent it?”

“That I don't know.” Jazz let loose a frustrated huff. “Whoever they are, they're good. Dunno if they're Autobot or Decepticon or NAIL. Just know that they don't like Starscream.”

“Hah. Like that narrows it down.”

Jazz tapped the messenger. “Exactly, and because of that, they don't like you. I don't have a name, but I do know they're responsible for the blackout.”

Well, frag it all. “I can take care of myself,” Blurr declared. “Something I think both you and Starscream seem to be forgetting.”

Jazz rolled his shoulders. “I ain't sayin' ya can't. I'm just sayin' be careful. Watch yer back. Maybe remember how it feels to go armed again. That's all.”

Politically, that was a bad move. Only mechs looking for trouble or Starscream's hand-picked Enforcer patrol went visibly armed. It was one of the declarations Starscream had made in the wake of Megatron's return and the battle that followed, along with the casting out of those who retained their factional allegiance.

But Jazz had a point. Blurr couldn't rely only on his speed to protect him.

Ugh. This was getting ugly.
“I'll keep that in mind,” Blurr said and tucked away the messenger. “For now, I've got a bar to run and you've got to figure out what the frag Starscream's up to.”

Jazz smirked. “Isn't that your job?”

“I'll do my part, you do yours.” Blurr’s hackles were still up about Starscream. He had to figure out a plan of attack before the sneaky Seeker got to thinking he’d won.

“Sure, sure. Whatever ya say, boss.” Jazz's visor half-darkened in a wink and he turned away, whistling.

Blurr thought about the messenger in his subspace.

“Jazz?” He waited for the former third in command to pause and look back at him. “Thanks for worrying about me.”

Jazz broke into a full grin. “All in the job, boss. All in the job.”

He went on his way and bracing himself, Blurr did as well. And if he peered around a bit more than usual and startled at unexpected sounds, well, that was only to be expected.
Chapter Summary

Starscream ruminates. Rattrap finally has a name. Jazz swings by to flirt.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He hadn't spoken to Blurr in three days.

He told himself it was because Blurr was the one who had been rude; therefore, Blurr should be the one to initiate contact. Starscream was not about to admit the real reason. Not even to himself.

It was fine. Because Starscream had Work to do. He had an investigation to complete. He had to make sure his city functioned properly and that his citizens received the assistance they needed. Supplies were running low in the medquarter. Starscream had to make arrangements for the medics to get priority.

One of the Decepticons had shown up at the wall, brand in hand, asking for asylum. Starscream recognized him as a low-level grunt and granted him a pass, though he was subjected to numerous scans and he was being shadowed for the next week by one of Rattrap's lackeys. Yes, even Rattrap had lackeys.

Starscream wouldn't put it past Soundwave to send in a spy. Even an obvious one.

So he was busy. He didn't have time to think about Blurr. Right now, he had work to do. He'd worry about that particular business venture when it became important again.

Besides, he didn't need Blurr. He had a friend and a willing set of audials. He had Wheeljack. And right now, Wheeljack couldn't even talk back.

He couldn't do much of anything but float in his regen tank and heal.

Starscream paced around the tube. The sound of the energon and nanite gel bubbling had started to become soothing to him. It represented peace. A lack of judgment. A level of comfort Starscream could not have expected.

“There's something else going on. I don't have names, but I'm going to get them,” Starscream said as he continued the same circuit. “Blurr doesn't get it. This isn't about who is faster or stronger or was a Wrecker. It's about politics. It's about playing smart. It's about... yes, it's about knowing how to stab someone in the back.”

Starscream knew all the rumors. His reputation. The tasteless jokes. Some of it was true and well-deserved. Yes, he'd made a habit of turning traitor. Yes, he and Megatron had never seen optic to optic on anything. It meant Starscream was good at sniffing out lies and deceit.

Blurr wasn't and never would be.
“And the last thing I need right now is for someone to assassinate him. He's my ally. My public ally. Can you imagine how bad that would look?”

Starscream's comm chirped.

He paused, wings to the regen tube, and acknowledged the hail. “What do you want? I'm busy.”

“I have that information ya were lookin' fer, boss,” Rattrap said, sounding more than a little proud of himself.

Starscream grinned. “Meet me in my suite then. I don't want to talk about this over open comms.”

“Sure thing, boss.”

Rattrap closed the comm with a click, leaving Starscream with dead air. He rolled his optics and dropped the comm.

“Well, looks like I have work to do,” Starscream said and he turned back to face Wheeljack. He didn't know how much longer the engineer would need to be in here. Frankly, he was impressed Wheeljack had survived at all. “Try not to miss me.”

Starscream grinned, winked, and took his leave. He locked the doors behind him, both old-fashioned physical locks and triple-encrypted electronic locks, and made his way back upstairs. He'd claimed this entire building for his own, though the floors between the basement and his penthouse loft were unoccupied at the moment.

He suspected that Rattrap had claimed one of the rooms for a nest, but until it became relevant, Starscream was going to let it slide. He kept his enemies closer after all.

Maybe he ought to move Blurr in here.

Starscream almost laughed out loud at the thought.

He arrived at the door to his suite and was greeted to the unpleasant sight of Rattrap loitering outside it. He could not have possibly beaten Starscream here. Which meant he'd already been waiting by the time he commed Starscream.

He didn't think Rattrap could get any creepier until now.

Starscream frowned. “This had better be good intel,” he said as he keyed in his code and the door slid open. He'd have to change that later. “And I want sources. No guesses.”

“Whatever ya say, boss.” Rattrap trailed in after him, bringing his trademark odor with him. Ugh. Starscream would have to fumigate later, too.

He really needed to think about modifying one of the lower levels into some kind of office. He'd put that next on the list and hire one of the freelance construction mechs in the city. Surely someone could use a ration card or two. Or extra shanix to waste in one of the bars populating New Iacon like a bad case of rustmites.

Maccadams was still the favored. Something which ought to make Blurr proud.
“What do you have for me?” Starscream asked as he hit the button for the lights, illuminating the interior of his suite. It was sparsely furnished still, but he would adjust that with time.

“A designation,” Rattrap rasped. He sounded like he’d been sneaking around the lower levels again, where there was no ventilation and the air was clogged with smoke and particulate. He poked around until Starscream glared and that was enough to make Rattrap stand by the door.

Starscream moved to the window, opening the shutters to look out on the city. It was getting late, almost night-cycle. “Who?”

“Obsidian.”

Starscream whirled toward Rattrap so fast his wings almost smacked against the window frame. “He's dead,” he hissed.

“So’re a lot of mechs. Seems like people just don' stay dead anymore.” Rattrap shrugged, but it was far from nonchalant. “I ain't sayin' ya hafta believe me. I'm just tellin' ya what I know. And I know that Obsidian's here. On Cybertron.”

This was unexpected. This was unsettling. This changed a lot of things.

Starscream paced away from the window, clasping his hands behind his back. His frown etched into his faceplate.

“What's he doing here?” Starscream demanded as possibilities unfurled in his processor. Possibilities and threats.

Obsidian was a Decepticon only because he refused to be an Autobot and also refused to be a Neutral. He always claimed to fight for the protection of Cybertron. He was an extremist, the sort that believed sometimes in order to protect something, you had to destroy it. He was worse than Megatron, not that it said much, and Starscream thought he was dead because Starscream had killed him.

On Megatron's orders, but still. One did not try to lead a coup against the Decepticon warlord. Starscream took special exception to someone trying to steal the throne that was rightfully his. In fact, it wasn't long after Obsidian's failed attempt that Megatron formed the Decepticon Justice Division.

“Dunno,” Rattrap said. “Dunno where he is either. Just that he's hidin'. Dunno why he's doin' it or how many he's got, except that it ain’t just ’Cons. He's recruited Bots and NAILs, too.”


This was a much bigger problem then some malcontent trying to make things difficult for Starscream. Or Soundwave having found his sneaky way back into the city to cause problems and free his precious leader. Starscream knew Soundwave, could plan for Soundwave. But Obsidian was a wildcard.

Obsidian was the type to kill anyone in his way, no matter if they were innocent or not. And the only individual he loathed more than Starscream was Megatron. Blurr truly didn't know what kind of mire he'd stepped into.

“Find him,” Starscream demanded as he pinned Rattrap down with a look. “I don't care how, but
“you find where Obsidian is hiding.”

“Ain’t gonna be easy.”

“Nothing ever is,” Starscream sighed. He pinched his olfactory sensor, tension replacing all semblance of calm he’d obtained.

“Whatever ya say, boss.” Rattrap sketched a salute and slipped out the door. It clicked shut behind him and suddenly paranoid, Starscream coddled it shut.

He didn’t know who Obsidian had recruited, but he did know that they were good. Good enough to sneak around Maccadams without being seen. Good enough to sabotage the power grid without leaving clues. And good enough to hide their identities.

Starscream suspected he only knew Obsidian’s identity because Obsidian wanted him to know. Primus. This was not the headache he needed right now.

“So things are getting a bit more complicated, huh?”

Starscream’s wings tensed. He turned slowly, wishing he wasn’t so surprised to find Jazz lounging in the door of his berth room. The former Autobot casually leaned against the frame, one ankle crossed over the other, his arms folded under his bumper. He was smirking, but then, he usually was when he came around to taunt or threaten Starscream.

“How long have you been here?” Starscream demanded. He didn’t bother to ask Jazz how he got in. He was well-acquainted with Jazz’s ability to get into places he shouldn’t.

“Long enough.” Jazz tilted his helm. “Obsidian, hm? You might be in over your helm, Starscream.”

“I can handle myself.”

Jazz pushed off the frame and crept into the main room, his posture casual but he never failed to carry a hint of menace. “Sure, sure,” he said. “You always so mean to your toys?”

He should have known this was coming, too.

Starscream planted a smirk on his face and started to circle Jazz. “The only one allowed to break them is me,” he said as Jazz tracked his movements with that unreadable visor of his. “It’s a harsh lesson, I know.”

“So you’re worried?” Jazz said. His glossa flicked over his lips, hip cocked toward Starscream. “Feel like I should be jealous. Thought we had something special.”

Starscream snorted. “Concerned about my investment? Yes. Us?” He reached out, finger flicking one of Jazz’s tires and setting it to spin. “Special is not quite the term I’d use.”

“I’m hurt.”

“No, you’re not.” Starscream smirked and came to a stop in front of Jazz. They were within arms reach of each other, not that it mattered. Jazz could kill him from up close or far away. “What are you here for, other than telling me to take better care of my toy?”
Jazz examined his fingertips. “Figured if anyone knew what that threat was about, it would be you. And what do you know, I was right.” He slanted a look toward Starscream. “Come on. There's a berth right there. What do ya say? For old times sake?”

He knew enough to know that Jazz wasn't serious.

Starscream flicked his wings. “What do you know about Obsidian?”

“I know that he hates you. Then again, who doesn't?” Jazz turned around, stupidly presenting his back to Starscream. Someone was feeling more than a little self-confident. Especially as he pushed his arms over his helm and proceeded to stretch.

Starscream would be lying if he claimed he wasn't interested. He liked racing frames, and he knew very well Jazz's skills.

But he didn't trust Jazz, and like the Pit he was going to let that menace into his berth again. They weren't in the middle of a war anymore. Starscream had better ways to risk his spark.

“How is he alive?”

“How do you think?” Joints popped as Jazz rose to the tips of his pedes and then down again, releasing a little hiss of ventilation. “His conjunct.”

“Strika.” Frag it. Starscream should have known. He'd thought Strika dead, too. But if Arcee had survived, small wonder that Strika did, too.

Jazz looked over his shoulder. “Yep.”

Starscream stared at him. “You've always known he was alive.”

“We might have been harboring him. Or maybe I had him stashed somewhere. Thought he could be useful. Oops.” Jazz shrugged and turned back around to face Starscream. “Or maybe I'm lying to see how angry you'll get and it's all one unfortunate coincidence.”

Starscream really hated spies.

He folded his arms over his chestplate. “Do you have anything useful to say?”

Jazz grinned. “Mech. I'm always useful. But what I know I'm not sharing right now. Call it an ace up my sleeve.”

Starscream ground his denta. “This is why there is no 'us'. ”

Jazz laughed and strode toward Starscream's door, effortlessly hacking the panel in under ten seconds. “There are a lot more reasons than that, Star. Besides, you have a new toy. Go play with him.”

“I should think you wouldn't be encouraging this,” Starscream said.

Jazz turned in the doorframe and smirked. He gestured toward his Autobrands. “Yeah, well. Things change, right?”
“They certainly do.”

Jazz left, the door shut behind him, and Starscream heard it click to lock. Not that it mattered since he planned on ripping out the entire system and replacing it something far more secure. Too many rodents getting in here.

Starscream frowned and returned to the window. Obsidian was alive, and Strika with him. This was definitely a problem.

Heavy was the head, he thought. Heavy was the head.

Chapter End Notes

I snagged the name Obsidian and the brief summary of the character from tf-wiki. This is not the Obsidian who appears in Combiner Wars. This Strika is also not the one from TFA. Neither of them are exactly like their other universe counterparts (Beast Wars, I think?) I can't remember if Jhiaxus had other victims other than Arcee, but I'm going on the assumption that if he was experimenting on one, he had others, too. Strika was one of his "failed" experiments here in my AU.

I needed an antagonist and I didn't want an OC or someone who was already busy and off doing other things in-universe. I was also hoping for one that hadn't been seen in IDW yet. As far as I know, there's been no sign of Strika yet. And Obsidian only just showed up. So there's my reasoning.

Phew. That being said, I hope you enjoyed! Feedback is always welcome and appreciated.

More fic to come!
Chapter Summary

Blurr fumes, Swindle smirks, and Starscream kind of admits he was wrong. But not really.

Chapter Notes

For ladydragon76's flash fiction prompt of Blurr/Starscream, “I'm your partner, not your plaything”

He hadn't heard from Starscream in a week. Good riddance, right? Except Blurr had thrown his hat into Starscream's ring and mechs were starting to get suspicious. They were asking questions Blurr couldn't answer.

He was good at evasion and changing the subject. He threw free drinks at those that were a little more persistent. And all the while, he eyed the door, waiting for Starscream to come striding through it with a smirk and a pseudo-apology.

Was he still sulking because Blurr had called him on his slag?

Blurr snorted. Trust the vain Seeker to get his wings in a twist over that. Starscream was too used to his followers fawning over him. Well, Blurr had been there, done that. He knew what it was like to be in the spotlight. He wasn't about to become an idiot fan who lost his cool because his favorite racer had walked into the arena.

No fragging way.

Blurr aggressively scrubbed the countertop. This damned stain. No matter how much he sprayed it and sanded it and repainted, the off color kept bleeding through. It was hideous. Maybe he ought to rip out the whole counter and start over?

No. That cost shanix he didn't have. And favors no one owed him. Prices for some things had mysteriously gone up since he’d thrown his lot in with Starscream. Meanwhile, other supplies were getting tossed at him, no questions asked, no shanix required. It was getting pathetically easy to see who was in Starscream's camp and who wanted to rip off the Seeker's wings.

There were sadly more of the latter than the former. Blurr could sympathize. There were times he wanted to wipe that smug smirk off Starscream's face, too.

The front door opened. Blurr didn't look up.

“'I'm not open yet,'” Blurr called out as he ducked behind the counter to find the bottle of solvent he'd stashed there.
“Not even for an old pal like me?”

Blurr straightened, peering over the counter. Swindle had a box on one hip and a swagger to his step. He had a cheap smile on his lips and a gleam to his optical band that suggested this conversation was going to cost Blurr a helmache and far too much of what he didn't have to spare. And he wasn't talking about shanix.

“Not unless you have the supplies I ordered,” Blurr said. He abandoned his search for the solvent and came around the counter, taking the box from Swindle's hands.

He plopped it on the nearest table and started rummaging through it. Swindle still couldn't count and Blurr wouldn't trust him any further than he could throw him.

“I have everything you asked for,” Swindle said as he leaned a hip against the table. His smile never lost its sparkle. “What kind of supplier do you take me for?”

Blurr snorted and didn't dignify that with an answer. All the magnesium this time. Sulfur, too. An extra tube of copper, like slag he was going to point that out. A fresh stack of washrags. A box of bulbs for the flickering sign.

“So I'm hearing rumors that you and flyboy are, how shall I say it, crashed and burned?” Swindle said as Blurr continued to count. He pushed off the table and started to wander around the bar.

Blurr kept one optic on him and one on his counting. “Don't know what you're talking about.”

“Of course you don't.” Swindle chuckled. “What do I know anyway? It's not like I got my nose and audials and optics in all the juiciest gossip around here. And it's not like there isn't another bigger player out there anyway.”

Blurr froze. His optics narrowed. He lifted his gaze and found Swindle by the jukebox Jazz had salvaged and was trying to repair. ‘Bigger player?’ Could this have something to do with whatever Starscream refused to tell him?

Swindle gave him a slag-eating grin. His optical band lit up. “Oh? Didn't you know?” He sounded like the turbofox who'd caught the metallocanary. “There's another king vying for the throne and this one might actually oust your flyboy. He's got more allies and he's better connected.”

Blurr circled the table, wondering how much the information was going to cost him. “Who?”

Swindle whirled and started examining the jukebox as though it held all the secrets. He shrugged. “What makes you think I know? Hey, does this thing work?”

“No, it doesn't,” Blurr bit out. He popped in on Swindle's other side, leaning into the trader's personal space. “Don't give me that slag either. You know who it is. Tell me.”

“Why? Worried about Starscream?”

“Frag him,” Blurr almost snarled and had to remind himself that he was allies with Starscream. “He can take care of himself. But I need to know what I'm dealing with if I'm going to protect me and mine.”

Swindle snorted. “Like who? Jazz? Trust me. That mech can handle himself.” He punched a few
buttons on the jukebox and then sniffed as though shocked it didn't work. “Besides, I'm not lying. I don't know who it is. He's keeping to the shadows, contacting me through proxies. I was thinking you knew more, but I guess we're both in the dark.”

Blurr's optics narrowed. “Why don't I believe you?”

Swindle backed away, planting a look of affront on his face. “I'm hurt, Blurr. Aren't we friends? Aren't we allies?” He flicked a hand toward his faction-empty chestplate. “Didn't I save your spark once upon a time?”

“And I thought you had better taste than that, Blurr.”

Blurr stiffened. That voice was just as unmistakable as Swindle's. He turned slowly, hackles raised.

“Starscream,” he acknowledged, surprised that not only was Starscream here, but he wasn't smirking or looking smug. In fact, if Blurr had to venture a guess, he'd say that Starscream looked... angry. Or worried. Perhaps both. “Good of you to come by.”

“I was in the neighborhood,” Starscream drawled. He crossed his arms, optics shifting to Swindle. “I think you've overstayed your welcome, Swindle.”

The trader chuckled and edged toward the exit, a rather graceful retreat if anyone asked Blurr.

“I think I have,” he said. He tossed Blurr a neutral salute. “We'll discuss payment and terms later, Blurr.”

“Right,” Blurr said, refusing to take his optics off Starscream. If the Seeker thought he was going to intimidate Blurr like he did Swindle, well, he had another thing coming.

The door opened and shut. Blurr glared at Starscream for a full thirty seconds before he broke it off and stalked forward. He snatched his box of supplies off the table and headed to the store room. If Starscream wanted to talk, he'd follow. Also, Blurr wasn't going to be the one to talk first either.

Starscream followed him. The awkward silence lingered.

Blurr propped the storeroom door open and started to distribute the supplies. He snuck the occasional look at Starscream. The Seeker had wiped his face clear of expression, but every once in a while, an emotion would slip through. His wings twitched and they were obvious giveaways.

“Business appears to be booming,” Starscream finally ventured.

Blurr snorted and cast him a sideways look. “Sales have declined twenty percent since I declared myself your ally,” he retorted. “I'm sure they'll decline further. No one likes you Starscream.”

Starscream flinched. Blurr refused to feel bad about it.

“I am not supposed to be their friend,” Starscream retorted instead. “I am their leader. That means I make the difficult choices.”

Blurr made a noncommittal noise and pulled the rest of the supplies out of the box, arranging them neatly on the shelves. He was still running low on a few things. He made a mental note to text
Swindle the list later.

“It also means that I’ve made some enemies.”

Starscream moved closer, into the doorway. His gaze wandered around the room, taking in the neatly labeled stacks of backstock and equipment.

“Those that would strike at you just to hurt me.”

Blurr went still. He braced his hands on the shelves and looked at Starscream. “You almost sound like you’d care.”

Starscream hissed a ventilation and rubbed his forehelm. “It is my responsibility—”

“Slag and you know it!” Blurr snapped. He whirled toward Starscream, refusing to allow himself to be intimidated by the larger Seeker. “This is how it’s going to be, Starscream. You’re going to decide and you’re going to do it right now. Either I’m your partner or I’m your plaything. I can’t be both and I refuse to be the latter. You get me?”

Starscream lowered his hand and stared. “We are allies—”

“So help me Primus if you complete that sentence with another evasion, I am going to throw you out of this bar and I don’t give a frag who sees me do it,” Blurr snarled.

He didn’t stomp his pede, but it was a near thing. His fingers were itching and he wished he had his pistol, but he’d made a point of not wearing it when he was in the bar.

Starscream sighed and crossed his arms. Everything about his posture read defensive, even the down-tilt of his wings.

“Fine,” he bit out. “We're partners.”

“Equal partners,” Blurr growled.

Starscream inclined his helm. “Equal partners.” His wings fluttered and raised a few degrees. “It has come to my attention that I am in need of them now, even more than I was before. I am not going to alienate one of the few mechs I can believe is on my side.”

Blurr blinked. Had Starscream just...? No. He wasn't going to fall into that trap. No way Starscream let that slip by accident. It had to be calculated.

“Good,” he said. “Then you're going to tell me what's going on because I'm sure you know more than Swindle does. Who's the new player?”

Starscream grimaced and stepped further into the storeroom, pulling the door shut behind him. It didn't make the storeroom soundproof, but whatever made him feel better Blurr supposed.

“His name's Obsidian,” Starscream finally explained, armor drawn tight with tension. “He's supposed to be dead, along with his partner, Strika.”

Blurr didn't recognize either name. “Decepticons?”

“By default.” Starscream's shoulders hunched as anger flickered through his field. “But extremists
who were worse than Megatron. They care more about Cybertron as a whole, a concept, than the mechs who live here.”

Ugh. The worst kind. You couldn't reason with extremists.

“But that's all I know.” Starscream audibly cycled a ventilation. “I've got my mechs looking for more information. Until I know more, we all have to be careful. Obsidian is the type to do whatever it takes. He doesn't care who or what he has to go through. And he doesn't give a frag about public opinion.”

“I'll keep that in mind,” Blurr replied.

He looked at Starscream who returned his gaze evenly. Silence fell again, only slightly less awkward than before. Blurr was still waiting for his apology. He doubted he'd get it.

“I have work to do,” Blurr said because Starscream staring at him was now verging on weird and it was making his plating itch. “I'm sure you do, too.”

He moved to pass Starscream, but the Seeker intercepted him with a single step. His helm was tilted toward Blurr, but his gaze was on the wall behind.

“Are we good?”

“We're still allies,” Blurr said. “But if you want me back in your berth, you've got a long way to go. Because that road seems to lead to a gross misconception on your part.”

Starscream rolled his optics. “What do you want from me? Actual courting? Because I didn't think that's what we were doing.”

“An apology would be a start.” Blurr ducked around Starscream and pushed the door back open. Luckily, no one had walked into the bar in his absence. “I think a little humility might do you some good.”

“Ha.” Starscream followed him out. “Humility? You're one to talk.”

Blurr glanced over his shoulder. “I've learned.” The war had been a pretty harsh teacher.

He slipped behind his bar after a peek at his chronometer. “I have to open soon. If you want to continue this conversation, it will have to be later.”

“Tonight. My place. It's safer than that hovel you call a habsuite,” Starscream said. How hard had he struggled to keep the sneer from his face?

“Fine. Whatever.”

He focused intently on that stain again. He felt Starscream staring at him, but refused to look up and acknowledge it. He waited for Starscream to say something else, maybe that much needed apology, but instead, Starscream made himself scarce.

Go figure.

Blurr sighed and threw the rag down again. He pinched the bridge of his olfactory sensor. Fragging complications.
This was not what he signed up for.

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Wrecking Ball

Chapter Summary

Blurr arrives at Starscream's for their scheduled chat, and is shocked by the surprise Starscream has for him.

It was a busy night.

Blurr's association with Starscream might not have been good for business, but his visible drama with Starscream? That drew in customers. They all wanted to point and stare and whisper. A few brave sparks actually asked if he and Starscream were “breaking up.”

After the first time he snarled at someone that they weren't dating or anything like it to begin with, Blurr stopped trying. He ignored the pointed questions and overcharged those patrons on purpose. Nosiness tax, he called it. All the better if they never came back.

He wasn't here to be their free show.

Worse was that Jazz never showed up. Sky-Byte managed to entertain the crowd on his own with a rhythmic poetry reading and the two Tankors got up on the stage and did some kind of dance routine that broke two chairs. But Jazz never once showed his face. He didn't even have the courtesy to call and say he was otherwise occupied.

Blurr wasn't so much worried as he was annoyed. Jazz could take care of himself, but his absences as of late were getting more and more frequent. He obviously had something going on that he wasn't sharing with Blurr. That, too, was irritating.

What was with everyone and coddling him lately? He'd been an Autobot and a Wrecker, damn it. He wasn't fragile. He wasn't untrained. He could protect himself!

Irritation built until Blurr had worked himself into a rightful wroth. He closed the bar twenty minutes early, kicked out the lingering drunks, and locked up behind himself. If it weren't for the fact he'd told Starscream he'd meet with the Seeker, Blurr would have stomped up into his apartment and sulked in peace.

The night was cool. There wasn't a wind, but a chill in the air that undercut his armor and ghosted over his protoform. Blurr shivered and opted to shift to alt-mode, his wheels crackling over the debris-strewn ground.

New Iacon was silent and still around him. There was very little movement and mechs out and about. That was unusual. Granted, the streets were typically crowded only during what had been decided to be the daycycle. Most mechs went back to whatever shacks they called home during the determined nightcycle. But not to see anyone on the streets?

That was a little unnerving.

Blurr put on a burst of speed and aimed himself toward the tower Starscream had claimed for his
There wasn't anyone around by the time he arrived. Blurr's backstrut crawled with unease as he hit the main door's chime.

“It's me, Starscream,” he said into the intercom.

The door clicked open in reply and Blurr eased into the tower. The door shut and locked behind him. Starscream was serious about his security.

The lobby was dimly lit and cluttered with scavenged items. Anything that could be salvaged and of potential future use. Starscream used all the unoccupied floors as makeshift storage closets. Blurr knew that Rattrap had claimed one of them for a nest, but he didn't know which one. Other than that, however, Starscream lived here alone.

That Starscream had few friends was no secret.

Blurr stepped into the lift and punched the button for the penthouse. Starscream was certainly one who believed in luxury. Most residents of New Iacon were saving their energy credits and relying on manual lifts and locks.

He arrived on the top floor and stepped out into the short corridor leading to the massive double doors of Starscream's penthouse. He once again pinged for entry and found himself given leave to enter without verbal acknowledgment from Starscream. Blurr checked the corners but couldn't see any cameras.

It wasn't like Starscream to not be paranoid.

Whatever.

Blurr slipped into Starscream's apartment, the snarky Seeker nowhere in immediate sight. Which left either the washracks or the berthroom and given that Blurr couldn’t hear any solvent running, process of elimination meant Starscream was aberth.

He wasn't at all surprised.

Blurr picked his way across the floor to the berthroom and rapped his knuckles against the open frame as he rounded the corner through the door and into the room. Only to draw up short and stare.

Starscream was lounging on the berth as though purposefully putting himself on display. His helm was propped up on one hand, while the other hand was idly stroking over his interface array. His plating had been polished to a reflective shine, glittering in the overhead light.

But that wasn't the surprising part.

Somehow, in the time between when Blurr had last spoken with him that afternoon and now, Starscream had gone through a complete overhaul. Gone was the grey, blue, and red armor that Blurr was most familiar with. Now, he was a glossy, sexy crimson. A lot of the bulk had been stripped from his frame, making him all sleek, sharp angles. In short, he looked like an aerial racing frame.

Blurr's engine purred entirely without his consent.
“Mmm, there you are,” Starscream purred, the fragger knowing good and well how attractive he looked right now. He’d arranged himself like this on purpose. “Care to join me?”

Blurr went through a series of appropriate responses before he settled on something that wouldn’t embarrass himself. “That is not what I came here for,” he said.

Starscream chuckled. “But it is a charming bonus,” he said and one finger traced the seams of his interface panel over and over.

Blurr absolutely was not watching the circuitous path of that finger. Nor was he wondering if Starscream had gone through a frame overhaul or had gone for the easier, faster route of a protoform transfer. He’d lost a lot of mass and had probably gained speed in return.

Blurr snorted as his faceplate started to heat. “Who said you were charming?”

“It’s a given.” Starscream crooked a finger at him. “Why are you standing all the way over there?”

“Because I’m still slagged at you?” Blurr said, but it came out more of a question and lacked the heat he intended. Well, the angry kind of heat anyway. His spike had already started to pulse and take notice of Starscream's new design.

Frag it all to the Pit, but it was like Starscream had dug right into Blurr's helm and picked out everything that Blurr liked in a frame. His fingers twitched with the urge to touch.

Starscream shifted around on the berth, making himself more comfortable. He folded one arm behind his helm as his other hand continued to stroke soft circles over his panel.

“I thought we were over that.”

“Only you could think that agreeing to see things my way is the same thing as an apology,” Blurr retorted. He rolled his optics.

Starscream gave him an askance look. “Is that what you want? An apology?” His plating flared, giving Blurr a peek at the shiny new wires and cables beneath. Frag, he could almost smell the fresh metal of them from here.

“It would be a nice start,” Blurr bit out. His vents opened, catching a whiff of the Seeker's wax and polish.

It had to be imported. Nothing they had available on Cybertron had that spicy-sweet scent. And when the frag had he gotten so close to the berth anyway?

Starscream chuckled. “You should join me,” he purred. “You've been hard at work all day and I'm feeling a sudden need to spoil you.”

Blurr's optics narrowed. Theoretically, he could dig in his heelstruts, turn around, and walk back out the door. Their political alliance had nothing to do with this. He knew frag well Starscream was playing some kind of game with him. He should have turned around and walked back out the moment he realized Starscream didn't want to talk business.

But.
His optics roved over those sharp angles and that lustrous finish and his engine gave a telling purr.

He was tempted. By all that was unholy, Starscream was a damned tempting sight and Blurr did not want to turn his back on him.

There had to be some benefit to their political alliance, right?

“We're not done talking,” Blurr growled as he stalked the last few strides to Starscream's berth and climbed up onto it – literally, the damn thing was too high off the ground.

“Who said we need words?” Starscream retorted as he grabbed Blurr and pulled.

Blurr flailed, his world spinning, as he suddenly ended on top of a very amorous Seeker who sealed their lips together and plunged his glossa into Blurr's mouth. Blurr moaned and reached up, his fingers sliding over new armor and paint that was as sleek and smooth as fresh plating could be. Oh, Primus. This was high-quality material here.

Blurr shuddered. He ground down, his closed panel throbbing. Starscream's own panel exuded heat, his engine whining from restraint. Starscream's legs latched around his waist as Starscream rolled up against him, demanding without words.

Well, this was different. Blurr wasn't opposed, but Starscream all but demanding that Blurr frag him was different. Appealing, but unusual.

He supposed talking to Starscream would have to wait until afterward.

“Did you miss me?” Blurr asked with a smirk as he broke off the kiss and nipped at Starscream's intake, feeling the Seeker shudder beneath him.

Starscream's field was alight with lust, far more than he usually allowed Blurr to sense. He was shivering, too, his plating flared to allow the release of excess heat and the nimble touch of Blurr's fingers on his protoform beneath.

“Is that why you're so eager for me?” Blurr added, shifting his weight to slip one hand between Starscream's legs.

His fingers encountered Starscream's panels, expecting to find them closed, only to be surprised as his fingers slid through damp stickiness. Starscream was positively dripping. Only his spike remained tucked away, and Blurr could feel the rise behind it, as though Starscream was holding back. Though Blurr couldn't imagine why. Starscream never held anything back.

“Maybe I'm just trying to shut you up,” Starscream retorted, but it petered away into a gasp as two of Blurr's fingers slid into his valve.

His tight, soaking valve. Did he replace these components, too? Blurr did not remember him being this tight.

Blurr nipped at Starscream's intake as taloned fingers scratched at his backplate, just below his boosters. He drew back with a smirk.

“Seems like I'm the one shutting you up,” Blurr said. His thumb pressed against Starscream's swollen node as he crooked his fingers, rubbing hard over the ring of nodes just behind Starscream's rim.
Oh, yeah. These were definitely new.

Starscream shuddered. His thighs trembled around Blurr's waist and he arched up against Blurr. His wings twitched against the berth, his optics going dim with pleasure. Lubricant pulsed from his valve and Blurr felt his calipers twitch at the tips of Blurr's fingers.

Starscream's helm tossed back, a shiver visibly rippling across his plating. “Just frag me already,” he moaned, his heels digging into the back of Blurr's thighs.

“Impatient much?” Blurr asked but didn't give Starscream a chance to answer. He dragged his lips back to the Seeker's and stole Starscream's mouth for a deep kiss.

A bolt of pleasure shot down his spinal strut as Starscream moaned again and snatched at Blurr's glossa, sucking it into his mouth. His denta grazed the sensitive dermal layer, a scrape of pain that didn't quite hurt like Blurr thought it would.

Well then.

He circled Starscream's anterior node again and then shifted position. He redirected his weight to his knees and grabbed Starscream's hips, pulling the Seeker toward his spike. He ground his panel against Starscream's valve, feeling the wet slide of swollen pleats against his closed panel.

He nipped at Starscream's lips, nearly hard enough to draw energon, and felt an answering shiver. Different indeed. Different enough that Blurr was going to have some serious questions afterward.

But for now… Starscream was blasting heat like he'd been flying at top speed for the better part of ten minutes and his entire frame was rattling in Blurr's arms. Blurr didn't know how and why he'd gotten worked up so fast, but it felt cruel to delay any longer. He tightened his grip on Starscream's hips and opened his panel, his spike pressurizing directly into the Seeker's leaking valve.

Starscream broke away from the kiss to hiss air through his vents. His claws pressed hard on Blurr's back, stabbing at his protoform. His valve clenched down, clutching on Blurr's spike in a tight grip. Molten heat flooded Blurr's internals, and he shivered, pleasure shooting like a lightning bolt through his lines.

“More,” Starscream panted, his optics bright with need.

Blurr gasped and plunged into Starscream, his spike grinding over the Seeker's ceiling node. Starscream spiraled down onto his spike, hard enough that his receptors sparked with Blurr's sensor nodes. Starscream tossed his helm back and moaned, his valve rippling around Blurr's spike in a sudden overload.

“Wow,” Blurr said as Starscream stilled and shivered beneath him. Lubricant welled up around Blurr's spike. “And everyone says I'm fast.”

Crimson optics flashed. Starscream's talons pricked at Blurr's protoform. “I'm not done yet,” he snapped and rolled his hips, twitching calipers grasping at Blurr's spike again. Lubricant dripped onto Blurr's thighs and panel.

“I noticed,” Blurr said in a dry tone. He tightened his grip on Starscream's waist, dragging the Seeker down onto his next grinding thrust.
Starscream all but keened, energy crackling out from beneath his armor. His field spiked, static need flashing the room. Arousal was hot and crackling through it.

Blurr panted, his vents flaring open to compensate, though he could barely hear his own cooling fans over Starscream's. The Seeker's thighs pressed in on his hips, hard enough to dent, and he clutched at Blurr as though he couldn't bear to let go. His frame moved in a wave, grinding their plating together.

Blurr rolled his hips, sliding into Starscream over and over. Charge nipped at his spike. Starscream clutched at him, valve cycling tighter and tighter. His fingers spasmed, talons nicking Blurr's protomesh and he felt the light trickle of energon.

“Stop that,” Blurr hissed. It didn't hurt, but it was uncomfortable, and it made him itch beneath his armor. Which was distracting him from all the arousal coursing through his lines.

Starscream's laugh was hoarse and ragged around the edges. “Stop what?” he demanded and his pedes kicked the back of Blurr's knees. He dug in, causing another flash of discomfort.

Blurr growled and dropped his hold on Starscream's hips. The Seeker sagged toward the berth, which caused him to clutch at Blurr all the harder. Frag it. He had to get those talons away from his protomesh. Blurr snatched at Starscream's arms, his thrusts slowing to a halt.

“Let go!” Blurr demanded, squeezing Starscream's forearms.

Before, he wouldn't have caused hardly any damage. But Starscream's armor was thinner now, and he felt it slightly give way beneath him. It didn't make any sense! Why would Starscream make himself more vulnerable?

Starscream hissed and his talons disengaged from Blurr's protoform. “You let go!” he snarled and tugged on his arms.

Blurr growled and dropped his grip on Starscream's arms. He slid back, pulling himself out of Starscream, which caused the Seeker to growl in frustration.

“What are you doing?” he demanded, his thighs gripping at Blurr's hips.

Blurr grabbed Starscream's knees and worked himself free of Starscream's hold. “Preventing further damage,” he said and took hold of Starscream's hips.

It was almost scary how easy it was to flip Starscream onto his front. The Seeker weighed thirty percent less than Blurr remembered him weighing before. His heavy battle armor was gone. He must have dropped a good bit of his internal weaponry, too. He'd completely re-framed. This was no mere reformat. He'd done an honest-to-Primus spark transfer.

That was dangerous as the Pit and Blurr had no idea why he'd done it. He'd have to ask later, when he wasn't taking care of the desperate Seeker sprawled beneath him. At least that explained the sudden need.

“Idiot,” Blurr hissed as he dragged Starscream's aft back toward him and plunged into the Seeker's valve.

Starscream's knees dug into the berth as he flopped onto his cockpit. He clawed at the berth, talons
ripping furrows in the expensive cover.

“You should still be in a CR chamber at the least,” Blurr snapped as he plunged into Starscream's valve, over and over again, setting up a hard and fast pace.

“Don't need one,” Starscream gasped out. His wings fluttered and his field spiked with desperate need. He gripped at the berth, tucking his elbows beneath him, and buried his face in the berth.

The fabric muffled another heavy moan as Starscream clamped down on Blurr's spike and overloaded for a second time. A wave of charge danced over his frame, briefly setting the room alight with blue fire.

His aft pushed back toward Blurr, forcing Blurr deeper, the head of his spike grinding against Starscream's ceiling node. His hips circled, all but using Blurr as a frag toy.

Which was what happened when you didn't give your spark time to adjust to your brand new frame, provided you survived the transfer in the first place. Part of Starscream's behavior was instinctive, a desperate search for sensation to ground him into his frame.

If he'd just spent a cycle in a regen chamber, he'd have been fine. But, no. Starscream didn't want to be that vulnerable, Blurr was sure. But he was perfectly fine with stripping himself of battle armor and heavy weaponry?

Contradiction, thy name was Starscream.

Blurr waited out the last few tremors of Starscream's overload before he started to thrust again. He heard a pop as Starscream's spike panel popped, his spike finally emerging.

“Primus,” Starscream moaned as his frame started to shake. His thin armor twitched and shifted aside, giving glimpses to the shiny new cables beneath.

“It's your own damned fault,” Blurr said. He shifted his weight on his knees so that he could free up his hands.

He set himself to exploring, tracing new seams with his fingertips and digging between them to flirt with the protoform beneath. Starscream honest-to-Primus whimpered and rocked on his knees, pushing back toward Blurr. His valve grasped at Blurr's spike as though desperate to keep them connected.

“Sh-shut up,” Starscream stuttered, his vocals muffled by the berth. Fabric ripped as his talons tangled further in it. “Just... don't stop.” The last almost sounded like a plea.

“Couldn't even if I tried,” Blurr said.

His hands flirted over sleek plating, hot from Starscream's rising internal temperature, but so smooth and sleek. His new frame wasn't practical, but damn was it attractive. Blurr's internals flipped with desire. His spike swelled.

His palms flattened over the backs of Starscream's wings and the response was electric. Starscream gasped, his helm tossing back and his valve tightening down. Another wave of charge danced over his frame. A third overload made Starscream's vents stutter. He became a creature of motion, rocking back and forth on the berth, keeping Blurr deep within him. His valve didn't rest, cycling back up toward another overload.
Blurr smirked and curled his fingers over the top edge of Starscream's wing. He dragged a grip along the edge and was rewarded with a thin whine of need. Starscream's thrusters roared. His engine growled.

More lubricant slopped between them. Starscream's valve was a mess of heat and fluids, but it continued to cycle down tighter and tighter on Blurr's spike. Their nodes and receptors synced, charge flickering back and forth between them. Blurr's helm drooped as arousal tightened into a coil.

He hunched forward, gasping as his knees wobbled. Overload crashed over him and he slammed his hips against Starscream's aft, shooting his transfluid deep into the Seeker. He panted for cooler air, which Starscream seemed to steal from the room, and ground against Starscream.

Blurr slumped onto Starscream, draped across the Seeker's back. His knees were wobbling and Starscream sagged beneath him – Blurr was actually heavier than him now. One hand continued to pet the flat planes of Starscream's wings, charge rising up to nip at his fingertips.

"You're too heavy," Starscream gasped as he tried to buck up against Blurr. His valve clutched at Blurr's depressurizing spike.

He was only half-hard, though his spike twitched with reviving spirit. Starscream's valve was wet and snug and everything in Starscream's field screamed desire.

Blurr shifted his weight as best he could, precariously balanced on his knees. One hand worked beneath Starscream's frame, fingers seeking Starscream's spike. The Seeker moaned as Blurr circled the dripping tip before curling around the painfully rigid length.

He rolled his hips, rocking his re-awakening spike in Starscream's valve.

"One more?" Blurr asked as Starscream shook beneath him. The Seeker's spike throbbed in his fingers.

He shifted again, letting go of Starscream's wing to work his other arm around the Seeker's much thinner waist. He sought out Starscream's throbbing nub, the anterior node hot and swollen with need.

Starscream didn't answer.

Blurr nipped at his backstrut, denta grazing along a decorative spur. "Starscream?"

"Yes," Starscream moaned, his aft pressing against Blurr's in tiny circles. He'd tucked his elbows in close to his cockpit and buried his face between his arms, as if he were trying to hide his desperation. "Harder."

The need in his vocals pinged straight to Blurr's array. His spike swelled again, notching into all the empty space left in Starscream's valve. Calipers eagerly latched onto his spike, nodes sending out pulses of charge to activate his receptors.

Blurr shivered and squeezed Starscream's spike. His fingers worked circles around Starscream's throbbing node. Starscream's hips followed his motions, torn between rolling back on Blurr's spike, or thrusting into his fingers.
Blurr's helm rested on Starscream's backstrut. He ex-vented heat on the Seeker's plating as he tried to keep himself under control. But it was too hard with Starscream's field tugging at his, demanding more and more and more. Heat buffeted him from all directions. Starscream was making all these needy, wanton noises.

Blurr ground against Starscream's aft, grinding on Starscream's ceiling node. He rolled his fingers over Starscream's swollen node and pinched it.

Starscream full-frame shivered. A low moan rolled through his chassis. His valve absolutely rippled and his spike pulsed.

Blurr licked his lips and rocked his hips again. He was cycling fast toward another overload of his own. He pinched at Starscream's node again, causing the Seeker to jerk in his arms. A low whine echoed from Starscream's engine. He panted, vents working so hard they rattled Starscream's entire frame.

Almost there.

Blurr squeezed Starscream's spike, feeling it pulse within his fingers. He rubbed the flat of his finger over Starscream's nub and then pinched it again, harder this time.

Starscream spasmed. His helm lifted from the berth, a spiraling cry spilling from his vocalizer. His entire frame went rigid as he overloaded for a fourth time, valve cycling so tight on Blurr's spike he could barely thrust. A wave of charge spilled over Starscream's frame, and leapt onto Blurr's. It tingled at his protoform and dragged Blurr into his second release of the evening.

They collapsed, panting, onto the berth. Starscream sprawled out beneath him, vents whirring so fast they rattled. His entire frame was shaking, plating reshuffling over his protoform as though it couldn't remember it's proper configuration. Starscream's field gradually settled.

Blurr pulled his arms out from beneath Starscream and shifted so that he was no longer within Starscream. He tilted onto his side, one leg still draped over Starscream's. His own frame was shaking a little. Exhaustion tugged at him. He, after all, had worked an entire cycle. He was tired before he even showed up here.

Condensation painted his frame. He wanted a cube of energon and a helping of coolant, but both required getting off the berth.

He didn't think either of them were going to do that soon.

He looked at Starscream, but Starscream's face was turned away from him. The Seeker was sprawled partially on his front, one arm tucked under his helm. His wings were shivering and his frame exuded heat like a furnace. One drawn up knee gave Blurr fleeting glimpses of the Seeker's wet, sticky valve. His pleats were still swollen, but his anterior node had softened.

Intrigued, Blurr dragged a gentle finger over the swollen folds and was rewarded with a soft shiver from the Seeker. Starscream shifted, drawing up his knee a few more inches and opening himself to Blurr's careful explorations, even though he could hear the Seeker cycling down into recharge. It had to be a purely instinctive response still.

Starscream made a noise of protest, even though his fans were cycling down. Tremors still wracked his frame.
Blurr stopped and pushed himself upright.

“Starscream.”

“Mn?” Starscream didn't sound all that aware.

Blurr leaned over him, careful not to let their frames touch. Starscream's optics were shuttered, his swollen lips parted by a fraction. Energon darted the swollen metalmesh. He must have been biting his lips to keep himself quieter.

“Starscream,” Blurr repeated, louder this time.

Optics slitted open, a dim glow of crimson beneath. His glossa flicked over his lips. “What?”

“We need to talk,” Blurr said. He meant it, too. Except that his arm was wobbling and the urge to recharge kept pinging at his processor. He amended himself with, “Tomorrow. You're not going to put me off again.”

“Mm hm.” Starscream's optics slitted back shut. His ex-vents whooshed out, cooler than before but still ripe with heat.

He had to be exhausted because normally, at this time, Starscream would be griping about the mess on the berth and the mess on his frame. He would demand that Blurr take care of him, or drag Blurr into the washracks with him.

Blurr sighed and tried to climb over Starscream's frame. Time to make himself scarce, he figured. Not from the apartment, otherwise Starscream might make an excuse to avoid their conversation, but the couch in the main room looked comfortable enough.

He didn't manage to get a single pede over the edge of the berth before Starscream shifted and a hand lashed out, grabbing onto Blurr's arm. He had a moment to cycle his optics before Starscream rolled and pulled Blurr half under him. He snuggled into Blurr's side, threw a leg over Blurr's hip, and trapped him in place.

Sure, Starscream was a lot lighter. It would hardly be a challenge for him to toss the Seeker off. But Starscream's arm was curled around his, Starscream's faceplate was buried against his chassis, and Starscream's frame was a purring warmth against his own. Blurr twitched, and Starscream clung all the tighter.

Blurr sighed a ventilation. It wouldn't be the first time.

He checked his fluid levels. While he would prefer to get up and retrieve some energon and coolant, he could wait until morning. It didn't seem like his berthmate was going to let go anytime soon.

Which, he reflected, was another symptom of the frame change.

He supposed all he could do was try and get comfortable now and address it in the morning. Starscream had better talk to him.
Another morning after, and Blurr confronts Starscream for some truth.

Overheat warnings propelled Blurr out of recharge. He startled awake, feeling parched and dry and why couldn't he move his right side?

Blurr dismissed the warnings and the fact that they were telling him his coolant levels needed to be replenished. He tapped into his short-term memory at the same moment he tilted his helm, finding that he couldn't move because he had a bright red Seeker attached to his right side. Starscream appeared to still be in recharge.

Blurr checked his chronometer. By all accounts, it was too early for Blurr to be online, and Starscream had over-recharged. Wasn't he supposed to be up and out politicking by now?

Blurr tried to ease his way free. There was an arm slung across his chest. Talons hooked into a seam. As he shifted, they dug in harder, scraping the protomesh beneath. Starscream twitched.

Blurr sighed.

The hard way then.

He lifted his shoulder. “Starscream. I'm overheating. Wake up.”

A low sound rose from Starscream's chassis, a soft, almost cute sound. He snuggled in all the harder, his frame blocking one of Blurr's side vents and worsening the problem.

Blurr narrowed his optics. “Starscream!” he hissed, and reached over with his free hand, poking a finger into one of the vents on Starscream's chest. “Get! Up!”

Starscream stirred, kneading at Blurr's armor with his fingers as he stretched across the berth, their armor sliding together.

“Mm?”

“Wake up!” Blurr said, a little louder this time, and he gave Starscream's shoulder a shove.

Crimson optics snapped online, only to dim by a fraction immediately thereafter. “Why are you squirming?” he asked, but he only sounded half-aware.

“Because I'm overheating.” Blurr shrugged his entire right side and tried to ease off the berth again. “Back off.”

Starscream clicked his glossa, but loosened his grip on Blurr. “You are an incorrigible berth mate. Have you no respect for a lazy morning in?”
“Not when I need to move.” Blurr shrugged off the last of clingy Seeker and nearly toppled out of the berth as he fought his way free.

He grimaced as flakes of dried transfluid and lubricant fluttered to the floor. He needed a trip to the washracks as much as he desperately needed coolant and energon. Blurr brushed at them in vain before realizing he would need a full wash.

“I know you have coolant or something around here,” Blurr added with a pointed look at the slowly rising Seeker.

Starscream stretched his arms over his helm, his wings flicking up and down as though stretching as well. “In the other room. With the energon. Help yourself.” His field was a lazy flicker against Blurr’s, thick with sated pleasure.

Blurr spun on a heelstrut before Starscream could convince him back into the berth. He did not speed from the room, despite evidence to the contrary. It was just that the relentless pinging of his systems was beyond an annoyance.

He hurried through the receiving room and into the connecting room that served as Starscream’s energon storage. He hadn’t been here often enough to know his way around, but he knew what a bottle of coolant looked like and sure enough, found one in a nearby cabinet. He found several, actually, most of them blended for Seekers, but two were Racer blend.

There would be no reason for Starscream to have these, Blurr realized as he replenished his exhausted stores and the alerts in his system shifted from red to orange to ready green. He frowned as he examined the label. Not only was it Racer blend, but it was Blurr’s favorite. His optics narrowed.

He wasn’t sure he liked the implications here.

“Did you save me any?” Starscream asked as he came strutting into the room, his field scarily perky. He was smirking, but then, that was par for the course when it came to Starscream.

“You have enough here to supply a Spec Ops team,” Blurr said with a raised orbital ridge. He put the cap back on the coolant and shoved it back into the cabinet.

Now to find some energon.

Starscream plopped down at the table scrunched into the corner, perching himself on one of the three stools. “I have learned to be prepared,” he said in an amused tone. “What’s on the menu, barkeep?”

Blurr shot him a dark look. “I’m not here to be your servant.”

“But you are already up,” Starscream purred as he leaned against the table and propped his chin on his palm. “I like my energon sweet and sultry.”

Blurr bit back a sigh and started rummaging through the cabinets again. He was unsurprised to find different grades of energon and a nice variety of flavors and mixes to spice it up. Starscream was nothing if not determined to spoil himself.

“What’s with the re-frame?” Blurr asked as he started to pull out everything he’d need to mix up a good energon blend.
Not engex, thank you very much. He didn't need to start the day overcharged.

Starscream's field went still and then shrank. “I felt it was time for a change,” he said in a bland tone. “The old frame was one meant for war. I had to prove that such things were no longer on my agenda.”

Blurr paused and looked over his shoulder. “So you deliberately made yourself vulnerable to prove a point?”

“It was just as big a risk to keep my battle-grade armor and weapons,” Starscream retorted, his too-thin plating clamped tightly to his protoform. “I am not incapable of defending myself.”

“No, you're just a brighter target now.” Blurr turned his attention back to his high grade. He wasn't sure why this bothered him so much. “A day after we find out about Obsidian and you make the decision to change to a civilian frame. It doesn't add up.”

Starscream waved a dismissive hand, a motion caught from Blurr's peripheral vision. “This appointment was set ages ago. Long before I ever heard of Obsidian. I'm not worried about him.”

“Of course you're not.”

A sprinkle of magnesium put the finishing touches on the energon. Blurr grabbed a cube of each and joined Starscream at the table. He hauled himself onto his own stool, hooking his pedes around the legs to steady himself.

Starscream's glossa flicked over his lips. “Much obliged,” he purred as he accepted the cube. He gave it a testing sip and made a noise of appreciation. “How did you ever learn to mix energon anyway?”

Blurr lifted both orbital ridges. “That was almost a personal question, Starscream. I thought this was business.”

“It is,” Starscream said, but he had a startled look on his face. His wings twitched and he leaned back on his stool, wiping his face clear of expression. “And speaking of business, I think we should host a question and answer session for the people of Cybertron.”

Blurr tilted his helm. “What?”

Starscream's free hand tapped on the table, claws clicking a steady staccato. “It would be an opportunity for me to connect with my constituents. Let them offer suggestions or proposals. It would help me identify what problems are rated higher than the others. And we should hold it at your bar.”

He should have known that was coming. Where else would Starscream hold such an event that would let him speak with the “common Cybertronian”?

“Don't you think that's dangerous?”

Starscream smirked. “Are you afraid, Blurr?”

He snorted. “No, but considering your track record, I feel like I ought to be concerned. You have a bad habit of lying and concealing the actual danger.” He gave Starscream a pointed look.
He was still angry that Starscream was keeping secrets from him. He was angrier at himself for getting into this situation, but Starscream was a much better target. Especially since he was still playing things close to the chassis. Obsidian was obviously not someone to take lightly.

Starscream sighed and rubbed his forehelm. “You certainly know how to hold onto a grudge.”

Blurr finished his energon and rose to his pedes. “Only because you don’t know how to apologize when you’re wrong.” He dispersed the cube with a flick of his fingers. “I have to go.”

“Wait.”

He paused, half-turning toward Starscream. The Seeker’s expression continued to be unreadable, but he was gnawing on his bottom lip. He toyed with his energon cube, his field quiescent and held close.

“I’m waiting,” Blurr said, but not with patience.

Last night, obviously, had been a mistake. One he didn’t need to repeat. He would work with Starscream for the good of Cybertron, but sharing the Seeker’s berth was proving to be one of the worst decisions he’d ever made.

Starscream rested his cube on the table and rose to his pedes. He crossed his arms over his cockpit, and he was the most uncomfortable Blurr had ever seen him.

“My intentions may have been selfish,” Starscream said, each word carefully chosen as though it was taking him great effort. “And I am sorry for that.”

Blurr cycled his optics. He rebooted his audials as well.

He turned fully toward Starscream, uncertain he had heard correctly. “Go on,” he said, drawing his field in tight so that Starscream could not read the incredulity in it. The last thing he wanted was for Starscream to realize how much he’d surprised Blurr.

Starscream outright scowled and rolled his optics. “I’ve apologized. What more do you want from me?”

Blurr supposed it was the best he was going to get. He shook his helm. “Nothing. I guess that’ll do. Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to get clean before I start to itch.”

“I do have washracks here, you know. And they’ll be better than what you’ll get out there,” Starscream pointed out.

He looked… well, he looked offended. As if Blurr had spat upon his hospitality by implying he intended to leave.

Sometimes, navigating Starscream was like maneuvering through a minefield. And he supposed it would be an insult to turn down the offer. Blurr swallowed down a sigh.

“Thanks for the offer,” he said. “I’ll take you up on that.” He paused and considered before adding, “Are you joining me?” He assumed that the offer had been made for this reason.

Starscream shook his helm and unfolded his arms, picking up his half-finished energon. “No. I
have some things I need to take care of first.”

Hmmm. Interesting.

Blurr shrugged. “If you say so.” He turned to leave the room, a little bounce in his step. The dried fluids really were starting to itch and it would be a luxury to get to wash up in peace.

The communal racks just weren’t private and some mechs thought they could be handsy and get away with it. Blurr helped them understand otherwise, but it was still frustrating as the Pit.

“Blurr?”

He paused in the doorway and looked back at Starscream, who was suddenly examining his energon as though it was the answer to the universe.

“Yeah?”

Starscream fiddled with the cube, tracing the lip of it with one finger. “We're partners, right?” he asked.

Blurr's optics narrowed. “Last time I checked. Why?”

“No reason.” He shook his helm and flicked his free hand at Blurr. “Enjoy your bath.”

Blurr tossed him a look, but left the room anyway. Starscream was acting fragging weird lately and he'd be damned if he knew why.

Maybe it was time to ask Jazz for some advice.

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Fire Bomb

Chapter Summary

Blurr is understaffed and Starscream loves to hear himself talk. Meanwhile, Obsidian finally makes a move.

It sounded like a good idea in theory. Starscream probably hadn't expected a huge turn-out considering he was still a divisive subject for the Autobots at large. But Blurr suspected curiosity was largely to blame and far more participants showed up than could possibly fit into Maccadam's.

They had to move the venue outside, where a hastily constructed stage made it possible for everyone to see Starscream, and lamps sprang up like magic around said stage, illuminating it and putting Starscream in the spotlight. Just where he wanted to be, of course.

There was a crowd out there now, restlessly stirring, murmuring to one another as they waited for Starscream's Q&A session to begin. There were few who looked friendly. Starscream's fanmechs took up the first two rows, a physical barrier between Starscream and the potential riot building behind them.

It was already a mess, and it hadn't even begun.

Blurr was, plainly put, overwhelmed. It might not be taking place inside his bar, but it was just outside it, which meant plenty of customers wandered in and out to purchase engex. Technically, they weren't supposed to take it outside the door, but who would stop them?

Not Blurr, who was so understaffed it ceased being funny hours ago. Where was Jazz? No one knew. Blurr hadn't seen plate nor sensor of his friend and occasional part-time worker for the past several days. Not since before Starscream re-framed and before Blurr and Starscream worked out an agreement.

And no, Blurr was not desperate enough to invite Swindle's help, even if Swindle had offered. No, thank you. Luckily, Skybyte offered to lend a hand and so did Tall Tankor. Enough that Blurr had time to rush into the back and pull out some much needed supplies to re-stock.

Swindle better come through with that high-speed shipping. After today, Blurr was going to be out of almost everything.

He rummaged through the shelves, looking for the last vial of tungsten flakes he knew he had in here somewhere. He heard the door open, but didn't bother to check and see who it was.

“Two more minutes!” Blurr shouted, his vocals muffled by the corners of the shelving unit. “I've almost got everything.”

“Overwhelmed?”

Blurr startled and knocked his helm on the shelf above. He cursed and rubbed at his crest, but managed to spot the vial. He snatched it up and backed out of the unit, whirling to face the
Of course it was Starscream.

“You didn't think this through,” he grumbled as he tossed the vial into the crate of other supplies his front bar desperately needed. “I'm only one mech, and I've got half of Cybertron out there demanding engex.”

Starscream grinned and slung an arm around Blurr's waist. “But it's good for business, and weren't you just saying I was causing you a drop in profits?”

Blurr tried to spin out of the hold, but Starscream's grip was firm, and his hold on the crate made his balance awkward. “You didn't plan this to help my bottom-line.”

“It's just a charming bonus.” Starscream winked at him and slid his fingers into a seam at Blurr's hip. “You are joining me on stage, yes?”

Blurr sighed and suppressed a shiver as thin talons caressed a bundle of cables beneath his armor. “I sell engex. I don't do public speaking.”

“Half the point of this is that we present a united front,” Starscream pointed out with something Blurr dared call a nuzzle to the side of Blurr's face. “Can't do that if you're not next to me.”

He twisted out of Starscream's hold, nearly overbalancing in the process. “I have work to do,” Blurr said with an audible huff. “I don't have time to be your plaything right now.”

Vents chuffed. Starscream stepped back and crossed his arms over his cockpit. He all but radiated offense as his plating slicked down and his wings hiked upright.

“I'm sensing some hostility,” he said as he tilted his helm and stared at Blurr. All amusement wiped from his expression, leaving a blank facade behind that was not an improvement over his flirtations.

Blurr sighed and shifted the crate around. He really didn't have time to mollify Starscream's wounded pride. “I'm tired. I'm annoyed. I'm overworked and understaffed and while I'm sure you're having fun, I'm not. Right now, you're just in the way.”

Starscream's optics cycled. He stared at Blurr for long enough that Blurr started to fidget and his comm pinged – Skybyte demanding these supplies stat.

“The debate starts in ten minutes,” Starscream finally said. He unfolded his arms and approached Blurr, only to wrest the crate from his arms. “I can help for that long.”

Blurr's jaw absolutely did not drop. No, he wasn't gaping either.

“You? Help?” He didn't mean to sound incredulous, but he couldn't help himself. Starscream wasn't exactly known for manual labor.

Starscream juggled the crate for a second before getting a good grip on it. “We're partners, remember?” he said, and spun on a heelstrut, heading for the swinging door. “Besides, it can only work in my favor for the people to see me working like the Common Cybertronian.”

Blurr's optics narrowed, but he couldn't form a response. Words died in his vocalizer, and all he
could do was use his now empty arms to grab another box of disposable cups and follow Starscream into the madness his bar had become. Maccadam's was still packed to the walls, and Skybyte and Tall Tankor looked harried and frazzled.

Blurr hurried to the counter to lend a hand, pushing Starscream from his mind. But the next time he turned around to mix three drinks, Starscream was there, putting away the supplies Blurr needed and prepping some of the more common blends. He was legitimately helping.

Blurr didn't know what to think about it. So he took it for the blessing it was and decided he could worry about what it meant later. Right now, he had thirsty Cybertronians yelling toward him and an event soon to begin.

Ten minutes later, Starscream excused himself to take his place on the stage with another reminder for Blurr to try and join him. He patted Blurr on the shoulder and made his escape, leaving the three bartenders to deal with the rest of the crowd.

Luckily, the moment Starscream started to speak, the crowd began to disperse, even those that hadn't gotten their drinks. Everyone wanted to hear what Starscream had to say, if only so they could have something to throw in his face later.

Blurr leaned against the counter, exhausted. The main room was a mess. Overturned chairs. Sticky spills on the floor. Empty cups and cubes left in haphazard stacks. Two of the pictures were crooked. A table was upended.

It looked like a stampede had come through here. Not only would he have to clean this, he was quite sure he’d have to repeat himself after Starscream's little session was done. On top of that, he’d have to listen to bitching and arguing as everyone discussed what Starscream meant.

Blurr was rather sure his supplies couldn’t take another rush like that.

“Go on, boss,” said Tall Tankor with a helm tilt toward the door. “We've got it from here.”

Blurr blinked at him. “It's my bar.”

“Yes, but Starscream wrangling is also your responsibility, too,” Skybyte pointed out. He grinned with a mouthful of denta. “And Jazz isn't around to keep a visor on him, either.”

“I noticed.” Blurr swept a hand over his helm, only able to catch a few snatches of Starscream's speech from within the bar. “You're sure?”

“Go!” Tall Tankor flicked a hand at him as he vaulted over the counter, broom in hand. He winked. “Just means you'll owe us.”

Which was a Pit of a lot better than owing Swindle.

Blurr grinned and stretched his arms over his helm. He was tired; he was sore. He really wanted to rest before the second wave hit, but they were right. He had a responsibility to keep an optic on Starscream, and he should show his face. Everyone knew they were aligned anyway. No point in trying to keep to the shadows after all.

Blurr braced himself and edged out the front door, immediately coming face to face with a packed roadway. There was no room to walk, and certainly no room to drive. Starscream's stage had been set against the front of Blurr's bar, to the left of the main entrance, but he was surrounded on all
Blurr sighed and started to inch his way through.

“--important to me that I hear and recognize your voices,” Starscream was saying as he made grand gestures, strutting back and forth across the stage. He looked absolutely stunning, the floodlights causing dark shadows against his crimson armor. “Cybertron belongs to all of us, no matter our former affiliation. We are all working together to rebuild and make it home again. Therefore, we must all have a say when it comes to the matters of great import.”

Starscream paused, a very humble smile on his face. He certainly was a good actor. He pressed a hand to his chestplate, his chassis tipping forward as though he were bowing.

“To that end, I invite you to submit proposals to me and my staff. What are your concerns? What do you think can be improved? What is of greatest urgency right now?”

His staff? Blurr snorted. Right now, Starscream's staff consisted of Rattrap and Blurr. His entourage didn’t count.

Starscream's hand dropped from his chestplate as he gestured to the crowd. “We are all equal now. We are dedicated to rebuilding what has been broken. And we can only do that together.”

Blurr barely refrained from snorting aloud. Who wrote Starscream's speeches? It wasn't that he didn't think Starscream believed it, but that the words were so over the top as to be unbelievable. And he knew he wasn't the only who thought so. The crowd wasn't getting excited, it was getting agitated.

Luckily, he was recognized and the more mechs realized he was trying to get through, the more room they made for him until he had a clear path to the stage. Starscream all but beamed when he saw Blurr awkwardly trying to climb onto the stage, though it was short-lived because he had to turn his attention back to the crowd.

“I now open the floor to you,” Starscream said with another gesture. “I call this open forum into session.”

Blurr winced as an immediate roar raced into being. That wasn't very smart, he reflected as he clambered onto the stage without any of his usual grace. Starscream should have known that Cybertronians weren't very good at taking turns. Perhaps they should adopt a human method and raise their hands?

“So pleased you could join me,” Starscream purred, barely audible over the noise of the crowd.

Blurr rolled his helm, trying to ease the kink in his neck cables. “It's what I'm supposed to do, isn't it?”

“So it would seem.” Starscream gave him a strange look and turned his attention back to the crowd, raising both hands. “My fellow Cybertronians, please. We must have a semblance of order. Perhaps if you raised your hands?”

Like a wave, the raucous crowd shifted to quiet. It wasn’t silent, that was impossible for a large gathering of mechanical beings who hissed and huffed and creaked and groaned. But it was quiet enough that voices could finally be heard.
Multiple hands shot into the air. Blurr hoped that Starscream was genuine about this and that he didn’t have several mecha planted into the audience to ask pre-arranged questions. All they needed was for someone to question the legitimacy of the event and cast Starscream's whole tenure into question.

Starscream selected a gangly pale green mech from close to the back, his set of four optics blinking eerily out of sync. “Yes, good sir. What is your question?” Starscream asked.

“What are you going to do about Megatron?” the mech demanded, sounding much more aggressive than his slight form suggested. He was taller than most of those around him, but even Blurr thought he looked like a civilian. A NAIL perhaps?

Starscream raised his orbital ridges.

Blurr cycled his optics. No way was that a scripted question. Starscream loathed Megatron and would do his very best to avoid talk of the Decepticon warlord and the one mech he could not measure up to. In fact, Starscream seemed rather willing to forget that they had Megatron trapped in a stasis belt and imprisoned deep in the bowels of what served as their central command center.

“A fair question,” Starscream said, his wings twitching. He cycled his vocalizer almost as though he were buying time. “In the interest of justice, I do think it is prudent that he be put to trial for his crimes against Cybertron, especially most recently. But such things are costly in both time and energon, and I think we should concern ourselves with more pertinent matters first, yes?”

In other words, Starscream intended to leave him there to rot as long as possible. Surely this came as a surprise to no one. Though Starscream had to know the risk. The Decepticons were exiled, but they weren't without resources. Soundwave, in particular, could easily find his way back into New Iacon, speaking nothing of those Decepticons who had discarded their badges and stayed behind, yet still remained loyal to Megatron.

“I suppose,” Disgruntled green mech said. His expression was pinched and his optics blinked out of succession again, but he didn't start yelling so Blurr guessed that was a good sign.

“Glad we agree. Next?” Starscream asked in a tone so bright Blurr almost labeled it cheerful.

“When are you going to fix the power outages?” someone shouted as the hands started waving wildly again.

Blurr traced the vocals to a squat purple mech off to the side, opposite the stage from where Blurr had made his entrance. He had a yellow visor and a visible scrape mark on his shoulder, probably from where he’d removed his badge. Everything about him screamed Autobot, though Blurr couldn’t put a finger on why.

It was a pointless question. They hadn't had a power outage in a week or even so much as a power flicker. Scoop was doing his job, apparently.

Or, whatever had caused it in the first place was no longer having an effect. Blurr suspected it was more the latter.

“It is my understanding that the issues with our electrical system have already been resolved,” Starscream replied, still with that gracious smile. “We may experience a few flickering in the future as we add more and more to the electrical grid, but my engineers reassure me that the grid itself is stable. Having been designed by Wheeljack, a mech we all trusted, would you expect any
A low grumble rippled through the audience but it wasn’t all dissatisfaction. Wheeljack was a mech well-known to the Autobots, Decepticons, and Neutrals. Even before the war, he was a name and face that the general population recognized. That he’d worked so hard to provide New Iacon with the basic amenities was another point in his favor.

Blurr wasn’t at all surprised that Starscream would invoke Wheeljack’s designation either. Word on the street was that they were something of friends before Wheeljack’s untimely demise.

Wheeljack was sorely missed. Times like these, Blurr wished he could consult with him. He wondered how Wheeljack would have chosen. Would he have abandoned his badge to stay in New Iacon? Would he have chosen to become Neutral? Or would he have taken exile with Bumblebee and the other Autobots who he was closer to?

“What?”

He blinked and looked up at Starscream, who was gesturing him forward. “What?”

“One of our attendees has a question for you, apparently,” Starscream said with a little smile and an arched orbital ridge. “Join me?”

His optics cycled down. “What kind of question?”

“One they feel only you can answer, of course.” Starscream chuckled, but it was his performance chuckle, not a genuine one. He gestured again for Blurr to join him.

Blurr sighed and pushed himself out of his lean. He closed the four steps between him and Starscream and searched the crowd.

“Is it true?” someone shouted before he could finish his scan. Blurr’s optics backtracked, tracing the vocals to a wide mech with a suspiciously clean spot on his abdominal armor. Former Autobot or Decepticon, apparently.

Blurr tilted his helm. “You’ll have to be more specific,” he said with a grin that he’d used for countless cameras and countless nagging journalists. “Is what true?”

“Are you and Starscream fragging?”

Blurr cycled his optics. Well, that was… blunt. He expected there to be some kind of question about he and Starscream. That was inevitable. They had come out and said they were politically aligned.

Blurr resisted the urge to fold his arms. He knew it made him come across as defensive. “While I don’t think it’s any of your business, I know the value of rumor,” Blurr replied, still with the same plastic smile he always gave the cameras when he was exhausted and hurting and just wanted to recharge. “We are partners,” he said. “We are united in our efforts to restore Cybertron. And yes, we are currently sharing a berth.”

The wide mech stared back at him, his optics round. It was as if he hadn’t expected Blurr to tell the truth. Why wouldn’t he? It would have come out eventually. Better to tackle it head-first and control the release of information, then let it build into gossip then rumor and then falsehoods. It was harder to do damage control on a rumor.
“The young mech didn't believe me, you see,” Starscream said, his vocals an undertone but one that was meant to be heard as the mechs in the first rows nearest the stage started to chuckle.

Blurr's smirk widened. “I guess that means I'm too good for you,” he said with a wink.

“You wish, Autobot,” Starscream purred, this time quiet enough for only Blurr to pick up. He turned back to their audience. “Are there any other questions?” he asked. “And I mean relevant questions.”

Blurr chuckled to himself and backed up again, returning to his spot several steps behind Starscream. He could see the crowd better this way, along with the door to his bar. Neither Skybyte nor Tall Tankor had peeked out yet, but no customers were entering either.

He still hadn't seen Jazz. Which was surprising because Blurr half-expected the former spy to be lurking somewhere out there, listening out for anyone muttering about Starscream or being allies with Obsidian.

“We are still having difficulty trading beyond Cybertron. Our reputation around the universe is well-known and our feud with the Galactic Council has left us--”

Starscream cut off mid-sentence, his wings hiking upright and his frame going rigid. Blurr cycled his optics and straightened in confusion at an unexpected spike of Starscream's energy field, suddenly filled with both contempt and outrage.

“Starscream?” he asked.

The Seeker whirled toward him, his optics dark and furious. His lipplate peeled back, his sharpened denta bared. His mouth opened, as though to say something, and the ground beneath them shuddered.

What in the name of Primus?

Blurr looked around as the crowd's whispering died down. Starscream's field spiked again, a touch of fear on the edges of it.

And then the world turned to fire. A blaze of heat rose up, caught Blurr and tossed him as though he were made of paper. He tumbled helm over heelstruts, the world spinning and spinning around him. There was a rush of noise, a blend of orange and red and smoke and fire.

Something went crack. Pain sliced through his sensory net. Warnings hollered through his system, from yellow to orange to crimson in a flash. Someone was screaming and shouting and there was a sharp, piercing whistle.

He didn't feel himself hit the ground.

There was only darkness as it swallowed him whole.
Chapter Summary

The aftermath of the explosion as Starscream tries to control the chaos and ends up giving away far more than he meant.

Starscream absolutely did not panic.

On the outside.

Inside, he screamed.

He was furious and terrified and frantic, but he had to keep his calm. Everything around him was chaos. There were injured mechs everywhere. The bar burned to the ground, completely unsalvageable. Obsidian's taunting laugh echoed over and over in his comms.

He couldn't find Blurr. And he couldn't abandon everything else to search for the racer either. He was a leader. He had responsibilities.

Starscream opened the comms and started shouting orders. He called for medics and construction bots. Soldiers streamed into the area, shooing away those who managed to escape unscathed.

A fire brigade screamed into view, lights flashing. Suppressing foam spewed onto the flames, quickly smothering them. Not that Blurr's bar could be saved. It was a total loss.

Blurr would be upset.

If he survived. If Starscream could find him.

Damage reports streamed straight to his HUD as he received them. Two casualties so far, multiple critical injuries, and several mechs who were battered and bruised, but capable of walking away.

Everyone was angry. Starscream could see their accusing glares tossed his direction. They blamed him for not protecting them. It was fair. Starscream blamed himself. He'd provoked and Obsidian had responded.

The fire brigade pulled two smoking frames from the debris of Blurr's bar. Neither of them were Blurr.

One of them was Skybyte.

That was going to be a political nightmare. Skybyte was respected by all three factions currently residing on Cybertron.

All hands on deck and Starscream had to prove he was a working mech, too. He pushed aside his concerns and started to dig, pulling more injured mechs from the rubble. Those on the edge of the blast radius who had been pelted with debris and the shockwave.
And where the frag was Jazz?!

Starscream seethed as he dug out another two mechs, dented and covered in debris, but barely damaged for all of that. They were lucky to be alive. They didn't even say thank you as the medics led them away. Ungrateful slaggers.

Humph.

Starscream pulled up a huge piece of what used to be the stage, throwing it aside. He caught sight of a light blue pede. His spark fluttered.

Starscream dug faster, revealing Blurr beneath the debris, his plating dented, scorched, and splattered with energon. The armor around his right hip was crushed. His windshield had shattered, the glass reflected the still burning debris. His optics were dark.

Starscream dropped to his knees, placing a hand over Blurr's chestplate. Beneath the windshield, Blurr's frame thrummed. His spark still pulsed. Starscream scanned him, limited field medicine reassuring him that Blurr ventilated. He lived. But he was damaged, scorched, and losing energon fast.

“Someone give me a hand!” Starscream shouted as he tossed the rest of the debris, half-afraid to touch Blurr. What if he moved him and something else snapped? What if he damaged him further?

Starscream cupped Blurr's helm, his face largely untouched save for a coating of ash and soot. His crest was dented, however.

_I will take everything you hold dear before I destroy what's left._

Obsidian's words rang in the back of his processor. Starscream's engine growled with fury.

It should have been me, he thought furiously. If Obsidian had a vendetta, he should have attacked _me_.

Footsteps skittering in debris. Starscream looked up as Jazz vaulted into view, looking undamaged, only to skim to a halt and stare down at Blurr's battered frame.

“Frag, I'm too late,” he breathed.

“Where the Pit have you been?” Starscream snapped, his wings going taut, before he flicked his free hand dismissively. “Never mind. Tell me later. Help me get him up.”

“Get him up? Starscream, he needs a medic!”

“He needs to be somewhere safe!” Starscream eased a hand under Blurr's back, grunting a little as the weight of Blurr's boosters dragged him down. He regretted, in that moment, shifting to a more civilian frame.

Well, Blurr wasn’t doing any racing right now. He didn't need these fragging things. A few quick twists of his wrists and Starscream detached both of them, which didn't matter since one had been hanging by a few loose wires and the other was crushed.

“And he won't be in the chaos the medical centers are right now,” Starscream added. “So get
Jazz stared at him for another long, aggravating moment before he slid down the wreckage and up under Blurr's other side. "Just so ya know, I'm registerin' a complaint about how bad of an idea this is."

"Noted." Starscream grunted as they lifted Blurr up, a task made difficult by the fact he was dead weight. "We're taking him back to my apartment."

"Just how are we supposed to do that? I'm barely bigger than a minibot and you're a civilian aircraft!"

"We'll figure out a way!" Starscream snapped. Even if it meant flagging down a lift mech and sending Jazz along as a guard. He would not send Blurr to the chaos of the medical centers, and he would not send Blurr off with someone who'd be tempted to do him harm.

Jazz stared at him, his visor unreadable, but his field gave away more. He was startled, and Starscream realized, with good reason. His behavior was ridiculous. Starscream needed to get hold of himself before someone else more inclined to hurting him noticed.

He cycled a ventilation and steadied Blurr's frame.

"Obsidian's operatives could be anywhere," Starscream continued with a firm look. "I don't know who I can trust. The safest place for Blurr right now is in my apartment."

Jazz worked his jaw. "Yeah, I get that," he said. "All I want ta know is how ya expect us to get him there."

Starscream ground his denta and scanned the chaos around him. Though chaos was a paltry word to describe the noise and madness. It felt like being back on the battlefield again, what with the stench of ash and burnt metal and spilled energon. What with the sound of shouting, screaming, even someone weeping. Perhaps a NAIL unused to the horrors that was the war.

The damage stretched as far as Starscream could see. The practiced optic recognized that the incendiaries used had a wide radius, but a low intensity. It was not unlike Thundercracker's sonic boom, used to flatten the area. It was only in striking volatile compounds that the fires erupted.

Obsidian had meant to make a statement, not cause carnage. No, the carnage was still to come.

Starscream swallowed down his rage and nearly crowed when his optics lit on a familiar frame. There, where the medics gathered to see to the wounded, was Flatline. Perhaps the only medic Starscream trusted, for lack of a better word.

Flatline had done his re-frame. He could be relied upon to care for Blurr.

"I have an idea," Starscream said as he both adjusted his grip on Blurr and sent a rapid flurry of emergency pings over Flatline's comm, on their private line.

"It better not involve me going alt-mode and tying Blurr to my roof," Jazz muttered.

Starscream ignored him as Flatline finally responded to his ping with a snarling "what?" that indicated he was highly stressed. The medic lifted his helm, scanning the area, before catching sight of Starscream. Their optics met, Flatline's narrowing.
“Never mind, I see,” Flatline said and the comm shut down.

Starscream watched him finish the mech he was treating, say something to the other two mechs with medic symbols on their shoulders, before heading Starscream's direction.

“It’s a hazardous existence to stand next to you, isn’t it?” Flatline remarked as he came close enough to scan Blurr. “He needs more than I can do right here.”

Starscream gritted his denta, refusing to rise to the bait of that remark. “I am aware. I want you and Jazz to take him back to my apartment. I am required here.”

“Whoa, whoa. I did not sign up for this,” Jazz said with a glance between himself and Flatline. “Since when did I become your subordinate?”

Starscream fixed the former Autobot with a glare. “Am I to understand that you have no stake in protecting Blurr then? I would have thought you two were friends.” He huffed. “My mistake.”

“I am needed here, Starscream,” Flatline said, taking his opportunity to protest. “I’m not your personal medic. There are others--”

“And there are other medics,” Starscream interrupted tightly. Blurr grew heavier by the minute, and Starscream was tracking every drip of energon from his frame. “I refuse to allow Obsidian any idea of victory. You will take Blurr back to my apartment, and you will repair him, and you will remember how dangerous I can be, Flatline. Is that clear?”

The red former Decepticon stared at him before lifting his chin. “Yes, Starscream.” He held out a hand, gesturing to Blurr. “Give him to me. I can carry him.”

Jazz obeyed, but Starscream hesitated, even though it was his idea in the first place. Blurr was ventilating, if shallow, and his frame was on fire due to his repair nanites swarming toward the multiple injuries. The last thing Starscream wanted to do was hand him over to Flatline and turn his back.

But he had to.

“Jazz will go with you,” Starscream said as Flatline easily took Blurr’s weight, despite being barely larger than Starscream and Jazz both.

Starscream sent the codes to disable the security system and grant access to Jazz, though he doubted Jazz actually needed them. He made a mental note to change them later.

“Sure, boss.” Jazz grinned, but Starscream wasn’t fooled. There was something nasty behind the curve of his lips and the flash of his denta. “Whatever ya say.”

Starscream watched them go, his spark tightening into a knot, before the pings of everyone demanding his attention forced him to shift his gaze. He was still leader of New Iacon. He had other responsibilities. He had his people to look after.

For now, he would have to trust Blurr's fate to Jazz and Flatline. Such as it was.

"You might also consider getting some medical attention for yourself," Flatline added in an offhand comm.
Starscream ignored him. He, at least, was conscious and on his pedes. There were others who needed it more.

Starscream cycled a ventilation and went to work, straight into the blinding lights and demanding vocals of a news crew. Trust these parasites to be first on the scene, not helping, but desperate to fill their broadcasting slots.

“Can you tell us what happened here tonight?”

“Is this a faction related attack?”

“Are you failing to keep us safe?”

“Is this a sign?”

Starscream growled. His wings hiked higher. He refused to rise to their bait, though the anger coiled and curled within him like an angered Dweller.

“I will answer your questions later,” he replied, close to a snap. “For now, I am more concerned with those who are injured and in need of assistance. So unless you have something useful to do, I would suggest you leave. Now.”

The nearest newbot smirked and leaned closer. “Should I call that a 'no comment'?"

Starscream's optics narrowed. The other newbots scattered, but this one remained, no fear in his optics. Starscream had a moment to spare for thought – was he one of Obsidian's? Or was he just a brave fool?

“Call it what you like,” Starscream said coolly with a lingering look to the drone camera hovering over the newbot's head, capturing Starscream's every move, “but the record will show that I am here, serving my people, as a leader should. So if you'll excuse me, I have to get back to work.”

He whirled on a heel-strut, snapped his wings, and ignored the shout directed at his back. He hadn't lied. He did have work to do. Never mind that he didn't have the answers to the newbots questions. At least, none that he was going to share.

Obsidian was not going to get any further ammunition.

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It was nearly dawn by the time Starscream managed to drag himself back to his apartment, stinking of spilled mechfluid and ash. He ached from helm to pede, his cables taut from effort. The lack of war had made him weak, helpless.

Or perhaps it was this stupid civilian frame, which he was now seeing the downsides of.

He stepped into the lowest level and made sure the doors were locked behind him and the security system engaged before he headed to the lift. All he wanted was to check on Blurr, chug some energon, and then collapse on the berth. Whether or not he slipped in a trip to the washracks was
debatable.

Something rustled.

Starscream whirled and powered up his blasters, aiming into the shadows. He really needed to get more lights down here.

“Whoa, boss. Calm down.” Something else rustled before Rattrap slithered out of the shadows like the vermin he was. “Don't shoot. I kinda live here, remember?”

Starscream huffed and lowered his arms. “You idiot. I would have killed you. Where the frag have you been?”

“Tryin’ ta find more info on that Obsidian mech.” Rattrap rolled his shoulders, his optics glowing eerily, no more so than the false ones from his organic alt-mode.

Starscream fought back a shudder. The stench honestly should have been his first clue. “And?”

“Nothin'. He's like a ghost or sumthin'. He's down deep.”

They stepped into the lift. Starscream folded his arms over his cockpit as it rattled and clunked its way up to the penthouse. Some day, he would have a better apartment than this. Someday, he and his people would be doing more than scrabbling around in the rust and garbage.


“Hey!” Rattrap reared back his helm, having the nerve to look offended. “I actually live here. I sniff around in the gutters. For ya.”

Starscream rolled his optics. “Well, you're not doing much good for me if you can't come up with a scrap of information.”

“I got scrap!” Rattrap's tail flicked. “I don know if it's useful or not, but I gotcher fraggin' scrap.”

The lift came to a shuddering halt and the door opened, spilling them into the hallway connected to the penthouse house.

“And?” Starscream prompted as he picked up the pace. Rattrap had to scurry to keep up.

A fact which he did not appreciate as he scowled. “Well, he hates ya.”

“I knew that.” Starscream snorted. He punched his code into the keypad directly outside his apartment and waited for the security system to disengage.

“On top of that, he's got a network of spies in th' city. Mechs ya can't tell one from t'other. I don't even have designations.”

Starscream tossed him a sidelong look. “Then you're not much use, are you?” he asked as he swept into his apartment, resisting the urge to start shouting for Flatline and Jazz.

Not that it was necessary. Jazz lounged upon the couch in the main room as though he hadn't a care in the world. Flatline was in the process of emerging from Starscream's private berth, a
Datapad in his hand.

“Ah,” he said. “Excellent timing.”

“How is he?” Starscream demanded as Jazz sat up on the couch, faking a human-like yawn and stretch.

Flatline gave him a flat look. “Not nearly as damaged as your hysteria would have indicated,” he said with a disdainful huff of his vents. “He'll need to stay off that leg as much as possible for a few days, but otherwise, it was mostly dents and torn lines. It looked worse than it was.”

“Hysteria?” Jazz repeated, his mouth curving with his amusement.

Starscream tossed him a look. “I was not hysterical,” he snapped. “Blurr is integral to my political position. If he offline, I'll lose the support of the remaining Autobots and a good portion of the NAILs.”

“Yeah. Politics. That's what it's about,” Jazz said as he leaned back, making himself even more comfortable on the couch.

“I see.” Flatline's visor flattened into a dark crimson. “Then you'll be happy to hear he'll make a full recovery. Though I can't say the same for you if you don't sit down and let me scan you. You're still technically a new frame.”

Starscream's optics narrowed but he was willing, at least, to listen. He gestured Flatline over impatiently and looked at Jazz.

“No issues?”

“None,” the former Autobot said cheerfully. “Unless you want to count the way Maccadam's was flattened as an issue. Blurr's not gonna be happy when he wakes up.”

“Wakes,” Starscream repeated, refusing to hide his disdain for the human term. He tried not to fidget as Flatline circled him, poking and prodding at his dents and wings. “Tell me where you've been.”

Jazz tilted his helm, his visor taking on an odd gleam. “Heard some rumors. Decided to look into 'em. Just like your friend over there.” His gaze slanted to Rattrap, lingering at the door to Starscream's quarters.

Starscream glanced at him but Rattrap held up his hands.

“Look, I don' know nothin'. Cept that if ya want to find Obsidian, ya gotta go deep. Like, old tunnels, old myths, nasty tunnel-dwellers deep,” Rattrap said.

“Yeah. That.” Jazz scratched at the side of his nose. “Oh. And does the designation Nightscream mean anythin' to ya?”

Starscream frowned. “Should it?”

“He blew up the bar. And then himself.” Jazz rolled his shoulders dismissively. “Obsidian plays for keeps. And he's got an army of fanatics.”
Ugh. Those were the worst.

Starscream scrubbed a hand down his face. “And yet neither of you can tell me where he is, who his compatriots are, or what his plans are for the future.”

Silence. Save for the beep of Flatline's scanner, which chose that moment to give off a neutral tone.

“Hmm.” Flatline tapped a staccato against the back of Starscream's shoulder. “It's all cosmetic. You're lucky.”

“I could have told you that much,” Starscream snapped. “Is there anything else I need to know?”

“A thank you would be appreciated, but I know better than that.” Flatline tucked away his datapad and cycled a ventilation. “Comm me if anything changes.”

He left. And Starscream stared at the two mechs who were supposed to keep their optics on the pulse of Cybertron. Who should have seen tonight coming before it was too late. Who he had begun to rely upon and who had failed him.

“I want answers,” Starscream said as he took a step and a dusting of ash fluttered from his frame.

“Don't we all,” Jazz drawled.

“I'm doin' the best I can here,” Rattrap retorted.

“Do better!” Starscream snapped and whipped his hand toward his berthroom door. “Blurr is injured. Maccadams is in ruins. Skybyte is dead. So when I say try harder, I fragging mean it.”

Times like these, he needed help. He needed more than the ruins of who was willing to stay in New Iacon. He needed Soundwave and his brats, but Starscream would go take a bath in the Pit before he'd invite Soundwave back here.

Rattrap hissed in a very organic manner that would have been imposing to a lesser mech. “It ain't like I'm getting' paid fer this, ya know,” he muttered with a flick of his tail. “But yeah. Sure. Lemme go pull some info outta thin air fer ya.”

“You do that,” Starscream said.

He glared until Rattrap left. Though he made a mental note. Rattrap would bear watching. Starscream didn't trust the little rat any further than he could throw him, and for all he knew, Rattrap was the traitor. Though Rattrap hadn't struck him as a loyalist fanatic.

Still.

Starscream hadn't survived this long by not being paranoid.

“I guess that's my cue to leave, too,” Jazz said as he rose to his pedes, his motions casual, but something guarded in his frame language. “Before ya start treating me like some kind of servant, too.”

“No.”
Jazz turned toward him slowly, danger coiling beneath his plating. “No?” he repeated, still with that infernal smile. “Oh, Starscream. I don't see where you're in any position to be telling me ‘no’. Especially since you're lucky I don't toss Blurr over my shoulder and take him outta here and away from you.”

Starscream's wings went rigid and he moved, putting himself between Jazz and the berthroom door faster than he could match action to thought. “What makes you think you'll get close enough to try?”

Jazz laughed. He planted his hands on his hips. “See, Star. That's what I love about you. Such delusions of grandeur.” He tilted his helm. “But if you think you can protect him, you're wrong. After all, look at how good of a job you've done so far.”

Starscream glared at him, refusing to admit how much the barb stung. “You're trying to bait me. It's not going to work.”

“Who says it hasn't already?” Jazz smirked and something in his posture eased, away from threat and into casual. “You played your cards too soon, Star. I can read you like an open book.”

Starscream cycled a ventilation.

Jazz's smirk widened.

Starscream checked his position, between Jazz and the berthroom, as hasty as it had been done. He realized Jazz was right.

Frag it all to the Pit.

He ground his denta and crossed his arms, not caring how defensive it made him look. Jazz had him by the intake.

He tried to turn it back toward business.

“How are you still in contact with the Autobots?” he asked.

Jazz's visor flickered. “No. Why would I be?”

“Liar.” He tried to sound sly, but it came out stale. Starscream was still too rattled. “I know good and well you and Bumblebee have some special comm line.”

Jazz bounced on his heelstruts. “Maybe I do. Why?”

“Because I'm going to need some help.” That hurt to admit almost as much as it did allowing Jazz to have that victory over him.

He was weak now. Starscream hated being weak. He hated having a weakness. But short of storming into the berthroom and killing Blurr himself, there was no solution. Not one he could fathom immediately at any rate.

“Why don't you call Soundwave?”

Starscream's plating clamped down tight. “Because I'll let an Autobot into my city before a Decepticon loyal to Megatron,” he hissed before he could remind himself he was trying not to
give so much away.

Too late.

Jazz frowned. “Well, ain't that a nightmare that I didn't need. Ya think Obsidian will make a play for him?”

Starscream shook his helm. “I don't know.” And he didn't know if Obsidian and the remaining Decepticons would unite. That was a mess none of them needed. Starscream didn't have enough NAILs and/or Autobots on his side to stop that.

Even if a Metrotitan had spoken to him.

“Neither do I,” Jazz admitted and when he grinned at Starscream, it was only half in humor. “Ain't that terrifyin?”

More than Starscream was willing to admit.

Jazz cycled a ventilation and dropped his hands. “Fine. I'll see what I can do,” he said and his look turned hard. “You just make sure nothing else happens to my boss in there. Got me?”

Starscream snorted. “Like I needed you to tell me that.”

Jazz left and Starscream cycled a ventilation. He made sure the door locked behind the former saboteur, not that he thought it would stop Jazz, and double-checked that the rest of his security system was engaged. It didn't feel like enough, and Starscream hated that uncertainty.

The tension of waiting to see if any of the NAILs were going to try something was one thing. But Obsidian was cold, calculated, and seemed capable of getting into places no one else could.

Obsidian was a threat. Starscream did not like threats.

He especially did not like threats that tried to take something that belonged to him. Agitation and concern warred together. Starscream scrubbed them out in the washracks, feeling slightly more put together as soot and filth sloughed from his frame.

Obsidian had attacked his city, had destroyed Blurr's bar, had nearly killed Blurr… and no one knew anything.

Starscream ground his denta.

This was unacceptable.

He dragged a towel over his damp frame, chugged a cube of energon, and dragged his exhausted frame into his berthroom. It was only a few hours to dawn, but it felt much later than that. Starscream could only afford a few hours rest before he had to be up again.

What passed for forensics in New Iacon should have a report for him then, but Starscream suspected they wouldn't be able to tell him anything he didn't already know.

Blurr was on his berth.

Starscream hadn't forgotten, per se, but it did remind him that he only had the one. And he
certainly wasn't going to recharge on the couch. There was room enough for two, even if Blurr was sprawled across it, obnoxiously taking up as much space as possible.

His blue paint, normally flawless, was marred with scrapes and dents. It was covered in static bandages and huge swaths of nanite gel to speed up healing. Blurr was going to be furious when he saw himself, and appalled. But he ventilated evenly, and there was no evidence of pain in his field.

Even repaired and covered in ugly nanite gel, he was a far better sight than the limp frame Starscream had pulled from the debris.

His hands curled into fists at his side.

This was unacceptable.

Starscream internally seethed and forced himself to swallow it down so that it didn't bleed into his field. He carefully climbed into the berth beside Blurr, taking care not to jostle the bruised racer, who looked a lot smaller without his boosters.

He would have to retrieve those, or have them rebuilt, later. Blurr wasn't going to be happy about their loss either.

Starscream cycled a ventilation and rested his palm on Blurr's chestplate. The Racer didn't stir, but beneath his hand, Starscream could detect the steady pulse of Blurr's spark.

He was going to be fine.

Starscream, however, wasn't sure he could say the same thing for himself.
Fear on Fire

Chapter Summary

Blurr wakes up, and as expected, he’s rather angry. Starscream and Jazz deal with the fall out.

Chapter Notes

it lives! XD

Old readers might want to start back at the beginning to refresh yourselves and because I gave it an edit and added a few things here and there. Nothing life-altering, but stuff to make sure continuity is right.

Updates will be regular as I've finished this now, just need to edit and format. Enjoy!

Blurr lurched awake with all the subtlety of a mid-air collision. His spark raced, his ventilations cycled rapidly, and every defensive protocol was screaming for him to get down, take cover, draw his weapon, prepare for war.

Except that the war was over, he was supposed to be safe, and that was all a lie.

And Blurr was… not in his tiny apartment over his bar.

He cycled his optics and looked around him. This was Starscream's berth. He was in Starscream's penthouse. He was in Starscream's berth. He was…

Covered in bandages and nanite patches? What the frag! Blurr stared down at himself, appalled by the state of his frame. Well. That at least explained why he felt like he'd been run over by a triple-changer. There wasn't a single part of him that didn't ache. And he felt… lighter? Why did he feel lighter?

His boosters were gone.

Blurr twisted his torso sharply, ignoring a stab of pain, and tried to reach over his shoulders and behind himself. He couldn't feel them. They just weren't there. They'd been disengaged from his frame.

What the frag?

Someone had cleaned him, too. It had been half-sparked at best, as they'd left soot in the crannies of his frame and Blurr itched with the sensation of grit in his cables. He needed a shower. But he needed answers, too. He needed--

Blurr pinged his memory. Short-term was a little hazy. Maybe because of the way his processor
ached. Short-term loss wasn't uncommon after a sharp knock to the helm. And he'd been hit by – Blurr squinted – falling debris.

He started to remember.

Heat. Shouting. A moment of panic. And then a whump of something invisible. A blast wave. It knocked him back and out. He hit the side of his bar, or the stage. Something solid enough to rattle him.

There'd been an explosion.

Blurr swung his legs over the side of the berth – Starscream's berth, his memory core continued to remind him – and gently slid to his pedes. Everything ached, and he couldn't put his full weight on his right leg. His hip felt like fire, but the idea of just lying around in his berth and waiting for someone to attend to him was highly unappealing.

He paused a moment, dizziness making him sway. Once it passed, he attempted a step, and hissed air through his denta. His hip burned, and only force of effort made him take another step, and then a third. He pretended he was on the battlefield, and if he didn't move, he wouldn't live, and that thought carried him two more steps toward the door. A sharp, stabbing throb radiated through his right hip.

He wanted answers. He needed answers. He wasn't sure if he approved that he'd woken in Starscream's berth. Why wasn't he in his own? Why wasn't he in a medical center? What the frag?

He made it to the door. It opened with a touch, his touch. Starscream had programmed it to respond to his field? When? Why?

No. Don’t worry about that right now. Worry about answers.

Blurr limped out of the berthroom. His audials caught words. Voices. Conversation. He recognized both voices – Starscream and Jazz.

“--a meeting,” Jazz said, his voice edged with static. He sounded tired.

Starscream huffed a ventilation. From his viewpoint, Blurr could only see his back, and his twitching wings. “Yes. I’ll just get on out into the wasteland. Surely no one will see me do such a thing. Has he any idea how absurd that sounds?”

“Oh, he knows. Why do ya think he suggested it?”

Starscream scoffed. He half-turned and paced a step, giving Blurr a brief glimpse of Jazz before he was blocked again. “Fine then. They can continue to rot out there, while what’s left of Cybertron crumbles at Obsidian’s command.” His engine grumbled. “So much for Autobot sentimentality.”

“I didn’t say he said no. Just that he wants ta chat.” Something creaked, Jazz’s joints perhaps. “And I didn’t say it had to be out there.”

Starscream jerked and whipped toward Jazz, wings arching high. “Why are you playing word games with me?”

“Mech, I play games with everyone. Or don’t ya know that by now.” Jazz laughed, but it didn’t sound amused. “Ya want the meeting or not?”
“What kind of meeting?” Blurr asked.

Starscream whipped around, his optics wide. “You’re online,” he said, crossing the floor in three quick steps to seize Blurr by the shoulders. “You should be in a berth. You’re still healing!”

Blurr slapped away his hands and limped around Starscream, making a beeline for the couch in the middle of the room. “I don’t want to be in the berth. I want answers. What meeting?”

He heard, more than saw, Starscream follow after him.

“It doesn’t matter;” Starscream said with an exasperated air. “I’m beginning to suspect it’s not legitimate.”

“Why wouldn’t it be? Cybertron’s my planet, too,” Jazz retorted, his visor flashing. The light behind it shifted to Blurr. “You okay, boss?”

“I hurt,” Blurr said flatly, and dropped down to the couch. “What happened?”

“Obsidian happened,” Starscream said. He opted to stand, his arms folded over his chest turbines. “It was his first move.”

Blurr rubbed at his aching hip, trying not to wince. “My bar?”

Starscream’s gaze met the floor. “Total loss,” he said and rubbed at his faceplate. “There’s nothing left but rubble.”

Primus damn it. He should have never gotten involved with Starscream. He knew it. He just knew this would happen.

“Casualties?” Blurr demanded.

Starscream flinched.

“Lots of injuries,” Jazz answered and scraped a hand over his helm. “Several casualties.” He audibly sighed. “Sorry, boss. One of them’s Skybyte.”

Skybyte.

Blurr’s spark went cold. He cycled a ventilation, but it rattled in his frame. He worked his intake, his hands drawing into fists. He turned his helm toward Starscream, letting nothing of weakness show in his optics.

“Tell me you know where this fragger is,” he demanded.

Starscream lifted his chin. “I wish that I did.”

Blurr shot to his pedes, ignoring the flash-fire of pain that raced across his hip, down his leg, and into his ankle-strut. “You have a network of spies, and an entourage, and a gaggle of loyal followers, and you know nothing?”

Starscream frowned and narrowed his optics to thin slits of crimson. “In case you haven’t noticed, the number of genuine associates I have can be counted on one hand.” He made a gesture with his
hand for emphasis, wriggling thin, claw-tipped fingers.

Blurr wobbled on his pedes, but held his ground. He would not do this while seated on his aft. Starscream took too many liberties already. “Then what’s our next move?”

Starscream tilted his helm. “Our?” He folded his arms over his chest again, closing himself off. “I am going to find him,” he said, baring his denta. “Obsidian won’t know what he’s unleashed. He will suffer for what he’s done.”

“And what am I supposed to do in the meantime?” Blurr demanded. He had not missed the fact that Starscream seemed content to leave him out of it. “That bar was everything I had. If anyone is going to take down Obsidian, it’ll be me.”

Starscream unfolded his arms and stalked across the floor toward Blurr. “You are going to find a new place to rebuild,” he said, one forefinger poking at Blurr’s chestplate. “You are going to rest, and recover, and put on a brave face. That is what you are going to do.”

Blurr once again batted Starscream’s hand away, his engine revving with fury. “So you’re going to sideline me,” he spat, his field rising up and batting against the reserved front Starscream put on. “You’re going to put me on a shelf like any other trophy.”

“That is not what I said,” Starscream snapped, his wings hiking upward.

Blurr leaned forward, ignoring the rising pain in his side. “Sure sounded like it to me.”

Starscream stared at him before he pinched his nasal ridge and turned away. “Blurr, I don’t have time for this,” he said, wings spasming. “I have to check on the injured, address the citizens, and somehow find Obsidian in all this mess. I can’t do that and worry about you, too.”

“This is what you call worry?” Blurr resisted the urge to stamp his pede. It was all he could do not to grab Starscream and shake some sense into him. But then, when had that done anyone any good? “I hate to see what you actually caring looks like.”

Someone coughed their vents. It was not Starscream.

Blurr blinked. Starscream went rigid. Both of them turned and found Jazz still seated in his chair, a look of unholy glee on his face.

“I guess this is the part where I leave, right?” he said as he hopped to his pedes, planting his hands on his hips. “Being that this is a lover’s spat and has nothing to do with me now.”

Blurr growled.

“It is not a lover’s spat, as you so eloquently put it,” Starscream snapped, his field spiking with irritation. “It is a debate between associates.”

Jazz shrugged. “Potato. Po-ta-toe. I call it like I see it, mechs.” His visor flashed. “My statement stands. I got work to do and it seems like you two don’t need someone eavesdroppin’. So. Off I go.”

Starscream sighed audibly and flicked a hand of dismissal. “By all means, don’t wait for an invitation on my part.”
“Ya gonna be all right, boss?” Jazz asked.

Blurr rubbed at his faceplate, forcing himself not to show the pain spiking through his neural net. Perhaps he really had gotten off the berth too soon.

“Starscream’s nothing I can’t handle,” Blurr said. “I don’t need a nanny-bot.”

“Suit yourself.” Jazz shrugged again, though there was nothing nonchalant in the action. “Ya know how to reach me if anything changes.” He spun on a heelstrut and navigated around his chair, aiming for the door. “Catch ya later, Starscream.”

“If there is any justice in the world, it will be a long time from now,” Starscream muttered.

Jazz’s laughter followed him out, until the door closed and locked behind him. Silence fell, Blurr turning back toward Starscream. There was a screaming pain in his hip, but he refused to acknowledge it.

Starscream sighed audibly. “There, now that he is gone, perhaps we can have a rational conversation about this.” He turned to face Blurr, his expression a mask of emotion. “Though I would prefer it if we could do so while you are resting.”

He started forward, and drew to a halt when Blurr held up a hand.

“No,” he said, and cycled a ventilation. He shook his helm slowly. “Right now, Starscream, I don’t want to hear it.” He turned away from the Seeker, not sure where he wanted to go, only knowing it was away. “You said it yourself that you had work to do. So go do it.”

“And where are you going?” Starscream demanded, petulant.

“Out.”

Blurr headed for the same door Jazz had used, ignoring the twinge in his hip, and the jagged slices of pain that raced down his leg.

“You’re still injured,” Starscream called after him.

“I’ve had worse,” Blurr shot back, slamming his palm against the panel. To his surprise, the door snapped open.

Starscream had keyed his bio-signature into the lock. Blurr blinked, and then shook his helm. No. He didn’t want to think about that now. He just wanted out.

He hurried through the door. If Starscream said something else to him, he didn’t hear it, because the door slid shut behind him. He heard it click and lock, not that Starscream couldn’t open it back up.

Blurr looked around him, torn on which way to go. He couldn’t go back to Maccadams. He couldn’t go back home. It didn’t exist anymore. There was nothing and nowhere for him to go.

He was marked now. Everyone associated him with Starscream. Who would harbor him? Who would offer him a place to stay?

Swindle?
Blurr scoffed aloud. That credit-grubbing thief? Sure, if Blurr promised to sign over half his spark or something equally sinister.

Jazz?

Blurr didn’t know where Jazz made his berth. He didn’t know where Jazz was right now. In fact, Blurr didn’t know much of anything at all. He didn’t know who all was injured. He didn’t know how his usual patrons had fared.

He was pretty damned useless, wasn’t he?

Blurr’s engine raced. His hands formed fists, shaking at his sides. He started walking, or limping more like, because he didn’t know what else to do.

Starscream occupied the penthouse, because of course he did. So Blurr limped into the lift and randomly pressed a button for one of the lower levels. The panel beeped obnoxiously at him.

Growling, Blurr slammed another button. Denied. A third. Denied. A fourth-- the panel chimed an affirmative and the doors slid shut. The lift rattled as it started to move.

The ground floor. He could leave. He could walk away from the tower, but where would he go? Out to wander the streets with a bum hip and a rapidly declining level of energon? Out where others had not fared as well in the bombing? Out where he could be easily snatched?

Blurr was not weak. He was not afraid. But he was not stupid either.

The lift donged and deposited him on the first floor. Blurr cycled a ventilation and limped out. He wasn’t going to leave. A sense of self-preservation ensured that. But while the first floor was a disorganized mess, someone had dragged a few benches into one of the corners, arranging them around a low table.

It would do. At this point, Blurr would sit on a boulder. His hip was sending jagged lines of pain up and down his leg. He couldn’t run away from a sparkling at this rate.

The last few steps and Blurr all but dragged his leg behind him. He dropped onto the bench with a sigh of relief, ventilations cycling air faster than was healthy. He groaned and leaned his helm back, offlineing his optics.

What a mess. And that was putting it kindly.

He held onto his anger. He clutched it close as the only thing giving him fuel, the only thing keeping him from spiraling. But it slipped through his fingers as though it were made of shadows, like the last pulses of victory before the war struck and took all value out of the races.

Blurr worked his intake. He focused on the pain. It didn’t help.

The war was over. They were supposed to be safe. The war was over, and yet his bar lay in ruins, Skybyte was dead, and safety was an illusion. Just like peace.

His spark squeezed tight. He was in so far over his helm it was not funny. There was nothing hilarious about this. What was he thinking getting involved with Starscream? Why did he think he could hold control over the situation.
He was a fool. A Primus-damned fool. An idiot who lost everything, and became the trophy he’d vowed he wouldn’t allow. He was a pretty thing. A smiling face to hang on Starscream’s arms and wave to the cameras. Side-lined and made useless. Like his bum leg and worse hip.

He had nothing left. Nothing and nowhere to go.

Blurr pressed his palms to his optics and leaned back, cycling ventilation after ventilation. His fans hiccuped.

Primus, but he was a mess.

Something clattered in the darkness.

Blurr leapt to his pedes and whirled around, only for his hip to protest the abrupt motion and buckle beneath him. He yelped and flailed, though there was nothing to grab, nothing to keep him from tumbling to the floor like a clumsy oaf.

Nothing but the bright red arms of a Seeker who was suddenly there, plucking Blurr from his fall as though he’d been in mid-air.

Blurr’s spark pumped from the rush. He looked up into Starscream’s face, empty of expression, and didn’t know whether he wanted to rage or weep. He certainly didn’t feel like expressing gratitude. So he didn’t.

“I told you,” Starscream said quietly as he guided Blurr back to the bench so that he could sit. “You’re still healing. You need to rest.”

“Don’t touch me.” Blurr smacked his hand away, leaning as far from Starscream as he could manage. “This is your fault.”

“Obsidian is the one who blew up your bar,” Starscream said as he sat next to Blurr, within reach, but not so close that they touched.

Blurr glared at him. “To get to you.”

Starscream inclined his helm. “Yes, that is true.” He sighed a ventilation and rubbed two fingers over his forehelm. “For what it is worth, I am sorry.”

“I don’t want your apologies,” Blurr snapped, the anger roiling in him like a dark mass, something that choked his spark. “I want answers. I want to find this fragger and end him. I don’t want to sit on the sidelines like a pretty pet!”

Starscream’s wings flicked. “You are not a pet, or a trophy for that matter. You are a valuable partner in this endeavor. I only meant that you are recovering and are in no condition to face against Obsidian and his ilk. I want you to be—” He cut himself off, shook his helm, and dropped his hand. “You will have an important part to play. I promise.”

Blurr’s optics narrowed. What was Starscream going to say before he stopped? Could he trust Starscream’s intentions here? Or were they empty platitudes to keep him mollified?

He didn’t know. And it bothered him that he didn’t.
“That’s all well and good, but I’m still out of a job, out of a home, and out of any way to be of use to you now.” Blurr snorted and folded his arms over his chassis, clinging to the anger if only to distract himself from the fierce throb in his leg.

Starscream shifted toward him. “You can stay here,” he said, and gestured around him. “I mean, in the penthouse, with me. It’ll be more convenient at any rate.”


Starscream shrugged, the gesture anything but nonchalant. “I have the space and it would make working together more convenient.” He gave Blurr a sidelong look. “It’s not as though we haven’t been sharing a berth already.”

“This and that are two different things,” Blurr said, jabbing a finger toward Starscream.

Starscream waved a hand of dismissal. “Either way, it’s all business.” He peered at Blurr before he rose to his pedes and offered Blurr a hand. “Come on. You need a cube of energon, a pain patch, and to get back in the berth.”

Blurr set his jaw. He wanted to decline on principle alone. But frag it all, Starscream was right. He was in no condition to leave, and the pain was only getting worse.

Blurr sighed and accepted Starscream’s hand, which resulted in Starscream hooking an arm around his waist, taking the majority of his weight.

“I want my boosters back,” Blurr said as Starscream helped him limp back toward the berth.

“You can when you are fully repaired,” Starscream replied, a note of irritation in his vocals. “While you are healing, however, your frame can’t take the strain. And this is coming from Flatline, not me.”

The lift dinged as it arrived, and Starscream got them inside, pressing the button for the penthouse without pause. Blurr wanted to ask about the other floors, but filed it away for later. Starscream cooperated for now. Blurr didn’t want to jinx it.

“They were damaged,” Starscream added in a softer tone as the lift started to rise. “You needed a medic more than I needed to try and retrieve them.”

Blurr set his jaw. He didn’t want to think about the explosion, or the damage to his frame, or the sparks that had been lost. All it did was remind him of what had been taken.

“Fine,” he said And left it at that.

They spent the rest of the rise in silence, until the lift deposited them at the top. Starscream half-walked, half-carried Blurr back into his hab-suite, where he ignored both the main room and the refueling room in favor of taking Blurr straight back to the berth.

He was surprisingly gentle as he eased Blurr onto the padded surface. Blurr laid back with a relieved sigh, shifting his weight to take the pressure off his hip. A dull throb set in, his frame sending off waves of heat.

“Here.” Starscream handed over a cube, and when Blurr took it, reached for Blurr’s other hand, tapping two fingers over his wrist port. “Open?”
Blurr hesitated as he braced himself upright with one elbow. Allow Starscream access to his systems?

Starscream arched an orbital ridge. “What do you think I’m going to do through a medical port, Blurr?”

“Pardon me for being cautious.” Blurr seethed as his panel snapped back, allowing Starscream access.

He focused on consuming the energon, and was relieved when Starscream didn’t connect to him personally. Instead, he slotted a pain chip into Blurr’s port reader, and patted Blurr’s wrist.

“That should get started immediately,” Starscream said.

Blurr triggered the panel to close. “Thanks,” he muttered as indeed it began to work, taking away the harshest pangs of agony and dulling them. He sipped at the cube, careful to conceal his grimace.

Medical grade was the absolute worst. He missed his usual energon, sweet and savory, with extra bursts for the busy, racing frame.

Starscream sat on the edge of the berth, his wings twitching behind him. “I am sorry, you know,” he said. “I know that Maccadams was more than just a bar.”

Blurr looked at him from over the rim of the cube. That was almost… honest. For Starscream.

“Yeah, well, I guess it’s not really your fault,” he said.

“Thanks,” Starscream drawled with a roll of his optics. He tilted his helm. “Besides, you can look at this way. Now you can finally replace that countertop with the stain, right?”

Blurr snorted a laugh. “Right.” He finished off the energon and flicked away the cube. “If I ever get to rebuild.”

“You will.”

Blurr gave him a sideways glance. “You sound awfully sure of that.”

“Because I know it will happen.” Starscream rolled his shoulders and slid off the berth. “You rebuilt once. You’ll rebuild again. That’s the thing about you Autobots. You’re damn tenacious.”

Blurr shifted to lay on the berth again, feeling as though gravity tugged him downward. Fatigue returned. “I’m not an Autobot.”

Starscream snorted. “Yes, you are.” He waved a dismissing hand. “Get some rest. A couple more days aberth and you should be back on your own two pedes.” He turned and headed toward the door. “Ping my comm if you need something.”

“Are you volunteering to wait on me?” Blurr arched an orbital ridge.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself.”
Blurr rolled his optics and shifted to get comfortable. The pain had lessened, but his spark continued to quiver. Little tremors ran through his frame, over his armor.

His hands were shaking, he realized.

He didn’t want to be alone right now. He didn’t want to be left here in this room, in the dark and silence, unable to defend himself. He couldn’t fight; he didn’t have his blasters. He couldn’t run, not with a bum leg and no boosters.

He couldn’t do much at all.

Blast it.

The door panel beeped as Starscream put in his code.

“Starscream.”

The Seeker paused in the frame, one hand on the panel. He didn’t say anything, but he did half-turn to look at Blurr.

He would probably hate himself for this in the morning.

“Stay,” Blurr said as he slowly turned on his side, facing the wall. There was enough room left on the berth for a second frame.

After a second’s hesitation, he added, “please,” though it galled him to do so.

The door slid shut with a locking beep. Starscream’s pedesteps returned, but his field preceded him, tentative and offering. Blurr expected to be taunted for his weakness, but all Starscream did was climb onto the berth behind Blurr. He did not lay down, but he sat with his back against the wall at the head of the berth, his right hip and leg pressed against Blurr’s back.

“I’m still mad at you,” Blurr muttered as he offlined his optics and tried to focus on his ventilations. Not that it was necessary. The pain patch must have had a soporific in it, too. Drowsiness dragged him toward recharge.

“I know,” Starscream replied before Blurr felt the first gentle, and tentative touch to his crest.

It was soothing, enough so that it lulled Blurr right into recharge. He thought distantly that his audials picked up Starscream saying something else, but that thought was whisked away with sleep.

***
Battle for the Sun

Chapter Summary

Blurr and Starscream hold a press conference, and display a united front.

“Are you sure?”

Blurr bit back the sigh before it could escape. He wanted to hide behind his hand, but re-paints necessitated that he hold still. Not that this was truly a re-paint. All Jazz managed to do right now was hide the flaws.

Sooner or later, Blurr would need a full-frame strip, paint, and wax. For now, presentable would have to do.

“I need to be on that stage, Jazz,” he replied.

His former commanding officer snorted a ventilation. “That’s not what I asked, Blurr. And ya know it.”

Not fidgeting was the hardest part.

Blurr frowned. “Am I sure about this? About Starscream? Frag, no,” he replied and fought down a twitch as Jazz brushed over a sensitive cable accidentally. “But I have to do something. I’m not letting Obsidian have his way.”

“Ya don’t hafta work with Starscream to stop Obsidian.” Jazz circled around to his front and gave him a critical look, one hand pressed to his chin. “I got connections.”

Blurr’s gaze slid to Jazz. “The same connections you and Starscream discussed?”

“Ah. Forgot ya heard that.” Jazz shrugged, his tires setting off into a spin. “More or less. But yeah. Say th’ word, we’ll drop ole Screamer, and go at this without him.”

Blurr nibbled on his bottom lip. The stench of paint spray made him dizzy, hard to think. It still didn’t change his mind, and he couldn’t even properly explain why.

“We need him,” he said finally, and with an audible sigh. “Like it or not, the Metrotitan spoke to him. And he’s useful.”

Jazz’s grin slid into a smirk. “For a great many things, I’m sure.” He folded his arms under his bumper. “He is pretty good in the berth.”

“That’s not what I meant!” Blurr snapped.

“I know what ya meant. Ya can lower your arms now, by the way.”

Blurr obeyed, rolling his shoulders to ease the cramp holding them had caused. He still wasn’t
one-hundred percent, but he refused to sit in the shadows while Starscream held this press conference. He didn’t want Obsidian to think he was scared, or that he’d won.

Frag that.

“What we do in the berth has nothing to do with our political alliance,” Blurr said as he looked down at his frame, using the mirror to check Jazz’s work.

He’d done a good job. Blurr was passable. Not perfect. But hopefully, no one would be so close as to see all the imperfections.

“It doesn’t?” Jazz gasped theatrically, his visor brightening. “Then ya mean ta say that your alliance is political, but the berth fun is all about romance?” He leaned close and peered at Blurr. “Are ya falling for yon sassy Seeker?”

Blurr rolled his optics. “Of course not.” He brushed at a smudge on his arm, but as it did no good, quickly gave up. “It’s release. Stress relief. Something to take the edge off.”

“Sure, sure.” Jazz straightened and looked Blurr up and down. “Well, I’d say yer presentable. And your adoring public waits.” He made a broad gesture, and then bowed at the waist.

“Adoring. Right.” Blurr snorted and turned toward the door, slower than usual. His hip twinged at sudden movements.

He hesitated. A quiver of unease rattled through his spark before he could clamp it down. Standing before a crowd should not induce any anxiety. It had been the entirety of his existence prior to the war. Yet, he hesitated.

Jazz slid in front of him, helm tilted. “All jokes aside,” he said, tone turned serious. “You don’t have to do this.”

Blurr shook his helm. “Yes, I do.”

“No, you don’t.” Jazz folded his arms under his bumper, all amusement gone, and nothing left in his field and expression but Commander Jazz, Spec Ops member. “If you want out, all you have to do is say so. I will get you out.”

Blurr rubbed at his forehelm. “You’re saying that like I’m trapped. Nothing’s keeping me here. I have my reasons.”

Jazz made a non-committal noise. He didn’t budge.

Blurr cycled a ventilation. “I mean it, Jazz. I’m seeing this through.” He dropped his hand and narrowed his optics. “It’s personal now.

“And Starscream has nothing to do with it.”

“Nothing except that he’s as involved as I am,” Blurr said in a firm tone. “Yeah, we share a berth, and yeah, apparently we’re living together now. But that’s it.”

Jazz blew out air in a rush and rolled his shoulders, dropping his hands. “If you say so,” he said, and planted a grin on his face, one that was both cheesy and disingenuous. “Then let’s go. The spotlight calls.”
Somehow, Blurr felt like he’d just lost some kind of game that he never knew he was playing. Nevertheless, he shook his helm and followed after Jazz.

His former Commander was right, at least. The public waited. And so did Starscream.

~

This time, someone had built the stage in an open area just outside of the building Starscream had claimed for himself. It was a stupid idea in Blurr’s opinion. It was as though Starscream intended to provoke Obsidian, calling him out and daring him to attack again.

But Obsidian hadn’t even intended to attack Starscream the first time around.

It was still foolish.

The crowd this time was larger, but also, angrier. They muttered, more than talked among themselves, and their collective fields rasped against Blurr’s own. Spotlights pointed toward the stage, itself lacklustre. Blurr expected glitz and glamor, not a bare podium and a solid-grey backdrop.

News crews clustered at the front of the stage, looking like a pack of ravenous piranhacons, eager for a soundbite to feed their hunger for discourse. At least a hundred mechs crowded the ground behind them, their badges missing or scraped over. A couple dozen more mechs, still with their badges though more discreetly, hung at the back. Of Starscream’s entourage Blurr saw very few, except a handful carefully placed near the stairs leading up to the stage.

Blurr was ushered onstage the moment he was noticed. Jazz vanished from his side, and Blurr never saw him disappear. He assumed Jazz was somewhere in the crowd, keeping an optic out for more bombers.

Blurr ascended to the stage and was more than a little startled when a ragged cheer rose up from one section of the crowd. He cycled his optics and gave a little wave in that direction before the cheer called again.

Odd.

Starscream hovered near the podium, his face blank as he noticed Blurr. He did, however, gesture for Blurr to come closer.

They had argued about this. Quite forcefully.

Starscream wanted Blurr to rest more. He claimed Obsidian might attack again, and Blurr was in no condition to flee for his life.

Blurr, however, refused to be intimidated by a mech who couldn’t even show his face to make threats. He refused to let Obsidian think he’d earned any fear. He would be on this stage, or the press conference wouldn’t happen at all.

He’d interrupt if he had to. Let the newsbots make what they could of that.
In the end, Starscream relented. Round one went to Blurr. He savored his victory because he believed they would be few and far between in the future.

“You’re just in time,” Starscream said with a sharp look up and down Blurr’s frame. “Jazz did a good job.”

Blurr’s lip curled into a vague smile. “Am I presentable enough?”

Starscream tilted his helm. “I didn’t mean to imply that you weren’t.” He held out a hand to Blurr. “Come. You can stand beside me.”

Blurr cycled his optics. “What happened to sidelining me?”

“ Someone told me that was a very bad idea. I’m inclined to agree with them.” Starscream grinned his politician grin and winked. “Besides, we’re in public.” He wriggled his fingers pointedly.

Blurr cycled a ventilation and placed his hand in Starscream’s, allowing the Seeker to pull him toward the podium. As Starscream did, the murmuring of the crowd grew into a dull roar. Several spotlights focused on the stage, directing at the podium as Starscream stepped behind it, drawing Blurr next to him.

He released Blurr’s hand and rested both of his own on the edge of the podium. He smiled that big grin, his wings still and settled, as Blurr shifted into a comfortable position next to him. He looked out at the crowd and tried not to get blinded by the attention.

“My fellow Cybertronians, if I could have your attention please,” Starscream said, speaking into a microphone. His voice carried and seemed to surround them, loud enough to quiet the crowd. “It’s time we get started, yes? I don’t want to keep you too long.”

Blurr tried not to fidget. He focused above the crowd’s helms, but his gaze wandered. He couldn’t help nervously looking around him, trying to find signs of discourse, of potential bombers. He still couldn’t find Jazz.

“I know you are all concerned about the attack on Maccadam’s. There have been many rumors circulating about what may have caused it,” Starscream said as he lowered his hand and braced himself on the podium. He actually managed to sound pleasant. “I am here to set the record straight, to reassure, and to make you a promise, but first, I wish to announce that Blurr is alive and well.” He half-turned and gestured toward Blurr with a curved grin. “I know there were many rumors to the contrary.”

Blurr cycled his optics and gave a little wave to the crowd. That same group who had cheered for him earlier made noise again.

“He’s a little battered, and a little bruised, but he remains fully committed to assisting me in serving Cybertron and the mecha who live here,” Starscream said, returning his attention to the podium. “He, like many of us, cannot be cowed by a cowardly act of violence, for that is what it was. An act of domestic terrorism by a shadowed party who wishes to see Cybertron fall.”

Blurr watched the audience. Most of those present looked confused. They exchanged glances. The chatter all but ceased.

Blurr looked for guilty faces. Smug faces. Anyone who might be connected to Obsidian in some way. He had no doubt that Obsidian’s spies lurked out there, waiting for an opportunity, or
reporting back to their boss.

“I do not have a name, for coward’s hide behind anonymity,” Starscream continued, his tone turning fierce and insistent. “But I do know this. He seeks to divide us. To turn us against one another, until we tear ourselves apart. He believes that none of us deserve to start again, that Cybertron is not our home.” Starscream narrowed his optics. “He is wrong.”

A ragged cheer rose in pockmarks from the crowd. Members of Starscream’s entourage? Mecha who genuinely supported him? Blurr didn’t know.

“This mech, this terrorist, is only interested in one thing: to divide and conquer. Let us not do him the courtesy of doing his work for him. Let us be united, Cybertronians with one vision, one goal. Let us show him that we are not going to be cowed, that we are not afraid, and that this is our planet, our home.”

More cheers, less ragged this time, rose up. They were loud, agreeing. Some mechs Blurr recognized as patrons to his bar. Others were those he knew had no affection for Starscream, and he didn’t believe for one second that idea had changed.

No, they cheered for a different reason. Because Starscream was right, even if he was, well, Starscream.

Cybertron was their planet. It was their home. They would not be driven away from it in fear, not again. Neither would they bow to another mech who sought to bring upon change with violence and audacity.

Megatron had soured everyone to such actions.

So while these mecha might not like Starscream, they agreed with him.

“I ask that if anyone has any information that may be of use in our search for this coward, please come forward that we may drag him into the light,” Starscream continued, his words more confident and fierce now. “I am putting together a team, a strike force whose sole purpose is to track down this individual and bring him to justice. Volunteers are greatly encouraged. We should all be given the opportunity to defend our home. To strike back against the mech who believes so little of our courage.”

Energy filled the crowd. Starscream certainly understood how to whip them into action, didn’t he? Perhaps he’d learned it from Megatron. If anyone asked what charisma could buy you, one need look no further than the army Megatron had once commanded.

“We are stronger together,” Starscream said with a large smile Blurr never knew he was capable of producing. “I firmly believe that, and I know that you all believe it as well.”

Someone started to clap, perhaps one of Starscream’s supporters. It was enough to get others started, one by one, the agreement picking up in volume. They stomped their pedes. They whistled. They whooped.

Starscream half-turned toward Blurr, grinning and holding out a hand. His fingers wriggled invitingly, as if calling Blurr to his side again.

Blurr cycled a ventilation. He’d brought this upon himself.
He planted a smile on his face and stepped that one pace closer to Starscream, unsurprised when Starscream tugged him up onto the podium, and they shared the narrow space. Starscream hooked an arm around his waist, his hand resting on Blurr’s opposite hip, half-possessive, half-affectionate.

He leaned into Blurr’s side, lips inches from Blurr’s audial. “Do you want to speak?” he asked.

Blurr resisted the urge to cross his arms defensively. “I think you’ve said everything you need to say,” he muttered, hopefully not loud enough to carry. “Why didn’t you name Obsidian?”

“Because they don’t need to know it was a former Decepticon. Factional tension is still too high.” Starscream’s lips came close enough to brush Blurr’s audial, sending a shiver down his spinal strut. “Do you disagree?”

Blurr worked his intake and turned his face closer to Starscream, something incredibly intimate, and he was more than aware of the crowd watching them. “Not in public, I don’t.”

“Mmm.” Starscream squeezed his hip. “I knew you were the right choice,” he purred, and drew away, turning his attention back to the crowd.

He raised his free hand for quiet, and it rippled through those attending. “Are there any questions?” he asked.

“Who’s going to lead your little strike force?” Someone demanded, his voice a loud boom from the back. Blurr could see nothing but a dark shape, a military frame perhaps given the size of it.

“That will be determined by the team itself,” Starscream replied in a pleasant tone. “Though I will offer advice if they feel it is necessary.”

“What about Maccadam’s?” Someone else shouted, this one nearer. Blurr tracked the question to a mech he did recognize as a frequent patron of his bar.

Scrapes and dings marred the mech’s armor, along with scorchmarks and a few temporary static bandages. He must have been there for the attack.

Starscream’s fingers pressed in on Blurr’s hip. “I do believe this question is for you, Zippy,” he said brightly.

He barely kept himself from glaring. Instead, Blurr cycled a ventilation and leaned forward, toward the podium.

“Yes,” he said. “I will locate a suitable location and begin rebuilding as soon as possible. Maccadam’s was my livelihood, and a place where all can come together. I will not let a single act of terrorism dissuade me from rebuilding.”

“Yer not afraid?” Someone else asked, this coming from a mech of purple and yellow accents, only a few rows back from the stage.

Blurr tilted his helm. “Should I be?”

“One might argue that yer alliance with Starscream is to blame for it’s destruction,” the purple-yellow mech replied, his optical band glittering with a deeper intelligence.
Blurr did not recognize this mech. Now, he wished he did. He made a mental note of him as someone to look into. Perhaps Jazz might want to see where he made his berth.

“I suppose you could assume that,” Blurr said with a shrug of his shoulders. “But I’ve also made it a point for Maccadam’s to welcome everyone. Even before Megatron’s return, I allowed mechs of all factions into my bar. Something tells me our mysterious terrorist doesn’t like that too much.”

“You don’t think he’ll strike again?”

Blurr tracked that question further toward the back, to a tall mech with dark plating and a single optic. A victim of Empurata in the past, perhaps.

“I’m not saying he won’t. But I am saying I’m not going to let fear of that stop me.” Blurr tilted his chin, stepping a little out of Starscream’s embrace to show that he stood on his own, with or without a Seeker in his berth. “Before this, I was an Autobot warrior. I was a Wrecker. We have peace now, and I welcome that, but I am not going to let a coward stop me from living.”

“Are you going to volunteer for the strike force?”

“No,” Starscream said, before Blurr could even form words. He leaned around Blurr, smile so very pleasant and reassuring. “At least, not at first. He still has much healing to do, despite being one of the lucky ones.”

Anger roiled within Blurr, though he was careful to keep it concealed. How nice of Starscream to decide for him. What if Blurr wanted to be on that task force? What if he wanted to help look for Obsidian?

What if it wasn’t Starscream’s choice at all? Because it wasn’t.

Now was not the time or the place to bring it up, however.

“Starscream does have a point.” Blurr’s smile was more of a grimace. “I’m not much use with this bum hip of mine.” He patted it and produced a laugh that many a camera had loved back when he’d been a world-class racer. “But I will help in anyway I can.”

Starscream’s field nudged against his in that moment, proud and affectionate. Blurr all but slapped it away with his own.

Not right now.

“I plan to have a memorial for Skybyte and all others who were killed in the attack,” Blurr continued, and took small satisfaction in feeling Starscream startle next to him.

Hah. They hadn’t discussed this. Because Blurr had come up with it all on his own. He could play political games, too.

“I am actually relieved that we live in a time of relative peace and can take the opportunity to do such a thing. Skybyte was a dear friend. He’ll be missed, and I want to honor the legacy he left behind.”

“As do we all,” Starscream added with that politician’s smile. “As soon as we’ve finalized preparations, we’ll let everyone know so that all can attend. Until then, we must all continue as we have, rebuilding, restructuring, and learning to live again. Thank you everyone for your support.
Together, we are one.”

Starscream stepped back from the podium and tugged Blurr with him, the look on his face indecipherable now that he no longer faced the crowd.

More questions were thrown their direction, but they were quickly drowned out by rising cheers and clapping. Blurr hated that he didn’t know if it was genuine or part of some elaborate plan of Starscream’s. One could never be sure when it came to the Seeker.

Starscream clasped his hand around Blurr’s, grip firm as though trying to keep him from fleeing, and tugged him to the stage exit. At the last moment, he paused, flashed the crowd a smile and a wave, before continuing on.

Members of Starscream’s entourage were there to keep the crowd at bay as Starscream urged Blurr back toward his apartment tower. There was a quickness to his steps, a twitch in his wings, that suggested anger.

Ask Blurr if he cared. Because he didn’t.

Starscream’s mask didn’t fall until they were in the relative solitude and quiet of the first floor, the main doors locking and shutting behind him. He dropped Blurr’s hand as if it burned him, his wings twitching madly.

“A memorial for Skybyte?”

Blurr arched his orbital ridges. So that was how Starscream wanted to start. Okay then.

“I think it’s appropriate, don’t you?”

“Of course it is.” Starscream whirled, his wings arched high and angry above his shoulders. “And also dangerous. You think Obsidian isn’t going to consider that an invitation to attack?”

Blurr shrugged. “He might. He might not. I wasn’t just lying or performing out there, Starscream.” Unlike some mechs. “I meant what I said. I’m not afraid, and I’m not going to let fear keep me from moving forward.”

He took a stalking step forward and ignored the twinge in his hip. “You spoke pretty words about unity, but unless you actually prove you mean them, they’ll turn on you as quickly as they turned on Bumblebee. They’ll kick you out of your penthouse and Obsidian won’t have to lift another finger.”

“Oh. So this is you being helpful, is it?”

Blurr folded his arms over his chestplate. “Helpful. Useful. Take your pick. I told you I wasn’t going to stand on the sideline. If you can’t handle that, let me know now. I’ll walk away and you can lose your civilian trophy.”

Starscream stared at him. His wings flicked.

Blurr stared back. He’d faced down worse than Starscream before.

“I… appreciate your help,” Starscream finally said, though there was something in his tone that was outright begrudging. “Only, it would be nice next time to not be caught unawares.”
Blurr tilted his helm. “Likewise.”

Starscream snorted a laugh and his wings drifted back downward. Tension eased out of his posture. “Fair enough.” His gaze flicked toward the door, where flashing lights indicated that the very noisy press still waited for their turn to grill Starscream. “Are you really interested in handling them?”

“No.”

“I didn’t think so.” Starscream audibly cycled a ventilation and started toward the door. “You should rest for today. Get off that hip. I’m going to arrange some things. I’ll be back later.”

“Things I need to know about?” Blurr demanded.

“Not unless you’re actually interested in the administrative part of my duties,” Starscream replied with a smirk thrown over his shoulder. “Are you?”

Blurr snorted. “Not in the least.

Starscream chuckled before he vanished out the doors, which closed and locked behind him, leaving Blurr in the dim quiet of the ground floor.

Blurr unfolded his arms and swept a hand over his helm.

“Are you sure you wanna do this?”

If he didn’t, who else would?

****
Burning Up

Chapter Summary

Blurr is a mess, and it’s all Starscream’s fault.

Blurr paced.

He didn’t have anything better to do. He’d been left alone. He’d rested. He’d refueled. He’d internally spun himself in circles, chomping on the problem that was Starscream.

Hours inched by.

So he paced.

Back and forth. Back and forth. Jittery anxiety kept him in motion, but there was nowhere to go. He couldn’t go for a drive because he couldn’t transform. He couldn’t go for a run because his hip couldn’t take his speeds. He couldn’t go spar because he couldn’t stress the joint.

He couldn’t do anything but pace.

And ache.

He again considered the handful of pain patches stuffed into his subspace. He hated the fog that crept over his thoughts when he took one. He hated how it slowed his processing. He hated everything about them.

He would deal with a little pain. What he couldn’t deal with was the overcharge crawling through his lines. He hated to be still. He hated waiting. He hated all of this.

The main door beeped.

Blurr drew to a halt and whipped toward it, his spark pulsing in his chassis. Fight or flight was a constant nagging in the back of his processor. Every sound, every twitch, set his instincts aflame.

The door opened. Starscream swept inside. The door closed behind him, beeping a cheerful triple tone as it locked. The panel glowed a baleful red. If there was one thing Blurr could trust, Starscream would make sure his apartment was secure. Starscream was more paranoid than Red Alert.

Somehow, that didn’t help him relax.

“Welcome back,” Blurr ground out.

Starscream blinked at him. “That sounded like you’d rather I throw myself out the window.”

Blurr’s hands twitched. He forced himself to ventilate. He smiled, but it felt more a grimace. “You’re late.”
Starscream arched an orbital ridge. “Did I miss an appointment I don’t remember making?”

“Frag you.” Blurr threw up his hands and limped out of the main room.

Starscream, and everything about him, made Blurr twitchy. This apartment. That plush berth. The fully-stocked room with Seeker coolant and Racer coolant all nestled together like some kind of happy family, cubes of energon crowded around them in approval.

Starscream followed him. Of course Starscream did.

Blurr avoided the berth at the last minute and started pacing again. Only here in the berthroom, there was less room to do so. His limp became more pronounced as his hip flared fire and screeched at him. He ignored the alerts.

“Blurr,” Starscream said in a condescending tone, one usually reserved for sparklings and misbehaving soldiers. “Is something wrong?” He tilted his helm, optics narrowed in consideration. “Are you out of pain patches?”

Blurr barely kept from snarling at him. “I still have the same handful you put in my hands this morning,” he retorted. “Thank you for that, by the way, doling them out to me like treats. All but patting me on the head and telling me to be good.”

Starscream’s frown deepened.

He lowered himself down to the chair near the desk, though not before Blurr caught his wings twitching. First one, and then the other.

“I thought we were past this,” Starscream said slowly, carefully. “Are you still angry?”

“Of course I am!” He dragged to a halt and whipped a finger in the vague direction of the platform built just outside this tower. “I am not your primus-bedamned puppet, Starscream! Don’t think I don’t know what that act out there was.”

Starscream steepled his fingers together. “Act,” he repeated in a mild tone. “We are allies. They already know we share a berth as well. I fail to see where I overstepped.”

Blurr’s engine snarled. He resisted the urge to stomp his pede like a sparkling. “We’re fragging, not sharing a berth,” he snarled.

“There’s only one in this apartment. We’ll be sharing it eventually,” Starscream remarked.

“Don’t you fragging argue semantics with me.” Blurr’s ventilations whooshed out in a huff. “You know exactly what I mean.”

Starscream lowered his hands and tilted his helm. “I’m afraid I don’t, Blurr. You’re going to have to clarify for me.” His optics narrowed. “And perhaps take a seat. You’ll overstress your joint at this rate, and another surgery will only slow how fast you heal.”

Blurr ground his denta so hard he tasted sparks on his glossa. Starscream’s condescending tone grated in his audials. He balled up his hands into fists, feeling the urge to snarl his irritation and shout to the heavens. The overcharge crawled in his lines, bit at him, like a horde of scraplets beneath his armor.
Starscream didn’t fragging get it. Or maybe he did and this was all some game to him. Maybe this was how he played everyone and Blurr should realize by now that he would always be a pawn and stop thinking he had some kind of edge.

No.

Whatever.

Fine.

Starscream wanted to play it like this? Wanted to treat Blurr like some kind of doll to be posed, some kind of trophy to display?

Fine.

Then Blurr was going to get what he wanted out of it, too. He couldn’t run, couldn’t race, couldn’t fight, couldn’t work. But he could break that berth.


He stormed across the floor. He couldn’t think with the pain and the charge, all knotting inside of him like a restless sparkeater.

Starscream had caused this mess. He was going to help fix it in the only method left to Blurr.

He ignored the twinges in his hips and shoved Starscream’s hands aside, freeing room on the Seeker’s lap for him to plop himself down. He straddled Starscream’s thighs, his valve already leaking around his panel. He gripped Starscream’s face in his hands.

“Wha--”

Blurr cut off Starscream’s stupid question with a kiss. He shoved their mouths together, lips and denta and glossa demanding. He rolled his hips forward purposefully, grinding against Starscream’s belly and hip. Need surged through his systems like an inferno, his valve cycling and his spike pulsing behind his panel.

He was shaking, he knew he was. He needed to move, damn it.

Starscream’s hands found his hips, but they quickly slid up to his waist, cupping just under the edge of his windshield. He pulled back from the kiss, optics round and bright.

“What are you doing?” he asked, but if he was aiming for outraged, he missed the mark.

Blurr rolled his optics. “What’s it look like I’m doing?” he retorted, and pulled Starscream back into another kiss, plunging his glossa into Starscream’s mouth.

He pulled out the tiniest of moans from the Seeker. He ignored the twinges of his hip as he dug his pedes into the floor and ground his frame forward, heat blooming throughout his frame like a flash-fire. His valve pulsed at him, and more lubricant seeped out the edges. Charge danced through his lines, making him jitter.

“I’m your toy, aren’t I?” Blurr growled as he nipped at Starscream’s bottom lip, briefly pressing
the dermal layer between his denta. He ground down, aft pressed to Starscream’s upper thigh. “So frag me.”

Starscream’s fingers rippled on his torso. “No, that’s not… I’m not going to--”

Blurr tightened his grip on Starscream’s face and his engine roared. “Yes, you are,” he said, grinding harder, leaving thin streaks of lubricant behind. “I can’t run. Can’t spar. Can’t move.” He was panting, he knew he was. “I need it.”

Starscream looked back at him, his expression unreadable. But there was no hiding the desire in his field. He might be trying to play some kind of noble martyr or some slag, but the panel beneath Blurr’s aft was hot and Starscream’s wings were in a state of constant motion. He wanted Blurr just as much.

“It’s your fault,” Blurr added on a murmur, and he bit Starscream’s lip again, sucking it briefly into his mouth. “So fix it.”

Crimson optics flashed. Starscream’s hands tightened briefly before they slid to Blurr’s aft, hooking around it.

“Fine,” he bit out, and abruptly shoved to his pedes, lifting Blurr with seeming ease.

Blurr tightened his thighs around Starscream’s waist, his processor spinning. It was only four steps to the berth, and he gasped as his back hit the plush surface, having forgotten that he didn’t have his boosters. There was nothing to stop him from sinking into the berth itself.

He shoved his elbows into the berth and clawed his way backward, leaving room for Starscream to join him. His array panels juttered, need yawing through him. He left a streak of lubricant behind and couldn’t be bothered to care. The overcharge was dizzying, but no more so than the look on Starscream’s face as he followed Blurr onto the berth.

He knelt between Blurr’s drawn up knees and a single taloned finger scraped up the cover of Blurr’s array.

“Open,” Starscream demanded.

Was there static in his vocals or was Blurr imagining it?

No. It didn’t matter. His panels snapped open between one sparkbeat and the next, a sigh of relief hissing from his vents. His spike jutted free, already dribbling with pre-fluid. His valve pulsed longing, lubricant dampening the berth beneath his aft. He clenched on nothing and moaned.

Starscream’s finger traced around the edge of his array, touching neither of his components. “Spike or valve?” he asked.

Blurr forced himself to focus on Starscream through the surge of need, his hips pushing into the air. “Huh?” What did it matter?

Starscream’s hands cupped his hips. He curved forward, expression intent.

“Spike,” he purred before sucking the head of Blurr’s spike into his mouth, glossa swirling around the sensor-laden tip.
Blurr moaned and fisted the berth covers. A rattle started at the crest of his spinal strut and worked its way down, pooling into his groin.

Starscream let him slip free with a pop. “Or valve?” he asked, and dipped his helm, glossa extending to lick a long, wet stripe up the center of Blurr’s valve. His lips brushed Blurr’s exterior node before he drew it into his mouth and gave it a deep suckle.


“As you wish,” Starscream murmured, and his mouth returned to Blurr’s spike, sucking him deep in the space of a vent.

Blurr let free a choked sound. He shoved a fist against his mouth, unwilling to let the embarrassing noises free. His engine screeched as his spike was engulfed, the tip rubbing against the back of Starscream’s intake, while a willing glossa sought out and explored every sensitive receptor.

His hips bucked, but Starscream’s hands were there, pinning him gently against the berth. He worked his intake, the flexible protomesh squeezing and rippling around Blurr’s spike. His denta scraped ever so gently around the base of his spike. Blurr groaned around his fist, pleasure sparking through his lines in a flash-fire.

He twitched and trembled in Starscream’s grip, wanting to thrust, to buck, to roll, to move. His plating flared, heat billowing out from beneath it, his engine revving so hard as to vibrate the berth.

Starscream hummed around his spike, and Blurr lost it.

He choked a sound in his intake, tossed his helm back, and overloaded, pulsing wave after wave of transfluid down Starscream’s throat. His heelstruts shoved into the berth, his frame thrashing within Starscream’s grip. His cooling fans spun madly, sucking in desperately cooler air. His spark throbbed.

He was enrobed in pleasure, shattered from the force of it.

Starscream hummed again, softer this time, and lapped at Blurr’s spike as he drew free. He had the audacity to lick his lips as he looked up at Blurr, and pressed a kiss to the tip of Blurr’s spike.

“One,” he murmured.

Blurr, dazed and throbbing with want, couldn’t seem to focus. His entire frame still hummed with overcharge. It’d been building for hours. One measly spike release wasn’t going to cut it.

“What?” he asked.

Starscream didn’t answer. Instead, he lowered himself down, and ex-vented heat over Blurr’s soaking valve. His valve lips throbbed with need, anterior node flickering rapidly. Blurr whined as he tilted his hips toward Starscream’s mouth, and the berthcover tangled around his fingers at the first delicate press of lips to his throbbing nub.

Starscream nuzzled his array, lips caressing the fold of his valve, the plush rim, the throbbing node. His thumb swept around protective lip. His ex-vents stirred the pleasure.

“Stop teasing me!” Blurr demanded.
Starscream’s answer was to press his mouth against Blurr’s valve and slide his glossa inside, curling it to nudge the tip against the cluster of nodes on the inside of Blurr’s rim, near the apex. His nasal ridge bumped Blurr’s anterior nub, sending fire licking through his lines.

He shivered and clutched at the berth. He rolled his hips toward Starscream’s mouth, the sounds of a glossa working over his swollen rim only ramping up his charge. Starscream was slow, methodical, as he licked into Blurr’s valve, nibbled on his lips, and suckled on his anterior node. Each flick of his glossa over Blurr’s nub made his hips jerk.

His ventilations stuttered. The fire in his array built into a slow crescendo. His armor rattled. He lost all sense of focus on anything but the mouth between his thighs, licking him open, licking him to overload.

Charge crackled in his lines, seared through his sensory net. His spark throbbed until he felt like it matched the rhythm of Starscream’s glossa, licking, licking, lapping, suckling. Denta got involved, nipping at Blurr’s nub, pressing it between and bearing down just to the point of pain.

Blurr hissed air through his intake, backstrut bowing as his processor briefly whited out from ecstasy. He shook, moaning, thighs trembling around Starscream’s helm. His hips moved of their own accord, riding the motions of Starscream’s mouth, his calipers twitching restlessly. The need for something to fill him clawed through his array, but the inferno focused around his node built and built.

It was so much. It was too good.

He released the berth and threw his arms over his face, hiding his desperation. He couldn’t let Starscream know how much he needed it, how much he craved it. How he’d do anything so long as Starscream never stopped, so long as he kept suckling on Blurr’s node, sucking on the bottom curve of Blurr’s rim, and lapping at his outer lips and licking inward, licking deep, so deep.

Blurr’s engine roared. Something ignited deep within him, a roar of pleasure that drowned out all else. He bucked in Starscream’s hold as overload snatched him up, shook him senseless, and left him muffling his cries into the concealment of his arms. He twisted and writhed, kept pinned by Starscream’s grip alone, pulsing wave after wave of lubricant from his valve.

Starscream slurped it all, nuzzling Blurr’s array with nothing short of care, until he drew back with a parting kiss. Blurr’s valve throbbed, his calipers click-click-clicking in a restless request for more.

His thighs shook. He moaned piteously, arms sliding away from his face, vision dim and distorted. He felt the berth shift, felt Starscream pull away, and conscious thought abandoned him.

“Two,” Starscream said, distantly, through the static in Blurr’s audials.

He pawed at Starscream, and his backstrut arched as two fingers slid into his valve, finally giving him the sensation he craved. His hips bucked – free now – and his calipers cycled down tightly on the digits. They rippled, trying to urge Starscream’s fingers deeper, and he all but sobbed as a third finger slid in beside them.

They pushed deep, curved and twisted, rubbing against every internal sensor within reach. Blurr’s pedes dug into the berth as he worked his hips, riding the motion of Starscream’s fingers, and another sharp cry escaped him when Starscream’s palm pressed against his exterior node.
He clutched at Starscream’s shoulders, entire frame trembling, pleasure pulsing hard through him. The last vestiges of his second overload screeched from a cycle down and did an about face, surging back toward ecstasy again.

He didn’t realize he was wailing until Starscream’s mouth fell over his, lips and denta and glossa muffling his cries. He gave himself to the kiss, the sweet buzz in his backstrut stripping away his senses. He tasted himself on Starscream’s glossa and writhed beneath Starscream, thighs snapping together, trapping Starscream’s wrist and arm between them.

Starscream had no choice but to frag Blurr with his fingers, palm rubbing a steady pressure on Blurr’s anterior node. Heat blazed in his array, narrowing down to that point of rapture. He panted into the kiss, making needy noises, his optics shuttered tight. His engine roared.

His hips bucked again.

Starscream pushed deep, his middle fingertip just barely brushing Blurr’s ceiling node. Blurr’s helm tossed back, heelstruts slamming into the berth as he shattered again, his spike spurting a second time without touch as his valve spiraled down tight, milking Starscream’s fingers for the receptor nodes he didn’t have.

Sound rushed out. His vents roared. Lubricant soaked his aft, the berth, and still his valve spasmed. Still overload rushed through his lines, crackling out from his substructure in a bright release of charge. His cooling fans whirred madly. His engine reached a high pitch, until he fell back to the berth, limp and sated.

Blurr panted, every vent open, condensation painting his lower half. His thoughts spun, his sensory suites struggling to reboot. He made low noises in his intake, his hands trembling where they gripped Starscream’s shoulders. He shook as Starscream’s fingers gently stroked the inside of his valve, easing him through the last ripples of overload.

He realized, dimly, that Starscream had pressed his face into the side of Blurr’s helm and was nibbling on his upper vents.

Blurr’s hands peeled free of Starscream’s shoulders and gripped Starscream’s helm. He pulled Starscream’s mouth to his, humming into the kiss as it turned slow and savoring, the gentle tangle of glossa together. His thighs eased, freeing Starscream’s hand, which removed itself to rest damply on Blurr’s thigh.

Starscream pulled back from the kiss, his lips slightly curved. “Better?” he asked.

It took Blurr two tries to reboot his vocalizer. “The charge is gone,” he rasped. “So yeah. Better.”

“Good.” Starscream’s hand patted his thigh. His optics were bright, his field warm as it pulsed against Blurr’s own.

Blurr dropped his hands from Starscream’s helm, returning them to Starscream’s shoulders. “What about you?”

“What about me?” Starscream’s hand stroked down Blurr’s thigh, to his knee, before it removed itself. “You need to recharge.”

“But--”
Starscream kissed him again, slow and savoring. A low sound rose in Starscream’s intake, one of pleasure, as he kissed Blurr like a lover might. Soft and sweet.

Well. All right then.

Blurr sighed into the kiss, and refused to admit he was disappointed when Starscream drew back. Instead, he curled onto his side, his good hip, the low throb of satisfaction pulsing through his lines. He had Starscream at his back, and there was something about the warmth of him that was comforting.

Blurr was too pleasure-drunk to pick apart why.

He was a mess. They both were. But Blurr didn’t want to move. Satisfaction hummed in his lines. Except for his hip. It still throbbed. Primus be damned.

“You need a pain patch,” Starscream murmured.

“Don’t want one,” Blurr replied.

Starscream hissed a sigh and then the berth shifted. Fingers enclosed Blurr’s right wrist, two tapping at his medical data port.

“Open,” Starscream demanded.

“No.”

His fingers pressed harder. “Open, Blurr. You won’t get any recharge if you hurt, and your self-repair won’t function properly if you don’t recharge.” There was a beat, a moment where Starscream waited, only for him to add, “Please.”

Damn him.

Blurr pressed his lips together and sent the command. His port cover slid aside, and Starscream was already ready. A flick of his fingertip popped out the expended pain chip, and he slid a new one into place. Within moments, the pain eased and Blurr ex-vented a tension he didn’t realize he carried.

“I hate you,” he grumbled as the fog came with the relief.

Starscream let go of his wrist, his hand moving to rest on Blurr’s hip. “I know. Go to recharge anyway.”

Blurr grumbled subvocally, but the pull of the chip was too strong. That coupled with the multiple overloads, and he drifted off to recharge.

***
Starscream had not planned for this. Neither had Blurr.

Blurr recharged.

Starscream didn’t dare.

He lay there, the Racer curled in his arms, occasional tremors wracking blue plating. Heat still wafted from Blurr in waves. Starscream tasted Blurr on his lips.

For once, Starscream’s thoughts were still. Silent. He pursed his lips together, his spark the maelstrom, rather than his processor.

He… had not planned for any of this.

Blurr let out a soft sigh. His face smoothed over, the tension easing out of his frame. His systems audibly cycled quieter, down into a deeper layer of recharge. The rest of those who felt safe.

Safe.

Starscream’s lips firmed a thin line. His spark warbled again.

He gently worked his way free of their embrace, and eased off the berth. Blurr did not so much as twitch, though he made a low sound in his intake. His field hummed, stuck to Starscream’s own like glue.

Starscream moved away from the berth, the edges of their fields stretching together where they joined. It was an almost physical feeling as they came apart, string by string, until the last tendril dropped away, and Starscream was free.

And shaking.

Starscream backed out of the berthroom, though he left the door open. He told himself it was for security reasons. It wasn’t because he wanted to know if Blurr needed him.

Primus save him.

Starscream went straight into the storage room, dug into the back of the lowest cabinet, and pulled out a small decanter of engex. It was powerful, and bitter, the strongest high grade he had on hand.

He poured half the decanter into a tall, thin flute. He took a swig from the decanter itself, grimacing as it burned on the way down, before he replaced the cap and returned the engex to its hiding place.
He grabbed the flute and returned to the main room, sending the command to turn off the lights as he did so, until the entirety of his flat was bathed in shadows. He passed the berthonium, where only Blurr’s barely-glowing biolights lit the dim.

He didn’t want to sit. He ignored every plush chair and couch. He had no desire for noise. He ignored the fine entertainment center he’d had installed, and now couldn’t remember if he’d ever even turned it on.

He moved to the window. All of New Iacon – rebuilt and still in ruins – stretched out in front of him. The sky was dark as always, but lights gamely flickered from the many residential and businesses that had cropped up in the wake of Cybertron’s quote-unquote rebirth. He could see, from here, the remains of Maccadam’s, and the lurid splash of graffiti painted on the building next to it. Obsidian – claiming his terrorism.

There weren’t as many mecha in the streets as there were during the agreed-upon daycycle, but there were still some. From this high up, Starscream could only make out vague shapes, traveling together in small groups for the most part. This far, he couldn’t see badges or the lack thereof.

He sipped at his high grade. He pretended he didn’t notice how his fingers trembled. He concentrated on the burn of the engex in his tank. It didn’t even qualify as fuel.

His optics dimmed. His spark gave a tremor. His thoughts were still, while the rest was a storm.

This wasn’t part of the plan at all.

His comm pinged. This late, it could only mean one thing.

Starscream lowered the cube and accepted the comm. “Go ahead.”

“Figured ya wouldn’t be sleepin’.” Jazz’s voice poured into his audial, ripe with amusement. “Got some good ‘n bad news.”

Starscream shifted his weight. “I’m not surprised.”

Jazz chuckled. “Yeah. Anyway, I chatted with the ‘Bots, and they ain’t budgin’, despite my best efforts. They want ya to come to them. Ya want their help, they wanna hear it from you.”

Starscream suspected that would be the case. He would have contacted them on his own if he thought there was a chance in the Pit they’d accept his comm in the first place. He needed Jazz to get through the last barrier, though he’d hoped having Jazz make first contact might grease the wheels, so to speak.

Clearly, he’d overestimated their affection for Jazz.

“Set it up then,” Starscream said. “I’ll be there.”

“Wow. Without an argument and everythin’.” Jazz whistled into the comm, though how he effected such a noise, Starscream didn’t know. “What’s wrong, Screamer? Not in the mood to play games?”

“Don’t call me that.”

Jazz outright laughed. “Ooo, somethin’ is wrong.” Some of the mirth faded from his tone. “When
I come back, I better find my boss alive and well.”

“Blurr is fine,” Starscream snapped, his wings raising high and arched behind him.

He cycled a ventilation and gritted his denta. “Nothing’s wrong, you nosy little spy. I’ve had a long day, and it’s late.”

“Sure, sure. Whatever ya say.” Jazz didn’t sound the least bit convinced. “Get some rest then, Screamer. Don’t want ya collapsin’ and leavin’ Cybertron without leadership.”

“Perish the thought,” Starscream drawled and closed the comm.

Silence wrapped around him again. He cycled several ventilations, grasping for a calm he hadn’t had to start with.

He sipped at his engex again, indulging in the burn. He focused on the fire that spilled down his intake and simmered in his tanks. He grounded himself in the sensation, while he counted the throbs of his spark.

He finished the last of the high grade and returned the glass to the storage room. It took all he had not to pull out the bottle and finish the rest. He might need it later. Waste not, want not. The heat in his tank spread through his frame in a slow and steady burn.

He felt wobbly. It was better than the storm.

Time for recharge.

Starscream lurched back toward the berthroom, but he hesitated at actually entering. Instead, he lingered in the doorway. That was his berth and by rights, he should be recharging in it. The plushness was at the perfect level. There was room enough for his wings. It was the perfect height off the ground.

That was his berth.

But Blurr was in it. Blurr curled on his side, one arm reaching for the empty space Starscream had abandoned. His face was relaxed, safe in recharge. His engine was still, but the quiet noises of a mech in recharge were still audible.

Starscream wanted nothing more than to climb back into that empty space, wrap himself around warm blue armor, and return to recharge.

It was a trap.

It wasn’t part of the plan.

Starscream made himself turn away. He went back to the main room. The couch wasn’t comfortable, but it wasn’t a torture device either. It would suffice for now. It was a small price to pay.

He couldn’t afford to fall into the trap. He couldn’t afford to be that foolish again.

~
Blurr woke muzzily, a chill encompassing his armor, and a tackiness between his thighs. Memories returned slowly, replacing some of the chill with the slow throb of heat.

Starscream had… well, Starscream had brought him to three dizzying overloads, asked for nothing in return, and then apparently left him to recharge alone on the berth.

Blurr frowned. What in the world did that mean?

He sat up, wincing a little as his sore hip protested. But it wasn’t the jagged pain of yesterday. It was tolerable.

He popped his wrist port and flicked out the used pain chip. If he could get away with it, he wouldn’t use another. He hated them. Never mind that the one from last night had given him restful recharge. He still loathed them.

Blurr eased off the berth, tentatively taking a few steps around the berthroom. He limped a little, but not as bad as yesterday. So long as he didn’t get too excited and expend too much effort, he shouldn’t start hurting again. That meant he couldn’t go looking for a new location for Maccadam’s.

Damn.

Well, he could wait another day if it meant he wouldn’t have to suffer another pain patch.

Twisting to ease a kink in his lower back, Blurr groaned. His tank gurgled at him. Time to refuel and greet the day with whatever good nature he could find lying around. He wasn’t feeling all that charitable at the moment.

The door to the berthroom was still open. Blurr blinked. Maybe Starscream had simply woken before him then? Though it was odd he would leave it open.

Blurr inched into the main room which was dim and quiet. None of the lights were activated, so Blurr sent the command for half-power. He didn’t want to blind himself.

Shadows clarified into shapes and furniture, including the couch. Said futon was occupied by none other than Starscream himself, awkwardly contorted into the small space as he lay on his belly. His pedes hung off one end, and his arm hung over the edge. His wings folded oddly against his back, his face buried in a pillow.

He looked uncomfortable. Why in the world was he recharging on the couch? There was plenty of room on the berth.

Blurr frowned and approached the couch. Starscream’s frame twitched in arrhythmic intervals. His vents were shallow, his faceplate creased with discomfort. That could not have resulted in a peaceful recharge.

Seekers were weird.

“Starscream, wake up,” Blurr said, though he was careful not to bark too loudly. He’d learned his lessons about warbuilds.
It didn’t matter how much “peace” there was; warbuilds always onlined ready to fight. Starscream was no exception. Blurr couldn’t blame him, given that he’d been a Decepticon for so long. He’d heard rumors, too, about Starscream and Megatron. If even half of it was true, well, some of Starscream’s waspishness could be explained.

Starscream’s optics unshuttered, dimly onlining. He stirred, wings twitching on his back. “Hm?”

“Wake up,” Blurr said, a bit louder this time. “Why are you on the couch anyway?”

The Seeker fully onlined and pushed himself upright, a low groan escaping his lips as he did so. “You needed space,” he said as he dragged himself into a seated position with a wince. One hand rubbed at the back of his neck.

Blurr frowned. “That berth is more than big enough for both of us.”

“Didn’t want to bump your hip then,” Starscream replied and rolled his shoulders, his wings flicking in various directions. His optics fully lit and he peered up at Blurr. “Feeling better?”

“I’ll live.” Blurr spun on a heelstrut and headed to the storage room.

If Starscream was going to sit there and lie to him, he would go get energon. He reminded himself again that he was here of his own volition. That he’d chosen this. He had only himself to blame.

He dug into the cabinets for a cube of his own and after a moment of debate, something for Starscream as well. Even though the lying liar didn’t deserve it. He shoved the cabinets shut, rattling something on the counter.

It was a glass, one of the expensive looking ones that mechs like Mirage favored when they came to his bar. It hadn’t been out yesterday.

Blurr’s optics narrowed. He gave it a sniff, his nasal sensors burning. Ugh. It smelled like organic perfume. What kind of toxic sludge had Starscream been drinking? Was this from last night? Had Starscream gotten out of the berth and drunk high grade until he passed out on the couch?

Blurr frowned.

He juggled the energon and returned to the main room. Starscream looked a bit more alert now, though he grimaced as he rubbed at his lower back.

“Should’ve slept in the berth,” Blurr said as he handed Starscream the energon he’d gathered.

“I’ll see about getting another one,” Starscream replied. He blinked at the cube before he accepted it. “Thanks.”

Blurr shrugged. “I was there already.” He lowered himself carefully into a chair and sipped at his energon. “What do you need another berth for? It’s not like I’m going to be here forever.”

“Because sleeping on that couch is tantamount to torture and I would not wish that ill on anyone.” Starscream grimaced.

Blurr rolled his optics. “You’re such a drama queen, Star. Just sleep on the damn berth. We can both fit.”
Starscream focused on his energon as though he hadn’t heard anything Blurr said. “I have a meeting this morning,” he said instead. “And since you asked for transparency, I will tell you it is with some mechs who I hope will be allies in the fight against Obsidian.”

Blurr sat up straighter. “Who?”

“Bumblebee and the Autobots,” Starscream admitted, and it was with a little sigh. He shifted on the couch, rapping the fingers of his free hand on the cushion. “Yes, I am that desperate.”

It was Blurr’s turn to grimace. Starscream must be desperate if he intended to go crawling to Bumblebee for help. The same mechs he’d exiled to live out in the dangerous wilds.

“I’ll come with you,” Blurr said. He finished the rest of his energon in two quick gulps and tossed the cube onto the low table in the middle. “Maybe I can convince him to help.”

Starscream shook his helm. “No. Jazz has already done that groundwork. I have to convince them on my own or it’s pointless.” He held up a hand before Blurr could voice the protest forming on his lips. “This, Blurr, is not up for debate. I told you because we are allies. You are not coming because I am Cybertron’s leader.”

Blurr pressed his lips together.

There was a distinction there. It was a fine one, so thin as to be transparent, but it was there.

Fine. Blurr didn’t like it, but he’d obey. He sat back on his chair.

“What am I supposed to do then?” he demanded.

Starscream arched an orbital ridge. “Here’s a wild idea,” he drawled. “Why don’t you rest so your self-repair can actually get to work.”

As much as Blurr wanted to argue otherwise, maybe Starscream had a point. He would heal faster if he stayed off his hip instead of aggravating the joint. Besides, with Starscream gone, Blurr could indulge in the washrack and take as long as he wanted. He was painfully aware of the mess between his thighs, and come to think of it, on the berth, too.

“You’ll tell me exactly what the Autobots said?” Blurr asked.

Starscream finished off his cube and set it on the table. “Of course.” He rose to his pedes, rolling his frame into a long stretch. “We are allies, aren’t we?”

“So glad you finally noticed.”

Starscream chuckled. “I was the one who asked, if you’ll recall.” He stepped around the table and headed for the door. “I’ll be back late probably. If you need me, ping my comm.”

Blurr made a non-committal noise. He watched Starscream go, unsure what to call the twisting, curling around his spark, save that it was there, and it was disconcerting.

The door beeped as it locked behind Starscream, leaving him in stillness and silence, alone in Starscream’s penthouse suite, with lubricant tacky between his thighs.

Blurr cycled a ventilation and scrubbed a hand down his faceplate.
Primus save him.

***
Starscream makes a deal with Bumblebee and the Autobots. Blurr stumbles upon one of Starscream’s secrets.

Jazz kept to the shadows, an action which did not endear him to Starscream. Though part of him was grateful. At least if he was creeping about in the dim, he wasn’t poking Starscream with innumerable, incisive questions. Or offering that enigmatic, cutting smirk.

Slipping out of Iacon unseen was not the difficult part. Though it reminded Starscream that security was lacking in his city. They had no guard, no watchful optics, nothing to serve as advanced warning of an attack.

He would have to attend to that. But later.

Jazz arranged for him to meet with the Autobots within optic-sight of the new settlement, though not so close the casual observer would spot them. A hollowed out building served for cover, concealing them from prying optics.

Starscream expected one, perhaps two Autobots, including Jazz. However, he found three waiting for him in the building, and just beyond the rise, he detected the presence of six more sparks. Starlight occasionally glinted off bright green and purple armor, which was unsurprising considering Prowl was one of the three Autobots waiting within.

Starscream folded his arms over his cockpit. “I’m feeling more than a little outnumbered,” he muttered as he lifted his gaze, checking the rafters for more Autobots. Nothing but dust and ironspider webs up there.

Still. That didn’t mean there weren’t any spies hiding in the dark. Jazz, after all, would have been invisible in the dim.

Prowl, behind Mirage and Bumblebee both, sneered. “Get over it.”

“Right,” Starscream drawled. “I’ll get right on that.”

“Starscream, don’t start,” Bumblebee said with an audible sigh. He rubbed at his face, his very different face. Someone had gotten a makeover. “What do you want?”

Starscream held his wings in check. He didn’t want their twitching to betray his unease. “There’re vermin infesting my city, and you’re the closest thing I have to an exterminator.”

Bumblebee’s expression softened. Well, what of it Starscream could see. He had a mouthplate now. It left him looking less friendly.

“Yes. We heard of the explosion. And about Skybyte,” Bumblebee said. At least there was genuine regret in his tone. That made Mirage and Prowl’s scrutiny easier to bear.
Jazz, unsurprisingly, had vanished the moment he’d shown Starscream to the rundown building.

“Who is to blame?” Prowl demanded, more aggressive than Starscream would have expected. In fact, his plating flickered and flared, his field surging with irritation.

Starscream ground his denta. He reserved most of his loathing for Megatron, but damn if there weren’t times he had some to spare for Prowl. He and the tactician occupied the same position, just on opposite sides, and the difference in their respective treatment had always been a source of contention for Starscream.

“Obsidian and Strika are claiming responsibility,” Starscream gritted out. “I’m sure those designations are familiar to you.”

Prowl’s optics flashed. Oh yes, he knew those designations.

Bumblebee’s optics darkened, however. “I don’t recognize them.”

“They are fanatics. Worse than Megatron ever was. They are loyal to no faction, and they will not listen to reason,” Prowl said stiffly.

Starscream inclined his helm. “Precisely. And they are currently hiding somewhere in the maze of tunnels beneath New Iacon. They also have allies, spies, and there is no way to know who they are.”

Mirage stirred at last. “I am failing to see where this is our problem,” he said, his voice as warm as a tank of liquid nitrogen.

Starscream tried not to hate him.

“Because once Obsidian’s done laying waste to me and mine, he’ll come after you and yours,” Starscream replied with an even stare. “His goal isn’t to simply oust me, but to destroy me and everything I stand for.”

“Including the effort to unite Cybertron,” Bumblebee guessed shrewdly.

Starscream lifted his chin. “Naturally.” He dropped his hands and rested one on his hip. “I’ve no doubt he’ll make an offer for the citizenry at large to join him. Just as I’ve no doubt there are many who’ll say yes if only to keep themselves safe.”

“Then that brings us back to the question at hand,” Prowl said, stepping up until he nearly touched Bumblebee’s backplate. “What do you want, Starscream?”

Starscream huffed a ventilation. “Obviously, I’m a little understaffed at the moment. Meanwhile, you’ve got spies and assassins aplenty.”

Arcee wasn’t here, which was a pity. Starscream could really use her assistance. And he had the feeling she’d be more reasonable than these three.

“You have a spy,” Mirage said.

“Rattrap doesn’t count,” Starscream retorted, rolling his optics. “All he got me was a name. He can’t find Obsidian, which means he’s not doing any good. I’m running out of time. I know
Obsidian is going to strike again, and I refuse to let that happen.”

Prowl’s optics narrowed.

But it was the way Bumblebee tilted his helm and looked at Starscream that was the most disconcerting. “How is Blurr?”

Starscream cycled his optics, and found himself taking an unconscious step backward. “Fine,” he snapped. “Healing. I fail to see how that’s relevant.”

“He is an Autobot,” Bumblebee said.

“He is not,” Starscream hissed, and curse them all, but there his wings went, hiking upward. His armor flared, and he had to fight to get it back down. “Now are you going to help me or not?”

Mirage shifted his weight, and though he was shorter, Starscream had the impression he looked down his nasal ridge. “I’m tempted, if only because you must be desperate to actually come to those you exiled for help.”

“Speaking of which,” Prowl added with an aggressive fluff of his armor, “We’re not helping you only to be left scrabbling to survive out here.”

Starscream dropped his hand. “I can’t simply let you come back to Iacon en masse. I would lose what standing I’ve gained with my citizens.”

“Your citizens.” Mirage snorted.

“We don’t need more riots,” Bumblebee said, though Starscream wasn’t sure he could call it agreement. “However, I do agree with Prowl. You can’t come to us and demand help without offering anything in return.”

Starscream grumbled internally. “I’m prepared to offer sanctuary to some of your soldiers,” he said, refusing to hide his reluctance. “But Prowl and his pet Constructicons can’t be among them.”

“They are not my pets!” Prowl hissed.

Bumblebee half-turned, resting a hand on Prowl’s shoulder. “Don’t let him provoke you,” he said. “Besides, he is right.” He gave Starscream a sidelong look. “Myself, Prowl, the Constructicons, and Arcee will temporarily remain out here until tensions are smoothed over. The others are to be allowed back into Iacon.”

Starscream nibbled on his bottom lip. That… could actually work. If he allowed the Autobots back in small groups over a week’s time, especially once Obsidian was handled, he was sure he could sway the populace to accepting it. They would have to play repentant, and marginally obedient, but it could work.

“Fine,” he said. “But on my terms. I can’t have a mass influx into my city, or everyone is going to assume it’s an invasion.”

“Fair enough. You can coordinate with Prowl,” Bumblebee said.

Oh, wouldn’t that be fun? If the lasers shooting from Prowl’s optics were any indication, Starscream was going to have the time of his life.
He stared at Bumblebee. “You’re being unexpectedly reasonable about this.”

“It’s our planet, too,” Bumblebee said, before he turned to Mirage. “Are you willing to assist Starscream?”

The prissy noble folded his arms. He gave Starscream a once-over, assessing and dismissing all at once. “Sure,” he said, and his lip curled into a smirk. “It’ll be interesting to see what I actually find.”

A shiver tapped down Starscream’s backstrut. He started to wonder if maybe, contacting Soundwave first might have been the better course of action after all.

~

His first order of instance was to get clean.

Blurr made a beeline for the washracks and sighed with relief as he stood under the hot solvent. It seeped beneath his armor, against his cables, as steam filled the narrow ‘rack around him. Starscream had it fully stocked with the good stuff, so Blurr took his time.

He scrubbed every nook and cranny. He cataloged scrapes and scratches and places where he’d have to involve a dent-puller. It felt weird to have the solvent spray hit his back, a reminder that he didn’t have his boosters.

Something else to add to the list.

His processor was blissfully calm for once, instead of running crazy circles. Blurr lingered in the rack a little longer than was necessary before he powered down the sprayer and quickly towed himself off. He gave himself a critical look in the mirror – scrapes and dings accounted for, to be tended later, but he was clean enough.

Blurr wandered back into the main room and turned in a slow circle. He couldn’t return to the berth and recharge the cycle away. That was impossible. Neither could he sit and read a datapad or something equally sedentary. He had to be moving.

The apartment was a mess.

Blurr frowned. He wasn’t a janitor, and he certainly wasn’t Starscream’s cleaning service, but if he was going to be living here, he’d rather it be tidy. Less places for potential assassins to hide for one thing.

Blurr started to clean, and tried not to think too closely about what he was doing. He tidied up the main room, tossing empty cubes into a recycle bin, stacking scattered datapads, pushing random piles of junk into one large pile into the corner.

He straightened the supply room, rinsed out Starscream’s used glass, and found the bottle of ultra-high grade when he organized the bottles of energon and coolant. It must have been what Starscream was drinking, an assumption he confirmed when he gave it a whiff. Primus, but it was awful.
Blurr shoved it to the back of the cabinet. He treated himself to a small serving of coolant – he was running a little hot – and returned to the main room. He planted his hands on his hips as he surveyed his work, feeling a lot less twitchy now that everything was clean. Though the windows remained atrocious.

Frag that. Blurr did not do windows.

He went into the berthroom instead. Here he stripped the berth of the soiled covers and replaced them with fresh ones he found stuffed into a nearby trunk. He refused to dust, but he did pick up some of the random junk from around the room and shove it into a cabinet. Out of sight, out of mind.

He gathered the dirtied covers, unsure what to do with them. Had there been a cleaning station in the storage room? Maybe.

Blurr went back into the main room with his armload of sheets.

“What a good little housemech ya make.”

Blurr startled, sheets dropping from his arms as he whirled toward the voice, his spark leaping into his intake. It didn’t matter that it was only Rattrap, leaning casually against the wall near the entrance. How the frag was he getting in here all the time? Did Starscream know he had an infestation problem?

“Wow. Jumpy much?” Starscream’s little spy said with a big smirk. His pseudo-tail twitched behind him, his grin much like a turbofox that caught the metallocanary.

Blurr scowled. “What the frag are you doing here?” he demanded as he crouched to gather up the sheets. “Starscream isn’t here.”

“Oh, I realize that now.” Rattrap drawled. His tilted his helm from one side to the other. “But since you and him ‘re perty much the same now, I figured ya’d know where I can find him.”

Blurr snorted. “I don’t.” He edged into the storage room and tossed the dirtied covers in the general direction of what he thought was the cleaning station before he returned to the main room.

Rattrap lingered. “Pity. And here I have news and everythin’,” he said, and gave Blurr a long, long look which hinted to the crafty mind behind the stench. “Ya look nice and comfortable here, doncha?”

Blurr planted his hands on his hips. “What’s it to you if I am?”

“Nothin’, Nothin’ at all.” Rattrap pushed off the wall, his smirk widening. “I ain’t gotta join the chorus o’ mechs tellin’ ya to be careful, right? Ya already knew that.”

“You’re telling me to be careful?”

Rattrap had the audacity to laugh, a raspy sound that grated on Blurr’s audials. “I’m his spy, not his lover. It’s debatable which one’s safer.”

His spy.

Blurr was, at once, struck with an idea. He crossed his arms over his chassis. “Then tell me
something.”

Rattrap gave him an askance look. “Mebbe I will, mebbe I won’t.”

Blurr cycled a ventilation, clinging to patience with a fierce tenacity. “There’s a mech in Starscream’s entourage. Name’s Fasttrack.” This little mystery had been nagging at him for weeks. It was past time he addressed it.

“Oh? Ya jealous?”

“It isn’t like that,” Blurr snapped, his engine revving. “He’s supposed to be dead!”

Rattrap shrugged. “Lotta people are. And lotta people aren’t who used they used ta be anymore. It happens.”

Because all the best names were taken. Yes, Blurr knew. He’d considered, on numerous occasions, that this Fasttrack was just a mech. Maybe a Neutral, maybe a former Con. Maybe even an Autobot. Maybe he was someone who wanted to start over with a new name, and knew Fasttrack was dead. Maybe he didn’t even know a real Fasttrack ever existed.

Maybe, maybe, maybe.

But it was a pretty unlikely coincidence, wasn’t it?

“You know anything about him?” Blurr asked.

“Nope.” Rattrap bounced the word in his vocalizer, something in his expression sly. He tapped his chin with clawed fingers. “Buuuuuut, I can have a looksee if ya want.”

Blurr gave him an askance look. “Why?”

“Yer Starscream’s now. One and the same.” Rattrap shrugged, though it was far from dismissive, and spun on a heelstrut. He waved a hand over his shoulder. “Though I’d be cautious about trustin’ him. If ya don’t believe me, ya should have a look at what’s in his basement.”

“What do you mean?” Blurr demanded. Something cold dripped into his spark, a little drop of common sense that screamed I knew it!

“See fer yerself.” Rattrap’s fingers glided over the control panel, the door opening for him without so much as a protest. “But ya have a visitor. Might want to take care of that first.”

Rattrap vanished out the door as the panel buzzed. Blurr almost startled again, despite Rattrap’s warning. He stormed toward the panel as Swindle’s voice poured through the speaker.

“Blurr! My best and favorite customer!” The sleazy sales mech sounded far too chipper. “You gonna leave me standing out here all day or can I come up and check out your new digs?”

Blurr pressed a finger to the panel. His optics narrowed. “I’ll come down to you.”

“Now that’s just no fun at all.”

Blurr ignored him. The door opened for him automatically, and he stepped into the main corridor. Rattrap was already gone, and the lift waited for Blurr, so he hadn’t taken it.
Maybe Blurr didn’t want to know how the smelly spy got around.

Blurr selected the ground floor, and examined the buttons as the doors closed and the lift started to descend. Rattrap’s warning lingered. Except that Blurr didn’t even see an option for a basement level. He knew, from a few days ago, that the lift didn’t stop at certain floors. He would have to ask Starscream why.

Nothing indicated the presence of a basement. There was, however, a field scanner.

Curious.

The lift beeped and deposited him on the ground floor. Blurr’s limp was barely present as he wove through the dim toward the front, where he could make out the shadow of Swindle’s frame through the glassed double-doors.

The moment he opened them, Swindle came strolling inside as though he owned the place. His field preceded him, bright and bubbly, and he threw his hands into the air in a grand gesture.

“Blurr!” His smile was large, wide, practiced. It reminded him, in fact, of Starscream’s politician grin. “Look at you! The picture of recovery.”

Blurr’s optics narrowed. He folded his arms across his abdomen. “What do you want, Swindle?”

The conmech dropped his hands and planted them on his hips. “Now. Is that any way to treat an old friend? Can’t I just drop by because I’m concerned about you?” He tilted his helm, purple visor flashing. “Starscream’s had you sequestered up in here in this tower, after all.”

Blurr arched an orbital ridge. “I was at the conference yesterday.”


“I don’t have a bar anymore, Swindle. The answer to that should be pretty clear.” And yes, thank you for the reminder. It was what he needed. To remember that his livelihood, his peace, his future – it was all nothing more than ashes, debris, and pain.

“Blurr. Sweetspark. My favorite customer. When has a little thing like an explosion kept a businessmech from being in business, hm?” Swindle sashayed forward, his hands making quick gestures. “You should see this as an opportunity! A chance to go bigger, bolder, better.” He waved to the vague ceiling. “I’m seeing lights. A stage. Multiple bars. A trading post even.”

Blurr wasn’t sure if he was supposed to be amused or annoyed. He settled for a little of both. “I don’t have the credits for half that.”

Swindle slung an arm over his shoulder and poked him in the side. “You do if I put up the other capital.”

Blurr twisted out from under Swindle’s arm, giving his armor a shake. “And why would I let you do that? I look away once, and you’d cut ownership out from under me.”

“I wouldn’t do that.” Swindle gasped theatrically, clutching at his chestplate. “I can’t believe you’d say such things about me.”
Blurr rubbed at his forehelm. His hip didn’t hurt, but frag if an ache wasn’t building in his processor. “Swin, what is this really about?”

“Blurr, sweetspark, the only thing I’m ever about is credits, and lots of ‘em.” Swindle paused however, and peered at him. “You’re looking a little strained, Blurr. Starscream got you on a tight leash?”

His armor fluffed before he could stop himself. Anger rose to the forefront, above the amusement. “He doesn’t have me on any kind of leash!”

“Really?” Swindle tilted his helm, lips pulled into a slow smirk. “That sounded defensive.” He pointed toward Blurr. “And you’re getting pretty agitated there.” He paused and tapped two fingers against his lips. “Hmm. Can’t race. Can’t run. Can’t even spar, I’ll bet. Need some help handling that charge?”

The dull ache turned into a throb Blurr couldn’t ignore. He groaned. He and Swindle had never shared a berth, not for lack of trying on Swindle’s part. This was obviously neither the time nor the place for Swindle to make yet another pointless overture, yet here he was.

Swindle was up to something. Blurr just wished he could read between the lines to figure out what it was.

“No, thanks.”

Swindle chuckled. “Yeah, Starscream probably has that well in hand. Wouldn’t want to encroach.” He paused and laughed a little harder. “Never had my optics clawed out by a Seeker before. Not an experience I’d care to have.”

Blurr rubbed at his forehelm. “Is there a point to this or are you just here to waste my time?”

“No, thanks.”

Swindle chuckled. “Yeah, Starscream probably has that well in hand. Wouldn’t want to encroach.” He paused and laughed a little harder. “Never had my optics clawed out by a Seeker before. Not an experience I’d care to have.”

Blurr rubbed at his forehelm. “Is there a point to this or are you just here to waste my time?”

“Of course there is. We should be business partners, you ‘n me. Together, I think we can help breathe some spark into this economy, doncha think?” Swindle made broad gestures, his animated frame language as much a show as that politician’s grin. “I mean, we don’t have to be partners like you and Starscream, but partners all the same.”

Even in the height of his racing days, Blurr could not remember a time he was as popular in the way he was now. First Starscream, now Swindle. What did they honestly think he had to offer? Was he that much of a trophy?

Blurr frowned. He took another step back from Swindle. “I can’t think about that right now. In case you haven’t noticed, there’s a terrorist trying to destroy Cybertron.”

“There’s always a terrorist trying to kill everyone,” Swindle retorted with a flash of his visor. “If it’s not this mystery mech Starscream claims exists, then it’s Megatron who, by the way, your Seeker lover used to serve.”

Blurr cycled a ventilation. “He’s not my lover,” he said, and then shook his helm. “The point is, I can’t think about rebuilding yet. Not until I have Obsidian where he belongs.”

“Obsidian, hm? Is that his name?” Blurr didn’t know Swindle’s smile could get any larger, until it did. “I had my suspicions.”
Primus damn it. Frag, but Blurr hated Swindle sometimes.

Blurr’s engine growled. “Out.”

Swindle had the gall to look offended. “Well, that’s rather rude. Here I am trying to be generous, help you get back on your pedes, and you’re throwing me out on my aft.”

“Because you weren’t interested in helping me, you just wanted information.” Blurr grabbed Swindle by the elbow and ushered him to the door. “There. You got your information. Now you can stop pretending you care and leave.”

Swindle didn’t fight him at least. “I meant what I said. We should go into business together.”

“I’m not interested.”

The door opened and Blurr all but shoved Swindle onto the other side of it.

“Is that because Starscream doesn’t want you to be?” Swindle asked.

Blurr slammed his fist into the panel, closing it on Swindle’s question. That might have just been a very poor decision. Swindle was his only supplier, after all. But if he never managed to rebuild Maccadams, he supposed it wouldn’t matter.

Besides, Swindle was easily swayed by credits. He’d forgive anything and everything if you waved enough under his nasal ridge.

Blurr did not like being played.

He huffed a ventilation and stalked back toward the lift. He didn’t have to look to know that Swindle didn’t linger. Why would he? He’d gotten what he wanted. Blurr had no idea what Swindle was going to do with the information.

Sell it to the highest bidder probably. Fantastic.

Blurr growled subvocally and stomped into the lift. He made to punch the button for the penthouse, but hesitated. The field scanner was right there. Rattrap indicated Starscream was hiding something in the basement.

Blurr did not like being lied to either.

He refused to sit up in that penthouse like some housemech waiting for their master to come home. Frag that.

He shoved his hand into the scanner, felt the prickle of the ion field as it washed over his plating. He half-expected to be denied. But just like the security protocols above, this one accepted him. There was a confirming beep before the doors closed, and the lift descended.

Blurr claimed his hand and waited, spark thumping in his chassis. He was half afraid of what he would find. He didn’t know what to expect. What could Starscream possibly be hiding down here? What dark secret would he find?

The lift donged and the doors opened. Just beyond was a dark room, dimly lit on the far end. He couldn’t make out anything but vague shapes. It was quiet, save for the steady hum of some
distant machinery.

Blurr cycled a ventilation and stepped out of the lift. A quick scan informed him he was in an open space, though one filled with boxes and crates. He clicked on his headlights and moved to the nearest one, prying up the lid. It was filled with junk.

Seriously. It was junk. Stuff that could probably be made useful by an enterprising mech, or could be refurbished for some reason or another. But it was junk.

Had he expected something else? Weapons? Ordinance? Stockpiles of energon and other necessary supplies?

There was a path through the stacks of crates. It was comfortable sized for a mech of Blurr’s size, but for a Seeker? It would have been uncomfortably narrow. He tried to imagine Starscream fitting through here.

Blurr followed the path, which was winding rather than straight forward. It led him toward the dim glow in the far corner, however, which got brighter as he got closer. The sound of machinery became louder as well.

He rounded the corner, and Blurr drew to a startled stop. His optics rounded, his jaw physically dropping.

Of all the things he expected to find in Starscream’s basement, Wheeljack in a regeneration chamber was the least of them.

What the frag?

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Chapter Summary

Blurr confronts Starscream about what he found in the Seeker’s basement, and lines are drawn.

“Hey, boss?”

The nearly-tentative query pinged his comm the moment Starscream flew over what constituted a gate for New Iacon. He frowned internally, and transformed mid-air, dropping to the ground with a nearly soundless landing.

“What is it?” he demanded. Something about Rattrap’s tone instantly grated on his already thin patience.

He blamed Prowl for that. Prowl and his snooty spy, who would be making his way to Iacon soon enough. Starscream already planned to have Rattrap introduce Mirage to the tunnels beneath Iacon. Let them fester in each other’s presence. Hah.

Rattrap loosed a sound of disgruntlement. “Remember that science project ya keep in yer basement?”

Starscream’s optics narrowed. He dipped into a trash-cluttered alley before anyone could see him. “What of it?”

“Blurr found it.”

Starscream’s entire frame stuttered and flushed with ice. “How?”

“Seems ta me someone keyed him into yer security system. Wonder who that coulda been?”

Frag it. He only had himself to blame. In his haste to make sure Blurr could come and go as he pleased, Starscream hadn’t set the restrictions. Damn. Primus only knew what Blurr was thinking right now.

Probably the worst. As would anyone else.

Starscream gritted his denta. “I’ll be there as soon as I can. In the meantime, I’ve a task for you.”

Rattrap snorted. “When do ya not?”

Hmm. Someone was a little testy. Perhaps Rattrap felt he wasn’t getting the recognition he deserved. Starscream would have to attend to that later. For now, there were greater matters at hand.

Starscream eased out of the alley, finding that no one was in sight. Perfect. He popped his thrusters and rode them into the sky. He didn’t have time to walk. Who knew what crazy stories
Blurr wrote for himself in the meantime?

“If you want out, all you have to do is say so,” Starscream said into the comm. He refused to beg. Especially since he wasn’t sure he entirely understood why Rattrap assisted him in the first place.

“I ain’t sayin’ that,” Rattrap retorted, a little hastily. “I’m just sayin’, I won’t always be here to root around in the gutters fer ya.”

“Noted.”

A small huff passed through the comm. “What task?”

Starscream didn’t bother to hide his smirk; Rattrap couldn’t see it after all. “Bumblebee’s noble spy has volunteered to help us locate Obsidian. Feel free to introduce him to the dirtiest, darkest underlevels you can find.”

There was a moment of buzzing static before Rattrap’s laughter filled the comm. “Aww, boss. I didn’t know ya’d be rewardin’ me so soon!”

His tower came into view, the penthouse suite dark, as were most of the windows visible on the upper floors. Most of them were uninhabitable, after all, and served as random storage locations.

Starscream cycled a ventilation, internally bracing himself. “Just try to actually find something while you’re down there.”

“I’ll find my way to Mirage’s aft,” Rattrap replied.

Which was far more than Starscream ever wanted to know. Ew.

“Meet him at the western gate tonight,” Starscream said as he angled toward the penthouse balcony, and transformed mid-fall to land perfectly on the reinforced ledge. “Don’t be late.”

“Sir, yes, sir!” Rattrap’s tone was borderline disrespectful, but Starscream let it slide as he ended the comm immediately after.

Thank Primus for small favors. Starscream had no interest in learning about Rattrap’s charge for Mirage.

Just, no.

Starscream pressed his hand to the field scanner and waited for it to accept him. In the reflection of the balcony window, he could see his wings twitching, betraying his agitation. There was nothing he could do for it now.

Either Blurr would understand what he was trying to do, or everything Starscream carefully built would come crumbling around him. That was a lot of hope to place on the shoulders of one mech.

Damn it.

The door opened with a whoosh, admitting Starscream into the suite. It closed behind him immediately, locking once more. He stepped into the main room and made a beeline for the door, only to pause.
He stopped in the center, just in front of one of the futons, and turned in a slow circle. He drew in air through his vents.

Had Blurr… cleaned?

Starscream cycled his optics. He peeked into the berthroom, and it was much the same as the main room. It didn’t sparkle and shine like new, but the assorted piles of items had been organized, the berth covers had been changed, and the furniture had been wiped down.

His dirty flute was gone from the storage room. The containers on the counter had been put away. There was a pile of soiled berth covers in the supply closet. The furniture in the main room had been rearranged.

Blurr had cleaned. How bored was he?

Starscream shook his helm and headed back to the door. He couldn’t think about that, couldn’t stop to indulge in the mental image of Blurr cleaning his apartment like they were a domestic couple, and he was the housemech.

Starscream hurried out of the room and into the lift, waiting anxiously as it scanned his field to allow him to the lowest level. He shouldn’t have been so careless. It wasn’t that he never planned on telling anyone about Wheeljack, and neither was Wheeljack a prisoner.

He wanted to wait for the right time. He needed to know he could trust Blurr before he let that detail slip.

He had only himself to blame if this went sour.

The lift dipped as it stopped, the door chiming cheerfully as it opened. Cheerful, as though Starscream’s internals weren’t in knots, and his spark didn’t pulse an agitated rhythm.

He stepped into the dark level and hurried through the maze of boxes and crates, as fast as he dared without making it look as though he was frantic. He heard the low murmur of voices before he saw them, but he couldn’t detect their fields, which wasn’t surprising. It only meant that no one had disengaged the field dampener.

Starscream braced himself, cycled a ventilation, and stepped around the corner.

The CR chamber had been powered down – as any mech who could press a button could do – and the regenerative fluid matrix drained. It stood empty, the door swung open.

Wheeljack perched on a crate in the middle of the makeshift medbay, and cupped a cube of energon in his hands. There was another empty crate in front of him, as though Blurr had been sitting, but for the moment, Blurr was circling around Wheeljack with a mesh cloth. The regenerative matrix did have a tendency to cling.

Both looked up as Starscream appeared. Blurr’s expression was unreadable, but Wheeljack’s indicators flashed brightly.

“There he is,” Wheeljack said, his vocals flickering with static. They would for some time now.

“About time you got here.”

Starscream folded his arms behind his back. “I had some business outside of Iacon,” he said, his
gaze briefly flicking to Blurr before he returned it to Wheeljack. “You are well?”

Wheeljack straightened with a nod. “Probably coulda used a few more days in there, but nothing my self-repair can’t handle.” He paused, indicators flickering a dull yellow. “Ya saved my spark.”

“I’m sure it wasn’t for any altruistic reason,” Blurr muttered.

Starscream flinched.

That… well, that hurt. He would not lie to himself and claim otherwise.

“You still think so little of me,” Starscream replied, and remained there, frozen in place. He didn’t have the energy for a confident walk across the floor. It had all drained out of him, pooling in a puddle of disappointment at his pedes.

Blurr moved, until he stood between Starscream and Wheeljack. “What am I supposed to think when I come down here and find what amounts to a laboratory in your basement, and one of my old friends jammed into a tube?”

“Hey.” Wheeljack rose, wobbling on unsteady limbs, but rising nonetheless. “I’m pretty sure it’s not as bad as it looks.”

“Sure it isn’t.” Blurr’s optics narrowed, never once shifting from Starscream’s face. “Because it’s not like there are any medics or medical bays around here where Starscream could have taken you or anything. He did what he had to do.”

Yes.

He’d been right, after all.

Starscream mourned what could have been and prepared himself, instead, for damage control.

Starscream cycled a ventilation, and rubbed a hand down his faceplate. “I wasn’t going to keep him down here forever,” he said, trying to swallow past the rapid thudding of his spark. “I only did what I thought was best.”

“For who?” Blurr demanded, with a single step forward that sounded abruptly loud in the silence. “Because Wheeljack would have been better served with an actual medic, and this city would have been much happier to know he was alive. Bumblebee would have been happy to know.”

Starscream did not have an answer for that which wouldn’t make the situation worse.

“Blurr.” Wheeljack’s hand rested on the Racer’s right arm, giving it a squeeze. “Calm down.”

Blurr’s engine revved. “Who says I’m not calm?” he snapped.

Wheeljack chuckled. “For who? You’re about to vibrate out of your armor for one thing,” Wheeljack said with another squeeze. He stepped up to Blurr’s side, and then his helm tilted, his gaze shifting from Blurr to Starscream and back again. “Though I’m beginning to think there’s something else going on here than concern about me.”
Starscream audibly reset his vocalizer. “Blurr and I are in something of a political partnership,” he explained quietly as he managed a single step forward. “For the benefit of Cybertron. And I suspect I’ve not only disappointed him, I’ve given him all the more reason he needs to extricate himself.”

“Because ya saved my spark?” Wheeljack asked, confused.

“It is a tad more complicated than that,” Starscream admitted, but he did manage a small curve of his lips. “I am glad you survived. There were several times I did not think you would.”

Wheeljack rubbed the back of his helm with his free hand. “Yeah, I’m actually surprised I’m not in the Well. I thought I was done for. How did you--”

“You’re seriously just going to stand here and act normal about this?” Blurr demanded as he twisted out of Wheeljack’s grip, whirling to face him. Only, his injured hip protested the abrupt movement, and he staggered.

Starscream took a step forward, before he thought twice about it, but a single hard look from Blurr made him stop. Blurr caught his balance on his own.

“Never known you to be ungraceful,” Wheeljack commented, his indicators flashing muted colors of concern.

Blurr tossed Starscream a sour look. “There was an explosion,” he bit out, and reached down, rubbing at his hip. “I’m still recovering.”

“But not in a berth, I see. Same old Blurr.” Wheeljack chuckled, but it sounded strained. He cycled a ventilation and lowered himself back to his crate. “And yeah, I’m going to act normal about this. Because if I flip out, I don’t know if I’m gonna stop.” He looked up at Starscream. “I hear we got Megatron locked up? And the Autobots are gone?”

Starscream folded his arms over his cockpit. He focused on Wheeljack, because he couldn’t bear to look at Blurr. “Megatron is imprisoned, thanks to you. As for the Autobots, well, that may be about to change.”

Blurr made a startled noise. “What do you mean?”

“Bumblebee accepted my request for assistance in exchange for allowing most of the Autobots back into Iacon.”

“Most,” Blurr repeated. “But not all.”

Starscream sighed and rubbed at his forehelm. “If I turn around and let every one of them – including Prowl and the Constructicons mind – back into the city, but continue to outcast the Decepticons, what little control I do have, will evaporate.”

“I can see where that would be a problem,” Wheeljack said. His gaze drifted between Blurr and Starscream before settling on Starscream once more. “So. What’s our next move? Since I’m awake and all.”

Starscream cycled his optics. “Beg pardon?”
Wheeljack tilted his helm toward Blurr. “There was an explosion. Blurr got hurt. You needed the Autobots’ help, but Megatron’s in jail and I’m guessing it ain’t cause of Decepticons. So that means there’s someone else out there causin’ trouble. I wanna help.”

Blurr’s engine growled. “I can’t believe you’re just going to ignore the combiner in the corner.”

“If you’re expecting me to be angry that Starscream saved my life, you’re expecting somethin’ I can’t do, Blurr,” Wheeljack said with a scary kind of patience. “Yeah, mebbe it’s weird he didn’t drag me to a real medic, but I’ll bet all the creds I ain’t got that the medics were overwhelmed after Megatron’s attack. Yeah, they mighta prioritized me, and maybe they might not’ve. But I’m alive. And that’s what’s important to me.”

Blurr’s optics narrowed. “He only did that so he could use you.”

“Well...” Wheeljack chuckled and slanted Starscream a sideways look. “That’s probably true. But unless he figured out some slave coding, he can’t force me to do much of anythin’, can he?”

“He,” Starscream gritted out, “is still standing right here.”


He stormed across the floor and past Starscream without a word. Despite the field dampeners, Starscream felt the prickle of Blurr’s anger against his own field.

He let Blurr go. Trying to stop him at this point would make Wheeljack suspicious. If they were just business partners, Starscream shouldn’t go crawling after Blurr like a lover caught in an indiscretion.

Starscream sighed.

Wheeljack whistled. “He’s a little angry, huh?”

Starscream rubbed at his forehelm. “It’s complicated,” he admitted in the ensuing silence, his spark writhing like a trapped thing, while guilt sought to seep in around the anxiety, “And he’s not wrong.”

“Mebbe.” Wheeljack pushed to his pedes and stretched his arms over his helm. “But he ain’t right either. My apartment still standing?”

Starscream inclined his helm. “Apartment and lab both. I’ve had them secured since... well, you know.”

“Yeah, I know. Good looking out, Star. Thanks.”

His faceplate heated. Wheeljack said the nickname so easily, like it wasn’t a big deal to be standing in a basement, beside stolen medical equipment, and speak to the former second in command of the Decepticons. Starscream had a reputation, he knew he did. Yet, there wasn’t an ounce of fear in Wheeljack’s optics.

“Cybertron needs you,” Starscream said.
“And I’m guessing you need to go talk to Blurr,” Wheeljack replied in that shrewd tone that seemed to always be present. He had a way of looking right through you, Wheeljack did.

It was kind of reassuring.

Starscream sighed and rubbed his forehead. “Yes, I do.”

“Go. Take care of that mess.” Wheeljack actually shooed him toward the door. “I’m gonna finish up this energon, and then maybe look around these crates. You know that one is stamped for high-pressure recycling?”

Starscream, despite himself, chuckled. “No, I didn’t. Help yourself though. Anything you think you can use, put in a pile. I’ll get someone to help you take it to your lab.”

“Oh, this is going to be fun.” Wheeljack’s indicators lit in bright bursts of pink. He clapped his hands together, rubbing his palms.

Starscream’s lips curved and he turned to go, dreading the encounter that he knew was to come. Would it be better or worse without Wheeljack there to serve as witness?

He sighed.

Definitely worse.

“Starscream?”

He paused before he vanished around the crate stack, optical ridge raised in question.

“Thanks,” Wheeljack said, with honest gratitude in his vocals. “For saving my spark, I mean. I kinda like living.”

Starscream’s spark squeezed. “Well,” he said. “I also quite like you alive.”

He turned and left before he made a fool of himself any further. He wound back through the maze of crates and boxes, and headed for the lift. Blurr had already gotten into it, and with some relief, taken it to the penthouse.

Was that good news? Starscream didn’t know.

He waited on bolts and brackets for the lift to arrive and take him to the penthouse. He didn’t know what to expect in his suite, but he prepared himself for the end he’d always known was coming. Not that there was ever a beginning.

He only hoped Blurr didn’t destroy all of Starscream’s attempts at leadership in the process. Hopefully, he’d just call an end to their agreement and leave, without planning on irreparable damage in the process.

How Starscream loathed placing this much faith in another individual.

The lift donged, ever so cheery, leaving Starscream with nothing left to do but face the furious former Wrecker waiting in his hab-suite.

Primus help him.
Inside was an ominous silence. Blurr wasn’t in the main room, where Starscream expected to find him pacing. He wasn’t in the storage room or the berthroom either.

Starscream gnawed on his bottom lip. Perhaps the lift had just taken itself wherever it wanted and Blurr had left after all.

He turned and caught pale blue in his peripheral vision.

Blurr was on the balcony. Starscream couldn’t remember a single time that the Racer had ventured out there before. It had no railing, so it was understandable that a grounder had little interest in venturing onto the ledge.

Yet Blurr stood there, his hands on his hips, his gaze focused out at Iacon proper. His armor was clamped tight.

Starscream was not a coward, contrary to proper belief. He did pick and choose his battles. And this one… he couldn’t run away from.

He keyed open the door to the balcony and stepped outside. Blurr didn’t turn around at the sound of the door opening, but the armor across his back shifted.

“You’re still here,” Starscream commented quietly.

Blurr snorted. “Where else would I go? Obsidian blew up my apartment and my bar.”

Starscream folded his arms across his chest, and leaned against the wall near the door, not blocking it, but also, keeping a safe distance from Blurr. “I’ll get you an apartment.”

“No thanks. I don’t want one of your handouts. I’m pretty sure I’m out of payment.”

Ouch.

Starscream cycled a ventilation. “I didn’t tell you because I could never find the right time.”

“That’s Pitslag and you know it,” Blurr bit out, and only then did he turn, slow and careful, his optics dark and dangerous. “You knew how shady it looked, and you hadn’t figured out what to do about it so you wouldn’t get caught.”

Well, yes, that too.

Starscream pinched his nasal ridge. He considered several arguments and tossed them away as quickly. Blurr wouldn’t accept any of it, no matter what the explanation was.

“Clearly, there’s nothing I can say you don’t already have an answer for,” Starscream said at length, slowly lowering his hand. He refolded his arms. “What do you want from me?”

Blurr cycled his optics. He looked startled. “What?”

Starscream rolled his shoulders. “You’ve already decided I’m a monster of some kind, which is probably true.” He looked to the left of Blurr’s shoulder, where off in the distance, someone was attempting to rebuild something.
“There’s no point in trying to convince you otherwise. I can apologize, but I’m not sure what I’ve done that’s offended you the worst.” He tapped his fingers on his arm paneling. “At this point, all I can wonder is what it is you still want from me.” He dragged his gaze back to Blurr, hoping that the blank calm in his field was enough to disguise the raging currents beneath.

Blurr’s mouth moved, shaping words, before he shook his helm. He jabbed one finger downward. “You had Wheeljack in your basement,” he hissed.

“Yes, I did.”

“You told everyone he was dead!”

Starscream inclined his helm. “In a manner of speaking.”

Blurr’s arms shot into the air. “Can’t you see how appalling that is?” There was something outraged in his tone, but something else, too. Something Starscream couldn’t quite place.

Starscream pushed off the wall. “It must be nice,” he said, offhand, drawing on distance as all he had left. “To believe that always doing the right thing means the world will fall in line behind you. Because mechs are generally good, and make good choices. Because nobody lies, and everyone is virtuous, or at least… everyone wearing a red badge.” He turned his helm, giving Blurr a sidelong look. “Right?”

“That’s not – I’m not--” Blurr drew up straight. “Don’t put words into my mouth.”

“You should know by now that nothing in this universe is black and white,” Starscream said, calm, collected, controlled.

Inside, he ached.

Blurr had so quickly thought the worst of him. It was more painful than any blow Megatron had ever landed.

“Especially not me,” Starscream finished, and braced himself. “You are welcome to dissolve this partnership if you feel you can no longer walk in step with a monster. But do remember that there are worse things lurking beneath the streets of this city.”

Silence. Save for the noise several floors beneath them, mechs going about their business, heedless to the argument above their helms.

Blurr’s hands drew into slow fists at his sides. He visibly gritted his denta before he huffed a ventilation. “I never said you were a monster,” he muttered.

“You didn’t have to,” Starscream replied. “It was written all over your face.”

Blurr sighed and scrubbed his hand down his faceplate. He pinched his nasal ridge. “I wanted to run a bar,” he said, with a quiet, defeated sigh. “I wanted to put the war behind me. I wanted a simple future.”

“You could have said ‘no.’”

“I know that!” Blurr snapped, and his hand dropped. “I know damn well this is my own damn fault, thank you.”
Starscream cycled a ventilation. “Then what is it you want from me?”

“I don’t know!” Blurr’s faceplate colored, his field smacking against Starscream’s as he briefly lost control. “Maybe a realization that you fragged up? That sometimes you can be an impossible aft? That not everything is under your control?”

“I did what I thought was necessary. Perhaps it’s time you do the same,” Starscream forced himself to say, though his vocalizer threatened to glitch. “This is who I am. This is what I do. If you can’t handle that...” He trailed off and shrugged. “You can always dissolve our partnership.”

“Partnership,” Blurr repeated flatly. “I’m beginning to wonder if there ever was one.”

Starscream worked his intake. There wasn’t anything he could say to that. So instead, he spun on a heelstrut toward the door.

“I’m going to check on Wheeljack, help him get settled. You do whatever you think is right.” Starscream keyed open the door, only to pause in the entry.

Blurr might not be here when he returned.

“Thank you for cleaning the apartment. It looks nice,” Starscream said, and let himself inside.

If Blurr said anything else, Starscream didn’t linger to hear it. He was afraid of what it might have been.
Lost Boys

Chapter Summary

Blurr seeks advice from Jazz, while Starscream deals with the fear his world will come crashing down.

Starscream left. Blurr didn’t know if he should consider it a courtesy or not. He wasn’t sure if he could even call it a relief.

He paced around the penthouse, long circles, ignoring the ache in his hip from the extended movement. He should be resting. He should be recharging. He should be refueling. He should be-

Blurr paused behind the couch.

Starscream’s face kept popping into his head. That look of sadness and then resignation. That look of longing. That look of-- well, Blurr didn’t know what to call it, save that it made guilt claw at his spark as though he’d been the one who’d done wrong.

Well. He hadn’t.

He wasn’t the one who lied. He wasn’t the one who had Wheeljack strung up in his basement like some kind of science project.

Blurr’s engine growled.

Thank you for cleaning the apartment.

Blurr’s lips curled into a sneer. That was Starscream, sure enough, manipulative to the last. Perhaps he thought to appeal to Blurr’s better nature. To his soft-sparked Autobot-ness. Well, frag that.

He couldn’t stay here right now.

Blurr stormed out of the apartment. He would leave, and this time, maybe he wouldn’t come back. Starscream obviously didn’t need his help anyway.

Righteous anger carried him down the hall, into the lift, and out the front door. But once he stood in the middle of the street, he paused. Where could he go? He had nothing left.

Nothing but an aching hip. Perhaps a visit to the medical facilities was in order. It wasn’t much, but it was something.

Blurr spun on a heelstrut and limped down the street. There weren’t many random mechs about, but he passed a few who recognized him. They called out greetings as they passed, and Blurr somehow mustered up a smile, along with a lie or two when they asked how he was.
Just fine, thank you.

How was Starscream?

Blurr did not give one rusted gear. But he smiled and answered it as pleasantly as he could. That was easy. Racing had been as much politics as it had been acting. He could put on a brave front for anyone who only saw the surface anyway.

“Hey there, sweetspark. You lookin’ for a good time?”

A chill ran up Blurr’s backstrut. “No, I’m not,” he said, whirling toward the voice which had summoned him from a shadowy alley. “I-- Swindle!”

Sure enough, the sleazy salesmech oozed out of the alley with a smirk on his face.

“Aw, I’m hurt you didn’t recognize my voice,” Swindle said, as though he hadn’t altered it to be syrupy sweet when he crooned that invitation.

Blurr scowled. “I’m a little preoccupied right now.”

“I noticed.” Swindle cozied up to his side, slinging an arm around Blurr’s waist. “Starscream let you off your leash, did he?” His free hand patted Blurr’s chestplate.

“I don’t have a leash.” Blurr shook out of Swindle’s grip, Swindle’s field oozing over his like old oil – sticky and impossible to be rid of.

“Sure you don’t.” Swindle’s hand lingered on his chestplate before it slid away. “And speaking of screechy Seekers, you know, I’ve been looking into that terrorist business of yours.”

Blurr folded his arms over his chestplate. Maybe Swindle would stop touching him then. “And?”

Swindle shook his helm, waggling a finger at Blurr. “Blurr. Sweetspark. I don’t sell nothing for free. You know that.”

“And you know I don’t have any credits, or any means to acquire any,” Blurr retorted, rolling his optics. “I don’t even have a place to live. What do you think I can offer you?”

Swindle’s sly smile lengthened. “Now, that ain’t all true, is it? You and yon punching bag share a berth, don’t you?”

“If you think I’m going to ask Starscream--”

“No, no, no. That’s not what I’m saying at all.” Swindle laughed, but even Blurr could tell it was staged. “I wouldn’t dream of putting you more in his debt. No, I’m thinking that there’s still something you could offer.”

Blurr’s optics narrowed. “Why am I not liking the sound of this?”

“Because Swindle is a cheat and a liar, and ya should know better than to trust him.”

Swindle’s smile faltered. Some of Blurr’s tension eased. This voice he knew.

He half-turned to see Jazz strolling toward them, an easygoing smile on his lips, but a dark cast to
his visor that suggested danger was afoot.

“That is hardly fair,” Swindle said with an offended sniff. “I never cheat my honest customers, and I only lie when my spark is on the line.”

Jazz’s grin never faltered, though he did put himself firmly between Blurr and Swindle. “Ya must be in danger pretty often then. I can’t recall a time ya ever spoke the truth. Or at least, yer version of it.”

Blurr’s gaze darted between them. “Why do I get the feeling I’m missing something? Do you two have a history, too?” As it seemed everyone did these days.

“We’ve crossed paths a few times but nothing serious.” Swindle rolled his shoulders, shuttering one optic in a wink. “These things happen. But ya know how it is with those Spec Ops mechs. They don’t trust anyone.”

Laughter rumbled in Jazz’s chassis, though it sounded far from amused. “Especially not sticky conmechs who are angling for an overload or two.”

“Now, whenever did I say that?” Swindle projected innocence as though he’d been sparked with it.

Jazz’s backarmor ruffled, though Swindle couldn’t see it. “Ya know what ya did. Ya also know ya don’t know anything. So why don’t you just scram?”

“Pfft. You can’t know that for sure, can you?” Swindle tilted his helm, something in his smile turning sharp. “Guess you’ll never find out.” His gaze shifted past Jazz to Blurr. “Seems like we’ll have to have our chat another time.”

“I look forward to it,” Blurr said, every inch of it a lie.

Swindle gave Jazz one last look before he scammed, though his walk was lackadaisical, as though he hadn’t a care in the universe.

“I can handle Swindle,” Blurr said as Jazz turned toward him, his expression wiped of that dangerous cheer he’d had earlier.

“Yeah. I saw how great he was handlin’ ya,” Jazz said with a tilt of his helm. “Ain’t ya supposed to be resting, boss?”

Blurr worked his jaw, his gaze wandering to a nearby building. “Not in that penthouse, I’m not.”

“Ah.”

He cut his optics back toward Jazz. “Don’t you make that sound.”

Jazz held up his hands. “Hey, I didn’t say nothin’. But ya’ve got the look of a mech who’s been at it with Starscream – believe me, I know that feelin’.”

Blurr cycled a ventilation and rubbed a palm down his faceplate. “I honestly don’t know what to do anymore, Jazz.”

“I figured as much.” Jazz tapped his elbow. “C’mon. Ya need to rest that hip. And judgin’ from
the look of ya, grab a pain chip or two.”

“No pain chips.” He fell into a limping step behind Jazz.

“Whatever ya want.” Jazz’s tone was easygoing, yet there was something behind the set of his shoulders that was anything but.

Blurr followed him, a frown curling his lips. “Where are we going?”

“My place.”

“You have a place – wait. What am I saying? Of course you do.” Blurr rolled his optics and palmed his faceplate. “Primus, my processor is wrecked.”

“Yeah. That’s Starscream syndrome all right.” Jazz chuckled. “Don’t worry. I’ll help ya get it sorted. And like I said, if ya want out, all ya gotta do is say it.”

For the first time since Starscream came to him with the offer, Blurr genuinely considered it. No more dealing with politics. No more navigating the confusing minefield that was Starscream. No more trying to figure out what was lie and what was truth.

Maybe he could actually find that peace he wanted. He could rebuild his bar, put it all behind him. He could move on and never give another thought to Starscream again.

It would be so much easier.

Jazz stopped in front of a dilapidated building that had been reconstructed into apartment style housing. Blurr had passed it a few times, unable to believe that someone had taken residence there, and now he found himself following Jazz inside. Surely Jazz could have found somewhere better.

“If ya wanna hide, ya do it in plain sight,” Jazz said with a wink of his visor. He pulled a ring of keys out of subspace and whistled as he spun them on his finger.

Two floors down, they were below surface level now, and at the end of a hall, Jazz manually unlocked a rusty door and shoved it open, gesturing Blurr inside. He braced himself, prepared to find all manner of uncomfortable living, and didn’t relax until he realized that while the place was small and barely furnished, it was clean.

“So,” Jazz said as he shoved the door closed behind them, a loud screech accompanying the motion. “What happened?”

Blurr gingerly stepped further into the apartment. He could see a berthroom through one doorway, but little else. No private rack. Not even a storage room. He assumed Jazz kept his supplies in one of the crates stacked against the far wall.

“Starscream is an aft,” he said.

Jazz snorted. “Yeah, well, I knew that.” He flopped down on a futon, a cloud of dust rising up as he did so. “Specifically, how is he an aft?”

Blurr located a metal chair – no padding, less chance of dirt – and lowered himself into it. His throbbing hip thanked him. He sighed. “Wheeljack is alive.”
“And?”

Blurr’s helm shot up, his optics finding Jazz, unable to hide the disbelief in his tone. “You knew?”

“I had a feeling.” Jazz said. He leaned forward, bracing his elbows on his knees. “Never could find his frame. Lots of energon though. I didn’t know where he’d gone. Thought maybe someone had taken him.” He paused to frown. “Of all the theories I had, Starscream savin’ him was up there.”

Blurr’s hands curled into fists. “Starscream didn’t save him. He had Wheeljack in his basement, stuck in a CR chamber, like some secret he was desperate to keep.”

Jazz stared at him with a tilt of his helm. “But he’s alive.”

“I just said that!”

The light behind Jazz’s visor narrowed. “Then I’m not seein’ the problem here.” He rolled his shoulders in a shrug. “So Starscream didn’t announce to everyone that the mech responsible for putting away Megatron is still alive. I can’t say I wouldn’t have made the same choice if I was him.”

Blurr scoffed. He leaned back in the chair and folded his arms. “He didn’t do it to protect Wheeljack. He was just protecting himself.”

Jazz’s fingers tangled together. He stared at Blurr, not commenting, for long enough that Blurr started to squirm. And then he shifted back, straightening, something in his posture less that of a friend, and more… commanding.

“Starscream has a history of looking after himself, this is true,” Jazz said slowly, as though carefully choosing his words. “But he saved Wheeljack, and he pulled you out of the rubble. So I’m thinkin’, he’s not as selfish as you’ve made him out to be.”

Blurr stared at him. Something in his chassis tightened, like a gear wound to its limits. His mouth opened and shut before he ground his denta.

“So you’re just fine with it?” he demanded.

“I ain’t sayin’ that it’s not a little sketchy,” Jazz admitted, but then he shook his helm. “But I do think yer reachin’. ” He paused and frowned. “In fact, you’re overreactin’. He saved Wheeljack’s spark and yer actin’ like ya found a pile of corpses in his basement.”

Blurr shot to his pedes, and hissed when jagged pain lanced down his leg. “He lied to me.”

“A lie of omission, but yeah, I’ll give ya that. But given how you’re behavin’ now, I’d probably lie to ya, too,” Jazz said. He cycled a ventilation and pushed to his pedes. “Tell me somethin’, Blurr. You ever been a Decepticon?”

“Of course I haven’t!”

“Right. Of course.” Jazz folded his arms and started to walk, though it was more of a pace, a slow and steady course around the room. “Ever lied then? Done something you regretted? Done something you had to do cause there was no other choice?”
Blurr narrowed his optics. This sounded eerily familiar. “I never said I was perfect. We were in a
war. We’ve all done stuff we’re not proud of.”

“Yeah. We have. Autobots and Decepticons both.”

Blurr shook his helm. “Oh, no. Don’t you play semantics with me. Starscream was not just a
Decepticon. He was Megatron’s right hand, his second in command. Just as guilty as Megatron.”

Jazz gave him a long eerie look. “Who’s playing semantics?” he asked. “You do realize who I am,
right? Starscream, except I wear a different badge. Or, well, did.” He patted his chestplate, where
the shadow of the Autobot badge lingered. “But that’s not my point.”

“Then what is?”

“Ya never even gave him a chance,” Jazz replied, direct and simple.

Blurr stared at him. “What?”

“Look, I get it.” Jazz started to pace again, though now he gesticulated as well. “He’s Starscream.
Experience tells ya to be careful, to watch yer back. But I’ve been watchin’ since day one, Blurr,
and all I’ve seen is him bendin’ over backward to try and keep you satisfied, while you wait for
him to slip up so you can point a finger and talk about how much you knew it would happen.”

Blurr’s jaw dropped. “I haven’t--”

“Yes, you have.” Jazz’s vocals turned stern, all trace of the jovial performer gone, leaving only the
hard-edged commander Jazz used to be. “Ya ever wonder why I keep asking if you want out?”

“Because I’m in danger?”

Jazz’s visor flashed. “Because you act’ like ya are, but ya keep stickin’ around anyway.
Yer a walkin’ contradiction. No wonder Starscream’s dancin’ on bolts and brackets around ya.”

Blurr’s optics narrowed. “I don’t have to listen to this,” he bit out, and spun toward the door.

Only to be intercepted by Jazz, who suddenly looked just as dangerous as Starscream could be.
“Yes, you do,” he said. “Ya owe him that much.”

“I don’t owe Starscream anything,” Blurr hissed. “He’s the one who came to me.”

“And you could have turned him down,” Jazz said, his tone as warm as liquid nitrogen. “But you
didn’t. You opted to work with him, and despite all that, you never even gave him a chance. You
never saw him as anything more than Decepticon Starscream.”

Blurr’s engine revved. He ground his denta. “You’re the one who told me to be careful,” he
gritted out.

“Yeah, I did,” Jazz snapped. “But I didn’t tell ya to act like you were sleeping with the Unmaker.
Which, by the way, yer the one who crawled into that berth. No one made ya do it. And no one’s
making you stay.”

Blurr whirled away from Jazz, intending on circling around the couch and making for the door
again. “You’re doing it right now.”

Jazz noisily cycled a ventilation. “Primus, yer just as bad as he is,” he huffed. “You need to stop right now, Blurr. It was funny at first. Now it’s not anymore. If you don’t trust Starscream, fine. End the partnership right here. But stop fragging dragging it out and treating him like some kind of sparkeater who turned on ya.”

Blurr gnawed on his bottom lip and turned slowly. He tilted his helm. “How close are you two?”

“Mech, you really wanna go there right now?” Jazz said carefully. “The past ain’t none of yer business.”

“It is if it explains why you’re defending him.”

Jazz slid a hand down his face, his expression hiding behind his palm. “Blurr, yer one of my own, and I’ll never stop thinkin’ that no matter what kind of peace we’re in, but yer seriously tryin’ my patience right now.”

“Good. Then can I go?”

“No.” Jazz’s hand dropped away, and the look in his visor was flat. “If you’re not going to walk away from Starscream, here and now, then you had damn well better go apologize to him.”

Blurr’s optics rounded. He staggered backward. “What?”

“You heard me.”

Blurr shook his helm. He turned and bumped into the couch, his aching hip screeching so noisily that his knee buckled. He stumbled and grabbed the couch for balance, a short huff escaping his vents.

Jazz sighed. He moved across the floor, not that Blurr heard him, and took Blurr’s elbow. “Sit before ya fall down, Boss,” he said, his tone gentler than before. “Ya know ya should really be in a berth.”

“So I’ve been told.” Blurr let Jazz guide him to the couch, however dusty it was. Pain radiated up and down his leg, making his pede twitch.

That winding, squeezing sensation in his tank had yet to abate. If anything it grew stronger, especially when Jazz plopped his aft on the low table in front of the couch. Blurr had nowhere to go, to escape, from the intent look in Jazz’s visor.

“I’m goin’ to ask you a question,” Jazz said. “And I want ya to answer truthfully. I need to know before I go any further, ya got me?”

Blurr worked his intake. He couldn’t trust himself to speak. He nodded instead.

“Good.” Jazz clasped his hands together, briefly lifted his chin, and dropped it again. “Has Starscream ever hurt you?”

“No,” Blurr said firmly, surprising himself with how quickly he answered. He was quite sure Jazz didn’t mean the times Star had bitten him or clawed him while facing because Blurr had quite enjoyed that.
He knew exactly what Jazz was getting at.

“No,” Blurr repeated and now it was his turn to hide behind his hands, to sink into the couch and feel every bit of the tightness clawing into his spark. “He’s never hurt me, never threatened me, never...” He sighed. “Never did anything to me.”

“Or anyone else?”

“Or anyone else,” Blurr confirmed. “Not that I know of.”

Jazz cycled a soft ventilation. “Good. Cause I was beginnin’ to worry that maybe I had this all wrong, and I’m protectin’ an abuser.”

“I’m not a… a… victim of some kind,” Blurr hissed, outrage briefly replacing that other emotion before it drained away. “Star’s many things, but he’s not… and I’m not...”

“Then you owe him an apology,” Jazz said frankly, and rested his weight on his knees, his elbows tucked in. “Whatever happened before the war, whatever he was then, we can’t keep livin’ in that or we’ll never leave it. I’m different. You’re different. He is, too. He’s tryin’ and mech, ya must be some kind of blind if you can’t see it.”

Blurr folded his arms. “That’s not fair.”

“Yeah, well, neither were you.” Jazz’s visor brightened at him. “Ain’t none of us Starscream’s biggest fans, but you agreed to work with him, you climbed into his berth, and since then, he’s done nothin’ but try to work with you, and all you’ve done is wait for him to fuck up. That ain’t fair at all.”

Blurr turned his helm. He stared at the stack of crates against the wall. “Why do you care anyway?”

“Because like it or not, Starscream’s in charge of Cybertron right now. We’ve got a sort of peace – Obsidian aside – and I kinda like that part. Plus, I like both of ya and it’s time there was a little more give and a lot less take in this partnership, if ya ask me,” Jazz said. “Ya like him, Blurr. Stop actin’ like ya don’t. And stop actin’ like a spoiled towerling, too.”

Blurr worked his jaw.

Jazz’s words stung. They resonated all too much with that twisting, churning sensation in the back of his spark. Something that clawed at his conscience and told him Jazz was right.

“He still lied to me,” Blurr said.

Jazz sighed. He rubbed his forehelm and leaned back. “Yeah, he did. But I’m also guessin’ ya never gave him the chance to explain why.”

No. He hadn’t. He’d leapt right into anger and stayed there, letting it fuel and feed him so that he wouldn’t have to look at Starscream and hate himself. Not when it was so much easier to lay the blame solely at Starscream’s pedes.

Blurr worked his intake. “You said he pulled me out of the rubble?”
“Dug ya out with his own two hands.”

And then took me home to his apartment where he cared for me on his own.

Starscream had been a Decepticon. He’d been Megatron’s right hand. He’d assassinated the Senate. He’d committed so many atrocities. He was probably, even now, plotting something of which Blurr knew nothing about.

Or did Blurr simply assume he was because of the war he continued to carry with him? Blurr didn’t know. He was too tired and in too much pain to make sense of the madness.

Because Jazz was right. He’d agreed to Starscream’s terms. He’d gone willingly to Starscream’s berth. He stayed. Every time he could leave, he’d opted to stay.

Blurr’s internals squeezed. He bowed his helm, dimming his optics.

“The truth,” Jazz added in a soft tone, “is that I need Starscream. We all do. A leader I know is preferable to one I don’t. So I either need yer partnership to work, or I need ya to end it before it blows up. Got me?”

Blurr ex-vented in a slow burst. “Yeah. I do.”

“And?”

Blurr lifted his helm, his lip lifting in the thinnest smile he’d ever produced. “I think I owe someone an apology.”

“You owe him a lot more than that.”

Blurr cycled a ventilation and hung his helm. “I know.”

~

Starscream had only been upstairs for maybe twenty minutes, but in that time, Wheeljack had managed to accumulate a stack of boxes he wanted to keep that was taller than he was. Even working together, it would take them the better part of the afternoon to move this all.

“You’ve been busy,” he remarked, trying to keep his tone light. There was nothing wrong here. Nothing at all.

“You have a lot of good stuff,” Wheeljack replied with a huff as he set one crate down on top of the smallest stack next to his. “Where did you get it all?”

“Here and there.” Starscream shrugged dismissively. “Right now, I try not to discard anything that could potentially be useful.”

Wheeljack nodded. “That’s a good plan.” He leaned hard against the stack of crates and gave it a happy pat. “You never know when something can be of use.”

Starscream made a non-committal noise of agreement. “It might take a few trips, but I think we can get it all.”
“Nah. I don’t need it all, I just want it.” Wheeljack chuckled and waved a dismissive hand. “I’ll just take a couple now and come back for the rest later. If that’s all right.”

“I’ll key you into the system. Come get it whenever you want.” Starscream walked up the crates, giving them a look. He honestly had no idea what was in them. He hadn’t time to really pry. “Which ones do you want today? I’ll help.”

Wheeljack cycled his optics. “Uhh, ya don’t hafta do that. I’m sure ya got better things to do.”

“Helping you is included in that,” Starscream said with a shrug. He reached for the nearest crate. “This one?”

“No, I won’t need that one for weeks. But you can grab the one under it,” Wheeljack said, though there remained something hesitant in his tone. He grunted as he picked up two crates for himself. “Everythin’ all right?”

Starscream tugged out the lower crate and heaved it up. It wasn’t heavy, but it was awkward. Oh, what he wouldn’t give to have a hauler-class on his staff right now.

“Why wouldn’t it be?” he asked airily.

“Mebbe cause I just saw the equivalent of a lover’s spat before Blurr stormed out of here like a sparkling who didn’t get his way?”

Starscream chuckled. “Oh, that. Minor difference of opinion is all.” He paused and gave Wheeljack a look. “Maybe you shouldn’t be carrying that. You did just get out of a CR chamber.”

“I’m tougher than I look.”

“So it would seem.” Starscream shook his helm, and adjusted his grip on the crate. “The lift’s this way.”

“It’ll be nice to see the city. I wonder how much it’s changed.”

“Not as much as you’d think. Or hope,” Starscream said with a cycled ventilation. If anything, he lamented, it was worse. “We should maybe think about some kind of press conference? That way people don’t think there’s a ghost wandering around the streets.”

Wheeljack chuckled. “It could be fun almost. I could pop out of alleys and say ‘boo’ and see who drains their tank.”

Starscream gave him a dry look. “You don’t strike me as the pranking type.”

“It was just a thought.” Wheeljack shrugged as the lift arrived and they squeezed into it, the gears protesting the additional weight. “But if you think we should have a meeting or something, I’ll do it. I just don’t think anyone cares that much.”

Starscream selected the ground floor and adjusted his grip on the crate. “You were missed,” he said quietly.

Wheeljack’s indicators flashed a dim green. “Yeah, I gathered,” he said before he shook himself visibly, armor ruffling and resettling. “Anyway, that wasn’t a minor disagreement. What’s up with
The lift dinged, depositing them on the ground floor. Rather than lead Wheeljack out the front – where onlookers were sure to notice – Starscream gestured him to a side entrance. He hoped to keep to the alleys and shadows. He didn’t want anyone else catching sight of Wheeljack and reacting as Blurr had.

Starscream already had one disaster in the making. He didn’t need another.

“As I said, we are business associates,” Starscream replied.

“Not buying it.” Wheeljack juggled the crates as he dipped through the smaller doorframe. “That kind of anger is personal.”

Well. Wasn’t he just a wealth of incisive observations today?

Starscream sighed. Might as well come clean. Wheeljack would figure it out eventually. After all, it wasn’t like all of Cybertron didn’t already know.

“We also, occasionally, share a berth.” He gestured Wheeljack down a nearby alley, one cluttered with detritus, but luckily, Wheeljack didn’t protest. He seemed to understand the necessity of privacy.

“And you’re living together,” Wheeljack said.

Starscream winced. “Not quite.”

Wheeljack’s indicators flashed in the alley, reflecting off the charred walls. He gave Starscream a look that spoke volumes, including a demand for Starscream to elaborate.

He sighed again. “That terrorist I mentioned? His first strike destroyed Maccadam’s.”

“And it was easier if Blurr stayed with you.”

“Safer, too. Obsidian is very dangerous.” Starscream peered into the road ahead and behind them, but it was deserted. Good thing mechs around here still kept to a reasonably normal schedule. Most of them were still at whatever they called work.

Wheeljack’s laboratory was just across the road, within comfortable walking distance of Starscream’s penthouse as a matter of fact.

“I’m sure,” Wheeljack replied, but he didn’t sound convinced.

No one saw them inch across the road and duck down into the below-street level entrance to Wheeljack’s lab. Or at least, Starscream assumed no one did.

Wheeljack’s old code didn’t work, so Starscream put in the new one for the new security system he’d had installed, and handed programming of the system over to Wheeljack.

“You have all the permissions,” Starscream said as they stepped into the dim. He juggled his crate so he could hit the main power switch. “I didn’t even put in a backdoor for myself.”

“I appreciate your restraint,” Wheeljack said with a chuckle. He stepped further inside and gave a
low whistle before he dropped his crate to the floor. “Primus, it’s a mess in here. Not that I was ever much one for cleaning.”

Starscream smirked and set his own crate down, though with more care. “Maybe you can hire Blurr to clean it for you. From what I saw, he’s pretty good at it.” He tried to laugh, but it fell flat.

Damn. He was trying not to think about that.

“Is he now?” Wheeljack said. He gave Starscream a shrewd look before he ventured deeper into the laboratory. “For a relationship that’s half-business, and half friends with benefits, you two sure have a lot of checkmarks in the other column.”

Starscream’s wings twitched. He folded his arms over his cockpit. “It’s complicated.”

“It always is.” Wheeljack’s fingers trailed over his desk top, cluttered with datapads, and coated in a layer of dust. “Ya know, while I was in that tank, I could hear everythin’ going on around me. I wasn’t aware enough to interact with it, but I still heard it.”

Starscream’s optics widened. His face heated. “I… didn’t know that,” he said. He hunched his shoulders, suddenly recalling hours he’d spent talking to a mech he thought wasn’t listening. “Mechs are usually in stasis.”

“Well, I was but...” Wheeljack shrugged and rapped his knuckles over his own helm. “Ratchet would have a fit if he knew, but I adjusted my coding a bit ago. I never fully go out. Too dangerous.”

Starscream shifted his weight. “I see.” His spark stuttered. He recalled all sorts of things he’d said, admissions he’d made. About himself, about Metalhawk, about Blurr.

And Wheeljack still looked at him as though he was a friend. He’d still defended Starscream to Blurr.

Starscream sucked his bottom lip into his mouth, gnawing on it. He drew his armor in tight, unsure what he should do now. Go? Stay?

Wheeljack’s face gave nothing away. Neither did his field. He only looked at Starscream as though waiting for something.

“I suppose that means there’s no point in being evasive,” Starscream said carefully, his cables drawing tight.

“None at all.” Wheeljack’s tone was almost cheerful as he peered at the datapads on his desk, and then swept them all into a trash bin. “So how about you pull up a stool, I rustle up some energon for us both, and you tell me what’s really going on with you and Blurr?”

Starscream worked his intake. He shook his helm. “Why do you care?” He meant it to be scathing, waspish even, instead it came out hurt.

Damn him.

“Because I do.” Wheeljack swept some dust off a stool, pulled it out, and set it firmly beside him. “Sit.”
Starscream gnawed on his bottom lip again. He should leave. Now. While he still could. Go somewhere the open honesty in Wheeljack’s optics couldn’t reel him in, promising a friendship Starscream didn’t deserve. Had never deserved.

He could go back to his apartment, and the reek of Blurr’s disappointment. Or he could wander around his city in a lost daze, waiting for his own downfall.

Starscream cycled a ventilation.

He sat in the stool. “Fine,” he said, grasping for a semblance of control he didn’t feel.

“But we’re not going to gossip like a pair of lovesick fools.”

Wheeljack chuckled. “Fair enough.”

It would be nice, at least, to have this until his citizens turned against him, and the last of his power was wrested from his fingers. As it always was.

Starscream bit back a sigh and waited for Wheeljack to finish rummaging up some energon.

Perhaps Obsidian would get his way after all.
Delirious

Chapter Summary

Starscream returns home, expecting nothing, and is surprised when Blurr has something important to say.

Starscream distracted himself for as long as possible.

He stayed in Wheeljack’s lab as long as he dared before duty called. He spent the on-shift on bolts and brackets, waiting for the press to ambush him, or for someone to start throwing stones and drive him out of the city. The fact that it didn’t happen only made him more agitated.

He left Wheeljack to rest, the engineer already hip deep in some kind of energon-production device, and Starscream attended to his duties. He met with construction crews who’d been evaluating buildings for reconstruction attempts. He spoke with buyers and suppliers. He discussed energon production with other engineers.

He met with a few mechs who felt safe enough to address their grievances with him directly, most of which involved the lack of certain supplies or a desire to speed up certain processes. One mech expressed his concern over the terrorist, and Starscream put on a brave front to provide reassurance.

He set up a date and time for all those interested in his task force to meet, and watched the applications pop up here and there with no real enthusiasm. It was as disheartening as the rest of his shift.

Starscream was more productive in this single on-shift than he had been in the past week. He worked as long as he could, through the last of first shift, all of the second shift, and late into the third. Anything to keep from returning to what he knew he’d find in his penthouse.

It wasn’t until his processor screamed at him for recharge, for rest, for refueling, that Starscream gave in to the demands of his frame. He turned toward home, or the closest thing to it, opting to enter through the balcony.

The suite was dark as he approached, which came as no surprise. He let himself in, spark twisting itself into knots, and stepped into the dim silence of the main room. The only illumination came from standby lights from various pieces of equipment.

There was no one here. Starscream didn’t have to wander around to look. There was no need. He could feel the lack of any other living being.

He’d known this would be the outcome. That didn’t make it any easier to bear. Blurr had, in all likelihood, left the moment Starscream did. He had no reason to return. Surely there were many mechs in the city willing to offer him shelter. He, after all, was popular.

Starscream gnawed on his bottom lip. He forced himself into motion, slipping into the energon storage room and drawing a cube of mid-grade. It was enough to sate the clenching of his tanks,
though he barely tasted it. Fuel was necessary. Enjoying it was not.

He wandered back into the main room. He supposed he could attend to any of the datapads stacked on the central table. He could peruse the applications in his inbox. He could try and contact Rattrap and see if there was any news of Obsidian.

He could do... well anything other than turn in slow circles in the main room like some kind of lost creature.

Easier said than done.

The silence unnerved him.

Starscream paused behind the couch, not for any real reason, it was just where he happened to be when his limbs stopped moving. He cycled a long ventilation. His spark felt heavy, cold. His hand scrubbed down his face, burying himself behind it. Pathetic.

He fragging knew it.

The door clicked as it opened.

No. Starscream didn’t feel like dealing with Obsidian and his ilk today.

“Whatever news you have for me can wait until tomorrow,” Starscream muttered. It didn’t matter which of the two had come – Jazz or Rattrap. They’d get over it. Just like he’d gotten over the fact both of them could cut through any security he devised to let themselves in whenever they wanted.

“I’m sorry.”

Blurr’s voice.

Starscream startled. He slowly lowered his hand and lifted his gaze, his optics finding Blurr stepping further into the loft, the door clicking shut behind him. There was something tentative in his expression, but determined as well.

Starscream cycled his optics. “What?”

“I said--” Blurr paused to intake a deep vent. “I’m sorry.” He took another step, and then a third. His armor was drawn tight. “I overreacted. I said things I shouldn’t have.”

No. This wasn’t right. This was wrong. He didn’t know what game Blurr wanted to play now, but mechs didn’t apologize to Starscream. They especially didn’t apologize for saying what everyone else thought.

Starscream shook his helm. “Don’t apologize for speaking the truth,” he said. He was so very tired of games. He’d known better, he’d dared try anyway, and look what it had gotten him. “I am who I am, and I don’t blame you for that.”

Blurr limped closer, his optics downcast. “No, I mean it, Star. I’m sorry. I was being unfair.”

The words didn’t make any sense. Starscream heard them, but he couldn’t make sense of them.
He took a step back, toward the balcony. “You were right,” he said, and spread his hands. “I did save Wheeljack for selfish reasons. I did keep him a secret, and I’ve done things. Awful things. I’m not a good mech. I’ll never be a good mech. It’s what I am.”

Blurr said nothing. He stared at Starscream as though he’d never seen Starscream before. His expression softened around the edges, but of his field, Starscream could feel nothing. He had no clue what Blurr was thinking right now.

It didn’t matter. He’d heard enough of what Blurr felt about him.

Starscream pinched his nasal ridge. “I’m ending our partnership.”

Blurr jerked as though Starscream had struck him. “What?”

This was so much easier. Starscream went to that place, where he was cold and empty inside, and found it felt like home.

“It was a mistake from the start,” he said, dismissive, and shrugged. “A poorly executed plan on my part, but what else is new?” He smiled, though there was no amusement in it. “You’re still welcome to stay here until you’ve found somewhere else. I can make other arrangements.”

Blurr’s optics brightened. He took another limping step forward, his hands twitching at his sides. “I don’t… that’s not.. I’m trying to apologize here!” he said with a huff of his ventilations.

“And I appreciate it, but there’s no need. You have nothing to be sorry for.”

Yes. This was what he’d been missing. It was so much easier when he was dead inside.

Starscream cycled a ventilation. “In any case, I can tell by that limp you’ve not rested today, so I recommend you do so. I’ll leave you to it.”

He turned toward the balcony, and caught his reflection in the transsteel as he did so. His expression was cold and empty, something that had often served him well when staring down a furious Megatron. He hadn’t known it would be so useful in this instance as well.

“Starscream, stop.”

There was a scramble of pedesteps, a clunk, and a curse, all echoing from behind him.

“Please,” Blurr said, and then hissed, “Ow. Primus damn it. Come on, Starscream. I can’t chase after you like this!”

Starscream paused, inches from freedom. He half-turned, enough to see that Blurr was indeed pushing himself across the floor. “Why would you? I believe our business is concluded.”

Blurr’s optics flashed. He seemed to have shaken off whatever confusion had taken residence before. “This stopped being business weeks ago and you know it,” he huffed, coming around the edge of the nearest chair.

Starscream gave him a sideways look. “I am giving you an out,” he said, as plain as he could manage. His spark thumped a rhythm in his chassis, and he wanted to shout at it, tell the foolish thing to cease that behavior at once.
“I don’t want it,” Blurr insisted, within reaching distance now. His jaw had set, his optics bright and determined.

That was not fair. Not at all.

Starscream’s engine caught on a gear and made a strangled noise. His wings fluttered downward. He shook his helm, and slid a hand down his face. “Then I don’t know what you want from me!” Starscream gritted out, every inch of him aching. His free hand curled into a fist, one he was alarmed to find trembled.

The first points of Blurr’s field reached him. It was tentative, warm, open. He came closer, ungraceful steps so uncharacteristic of him, before Starscream felt the first delicate touch of fingers against his hand.

“I’m sorry,” Blurr said, again, and the words sounded so foreign, like binary garble. “I fragged up. And it was easier to blame you instead and that was unfair. So… I’m sorry.”

Starscream’s hand slid down. Blurr was there, right there in front of him, looking at him with nothing but genuine apology in his expression. Guilt, too. It hung in his field like a grey miasma.

“I don’t want to dissolve our partnership,” Blurr added with the smallest of squeezes to Starscream’s fingers. “I don’t want you to leave either.”

Starscream’s mouth opened and closed, but he had no words. He forced his vocalizer into action, saying the only thing he knew to be true. “I am not a good mech.”

Blurr’s free hand lifted, and Starscream braced himself. He didn’t know what to expect, but it certainly wasn’t the gentle way Blurr’s palm cupped his face.

“Turns out, neither am I,” he said with a sheepish cant to his field. His thumb stroked over Starscream’s cheek and leaned in close enough that Starscream felt the ghost of his ex-vents. “Is it okay if I--”

“Yes,” Starscream answered before his mind overrode his spark.

Blurr’s lips closed over his before the last syllable could fade, so warm and welcoming. Starscream sank into the kiss, the warm press of their lips, the gentle touch against his face. He ached and unknotted all at once.

Blurr pressed closer, warmth emanating from his plating. “I’m sorry,” he said, again, his lips brushing over Starscream’s.

“You said that already,” Starscream said, and dumbly at that. He felt in a daze, and didn’t know if the lack of recharge was to blame, or the dizzying way Blurr pressed gentle kisses to the curve of his jaw.

“I’m not sure you know that I mean it,” Blurr replied, his hand curving around the back of Starscream’s helm.

He pushed closer and Starscream stumbled backward, a mere-half step before his wings and back hit the cool transsteel of the balcony window. He had nowhere to go from the warmth Blurr offered, and he didn’t want to leave.
They kissed again, soft and sweet, and Starscream couldn’t be sure this wasn’t part of some recharge-addled dream. That he hadn’t fallen into recharge over his desk and wandered to an imagining where someone cared about him.

Blurr squeezed his hand and then let it go, circling his arm around Starscream’s frame, his hand pressed to Starscream’s backstrut. He urged their frames together, and Starscream moaned into the kiss. He forced his hands into motion, seeking an anchor and finding it in Blurr’s hips.

His processor continued to spin, as his spark throbbed, and heat pulsed into his lines. Blurr nipped at his lips, so gentle that it barely counted as a nip, before his mouth wandered down to the vulnerable cables of Starscream’s neck. He worked his intake, helm tilting back against the transsteel, Blurr’s lips and glossa teasing the sensitive dermal metal.

Starscream’s knees wobbled. “Why?” he stammered. “Why are you--?”

“Kissing you? Because I want to.” Blurr’s hands slid to his shoulders, to his sides, to his waist, to his hip. “To show you that you’re not a monster.”

Starscream’s spark clenched. He couldn’t swallow past the knot in his intake. His hands moved to Blurr’s shoulders as Blurr knelt in front of him, which he shouldn’t do because of his healing hip. But if it hurt, Starscream couldn’t tell, not with the way Blurr nuzzled his groin and ex-vented wet heat over his panels.

“Gonna open for me?” Blurr asked as he rubbed his cheek against Starscream’s groin plating.

“What?” Starscream asked, dumbly.

Blurr’s fingers held his hip, thumbs sweeping into transformation seams and teasing the cables beneath. “Because it’ll be difficult for me to suck you off with your panels shut. Unless you’d rather I lick you out instead.”

Starscream’s engine all but roared. His ventilations heaved, panels clicking open with an audible pop. His hands rested on Blurr’s shoulders, fingers flexing.

“Mmm, that’s better,” Blurr murmured, and ex-vented over Starscream’s equipment again. His lips brushed over the heated metal surrounding his panels. “Got a preference for which one?”

Starscream shivered. He worked his intake.

“No?” Blurr said before Starscream could manage a single word. “Guess I’ll just have to try them both. Like this pretty spike right here, I think.” His glossa extended, lapping at the tip of Starscream’s spike and returning with a drop of pre-fluid.

Starscream groaned. His hips juttered forward, spike drawn to the temptation of Blurr’s mouth. A jolt of need shot up his backstrut and back down again, focusing in his groin.

“Can’t believe I haven’t done this yet,” Blurr murmured before he slowly took Starscream into his mouth, swallowing Starscream’s spike inch by precious inch.

Starscream gasped. He gnawed on his bottom lip, his fingers curling into claws around Blurr’s shoulders. His hips jerked with every sweep of Blurr’s glossa, every gentle touch of his denta.
“Blurr, you don’t have to--”

“What? Offer you pleasure?” Blurr asked as he let Starscream slip from his lips. He looked up at Starscream, his optics bright. “Why not? You’ve done the same for me.”

“Yes, but--”

“Do you not like it?” Blurr ex-vented hotly, the warm gust sending tingles through Starscream’s spike and into his sensory net.

He shivered and gnawed on his bottom lip. “I do.”

“How do you want me to stop?”

“No.”

“Then I don’t see what the problem is.” Blurr rubbed his cheek along Starscream’s spike, making it throb. “Unless you want me to kiss elsewhere. Is that it?”

A choked sound escaped from Starscream’s vocalizer. His frame flushed with heat as his processor instantly conjured up images of Blurr nudging between his thighs, kissing his valve, and nibbling on his exterior nodes.

“That’s what I thought,” Blurr murmured as he nuzzled his way further down, lips pressing a kiss to the base of Starscream’s spike before he ventured further. “This pretty valve wants some attention, too.”

Starscream moaned, his thighs parting of their own accord, a wash of cool air wafting over the exposed components of his valve. His calipers fluttered, biolights blinking fitfully in anticipation.

“Look at it,” Blurr murmured as he curved one hand around Starscream’s hip and the back of his thigh, holding him in place. “Begging for attention. I should obey, shouldn’t I?”

Oh, Primus. Starscream ground his denta if only to keep from making more pathetic sounds.

“Yes, I think I should,” Blurr said before Starscream felt the first delicate touch of a glossa to the rim of his valve.

A whimper escaped Starscream’s intake. His knees wobbled, even as Blurr made a sound of delight and pressed harder, his nasal ridge nudging Starscream’s anterior node as his glossa pushed deeper, getting his first taste of Starscream’s lubricant.

Starscream’s spark throbbed. He gasped a ventilation, hands hooking harder into Blurr’s shoulders. He canted his hips forward, opening himself up to each careful lap of Blurr’s glossa, each tiny circle, and careful tasting of his nodes.

The pleasure rose inside him, like tiny cresting waves that his frame rode, rocking against Blurr’s mouth, his glossa, the tiny kisses he laved over Starscream’s rim. It felt like affection, like worship, and Starscream couldn’t remember a time he ever felt this adored.

It was a dream. It had to be.

Well, if it was, Starscream didn’t want to wake.
He trembled, one hand flailing for something to hold on to, as Blurr found and nibbled on his anterior node, suckling it with great care. Blurr’s hand caught his, and guided it to Blurr’s helm, urging him to direct Blurr. But all he could think was ‘more’ and his hand sought to guide Blurr deeper, harder.

Blurr purred against his valve, the vibrations stirring Starscream’s nodes. He gasped out a sound that may have been a word, hips canting forward, until the curve of Blurr’s hand around his thigh prompted him to lift a leg, draping it over Blurr’s shoulder. He tipped back, weight against the transteel window.

He moaned as Blurr’s glossa pushed into his valve, fragging him slowly, as though savoring each internal sensor he could reach. He trembled as Blurr returned to his nodes, both the anterior cluster and the caudal cluster. Heat built in his groin, charge cresting in his lines. His processor spun, the world around him twisting into heat and pleasure.

Blurr lapped at his rim, glossa tracing around it, before he nibbled on Starscream’s anterior node. He pinned it between his denta and flicked his glossa over it, again and again, until the coil of need in Starscream’s abdomen burst. He overloaded, gasping for a ventilation, as fire sparked through his lines. He gripped Blurr’s helm, keeping him in place, as he rocked against Blurr’s face, mindlessly seeking to extend that pleasure.

The ecstasy swept him up and dropped him down again, left him shaking, weak-kneed, and sagging against the transteel. He eased his grip on Blurr’s helm, vision wobbly, his leg gently guided back to the floor.

And then Blurr was there, cradling his face, kissing him again, tasting of Starscream’s lubricants. Starscream moaned into the kiss, clutching at Blurr’s side, dragging him close, pressing their frames together. His lines thrummed, spark spinning rapidly in his chassis. He felt like he were floating, drowning in the gentle presses of Blurr’s lips to his.

“Berth now?” Blurr murmured.

Starscream made an incoherent noise. “Hmm?”

“Well, I can’t carry you sadly,” Blurr said and rubbed their nasal ridges together. “But it would be better to continue this in a berth.”

“Continue?” He sounded like an idiot, he knew he did. But his comprehension had gone out the window the moment Blurr apologized.

He still wasn’t convinced that he was online and aware.

“Mm hmm.” Blurr hummed and nibbled along the curve of his jaw. “I want to press you down to the berth and slide into you slowly, savor every inch of that pretty valve you have.”

Starscream, embarrassingly, whimpered. His valve clenched down at the thought, more lubricant slicking his thighs.

Blurr kissed him again, and Starscream lost himself to the heat of it, the slow touch of their glossas, the repeated brush of his lips. The berthroom was too far away, but the lure of the comfort of a berth prompted him into motion. Seeing Blurr’s limp was all the motivation he needed to move faster.
He forced himself to pull away, to stumble toward the berthroom, his vision a blur of colors.

When was the last time you recharged, he asked himself, and he couldn’t remember. It didn’t matter.

Blurr cornered him against the berth again, burying him in kisses. And Starscream moaned into them, clutching at Blurr, enjoying the warmth of their plating pressed together. He swore he could feel the frenetic whirl of Blurr’s spark despite the armor separating them, and knew his own echoed it.

“On the berth for me?” Blurr asked against his lips, his fingers stroking a delicate pattern down the back of Starscream’s wings, making him shiver.

Starscream worked his intake. He nodded, unable to manage words, and hoisted himself onto the padded surface. His spark throbbed, desire swirling like a mad vortex inside of him. His valve clenched, desperate for stimulation. Starscream automatically moved to hands and knees.

Blurr’s hands landed on his hips, exerting a careful pressure. “No,” he said as he urged Starscream to roll over, to arrange his wings so that he could lay on his back. “I want to see your face.”

He nudged his way between Starscream’s thighs, not that Starscream didn’t open for him. His hands held Starscream’s hips, smoothed down the outside of his thighs, tickled at the back of his knees. Starscream hummed deep in his intake, a shiver working down his spinal strut.

“Why?” Starscream asked, and instantly regretted the question, because it revealed more than he ever wanted to disclose.

Blurr paused and looked at him, something flicking across his face. He leaned forward, hands bracing themselves to either side of Starscream’s helm, his face hovering over Starscream’s.

“You’re beautiful,” he said, so simply, so frankly. “And I don’t think I’ve ever told you that.”

Starscream’s face heated. “I don’t think--”

“If you’re still thinking, I’m not doing my job right,” Blurr said with a little laugh. He pressed their forehelms together, and one by one, his hands sought out Starscream’s, tangling their fingers together. “So let me say it again, while you’re paying attention.”

Starscream’s thighs tightened against Blurr’s, the heat of Blurr’s panels pressed to his array like a promise. “You don’t have to.”

“Yes, I do.” Blurr squeezed Starscream’s hands. “I’m sorry.”

Starscream worked his intake. “I accept your apology.”

“Mmm. Good.” Blurr rocked against him, his panel rubbing against Starscream’s external nodes. “I want to spike you now. Any objections to that?”

Starscream moaned, a coil tightening in his abdomen. He hooked his legs around Blurr’s waist, drawing the Racer tightly against him. “None.”

Blurr’s panels popped, and Starscream felt the wet brush of a spike against his inner thigh,
nudging over his valve rim. He moaned, thighs trembling against Blurr’s hips. His helm tilted back against the berth as Blurr’s mouth descended to his intake, kissing and nibbling the sensitive cables there.

Blurr rocked his hips achingly slow, and his spike bobbed against Starscream’s swollen rim before the head finally caught. He pushed inside, a slow, savoring thrust that lit up Starscream’s internal nodes one by one.

Starscream’s backstrut arched, his hands squeezing Blurr’s, as he urged Blurr inside him, his calipers clutching at Blurr’s spike and trying to pull him deeper. His frame shook, heat cascading through his lines in a steady wave of need.

He waited. He expected Blurr to start fragging him in earnest now, pushing him deeper and deeper into the berth, his hands possessive and gripping.

Instead, Blurr’s mouth dragged back to his in another lingering kiss. They exchanged heated intakes, Blurr’s lips brushing over his. It was less a kiss, and better an embrace. He pushed into Starscream in slow, steady thrusts, spike dragging continuously over Starscream’s internal nodes.

Pleasure unfurled within Starscream like the ecstasy of a first transformation after weeks spent aberth. Like soaring high into the sky, spinning toward the stars. Starscream’s hands twitched against Blurr’s, trying to pull free, even as he turned his helm away from Blurr.

The pleasure, he knew, had to be written into his face. As did the need. He could feel the heat, the desperation of it, and he didn’t want Blurr to see him like that.

But Blurr’s grip on him was firm. Starscream’s hands were pinned to the berth. His entire frame was blanketed with Blurr’s, helpless to the pleasure Blurr built within him in steady waves. His thrusts never increased, only continued that steady drag against Starscream’s nodes, which spat charge back at Blurr’s spike.

Blurr peppered kisses over Starscream’s face, each of them feeling like the tiniest of promises.

Starscream’s spark ached. He trembled, vents sucking in desperate draughts of cooler air. The ecstasy spooled inside of him, knotting tighter and tighter. It wasn’t a frantic scrabble toward overload. It was completely out of his control.

Starscream whimpered, until Blurr’s lips caught his in a brief, gentle kiss. He pressed their forehelms together, his lips hovering over Starscream’s, but his gaze focused on Starscream’s. Their optics locked, and heat flooded Starscream’s face.

“I know you’re close,” Blurr murmured as he pushed deeper into Starscream, grinding against his ceiling node. His fingers flexed around Starscream’s. “I want to see you overload.”

Starscream worked his intake. He wanted to look away, but he felt trapped by the honesty in Blurr’s optics, and the affection in his field. Genuine affection.

He wanted to think this was all some game, some plan of Blurr’s to have Starscream under his thumb. But if Blurr was acting, he was a damn good one. There was sincerity in his words, in his actions, and it was intoxicating.

Starscream’s spark spun tighter, matching the pleasure that built and built and built in his frame. His ventilations caught and held, vibrating his frame.
“Come on,” Blurr purred, grinding deep into Starscream, their frames locked together, his hands squeezing. “Overload, Star. Sing for me.”

And he did.

The keen that rose in his vocalizer had no words, and the overload that swept over him was less an assault of ecstasy, and more a suffusing wave of rapture that carried him away. He trembled and shook, valve spasming and tightening on Blurr’s spike, his backstrut arching. His thighs clamped around Blurr’s hip as though desperate to keep Blurr within him, as he shook and shook and shook.

Blurr’s lips closed over his, swallowing the rest of the embarrassing noises, and Starscream was grateful for that. His optics shuttered and he sank into the berth, sank into the pleasure the overload offered.

The hot splatter of Blurr’s transfluid within him, washing over his nodes, sent Starscream into a second, smaller overload. He clamped down on Blurr, held him close, their frames moving together in tiny motions of metal shifting against metal, until the tension flooded out of Starscream’s cables, leaving him a limp mass against the berth.

He panted for ventilation, his vision fuzzy, his audials striped with static.

Blurr nuzzled his face, and he let Starscream’s hands go, giving him rein to wrap his arms around Blurr and keep the Racer pinned against him.

“I’m sorry,” Blurr murmured, again. His field was an embrace, wrapping around Starscream, soaked in guilt, apology, and affection.

Starscream’s spark fluttered. “I know.”
Swallow My Bullet

Chapter Summary

The morning after, a conversation is had, and Starscream’s newest confession tests the limits of Blurr’s resolve.

Blurr onlined slowly, aching and overheated. It was early, judging by his chronometer. His processor was a muddled mess, his tanks pinged him for energon and coolant both. His optics unshuttered, blurry vision slowly informing him that he was in Starscream’s penthouse and berthroom.

And the weight on top of him, fully wrapped around his frame, was Starscream himself. The slight pinch of talons in his seams, brushing the cables beneath, was further proof. Starscream tended to attach himself like a burr in recharge, and this time was no exception.

Blurr couldn’t even fault him for it.

The guilt returned, seeping into his spark, as Blurr fully onlined. The throb in his hip became a dull, nauseating ache. He’d overextended last night. But he deserved that.

Blurr looked down. Starscream lay on top of him, his helm pillowed on Blurr’s shoulder, one arm extended over Blurr’s chestplate, and claws hooked in the seams of his opposite shoulder. He had a leg thrown over Blurr’s lower half as he blanketed most of Blurr’s frame with his own.

He ventilated evenly, energy field quiescent. Calm.

If someone had told Blurr, weeks ago, that he’d one day wake in Starscream’s berth and find himself looking at Starscream with something approaching affection, Blurr would have told them that they needed their processor examined.

Now… now it was true.

Blurr cycled a soft ventilation and stroked a hand down Starscream’s back, careful to avoid his wings as that was more likely to startle Starscream online. The very fact that he knew that should have been telling.

Starscream stirred, his helm nuzzling Blurr’s shoulder. He made a low humming noise in his intake before he lifted his helm, optics spiraling in and out before they focused on Blurr.

“Good morning,” Blurr said, in what he hoped was a neutral tone.

Crimson optics brightened by narrow degrees. “Is it?” Starscream asked, his vocals still heavy with the static of a frame slowly surging to coherency.

Blurr cycled a ventilation. “I deserved that,” he admitted. “We need to talk.” Because last night hadn’t been much talking after a certain point. And while their berth chemistry was obviously not an issue, they couldn’t work together on that alone.
Starscream’s claws retracted in a snap. His armor slicked down tightly to his frame. “Yes, we do,” he said, and shifted back, pulling himself from Blurr’s embrace, his field withdrawing the same.

Blurr winced as their tangled energies parted, and his own field sought to cling to Starscream’s. Apparently, his processor might not have understood it, but his spark and field, had. Because both wanted to keep Starscream near.

Blurr shifted as Starscream pulled away, and pain lanced down his leg, radiating from his injured hip. He hissed before he could stop himself.

“Dammit.”

“You overexerted yourself,” Starscream observed as he slid off the berth, wings shifting behind him, as they often did post-recharge. “You need a pain patch.”

“I don’t--”

“You need a pain patch,” Starscream said firmly. His expression was neutral, closed off, and it sent a chill through Blurr’s spark.

His apology had not been enough. Of course it wasn’t. He’d hurt Starscream. What did he expect?

Blurr sighed and dragged his aching frame upright, bracing his back against the wall. “Fine.”

“I’ll make it the lowest grade possible,” Starscream said as he moved to his desk and started rummaging in the drawers. “You’ll still hurt, but it won’t be as bad and you won’t have that processor fog you despise.”

Blurr cycled a ventilation. “Thank you.”

Starscream plucked a small box out of a drawer and returned to the berth. He sat on the edge of it and reached for Blurr’s nearest arm, prompting him to open his medical port. The very fact Blurr felt comfortable exposing it to Starscream should have been a clue for him. One he should have picked up weeks ago.

Starscream slid in the new chip, and tucked the tiny box of assorted chips under the berth.

“I mean it,” Blurr said as he took his arm back and tension eased out of his frame with the flood of receptor numbing. “Thank you.”

Starscream shrugged. “I broke it. I’m responsible for fixing it.”

Blurr shook his helm. “Obsidian did this,” he said, patting his hip. “And you’ve gone above and beyond what anyone would expect. Why didn’t you just leave me in the medcenter?”

Starscream gave him an askance look. “You know why.”

“Right.” Blurr briefly gnawed on his bottom lip. He plucked at the berth cover.

Starscream cycled a ventilation. “Whatever you might think of me, I didn’t plan this. I didn’t want it. I wanted a political partner who would offer me credibility and a means to connect with my people. I didn’t want… this.” He gestured between them.
“And what is this?” Blurr asked.

“A complication,” Starscream bit out. His armor smoothed over his protoform again, his wings pressed against his back. “A distraction. A weakness.”

“Relationships often are.”

“We don’t have a relationship,” Starscream retorted. He rolled his optics and folded his arms over his cockpit. “We have a mess, glued together with transfluid and pride.”

Well, that kind of stung. No matter how much it was true.

Blurr plucked harder at the berth covers, finding a loose string and tugging on it. “Do you want one?”

Starscream cycled his optics. “What?”

Blurr shifted his weight and lifted his gaze. “I like you, and apparently you like me, and we’re both lying if we say otherwise. So let’s stop pretending we’re only business partners, and start acting like we’re something more.”

“You do realize who I am, don’t you?” Starscream demanded, and there was a hint of something in his tone.

Blurr scraped a hand down his face. “Yes, I do.” He cycled a ventilation, and threw his pride out the window. “Look, I know I fragged up. I overreacted. I jumped to conclusions. I said things I shouldn’t have. And I’m sorry about that.”

“I know you are. You said it multiple times last night,” Starscream said, and he unfolded his arms with a sigh. “But you are also right. I was a Decepticon. I did do terrible things. I did lie to you, however much it was a lie of omission. And just because things are different now, doesn’t mean that I’m not guilty of everything else.”

“Are you lying to me now?”

Starscream cycled his optics. He shifted his weight by a fraction. “I…”

“About something that I need to know, not something that you’re allowed to keep private,” Blurr clarified, because sometimes, there were self-truths you weren’t ready to reveal to others.

Starscream slid off the berth. The agitation was back in his field, his wings twitching before he managed to still them. He turned away from Blurr, shoulders hunching, arms crossing again.

His silence spoke volumes.

“Starscream?”

“You know what, frag that,” Starscream finally said, though it was with a low hiss that was somewhat alarming. “You already know the worst of me, so what does it matter anymore.” He half-turned, so that Blurr could only see the shadows of his face. “I killed Metalhawk.”

Blurr went cold. “… What?”
“I saw an opportunity and I took it,” Starscream snapped, his wings vibrating, his energy field so gone as to be dead. “I needed the people of this city to unite. I needed them to stop fighting. I needed to give them incentive to do so. Metalhawk was the sacrifice for that cause.”

Starscream whirled, his hands dropping from his chassis to spread wide as though he were offering himself, the expression on his face one Blurr had never seen before. “Metalhawk was my friend, or so he claimed, and I killed him. There. Are you happy? Now there are no lies.”

Blurr’s mouth moved, but he couldn’t find any words. He felt… numb, for lack of a better word. Starscream stood there, halfway hysterical, claiming that he’d killed Metalhawk, and not Turmoil as he’d claimed, and Blurr didn’t know how he was supposed to react to that.

Because that was the Starscream Blurr feared. The one he remembered of the Decepticons, who had slaughtered the Senate, and led countless attacks against the Autobots.

That Starscream clashed with the one Blurr had slowly come to know. The one who startled when presented with kindness, who saved Wheeljack, and who had cared for Blurr on his own.

Blurr worked his jaw.

Last night, Starscream had given him an out. He supposed that offer still stood. Not that it hadn’t always been present. He only needed to say he was done. Blurr was sure Starscream would let him walk away. He was sure of that much. He trusted Starscream wouldn’t murder him to keep the secret hidden.

He trusted Starscream that much, and it was frightening.

“Well,” Starscream said, his engine revving into a higher pitch. “Say something.”

“Do you regret it?” Blurr asked, because the alternative wasn’t much better.

Starscream reared back. “Do I – excuse me – do I regret it?”

Blurr shifted his weight, moving to get off the berth, because like frag was he going to have this conversation on his aft. “You said you killed him to solidify your political position, or at least I’m assuming that. So do you regret it?”

Starscream stared at him, looking every bit as though he was caught in the middle of a debate between flight or fight. “No,” he said, though it wasn’t as firm as it should have been. “I don’t. I did what I had to do.”

Blurr’s legs wobbled, but he managed to stay upright, though he braced his good hip against the edge of the berth. “Are you going to kill me?”

“No!”

Now that sounded a lot more firm.

“Why not?” Blurr folded his arms over his chestplate, his spark pounding within its chamber. This was quite possibly the stupidest thing he’d ever done. “Kill me. Blame it on Obsidian. It would make for some good incentive.”
Color bleached out of Starscream’s face, his optics dulling. “If I was going to do that, I would have never dug you out of that debris.”

“But you did.”

“Because I still needed you,” Starscream spat.

Blurr shook his helm. “I thought you weren’t going to lie to me.”

Starscream’s hands closed into shaking fists. His optics widened, ex-vents coming in sharp bursts, agitation writ into his field.

Blurr knew that look. It was one of a cornered mechanimal, injured and left with nowhere to run. For a moment, Blurr felt guilty.

He’d started this. It was his fault.

But Starscream had given him plenty of outs. He’d never lied about who he was. Blurr had always known, had come into this thinking he was some kind of hero, one who could temper Starscream, or at least stop him from doing something terrible.

Right now, the monster was beneath their pedes. He lurked in the underlevels, setting bombs because he could, sowing fear and dissension into those trying to start over on Cybertron.

Starscream wasn’t a good mech.

None of them were anymore.

Blurr pushed himself forward, away from the berth, ignoring the twinge in his hip. The pain was a dull ache, tolerable, and he managed not to limp as he approached Starscream.

He expected Starscream to run away, avoid him. A part of him feared that Starscream might attack, as wounded mechanimals were wont to do. But Starscream didn’t. He watched Blurr’s approach warily, his ventilations ragged and sharp.

“You saved Wheeljack, and you saved me,” Blurr said, keeping his gaze on Starscream as he did so, forcing Starscream to look at him. “You can tell me it was for personal gain all you want, because yes that is true, but you can’t sit there and lie and tell me that’s all it was.”

They were inches apart, close enough Blurr could feel the biting snap of Starscream’s energy field, the way it thrashed like a caged thing. They were too near for Starscream to conceal it completely, and the disbelief and dread in it were hard to ignore.

“Tell me I’m the one lying,” Blurr said.

Starscream shook his helm. “You’re not,” he said, his vocals striped with static, a small shiver coursing over his armor. “But I still killed Metalhawk.”

“Yeah. I heard you the first time.”

“Then why aren’t you running?” Starscream demanded, through denta clenched and a quiver in his wings. “Why aren’t you screaming for the media, for anyone who will listen? You have the power, right now, to end me.”
Blurr tilted his helm, lips pulling into a slight smile. “I know. Terrifying, isn’t it?” One more step and they shared ventilating air. “Right now, you could kill me. I know you’re armed. You could save yourself, and all you have to do is shoot me. Right here.” He patted his chestplate, so thin, barely a protection. “But you haven’t. Why is that?”

“I don’t want to,” Starscream said, though it was barely above a whisper, so pained was it.

“And I don’t want to run,” Blurr added. He loudly cycled a ventilation. “For better or worse, you’re the leader Cybertron needs right now. And on a more personal note, you’re the mech I want in my berth, too.”

Starscream’s optics widened. His mouth opened, as though he intended to speak, but words escaped him. Instead, he reached for Blurr, and Blurr didn’t even have the instinctive need to retreat. He didn’t so much as flinch as Starscream cupped his face and drew him in for a kiss, a fierce one, all lips and denta.

Blurr moaned into the kiss as their frames collided. He gripped Starscream, hands curving around the Seeker’s frame, holding them close. Starscream’s glossa plunged into his mouth, deepening the kiss, as though laying claim. His field wrapped around them both, pulsing with need.

Primus help him, but Blurr didn’t want to walk away from Starscream. The Seeker had nestled under his plating, and close to his spark.

Starscream had just confessed to murder, and all Blurr wanted to do was pin him down to the berth and frag him into stasis. Because in the same breath, Starscream admitted that his self-proclaimed selfishness had a blind spot, and it was Blurr.

How could he walk away from something that intoxicating?

He couldn’t.

Starscream was danger and desire wrapped in a pretty package, and Blurr felt breathless as he gave in to that risk. He was overcharged on the power it offered him. He was dizzy in the wake of the pleasure, in the biting kisses Starscream bestowed on him and the heat of the Seeker’s armor.

Starscream’s engine purred, in counterpoint to the heated rumble of Blurr’s own. The kiss deepened, lust infecting their fields.

“You are going to be the end of me,” Starscream said against Blurr’s lips, his thumbs sweeping a gentle pattern over Blurr’s cheek, much as Blurr had the night before.

“I could say the same for you,” Blurr said, his hands tightening on Starscream’s waist, anything to keep them close.

Starscream chuckled, though it was a dark and dangerous sound. “You really want to do this?”

“Try a relationship with you?” Blurr asked and it was his turn to free a soft laugh. “It won’t be the worst decision I’ve ever made.”

“Pretty close though?”

Blurr pressed a kiss to the curve of Starscream’s jaw, trying to resist the urge to back the Seeker
toward the berth and stay in it for the rest of the day. “I guess we’ll just have to wait and see.”

Starscream’s thumbs swept over his cheek again. “I’ll take that as a challenge.” Humor thrummed through his field.

Blurr chuckled. “If you say so.” He bit at Starscream’s lower lip before forcing himself to draw back. “What now?”

Starscream’s glossa flicked over his lips. “Now we sit down, refuel, and figure out what we’re going to do about Obsidian and Strika.”

“Together?” Blurr asked, unable to hide the suspicion in his tone. He almost felt guilty for it, until he saw the smile on Starscream’s lips – warm and genuine.


He kissed Blurr again, soft and sweet, their lips moving together, and fields pulsing in sync. Blurr’s optics flickered. He melted into the kiss. It was startlingly easy to do.

As it turned out, agreeing to be with Starscream wasn’t the hardest decision he’d ever had to make.
Chapter Summary

Routines are established. Wheeljack announces himself to the world. And Obsidian makes another move.

Do nothing.

It sounded counter-intuitive, but it was the best course of action they had.

Do nothing. Wait for the spies to turn up some kind of lead. And in the meantime, pretend that all was right with the world.

Starscream would continue to lead Cybertron. Blurr would continue to heal, make connections, and look into rebuilding Maccadam’s.

It sounded so simple in theory. While Starscream might have mastered the art of playing casual while under stress, Blurr had not. He couldn’t help constantly looking over his shoulder, peering into dark alleys, and being suspicious of anyone he came into contact with.

Which meant he nearly leapt out of his plating when he walked into the lower floor of Starscream’s apartment building and Jazz was lounging on one of the benches as though he belonged there.

“A little jumpy there?” Jazz asked as he hopped to his pedes, every inch the casual spy that he was.

Blurr gave him a sour look. “Excuse me for not being a stealthy assassin who can spot trouble coming from a galaxy away.”

Jazz chuckled. “I ain’t that perfect, mech.” He fell into step beside Blurr, giving him a lookover. “I see that you and Starscream made up.”

“Yes.”

“Thanks to me?”

“In part.” Blurr gave him an askance look. “And you’re here because…?”

“Just wanted to check on ya.” Jazz patted him on the shoulder and then followed Blurr into the lift. “See how things were goin’. Catch up. That sort of thing. Why aren’t ya at the announcement?”

Blurr selected the penthouse and waited for the lift to activate. Jazz beamed at him, full of bouncy cheer.

“I didn’t want to steal Wheeljack’s thunder,” he deadpanned. His lips curved into a small smirk.
“Or Starscream’s for that matter.”

“Mmm.” Jazz tilted his helm, something incisive in his gaze. “So I’m guessin’ that ya’ll finally sat down and realized what the rest of us already knew.”

Blurr dragged a hand down his faceplate. “Everyone around here is nothing but a bunch of busybody, nanny-bots,” he muttered.

Jazz laughed. “It’s only cause we care. Well, that and because you and Starscream are the epitome of high entertainment around here.”

Blurr covered his mouth. “You do know Starscream killed Metalhawk, right?” He wasn’t sure why he blurted that out. Maybe so Jazz would stop looking at him like this was all some kind of comedy routine.

The bounce in Jazz’s pedes ceased. “I suspected as much. Old Screamer has some pretty bad habits.”

The lift donged and deposited them on the top floor, with Jazz following Blurr out and to the front door of the penthouse he now shared with Starscream.

“Metalhawk was a threat to his leadership, and a threat to the potential stability of Cybertronian politics,” Jazz added with a thoughtful hum. “The opportunity was there. I ain’t surprised he took it.” He tilted his helm and looked at Blurr. “Funny ya don’t sound angry about it.”

Blurr scanned himself into the security system before the door opened, admitting he and Jazz into the dim quiet of the suite.

“I know I should be,” he said with a small ventilation. “I should be horrified. Furious. Terrified even. But I’m not.” He swept a hand over his crest. “What that says about me, I don’t know.” He moved to the couch and dropped onto it with a relieved ex-vent.

Nearly a week of rest and his hip was almost fully healed. Soon enough, he could badger Wheeljack to repair or replace his boosters, and Starscream couldn’t whittle him down into agreeing not to wear them just yet. He wanted them back, frag it. He didn’t feel like himself without them.

“To be fair, no one really liked Metalhawk,” Jazz said as he hopped into a chair.

Blurr thought that might have been a joke. He frowned and stretched his arms across the back of the couch, giving Jazz a long look.

“I’m fragged up,” he said. “And I don’t know if I should be blaming Starscream for that, or if I was always like this and he just brought it out in me.”

Jazz’s visor flashed. “Blurr, we’re all messed up in all kindsa ways. That’s what happens when yer one of the lucky few to survive a war that pretty much destroyed your planet.” He leaned back and propped his pedes on the low table between them. “I say, as long as yer happy, frag the rest.”

That sounded good in theory, but also, incredibly selfish. Blurr wasn’t sure he could call what he felt right now ‘happiness’, but maybe it was a start toward something like satisfaction.

“If you say so,” he said. “Get your pedes off my table.”
Jazz chuckled. “Sure thing, boss.” His pedes snapped to the floor, and that seemed to launch him right out of the chair. He stretched his arms over his helm. “Guess that’s my cue to leave.”

“You just got here.” Blurr narrowed his optics.

“Yeah, and ya spilled the beans faster than I thought ya would.” Half of Jazz’s visor fluttered in his version of a wink. “I wish you and Starscream many happy returns, nights of overloads, and sappy poems.”

Blurr scowled. “You’re impossible.”

Jazz planted his hands on his hips and chuckled. “‘Sides, I got work to do. Ya’d think my team and I woulda found Obsidian by now, but he’s a lot more slippery than we thought.”

“And Strika,” Blurr corrected.

“Yeah, that’s the thing. No sign of her.”

Blurr frowned. “Huh. Weird.” Usually the two were so close as to be attached the hip. You never saw one without the other. Strika, more often than not, was the tactical mind, but Obsidian had always been the charismatic one. Or so Blurr heard at least.

He tugged a datapad out of subspace and powered it on. It contained a list of potential locations to rebuild New Maccadam’s, and while he didn’t intend to do any kind of construction while Obsidian lurked in the dark, it was fine to start planning.

“How’re Mirage and Rattrap getting along?” Blurr asked.

Jazz snorted a laugh. “Mech, you don’t even wanna know.”

“That bad, huh?”

Jazz tapped his audials. “If you had ta hear the bickering I do, you’d pity me.”

Blurr chuckled and swept his fingers over the datapad, dismissing a location that was a bit too near the ruins of Kimia for his comfort. Besides, last he’d heard, Starscream’s Enforcers were setting up camp near there and the last thing Blurr needed was his bar within shouting distance of the local law.

“Maybe I need to find you a Seeker of your own. For stress relief,” Blurr commented.

“Pah. Ya keep the one you got. He’s more of a handful than I ever want.” Jazz waved a dismissive hand.

The front door chimed.

Blurr cycled his optics.

“Ya expecting company?” Jazz asked.

“Do I ever?” Blurr pushed to his pedes, setting his datapad aside, and moved to answer the door. He felt, more than saw, Jazz tense, and knew Jazz had his back if necessary.
Maybe he should look into having Wheeljack acquire him some replacement weapons before he thought about his boosters. His blasters had both been wrecked in the explosion at his bar, along with the rest of his possessions. Without his boosters, he couldn’t outrun an attacker for long either.

Blurr keyed his code into the panel, bracing himself for anything. The door slid open, and all of the tension left Blurr in a rush.

“Am I interruptin’ sumthin’?” Rattrap asked with a raised orbital ridge. He strutted into the apartment as though he belonged there, two datapads tucked under his arm.

“You usually let yourself in,” Blurr said as he stepped aside and Jazz stood down, surreptitiously tucking a blaster back into whatever secret place he kept it.

Rattrap smirked. “Yeah, well, this time I didn’t. I figured ya were pretty twitchy.” He grabbed the datapads and handed them to Blurr. “These’re for Starscream. Final list of the volunteers fer the task force.”

“Why aren’t you in the sublevels?” Jazz asked.

“Why aren’t you giving these to Starscream?” Blurr added, though he still accepted them. He was curious who all had volunteered. “Especially since he’s supposed to be meeting with the task force after Wheeljack’s announcement.” Which, he checked his chronometer, ended about ten minutes ago.

“Had ta come up for a breath of fresh air,” Rattrap said in answer to Jazz, with an implication of ‘you’re not the boss of me’ which, while true, was a bit rude. “Mirage is fine. Yer pretty spy can take care ‘o himself.”

Jazz folded his arms under his chassis. “It’s not Mirage I’m worried about.”

Blurr waved the datapad pointedly. “Why are these here?”

“Because I ain’t traipsing halfway across the city when ya can make sure he gets them just as well as I can,” Rattrap said with a huff. “I got work ta do. I ain’t his errand mech, ya know.”

“Sure seems like it,” Jazz remarked.

Blurr ignored both of them. He flicked on the datapad Rattrap had given him, skimming the names available. Most he recognized as belonging to Starscream’s entourage. A few were NAILs who were often patrons of his shop. There were two former Decepticons, and a former Autobot as well. It was a fairly rounded group.

One name in particular stuck out: Fasttrack.

Blurr tapped on his designation, bringing up the file attached. There was an image capture of the mech: definitely a speedster, colors similar to Fasttrack but not an exact match, and he had a visor where Fasttrack had not. It could be a coincidence. Or it wasn’t one at all.

“I ain’t done nothin’ that weren’t invited,” Rattrap was saying as Blurr turned his attention back to the two pseudo-spies.
Jazz’s armor was fluffed aggressively. Rattrap’s denta were bared, and even the optics on his alt-mode seemed to gleam with anger.

Blurr slid between them, waving the datapad in Rattrap’s face. “Fasttrack. Does that sound familiar to you?”

“Should it?” Rattrap asked.

“You were supposed to look into him. Find out more about him. Remember?” Blurr said giving another shake of the datapad. “Now here he is, signed up for the task force.”

“And?”

“Yeah,” Jazz said. “I have to agree with the rodent. What is the point you’re tryin’ to make here, Blurr?”

Blurr gritted his denta. “Fasttrack is dead,” he hissed, free hand curling into a fist. “Has been for centuries. I want to know who’s using his name and why.”

“Lotsa people’ve changed their names. It ain’t that big of a deal,” Rattrap said. He shrugged dismissively. “I don’t see why yer so hung up on this one.”

“Fine. I’ll look into it myself,” Blurr snapped, and whirled away from the both of them. He shoved the datapad into his subspace and stalked back toward the couch, sweeping up the other datapads he’d left behind.

“Seriously,” Jazz said as he followed after Blurr. “What about this one caught your optic?”

Blurr didn’t answer him. He was too busy looking out the transsteel of the balcony, where a plume of smoke rose in the distance, billowing high into the sky. It was in the direction of the ruins of Kimia, where Starscream’s Enforcers gathered, and where he’d arranged to meet with his new task force. Where he should be, right at this very moment.

Blurr’s spark dropped into his pedes. His hand shot to his comm. “Starscream!”

Static crackled through his comm.

Frag.

Blurr spun on a heelstrut and ran toward the door, shoving past both Jazz and Rattrap. Now would be a fragging good time to have some wings, he seethed. He slammed his code into the lock, cursed the slow verification system, and pinged Starscream’s comm again.

Nothing.

He told himself to calm down. That Starscream’s comm could have been fried, that there could be a dampening field, that Starscream could have been knocked into a brief reset. That there were dozens of explanations other than the worse case scenario.

The door opened, and Blurr made a beeline for the lift. He didn’t bother to wait for the others. If they weren’t on his heelstruts, they could take the next one. They were there when the doors closed, however, and as Blurr punched the button for the ground floor.
“What happened?” Jazz asked. “I’m gettin’ all kinds of reports. Fires. An explosion. All emergency responders are being summoned.”


Blurr’s engine revved. He didn’t want to hear theories. He pinged Starscream again. He didn’t bother to leave a message. If he found out Starscream was ignoring him for whatever reason, he was going to blow a gasket.

“I’m sure Starscream’s fine.” Jazz squeezed his shoulder.

Blurr shrugged him off and hurried out of the lift. He didn’t want any empty platitudes. He wanted answers.

Luckily, he could still transform without his boosters. Oh, it was medically inadvisable, but since when had Blurr ever paid attention to what the medics said? That was how races were lost.

Blurr transformed and hit the ground with tires grinding against the rough, uneven road. He heard Jazz shift to alt-mode behind him, and didn’t know what Rattrap had done. It didn’t matter.

He had to find Starscream.
In the wake of Obsidian’s second attack, Starscream makes a decision that may ruin everything.
He startled, nearly leaping into the air, as the shout came across both his rebooted comms and carried through the air to his audials. Static striped his comms still, but he whirled in time to see Blurr speeding toward him.

In alt-mode, the fool!

Blurr screeched to a halt and transformed, his helm swinging before he caught sight of Starscream. Relief visibly flickered over his face before it was wiped away, and he stormed across the ground.

“Why haven’t you been answering your comms!” he demanded.

Starscream tapped his audial. “They’re damaged, I think. What are you doing here?” He moved to intercept Blurr before he could see too many of the grey frames laid across the ground.

“Obviously I came to make sure you were all right.” Blurr frowned, his gaze flicking past Starscream. And thank Primus for small favors, he lowered his voice. “This was Obsidian, wasn’t it?”

“That’s the prevailing theory, yes.” Starscream blinked in surprise as Blurr grabbed his hands and gave him a long, scanning look.

That was, well, that was both presumptuous and public of him. It was one thing for them to admit to a curious crowd that they were sharing a berth. It was another to appear as though they were lovers, even if that was the truth.

“You’re dented,” Blurr observed.

“Nothing serious,” Starscream said. “I was lucky. I only caught the pressure wave.”

“Obsidian didn’t want to kill ya.”

Starscream glanced past Blurr where Jazz approached at a much more leisurely pace. He looked casual, but Starscream knew that he was taking in details rapidly.

“There’s no way he intended to kill ya here,” Jazz added as he caught up to them, his attention briefly focused on Blurr holding Starscream’s hand, before his lips curled in a grin. “That would be too easy.”

Starscream squeezed Blurr’s hands, hoping he wouldn’t take offense, before he reclaimed his own. “He wanted to make a statement, would be my guess,” he replied smoothly.

“Yeah, well, he succeeded.” Jazz half-turned, tilting his helm toward the debris littered street behind him.

Spinning lights announced an approaching crowd, at the head of it marched Streamline and his gaggle of cameras.

Fantastic.

He had only a moment to brace himself – one where Jazz vanished and Blurr moved to stand beside Starscream – before the news crews attacked.

“Starscream!”
“Can you tell us what happened here?”

“You promised to keep the mecha of New Iacon safe!”

“Is this a failure to keep your promise?”

“Can you keep us safe?”

“Are the Decepticons to blame?”

“Was this a terrorist attack?”

“How many mechs died?”

Starscream twitched, and felt Blurr ex-vent noisily beside him. He made a small gesture with his right hand, hoping Blurr caught it, and held up his other hand.

“Gentlemechs,” Starscream said smoothly, planting a politician’s smile on his face, though thin it was. “One question at a time please. And have some respect. A tragedy occurred today.”

They calmed, but only in comparison to the noise that had assaulted him before.

“It is too soon to tell what exactly happened here,” Starscream continued once he was sure he had their attention. “Early reports seem to indicate that this is another attack from the terrorist seeking to bring us down. Exact casualty numbers are uncertain at this time as rescue efforts are still underway.”

One mech thrust himself forward, working his way free of the crowd. “What do you have to say to the mechs who believe you are failing to protect them?” he demanded, shoving a vid-recorder as close to Starscream’s face as he could manage.

“I would remind them that division will only help the terrorist right now. The team gathered here today was intended to hunt down the perpetrator and bring him to justice. Clearly, he did not like the idea of this. But do not worry. I am determined. I will take up this challenge personally, if I must,” Starscream answered, or evaded rather.

He couldn’t promise that the citizens would be safe. Because he couldn’t fragging find Obsidian. And if he couldn’t find Obsidian, he couldn’t very well stop him, now could he?

Going to the Autobots hadn’t been enough apparently. He was grossly understaffed, and even more so now that half of his strongest supporters had been caught in the blast.

Frag it all.

“Will you assemble another task force?”

Starscream barely kept from cringing as lights flashed in front of his optics, multiple photos being taken at once. He suspected Blurr’s proximity was partly to blame. He was close enough that Starscream could feel the heat of his frame, his field nudging against Starscream’s own.

“Yes, of course,” Starscream said. “If there are any volunteers who do not fear this terrorist, I would gladly accept their assistance. Cybertron belongs to all those who wish to peacefully reside
here. It is up to all of us to work together to keep our home safe."

“And I’ll be the first volunteer,” Blurr said with a bright smile.

Starscream’s optics widened before he could stop himself. It took all his self-control not to whirl on Blurr and hiss at him. What did he think he was doing? Did he want to make a bigger target of himself than he already was?

“Even though it is clear that is a dangerous decision?” one of the newsbots pressed, the look of glee on his face enough that Starscream wanted to smack it off.

Blurr lifted his chin, and subtly laced his fingers with Starscream’s, though of course the newsbots had to notice. “I trust that Starscream means to take down this terrorist, and I have faith that working together will carry us through. So yes. I am willing to put my spark on the line to ensure that Cybertron is safe for everyone.”

“Blurr is dedicated to the people of Cybertron, just as I am,” Starscream was quick to insert before another question could be shouted at him. “Now if you gentlemechs will excuse us, we have a great deal of work to do if we are to catch this terrorist before any further harm can be done.”

Starscream firmly turned, squeezing Blurr’s hand to encourage Blurr to come with him, and moved toward the clean up and rescue crews. “If they ask anything else, ignore them,” he said subvocally.

Blurr leaned in close enough to bump shoulders. “You know, I used to be in the spotlight all the time. I do know how to handle the press.”

“Does that include making bold statements we haven’t discussed?” Starscream demanded. He glanced over his shoulder, but the press still watched them avidly. He cycled a ventilation. “Never mind, we’ll talk about this later.”

“Sure.” Blurr squeezed his hand and let it go. “But if you think that means you’re sending me back to our penthouse, you’re mistaken. I’m going to stay and help.”

“Far be it from me to stop you,” Starscream replied with a sigh. He rubbed at his forehelm, feeling an ache coming on. “Just… be careful. We don’t know what incendiary device was used, or if Obsidian’s followers are lurking about.”

“I was a Wrecker, Starscream. I think I can take care of myself.” He winked an optic. “But I’m touched by your concern, sweetspark.”

Before Starscream could summon up a worthwhile retort, Blurr turned and jogged toward the rescue workers, making a beeline toward Scoop, who had taken it upon himself to oversee the recovery operation. Starscream still did not trust the mech, but as long as he was assisting Cybertron, he wouldn’t kick up too much of a fuss.

He had no idea where Jazz had gone. He suspected the former Autobot would contact him later, if need be.

For now, there was work to be done. So Starscream cycled a ventilation, and dove back into the fray.
They worked well into the night, staying until the last of the embers cooled and all the surviving mechs were either tucked into their homes, or safe in Flatline’s care. He had one mech in critical condition, but the rest were expected to survive.

That brought the final death count to seven.

Seven mechs who had trusted Starscream and paid the price. Four of his inner circle, two NAILs and a former Autobot. It was a former Decepticon who was in critical condition. Flatline was optimistic; Starscream didn’t know if he dare be the same.

He returned with Blurr back to their penthouse, and they did little more than share a cube of energon between them before they crawled into the berth for recharge. Together. And wasn’t that something that still stalled Starscream’s processor? The two of them, sharing a berth, and without interfacing involved.

He didn’t want to spoil the moment by addressing Blurr’s ridiculous act out there for the news crews. But he made a mental note of it. Because come the morning, Starscream had the feeling neither of them were going to be happy.

And he was right.

“You do realize I can take care of myself,” Blurr said, for the umpteenth time, as he paced around Starscream, gesturing broadly with one cube of mid-grade. “Besides, what you’re failing to acknowledge is that politically, that was a good move.”

Starscream pinched his nasal ridge. “I’m not saying it wasn’t, I’m just saying that I don’t think you thought it through. You already have a target on your back. Are you trying to make yourself Obsidian’s number one enemy?”

“I don’t have to try. I’m on his hit list whether I volunteered or not.” Blurr shrugged, in that dismissive way he did which never failed to infuriate Starscream.

Starscream worked his intake. He cycled several ventilations.

“So why don’t you stop telling me all the things you think I’m doing wrong, and start talking about our next move,” Blurr continued, circling around the couch to get closer to Starscream. “Obsidian’s not going to stop until we stop him. We need to catch him before he hurts someone else.”

Starscream lowered his hand. “I am aware of that. But now that I’m officially understaffed and out of options, there’s only one thing left to do.”

“And what’s that?”

Starscream rolled his shoulders, his wings pressing tight to his backplate. This was, and had always been, his last resort. But if the Autobots’ best weren’t giving him results, then he needed to swallow his pride.

“I’m going to talk to Soundwave.”
Blurr’s optics widened, and he choked on his next sip of energon. He coughed air through his vents, his optics bright.

“Are you crazy?” he demanded as he wiped energon splatter from his lips. “You’re going to invite the mech most loyal to Megatron back into this city?”

Starscream folded his arms over his cockpit. “If I must, yes. Right now, Obsidian’s a greater threat.”

“No. Absolutely not.” Blurr shook his helm, and set his cube of energon on the central table. “Starscream, you cannot seriously consider this. Soundwave’s worst than dangerous. You invite him back here, and we won’t even need Obsidian to oust you. Why would you even think this is a good idea?”

“Because of you!” Starscream snapped, and his wings went taut, his spark spiraling a frenetic pulse within his chamber.

Blurr reared back, his orbital ridges drawing down. “That doesn’t make sense. What did I do?”

Starscream started to pace. He had to do something for the restless charge coiling inside of him. “You went and volunteered for that damn task force knowing Obsidian’s going to aim for it again,” he snapped, and he couldn’t bring himself to look at Blurr. “I don’t have time to wait for Mirage and Rattrap to find him anymore. He has to be stopped. Now.”

“How many times do I have to tell you?” Blurr near-snarled, his armor ruffling up as he stalked forward. “I don’t need you to protect me.”

Starscream jabbed a finger toward Blurr’s chestplate. “I don’t care how fast you think you are,” he said in a low, careful tone. “You can’t outrun a bomb.”

Blurr snorted and crossed his arms over his chest. “Then clearly you haven’t been paying attention. I have before.”

“You didn’t last time,” Starscream snapped, and his wings went high and rigid, vibrating in place.

Because that was also what he needed right now, a reminder. Memories of watching Maccadam’s go up in flames. Of the warning in his audials as he turned to see his world shattering around him, and Blurr swallowed by a fireball.

“That took me by surprise. It won’t happen again,” Blurr said.

Starscream shook his helm. “Maybe, maybe not. I refuse to take any chances.”

“So you’re really going to ask Soundwave for help.”

“I will do whatever I think is necessary to ensure the safety of Cybertron,” Starscream said tightly. “I’m not asking you to agree with me.”

Blurr’s shoulders hunched. “Clearly.”

Starscream refused to feel guilty. “I’m going to stop by the medical center first and have Flatline repair my comms. If anyone comes looking for me, I am attending business elsewhere.”
“Sure. No problem. I'll be your message bot,” Blurr said, his tone implying that it actually was a problem. “Anything else I can do for you, boss?”

Starscream dropped his arms and cycled a ventilation. He didn’t mind if Blurr was angry with him, so long as Blurr was alive.

He moved past Blurr, keeping his field contained so he didn’t have to sense the fury in Blurr’s. “I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Starscream said.

“I’ll try not to hold my vents.”

Starscream winced, but didn’t dignify that with an answer. He opted to exit through the balcony rather than the front entrance, in case the press waited on the ground floor, demanding more answers he didn’t have.

He had Decepticons to find.
Starscream had only a vague idea of which direction the Decepticons had gone. He knew they’d made camp opposite of the Autobots, so that the newly rebuilt city was sandwiched between the two factions. He did not know how far, however, and did not want to stumble upon their campsite.

Caution meant that he sacrificed speed. He suspected, anyway, that Soundwave’s minions would find him first.

And he was right.

Starscream had no indication he wasn’t alone until the voice rose out of the dim and debris. “You’re not half the coward Megatron thought you were.”

Ravage.

Starscream didn’t bother to look around. He wouldn’t see the felinoid until Ravage wanted him to. He kept forward, though he did scan the area. Not that it did him any good. No spark signatures. No heat signatures. According to his equipment, he was alone.

“I am none of the insults he favored,” Starscream replied, careful to keep his tone mild. “Where’s your master? I want a word with him.”

“What if he doesn’t want to talk to you?”

Starscream hopped to the top of a broken building with a pop of his thrusters. Yet, he still couldn’t see anything.

“He will if he wants to cease scraping about in the dirt,” Starscream replied with a snort. His wings twitched. “I’m prepared to make him an offer.”

Silence.

Perhaps Ravage had gone to report to Soundwave. Fair enough. Starscream continued forward. He had to be close, or at least on the right track, if Ravage had spoken to him.

“He’s prepared to listen.”

Starscream didn’t startle. He had too much control for that. Even if Ravage’s voice had come from behind him.

Starscream slowly turned, unsurprised to find the felinoid sitting on the path Starscream had just crossed. “Only him?” Starscream asked.

Ravage’s head tilted, his optics glinting. “Didn’t think you’d want to talk to anyone else.”
“Well, you’re right about that.” Starscream flicked his hands at Ravage. “Lead on then. Let’s get this over with.”

“As if we’re going to let you anywhere near where we’re hidin’.”

Starscream’s gaze swung to the side as a twin pair of clunks announced Frenzy and Rumble’s arrival. They hopped into view, perching on a nearby boulder, their lips pulled into grins.

“Yeah,” Rumble agreed with a laugh. “We don’t need ya stinking up the place.”

“Fantastic,” Starscream muttered as he folded his arms over his chassis. “I get the whole circus.”

“Starscream: afraid?”

He half-turned as Soundwave moved into view, as oddly silent as always. For a mech his size and mass, Soundwave often went unnoticed. Starscream had always hated that about him. Laserbeak – or at least Starscream thought it was Laserbeak, he could never tell them apart – perched on Soundwave’s shoulder, opposite his sonic cannon.

Starscream need only look up to see the other avian cassette, circling above him. Yes, all of them had come. Starscream didn’t know if he was surprised, or if he’d expected it.

“If I was, I wouldn’t have shown up alone,” Starscream retorted with a roll of his optics.

Ravage stood, moving to plant himself by Soundwave’s pedes. “You must be desperate, if you’re coming to us.”

“If he had a tail, it’d be between his legs, right?” Frenzy elbowed Rumble in the side, grin so large you could fit a fist through it.

Starscream ignored them all, his gaze for Soundwave alone. The silent, dour mech stared back at him, expression unreadable. Someone had repaired both mask and visor for him, and Starscream had no clue who. The Constructicons, after all, were with Prowl and the Autobots.

“You may not live in the city anymore, but I’m sure you’ve heard of what’s been happening,” Starscream said.

“It wasn’t us!” Rumble announced.

“Yeah, it wasn’t us,” Frenzy agreed, and the two cassettes started jostling each other again. “We’d’ve done a way better job than that hack if it were.”

Starscream frowned. “I never said it was you. I don’t need help identifying the perpetrator. I need help finding him.”

“Him,” Soundwave repeated. He tilted his helm as Laserbeak shifted on his shoulder. “Identity?”

Starscream cycled a ventilation. “Obsidian and his conjunx.”

Laserbeak squawked. Distaste rippled through the air. In this, at least, they were in agreement. Obsidian had few friends, and no shortage of enemies.

“He will lay Cybertron to waste before he sees it in any hands he deems unacceptable,” Ravage pointed out. His armor twitched, smoothing down close to his frame.

Starscream inclined his helm. “Yes, I know. And he’s lurking in the underlevels, using the forgotten tunnels and mazes down there.”
“Starscream desperate?” Soundwave asked.

It was the second time they’d used that word. And Starscream supposed he must appear to be so. If he’d come to the very people he’d outcast, all but begging for help, he did look desperate.

They were right.

Starscream couldn’t let Obsidian fester. He couldn’t hope that Mirage and Rattrap managed to smoke the terrorist out before Obsidian attacked again. Who knew? Obsidian’s next attack could be worse. He could stop trying to discredit Starscream, and aim to hurt Starscream instead.

He could hurt Blurr. Wheeljack. Destroy everything Starscream had worked so hard to build, all the power he’d accumulated, all the respect he’d earned.

Yes.

Obsidian had made Starscream very desperate.

“You don’t want to see Cybertron destroyed any more than I do,” Starscream said after cycling a ventilation. He hoped that Soundwave wasn’t listening in on his thoughts.

He didn’t need Soundwave knowing about Blurr.

“So?” Frenzy demanded. “What makes ya think we’re gonna help you anyway?”

“Yeah,” Rumble chimed in, that odd ability to complete each other’s thoughts coming into play. “You kicked us out. You helped take down Megatron. We ain’t friends. We never were!”

“Yeah!” Frenzy agreed. “What’s in it for us?”

Starscream ignored both of them. He focused his gaze on Soundwave alone. “I’ll extend to you the same offer I gave to the Autobots – the willingness to allow some of the outcast Decepticons back into the city. And no, freeing Megatron is not an option.”

“Some,” Ravage repeated.

Starscream rubbed at his forehelm. “If I were to fling open the gates and welcome all and sundry, the Neutrals and NAILs would revolt again. We’d be back where we started.”

“But you wouldn’t have Obsidian to deal with,” Ravage said.

“I might as well,” Starscream snapped, and forced himself to cycle a ventilation. He didn’t need to convince the sparklings. He needed to convince their master. “Are you that loyal to Megatron, Soundwave? What has he ever done for us?”

Laserbeak squawked, and Frenzy and Rumble shouted something in unison, but Soundwave lifted a hand. All three quieted. Ravage, Starscream noticed, said nothing.

“Megatron Decepticon Lord,” Soundwave said.

“The war is over. The sooner you all realize that, the sooner you can start actually living. What good is it doing any of you to cling to it?” Starscream retorted with a roll of his optics.

Soundwave stared at him. “War never over.”

Well, he was right about that. Starscream snorted to himself. The war was officially over, but there
Megatron had come, striding back into the city as though he couldn’t just die. The war was over, but here Obsidian was, trying to cause chaos again. The war was over, but out there in the universe, hundreds of Decepticons didn’t believe it.

And the DJD still lurked.

“Maybe not for you. But I got what I want, and I intend to protect it,” Starscream said, and he unfolded his arms. “What did you want from it, Soundwave? Was it to rule the universe alongside that fool? Why did you start fighting?”

Laserbeak’s featherplates ruffled. He turned his head toward his master, chirping something soft. Soundwave’s expression, if Starscream dared call it that, didn’t waver.

“Freedom sought,” Soundwave finally said, as though he struggled to find the words. “Opportunity. Equality.”

Starscream’s lips curved into a grin. “That’s what I thought. The original intent of the Decepticons, yes? To rise against our oppressors. To change the world. And we did, didn’t we? There are different kinds of victory. We didn’t lose, Soundwave. We just didn’t win.”

“That’s the same thing!” Frenzy cried.

“No,” Soundwave said with a shake of helm. “Differences many.” He cycled an audible ventilation, and his gaze shifted to Laserbeak. If they spoke, Starscream didn’t hear it. “What is Starscream’s bargain?”

Starscream straightened. Perhaps he was getting through to the drone after all.

“As I said, I’m willing to allow some Decepticons back into the city, provided that they agree to lay aside arms and acknowledge my leadership,” he said.

“Negative.”

Laserbeak alit from Soundwave’s shoulder and rose into the sky, where indeed, Buzzsaw circled above them. The two avian cassettes flitted around one another before they took off, heading in a direction opposite the city. Perhaps toward wherever the Decepticons had made their camp.

“Soundwave would bargain for Megatron.”

Starscream shook his helm. “Absolutely not,” he said icily. “Megatron is staying right where he is. I’m not taking down one terrorist by freeing a tyrant.”

Soundwave’s weight shifted.

“We could always kill ya right here and now, take him anyway,” Frenzy said as he and his twin slid from the rock, pedes tapping against the ground.

“Don’t need yer permission for that,” Rumble agreed.

“You could try, pipsqueaks,” Starscream said with a glare their direction. He planted his hands on his hips. “Megatron’s been trying to kill me for years. What makes you think you’ll do any better?”

Soundwave made a sound in his chassis, somewhere between a hiss and a grinding of gears. “Desist.”

“No fun at all, anymore.”

Primus, how did Soundwave stand being around the two of them for centuries? A few minutes and Starscream’s helm already ached.

“Starscream’s intentions for Megatron?”

Ahhh. Now they were getting to the protoform of the matter.

Starscream tilted his helm. “Eventually, he’ll be put on trial. I’m not executing him. He doesn’t deserve to be a martyr. I want him to see Cybertron reborn and weep because he doesn’t have a part in it.” Nothing would be sweeter, to be honest.

He wanted to succeed and then throw that in Megatron’s face. Show Megatron what Starscream could accomplish without a noose around his intake.

“Understood.” Soundwave made a gesture toward Frenzy and Rumble, which prompted the two idiots to mutter something subvocally and stomp off, leaving only Ravage and Soundwave present. “Terms accepted.”

Starscream rebooted his sensory suites. That had been… easy. What kind of game was Soundwave playing here?

He squinted at the carrier mech. “Why?”

“Because the war is over,” Ravage said, though a hint of displeasure echoed in his tone. “And the Decepticons didn’t win.”

Well, that didn’t clarify anything at all.

Starscream frowned. He didn’t trust Soundwave. He didn’t trust Ravage. But he was desperate, and that made him prone to taking risks.

Megatron, at least, was predictable. Obsidian was not.

“Fine,” Starscream said with an ex-vent. “I’m probably going to regret this. In fact, I know I am. You’ll come back to the city with me now then?”

Soundwave shook his helm and gestured down to his feline cassette. “Ravage will assist.”

“That’s all?”

“Only Ravage needed.”

Starscream snorted. “You must think highly of him.”

Ravage stood, backstrut arching in a stretch that highlighted the double rockets attached to his frame. “Well, I am the best,” he drawled.

Starscream’s wings twitched before he could stop them. “What do you want in exchange then?”

Soundwave’s eerie, cold stare focused on him. “Peace,” he said and spun on a heelstrut.

Starscream had worked with Soundwave long enough to know that he wasn’t going to get anything more out of the taciturn former commander. Soundwave left in the same direction Frenzy
and Rumble had gone. He left Ravage behind, the feline cassette looking up at Starscream with all the disdain a feline could muster.

“Well,” he prompted with a flick of his audials. “Do you want to stand here, or do you want to stop Obsidian before he destroys more of your city?”

Starscream rubbed at his forehelm. “I’m going to regret this,” he muttered.

“No more than I am,” Ravage said. He turned and started toward the city, his footsteps not making so much as a sound.

Starscream cycled a ventilation. The agitation in his belly only grew. He didn’t know if he made the right call, and Blurr’s warnings echoed in the back of his processor.

He had to do this, however. Obsidian had to be stopped, by whatever means necessary. And if the worst came to pass, Starscream would simply have to find a way to put Megatron right back in his cell where he belonged.

Starscream refused to go down without a fight.

~
Wheeljack teases Blurr, and Blurr comes to a revelation about his feelings for Starscream.

Blurr paced. His restless energy wouldn’t allow anything else. He made several circuits around the main room and kept going.

Frag the media for camping out on what was basically his front porch. He couldn’t leave because unlike some mechs, he didn’t have wings. Wheeljack barely made it in here alive as it was.

Starscream had left hours ago, and Blurr had nothing to distract him. No way to pass the time except imagine all the terrible ways the angry Decepticons would tear Starscream apart for being a traitor. What would happen then?

Blurr hadn’t the slightest idea.

“Will ya sit down already? You’re makin’ me dizzy,” Wheeljack said. He currently sat cross-legged in the middle of the floor, having shoved aside the low, central table. He had Blurr’s boosters in his lap, though where he’d gotten them from, Blurr didn’t know.

Starscream must have had them stashed somewhere.

“I haven’t ran in weeks,” Blurr replied by way of explanation.

Wheeljack scoffed. “Ya raced over to the remains of Kimia just last night. Don’t give me that slag.”

Blurr reared up and stared down at Wheeljack, but the engineer was bent over Blurr’s boosters and didn’t so much as look at him. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing.” Wheeljack fiddled with something that went clunk. “Just that you’re pacing ‘cause you’re worried.”

“I am not!”

Wheeljack chuckled and looked up at him, indicators flashing a stream of bright colors. “You and Starscream are a lot alike, you know.”

Blurr folded his arms. “No, we’re not.”

“Well, opposites don’t always attract.” Wheeljack shrugged and went back to work. His winglets twitched. “I think it’s kinda cute. Never thought I’d see Starscream genuinely fall for someone. Guess there’s a first time for everything.”

Blurr’s mouth moved, but no words emerged. Cute? He and Starscream were cute? They could barely go a day without yelling at each other! How was that cute?

He huffed a ventilation. “Can we not talk about Starscream?”
Wheeljack chuckled, his field poking at Blurr’s with genuine amusement. “Sure. I mean, it’s not like we’re in his penthouse or anythin’.” He looked up at Blurr, his indicators flashing a rosy hue.

Blurr’s face heated. He rubbed at his nasal ridge. “What about you? Feeling better now that you’re out of the regeneration chamber?”

“It’s nice to be on my own two pedes again,” Wheeljack said. His fingers continued to move, though he wasn’t looking down at them. “Other people seem happy ta see me, so I guess that’s good. Swindle was talkin’ about throwin’ some kind of party but...” He trailed off and shrugged. “I ain’t the partyin’ type.”

Swindle. Ugh.

Blurr’s engine growled.

He appreciated the salesmech for a great many things, but some of Swindle’s behavior as of late had approached the realm of tasteless. Swindle had some kind of agenda, only Blurr didn’t know what it was. He already had one political headache in Starscream; he didn’t need another.

“Besides, where would we have it at? I can’t imagine anywhere other’n Maccadam’s personally,” Wheeljack added. “That place always kind of felt like home, ya know?”

“Yeah,” Blurr said with a small smile. “I know.”

“Ya can rebuild. I’ll even help,” Wheeljack said brightly, the moment of sadness gone. “I’ve got some great ideas for engex mixers and dispensers. Also, lights, bright colorful lights to really give it that energetic look.”

Blurr leaned a hip against the couch and folded his arms. “Sounds good,” he said, and it wasn’t even a lie. It did sound good.

Something new. A fresh start. Maybe that was what he needed.

“It’ll be nice to build something that ain’t a weapon for once,” Wheeljack added, almost wistfully. Though it was spoken almost as if he hadn’t intended to let that free. “Not that I’m not goin’ to get you those blasters. A mech’s gotta protect himself after all. And his loved ones.”

Blurr’s spark twinged. He felt guilty, now, for even asking. He should have just gone to Swindle. He should have swallowed his pride, asked Starscream for a loan, and gone to Swindle.

Blurr chewed on his bottom lip. “Thank you,” he said. He knew telling Wheeljack not to bother with them anymore was pointless. “I appreciate it.”

Wheeljack’s optics beamed at him, his indicators lighting up. “I know. Which is why I’m happy to do it for ya.” He held up Blurr’s boosters and gave them a tap. “Thirteen percent faster now. How’s about that?”

The door to the balcony beeped, and Blurr whirled toward it. Starscream emerged from the balcony, a frown on his lips, and fingers brushing at his arms as though wiping away dirt. There wasn’t a scratch on him, or at least, not a new one.

“Primus save me from spies,” he groused as the door slid shut behind him before he looked up, registering both Blurr and Wheeljack in an instant. He blinked. “What are you staring at?”

“All idiot,” Blurr said. He folded his arms over his chest, unwilling to show the relief that
cascaded through his systems. “How did it go?”

“Fine. Soundwave agreed to help,” Starscream said breezily. He moved further into the suite, giving a nod to Wheeljack. “Nice to see you,” he greeted as he made a beeline for the energon storage room.

“Likewise,” Wheeljack chirped, and hauled himself up from the floor, setting Blurr’s boosters onto the low table. “I’m almost done with these. Did a little fiddlin’ while I was at it. Should process fuel more efficiently now, too.”

Blurr gave him an askance look. “Without exploding?”

Wheeljack laughed. “I’ll have ya know don’t nothin’ explode that I don’t intend to.” He glanced toward the energon storage room, but Starscream had yet to emerge. “I’ll get to work on those other things, too.”

“Thanks,” Blurr replied, some of the tension easing out of his frame. He’d feel a lot better as soon as he was armed again. He’d enjoyed being a civilian, but that time was up.

War was afoot.

“No problem.” Wheeljack stretched his arms over his helm, his winglets fluttering again. “Well, I’d best be going. Somethin’ tells me I’m about to be the third wheel.”

Blurr coughed a ventilation. “It’s not like that,” he said as he followed Wheeljack to the door. The security system wasn’t coded for the engineer, after all.

“Yes, it is,” Wheeljack said with a little laugh. He bumped shoulders with Blurr. “Though I appreciate ya havin’ restraint around my innocent optics.”

“There’s nothing innocent about you,” Blurr retorted as he palmed the door open, the security system beeping as it registered his energy field.

Wheeljack chuckled. “Guilty as charged.” He hovered in the doorway, looking past Blurr into the apartment, though Starscream hadn’t emerged yet. “You two have fun now.”

Blurr’s face heated, though he hadn’t a clue why. He’d had partners and lovers and one night stands before. Sharing a penthouse with Starscream shouldn’t be so embarrassing.

Perhaps it was the salacious lick in Wheeljack’s field before he winked again and stepped out the door, prompting it to close shut behind him, locking in place.

Blurr shook his helm. Wheeljack really was something else, wasn’t he?

Blurr turned around just as Starscream finally emerged from the energon storage, holding a cube of something that was not midgrade. Engex perhaps? Well, at least he wasn’t drinking it out of the expensive-looking flute.

“Wheeljack gone?” Starscream asked as he looked around the main room as if Wheeljack lurked behind one of the pieces of furniture.

Blurr nodded. “You gonna tell me about Soundwave now?”

“There’s not much to tell.” Starscream audibly cycled a ventilation and lowered himself down into the couch. “We spoke. He agreed to provide assistance. I returned with Ravage in tow and arranged for him to meet with Mirage and Rattrap.” Starscream’s lips curved in amusement. “That
meeting will probably be the highlight of my week.”

Blurr eased down into the couch next to Starscream. “Why would Soundwave agree to help you?”

Starscream’s smirk slid away, turning into a neutral expression of contemplation. “I’m not entirely sure. Perhaps he’s realizing the folly of blindly panting after Megatron.” He lifted his shoulders in a shrug. “His motives are the least of my concern, so long as he’s not actively working against me.” He sipped at his energon and leaned back into the embrace of the couch.

“You got lucky,” Blurr said. “He could have killed you.”

Starscream gave him an askance look. “Soundwave and I have had our differences, but we do have something of an understanding. And he’s too smart to think that killing me will solve any of his problems.” He finished off his cube and leaned forward to place the empty on the table. “I was in no danger.”

“Must be nice to be so sure,” Blurr muttered.

Starscream settled back into the couch, and he gave Blurr a long look. “I wouldn’t have sought him out if I wasn’t certain I could reason with Soundwave,” he said, and tilted his helm. “Though I do appreciate your concern.”

Blurr narrowed his optics. “I’m beginning to wonder if I should have bothered,” he said with a huff. He twisted away from Starscream, twitching.

Silence fell between them though Blurr was sure it wouldn’t last for long. Starscream never could go without having the last word.

Meanwhile, emotions twisted and churned inside of Blurr. The ones that wanted to launch himself at Starscream out of some romantic sense of relief. And the other ones that wanted to storm from his apartment because Starscream drove him mad.

“Do you want me to apologize?” Starscream finally asked, and Blurr felt the futon jostle as Starscream shifted toward him. His field reached toward Blurr, somewhat tentative, but warm also.

Blurr snorted. “I’m not going to hold my vents for that.” He gave Starscream an askance look before he shoved himself off the couch. “I’m going to recharge.”

Starscream caught him about the wrist before he could so much as take a step, though the hold was loose. More a request, than a demand.

“I’m not going to apologize for doing what I had to do,” Starscream said, and his tone was oddly gentle, less sharp than Blurr would have expected. “Or for ensuring that a mad mech is brought to heel.”

Blurr pressed his lips together. He half-turned toward Starscream, enough that he could read the Seeker’s expression. Starscream, however, was being irritatingly neutral.

“Thus the reason I didn’t ask for one,” Blurr said.

Starscream cycled a ventilation. His fingers briefly squeezed Blurr’s wrist. “This is the mech I am,” he said. Something he brought up often, as a matter of fact.

Blurr rubbed at his forehelm. “I know. I can still get mad that you’re treating me like glass
though.”

Starscream let go of his wrist, and Blurr instantly mourned the loss, though he couldn’t fathom why. “I’m actually not,” he said, and he pushed himself to his pedes, wings flicking behind him. “Is it not natural for a mech to want to protect the things that matter to him?”

“To some,” Blurr admitted. “But...” Here he trailed off. He bit his bottom lip instead. He didn’t want to say what just crossed his mind.

But Starscream was not a normal mech. Starscream was not supposed to be a mech who cared. That was pretty well documented.

“You still don’t trust me,” Starscream said, and though his words were calm and even, there were layers of hurt in it. Hurt Blurr never would have believed Starscream would show. Especially as he folded his arms over his cockpit, as if protecting the vulnerable spark beneath.

“Trust is a many layered thing,” Blurr said, and his face heated when he realized he was quoting Perceptor of all mechs. But Primus, how many times had he heard Perceptor mutter something to that effect?

Blurr rubbed the back of his neck and cycled another ventilation. “Can we just, I dunno, talk about this in the morning?”

“Whatever you want.” Starscream shrugged, but it was far from dismissive. He waved a hand and made as if to sit back on the couch.

Blurr stared at him. “What are you doing?”

Starscream’s orbital ridges lifted. “I did fly out into the Wastes this afternoon. I’m in need of recharge as much as you.”

Blurr worked his jaw. “On the couch?”

Again, that nonchalant shrug that didn’t hide as much as Starscream thought it did. “Seemed the better course.”

Blurr rolled his optics and snatched Starscream by the wrist. “You are such a drama queen,” he muttered as he tugged on Starscream’s arm. “Come on.” He towed the Seeker behind him, relieved when Starscream didn’t put up a fight. “You’re recharging on the berth. With me, to clarify, because I’m not laying on that couch either.”

“If you insist,” Starscream said.

Behind them, the lights in the main room darkened until only the emergency runners were lit. Blurr tugged Starscream into the berthroom, triggering the door to close behind them. Only the desk lamp glowed, casting the room in dim shadows.

Blurr gave Starscream a push toward the berth. “You first,” he said.

“Because you think I’m going to run?” Starscream replied, amused. He did obey, however, climbing onto the berth and sinking into the plush surface.

Blurr snorted. “No. Because wings are inflexible.” And Blurr, sadly, didn’t have his boosters to create an obstacle. Of the two of them right now, he was more maneuverable.

With Starscream settled, Blurr climbed on after him, notching himself against Starscream’s side
and resting his helm on Starscream’s shoulder. It took some doing to ensure he wasn’t laying too much of his weight on the flat planes of Starscream’s wings. It also took some mech handling on his part before finally, he was comfortable.

Starscream’s field continued to radiate amusement, but now there was something deeper mingled with it. Affection perhaps.

“This is the most aggressive cuddling I have ever experienced,” Starscream said, his tone rich with amusement, lips curled.

“Well, what else would you expect?” Blurr chuckled. “For us, I mean. You’ve been nothing but ornery since day one.”

“Me?” Starscream’s hand slid around Blurr’s chassis, talon slipping into a seam and barely brushing the cables beneath. “You, Zippy, are the most contrary mech I have ever met, and that’s saying something.”

Blurr snorted. “I highly doubt that. You just don’t like people telling you ‘no.’”

“Mmm. Well, you may have a point about that.” Starscream’s free hand pinched one of Blurr’s tires, making him squirm. “Hurt?”

Blurr wriggled around, trying to notch his frame closer to Starscream’s. There was something addictive in the heat Starscream exuded.

“Lemme bite your wing tip and you tell me,” Blurr retorted.

Starscream shivered beneath him. His plating further warmed.

Well then.

Starscream pinched Blurr’s tire again, and Blurr’s engine purred. He wriggled atop Starscream, shifting further up until he could bury his face in Starscream’s intake. He in-vented, dragging in Starscream’s scent, today a mix of atmosphere and old ordinance. Scent he’d carried with him from the Cybertronian wilderness.

“And to think,” Starscream murmured, “there was a time you hated me.”

Blurr snorted. “Hate is a strong word. I didn’t know you. How could I hate you?”

“Mm. Good point.” Starscream’s fingers caressed Blurr’s seams, fluttering over the cables beneath. He didn’t flinch at the light nip of charge that danced from Blurr’s protoform. “Didn’t much approve of me then.”

“I’ll give you that much.”

“And now?”

Was Starscream reaching for confirmation of some kind? Probably.

“Well, we’re sharing a berth, and kind of living together, and I keep hoping you’ll get the hint and frag me.” Blurr pressed a kiss to the underside of Starscream’s jaw, his spark fluttering. “So I’m pretty sure I’m far from loathing and disapproval both,” he said dryly.

Starscream shivered again, his engine activating into a low, steady rumble. “Not hating is not the same as liking.”
Blurr braced his arms beneath him, rising up so he could look Starscream in the optics. He shifted until he straddled Starscream’s hips, planting his aft upon a groin which was definitely warm. Starscream’s hands found their way to his waist, briefly stroking down to cup his aft, before sliding back up to his waist again. As though he couldn’t decide where he was allowed to touch.

For the record: everywhere.

“I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t attracted to you,” Blurr said as he leaned close enough to exchange ventilating air. “And I definitely wouldn’t be doing this if I didn’t like you.” He closed the distance between them, brushing his lips over Starscream’s, glossa slipping free to dampen Starscream’s lips.

Starscream shook beneath him. All the incentive Blurr needed to deepen the kiss, pressing his lips firmly against Starscream’s before introducing his glossa as well. He hummed low in his intake, grinding down, hoping to chase away the weird mood that had infected them both.

This was new territory, he had to admit. They were in the berth, ostensibly cuddling, though Blurr now had the intent to interface. They had come to something of an agreement regarding an actual relationship, and Blurr didn’t know about Starscream, but Blurr had never been one to attempt such a thing before. Especially with someone like Starscream.

But here he was, and there Starscream was, and all Blurr could think about was deepening the kiss, tasting Starscream on his glossa, and hoping to entice Starscream to unleash his equipment.

Blurr’s valve ached.

Starscream made a small sound, one of delight, before his grip tightened on Blurr’s hips. He returned the kiss, much more aggressive than before, his glossa winding with Blurr’s. Each touch of it sent a shock of need through Blurr’s frame, a need more vibrant and demanding than he’d felt before.

Blurr groaned into the kiss and rolled his hips, rocking against Starscream’s frame and the heat he felt building beneath him. His calipers cycled restlessly, lubricant gathering within his valve. This, at least, he and Starscream were good at.

“Come on,” Blurr murmured against Starscream’s lips. “Frag me.” His panel snapped open, a few drops of lubricant dripping free to spatter against Starscream’s armor.

Starscream gripped his hips and pulled him down, their frames pressed together, forcing Blurr to rock his hips so as to grind his valve down on Starscream’s pelvic armor. He shuddered as his valve rim was stimulated, the nodes peppering to life, and leaving streaks of lubricant behind.

“You want my spike?” Starscream purred, or teased rather.

Blurr groaned. He bit at Starscream’s lips, pinning the bottom between his denta. “I’m not going to beg,” he said.

Starscream’s optics glowed up at him, dark with desire. “Are you sure about that?” He tipped Blurr’s helm up and bit at Blurr’s intake, his denta dragging along his cables. “I can be patient if given enough incentive.”

“Yeah, well, I can’t,” Blurr panted.

His fingers kneaded at the berth covers. He freed his spike, sighing with relief as the sensitive head rubbed against Starscream’s belly, leaving a streak of pre-fluid behind. It wasn’t perfect. It wasn’t a spike in his valve, lighting up his nodes. But it was good enough.
Blurr licked his lips as he rocked his hips, rutting both valve and spike against Starscream’s heated armor. Pleasure coiled lazily in his abdomen, and drizzled down his spinal strut.

“So impatient,” Starscream murmured, his lips brushing over the crest of Blurr’s helm. “We can’t have that.”

Blurr rolled his hips harder, his valve sparking with delight as his nub rubbed over Starscream’s armor. He could overload just like this, a slow and steady overload.


Starscream chuckled. “We’ll see about that,” he said. His field throbbed, thick with promise.

Blurr should have been paying attention. But he was too focused on his array, on the lazy heat in his belly. He missed Starscream tensing, his grip tightening, until his world turned upside down.

He landed on the berth with an oomph, his fingers tangled with Starscream’s and pressed into the berth above his helm. Starscream notched between his legs, sliding up and up, until Blurr’s thighs were splayed wide over Starscream’s, but there was a distance between them. Blurr couldn’t shift up or down, his valve twitching as it was caressed by heated air and little else.

Blurr groaned. “Starscream, why are you being a tease?” He tried pouting – he was told it made him irresistible – and arched his back, hands tugging on Starscream’s.

Talon-tipped fingers curled tighter around his, their palms pressed together. Starscream bore him down, kept him pinned, and Blurr’s engine gave a little rev.

“Because I can,” Starscream murmured, his wings arched high, flaps wriggling as they often did when he was proud of himself. The slagger.

He curved down, enough to capture Blurr’s lips for a kiss, but not enough to allow Blurr to get any friction. He moaned into the kiss, squirming beneath Starscream, his spike throbbing and his valve dripping lubricant, enough that it trickled from the caudal lip and down his aft.

This was unfair.

Blurr flexed his legs, trying to get some leverage against Starscream, pull the Seeker tighter against him. But Starscream had the upper hand here, and he chuckled as he kept himself just out of reach.

His lips broke away from Blurr’s, mouth leaving a wet path over the curve of Blurr’s jaw, down to his intake. Denta nipped at the thick cables there, making Blurr jerk.

Starscream’s spike emerged with a click, and the head of it nudged at Blurr’s valve. It graced his rim, bumped over his external nodes, briefly prodded at his anterior node. It, like Starscream, was nothing more than a tease.

Blurr’s engine growled. “Just frag me already!”

“Ask nicely,” Starscream purred into his audial before he bit at Blurr’s intake, a sharp sting that drew a bolt of charge down Blurr’s backstrut.

His valve clenched, squeezing out more lubricant. He gritted his denta, field battering at Starscream’s with need. His thighs pressed in on Starscream’s hips, the back of his pedes beating against the back of Starscream’s legs. He panted, dragged in ventilation after ventilation.
He arched his backstrut, tried to push off the berth, shove himself closer to Starscream. The head of Starscream’s spike brushed over his valve again. It stirred through the lubricants soaking his rim. It taunted him with the idea of penetration, but never did more than apply a distant pressure.

It was maddening.

Starscream’s fingers squeezed his in arrhythmic pulses. “All you have to do is ask,” he purred, something in his vocals making the need coil in Blurr’s lines spark stronger. “Do you want me to spike you?”

The question was accompanied by a roll of Starscream’s hips. His spikehead caught the lip of Blurr’s valve, teased around the inside of his rim, not even to the first caliper, before it slipped free again. It rubbed over Blurr’s anterior node, now slick with Blurr’s lubricants, and Blurr shuddered.

His helm tossed back with a gasp. He drew in a sharp ventilation, his cooling fans bursting to life. The coil of need tightened and tightened, his thighs trembling.

“Yes,” Blurr moaned as he gnawed on his bottom lip. Hazy vision gave him glimpses of Starscream, his expression one of hunger and desire. “Please, Star. I need it.”

Starscream’s field swirled, slamming into Blurr’s own, thick and dizzying with lust. He squeezed Blurr’s hands, and shifted his weight.

“As you wish,” Starscream purred before his lips captured Blurr’s.

Starscream’s glossa plunged into Blurr’s mouth in the same moment that he tilted his hips and slid his spike into Blurr’s valve. It was one long, slow, steady thrust that buried him to the hilt, the head of his spike grinding against Blurr’s ceiling node.

Blurr outright whimpered, his valve cinching down tight, grasping onto Starscream’s spike, charge igniting between their nodes. His thighs trembled, a flashfire sparking through his lines. He shook as pleasure assaulted him, his valve rippling around Starscream’s spike.

It felt good, deliriously so. Starscream ex-vented heat above him, the tiniest whuffs of it puffing against Blurr’s armor and teasing the cables covering his protoform. He bit at Starscream’s mouth, the kiss desperate and hungry. He worked his hips, moving it in all the increments he could manage, his node throbbing.

The head of his spike brushed against Starscream’s frame, leaving streaks of transfluid behind. Starscream locked their arrays together, his hips making tiny circles which ground his spike deep in Blurr’s valve.

Sparks danced in the back of Blurr’s optics. He panted against Starscream’s lips as his valve quivered, the coil of need in his abdomen cinching tight. His backstrut arched, his hands squeezing Starscream’s in return. Words bubbled up in his vocalizer, but they were swallowed by Starscream’s lips.

He panted air through his vents. His spike throbbed where it rubbed again and again and again at Starscream’s abdominal armor. He felt dizzy, need knotting into a mess in his abdomen. Starscream ground harder against him, the base of his spike array rubbing hard against Blurr’s anterior node.

Blurr shattered.

Overload swept him up and swallowed him whole. His pedes snapped against Starscream’s legs,
his valve cinching down tight enough to pull a whimper from Starscream. His spike spurted, dribbling transfluid against Starscream’s frame, even as his valve convulsed.

Starscream’s mouth broke away and his forehelm pressed to Blurr’s. His optics were shuttered, his face creased with pleasure.

“Oh, Primus,” he moaned and his hips jerked, slamming into Blurr, spike shoving through his twitching calipers.

One thrust, two thrusts, three and Blurr felt the wash of charged fluid over his sensitive nodes. It forced another smaller overload out of him, and he whimpered. His backstrut arched as his frame trembled, charge erupting from beneath his armor.

He sagged back into the embrace of the berth, cooling fans whirling madly, his vents desperately sucking in cool air. Starscream trembled above him before he sank down, his spike still snug within Blurr’s valve. His lips descended over Blurr’s again, but gently this time, the soft touch of his glossa enough to send a jolt to Blurr’s spark.

He hummed into the kiss, his hands twitching under Starscream’s grip. It softened in reply until Starscream shifted enough to release him. Blurr immediately wrapped his arms around Starscream’s chassis, pulling the Seeker down on top of him.

It was kind of nice to just kiss. To slowly press their lips together, to tangle their glossas. To brush their nasal ridges as their frames cooled and the frantic spin of their sparks slowed.

In moments like this, they felt like a genuine relationship, and not an entangled mess of emotion, thinly tied by their dedication to Cybertron.

Blurr’s spark throbbed.

Suddenly, he wanted it to be real.

And that thought scared him most of all.
Chapter Summary

Starscream’s newest task force meets, and the mystery surrounding Fasttrack is finally revealed.

Starscream woke to his internal alarm obnoxiously beeping at him. He didn’t remember setting it the night before, and had to muzzily consult his internal schedule to recall why he needed to be online so damned early.

Oh. Right. The meeting with the new task force and what remained of the old one. It was the first item on his agenda today. He also needed to make contact with his interfactional operative team and see what they’d discovered.

But first.

Starscream onlined his optics, looking down at the mech sprawled on top of him, still deep in recharge. This was early, even for Blurr, who prior to the destruction of the bar, would have only stumbled home about a few hours ago.

It was an interesting experience, to wake up next to a lover, a near-partner. To wake up not alone period. It wasn’t the first time he’d shared a berth with Blurr. It wasn’t even the first time since they’d kind of decided to try for a real relationship.

Something about it still tugged at Starscream’s spark.

*Can’t we just talk about this in the morning?*

Starscream’s good mood nearly evaporated. Talking. It seemed all he and Blurr ever did was disagree. When they weren’t fragging.

Well, at least it was something.

Starscream sighed and considered how best to wake Blurr. Autobot or not, Blurr had been a Wrecker, and while his instincts weren’t quite as dangerous as other berthpartners Starscream had, it was still good to be cautious.

Jazz, Starscream recalled, had been the worst. The tiniest of twitches and Jazz bolted online with a snarl and a vibroblade pulled from Primus only knew where. Starscream never could track where he’d gotten it, or where he tucked it away once he fully onlined and realized where he was.

After the first couple times that happened, they both agreed that sharing a berth was not a good idea.

Well. It wouldn’t be the first time Starscream had been struck by a startled berthpartner. He braced himself and stroked a hand down Blurr’s back, careful to avoid the sensitive ports where Blurr’s boosters were supposed to be. He hoped the gentle touch would override Blurr’s offensive protocols.
Blurr made a small noise, one that was ridiculously adorable, and shifted atop Starscream. He ex-vented a lukewarm burst of air, his cheek rubbing against Starscream’s cockpit.

“Too early,” he grumbled, vocalizer riddled with static. “Gimme ten more minutes.” His outstretched hand flexed and settled again.

Starscream chuckled softly. “And what difference is ten more minutes going to make?” he asked mildly. “Besides, I have work to do. And so do you.”

Blurr had yet to online his optics. “No bar. No work. Recharge now.” He ex-vented, frame going limp atop Starscream.

He really was going to attempt going back to recharge. If Starscream didn’t have a meeting to attend, he would have been sorely tempted to allow Blurr to do so. Moments like these, well, they were rare. He suspected Blurr was only so unguarded because he was barely online.

Starscream stroked down Blurr’s back again, his hand resting at the base of his backstrut. “You signed up for my task force, remember?”

“Mrrph.” Blurr shifted, their armor sliding together. His legs untangled from Starscream’s. He lifted his helm and blinked at Starscream. “Oh, right. I did.”

“Regret that decision now?”

“No.” The haze cleared from Blurr’s optics. His field pushed against Starscream’s own before he loudly cycled his vocalizer and forced himself upright.

Starscream tried not to miss the warm of his frame. He sat up as well, only to frown at the mess on the berth, and on each other. They were liberally spattered with dried fluids.

“Washrack first though,” Starscream said, brushing futilely at the mess. “I do not think it is appropriate to appear looking as though we have recently fragged.”

Blurr gave him a crooked grin. “Why not? It’s the truth.”

Starscream rolled his optics. “Just because it is true does not mean we need to announce it to the universe with proof.” He slid off the berth and hissed as a cable in his back announced its displeasure. He reached for it, intended to rub out the knot.

Blurr got there first. Starscream blinked in surprise as Blurr’s fingers slid between his armor seams, deftly seeking out the source of the discomfort. Starscream, without asking, twisted to open the seam, granting him better access.

“Thank you,” Starscream said as relief cast through his frame. The knot eased from a tight clamp, into a more tolerable ache. The heat of the solvent spray should work out the rest of the discomfort.

Blurr rubbed the back of his neck with his free hand. “It’s the kind of thing lovers do, right?”

Lovers.

They had yet to use the word.

Starscream tasted it with his lips and glossa before he dared repeat it. “Lovers,” he murmured. He angled closer to Blurr, enough that he could taste the edge of Blurr’s suddenly withdrawn field. “Are we calling ourselves that now?”
“I thought we’d agreed we were.” Blurr frowned, but it looked more confused than anything. “Unless I misunderstood you.”

Starscream shook his helm. “No, I just...” He trailed off, unsure he wanted to voice the confusing tangle of emotions within his spark. “Just wanted to make sure we were on the same page.”

“We’re lovers,” Blurr said and grabbed his hand, giving it a squeeze. He stepped closer, into Starscream’s personal space. “We’re lovers who are going to go get clean, gobble down energon, hopefully avoid a crowd of news crews on our front porch, and then attend an important meeting.”

*Trust is a multi-layered thing.*

Someday, Starscream might even gather up the courage to ask what that meant.

“Fair enough,” Starscream said.

Blurr kissed him.

It wasn’t much, it barely qualified as a kiss. Blurr’s lips brushed his. Blurr’s glossa briefly introduced itself. And then Blurr was gone, his lips curled in that half-grin, so cocky and sure of itself that Starscream’s spark skipped an oscillation.

“Good,” he said. He squeezed Starscream’s hand. “Then let’s go.” He turned and towed Starscream toward the washracks.

Starscream’s spark fluttered. His lips tingled.

He followed after Blurr, his processor spinning.

~

They washed in record time, no matter how much Starscream wanted to linger. His fingers felt magnetically drawn to Blurr’s plating, and it was hardly a trial to wash the dried lubricants from Blurr’s armor. Though whilst he was down there, he had to force himself not to lean in and taste what was offered to him.

Blast responsibility.

Energon was obtained, though they didn’t have enough time to leisurely enjoy it. They had a meeting to make.

They took the lift to the first floor, saw the crowd waiting out front, some even going so far as to peer through the glass, and Starscream immediately closed the doors and took them down to the basement. Blurr was delighted to find the small, hidden trapdoor which left them free to squeeze from the penthouse without being spotted, only sacrificing their immaculate paint in the process.

Starscream was all optics and audials, scrutinizing every mech they passed, fearing that any one of them could be carrying another bomb on Obsidian’s orders. He knew it was a great risk to bring his task force together again, but he hoped that having arranged it at the last minute, Obsidian didn’t have enough time to set up something devastating.

When they arrived, Starscream counted frames and tried not to be disappointed. There were less than he could have hoped for, but more than zero. He supposed that counted for something. Most were former Autobots and Decepticons. Only one NAIL had elected to take the risk.

There were eight in all, including Blurr. Eight mechs of whom only six would actually be some
semblance of useful if it came down to a fight. Most were eager for revenge or to protect what peace they’d built in the wake of Megatron’s defeat. A few were uncertain, nervous, their armor shuffling and their fields on alert. Starscream could not blame them for their anxiety.

He, himself, was on the edge.

Starscream elected to keep the meeting as brief as possible. Introductions were passed around, though all recognized Blurr on sight.

Starscream organized them into teams of two and arranged a patrolling and investigation schedule. One mech was assigned the task of operating a tipline. Another was given the duty of obtaining reports and collating them for Starscream’s use.

Starscream made it a point to dismiss the meeting as quickly as possible, and he hoped that no one noticed him rushing the participants out of the room. But the longer they gathered in one place, the greater the risk that Obsidian would make another target of them.

Most seemed to understand without his saying so. They parted in groups of two – the partners Starscream had assigned for the most part. Blurr, however, lingered, no doubt waiting for Starscream. He was in conversation with his partner – the former NAIL.

Another lingered as well, hovering in Starscream’s periphery. He was a small thing, relatively speaking. Red and a very pale bluish-green, tires gave indication he was a grounder. He wore a narrow optical band. Starscream frowned, matching his face to the eight profiles waiting in queue in his processor.

Fasttrack.

“Do you have a question, Fasttrack?” Starscream asked once he could no longer tolerate the mech’s loitering.

Fasttrack beamed, looked over his shoulder – in Blurr’s direction no less – and then sidled up to Starscream. “Not a question,” he said with a little smile. “More of an answer.”

Starscream arched an orbital ridge. “I don’t recall asking a question.”

“Well, you didn’t.” Fasttrack bobbed on his heelstruts, like a mech who had joules of energy and nowhere to put it. He looked around them, at Blurr again, and then lowered his voice, whispering conspiratorially. “But I was wanderin’ around the city the other day and I saw somethin’ I think you should see.”

Starscream couldn’t decide if he was amused or irritated. “Oh really.” He folded his arms over his cockpit. “Is it about our terrorist?” He hadn’t told them of Obsidian’s identity. He didn’t want word getting out that he knew who it was.

“No. It’s, uh, it’s about your partner over there.” He tilted his helm toward Blurr before leaning in closer to Starscream. “And a certain goods dealer. If you know what I mean.”

Starscream rubbed at his forehelm. “I don’t actually. But feel free to enlighten me.” He hoped if he let Fasttrack say his piece, then the mech would go away. He was far too close for Starscream’s taste.

“Well, you know, he’s just gettin’ a little cozy if you ask me,” Fasttrack said with a shrug that was far from dismissive. He produced a data chip and held it up to Starscream. “I figured you wouldn’t believe me, so I got some image captures for you. Might want to take a look and see if maybe you’re putting your trust in the wrong place.”
Starscream’s optics narrowed. He plucked the datachip from Fasttrack’s fingers. “I see,” he said, a sour taste on his glossa. “And why are you so concerned?”

Fasttrack shrugged. “Just don’t like to see a pretty mech get hurt is all.”

That should have been flattering. It was not.

Starscream examined the chip, a frown curving his lips. “Well then aren’t you full of good deeds?”

Fasttrack beamed. His visor flashed with light. “I try.” He looked over his shoulder at Blurr, who was finishing up his conversation with his assigned partner. He startled and backed away from Starscream. “Anyway, that’s all I had to say. Sorry about the bad news and all, but you know, better knowledge than a fool, right?”

“Right.” Starscream agreed. He tucked the chip into his fist. “I appreciate your concern, Fasttrack.”

The grounder half-winked his visor and then he was gone, out the door before Blurr managed to arrive at Starscream’s side.

“What was that about?” he asked.

Starscream peered down at the chip. “I’m about to find out,” he said. “Do you have an empty datapad on you?” If this thing had a virus on it, Starscream wasn’t about to ruin one with important information.

Blurr shrugged, before his optics brightened. “Wait. Actually, I do.” He fumbled in his subspace and produced a little worn datapad. “This one has Maccadam’s stock on it, but that’s irrelevant now...”

“You’ll rebuild.” Starscream accepted the datapad, his fingers briefly brushing Blurr’s. “And then it’ll be relevant again.”

“We’ll see,” Blurr said. His tone was neutral, if not a little resigned.

Starscream let the topic drop for now.

He opened the chip port and inserted the one Fasttrack had given him before he powered the datapad on. It read the chip immediately, bringing up a folder containing the present data. It was as Fasttrack said, a collection of image captures. There were about ten of them.

Blurr leaned in close to peer at the screen as Starscream tapped on the first one.

“Is that... me?” Blurr asked. His engine gave a little rev.

Indeed it was. Starscream’s lips thinned. The picture was of poor quality, and in monochrome no less, but it was clearly Blurr.

And clearly Swindle.

Their location was one of shadows and pockets of light, but Starscream had memorized every inch of his apartment house, especially the rooms he used the most. He recognized this one to be the ground floor.

Swindle was close enough to be sharing ventilating space. He had an arm around Blurr, a smile on
his face.

“So it would seem,” Starscream replied.

Starscream quickly flicked to the next image, which was of the same scenario but from a different angle. It was not jealousy that flickered through his spark, but it was a near thing. He was aware that Blurr and Swindle had something of a business relationship, but he had not realized they were so… close.

“Starscream, what am I looking at?” Blurr demanded.

Starscream flicked to the next image, which was yet another angle, though this time Swindle was touching Blurr’s chestplate. The fourth image was much the same, including a closeup of the hand on Blurr’s backstrut.

“Starscream?”

The fifth image was different. This time, it was in color. It was taken outside, that much Starscream could tell from the background. The subject focus, however, was the same. Blurr and Swindle, distressingly close.

Starscream gritted his denta. He swept through images six through ten so fast they were a blur, yet he managed to get the finer details.

The datapad vanished from his hands, and Starscream hissed.

“Are you spying on me?” Blurr snapped as he jerked the datapad out of Starscream’s reach.

“What the frag is this?”

“You tell me.” Starscream’s hands lowered, curling into fists.

Blurr rolled his optics, though anger flashed in his fields. “Swindle getting too handsy, if you ask me. We’re business partners, you idiot.”

Starscream’s optics narrowed. “As I recall, that was how we started.”

Blurr made a sound of disgust. He shook the datapad in Starscream’s general direction. “I wouldn’t frag Swindle if he paid me,” he spat, his field reflecting his disdain. “And you still haven’t answered my question. Have you been fragging spying on me, Starscream? And I had better like the answer I get or so help me Primus, I will walk out that door.”

“No, I haven’t,” Starscream growled, his wings snapping high and arched. “I had nothing to do with those pictures, except for the fact they were just given to me. I didn’t even know what was on that datachip.”

Blurr’s hand clenched around the datapads. “Who?”

Starscream waved a dismissing hand, ex-venting in a rush. “One of the volunteers. Some grounder. Fasttrack, he called himself.”

Blurr’s lips curled into a snarl. “Fasttrack,” he hissed. “I told Rattrap there was something off about that mech, but no, Blurr is just paranoid. Lots of mechs change their names. There’s nothing to be worried about.”

He stormed forward, wriggling the datapad in Starscream’s face. “Stop thinking with your fragging spike and start worrying about how a mech like Fasttrack got surveillance footage from
your supposedly secure apartment!” He shoved the datapad at Starscream’s chestplate, the screen cracking.

Starscream fumbled to take it as Blurr whirled on a heelstrut and stormed toward the exit. His armor had fluffed, revealing the protoform beneath.

“Where are you going?” Starscream demanded, hurrying after him.

Because Primus be damned, but Blurr was right. Starscream had let emotion get the better of him, and he hadn’t stopped to think. How had Fasttrack gotten into his surveillance system? Why did he feel the need to spy on Blurr?

“I’m putting an end to this,” Blurr snapped and shoved the door open. “He can’t have gotten far.”

Starscream burst out the door a few kliks later, but Blurr had already folded into alt-mode, roaring down the street. He had little chance of finding Fasttrack like that.

Starscream shoved the datapad into his subspace and transformed as well, pushing himself into the sky. He pinged Blurr’s comm, the speedster making rapid distance despite the rough nature of the roads.

“What?” Blurr hissed.

“We’re not going to find him like this,” Starscream said.

Beneath him, Blurr hung a sharp right and roared through a narrow alley, nearly scraping his sides. “Yes, we are. I’ve just asked Blow-Out.” Said mech being Blurr’s task force partner. “Half the group met up at Oiler’s. And Fasttrack’s with them.”

Oiler’s was Blurr’s competition, though that was a generous term for the rundown bar on the edge of the city. It crouched in the lowest level of a condemned building, and the engex tasted as gritty as the dust its owner – appropriately named Oiler – never bothered to clear from the tables. But with Maccadam’s gone, there were fewer options for the city residents.

“I’ll meet you there,” Starscream said, easily shooting ahead of Blurr. He, after all, didn’t have to drive around buildings and pedestrians. “And for what it’s worth, I apologize for leaping to conclusions.”

“Noted.”

The comm went dead. Starscream bit back a sigh.

Great job, Starscream. Great job.

~

Starscream arrived long before Blurr would. Or at least, long enough that he could perhaps entice Fasttrack out of the bar without Blurr causing some kind of scene. Blurr was furious, and Starscream suspected it wasn’t entirely because of the implications that he was unfaithful. Not that they’d had any sort of fidelity agreement in the first place.

Starscream’s lips pulled into a moue of distaste as he looked at the ramshackle bar, from which loud and raucous music emerged. It didn’t even have proper windows, just holes cut into the walls to allow for air flow.

Ugh.
Starscream cycled a ventilation and braced himself. He’d gone into worst conditions than this, for
sure.

He held his helm high and strutted through the front door – though again, to label it such was
generous. It was a slab of metal attached to a hinge without a lock. Oiler was lucky no one had
stolen his wares.

Starscream walked into noise, with a lingering odor of rust, and fought the urge to wrinkle his
nasal ridge. The bar was packed, to be expected given that Maccadam’s was rubble, and no one
noticed him arrive.

It was impossible to be unobtrusive, but Starscream tried nonetheless. He scanned the crowd for
Fasttrack and was relieved to find the grounder relatively close. Starscream made a beeline for the
mech, his plating crawling. He wanted to be out of here as soon as possible.

Luckily, Fasttrack noticed him immediately. His visor lit up, and he excused himself from his
group of friends, meeting Starscream halfway.

“Starscream, sir,” he greeted with a tilt of his helm. “Can I help you?”

Starscream planted a look of sadness on his face. “I have reviewed the data you’ve given me,” he
said, loud enough to be heard, but hopefully conveying enough despair to convince Fasttrack. “I
was wondering if perhaps you could tell me more?”

“Ohh. I see.” Fasttrack patted him on the shoulder; Starscream tried not to flinch. “Sure, sure. But
here’s not the best, is it?”

“Somewhere quiet perhaps,” Starscream said, interjecting misery into the tone. It shouldn’t be this
easy to convince Fasttrack to follow him outside.

But apparently it was. One spark break and Fasttrack was easily persuaded to follow Starscream
out the door. Starscream tilted his helm in the vague direction of his tower, and the moment they
stepped into the nearest alley, he whirled on Fasttrack.

He grabbed the mech by the intake and slammed him against the wall, inches from the ground.

“Now Fasttrack,” Starscream said sweetly as the mech gasped, pedes scrabbling against the rusted
metal, his hands curling around Starscream’s wrist. “You are going to tell me just how you got
access to my security system.”

Fasttrack’s vocalizer glitched. Hmm. Perhaps Starscream’s grip was too tight?

“Starscream!”

Blurr skidded into view. He must have transformed mid-brake.

“If you’re going to tell me to put him down, I’m afraid I can’t comply,” Starscream said, his thumb
pressing to the side of Fasttrack’s intake, compressing a main fuel line.

“I wasn’t going to,” Blurr grumbled and stomped into the alley. “But whatever you’re doing, do it
fast. The nominal leader of Cybertron can’t be caught acting like some low thug in an alley, you
idiot.”

Hmm. Blurr did have a point.

Starscream turned his attention back to Fasttrack. “Now, my dear helping hand, you’re going to
answer my questions quickly and politely, and if you do, perhaps I won’t introduce you to our local jail. Trust me, that filthy bar is a palace compared to the hole I can find for you. Do we have an understanding?”

Fasttrack nodded, the light behind his visor briefly shifting to Blurr before it moved back to Starscream. “Y-y-yes, s-s-sir,” he crackled.

Blurr moved to Starscream’s side, his arms folded over his chassis. “Who are you really?” he demanded. “Fasttrack is dead. I raced with him before the war, and I know you’re not him.”

Ah, no wonder Blurr had been so fixated on this mech.

“Be a sweetspark and answer his questions honestly, too,” Starscream said as he loosened his grip on Fasttrack’s intake, but not before he produced a small pistol, which he aimed in the vicinity of where he assumed Fasttrack’s t-cog to be. “Or things are going to get very unpleasant.”

Fasttrack’s intake bobbed beneath his palm. “He told me to take it!” he cried, and his legs kicked out futilely. “It was just a cover.” His head strained to swing back toward Starscream. “He gave me the codes. I’m supposed to watch you.”

“He,” Starscream repeated, a cold chill in his spark. “Who is ‘he’?”

“I don’t know his name.” Fasttrack was shaking now, his armor clattering. His visor was bright and wide. “I just got a comm code. He-- he gave me creds. He helped me get a new frame and stuff.”

Starscream frowned.

Fasttrack’s field seemed to be genuine. But even a two-bit operative could project believable lies into his field. He wished Jazz were here. Starscream could use an effective interrogator right now.

“You do realize he’s the same mech that’s been bombing the city, don’t you?” Blurr demanded, but his expression had softened.

He was falling for Fasttrack’s act. If it was indeed an act.

Fasttrack squirmed. “I needed the creds – urk!”

Starscream tightened his grip. He had to resist the urge to squeeze tight enough to pop Fasttrack’s little helm from his cowardly little frame. Did he not know how many mechs had died? How close Blurr had come to dying?

“Starscream.”

He shook his helm. “I do not believe you,” Starscream hissed, glaring up at Fasttrack. He shoved the mech up the wall, hearing paint screech against rusted metal. “No mech is willing to ignore that kind of behavior for a few creds.”

“Star.” Blurr’s hand rested on his shoulder, giving it a squeeze. “Something tells me he doesn’t have anything else to offer.”

“I don’t,” Fasttrack squeaked out. “I swear. That’s all I know.”

Starscream sneered. Fasttrack quivered in his grip, pulling off ‘terrified mech’ very well. Starscream didn’t believe a second of it.
“Maybe. Maybe not,” Starscream said. “But I know someone who can find out if he does.”

Starscream huffed a noise of disgust. He dropped Fasttrack, the mech crumpling to the ground. He shakily tried to get to his hands and knees, but Blurr was there, standing over him.

“Stay,” he said.

That look in his optics, the dark cast to his face, made Starscream’s spark throb. He firmly told himself ‘not now’ and dialed Jazz’s comm. He half-turned away from Fasttrack as he waited for the former Autobot to pick up.

“It’s a bit early for ya to be pinging me, ain’t it?” Jazz said by way of answer.

“Yes,” Starscream said into the comm. His vents heaved. “But I’ve got a toy for you, Jazz. One I think you’ll really enjoy playing with.”

“Ooo. Lovely, ya really know how to turn my engine. Tell me more.”

Starscream’s lips curved into a smirk. He looked down at Fasttrack, and knew he appeared an agent of Unicron. “I have here a mech connected to Obsidian. He claims he doesn’t know much, so I’m thinking, you might be more persuasive.”

Fasttrack’s visor flashed. He threw himself past Blurr, scrabbling toward the end of the alley.

Primus.

Blurr took off after him, but he didn’t have far to go. Starscream lifted his blaster and fired a shot, taking out Fasttrack’s right knee. He tumbled face first, and Blurr all but tackled him. He yanked Fasttrack’s arms behind his back and hauled him up.

“Star?”

“Sorry. He made a break for it.” Starscream smirked though Jazz couldn’t see it. “He’s just that excited to see you, I suppose.”

Jazz laughed into the comm. “Where do ya want me to pick up the package?”

“Just outside of Oiler’s. And make it quick. I don’t want to attract any more attention than I already have.”

“Will do. Jazz out.”

The comm buzzed into silence.

Starscream turned toward Blurr who had a firm grip on Fasttrack. The grounder’s field was a nauseating mix of fear and dismay. If he was an actor, he was a good one. Starscream gave him that much credit.

But figuring out if he was telling the truth or was an operative in disguise would be Jazz’s task.

“Thank you, Blurr,” Starscream purred with a salacious wink. “Fasttrack here has a very important date with Jazz, and I’d hate for him to miss it.”

Fasttrack whimpered.
Trust In Me

Chapter Summary

A new lead on Obsidian is discovered.

Blurr tried not to think about what Jazz was doing with the mech known as Fasttrack. Whatever it was, he was sure it was necessary.

He believed that Fasttrack was an innocent mech in way over his helm. But he understood why Starscream wasn’t willing to accept that explanation. Obsidian was dangerous. They needed to find him. And right now, Fasttrack was their only real lead.

He and Starscream left Fasttrack in Jazz’s hands, and Blurr pretended he was deaf to the whimpered cries for them to be reasonable, for Blurr to help him because surely Blurr thought this was wrong? He ignored the cold chill in his spark. Instead, he focused on Sky-Byte, and the fact he was dead. He focused on Maccadam’s, buried in rubble, and the seven grey frames laid out in their idea of a morgue.

Fasttrack knew what he was involved with. He’d brought this on himself.

Maybe if Blurr repeated it often enough, he’d believe it.

He buried himself in other tasks. Starscream went away, saying something about some work he had to do. Cybertron, after all, didn’t rule itself, and apparently Flatline was making noises about needing medical supplies?

Blurr left him to it.

He didn’t have work of his own, but he busied himself by wandering around the city. He spoke with no few mechs, all of whom wanted reassurances. Would they find the terrorist? Would they bring him to justice? Was Blurr going to rebuild Maccadam’s? Could they really trust Starscream.

Yes. Yes to all. Even the last. Though Blurr hated himself for hesitating, for trying to sound certain, but still unsure deep within his spark.

Could they trust Starscream?

Blurr wanted to believe so. Because he desperately wanted to trust Starscream himself. But Starscream was Starscream.

While Blurr’s fury over Starscream’s accusations had ebbed, they’d not vanished. He understood Starscream’s flirtations with jealousy, but that didn’t make Blurr any more accepting of it.

He’d seen Starscream threaten Fasttrack, and he’d watched it numbly. He’d known Starscream could be dangerous. He’d known there was a darkness to the Seeker. He never thought he’d get to see it.

He never thought it would rev his engine so much either.

Starscream had loomed over Fasttrack like some kind of avenging, winged creature, and Blurr’s
spark had throbbed with want. He should have been alarmed, disturbed even. But all he could think was how much he wanted to shove Starscream against the wall and frag the Pit out of him.

Thank Primus he had some restraint and had buried the lust down deep. But the fact he felt it at all scared the Pit out of him.

Frankly, Blurr was glad when Jazz dragged Fasttrack away and Blurr and Starscream separated. He needed a moment to put his thoughts in order, to get his processor on track. He needed to stop thinking about all the ways he could make Starscream moan.

He popped by Wheeljack’s lab for a much needed distraction and felt relieved when Wheeljack told him his boosters would be ready soon. He approved the design of his new blasters, too, and considered himself accomplished.

Blurr lingered at Wheeljack’s as long as he possibly could before he excused himself and returned home.

Home.

What he considered Starscream’s penthouse apartment to be. And when had that happened? Blurr wasn’t sure. He couldn’t really identify a single moment when he considered his proximity to Starscream to be a normal thing.

Perhaps he shouldn’t put too much worry into it right now. He should be more concerned with Obsidian.

There were no news crews outside Starscream’s tower when Blurr arrived, which saved him from having to creep to the trapdoor Starscream had shown him. Blurr loathed the basement. The dark shadows and stacks of crates reminded him far too much of that first moment of discovery and how quickly his spark had sank into his tanks.

The lift hummed around him as it rose to the penthouse and deposited him on the topmost floor. Blurr braced himself, unsure what to expect, as the security system granted him access to the apartment. He figured Starscream wouldn’t be here.

He was wrong.

Two voices traveled to his audials as he stepped inside, though he only saw Starscream initially. The Seeker stood in front of the vid-screen in the main room, one hand planted on his hip. The other voice came from the vid-screen itself, and Blurr didn’t identify its owner until he moved further inside.

His jaw nearly dropped. The mech on-screen was Jazz, a voice Blurr should have recognized, but didn’t. Perhaps he was using a modulator?

Jazz was somewhere dimly lit. It looked like a warehouse of some kind. But that wasn’t the startling part. It was the heap of energon-splattered plating behind Jazz. Blurr thought that buried beneath the dents was Fasttrack, but he honestly couldn’t be sure.

His spark throbbed.

Starscream noticed him, but said nothing. Not even a greeting. If Jazz noticed Blurr, he gave no sign.

“We have a time and a location,” Jazz said, no trace of his usual accent in his voice. “It’s late tonight. I’ve sent Mirage and Ravage to infiltrate.”
“You think it’s genuine?” Starscream asked, and he, too, sounded different. This was not the Starscream who teased Blurr in the berth.

This was Decepticon Air Commander Starscream.

Blurr’s internals tightened again, heat pulsing through his lines. He told himself he had no business getting aroused, not when a tortured mech lay in the background, possibly unconscious, potentially dead.

Jazz smirked. He took a step back, which put him standing next to Fasttrack, who was bound to some kind of chair. His helm came up to Jazz’s hip, and Jazz rested a hand on the top of it, energon dotting his fingertips as a result.

“Do you think I’ve lost my touch?” he asked.

Fasttrack shuddered visibly. His optics flickered. Not dead then.

Starscream tilted his helm. “I think that Obsidian is very smart, and he’s eluded you before.”

Jazz bared his denta. “My hands were tied before.”

“Mmm.” Starscream made a bored sound. He looked intently at the screen, as though he could read the truth in Fasttrack’s battered frame.

“It’s just reconnaissance anyway,” Jazz said, his fingers still stroking over Fasttrack’s helm in a parody of a lover’s touch. “If they don’t find anything, then I get to play some more.”

Starscream scoffed. “If what he’s already told you is a lie, he’s not going to tell you anything else.”

“Oh, I know that,” Jazz purred, and his visor flashed. “But I deserve some compensation for the time I’ve wasted, don’t you think?”

Starscream chuckled darkly. “You do have a point.” He lifted his chin. “I’ll leave you to it then.”

“One more thing,” Jazz said as a tiny whimper eked out of the mech beside him. “From what my friend here tells me, Strika ain’t nowhere to be found.”

Starscream hummed in his intake. “Curious.”

“Ain’t it though?” Jazz grinned, razor-sharp, and barely recognizable for it. “Seems to me like there’s a rift and Strika jumped ship.”

“That would explain many things.” Starscream’s wings visibly twitched, satisfaction pulsed in his field. “Feel free to explore that little tidbit further. You’ll let me know what the others find?”

“You’ll be the first.” Jazz winked, half his visor flickering in his version of it. “Catch ya later, Starbaby.”

The screen fizzed out and then went black.

Starscream sighed and rubbed over his forehelm, muttering something subvocally. Only then did he turn to acknowledge Blurr, something wary in his expression.

“Welcome back,” Starscream said as he dropped his hand. “We’ve got a lead on Obsidian.”
“But not Strika. I saw.” Which was a very curious thing. They were supposed to be conjunx, one never without the other. Either Strika was dead or she’d left Obsidian or the other way around.

Something coiled restless in Blurr’s belly, and he wasn’t sure what to call it. Starscream looked trapped between uncertainty and defiance, as though he was going to bolt at any minute, but refused to run away.

“What if Fasttrack’s telling the truth?” Blurr asked, the image of the bleeding mech burned into the back of his processor. “What if he doesn’t know anything about Obsidian other than an untraceable comm code?”

Starscream shook his helm. “I know a lie when I hear one, Blurr.” His hand dropped from his hip, wings twitching behind him. “Spend enough time in the Decepticons, you’ll learn the difference, too.”

“Right,” Blurr said.

He should be alarmed. He knows he should be. The war was over, but there Jazz was, casually torturing a mech, and Starscream watching as though there was nothing wrong with it. In a way, maybe, that was proof the war was over. Autobot and Decepticon working together after all.

In another way…

Fasttrack had sounded so genuinely afraid.

Blurr nibbled on his bottom lip.

Starscream ex-vented and slid a hand down his face. “If you’re going to yell, can you get it over with already?” he asked, sounding pained. “It’s been a long day and I’d just as soon get to recharge in an awkward silence.”

“I’m not going to yell,” Blurr said. He moved further into the main room, slowly approaching Starscream.

The Seeker watched him as though he expected Blurr to strike at any moment. There was a tenseness in his posture, a way he held his wings back as though keeping them out of the line of fire.

“No?”

“No,” Blurr confirmed, close enough to get a distant taste of Starscream’s field, what little he could sense given how tightly he held it. “The Autobots aren’t as morally superior as you think we were.”

Starscream snorted. “Yes, I know.” His lips curled into a smirk. “You were worse. Jazz always did seem to be one of the most reasonable ones, though for someone willing to bend to Prime, perhaps not.”

“So says the mech who bowed to Megatron.”

“Point taken.” Starscream’s optics dimmed, his gaze focused on Blurr’s face. “If you’re not going to yell, then what are you going to do?”

“This.” Blurr reached for Starscream, relived when the Seeker didn’t flinch, and cupped his hands around Starscream’s face.
He swept his thumbs over Starscream’s cheeks and leaned in, sealing his lips over Starscream’s in a deep kiss. A low groan rattled in his chassis, his spark strobing need and want in a sudden burst. His engine rumbled, heat cascading through his frame.

Starscream held himself stiffly before he suddenly melted, his hands grasping at Blurr’s dorsal armor. He returned the kiss, making a low sound of need in his intake. His glossa slipped free, teasing at Blurr’s lips, and Blurr met in kind.

Blurr purred into the kiss, feeling something settle deep in his spark. If he was going to do this with Starscream, there were certain things he would have to accept. He couldn’t change Starscream; that was ridiculous. But he could accept him.

Blurr’s lips trailed over the curve of Starscream’s jaw, and he ex-vented a burst of moist heat. He should be thinking about a lot of things, but frankly, right now, all he wanted to do was push Starscream onto that futon and frag the Pit out of him.

“That was not what I expected,” Starscream said, his voice husky.

Blurr hummed in his intake. He stepped forward, and grinned as Starscream eased back.

“Opposed?” Blurr asked as another step urged Starscream toward the couch.

Starscream’s fingers twitched on his hips. “Not at all. If anything, this is much more preferable.”

One more step and Starscream toppled backward, though he must have sensed the futon behind him as it was less a fall and more a guided slide into the furniture. Blurr followed him down, crawling on hands and knees to blanket Starscream with his frame, lips and glossa kissing everything within reach.

Their lower limbs tangled, Blurr’s pelvic array grinding against Starscream’s. The rub of metal on metal sent tingling vibrations through his sensor net, making his spike throb.

He shivered and worked his way back to Starscream’s lips, claiming them for another kiss. Starscream’s arms wrapped around him, hands teasing at Blurr’s dorsal seams and his booster connectors. Little sparks of charge snapped free, biting at Starscream’s fingertips.

Blurr’s hand dug into the futon for balance. The other he worked between their frames, fingers seeking out and locating Starscream’s panels. He shoved his palm against them, feeling the heat beneath his dermal plating.

Starscream shivered and bucked into his hand. He bit at Blurr’s mouth, a bare sting that only made Blurr’s engine rev. His internals clenched, heat flooding every line, every circuit.

“Gonna open for me?” Blurr asked against Starscream’s lips. He tugged the bottom with his denta, ex-venting in sharp bursts of need.

Starscream moved beneath him, slow and sinuous, his talons sliding into Blurr’s armor gaps and raking the cables beneath. Blurr moaned, charge gathering beneath his plating. His spark pulsed and throbbed. Starscream was hot beneath him, hot and pliant, and Blurr just wanted to pin him down and make him scream.

“That depends on what you’ll give me if I do,” Starscream purred, or tried to. There was a hitch in his ventilations, a burble of static in his vocalizer.

He aimed for boredom, and landed somewhere closer to anticipation.
The heel of Blurr’s hand rubbed harder on Starscream’s panel, feeling the metal heat beneath his hand. Lubricant eased around the seams.

“As many overloads as you can bear,” Blurr said. He lifted his helm, capturing Starscream’s gaze with his own. “And then more after that.”

Starscream shivered, his optics darkening to a crimson fire. “Promises, promises,” he gasped, but his panel spiraled open, spike sliding right into Blurr’s waiting fingertips. He groaned as Blurr took him in hand, giving him a firm squeeze.

Starscream’s backstrut arched. He clawed at Blurr’s back, drawing free strips of paint.

Blurr licked his lips and buried his face in Starscream’s intake, denta and glossa tasting the surrender offered to him. Starscream’s field opened to him, hot and needy, just like the charge now dancing on Blurr’s glossa.

He moaned, his own panel snapping open and his spike pressurizing immediately thereafter. The tip rubbed against Starscream’s heated armor, leaving streaks behind. Blurr abandoned Starscream’s spike, his fingers drifting down to flit over Starscream’s valve, which dribbled lubricant. His rim was swollen, hot to the touch.

Starscream moaned and bucked his hips, working his valve against Blurr’s fingers. “Do something,” he hissed, legs shifting against Blurr’s. It was difficult to get any kind of leverage on the futon, however, so all he could do was rut his rim against Blurr’s palm.

“So impatient,” Blurr murmured, not that he was one to talk.

He found Starscream’s anterior node and pinched it. Starscream jerked beneath him, ex-vents hissing out in a heated rush.

“Blurr!”

“Mmm, say my name again,” he purred as he slid his hand back to Starscream’s spike, his fingers now slick with Starscream’s own lubricant.

He shifted his weight enough that his spike could push against Starscream’s. He shivered as Starscream’s length slid against his own, and he could feel the throb of Starscream’s spike against it.

Starscream bucked up against him again, his spike sliding oh so smoothly through Blurr’s fingers. “No,” he gritted out.

“You’re so stubborn.” Blurr sought out Starscream’s chest turbines, ex-venting wet heat into them. He shifted his grip to Starscream’s hips, holding Starscream against him for a long, steady grind, their spikes rubbing and rubbing together.

Pleasure peppered up and down his spinal strut.

Starscream shuddered. “So… are you,” he panted as his claws locked around Blurr’s armor, holding them tight together. He stopped bucking and started moving, heelstruts digging into the futon until one leg wrapped around Blurr, pinning his aft in place.

They rocked together, a heavy grind of metal on metal, spike against spike, heat against heat.

Blurr moaned, his forehelm pressing to Starscream’s shoulder. He gripped the futon for leverage, knees shoved into the cushion, and rocked his hips against Starscream’s. His spike slid and slipped
in the pre-fluid both of their spikes dribbled. He rutted against Starscream’s abdomen, his groin, and more perfectly, his equally rigid, and pulsing spike.

One of Starscream’s hands slid up, cupping the back of his neck. Blurr braced himself for the sharp prick of claws, but that never happened. Just the heavy weight of Starscream’s hand, as though keeping him from pulling away.

That was the furthest thing from what Blurr wanted.

He panted, optics shuttered, denta clenched, as the pleasure spooled within him, tightening and tightening. He rutted against Starscream as though he had no self-control, their plating screeching and scraping together. He’d have paint streaks tomorrow, he just knew it.

“Blurr,” Starscream moaned, and the sound of it sent tingles down Blurr’s backstrut.


Gone was the pride, the distance, everything Starscream wore like a mantle to keep himself at arm’s length. In his voice was need and desire.

For Blurr.

Blurr’s fingers tightened around Starscream’s hip, hard enough to dent. He thrust against Starscream in a mad rhythm, overload taking him by surprise. His spike spurted, painting Starscream’s armor with his transfuid.

Starscream bucked up beneath him, making a frustrated sound, but Blurr wasn’t done. Not even close. He shoved himself back from Starscream, ignoring the pained sound Starscream made, and sat back on his heels. He grabbed Starscream’s hips, curved forward, and swallowed Starscream’s spike all in one motion.

Starscream shrieked, hips bucking upward, but Blurr’s grip was firm. Taloned hands grasped at Blurr’s shoulders, sinking into the rubber of his tires, squeezing tight.

Blurr hummed around the spike in his mouth. He savored it, tasting Starscream’s pre-fluid, his own transfuid, and a taste that was uniquely Starscream.

He worked his mouth up and down, teasing the head of Starscream’s spike with the back of his intake, and lapping up the length with his glossa. Starscream throbbed in his mouth, his hips rocking in what little bursts Blurr allowed, going for deeper, hotter.

Blurr paused a moment, cycled a ventilation, let Starscream rest on his glossa. He looked up the length of Starscream’s frame, saw Starscream staring back at him with crimson optics afire with lust. His lips were pulled back in a feral snarl, his face darkened with need.

Blurr couldn’t smirk with a spike in his mouth, but he damn well tried. And then he took Starscream to the hilt, his nasal ridge pressed to Starscream’s base plating as Starscream’s spike slid all the way into his intake. He flexed his intake cables, stroked his glossa along the string of sensory nodes up the length of Starscream’s spike, and delighted in watching Starscream come undone beneath him.

The Seeker’s hips moved in jagged bursts. His helm tossed back, mouth open in a spiraling cry as he spilled his transfuid down Blurr’s intake. His claws dug into Blurr’s tires as though they meant to remain there, and he stiffened, hanging there for a single, orgasmic moment, before he crashed back to the futon again, cooling fans spinning so fast they vibrated it.
Blurr purred around Starscream’s spike. He eased the length out of his intake and gave it a parting kiss before he let Starscream’s spike slip from his lips. He nuzzled against the inside of Starscream’s thigh, pressed a kiss to Starscream’s fluid-spattered groin, and worked his way back up Starscream’s frame.

He pressed a kiss to Starscream’s belly, his cockpit, each of those spinning turbines, and Starscream’s intake. He nuzzled the side of his helm against Starscream’s before he achingly slowly dragged his lips to Starscream’s, stealing the Seeker’s mouth for a slow, slow kiss.

“That was not how I expected you to react,” Starscream murmured as he pressed his forehelm to Blurr’s. His talons unhooked from Blurr’s tires, sliding to his upper arms instead.

Blurr’s lips pulled into a smirk. “Don’t think you know everything about me just yet, Starbaby,” he said.

One of Starscream’s hands slid to his helm, giving his crest a tug, forcing him to look up into the Seeker’s optics. “You do know there is nothing between Jazz and I?”

“No anymore,” Blurr replied cheekily.

No, that whole thing wasn’t inspired by jealousy. Intense attraction to something that should appall him, perhaps. But not jealousy.

… Well, perhaps a smidge.

Jazz was unfairly attractive in his own right, and Blurr couldn’t blame Starscream if something was going on between them.

Starscream rolled his optics. “Yes, not anymore to be precise. Our only connection now is a professional respect and understanding. It would be difficult to explain.” He briefly frowned, optics turned cloudy.

Blurr tilted his helm back toward Starscream’s, glad that Starscream’s grip didn’t prevent him from doing so. “I don’t need an explanation. You say there’s nothing. So I believe you.”

“It’s that simple?”

Blurr’s lips curved back toward a smile. He brushed the tip of his nasal ridge over Starscream’s. “Gotta start with that trust somewhere, right?”

“Right.” Starscream made a low hum in his chassis. His hands stroked over Blurr’s upper arms.

Mmm. Much better. Starscream’s field returned to its soft, fuzziness of post-overload, and it wrapped around Blurr like a second embrace.

He nuzzled Starscream’s face, lips brushing the curve of Starscream’s jaw. He shifted his knee just so, feeling the wet slide of Starscream’s valve against it.

“Wanna move this to a berth now?” he murmured into Starscream’s audial.

Starscream’s answer was to capture Blurr’s lips with his own. Blurr moaned into the kiss, sinking down against Starscream.

Trust had to start somewhere.

Might as well start now.
Once again, Starscream did not wake alone in his berth. He had a blue speedster beneath him, Blurr’s vents quietly snuffling as he recharged, one arm loosely tossed over Starscream’s waist.

Starscream’s own hand was latched on Blurr’s chestplate, talons hung in an armor seam. Even in recharge, he clung to Blurr, as though fearing Blurr would slip away in the middle of the night.

It wouldn’t be the first time a lover had crept from Starscream’s berth.

Starscream onlined and felt the closest to content he had in centuries. Millennia even. His frame was warm, if a little achy from the overloads Blurr had wrung from him last night. He was spattered in fluids, and he could use a good detail and polish, but it was the kind of mess Starscream didn’t mind.

It was certainly better than the alternative.

Starscream eased his talons free, and tried to extricate himself from Blurr’s hold without disturbing the Racer. But such was easier said than done. The moment he twitched with the intention of freeing himself, Blurr ex-vented audibly and stirred. His optics onlined, spiraling in and out before they found Starscream.

“Morning,” he murmured, giving Starscream a sleepy smile. His hand stroked down Starscream’s backstrut, toward his aft.

“So it is,” Starscream replied. He eased himself upright. “We are filthy.”

Blurr chuckled, his optics focusing. “That’s usually what happens after a night of debauchery.” He sat up, the heel of one hand rubbing at his optics. “Gah, it’s early. Why am I awake?”

“This is a decent time for decent mechs,” Starscream replied with a roll of his optics. He couldn’t stop his smile, however. He eased off the berth.

“Pfft. Decent mechs. Sounds boring.” Blurr’s gaze shifted to him, optics raking up and down as though admiring.

Starscream, despite himself, felt his face heat. He planted his hands on his hips. “Are you looking for something? You’d think you would be exhausted after last night.”

“I’m a Racer, Star. If there’s one thing I have, it’s energy.” Blurr rolled his shoulders in a shrug, grin so easy and relaxed, as though it was every morning they woke up together in such fine spirits. He slid off the berth, stretching his arms over his helm. “Wanna share a bath?”

“It would save on solvent,” Starscream said.
Blurr chuckled. “Not with what I have in mind.”

In the end, Blurr was right. They did not save on solvent. In fact, they probably used three times more than they would have if they’d just washed separately. But Starscream had been unwilling and unable to say no when Blurr pressed him against the wall, kissed him fiercely, and then fragged him through two overloads.

“You’re lucky I don’t pay a bill for that,” Starscream said once they’d stumbled out of the washrack, clean and dry, though not polished.

Starscream feared if it got down to that, he might not leave the habsuite today, and he had far too much work to do for that.

Blurr laughed. “What would you have done if you did? Seized my assets?” He gave his aft a wriggle when he said that.

Damn cheeky Racer.

Starscream rolled his optics and retrieved energon for both of them from the storage room.

“You’re not as funny as you think you are,” he said as he returned, handing Blurr his cube.

Blurr sipped at it, his lips still curved in that confident smirk. “Yes, I am,” he said around the cube before he tipped it back and swallowed in one quick pull. “I am also going to be late if I don’t hurry.”

“Late?”

Blurr dispersed the cube with a flick of his fingers. “I have an appointment with Wheeljack. He’s supposed to fit my new boosters today.”

“Then Primus save us all.”

“Hey!” Blurr might have been aiming for indignant, but it came out charming instead. Especially when he sidled up to Starscream and slid a hand around his waist, tugging their frames together.

Their lips were inches apart, Blurr’s optics gleaming with mischief. He brushed their nasal ridges together, an oddly affectionate move.

“Want to meet up later?” he asked, his fingers tiptoeing up Starscream’s spinal strut. “For midday energon, I mean.”

“So you can show off your new boosters, I presume?” Starscream asked, amused.

“That and...” Blurr ex-vented warmly, the light chuff teasing Starscream’s lips. “Other reasons.”

Starscream would not admit aloud that he shivered. Or that his fully sated interfacing array sluggishly stirred. “This is new,” he murmured. “Though I admit, I am not disliking it.”

Blurr leaned back and shrugged, though it was far from dismissive. “This is who I am, Starscream,” he said with something of a coy grin, his words echoing Starscream’s own, the little slagger. “Guess you’ll just have to learn to live with it.”

“Yes, I suppose I will,” Starscream replied. He leaned forward, his lips brushing over Blurr’s.

Blurr’s field burst over his, drizzling with desire and amusement both. “Yes, sir,” he purred, and then he was gone, easing out of Starscream’s arms.

He winked, like he was the one in control here, before he vanished out the door. Starscream tried not to stare after him, and focused on consuming his energon instead. He backed toward the futon, sinking down into the plush comfort.

He’d woken in a berth beside a lover he was coming to trust, and somehow, he wondered if he’d actually woken at all. Or if he was still trapped in some kind of dream.

Was it cliché to hope he never online then?

Blurr wasn’t gone five minutes when the door opened again. Starscream rose from the futon with a frown, narrowed optics focused on the door.

Rattrap let himself inside, strutting in as though this was his penthouse and not Starscream’s. Maybe once Soundwave was allowed back in the city, Starscream could get some better security. Apparently the vermin just invited itself inside these days.

“You better have good news,” Starscream said. If he had to deal with a spy who let himself in, then it had better be for good reason.

Rattrap’s optics gleamed, both sets of them. “I have news,” he said, wriggling a datapad at Starscream. “Dunno if it’s good or not.”

Starscream held out a hand. “Give it here.”

“Yes, sir. Right away, sir. Whatever ya say, sir,” Rattrap drawled. He came close enough to hand over the datapad before folding his arms over his chest. “Someday, yer gonna realize that I won’t always be here when ya snap yer fingers, ya know.”

Starscream peered down at him over the top of the datapad. “You’re rarely here when I snap my fingers,” he said, amused. “Are you angling for a raise, Rattrap?”

The rodent snorted. “Ya don’t pay me.”

Starscream arched an orbital ridge. “Precisely my point.” He turned his attention back to the datapad and flicked it on. “You were the one who came to me, offering your services. You are more than welcome to walk away whenever you so choose.”

“What would ya even do without me? Ya don’t know half of what really goes on in this city,” Rattrap retorted.

Starscream skimmed the available documents on the datapad. Not that there were many. Most were tagged by Mirage. Ah, at least the mission report would be readable then. He tapped on the first one, a transcript of the meeting Mirage and Ravage infiltrated.

“Well, the Autobots are proving particularly useful as of late,” Starscream responded, though only half his focus was on the conversation at hand. The rest was reserved for Obsidian’s meeting.

Rattrap shifted his weight. “Mirage ain’t gonna be your lackey.”

How interesting.

Starscream glanced up from the datapad. “I was thinking, more or less, of Jazz. I know very well Mirage’s loyalty to me is nonexistent.” He tilted his helm. “Have you and the Autobot noble been
“Only as much as we need ta,” Rattrap muttered, but his armor fluttered.

Very interesting indeed.

Starscream swallowed down a laugh and focused his attention on the datapad. He quickly skimmed the transcript, noting little of interest save that Mirage and Ravage had taken photos of those in attendance, to match with the citizenry later. It would certainly make it easier to identify Obsidian’s supporters.

Of Obsidian, there had been no sign. The mech himself had not shown up, and the meeting was instead led by one of his lackeys, a mech Starscream did not recognize. Which meant nothing. It was easy enough these days to get a new frame and a new designation to go with it.

The meeting was mostly a discussion of ways to continue to undermine Starscream’s authority. They handed out scripts of rumors to start spreading. They debated another place to attack, and Starscream made a mental note of those suggested. He would increase security and distribute a list of potential suspects.

One key phrase struck out to him.

“*The big gun.*”

He wasn’t sure what it meant. It showed up repeatedly, and Obsidian’s minions kept alluding to Obsidian’s plans to retrieve and activate the big gun. It was his endgame apparently. The project that would mete him his victory.

And it was on Cybertron.

Starscream frowned.

All of Cybertron’s population was clustered in this area, even the exiled Autobots and Decepticons. The rest of the planet barely counted as habitable, and he knew that there were no secret weapons hidden anywhere. If they hadn’t been found during the course of the war, they were surely destroyed in that pulse of primordial energy released with the destruction of the dark heart.

Of course, this didn’t preclude any *new* weapons.

“This big gun,” Starscream said as he internally gnawed on the phrase. There was something about the wording, the way it was spoken…

He wondered less if it was a something, and more of a someone.

“I dunno what it is,” Rattrap said with a shrug. “Neither did Mirage. He figured it was somethin’ leftover of Shockwave’s. Maybe somethin’ Obsidian had stashed somewhere.”

Starscream made a noncommittal noise. He didn’t think that was the case. Shockwave was many things, but irresponsible with his projects was not one of them. He kept scrupulous records of everything, especially the more destructive items. All of them, Starscream knew, were accounted for.

Except for Shockwave himself, of course. Though Starscream doubted Shockwave and Obsidian were allied together. They came from opposite ends of the spectrum, and had entirely different motivations and end games.
Starscream’s lips pressed together.

Big gun.

His optics widened in sudden realization. There really was only one big gun which could destroy Starscream, Cybertron, and everything he’d struggled to build. One big gun which had already gotten close to ruining it all.

One big gun who was currently deep in prison, restrained only by a device of Wheeljack’s design, with loyalists lurking in the shadows, just waiting for a chance to set him free.

Megatron.

It had to be.

And even if it wasn’t, even if Starscream was wrong, there was absolutely no harm in double-checking to ensure that Megatron was secure. That none of his guards matched the faces in Mirage’s image captures.

“Starscream?”

He shook his helm, realizing that his engine had revved with agitation and his wings were flicking. “Nothing,” he answered, and powered down the datapad, tucking it into his subspace. “We learned very little. We are no closer to finding Obsidian than before.”

“Ya knew he was deep.”

Starscream narrowed his optics. “Yes, but I was under the impression that I had three of the best spies on Cybertron. Clearly I was mistaken.” He drew in several ventilations, forcing himself to present a calm front.

Rattrap ex-vented in a burst. “Ya ain’t got a clue what it’s like down there. Tunnels that go nowhere. Floors just crumble beneath ya. Scraplets nesting in corners. We’re lucky we know as much as we do.”

“Oh, well then. When Obsidian bombs this entire city, and we’re left standing in a sea of corpses, I’ll just shrug. Because it’s a maze down there, and it just couldn’t be helped.” Starscream sneered, lifting his shoulders in a sarcastic shrug. “We did our best. Oh well.”

Rattrap’s optics flashed. “That ain’t fair.”

“I never said it was.” Starscream bared his denta. “But it is the reality of the situation. I am not the only one running out of time, Rattrap.”

His spy stared at him, something defiant in his optics, until his armor twitched and he spun on a heelstrut. “I ain’t got a miracle up my sleeve, your highness.” His vocals dripped with disdain.

“Neither do I,” Starscream retorted. He folded his arms over his cockpit and watched Rattrap depart, paws from his alt-mode clenching in and out of fists.

It was a rather creepy effect.

Starscream shuddered. Organic-based alt-modes were the worst. He couldn’t imagine why anyone would choose to model themselves after something organic. Then again, it was likely Rattrap hadn’t had the choice.
To be honest, Starscream knew very little about Rattrap.

He frowned. That was a gap, a failing on his part. How could he allow himself to put so much trust into a mech who was such a blank slate to him? Unacceptable.

Starscream made a mental note to get some more background information on Rattrap. He suspected he would need to elicit Jazz’s assistance.

For now, however, there was the matter of Megatron.

Very few mechs on Cybertron knew exactly where the once-Lord was being imprisoned. Starscream had planned that on purpose. Oh, there was a location he released to the public, but it wasn’t Megatron’s true position. Starscream wasn’t a fool. He was well-aware there were many loyalists who would sacrifice their own spark if it meant freeing Megatron.

But just because there were very few who knew where Megatron could truly be found, didn’t mean that those few weren’t traitors. Starscream, after all, trusted no one implicitly, save a couple as of late, and he’d had to rely on a select group of mechs to guard Megatron’s cell.

They were former Autobots and Neutrals, both factions unlikely to desire Megatron’s release, but that still didn’t make them trustworthy. And any of them could be Obsidian’s supporters.

Hating Megatron was not the same as approving of Starscream after all.

Starscream briefly nibbled on his bottom lip. He had promised to meet Blurr for midday energon, but this was far more important. Obsidian’s meeting had not mentioned a timeline. For all Starscream knew, the fragger was on his way to Megatron’s cell right now.

Starscream pulled out a datapad and typed out a quick note to Blurr. This he left on the central table in the main room, along with a promise to return in time for them to share evening energon. Or perhaps something more. Starscream made a mental note to acquire some kind of treat.

He could have commed Blurr, but he worried about his ability to lie directly. Blurr made him feel an unexpected push to tell the truth, and Starscream did not like that. Neither could he deal with Blurr either demanding to come along, or wanting to know Megatron’s location as well. Blurr had some weird obsession with the truth.

No. Best to keep it indirect contact for now.

Message left, Starscream went into the berthroom and keyed in a special code onto the locking console. A panel in the side wall slid aside, revealing his armory, though that was a generous term. There was little here but his blades and a few easily concealed blasters. He hoped to fully stock it eventually, as much as he hoped that wouldn’t be necessary.

Starscream did not intend to start a war, continue one, or engage in one. He just wanted to protect what was his.

He left his blades – too obvious – but grabbed the blasters. For now, they would have to do. He couldn’t look like he’d come for battle.

Thus armed, Starscream locked his armory once more and exited his penthouse by way of the balcony. He headed toward what was left of Kimia, a heap of rubble that occasionally belched a plume of pale smoke as though it still burned.

Starscream dropped down behind the ruins of a building and ducked in through a small gap in the shattered wall. The quarters were dark and confined, and he had to suppress a shiver of
displeasure. He reminded himself it was only temporary, even as he shoved aside a slab of burnt metal, and prised up a trapdoor.

He dropped down, pulling the door shut behind him, hard enough that it jarred the slab he’d carefully overbalanced until it came tumbling back down. He would not be exiting through this way.

Starscream’s biolights were all that lit the way.

Rattrap’s words echoed back to him. That the underlevels were a twisting, churning maze of shadows and deadends, and Starscream knew that Rattrap was right. But this route was burned into Starscream’s cortex. He would always be able to find his way to the hole where he kept Megatron.

It was technically several levels below the actual prison where he claimed to be keeping Megatron. But it was not accessible through the legitimate prison itself. However, were anyone to track Megatron’s spark energy, he would be exactly where Starscream claimed he was.

It wasn’t a plan that would succeed forever. Starscream only needed it to work long enough for him to cement his leadership before he could bring Megatron to trial.

There was a rotating staff of six mechs, two at a time, with a third at a secondary location monitoring from afar, ready to sound the alarm if anything were to happen within the cell itself.

Starscream keyed the code into the access door and stepped through the narrow hall, to where Megatron was suspended in a harness, his frame glowing from the stasis belt Wheeljack had affixed to his frame. Starscream idly wondered when the battery on that thing would run out, or if it fed off Megatron’s own spark. He would have to ask Wheeljack. He made a mental note.

“Gentlemechs.” Starscream tipped his helm in greeting to the two mechs on duty, and to the camera in the corner. “I trust all is well?”

“Ain’t nothin’ changed since the last time ya asked,” one of them drawled, a former Autobot by the name of Treadshot, who appropriately, had a tank alt-mode. He was a large mech, towering over Starscream, which made him an interesting contrast to his partner.

“He hasn’t moved, and all signs indicate his health has not changed,” added the second guard, a smaller Neutral by name of Beltline. He had no discernible alt-mode kibble, leaving Starscream to believe he was a monoformer of some kind. The gun he carried, however, more than made up for the lack of in-built weaponry. It was nearly as large as he was.


Starscream folded his arms, giving them both a critical look. “If there were, you would be the first to know.”

“Of course, sir.” Beltline said, his optical band brightening as though he smirked behind his mouthguard. “Only your field seems to be agitated.”

Starscream purposefully flicked his wings. “It is common knowledge that Seekers do not like to be underground,” he said tersely.

He moved past both of them, close enough that he could smell the electric charge of the bars separating Megatron from the rest of the room. He looked up at his former lord and master, as Megatron’s battered and broken frame, the way he hung there chained and bound, and yet, Starscream still felt uneasy.
It would be a lot better if Megatron were dead.

“We will need to be extra vigilant,” Starscream said as he paced back and forth in front of the cell, no less reassured by the fact Megatron was still here. “I’m sure you’ve heard of the terrorist attacking our city.”

“Don’t get much news down here,” Treadshot said. He creaked, probably shrugging. “Ground shook a bit ago. Figured it was just some demo and construction.”

“Deceptions?” Beltline asked.

“It doesn’t matter who they are,” Starscream said as he clasped his hands behind his back, beneath his wings. “Rumor has it they may try to free Megatron, and we must ensure that such a thing doesn’t happen. Understood?”

He turned to face them, and his optics widened.

Two smaller blasters, and a cannon the size of Starscream’s thigh were pointed right at his chestplate.

“Now see, here’s the thing,” Treadshot said, the low whine of blasters charging barely audible over the snap-crackle of the energy bars behind Starscream. “Obsidian don’t give a scrap about Megatron.”

“He does, however, give a scrap about you,” Beltline added with a tilt of his helm. The end of his cannon glowed a baleful orange. “Now, he’d prefer to have you alive to start with.”

“But we’re kinda impatient,” Treadshot continued, his lips pulling into a long, slow smirk. One that showed fanged denta. “And I may’ve heard one too many stories about how treacherous ya are.”

“So just give me a reason,” Beltline finished. “I’ve been longing to put some holes in those pretty wings of yours.”

Starscream worked his intake.

They had the audacity to call him treacherous when they stood there, pointing guns at his face. How long had they been Obsidian’s? From the beginning?

Starscream didn’t know. He gathered it didn’t matter.

A former Autobot and a Neutral. Obsidian, it seemed, attracted all kinds. Starscream supposed he should feel honored. Apparently, he could inspire hate in everyone without even trying.

“Should I raise my arms then?” Starscream asked in a mild tone, tilting his helm. “Since I am, after all, surrendering.”

Treadshot and Beltline exchanged a glance.

It was the half a moment Starscream needed.

His blasters leapt into his hands, and he fired, perhaps a touch wildly in his haste to ensure he did not miss his chance.

Treadshot dodged, remarkably fast for a mech his size. Beltline hissed as one shot smashed into his shoulder, throwing him off balance. His cannon jerked up, and Starscream dove to the side just
as the shot sizzled over his helm, impacting the wall to the left of the control panel for Megatron’s cell.

“I told ya!” Treadshot snarled, presumably to Beltline, as the alert was triggered and screeching alarms began to sound.

Backup would be arriving soon enough. Starscream had only to get past these two goons and make a break for the exit.

Treadshot lunged at Starscream, who twisted to avoid, firing at the larger mech’s knee, hoping to take him down. The shot landed, but Treadshot’s personal shielding deflected it. Frag him to the Pit! Who’d equipped a Neutral with such a powerful shield?

Starscream snarled, his proximity alerts flashing, and dove to the floor, half-rolling to the side to avoid damaging his wings. Beltline’s second shot scorched the air, hitting the ceiling. Everything around them rumbled.

“Yer goin’ to get us killed, idiot!”

“You got a better idea?”

Starscream rolled to his pedes and whipped around to face the two idiots, who descended upon him, Beltline’s shoulder sparking, Treadshot’s now visible shielding arcing with bits of electric charge.

“Yes,” came a smooth voice from behind Starscream. “I do.”

He didn’t have a chance to turn. He never heard the mech arrive.

*Attention deflector,* he thought distantly. *Like Ravage.*

Damn it.

And then the world went black.

Chapter End Notes

a/n: And on that note, I leave you on a cliffhanger. ;)

Just until I get the edited chapters back and ready for posting I mean. They're written, just in the process of being edited. Cheers!
Blurr skidded to a stop in front of Wheeljack’s lab, nearly overshooting the door in his haste. He was only running a little behind, but it was entirely Starscream’s fault, which was what he’d say if anyone asked.

Who could have known that the fearsome Decepticon Air Commander would be so damned irresistible?

Catching his balance, Blurr jogged to Wheeljack’s front door and pressed the call button. It buzzed back at him, and the door immediately clicked open.

“Really?” Blurr asked aloud. He cycled his optics. Did Wheeljack not understand a thing about personal security? As far as Blurr could see, Wheeljack didn’t even have an exterior camera.

Blurr shook his helm and ducked into the laboratory, just as the door closed behind him with a snap, nearly clipping his aft. Well then. Good thing he was fast.

Inside, it was brightly lit. So bright Blurr squinted and readjusted his optical input. “Jack?”

“In the back!”

Blurr wove his way through a maze of crates and boxes, all piled high with unrecognizable objects, and occasionally interspersed with machines of unknown origin or use. Blurr was careful to keep his hands to himself. He didn’t dare touch anything here.

“You know, you should really consider a security system,” Blurr said as he emerged from between two narrow stacks of something, having to turn sideways to do so.

He stepped into a larger space where Wheeljack sat in the middle of a ring of tables, each of which were overburdened with what seemed to be multiple projects in progress. Wheeljack’s wheeled chair darted from table to table as he somehow multi-tasked on every last one of them.

“Whatever for? That might discourage mechs from visiting,” Wheeljack replied, his indicators flickering brightly as he rolled from a left table to a right one.

“Yeah, like the dangerous ones,” Blurr pointed out. He circled the tables from the opposite side, careful not to touch anything, and still having no idea what any of the projects were, save the one table. Those were clearly his boosters and a pair of blasters atop it.

Wheeljack scoffed. “I’m not worried about those.”

“Clearly,” Blurr said with a laugh. “What’re you working on?”

“Just a few things we could all use.” Wheeljack shrugged and bounced to his pedes, leaving his chair in front of a desk with some bubbling liquids. “But these lovelies are why you’re here,” he said as he stepped behind the table containing Blurr’s boosters.
Blurr inclined his helm. “They’re ready?”

Wheeljack winked an optic. “Of course. I may not be Perceptor, but I still no how to turn in a project on time.” He chuckled. “I’m going to have to make some adjustments to your connectors though. ‘M not sure the current circuits can handle the power boost.”

Blurr tried not to drool. “Power boost?” How much faster would he be going? His spark longed to try them out. Right now.

“Thirty percent more efficient and eighteen percent faster,” Wheeljack said proudly, patting the boosters with soot-stained fingers. “They’ll be easier to detach, too. Just in case.”

“Starscream will appreciate that,” Blurr muttered. The Seeker did enjoy recharging on top of him, and it was much easier to do so without the boosters getting in the way.

“Mmm. I’m sure he will,” Wheeljack said, amusement rich in his vocals. “He’s a cuddly thing, ain’t he?”

Blurr’s gaze snapped up from the boosters, focusing on Wheeljack. He briefly replayed the conversation, realized he’d commented aloud, and felt his face heat. He had not wanted to give details of his private life. He usually had better restraint than this.

“Ya wouldn’t expect that of someone like him,” Wheeljack continued as he lifted one of the boosters and fiddled with the thruster end of it. “Or maybe, it’s ‘cause of who he is that he’s so cuddly.”

“That… doesn’t make any sense,” Blurr said, forcing out the words.

“Does to me.” Wheeljack shrugged and turned the booster around in his fingers. “Well. Ready to try these out?”

Blurr tilted his helm. “You’ve tested them, right?”

“Yes.” Wheeljack lifted the other, balancing the two boosters in his hands. “Only recorded failure was when I was tryin’ to fail on purpose. Which reads a success to me.”

Blurr squinted.

Wheeljack beamed.

“Cross my spark,” he said, and literally made the gesture, though it was awkward given he was still juggling the boosters. “Besides, I know if anything were ta happen to ya, I’d have an angry Seeker clawing my aft.” Wheeljack chuckled.

Blurr’s face heated. He scratched at his chin. “You might be right about that.”

“I know I am.” Wheeljack weaved his way through several of the tables toward a berth in the corner.

It was piled high with blankets, of which Wheeljack shoved to the floor with a push. He hooked a free-standing lamp with his pede and dragged it closer, directing the light toward the berth. He then patted the berth with a free hand.

“So get on up here. You’ll probably want to be in stasis while I make the adjustments.”

“Stasis.” Blurr chewed on his bottom lip. A small niggle of worry wormed into his spark. “This is
gonna take awhile, huh?”

Wheeljack patted the berth again, and reluctantly, Blurr hiked himself on to it. His desire to have his boosters returned far outweighed any dread lingering in his spark.

“A couple hours provided I don’t have any complications,” Wheeljack explained as he leaned over to snag a wheeled table, engineering instruments gleaming in the bright lamp. “It’s a lot of small, delicate work. So unless you can be perfectly still...” He trailed off with another shrug.

Still?

Blurr snorted.

Even he knew how much he fidgeted. He couldn’t help it. Stillness was not in his nature. The very idea of not moving made him antsy.

“I’ll go into stasis,” he said, and stretched out across the berth, only to remember that Wheeljack needed access to his back.

Blurr turned over onto his belly, folding his arms beneath his chin. A few hours? He’d probably miss his midday energon break with Starscream then. Damn it. He’d been hoping to add a little dessert into that break.

“Good choice,” Wheeljack said with a hum. He patted Blurr’s nearest shoulder. “Sit tight. I’m going to grab a few instruments and then we can get to work.”

“Sure thing.”

Wheeljack wandered away to a collection of nearby crates. He pried up the lids of one and started rummaging around in it, pulling out odds and ends, only to either frown at them, or tuck them into his subspace.

His armor was still discolored and scraped. He could use a thorough strip and wax, Blurr noticed. Maybe he and Starscream could kidnap Wheeljack and offer to help. It would be a nice gesture, and a way of saying thanks, too. Especially since Wheeljack never asked for anything in return.

Blurr made a mental note of that and tried to relax. He offlineed his optics, and cycled several ventilations. He was glad to finally get his boosters back. He’d missed the weight of them, and the reassurance they offered.

Oh, but he’d miss his lunch with Starscream. That was right.

Blurr pinged Starscream’s comm and frowned when he was sent straight to the messaging system. Odd. But then, maybe Starscream was in some kind of private meeting, or any kind of meeting honestly. He seemed to have them left, right, and center.

Blurr left a message and hoped Starscream wouldn’t get all huffy because Blurr’s apologies had not been in person. One could never tell with Starscream sometimes.

“Ready?”

Wheeljack returned, arms laden with all kinds of gadgetry. Blurr tried not to cringe. Some of those things better resembled torture devices.

“Please don’t hurt me,” Blurr said.
Wheeljack chuckled, his voice filled with an infectious amusement. “I promise I won’t,” he said as he dumped his gadgets onto the wheeled table with a clatter. “And when you wake up, you’ll be faster than you were before.”

Excitement trilled through Blurr’s spark. It was enough to chase away the last vestiges of apprehension.

“Then do your worst,” he said.

“Actually, I’m going to do my best, but I get what you mean.” Wheeljack laughed and patted him on the shoulder. “Need some help powering down?”

“No at all.”

Blurr offlined his optics and rested his helm on his hands. He cycled several ventilations as he initiated stasis. Wheeljack was enough of a field medic to bring him out of it properly later.

He grinned to himself, tires wriggling with excitement. He was going to get his boosters back. He couldn’t wait.

~

Hours later, much later than Wheeljack anticipated, Blurr returned home, a little sore, but the familiar weight of his boosters on his back. He was also armed now, with a pair of slim pistols that fit into his thigh sheaths and were easily concealed.

The only downside was that it was now well after dark. He’d missed midday energon with Starscream, but upon onlining, hadn’t had an answer to his apology. He suspected his Seeker was sulking.

Alas.

Blurr cycled a bracing ventilation and keyed his code into the system and stepped into the penthouse, only to draw to a surprised halt. It was fully dark in here with only a single emergency light to provide any kind of illumination.

Starscream should be here.

Blurr frowned and sent the commands for the main lights to engage. As they did, it only highlighted how empty the penthouse was.

Something disquieting drizzled into Blurr’s spark. He moved further into the apartment, on alert for any kind of ambush. He couldn’t hear any movement, or detect any other systems, and as he searched all the rooms, he found them empty. The berth was still rumpled.

Starscream’s energon cube sat on the low table in the main room. He never could manage to take the dirtied things back to storage.

Blurr rolled his optics and moved to retrieve the cube. There was a datapad sitting next to it, so he scooped that up as well. It powered on as he moved it, likely activated by motion, and the document onscreen was addressed to him.

Odd. Why hadn’t Starscream just messaged him?

Blurr skimmed the note Starscream left him. There wasn’t much too it. Starscream was looking
into a new lead about Obsidian, it shouldn’t take him very long. He’d be back in time for them to share midday energon.

Back in time, hm?

Blurr tossed the used cube into the recycle bin. He tucked the datapad into his subspace. It was long past time Starscream should have returned. He’d never acknowledged Blurr’s messages either, or responded to the comm Blurr had sent.

Every battle instinct honed throughout centuries of war fired off all at once.

He cycled a ventilation and told himself to calm down. That he was alarming himself over nothing. That all he had to do was ping Starscream and the querulous Seeker would snap a demand to know why Blurr had interrupted him.

Easy.

He pinged Starscream and was immediately shunted to the messaging system. Blurr gnawed on his bottom lip.

He moved to the balcony, examining the panel. It still glowed a baleful crimson at him: locked. He accessed the system – the last registered use was hours ago, not too long after Blurr left. No one had been in or out since then.

Blurr pinged Starscream again.

Nothing.

Blurr tried not to panic. There was no reason to panic. Starscream could be out of touch for any number of reasons – including venturing out into the wastes after the Autobots or Decepticons for aid again. Perhaps he was in one of the underlevels meeting with his spy team. Maybe he was in some kind of secure meeting.

Except that he hadn’t told Blurr he was going to do any of that. Specifically, he’d mentioned working out of the office all day today, trying to catch up on loads of datawork that he’d let slide in the face of the chaos. So, yes, theoretically he could be in a secure meeting, but he’d still at least acknowledge Blurr’s messages if that were the case.

Blurr gnawed harder on his bottom lip. He pinged Starscream again, and was shunted straight to messaging.

Damn it.

He reached for his comm, intending to contact Jazz, when a message popped up in his communication suite. He immediately shifted his attention toward it, thinking Starscream finally returned his pings.

No. He didn’t recognize this number or this ident code. But it blinked at him, flashing ‘urgent’, and something about it precluded spam. It demanded attention, and he didn’t feel he could ignore it.

He accepted the comm and a datapacket tumbled into his temporary queue. It was heavy, occupying a lot of processing kernels, and when Blurr opened it, he found out why.

He physically staggered, vents gasping, as images streamed across his inner cortex. They were all of Starscream, time-stamped for today. He was chained to a wall, broken and bleeding, one of his
wings twisted at an odd angle that suggested it was mangled beyond use. Energon glittered on his frame. Dents stuck out in sharp relief against his scraped, crimson armor. One optic flared dimly, the other was dark. His cockpit had been smashed, shards of glass reflecting what little light was available.

He had to be unconscious, given the way he hung limply in his chains. And there were bolts through his limbs, keeping him in place, one even through the undamaged wing.

**YOU ARE BEING DECEIVED.**

Someone had spraypainted the words over Starscream’s frame and the wall behind him. Someone with a sense of showmanship.

Blurr’s engine revved. His spark dropped into his tanks.

What the frag!?

His comm chimed. Blurr leapt to answer it. “Who is this? What the frag do you want? Let him go right now or I’ll--”

“Blurr.”

Jazz’s voice. Damn it. Blurr hadn’t even stopped to check the ident code. His free hand pulled into a fist as he snarled.

“Jazz, Starscream’s gone!”

“I know.” Jazz’s voice was cold, colder than Blurr had ever heard it. “You gotta vidscreen, right? Turn it on.”

“What? Why?”

Jazz’s tone became even tighter, like leashed anger. “Just do it!”

Blurr snapped to obey before he thought twice about it. He whirled toward the main room, grabbed the remote, and powered on the vidscreen.

“What channel?” he asked, before he realized there was no need.

The broadcast occupied every channel. The screen flickered around the edges, the speakers spitting out static. The very same images that had been sent to Blurr’s private comm were now splashed on the screen, though in real-time. He could see Starscream’s plating twitching, could see the slow track of energon as it trickled down Starscream’s armor, could hear the rasping, rattling ventilations.

**YOU ARE BEING DECEIVED** was an even more lurid splash with the floodlights directed at Starscream, highlighting every bit of damage. Blurr swore he could see streams of sparklight, but maybe that was his terror playing tricks on him.

“Jazz, what is this?” Blurr asked, his spark throbbing so hard it felt it might escape from his chassis.

Jazz said nothing.

He didn’t have to.
The screen flickered. A shadow fell across Starscream’s frame before someone stepped into view.

He was a tall, spindly thing. All long, awkward limbs, no discernible alt-mode, and multiple optics. He was half-again Starscream’s height, though half Starscream’s mass. There had once been a badge prominent on his abdomen, but it had been so scratched through, Blurr could not tell which faction it belonged to.

“Good evening good citizens of Cybertron,” the mech purred, his lips stretched into a wide, satisfied grin. “So pleased to finally have your attention. Honestly, I was beginning to wonder what it would take. You worship this creature behind me to the point of your own detriment, not that any of you would realize that.”

Blurr’s ventilations stuttered. He stared at the screen, engine growling, but Obsidian continued. He paced slowly back and forth in front of Cybertron, staring directly into the camera.

“But you see how I’ve beaten him, this false idol of yours. See how he bleeds.” Obsidian gestured behind him with one spindly arm. A second set crossed over his chestplate. “This is what you allow to lead you. This traitor. This sycophant. This coward.”

The last was hissed. It was deprecating. More hateful than seemed logical.

“This is how desperate you are to be led. How you crave and cry for a firm hand.” Obsidian laughed, and there was no humor in it. He shook his head. “I would pity you if you were worthy of it.”

He took a step back toward Starscream, the one outflung hand reaching for Starscream’s face. Blurr’s engine raced into a higher pitch. He glared at the screen, but he couldn’t tear his gaze away, not as Obsidian grabbed hold of Starscream’s jaw and lifted his face.

“You chose this,” Obsidian said, still with that smirk, so self-satisfied and proud. “This. Have you no shame? No self-respect?”

He dropped his hold, and Starscream’s helm hung once more. Obsidian’s plating fluffed out, all of his optics flashing red fire.

“No, you don’t,” he said, and stalked toward the screen, his engine rumbling ominously. “And for that, you’ve earned the reckoning that’s coming. This planet is not for you. I will reclaim it for those of us who deserve it. I will cleanse Cybertron of your stain.”

“Jazz, are you watching this?” Blurr asked, nearly breathless, his spark down in his tank, swirling around in the energon he’d consumed earlier. The urge to purge clawed at the back of his intake, but he swallowed it down.

“Trying to get a lock on him now,” Jazz replied, as if from a distance. “Thank Primus he’s a vain fragger.”

“Every last one of you are to blame. Every last one of you will pay,” Obsidian hissed, and his armor flared. “And I will start, piece by piece, by everything this traitor has built.”

His arm whipped back toward Starscream, finger trembling as it pointed unerringly at Starscream’s chestplate.

“You will learn,” Obsidian said, his finger pointing at Starscream, but his gaze staring directly into the camera as though he was looking at everyone in the city. “And then you will burn.”

The screen fizzled out, static striping across the image, until it faded to black.
“Jazz?”

The apartment rumbled. Blurr heard something, as if from a distance, like a loud boom. The windows rattled.

Blurr spun on a heelstrut and jogged toward the balcony, just in time to see a fireball fill the sky in the distance. No, not that far away. A five minute run if he was down there. A minute flight for Starscream.

“Jazz, talk to me!”

“Obsidian just blew up the command center.”

The Command Center. Where Starscream’s office was, and the “offices” of his more loyal constituents and those who assisted him with any manner of tasks. It was also a secondary storage for city-wide supplies, including back up medical provisions and emergency energon rations.

Blurr growled. “Tell me you found him.” He whirled back around and stormed toward the door.

For all he knew, Obsidian would blow up this apartment next. Starscream had made no secret of where he lived. And if Obsidian was going to blame all of Cybertron’s ills on Starscream’s leadership, there was little doubt he’d destroy everything even vaguely associated with Starscream.

“I’m workin’ on it.”

“Work faster!” Blurr jabbed his finger against the panel, his spark crawling up into his intake now, throbbing so fast he couldn’t ventilate. “Where are you? I’m coming to you.”

Jazz sighed, but didn’t argue.

Good.

Because this wasn’t up for debate.

It was time they put Obsidian down for good. And Starscream had better be alive when Blurr found him.
Holes in the Sky

Chapter Summary

With Jazz, Mirage, Rattrap, Ravage and Wheeljack to help him, Blurr puts together the pieces and figures out where Obsidian is hiding.

Jazz didn’t have a base of operations. At least, not in so many words. It wasn’t smart to keep everything in one place, to be easily located. After all, see how quickly Obsidian had sniffed out and done away with the task force?

The city was a mess. Mecha were going crazy, yelling at each other, fighting with each other, rioting, and looting.

Obsidian had certainly accomplished one of his goals. He’d wanted the people to turn on each other, and they had. Part of the city was turning to ash, and another part would surely follow as it started to burn. Sirens split the night as some responsible parties decided to try and quench the flames.

Now was the time Starscream usually stepped in. He made contact, he organized, he reassured. He put himself on display, on camera, a voice for everyone to look at.

People didn’t like him. People didn’t trust him. But in times of trial, of fear, everyone wanted a leader. Someone to tell them what to do. Now, without it, they floundered.

Maybe there was truth in Obsidian’s words.

Blurr ignored it all. There wasn’t anything he could do. He was just a former Wrecker and former bar owner. He couldn’t stop the riots, or the looters. He couldn’t stop the world from going mad.

He had to save Starscream. That was what he could do.

Jazz’s current “base” was the ramshackle apartment he’d claimed for himself. It was small, barely stable, and even tinier with half a dozen mechs crammed into it. Blurr was the last to arrive, and he squeezed in between Mirage and Rattrap to find Jazz perched on his futon, crouching over a portable data system.

His fingers flew over the holographic keys, his lips pressed together in a thin line, the light in his visor flat. His pedes were planted on the seat of the futon, his aft on the high back of it.

“Tell me you found him,” Blurr said, again, by way of announcing himself.

“I’m close,” Jazz said, hissing through gritted denta. “Fragger’s bouncing his signal from one half-working satt to another. I can’t tell if it’s comin’ up or down.”

“That should be easy. He’s underground,” Blurr said.

Jazz straightened and one hand dragged over the holographic screen in front of him, only to flick out to the side. An image popped up mid-air, a 3D rendering of the city, an odd dissonance between standing buildings and those that were rubble. Tiny lights popped up randomly every
dozen seconds or so.

“Each one is a signal location,” Mirage said from behind Blurr’s right shoulder. His tone was oddly even considering their world was on fire around them. “It’s moving faster than Jazz can shut it down.”

“Ravage!” Jazz barked. “I need your fragging boss.”

The shadows beyond Jazz shifted, and Blurr startled. He hadn’t even seen the Decepticon cassette until crimson optics flashed into view.

“He doesn’t come when called, Autobot,” Ravage said in a mild tone. “Besides, he knows.”

“Of course he knows,” Jazz muttered and the large projected screen fizzled back out of view, taking with it the indicator marks. “But does he share? Nope. Not unless he can use it to his advantage.”

Ravage purred a laugh. “I see you’re finally learning.”

Blurr folded his arms over his chestplate. “So nice that you can make jokes.” He seethed. “But what I don’t see is you making progress. I’m standing here looking at four of the best spies of Cybertron and not a single one of you can find this fragger?”

“What do ya think we are? Magicians?” Rattrap demanded, throwing both of his hands into the air, his tail twitching behind him. “Ya think spies just go around and their prey falls into their laps easy-peasy?”

Blurr turned toward him, optics narrowing. “I’m thinking you’ve had weeks to find Obsidian and yet you’ve offered Starscream nothing. I’m thinking you kept giving him excuses. And now I’m thinking that maybe it’s because you didn’t want to find him.”

“Mech, ya wanna say what yer really thinkin’?” Rattrap demanded in a low tone, his lips peeling back over his pointed denta.

“No, he doesn’t,” Jazz interjected with a sharp burst of his energy field that felt like a punch to the gut.

It was enough to make Blurr flinch, to cast Jazz an almost guilty look. He didn’t apologize to Rattrap. He didn’t feel the need.

He didn’t know enough about Rattrap’s motivations to trust him, honestly. There was too much at stake here. Not even Starscream knew why he put so much faith in Rattrap. If you asked Blurr, that made for a blindspot a mile wide. One that Obsidian could slide right into with a smile on his face.

“Pointin’ fingers and shiftin’ blame ain’t helpin’ no one in here,” Jazz continued as he dialed back his energy field. “Neither is fightin’ each other. You’re just doin’ Obsidian’s work for him.”

Blurr chuffed a ventilation. He didn’t dignify that with a comment.

“Though it does beg the question of why you are so loyal to Starscream in the first place,” Mirage murmured with a lift of his orbital ridges.

Rattrap smirked, his pointed denta coming into view. “Mebbe I jes gotta thing fer Seekers.”

Mirage looked down his nasal ridge at Rattrap. “If that were true, you would have found a better
“Mebbe I prefer ‘em feisty,” Rattrap replied with the air of someone putting on false innocence. “A touch of elegance, too. Y’know how it is.”

“I’m sure I don’t,” Mirage said with a sniff. He folded his arms, angling his frame away from Rattrap.

Blurr’s gaze flicked between the two of them. He didn’t know if he was brave enough to be curious and ask.

“Hush. Both of ya,” Jazz said without looking away from the screen. It reflected on his visor in eerie flashes of light.

Blurr gritted his denta. “How much longer is this going to take?”

“As long as it needs,” Jazz said, only for his attention to shift to Blurr, his expression unreadable. “Ya should get out of here. You can do more good out there.” His helm jerked toward the door, as though gesturing to the city at large.

Blurr shook his helm. “No. I’m staying here.”

“I can handle this. I don’t need some worried conjunx peerin’ over my shoulder,” Jazz said as he focused on the keyboard again. His shoulders hunched. “Go out there and make sure Starscream’s city doesn’t crumble to pieces without him, all right?”

Conjunx? They weren’t even Amica! And if Obsidian had his way, Blurr would never get the chance to ask or be asked.

“No,” he said, more firmly this time. His engine revved. His hands formed fists at his side.

Jazz wasn’t his commanding officer. Not anymore. Blurr didn’t have to listen to a fragging thing he said if he didn’t want to.

“Blurr--”

“No!” His hand sliced through the air, his angered shout echoing in his audials. “I don’t care about that. I’m just a bar owner, okay? I’m a former soldier in a time of supposed peace, and my partner is in the hands of a lunatic. I’m not going to give a press conference while he could be out there dying!”

Silence. Save for his own rapidly spinning fans, and the quiet beeping of the holographic displays.

Blurr felt he should be embarrassed. He was making a fool of himself, making a scene, and he knew there were more important things. He did.

All he could think about right now, however, was Starscream.

Beaten. Broken. Splattered with energon. And Obsidian promising that they would all pay for their transgressions.

His vents were haggard, raw and aching. He couldn’t get his engine to stop revving.

Someone chuffed their vents into the silence. Pistons hissed as they shifted their weight.

“What’s the big deal,” Mirage muttered from behind Blurr, sounding dismissive. “It’s just Starscream.”
Starscream."

Blurr went so cold it turned into a white-hot fury that burned through his spark, and out through his pedes. His boosters spun up in response, prepping him for a burst.

“Mirage!”

Even Blurr startled at the snapped rebuke. He whipped his attention back to Jazz, whose armor was bristling, his visor flattening to a dark line of reproach.

“Enough.” Jazz’s tone was cold enough to freeze the atmosphere.

The two Special Ops mechs stared at each other. Blurr could feel them bristling at one another, though he couldn’t see it, their fields rising as if intending to do battle.

“I got it!”

Wheeljack burst into view, one hand waving wildly over his helm as he nearly tripped on a small chest shoved to the side. Blurr blinked. He hadn’t even realized Wheeljack was here. How’d he arrive so fast?

“Enhanced more than three hundred percent,” the engineer said with a loud ex-vent as he skidded to a halt next to Jazz, a portable holo-board clutched in his other hand.

Jazz gave Mirage another look before he turned his attention back to the screen in front of him, the pale light of it reflecting on his visor. “Good job, ‘Jack. Put it up on the main screen.”

Wheeljack, perhaps heedless to or in spite of the tension, did as Jazz asked. His fingers flicked as the main holographic screen blinked and was replaced by a very familiar image.

Blurr’s vents gasped as he lurched backward unconsciously. This was the very same image that had been burned into his cortex, one Obsidian had sent to him, of Starscream bound and in chains, beaten and bloodied. He was unconscious still, a wealth of abuse littering his frame.

Worse that it was magnified and clarified, that every little detail seemed to stand out in stark relief against the gloom. That he could trace and measure each dent, or track the rivulets of energon, or count the exact angle to which Starscream’s wing had been bent.

Blurr’s spark stuttered. He half-shuttered his optics and looked away, air rattling in his vents.

“That familiar to anyone?” Jazz asked.

“No.” That clipped tone belonged to Mirage.

“Looks the same as any other piece of slag tunnel down there,” Rattrap muttered. “Scraplets ‘nd all.”

Scraplets.

Wait.

Blurr forced himself to look at the picture again, but instead of focusing on Starscream, he concentrated on everything around his lover. The debris-littered floor paneling. The rust stains. The pitted pipes. The evidence of scraplets in the gnawed metal and scattered leavings.

“There’s some kinda writing behind his left wing,” Jazz observed, to the room in general. “See that?”
“What is that?” Wheeljack asked. Something beeped as he zoomed in on it, focusing on the glyphs stamped into the wall.

“I dunno. Sector number maybe?” Jazz ventured.

“No. Sectors are not numbered. They are primarily lettered,” Mirage said.

Blurr worked his intake. His hands drew into fists. “I know where he is.”

“What is it then?” Wheeljack asked.

“I ain’t got a clue, mech. Do I look like some kinda maintenance bot?” Rattrap said with a chuff of his vents.

Blurr revved his engine. “I know where he is!” he growled, loud enough to be heard over their petty bantering.

Four mechs turned to look at him, though Mirage’s expression better held disdain. Blurr tried not to hate the formerly noble Autobot too much.

“Obsidian’s been hiding under our fragging stabilizers this entire time,” Blurr said with a flung gesture toward the image. His armor fluffed out, betraying his anger.

Jazz lifted his chin. “Blurr. Focus. Tell me where.”

“Do you even know why I picked that ramshackle building out of all the other piece of slag places to build Maccadam’s?” Blurr demanded as he took a step forward. He shoved a finger toward the image. “It had a basement with storage and direct access to waste and recycling pumps.”

Jazz frowned.

“Ya didn’t have a basement though,” Rattrap said.

Blurr didn’t want to know how Rattrap knew that. Or how often Rattrap had skulked through Blurr’s private stocks.

He shook his helm. “A week before I opened, I stumbled on a scraplet infestation. They’d eaten almost the entirety of my iron filaments and magnesium drops. They were everywhere.” He rubbed the heel of his palm against his forehelm. “I didn’t have the time, the credits, or the mechpower to get rid of them. So I just sealed it up. Figured I’d get to it later.”

“Okayyyyy,” Rattrap rolled his optics. “But how do you know that rust-forsaken scraplet-infested pit is the same as your basement?”

“Because the glyphs are old-standard. Businesses everywhere used them. It identifies the building as one that processes energon.”

In other words, Blurr had chosen that building because it used to be a bar. Granted, by the time he acquired it, most of the processing equipment had been damaged or stolen, but the infrastructure had been solid. It was less rebuilding.

He’d thought it was karma or something. A sign from Primus that he was meant to enjoy peace and finally do something he’d always wanted to do.

“You’re sure?” Jazz asked.

Blurr nodded. “Positive.” He worked his intake, spark throbbing so hard he thought it might burst
Blurr nodded. “Positive.” He worked his intake, spark throbbing so hard he thought it might burst through his casing. “Obsidian’s hiding under Maccadam’s. Or what’s left of it.”

Jazz’s glossa swept over his lips. He chewed on the bottom one. The light behind his visor shifted from Rattrap to Mirage and back again.

“Alright then,” he said, and with a flick of his fingers, all of the holographic arrays vanished, leaving the dilapidated room awash with shadows. “Let’s go get our Seeker.”

“Obsidian has an untold number of mechs at his beck and call,” Mirage said with a deep frown. “And you think the six of us are enough to save some mech?”

Jazz hopped off the futon and stretched his arms over his helm, wriggling his hips from side to side in a deep stretch. “Three of us, actually. You, Ravage, and Blurr have other tasks.” The light in his visor flattened. “And he’s not some mech. He’s Starscream.”

“Which is my point,” Mirage snapped, his armor fluffing out. For the first time, he lost some of that noble poise.

Blurr would have been amused, if anger hadn’t replaced all else. “What other tasks?” he demanded, taking an aggressive step forward. “I’m going to help rescue Starscream.”

“No. You’re going to keep his city in order,” Jazz said, so matter of fact as though Blurr would obey him without question because he said so.

Frag that.

Blurr shook his helm. “No. I’m going.”

Ravage had the audacity to chuckle. “You have fun with that, Jazz. I’ll let you know what the boss says.”

He strutted between Blurr and Mirage, tail swishing behind him and looking all the more deadly for it. His energy field buzzed with amusement, grating against Blurr’s own, before he vanished into the darkness.

Blurr wasn’t sorry to see him go.

“Blurr, I ain’t walking into that kind of situation with some hot-headed conjunx ready to frag things up,” Jazz said slowly. Carefully. He planted his hands on his hips, lifting his chin. “You wanna help? You get out there and do something useful.”

Blurr’s optics narrowed.

“I’m not some pretty little trophy to stand here on the side, Jazz. I used to be--”

“That’s the key word there, Blurr. Used ta be.” Jazz stalked toward him, the light in his visor turning hard and cold. He poked a finger at Blurr’s chestplate. “Ya just got yer boosters back, ya haven’t even used those blasters yet, and ya can’t tell me that hip’s one-hundred percent. I need soldiers now. Not liabilities.”

Liability!? Of all the--

“Are we not going to discuss the fact that it’s Starscream you want us to risk our sparks for?” Mirage demanded on the edge of a hiss. “Not too long ago I was trying to shoot his arrogant aft out of the sky!”
Jazz gave Blurr a hard stare before he stepped back a pace. “And now we’re gonna save ‘im. Like it or not, Cybertron needs Starscream.”

“Primus help us all,” Mirage muttered.

Blurr pressed his lips together. His spark thumped a faster rhythm in his chassis. He thought, again, of the images Obsidian had sent him. As though he wanted Blurr, personally, to know what had happened.

Of course he did. Blurr and Starscream had not made their relationship a secret in the slightest.

Had it been a taunt? A warning?

An invitation?

Jazz and Mirage were still talking, their words a buzz in Blurr’s audials. Now Rattrap was joining in, standing shoulder to shoulder with Mirage. Jazz rubbed his forehelm, looking irritated. Wheeljack lingered in the background, winglets fluttering.

Not at one of them seemed to care that Starscream was, at this very moment, in the hands of a monster. They were too worried about their perceptions, their politics. Starscream was needed for Cybertron.

Did it always have to be about the greater good?

Blurr found himself taking a step backward, toward the door, nearly tumbling over a bottle of something on the floor. But he supposed his hip was a lot better than Jazz thought because he barely wobbled. His balance was fine.

He knew where Obsidian was hiding. He knew the best access point to those deep sublevels. He even knew which ones weren’t covered by rubble after Obsidian’s attack.

And he knew he was faster than every mech here.

Blurr spun without a word and ran toward the door, leaping over a chair in the process. His hip twinged a little when he landed, but he’d dealt with worse. He’d raced through worse. He’d survived as a Wrecker with worse. He’d survived the entire Cybertronian War with worse.

“Blurr!” Wheeljack shouted for him.

Blurr ignored him. He bodily shoved Jazz’s rickety-as-frag door open and darted into the hallway.

He could be there in five minutes, less if nothing was in his way or he didn’t run into one of the roving bands of looters and/or rioters. He had his boosters and if Wheeljack wasn’t fibbing about their new specs, he could be there sooner.

His comm clicked. “Ya idiot! Ya can’t do this alone!” Jazz snarled, easily slicing into Blurr’s comm suite.

“Then maybe you should stop arguing and help me,” Blurr snapped as he darted out of the ramshackle apartment complex and barreled into a plume of smoke. Something was on fire somewhere.

He heard yelling. Sirens. Madness. New Iacon was tearing itself apart.

Maybe he should do something.
Frag that. Blurr was a bar owner without a bar. He’d never asked to be a politician. It wasn’t what he wanted.

He was a former Wrecker who’d just found himself in another war. His partner was in the hands of a madman. That was something he could do. He was going to retrieve Starscream and put an end to this whole mess if he had to do it all himself.

“You’re going to get yerself killed!”

Not if he killed Obsidian first.
Sing Me to Sleep

Chapter Summary

Trapped in Obsidian's clutches, Starscream waits for his moment to strike.

Pain was nothing unfamiliar to Starscream. He had become inured to it. But he’d never had to tolerate so much of it while bearing a civilian frame and all the weaknesses said frame gave him.

But he had learned how to swallow it, and so he did. He bit back every cry, only offering a grunt to incense his tormentor. He made a point not to track the energon dripping down his frame, and the steady decline of his energon levels. He forced himself to ignore the twisted, mangled wing. He told himself he would fly again. He would.

It was only damage. It was only pain. He’d lived through worse.

“Why don’t you just kill me?” Starscream snarled, spat out through gritted denta, the taste of rust and purge still heavy on his glossa.

Obsidian paced in front of him, energon prod crackling noisily. He’d moved on from the whip and his own fists.

“You should be so lucky to earn that release,” Obsidian said, his multiple optics hard and dim. He kept walking in front of the lights, casting eerie shadows in all directions.

Starscream rolled his optics. “Like I haven’t heard that before.” He dragged in a rattling vent, heard some kind of fluid gurgle around. “If you’re trying to frighten me, then you have failed.”

Obsidian’s lips curved. “Did I now?”

Starscream braced himself. Even so, the electrical surge directly into his side was agonizing, a searing wave of heat followed by a noxious burst of charred metal filling his nasal sensors. His paint blackened, lines shorted out, cables melted to slag.

If he hadn’t dampened his pain receptors to the lowest he was capable without medical overrides, Starscream would have already screamed.

Primus save him from evil, dramatic tyrants.

Starscream’s tank rippled again. The noxious smell filled him with nausea. But there was nothing unprocessed left to purge. His energon levels glowed a steady, if not baleful twenty-three percent.

He’d survived on worse.

The energon prod pulled away, and Starscream hung in his bonds, gasping for a clear ventilation. His shoulders ached. His pedes didn’t touch the ground fully, leaving him little leeway to try to ease the joints.

Starscream’s vision went a little wobbly. He forced his optics to reboot, but still the visual feed came through a haze of orange. Great. Obsidian had fried something important. Lovely.
He forced his helm up, fixing Obsidian with a glare. “Is that the best you got?”

Obsidian snorted and folded his primary arms over his chest. The secondary set tapped the unactivated prod against his thigh. “You some kind of masochist?”

“No. I’m simply bored.” Starscream faked a yawn and rattled his chains. “Your pontificating is more tortuous than anything else.”

Obsidian sneered at him. “You sicken me, Starscream. You are a failure in every way. A blight on Seekerkind and certainly an insult to Decepticons everywhere.”

Starscream rolled his optics. “Please. You think I’ve not heard that all before?” He curved his lips into a smirk, forcing himself to ignore the increasing rattle in his vents. “Are you going to kill me yet?”

“No until your city burns.”

Starscream barked a laugh, energon flecking on his lips. “You’re making my mistakes, Obsidian. Careful now. I might have rubbed off on you.”

“Hardly.” Obsidian stalked closer, though out of reach, not that Starscream had a free limb. “I know you can’t hear it, Starscream. But right now, I’m listening to the raucous noise of rioting and pillaging in a city you claim to lead. Fitting, don’t you think?”

“Fear is an effective motivator. Any fool knows that.” Starscream sniffed imperiously, though it lost its effect when energon dribbled from his nasal ridge. “Is this the part where you detail to me your nefarious plan? Because I was having more fun when I was unconscious.”

Obsidian sneered. The energon prod crackled to life.

Starscream braced himself. Only for Obsidian’s optics to flash. He took several steps back, one hand lifting to his audial.

“What?” he snarled into his comm as he whirled, his back plates visibly twitching.

Starscream grimaced. Obsidian was a mess. He wondered if maybe the mech wasn’t already halfway to empty, given the rust on his frame, and the grime, too. He’d been skulking about in the garbage and the dark, crawling around with the rest of the vermin.

Strika was gone, Starscream and the spies had gathered. He – no, she. Starscream corrected himself. Rumor had it Strika had escaped from the same facility as Arcee. Anyhow, Strika had always seemed to be the steadier processor between the two. Maybe she kept Obsidian somewhere closer to functional.

“Then handle it!” Obsidian hissed.

Starscream cycled a few ventilations as Obsidian seethed. He didn’t know who Obsidian was talking to, one of his lackeys perhaps. He seemed to have no shortage of them. Then again, Starscream had a talent of making enemies. More people seemed to hate him than like him.

Well, frag them all.

He tried, again, to look for an escape. The chains were heavy, rusted things. Enough leverage and he could probably get them to snap. He had no weapons, but since when had that deterred him? Obsidian had height on him and was armed, true, but Starscream’s greatest weapon had always been his voice.
He only needed the right trigger.

Obsidian whipped back toward him, plating shuffling around his protoform.

“Problems dear?” Starscream asked in a sweet voice, one he’d often used to infuriate Megatron.

Obsidian stared at him, all of his optics narrowing. “None at all,” he said, in a tone equally saccharine. The energon prod was gone but he held up something else. A remote of some kind?

“In fact, why don’t I show you what you’re missing, hm?”

There was a click and a beep before several holographic images burst to life against the walls behind Obsidian. The images stood out in stark relief against the rusted pipes and grime-covered plates.

It was indeed Starscream’s city, though he didn’t know how Obsidian had access to this kind of feed. Obsidian had not lied. There were rioters and looters. Buildings had gone up in flame. Mechs crowded the streets.

It looked like a warzone. And they had no one to lead them, no one to guide them back to peace and calm.

Starscream gritted his denta. “You think this means you’ve won?”

“Haven’t I?” Obsidian lowered his hand, but the images continued to play. “Your city is in ruins. Your task force is dead. Soon you, this city, its residents, even Megatron, will all be burning rubble. And I can cleanse Cybertron of the stain you’ve given it.”

Starscream snorted. “Cleanse? You act as though you’re doing the planet a favor. Newsflash, lunatic, you’re not. This isn’t your planet alone.”

“And neither is it yours, to play with as you please.” Obsidian hissed, his optics darkening in hue. His fingers spasmed. “The Senate. The Primes. Megatron. You. All are the same. Tyrants and takers, users and abusers. You don’t care for the people. You only care for what power you can hold.”

“Doesn’t everybody?”

Obsidian’s optics flashed. The remote creaked in his grip. He surged forward, only to pause and lean back. He audibly cycled a ventilation.

“You seek to bait me,” he said, in a much calmer tone than Starscream would have expected. “To what end? Are you trying to buy time? Do you think you will free yourself?”

Starscream pointedly twitched the one functioning wing, ignoring the jagged stripes of pain it sent through his neural net. “All in due time.”

“Not soon enough if you ask me,” Starscream grumbled, only for his ventilations to catch, briefly stalling. The fluids had gathered into a pool. He could feel it slowly flooding his vents.

Twenty percent, his tanks told him. And still dropping.

“Oh perhaps you’re waiting for rescue?” Obsidian murmured, and now he sounded amused. “Perhaps you think you actually have allies, friends… a lover even.”
Starscream went cold, and tried not to show it. “I have business associates and plenty of them,” he said in a careful tone. “As to whether any of them value my continued existence enough to risk their own, the answer is surely negative.”

“Is that so?”

Obsidian grinned and the sound of it sent a chill up Starscream’s spinal strut. He took another step back, this time toward the door behind him, one where the locking panel had continuously glowed a baleful crimson.

“Maybe you’d like to see what’s behind door number one then?” he said with an exaggerated gesture toward it.

Starscream tensed. He hoped he sounded bored. “Oh, I don’t know. Will it mean you’re finally going to stop blathering?”

Obsidian didn’t rise to the bait. Instead he laughed and slammed his primary hand onto the panel. It must have been registered to his energy field – the same kind of security Starscream used – because the door beeped positively and slid open, admitting two military-grade frames, dragging a third between them.

Starscream did not know either of the mechs who were armed to the vents and whose badges had been so mangled, he didn’t know if they were purple or red.

But he knew the frame they dragged. The one spitting curses and snarling and thrashing in their grip, despite the blaster marks, dripping energon, and swollen faceplate. The one with his arms cuffed behind his back, and seemed to be resting most of his weight on his good leg, his good hip.

Blurr.

You idiot.

Starscream’s engine growled weakly. The tips of his pedes scraped at the ground. The chains rattled around him.

“Tell me Starscream,” Obsidian said as his henchmechs threw Blurr to the ground. He landed hard on his shoulder, hissing in pain. “Do you recognize this mech?”

Starscream ground his denta. “Never seen him before in my life.”

Obsidian chuckled. “You used to be a better liar than that.” He crouched over Blurr like some kind of nightmare, one of his primary hands grasping Blurr by the intake and lifting him with perilous ease. “You’ve been all over the news.”

“That was a show,” Starscream said, rolling his optics. He reined in his field, hoping Obsidian couldn’t read the panic in it. “He’s a means to an end.”

Blurr’s engine revved, but mercifully, he kept his mouth shut. He did pin Starscream with a glare, but frankly, he’d given Starscream worse. Besides, he was too busy gasping for a ventilation, and he needed to focus on that right now, not on getting angry at Starscream for no reason.

Obsidian clicked his glossa. “I know better than that. Sources tell me that you two are close.” He dragged Blurr closer to him, until their faces were inches apart. His knuckles flexed, crumpling the dermal metal of Blurr’s intake. “Is that not right, my racer friend?”

Blurr snarled. The tip of his pedes scraped the ground as his engine growled. And then he spat in
Obsidian’s face, a mix of oral lubricant and energon and honestly, Starscream had never been so proud in his Primus-damned life.

“I’m going to kill you,” Blurr gritted out, vocals thick with static, glitching out every other glyph.

Obsidian looked amused as he dropped Blurr back to the floor without warning, leaving Blurr no chance to catch himself. He gasped as his leg twisted beneath him and he tumbled, landing on his side. His armor was pitted and scratched, his boosters emitting smoke.

“Yes. You and your army of none,” Obsidian commented before he looked up at his two henchmechs, both of whom lingered by the door. “Give the order. Full raze.”

“Sir!”

They sloppily saluted. Brute on the right left without another word, but brute on the left hesitated. He looked between Obsidian and his two prisoners.

“Need help with ‘em?”

Obsidian stepped over Blurr like one might a mess on the floor. “Do I look like I do?”

Starscream looked down at Blurr, trying to catch the Racer’s gaze. Blurr struggled to roll somewhat upright, his engine whining and his hydraulics creaking. He left a puddle beneath him, the fluid looking alarmingly like coolant. Given the way Blurr’s boosters were smoking, that was a greater concern than the energon.

“No, sir.”

“Then give the order!”

Blurr wheezed and hacked up a glob of energon, unprocessed, but energon all the same. His right optical socket was swollen, as though one of the goons had entertained themselves by beating on him. Well, he hadn’t made it easy.

The door beeped as the henchmech departed, leaving Obsidian by himself. As all mad and destructive dictators were wont to do. At least Starscream had that much of an edge. Obsidian might think himself with all the power, but Starscream had been in worse situations than this, with worse evils standing over him.

Obsidian was nothing compared to Megatron.

“There. Now that we’re alone, we can get to the main event,” Obsidian said in a bright tone that did not bode well.

He strode past Blurr, almost dismissive, until one of his primary arms reached down, hands snatching Blurr’s crest as though it were a handle. Blurr hissed as he was dragged forward, scraping along on one and a half knees as the other didn’t function properly.

“Let me go, fragger!” Blurr seethed.

Obsidian ignored him. His other primary arm gestured to the holograms still projected onto the walls.

“There. Your city is burning. And as soon as my minions deploy the last of the bombs, it will be rubble.” He kept a firm grip on Blurr’s crest, so tightly that the metal creaked and Blurr hissed again. “There may be survivors, but I am equipped to deal with those. Anyone here in this
compound will be safe. I’ve taken pains to ensure that.”

“Oh, I see.” Starscream rolled his optics. “This is the part where you tell me your grand plan. I was wondering when we’d get to that.”

Obsidian’s optics narrowed at him, all four of them. “I am not Megatron, Starscream. You cannot bait me with spiteful words.”

He squinted at the other mech. “Are you sure? I’m pretty good at that.”

“Star, shut up for Primus’ sake!” Blurr snapped. He was painfully braced on his knees, trying to lift his frame to ease the pull on his crest. But his hip was spitting sparks, and his ventilations were growing more labored.

He needed a medic before he overheated and overclocked his processor.

Starscream worked his intake. “Shutting up has never been my strong suit,” he said in a mild tone and smirked at Obsidian, the energon in his mouth turning gummy and sour. “Do go on. Perhaps you can bore me to death. Won’t that be fun?”

“No, I’m all done with that.” Obsidian’s secondary hand dipped into his thigh panel, producing a blaster. “I think it’s finally time to grant your wish, Starscream.”

Starscream’s spark thudded in his chassis. He forced himself not to look at Blurr. “You’re going to kill me?”

“Well, yes.” Obsidian chuckled and tugged on Blurr’s crest, holding Blurr’s helm against his hip in a parody of lover’s affection. “But first I’m going to kill your partner here. That way I can witness the look in your optics when you realize the true depths to which you have failed.”

Starscream went so cold he flushed hot. It was a rage that started in the tips of his fingers, flooded his frame, and sputtered out through his thrusters. The barrel of the blaster pressed to Blurr’s forehelm. It wasn’t very high caliber, but it didn’t matter. At this range, there wouldn’t be enough left of Blurr’s processor to even attempt rebuilding it.

Blurr growled, his lips peeling back over his denta. “What did I ever do to you?” he demanded.

Obsidian chuckled. “You, my friend, had the audacity of not only befriending a monster, but crawling into its berth. Really, you’ve brought this on yourself.”

“Strong words from a mech with a gun pointed to an innocent person’s helm!” Starscream snarled as he lurched forward, the chains rattling around him, pain striking him afresh and anew. But pain had always been his fuel, and he leaned on it now.

“He’s no innocent.” Obsidian growled and took a step forward, dragging Blurr with him, blue metal leaving a harsh scrape in the floor. “You are what you are, Starscream. You’re a liar, but at least you’re honest about it. He knew exactly what he was getting into.”

Blurr laughed then. Something raspy and broken. It was less amusement, as it was exasperation. It bubbled past his lips like the gurgles of his vents, like the hissing-screeching of his hydraulics and the steam billowing from beneath his armor.

“You’re right about that,” he said as he twisted his neck, looking up at Obsidian with bright optics, his lips curved despite the energon staining them. “I walked in there with optics online, and
I’d do it again. I crawled in bed with a monster, and I’d choose him any day of the week.”

Starscream stared. His vents stalled.

“Starscream is what he is,” Blurr sneered, even as his plating fluttered, and his ventilations heaved, and his hip spat sparks. “And he’s mine.”

“Cute.” Obsidian thumbed the trigger, and the whine of the blaster powering to standby seemed to echo in Starscream’s audials. “Now say goodbye.”

Blurr snarled. “Frag you!”

Obsidian chuckled. “As you wish.”

“No!”

Starscream threw himself forward with all that he had left, powering his thrusters, his afterburner, everything he had. He heard metal rip and tear, something snapped and rattled.

Agony.

He’d had worse.

Starscream lurched across the room, seeing not the crimson of anger, but a kaleidoscope of colors, one that had no single emotion. Rage. Desperation. Panic. Fear.

He threw himself at Obsidian, screeching like all the rumors claimed of him, all the whispered mockery and pointed fingers. He clawed with the only weapon he had left.

He savored Obsidian’s startled look. He swatted away the blaster as Obsidian changed targets, and he tackled Obsidian to the floor, hating all over again his new civilian frame. He was too light. His limbs didn’t work right. He was too tamed.

Obsidian threw him off.

Starscream’s back hit the floor, and he shrieked as a new cascade of pain flared through his frame. His wings streaked warnings across his HUD, and Starscream shunted them all aside. He flipped to his side, forced himself onto his pedes, just in time to see Blurr throw himself at Obsidian.

His shoulder slammed into Obsidian’s left hip, throwing the mech off balance. Obsidian snarled and whipped his primary hand around, grabbing Blurr by the face and shoving him back. Blurr landed hard on his bound hands, something cracking beneath him.

Obsidian spat a curse as he slammed a foot down onto Blurr’s abdomen, crunching vent slats. Obsidian’s ventilations heaved, his field thick with rage and roaring around the room, rattling the rusty pipes. Blurr howled, backstrut arching.

And Obsidian still had his blaster.

Starscream scrambled forward. He had only one thought, and nothing else.

He had the space of a single sparkbeat. A single ventilation. Everything seemed to move in slow motion. Obsidian’s finger curling, Blurr trying to twist out from beneath him, his shoulders twitching. The blaster whining, so loud it pierced Starscream’s audials.

And then the shot, even louder, echoing in the room.
He never felt it. He thought he should have, considering that the barrel had been pressed against his chestplate when it discharged. He could smell hot metal, burning metal, charred metal. Slagged lines and curdling energon. He felt weakness in his limbs. His ventilations stalled entirely. His cooling fans, too.

He felt hot, but strangely cold.

His spark stuttered.

Obsidian stared down at him. Obsidian smiled, all four of his optics so bright and eerie. Because he’d won.

Or at least, he thought he did.

Or maybe he had.

The world spun around Starscream. Circles upon circles. He tasted energon on his lips, like it had been freshly poured.

He heard Blurr growl. Heard the clash of metal on metal. Heard Obsidian snarl and another shot fired. Then a third. Then a fourth. Then a fifth. Then more until he couldn’t count them anymore and all he heard was the click, click, click of empty charge.

Those tiny blasters were never good for much more than last-ditch attempts anyway. Limited charge. Limited range. Limited power. Nothing was better than a good, old-fashioned Null-ray. Why had he ever given those up?

“Starscream!”


Skidded to a stop in front of him. Starscream sagged forward, vents seizing as the fluid gathered in them tried to escape. He couldn’t seem to cough it up. It kept pooling there. Like the energon around him. Trickling down his chestplate.

Because he had a hole in his chest.

“I got shot,” Starscream said, or tried to say. He wasn’t sure how much of it came out intelligible. All he heard was garbled static.

“Primus, Star.” Blurr cupped his face, pressed their forehelms together. “What were you thinking?” His voice shook. His optics were bright, bleeding color at the edges.

Starscream couldn’t seem to make himself move. He tried, but he couldn’t even twitch his fingers.

He’d thought he’d had worse than this. But he could feel it. His spark shrinking. Damage reports streaked across his HUD, revealing why.

Obsidian had nicked his spark chamber. It wasn’t much. But it was enough. They were in the underlevels of Cybertron, far from help.

It was enough. Obsidian won after all.

“Not sorry,” Starscream said, he hoped.

Blurr’s mouth moved. Starscream’s audials glitched. He didn’t hear it.
Energon levels: eight percent.

Blurr’s grip on his face tightened. He was close enough now that Starscream’s upper half could rest against his, getting energon all over Blurr’s armor. Damn. And he wouldn’t be around to help rinse it off.

At least he’d managed one good thing.

Energon levels: four percent.

“Love you,” Starscream said, or tried to say. He didn’t even know if his vocalizer activated. He didn’t know if Blurr said anything back. His audials weren’t receiving auditory input.

At least he’d tried.

Blurr’s hands were warm on his. Blurr’s field was even more so. Starscream was incapable of reading it now, but there was no denying the embrace of it.

It was… nice.

And then it was black.
The Sound of Silence

Chapter Summary

Starscream’s words echo in his head, and Blurr is faced with the realization it may be too late.

Love you.

The words echoed in Blurr’s processor, over and over again, wreathed in static though they were. Starscream’s lips had shaped them as much as his vocals had, and now Blurr could never forget them.

Love you.

He wanted to rage, and he didn’t know if he should blame himself, Obsidian, or both. He wanted to kill Obsidian all over again, because Starscream’s frame was limp and chilled in his arms, and Blurr couldn’t save him.

He was a Racer. A former Wrecker. A former bar owner. And hastily slapped on static mesh couldn’t do anything about the massive hole in Starscream’s chassis. Blurr could see sparklight, dim though it was.

He didn’t want to watch it flicker and fade.

“Star?”

He didn’t know why he bothered. Starscream’s face was cold to the touch. His optics were offline. He barely ventilated.

He was dying.

Love you.

Blurr’s spark clenched.

He had to try.

Starscream was smaller now. Lighter. The civilian frame had its benefits in this, and only this. Because it certainly hadn’t protected Star.

Blurr lurched to his pedes. His aching hip protested. It screeched at him, joint grinding on socket. He could barely see through his right optic. His gyro stabilizers needed to be re-calibrated. But he was mobile.

He had to try.

He scooped Starscream into his arms, wincing as his Seeker’s wings dangled from twisted joints, one only connected by a jagged piece of metal and a few thick cables. Starscream was limp, uncooperative.
Blurr’s spark squeezed again.

He turned on unsteady pedes. He took a wobbly step toward the door. He ignored the twitching heap of bullet-spattered metal that was Obsidian. He didn’t look at the holographic images on the walls. New Iacon was burning.

And the door was still locked. The panel stared back at Blurr, mocking him for his attempts to save what was left of Starscream.

*You berthed a monster. You only have yourself to blame.*

*Love you.*

There wasn’t a single bit of charge left in the blaster. He’d wasted it all on making sure Obsidian was a bullet-riddled heap.

Blurr’s knees wobbled. He sank back down to the floor. His hands curled around Starscream, even as his vents wheezed and the overheating warnings started shrieking critical at him. Starscream’s field was nonexistent, the living thrum of his frame fading.

Blurr’s grip tightened. He bowed his helm. Not fast enough, he supposed. Not this time.

The panel beeped. His optics unshuttered with a snap. He looked up and found the panel flashing. It beeped again.

Friend? Foe?

There was a muffled *whump*, and then the door rattled open, only a crack. Hands curled around the frame, manually shoving it open, and there were Jazz and Wheeljack both, the latter bodily forcing the door into the nook. Jazz carried a gun better described as a cannon, his visor harsh and angry.

“Ya idiot!” he snarled.

Blurr rattled a laugh. “You’re late,” he said, dull more than anything. “Too late.” More warnings streaked across his HUD. His vision started to wobble, graying around the edges. He could hear his cooling fans roaring, but it wasn’t enough.

“It’s never that,” Wheeljack insisted as he dropped down in front of Blurr, one hand going to Starscream’s chestplate, the other producing some kind of scanner from subspace.

Blurr shook his helm. “I don’t think you have any miracles left, ‘Jack.”

Indicators flashed at him, as fierce as the growl in the engineer’s engine. “Watch me,” he said, and the scanner vanished. He scooped Starscream into his arms in a motion too quick for Blurr to track.

Or perhaps that’s because everything else seemed to be moving so slow. Even his own ventilations. Those warnings were louder, nauseating. Emergency stasis eminent, they told him. Over and over again.

“Wait,” Blurr said, or tried to say, but his vocalizer moved like it were filled with syrup. He lurched forward, and his lower half locked up on him.

He would have toppled onto his face if Jazz hadn’t caught him. If Jazz hadn’t helped haul him to his pedes, grunting as Blurr leaned heavily on his side. His legs unfurled slowly, with creaks and
hissing and grinding.

Oh. He was low on hydraulic fluid, too.

“Come on, boss. Let’s get ya out of here,” Jazz said, his arm looping around Blurr’s waist as he slung Blurr’s arm over his shoulders. He gripped Blurr’s wrist with his free hand and started to haul with more strength than Blurr would have expected of him.

Then again, he’d learned long ago not to underestimate Jazz.

“Obsidian’s dead,” Blurr said, dumbly.

“Yeah. I saw th’ mess,” Jazz replied, in a matter of fact tone.

Wheeljack was already gone. He’d taken Starscream with him. Blurr wanted to give chase, but his legs wobbled like a newspark’s. That hip ground and grated, spitting sparks with each lurching, forward step. The edges of his visual feed darkened further, creeping toward the center. There was static in his audials.

He sagged.

“Whoa! Come on, boss. I can’t carry ya by myself.”

His pedes didn’t want to lift. Something skreeled inside his frame. Jazz’s fingers pressed harder against his side, sinking into a seam, as though hoping pain would make him focus.

Blurr didn’t feel it. He registered a dull pressure, another warning flash that was nothing compared to the other noises.

He stumbled.

“Blurr!”

Jazz squeezed his wrist.

“Sorry,” he gasped out as warnings cascaded down his HUD along with a countdown. Stasis was imminent.

Blurr’s world flashed a rainbow of colors before it fizzled out to grey. He heard himself gasping for ventilations, felt the rattle in his fans, the searing heat that felt like boiling from the inside out.

He felt himself falling. Mercifully, he didn’t feel himself hit the ground.

~

Blurr onlined with a gasp, dragging near-frigid air into his vents. He was surrounded by darkness, broken only by pinpoints of crimson and orange light. He thrashed on a berth, only to find his wrists and ankles had been tied down.

What the frag?

He flopped back to the berth, spark pounding, his processor humming with a thousand and one images, streaming through his cortex faster than he could process them. His memory was fuzzy. He remembered fire and fury, the nauseating stench of burnt plasma cores and a paralyzing fear.

Everything felt slow, sluggish. His HUD reported stability, all systems functioning if not one-hundred percent, than at least serviceable. He wasn’t pretty, but he was alive.
Lights clicked on, so bright as to be blinding. Blurr hissed as he shuttered his optics, the sudden onslaught like a vibroknife to his aching processor.

“Turn it off!”

The lights dimmed. Blurr risked a peek, and found they’d dropped to half-power. He peered into the shadows as a pale frame came closer, biolights standing out in stark relief against the dim.

“Sorry,” said a familiar voice. “You’re not supposed to be online yet. How’d you burn through all those sedatives so fast?”

“Former Wrecker,” Blurr rasped, his vocalizer aching from his sudden shout. He squinted as the frame came closer – Wheeljack – his armor halfway between clean and grimy. “Starscream?”

Wheeljack reached for the strap on Blurr’s closest arm and undid them. “What kind of miracle-worker do ya think I am?” he said with a cheerful flash of his indicators. “He’s in a CR Chamber. He isn’t coming out anytime soon, but he’ll live.”

Blurr stared at him. “What?”

Wheeljack lifted a shoulder in a shrug and moved to Blurr’s nearest leg, disengaging that strap as well. “True, it was pretty close there for a minute. But your Seeker’s tough. He’s survived worse than Obsidian.” He moved around the other side of the berth and released the last two straps. “If it weren’t for the fact we’re short on chambers right now, I’d have you in one, too. Do you have any idea how many fuses you burned through? Your internals were melted slag!”

Blurr shook his helm as he sat up on the berth, aching from top to bottom. He felt as though he’d been stomped on by a Metrotitan, and then ground into the dirt for good measure. He looked down, and his frame was a mosaic of weld-lines, temp plating, and static mesh.

Oh, and his boosters were gone again.

“Never mind that you slagged up your boosters. I just rebuilt those!” Wheeljack said, throwing his hands into the air. “I don’t know which one of you’s worse, honestly. Always gotta try and do things for yourselves. Even when there are folks around who want to help. Che.” Wheeljack chuffed a vent.

“Sorry,” Blurr said.

A part of him still felt numb. Disconnected. He hoped it was just the sedatives. And the inevitable pain patches. Primus be damned, but he hated those things.

He looked around. Other than his berth, the small room was cluttered with unlabeled crates and boxes. The walls themselves were barely visible beneath pieces and parts hanging on them like macabre decorations.

“Where am I?”

“Storage room. Mine, I mean,” Wheeljack said and waved a hand of dismissal. “Medcenters were overwhelmed, even with the help Flatline had. And Jazz didn’t want to let Star or you out of sight. So you’re both here. In my lab, I mean.”

Like Starscream had hidden Wheeljack in his basement. How fitting.

Blurr swung his pedes over the side of the berth and eased down, while Wheeljack hovered
nearby like a nanny bot.

“Can I see him?”

“Sure. But he’s not conscious.”

“Doesn’t matter.” Blurr slid onto his pedes, and wobbled. Pain flashed up his hip and into his backstrut, before it vanished.

Ouch. At this rate, he’d probably have to do a full replacement. Refurbishing could only take him so far, especially if he got his boosters back.

“What happened?” Blurr asked as Wheeljack took him by the elbow, and Blurr was grateful. It helped keep him steady as much as it helped Wheeljack navigate him through the mess.

“We’re still sorting that out,” Wheeljack explained as he guided Blurr out of the storage room and into a narrow corridor. This, too, was dimly lit and oddly silent. “Obsidian’s dead and any of his goons that were in the compound. If he has any other supporters, they’re hiding, but Jazz doesn’t think they’ll cause trouble.”

Blurr sighed. “Probably not. If there’s one thing most of us are good at, it’s following others. Someone else’ll come along.”

“Sadly true.” Wheeljack hissed a vent as they approached a door. He tapped his code into the panel and the door whooshed open, revealing a large space that Blurr recognized as Wheeljack’s main lab. “The fires are out. The medcenter’s packed and overflowing. But mechs’re still getting energon and right now, everything is kinda quiet and calm.”

The calm after the storm, Blurr thought. The silence of a battlefield once retreat had been called, or victory declared. He wondered which of the two they should call Obsidian’s defeat.

“Who’s in charge?” Blurr asked.

“That’s where it gets interestin’.”

Blurr half-turned as Jazz slunk out of the shadows, like the spy he was. Yet, there was a grin on his face, and a bounce to his step.

“Star probably ain’t gonna like it, but it is what it is,” Jazz added with a wink of his visor. He offered an elbow to Blurr. “Want I should explain, boss? While I escort ya to yon healing Seeker, that is.”

“Flatline’s comming me for another box of fuel lines anyway,” Wheeljack said as he let go of Blurr’s arm, giving him a nudge in Jazz’s direction. “Keep an optic on both of them while I run out there?”

Jazz chuckled as he hooked his arm through Blurr’s. “Ain’t my first rodeo, Jackie.”

“Slipped free of you the first time, didn’t he?” Wheeljack retorted, but it was with a laugh. He waved at both of them before vanishing back through the door from which he and Blurr came.

“Mmm. Jack does have a point,” Jazz mused aloud before he patted Blurr’s arm and started pulling him toward the far side of the massive space. “Nice to see ya on yer pedes, boss. Thought you were gonna be down another few days.”

Blurr rubbed a hand down his face. His processor felt like it was spinning. “Wrecker protocols.
You know how it is.”

“That I do. Anyway, as I was sayin’, New Iacon’s pretty interesting right now. We got ourselves two leaders making sure everyone’s staying calm and quiet, yet no one’s fighting for power.”

Blurr tilted his helm. “What?”

Jazz shrugged, his shoulder tires bouncing and spinning. “Well, we’re short-handed. So I made a judgment call. Good news is, ain’t no one forced to live back in the Wastes.”

Blurr paused beside one of Wheeljack’s tables, stacked high with unknown equipment. “You let the Autobots and the Decepticons back?”

“More like told them, but yeah.” Jazz paused, too and looked up at him, helm tilted. “It was either that or watch this city tear itself apart again and I wasn’t gonna leave that mess for Star. I’ve put too much effort in.”

Blurr’s lips formed a thin line. His armor slicked down. Sometimes, he didn’t much like how close Jazz and Starscream were. Neither of them had offered an explanation as to why either, save reassurances that whatever it had been, it was over now.

It was proving less and less of a reassurance.

“Oh,” he said.

Jazz tilted his helm. “Ya know it ain’t like that, right?”

Blurr cycled a ventilation. “I just want to see Starscream,” he said on the end of a sigh, and rubbed his face again. “Please.”

“Sure thing, boss.” Jazz whipped right back into cheerful levity so fast it made Blurr’s processor ache. “Right this way.”

He let Jazz steer him around a shelving unit overflowing with who knew what kind of gadgets, toward a dim glow in the far corner of the room. It reminded Blurr all too much of finding Wheeljack in Starscream’s basement.

He could see a dark shape floating in a tall cylindrical container. It glowed energon blue at him, and as he got closer, the sounds of functional machinery greeted him.

Jazz let him go as soon as he was within touching distance, not that Blurr needed the support. He stumbled toward the regen tank.

“Starscream...” Blurr murmured. He pressed a hand to the thick glass as he looked up at his lover, floating peacefully in the energon and nutrient gel.

His wings were back where they belonged, albeit protoform bare in some places. His wounds were covered in gel-safe static mesh, and the worst of the injuries had been repaired. Like Blurr, he was a mosaic of weld-lines and temp plating.

But the machines hummed positively and beeped steadily and his spark output ready steady and strong. Stable. Healing.

Relief flooded throughout Blurr so quickly it left him weak. His knees wobbled. He slid down to the floor, resting his weight on his heelstruts, tilting forward to rest his forehelm against the glass. He ex-vented slowly as a tremble worked up his backstrut.
“He’s gonna be fine,” Jazz said, coming up to stand at Blurr’s left side. He had his arms folded under his bumper. “Well, as fine as Starscream ever is, anyway.”

Blurr dimmed his optics and listened to the fluid gurgle and the machines beep. “He took a bullet for me, Jazz.”

“Did he?”

Blurr worked his intake and onlined his optics. He looked up at Starscream. The screechy, manipulative, murderer who everyone knew was only ever in it for himself. Whose self-preservation instincts put everyone else’s to shame.

Love you.

Blurr forced himself back upright, though he staggered as his hip protested. He had to catch himself against the glass, which hummed beneath his palm.

“Yes. He did.” He cycled another ventilation, and looked over his shoulder. “Part of me’s afraid of what that means. The other part of me already knows.”

Jazz tilted his head, nothing in his expression. “Even I know it, Blurr.” He shrugged and lifted his gaze to Starscream. “Never thought I’d see the day it would happen though. Wasn’t sure it could.”

“People change,” Blurr said as he regained his balance and slid his hand free of the glass.

“Yeah. People do. But not Starscream.” Jazz audibly cycled a ventilation and turned firmly toward him. “Mebbe you’re the one that changed.”

Maybe.

How had he even gotten to this point?

Honestly. Blurr had no idea. It was addiction and compulsion and affection and like calling to like, he supposed. He looked at Starscream and his spark squeezed. It felt like a punch to the ventrum, a shock to the chassis, the road vanishing out from beneath him.

He couldn’t remember a time he’d felt so terrified.

No. He could. Down to the second where he’d seen Starscream strung up like a macabre wall decoration in Obsidian’s torture chamber.

Blurr chewed on the inside of his cheek. He bowed his helm.

“You love ‘im?”

Once upon a time, he would have had to think about it.

“Yeah,” he said. He looked at Jazz again. “Yeah, I think I do.”

Jazz’s lips curled in a half-grin. “Then I guess you’re no saner than the rest of us.” He clapped Blurr on the shoulder. “I’d say congratulations, but something tells me, the two of ya are goin’ to be pains in my aft from now until always.”

“You’re not jealous?”

“Pfft.” Blurr didn’t even know how Jazz could make that sound, honestly.
“I told you already, it ain’t like that.” Jazz patted Blurr on the shoulder again and then turned away. “Come on. Let’s get some fuel in ya, and I’ll tell ya what’s been happening in the past week.”

“Week?” Blurr’s engine revved. He’d lost a week?

Jazz chuckled. “Yep.” He moved back toward the center of Wheeljack’s lab, where the ring of tables were large shadows. “I’ll explain. Come on. Don’t worry. Star won’t even be out of sight.”

It was a small reassurance, but that Jazz offered it was a relief. Blurr pressed his hand to the glass for a final time, comforting himself with the steady hum, before he peeled his fingers away and followed Jazz.

Starscream was alive.

Starscream loved him.

And now, Blurr realized, he loved Starscream, too.
End of the Storm

Chapter Summary

Starscream wakes up and finds his entire world has changed, for better and for worse.

Starscream onlined with a gasp, coughing as his vents struggled to clear the nanite gel from his system. It tasted like medical grade energon, foul and unpleasant. He felt as though he were swimming through a rain-soaked atmosphere, even as his audials registered the sound of a regen tank draining.

Wait. He was alive?

It took too long for that realization to set in. For his systems to report green across the board, his short-term memory cache abruptly dumping into his active queue. Reminding him of Obsidian, of Blurr, of the blaster shot.

Of one last admission before the darkness claimed him.

Starscream’s vision blurred. It was bright. There were shapes in front of him. And noise. His wings flicked, one and then the other. Wings. He had his wings back. And pain. He wasn’t in any pain.

His fans whirred. He spat up another glob of nanite gel. He stumbled forward, one step, and then a second, only for the third to meet empty air. He flailed as he tumbled out of the tank and into someone’s arms.

“Whoa. It’s okay. I got you.”

He knew that voice. Starscream cycled his optics twice and looked up into blue ones, and a familiar face.

“Blurr?” he croaked.

“Yeah.” A smile, soft but genuine, not even a smirk. “It’s me. Welcome back to the land of the living.”

“I kind of feel dead,” Starscream rasped as his vocalizer struggled to engage. He tried to access his chronometer.

Wait.

Three weeks? No. That couldn’t be right.

“That’s because you’ve been in stasis for ages,” Blurr said with a chuckle. He had his arms around Starscream’s chassis, and now he struggled to get Starscream upright. “Can you stand?”

“Can try.” He got his pedes underneath him, but his knees wobbled. He slumped forward, braced against Blurr, and got his arms moving, too. Not that they went far.

They went precisely where he wanted them, which was to return Blurr’s embrace. Blurr was
warm, and alive, and smelled like fresh welds and engex and cleaning solution and spatters of the nanite gel. Starscream was probably sticky with it.

“Good enough, I suppose,” Blurr murmured, and one hand stroked down Starscream’s spinal strut, despite the goo still sticking to him. “You with us?”

“Us?”

Starscream reset all of his sensory input, the noise around him clarifying into something he could identify. The gurgle of the tank finishing its drain cycle. The hum of the machinery. The sound of Blurr’s systems. Other voices.

Starscream’s vision stopped wobbling. He peered over Blurr’s shoulder, catching one shape that slowly sharpened into Wheeljack. His indicators were slowly pulsing muted shades, his hands twisting together as though he were worried.

“I’m here,” Starscream said. His thoughts felt so muzzy. It was hard to focus, to concentrate. He pulled back, looked into Blurr’s face. “You’re here?”

Blurr’s forehelm pressed to his. “Where else would I be?” he asked with a little laugh. “You saved my life, Star.”

Starscream shivered, and it had nothing to do with the cold. He remembered then, with stark clarity, Blurr glaring up at Obsidian. Defying him and claiming Starscream in the process.

“I’m yours,” he said as his spark throbbed and longing spilled into his field.

“Damn right you are,” Blurr said, his arms tightened around Starscream. He brushed his nasal ridge over Starscream’s. “And for the record, the feeling’s mutual.”

Starscream made an incoherent noise. Heat flooded his faceplate. His thoughts were spinning. He wondered if he were alive after all. Surely this had to be a dream.

But then Blurr was kissing him, and Starscream’s dreams had never been this vivid and acute. Blurr’s mouth was warm, wet, his glossa firm and claiming. He tasted of mid-grade and iron shavings, and he didn’t seem to mind the nanite gel still coating Starscream’s mouth.

Starscream shivered, his talons sinking into Blurr’s seams as he held on. He moaned into the kiss, his glossa tangling with Blurr’s, and heat filling his frame, his fans whirring despite the gunk still clinging to them.

This was real. It wasn’t a dream.

Blurr ended the kiss, resting his forehelm against Starscream’s. “Not that I’m ungrateful,” he murmured. “But don’t you ever do that again.”

“No promises,” Starscream replied as Blurr’s ex-vents ghosted across his lips.

Behind Blurr, Wheeljack coughed a vent. His hydraulics hissed as he shifted his weight. “Uh, not that you two ain’t adorable and all, but I should probably scan Starscream and skedaddle before it gets any heavier than that.”

Starscream’s optics widened. His faceplate heated.

Blurr just chuckled and pulled back from Starscream. He looked over his shoulder at Wheeljack. “Is that jealousy I detect?”
“Not in the least,” Wheeljack said cheerfully, and his indicators flashed bright colors of joy. “I just didn’t come prepared for a free show, you know. Left all my recording equipment in the store room.”

Starscream coughed a vent. He disentangled himself from Blurr, though he noticed the Racer kept an arm around him. Whether because he couldn’t bear to let go or because Starscream genuinely needed the support, Starscream wasn’t sure. Either way, he appreciated it.

“No ‘facing vids,” Starscream said as the tingle of a scan washed over his frame. His plating felt overly sensitive to it.

“Pity.” Wheeljack chuckled as his scanner beeped and he peered at the results. “Well, you’re a pretty mess right now, but you’re good enough for light duty. Do you know what that means?”

Starscream looked down at himself, scowling at the sticky mess coating his frame. “I can visit the washracks?”

Wheeljack laughed. “That, but also, that means no flying, no transforming, no working more than half a shift, no heavy lifting.”


He remembered the feeds Obsidian showed him. He remembered his city up in flames, with rioters and looters in the streets. He remembered everything he built crashing around him.

“What’s even left?” he muttered.

“Funny you should ask that, cause there’s a whole lot that’s been waitin’ for ya to get out of that chamber.”

Starscream looked past Wheeljack to see Jazz strutting into view, his paint immaculate, his biolights bright, and a grin on his face.

“Boss, your interviewees are here, by the way,” Jazz said with a nod Blurr’s direction. “I can take Star from here if you want.”

Starscream tightened his grip on Blurr’s hand. He felt strangely reluctant to part from the Racer. Blurr looked at him with a soft smile.

“I’ll just be upstairs,” he said and tapped his audial with a free hand. “A comm call away if you need. Besides, Jazz has good news for you.”

“Well, good news is a matter of perspective,” Jazz said with a snort.

Hmm. That did not bode well.

“I’m sure I’ll be fine,” Starscream said with an uneasy smile. He forced himself to let go of Blurr, despite the shrieking in his spark. “If Jazz wanted to kill me, he’d have done so centuries ago.”

Blurr’s gaze flicked between them before he inclined his helm. “So I’ve heard.” He squeezed Starscream’s hand and leaned in for a quick kiss. “See you later.”

He released Starscream and stepped away, tapping Wheeljack on the shoulder. “Thanks again, Wheeljack.”

“None needed, but you’re still welcome.” Wheeljack winked and tucked away his scanner.
“Guess that’s my cue to scoot, too.” He tipped his helm toward the CR chamber. “I’ll come scrub that later.”

“Nah. I got lackeys for that. You just get some rest,” Jazz said. He had a smile on his face, but there was a firmness in his tone that brooked no argument.

Wheeljack’s salute was sloppy at best. “Sir, yes, sir,” he barked playfully and turned back toward Starscream. “Glad you’re back with us, Starscream.

“Thanks,” Starscream said, well aware that his vocals were more than a little faint.

He watched both Blurr and Wheeljack leave, until he was alone with Jazz, perhaps the only one who could possibly understand everything swirling within Starscream’s processor right now.

“Yeah, yer awake,” Jazz said as he strode closer to Starscream. “No, ya ain’t dreamin’. Yeah, Blurr loves ya. Yeah, Wheeljack considers ya a friend. And yeah, ya ain’t dead. That sum it up?”

Starscream shook his helm slowly. He scrubbed his palm over his face. “How do I know you’re not an apparition, too?”

Jazz chuckled and braced a hand on his hip, cocking it to the side. “Starbaby, do you honestly think even you could fantasize me up?”

“Now that I have Blurr? Not a chance,” Starscream replied, honestly without thinking. His optics widened as Jazz broke into a laugh.

“My point exactly,” Jazz said and poked him right in the cockpit. “You are a lucky, lucky Seeker.”

Starscream folded his arms over his chassis and took a step backward. “Well, you know how it is. You sell your spark to Unicron and he looks out for you.” He tilted his helm and arched his orbital ridge. “Interviewees? And where am I?”

“Your basement, now that it’s been cleaned up,” Jazz said with a dismissing wave of your hand. “We moved ya here after Wheeljack started getting popular. And as for interviewees, well, it’s been a busy three weeks.”

“So I’m gathering. I’m surprised there’s still a city left.”

“That’s where it gets interestin’,” Jazz tilted his helm toward where Blurr and Wheeljack had exited earlier. “Come on. Let’s have us a sit and talk.”

“With you, that never bodes well.” Starscream frowned, but he unfolded his arms and followed Jazz anyway.

Around a corner, one composed of neatly stacked crates and boxes, and Starscream found that his basement had indeed been cleaned out and organized. The haphazard piles had formed tidy stacks, and someone had set up a temporary living space. There was a berth, a table and chairs, a portable energon dispensary, and a portable computer console.

“Someone was always down here to keep on optic on ya. We still don’t know if we got all of Obsidian’s supporters,” Jazz said as he made a gesture to the living space at large. “Though now that I got the dream team, I’m pretty sure rootin’ out the rest is a done deal.”

“Dream team?”
Jazz chuckled. “Oh, that’s a surprise I’m savin’ for later.” He pulled out one of the chairs and dropped down into it, propping his pedes on the edge of the table. “Have a seat. Help yourself.” He waved to the tray in the middle.

Energon – medical grade judging by the color – and coolant were visible in two clear decanters. There was also a plate of goodies and some rust sticks.

“Who made goodies? And how?” Starscream demanded as he pulled out a stool and sat. He grabbed a goodie and gave it a sniff, his mouth filling with lubricant at the delicate aroma.

Primus, he couldn’t remember the last time he’d had something so divine.

“Mixmaster.”

Starscream jerked his gaze toward Jazz. His optics narrowed. “What’s a Decepticon doing making goodies?”

“See. That’s where it’s interestin’.” Jazz grinned like a cat that caught the metallocanary. “Sit right back and let me tell ya how I made sure ya still had a city to run when ya came back.”

Starscream had the feeling he wasn’t going to like this. He shoved the goodie into his mouth and gestured for Jazz to continue. He was exhausted and aching both. He wanted this over with, but most of all he wanted answers.

“Tell me,” Starscream said.

“My pleasure.” Jazz tilted his helm. “The Autobots and the Decepticons are both back in the city, led by Bumblebee and Soundwave respectively. It was kinda nice of them to show up when Obsidian was causin’ trouble and help bring order to chaos, though the proper way this time.”

Starscream had been right.

He didn’t like this one bit.

“Now before you go gettin’ all riled, they’ve both publicly declared their intent to work with the established rulership rather than fight to claim their own,” Jazz said as he held up a hand. “In other words, they’re supporting you.”

Starscream blinked. He straightened. “Beg pardon?” He thought he ought to reboot his audials. He couldn’t believe what he’d heard.

Jazz’s grin widened. He pulled a datapad out of subspace and placed it on the table. He gave it a shove with his fingertips, sliding it across the smooth surface.

“Here. Read this,” he said as he folded his hands over his belly, beneath his ventrum. He made himself comfortable in his chair. “It ain’t nitty-gritty. But it’s good enough.”

Starscream eyed him suspiciously. But Jazz was as impossible to read as ever. Better to just get his answers.

He grabbed the datapad, powered it on, and found it onlined to a single document. A rather long one, full of technical and political garble. Starscream skimmed the details, taking the larger points, but his optics found and located a single phrase that he returned to with a sharp ex-vent.

*Petition to Enact a Council of Joint Leadership.*
The datapad wobbled in his grip. Starscream swore that static fritzed across his visual feed. He rasped a ventilation.

“Is a council?” he demanded, and he felt himself approaching a shriek, that insensible noise which had never won him any arguments, where he felt helpless to a forthcoming defeat. “Are you fragging kidding me?”

He shot to his pedes, ignoring the slice of pain that stabbed through his frame, and slammed the datapad down so hard that the screen cracked.

“I’ve worked too hard to--”

Jazz’s calm voice sliced through his outrage as easily as a vibroblade through armor plating. “Starscream, sit down.”

He shook his helm, and found his fingers were trembling, too. “No, I can’t--”

“Sit. Down.” More firm, all command, more the threat Starscream had heard whispered than the sly, teasing mech who often wriggled his way into Starscream’s berth.

Starscream’s optics narrowed. He stared across the table at Jazz, a mech he had come to trust, for all that two mechs such as they could trust.

“This isn’t about you,” Jazz said, slowly, carefully. He didn’t demand Starscream sit down again, but every inch of him screamed tension, to his clamped plating to the firm set of his jaw. “This is bigger than you. Than me, Bee, and Soundwave. This is about Cybertron and if you care even an ounce about this planet, you’ll shut up and listen.”

Starscream dragged in a slow, heaving vent. He braced his palms on the table, though he didn’t lean forward. He didn’t need Jazz considering him a threat. His legs were too wobbly, his systems underpowered. He couldn’t take on a turbopuppy at this rate, much less a deadly assassin of Jazz’s caliber.

And he was still unarmed.

“I trusted you,” Starscream said, verbalizing what he’d already thought. “After everything I’ve done, we’ve done, that you would ruin me when I can’t defend myself...” His voice cracked, to his horror, and he forced his vocalizer into a reboot. He stared at Jazz as though he was a stranger and in this moment, he was. “I should’ve known better. You’re an Autobot after all.”

Jazz was unfazed. “So is Blurr.”

“No, he’s not!” Starscream snarled. His fist slammed into the table, making the datapad jump.

“And you’re not even listening you fragging, impatient jet,” Jazz growled, his visor flashing warningly. “Ya haven’t even read the damn terms and conditions!”

Terms?

Starscream pressed his lips into a thin line. He looked down at the datapad, the document still visible through the cracked screen. He picked it up reluctantly.

“Read it again.”

Loath to actually obey, Starscream’s curiosity won out. He initiated a systems check, trying to calm the angered roar of his vents, and skimmed the rest of the datapad.
It did indeed call for the institution of a council, but one lead by a Speaker, a primary leader who took the advice and actions of the council and shaped it into law.

Starscream was to be that Speaker.

His council so far was comprised of Bumblebee, with Prowl as his second, and Soundwave, who hadn’t nominated a second as of yet. There were nominations pending for two more members, of whom Starscream assumed would be chosen from the badgeless many still living within New Iacon.

“Everyone gets a voice,” Jazz said, his tone calmer now. “Everyone can be heard. It’s not perfect, but right now, it’s the only way we’re all gonna work together. Do you understand now?”

No one mech had all the power. Even Starscream would be restrained by a majority vote of the council if they chose to act against him. He could, however, veto and call for a second vote, or put it to a public vote if he felt the council was acting against the interest of the public.

It… was the best solution for Cybertron in general. Logically, Starscream knew this.

He still hated it. He hated that he’d had to concede to both the Autobots and the Decepticons. He hated he needed their help to protect his city, that once again, the power he’d scraped and fought to acquire was taken from him.

Starscream sighed as he finished the summary and set the datapad down. He pinched his nasal ridge, hiding his face behind his palm.

“You are the worst,” he said.

Times like these, he wondered if all those centuries ago, he should have just shot Jazz in the spark chamber when he had the chance.

“I am what I am,” Jazz replied, his tone lacking anything resembling apology. “I ain’t here to make sure ya keep yer power, Starbaby. All I want is a home again.”

Starscream lowered himself back to the chair. His vents had started to rattle, and right now, he didn’t know if it was anger or true exhaustion. He’d only been out of the regen tank for less than an hour after all.

“Besides, it ain’t all bad, is it? Yer still in charge, ya got yer penthouse, and ya even got a pretty trophy to call yer own.” Jazz leaned forward, dropping his pedes to the floor and bracing his elbows on the edge of the table. “No one’s beatin’ ya. There are people in this city who actually like ya. If ya ask me, yer doin’ pretty damn good.”

Starscream rubbed at his forehelm and sighed. “I would have preferred to keep things on my own terms.” He lowered his hand and glared at Jazz. “Blurr is not a trophy.”

Jazz shrugged. “We can’t always get what we want.” He tilted his helm, lips curling in a sly grin. “Ya tryin’ to tell me ya got real feelings for my boss? Because I’m pretty sure you were the one who told me yer spark wasn’t built for it.”

It was Starscream’s turn to shrug. He made a vague gesture. “I am what I am.” Like the Pit he was going to admit the truth now.

The sting of betrayal sliced too deep. Jazz didn’t deserve that truth. Besides, if Jazz couldn’t see it already, he didn’t deserve to know.
“So you say.” Jazz’s grin never faded.

He rose to his pedes, stretching his arms over his helm. “Come on then, let’s go see how your city is doing. Bring the treats. You’ll need them.”

“I’m fairly certain trotting all over New Iacon does not count as light duty,” Starscream said, but that didn’t stop him from standing.

If Jazz was going to hand his city over to whomever he pleased, like the Pit Starscream was going to find himself aberth. He wouldn’t let New Iacon go without a fight.

He grabbed the goodies.

“It’s just a little walking, Starbaby.” Jazz winked.

He gave Jazz a withering look. “Don’t call me that.”

“Aw, you don’t love me anymore.” Jazz’s lower lip popped out in a fake pout. He sidled up to Starscream’s side, lightly tapping him with an elbow. “I can’t even make it up to you the old-fashioned way anymore.”

Starscream eased away from Jazz. “No, you can’t,” he said frostily. “And you never answered me about interviewees either.”

Jazz held up his hands and backed away, though he never lost that grin. “You were out for three weeks, Blurr’s been busy. Finding a new place for his bar. Rebuilding. And now, hiring.”

Jazz spun on a heelstrut and headed for the lift, forcing Starscream to follow, albeit at a slower pace. He felt as though he moved like an old, rusting mech. New components grated against old ones, and weakness invaded his limbs.

Like the Pit he’d ask to rest, though.

“Are you not coming back to work for him?” Starscream asked.

“He needs more’n me for this new place,” Jazz replied with a laugh as he poked the call button for the lift. The doors opened immediately and Jazz moved inside. “Especially now that there are a lot more mechs livin’ in the city. Oilers burned down, ya know.”

Starscream followed Jazz into the lift. “No, I didn’t,” he said dryly. “And I suspect there are many things I missed in the past couple weeks.”

“Don’t worry.” Jazz winked his visor again. “I’ll fill you in.”

The lift beeped as it deposited them on the ground floor. The door opened, and Jazz gestured for Starscream to precede him. Though wary, Starscream obeyed, only to come to a startled stop.

Gone were the dim shadows, piles of clutter, cloth draped stacks of random things, and dust-covered windows. The entire ground floor had been cleared out and cleaned up, painted and redecorated, and furnished.

“It’s not much yet,” Jazz said as he sidled out of the elevator, looking far too smug. “But it’s getting there. Two floors worth of entertainment. A bar on each level with a spiraling ramp connecting them, and balcony access on the second floor.”

Starscream’s spark throbbed. “This is where he’s building his new bar?” On the lowest levels of
Starscream’s apartment tower?

“Well, he didn’t want to be far from home, and figured this was convenient.” Jazz shrugged, but it was far from dismissive. “Lots of storage space. A stable building that was easy to renovate. A location everyone could recognize.”

Starscream’s mouth shaped the word but he didn’t dare repeat it aloud. ‘Home’.

“He even has an office now,” Jazz said and tilted his helm to the side. “Come on. There’s a lot more to see. I’ll make sure the boss gives you a tour later.”

“I can ask him myself,” Starscream muttered, for once not caring how petulant he sounded.

This was not what he expected to wake and find. Then again, he hadn’t expected to wake at all. He’d thought himself dead.

Jazz laughed. “Now that’s the Starscream I remember.”

Starscream fought off a sigh and followed Jazz. He dug in this subspace for another handful of the goodies, popping one into his mouth.

It was delicious. And impossible without having allowed Mixmaster back into the city. He supposed it wasn’t an entirely awful decision.

He simply loathed that it had been made when he was incapable of voicing an opinion about it. But he supposed he could wait until he’d seen what had become of his city before making a final judgment.

At least he still had a city to lead.

~

It was late by the time Starscream dragged his exhausted, aching frame back to his apartment. He’d opted to use the balcony entrance, rather than wade through the flurry of activity still taking place on the bottom floors.

Surely a few seconds of flight to get to his apartment wasn’t too bad for his healing frame?

Obviously not, as Starscream landed with a wobble and stumbled forward, gasping for ventilation. His legs trembled beneath him; his fingers doing the same. Clearly, Wheeljack had not been exaggerating.

Inside, his apartment was dim and quiet. Starscream’s spark ached at the sight of it. The last time he’d been here, it was to the startled fear that Obsidian might go after Megatron. He’d left in a hurry, with a truncated note for Blurr.

That note was gone now. Clearly, Blurr had been busy. He kept a clean home, Blurr did. The apartment even smelled freshly cleaned.

Starscream’s spark twinged.

There was a cube of energon on the counter, still sealed. It was medical grade, but had two packets of sweetener next to it.

Starscream smiled. He was full, thanks to the sweets Jazz kept shoving at him, so he tucked the cube back into storage and the sweeteners as well. See? He could tidy as well.
He flicked off the last of the lights until only the emergency runners broke the dark, and made his way to the berthroom. Blue biolights glowed faintly on the berth, Blurr’s frame visible in the soft light of the lit lamp.

His optics onlined as Starscream moved past the doorframe into the room. “Star?” Blurr blinked and sat up, squinting at him. “What time is it?”

“Late.” Starscream clicked the lamp off and stumbled to the berth. All he wanted to do was recharge. He couldn’t fathom anything else. “Jazz had much to show me.”

“Of course he did.” Blurr sighed audibly as he reached for Starscream, tugging him into Blurr’s embrace until he blanketed the Racer’s frame with his own.

“I am, after all, the leader of this city,” Starscream said, his voice muffled against Blurr’s chestplate. “Despite what machinations Jazz orchestrated behind my back.” He would be bitter about that for quite some time.

“I’m gonna kill him,” Blurr grumbled as his hands swept over Starscream’s frame. “You’re supposed to be on light duty, not dragged all around Cybertron.”

Starscream chuckled and nosed his way into Blurr’s intake. “That is light duty, sweetspark. And I appreciate the sentiment, but Jazz would have you buried in a trash-heap before you knew what hit you.”

“The worst part is that I can’t argue otherwise.” There was a pout in Blurr’s voice and Starscream laughed again.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself.” Starscream rested his helm on Blurr’s chestplate, listening to the Racer’s spark pulse steadily. “There aren’t many who can take him down.”

“Could you?”

“No comment.”

Blurr’s hand stroked up his spinal strut. “I don’t get you two.”

“There’s nothing to get.” Fatigue tugged at Starscream, but not so much that he missed the odd note in Blurr’s voice. “Especially not now.” The last emerged on a growl, but it lacked heat. He was simply too tired to work up the proper outrage.

“Yeah.” Blurr’s engine purred, vibrating both of their frames. “He can be a real aft sometimes.”

Starscream chuckled softly. He shuttered his optics, focusing instead of the feeling of Blurr beneath him, warm and alive. Blurr’s field wrapped around him as strongly as his arms did.

“Star?”

“Hm.”

“Thank you for saving my life.”

He tightened his grip around Blurr, claws firmly hooked on seams, keeping Blurr right where he wanted him.

Blurr’s fingers gently tracked down his spinal strut. The steady motion was soothing, lulling Starscream right into recharge. Safe and warm and content.

Home.
Toward the Sun

Chapter Summary

Moving forward after Obsidian's attack, Blurr and Starscream get cuddly until Blurr has to leave to interview new bartenders.

Blurr woke alone, which was surprising in itself. He expected Starscream to still be thoroughly entangled with him, as exhausted as the Seeker’s field had been last night. But then, they hadn’t really discussed their schedules either.

Perhaps Starscream had a lot of work to catch up on. He had been in that regen tank for three weeks after all.

Blurr heaved himself out of the berth, rubbing a hand across the back of his neck. It was early yet, earlier than he was used to, but as of late, early was the way to go. Between construction and interviews, Blurr’s days were full. Though it helped that he didn’t divide his time also watching over Starscream.

He headed out of the berthroom and straight to the storage room, his tank gurgling with hunger. That was where he found Starscream, sipping on the energon Blurr had left for him the night before, one hip cocked against the counter. He was staring out the small, narrow window, but his wings twitched and he turned as Blurr came inside.

“Morning,” he said. His lips curved in a soft smile, but there was something in his optics that did not suggest it was a good one.

“Recharge okay?” Blurr asked.

“As well as can be expected,” Starscream said with a one-shoulder lift. He half-swiveled, grabbing a cube from behind him. “This is for you.”

“Thanks.” Blurr took it with one hand and leaned in for a kiss with the other, relieved when Starscream’s lips met his in welcome. He nuzzled their nasal ridges. “Nightmares?”

Starscream made a non-committal noise. He hooked his free arm around Blurr’s waist and pulled him in closer, pressing their forehelms together. “Busy day?”

“Don’t we both?” Blurr chuckled and kissed Starscream again. Honestly, he couldn’t get enough, even if Starscream’s lips carried the faint aftertaste of medical grade.

All the sweetener in the universe couldn’t make that glop more palatable.

Blurr returned the embrace, flattening his palm against Starscream’s backstrut. It was kind of nice to start the morning like this: soft and quiet and contemplative, sharing energon as if they were just two mechs with a normal, domestic life.

“What’s on your agenda?” Blurr asked as he forced himself to put in enough distance so he could drink his energon.
Starscream sipped at his nearly-finished cube. “Meetings. Especially with my new council.” He made a displeased face, his field shivering with disapproval. “You?”

“More interviews. I’ve got enough entertainment, but I’m still struggling to find bartenders I think I can trust,” Blurr replied. He downed half his cube in one go. “Especially since Swindle keeps sending me mechs I’m pretty sure are his spies.”

Starscream’s engine growled. “Swindle,” he repeated, and his lips curved downward. “I do not like that mech.”

“Join the club.” Blurr finished off the rest of his cube and set the empty container on the counter, freeing up his other hand so that he could wrap both arms around Starscream.

He didn’t know why, but he couldn’t get enough of holding Starscream right now. Of touching him, kissing him, feeling his warmth. Like an addiction that sought to be satisfied, or an obsession, only Blurr didn’t know which was worse.

“You’re very cuddly this morning,” Starscream observed. He finished off his own cube and set it down behind him. Both arms draped over Blurr’s shoulders, his fingers toying with Blurr’s booster connectors. “That’s not a complaint by the way.”

Blurr cycled a ventilation. He nosed into Starscream’s intake. “I watched Wheeljack carry you away when I thought you were dead, and then I watched you float in that regeneration tank for two weeks. Sorry if I just want to remind myself you’re alive.”

He sounded angry. He hadn’t meant to. But he also hadn’t expected the truth to emerge so readily. Wanting and needing someone was a weakness. And here he was laying it out for Starscream.

“Well, maybe I want that reassurance, too,” Starscream said. He tugged Blurr closer, their chestplates coming into contact before his mouth slanted over Blurr’s, warm and coaxing.

Blurr hummed into the kiss, his lips moving against Starscream’s, savoring and memorizing. His optics shuddered as he gave himself to the kiss, soaking in the feel of Starscream in his arms, mouth against his, and now glossa too, wet and warm and still tasting faintly of medical grade.

Starscream’s engine purred. His frame undulated against Blurr’s, plating heating. The kiss turned deeper, more urgent, as Starscream’s fingers pressed into Blurr’s seams and teased the cables beneath.

Blurr groaned, breaking off the kiss to nibble into Starscream’s intake. “I’m pretty sure Wheeljack said no interfacing.”

Starscream chuckled and Blurr felt the vibrations against his lips. “I’m not asking you to take me hard and fast against this countertop,” he said, only to pause as his engine growled and his field pulsed desire. “But there’s an idea...”

“No.” Blurr pressed a kiss to the hollow of Starscream’s intake and dragged his mouth back up. “Too risky.”

Starscream purred. “As much as I adore how much of a nanny-bot you’ve turned into, I think I can judge for myself what I’m capable of.” He shifted his weight and curled a leg around one of Blurr’s, his calf armor rubbing the back of Blurr’s knee. “But if it makes you more comfortable, we can always move this to a berth.” His hips rolled, rubbing against Blurr’s.

He had to fight back a groan. Starscream’s field was warm and sticky, thick with need and desire.
He smelled delicious, like he’d gone through the washracks as soon as he’d onlined, and while Blurr hated missing out on the opportunity to help Star wash, he loved a freshly scrubbed Starscream. All smooth, shiny plating and irresistible to touch.

Blurr hummed and dragged his mouth back to Starscream’s. He kissed the Seeker, his glossa plunging into Starscream’s mouth as he pressed Starscream back, pinning him against the counter.

Starscream rolled up against him, slow and languid, their armor sliding together in a wonderful susurrus of sound. His field throbbed against Blurr’s, thick with affection and desire, as much an embrace as his arms. Starscream’s fingers toyed with Blurr’s booster mounts, making little bursts of charge dance up his spinal strut.

Blurr purred into the kiss, nipping at Starscream’s lips before diving in with glossa once again. His fingers tracked up toward the base of Starscream’s wings, tweaking the hinges, as arousal stirred a path within him.

Perhaps taking Starscream against this counter wasn’t the best of ideas, but Primus he wanted to do so.

The front door chimed. Blurr groaned and rested his forehelm on Starscream’s shoulder. “And that would be Jazz with my list of new interviewees.”

Starscream’s field shimmered with amusement. “Doesn’t he know it’s too early for you to be functioning?”

“I think he had the thought of waking me up,” Blurr muttered and lifted his helm. “Though it’s probably a good thing. I still don’t think taking you hard and fast against this counter is a good idea.”

Starscream shivered, his wings fluttering. “Making bad decisions is the epitome of my existence though,” he said.

Blurr chuckled and grazed his lips over Starscream’s. “Am I one of those bad decisions?”

“I ask myself that everyday,” Starscream said dryly. He licked Blurr’s lips playfully as the front door buzzed again. “If you don’t answer it, he’ll just hack it.”

Blurr hummed a laugh. “Not anymore. I may have borrowed a little something from Ravage.”

Starscream’s optics widened. “You devious Racer, you.” He brushed his nasal ridge over Blurr’s. “No more unexpected visits from Jazz?” He arched an orbital ridge.

“Or Rattrap,” Blurr said smugly. He’d paid an arm, a leg, and a booster for it, and he now owed Ravage – and Soundwave by proxy – a favor. But it was worth it.

They needed some privacy, damn it.

“Primus, I love you,” Starscream said and sealed his mouth over Blurr’s, making a little needy noise in his intake as he tightened his embrace.

Blurr moaned into the kiss, leaning hard on Starscream again. The arousal throbbing in his lines didn’t want to ease. He rolled his hips, grinding hard against Starscream, wanting so badly to be within Starscream.

Three weeks!
The door buzzed again, and this time, didn’t let up. It was as though Jazz leaned on the call button, because of course he did. Any second now, and he’d start simultaneously pinging Blurr’s comm.

Blurr reluctantly broke off the kiss. “I’m going to kill him,” he muttered as he reluctantly peeled himself away from Starscream.

His Seeker laughed. “Didn’t we just have this discussion last night?”

“Maybe I mean it this time,” Blurr retorted.

“Mmm. Well, I’m in no condition to take another bullet, so maybe save the attempted maiming for a day when I can help.” Starscream followed him out of energon storage and into the main room. “Maybe between the two of us we can put a dent in him.”

Sad, but true.

Blurr slammed his palm on the door access just as Jazz started to ping his comm. Mercifully, both irritating noises ceased as the door slid open, and Jazz danced inside with a big grin on his face, and no clue that they’d been contemplating his demise.

“Good morning,” he said brightly. “Glad to see you’re up, boss. Ready to get back to work? I have a whole new list for you.” His gaze slid to Starscream and that grin only widened, to something sly and needling. “Starbaby, you’re looking lovely today!”

Starscream folded his arms over his cockpit. “I thought I told you to stop calling me that.”

“I didn’t think ya meant it.” Jazz winked.

Blurr ground his denta. “Don’t we have work to do?”

“That we do.” Jazz spun on a heelstrut back toward the doorway. “I’ll wait by the lift so you can say a proper goodbye.”

Blurr waited until Jazz walked out the door before he loosed the vent he’d been holding. He liked Jazz. Honestly, he did. But he couldn’t stand how close Jazz and Starscream were. He hated that there was a whole history there he didn’t know about.

And Jazz could be downright insufferable sometimes.

Starscream rolled his optics. “Maybe I’ll kill him first,” he grumbled. His wings flicked, first one and then the other, clear signs of agitation.

“We still need him,” Blurr said with a sigh. He went to Starscream, pulling him in for a kiss. “I have a full day, and I’m sure you do, too. Meet me back here later? I’ll give you a tour and then we can share evening energon.”

Starscream nodded. “If the council meeting runs late, I’ll comm you.”

“A real comm and not a message left on a datapad?” Blurr asked with a raised orbital ridge.

“Yes. A real comm.” Starscream’s lips curved, though the smile cracked around the edges. “I won’t be doing that again.”

“Good.” Blurr kissed him again, savoring it, and fighting down the arousal still simmering in his lines. Primus but he’d rather stay here in the berth with Starscream all day then be out there
Starscream ended the kiss by brushing his lips over Blurr’s. “Now you better leave before he starts harassing us again.”

Blurr huffed a laugh. But damn if Starscream wasn’t right. So he pulled himself away from his partner, and backed toward the door.

“See you later.”

“It’s a date.”

Warm, fuzzy feelings bubbled in Blurr’s spark as the door to their suite closed behind him, locking with a tri-tone chime. Jazz waited for him at the elevator, tapping a pede impatiently.

Blurr had kept the security to their suite alone, and allowed both Rattrap and Jazz access to the lift itself. Bar patrons, however, would be denied as to prevent any unwanted visitors. Wheeljack had access as well.

“Had to get in one last snuggle?” Jazz asked.

“You know how it is,” Blurr said as he joined Jazz in the lift and leaned against the side. “Given your past with him.”

The door slid shut. Jazz leaned against the side opposite of Blurr, his helm tilted. “Yer not gonna let that go, are ya?”

“Maybe I don’t like mysteries.”

“Or mebbe yer just jealous.” Jazz’s smile started to grate on Blurr’s patience. “Ya ain’t got nothin’ to worry about. It wasn’t like that.”

“Yeah, I keep hearing that, but the air sizzles between you two,” Blurr pointed out. His insides jittered with concern. He knew he couldn’t compete with Jazz. He didn’t even want to try.

Jazz folded his arm under his bumper. “Mm, well, like does call to like, ‘nd all. But like I said, it ain’t like that. Me and Star, we don’t get on that way. He’s fun to play with, but not the kind I keep.”

Keep. Blurr repeated the term, but only to himself. Anger crept in, on Starscream’s behalf.

“For the record, you’d have been lucky if he let you have him,” Blurr bit out, his field flashing with irritation.

Jazz’s orbital ridges crawled upward. “Is that so? Well, which one is it, boss. Are ya mad I didn’t wanna keep him? Or mad cause I’m still makin’ a play?”

The lift beeped as it stopped on the ground floor, the door sliding open to allow them to exit. Blurr chewed on Jazz’s question as he stepped off, well aware that his behavior was contradictory, but how else could he react? Both Starscream and Jazz played mysterious when it came to their past, and they had an easy camaraderie that Blurr envied.

The first floor of his bar was awash with activity. Mechs he’d hired to help with the renovation scurried around, attending to their tasks. Soon, he’d be near enough for the final touches: decorating, stocking, and training.
Blurr made a beeline for the primary bar in the center. It formed a circle and his intention was to have two main bartenders, each in charge of a half-circle. One side of the bar had a stage for live performances. The other side was meant for a DJ. The upstairs lounge was for patrons looking for a quieter, more intimate experience.

It was the bar he’d always dreamed of having. A part of him still struggled to believe it was becoming reality.

“You’re first interview is already here, by the way,” Jazz said, cutting into the tense silence between them. “One of the construction mechs let me know.”

“Who is it?”

“Autobot. Name of Bluestreak. He’s a good egg.”

Egg? No, never mind. Sometimes, Jazz was obtuse on purpose. He delighted in confusing otherwise. It was all mental games.

Blurr slid behind the bar, with Jazz beside him, and passed through the swinging door into the narrow hallway. A mech stood beside his door, peering intently at a datapad clutched in his hands. He was grey and red and had a chevron like most mechs from Praxus. He wasn’t at all familiar to Blurr, but he did bear an Autobot badge.

“Bluestreak, I presume?” Blurr said as he edged past the mech and keyed his code into the access panel. “Come on in. Sorry I’m late.”

“It’s okay. I’m actually early.” Bluestreak grinned at him, his datapad vanishing into subspace. “I figured that the first impression is the most important part, right? I mean, that’s what my caretakers always said.”

Blurr chuckled. “That is generally the better idea, yes. Go ahead and have a seat. You know my bar manager, right?” He slid behind his desk, dropping down into his very comfortable, very nice chair.

Jazz had followed them in, but he kept looking at Bluestreak like he’d never seen the Autobot before. There was a strange expression on his face, one Blurr couldn’t identify.

“I do. Hi, Jazz!” Bluestreak said brightly, his optics lighting up. “Good to see you again.”

Jazz paused and tilted his helm. “Yeah, uh, good to see ya, too, Bluestreak.” He coughed a vent. “Did you re-frame?”

Bluestreak looked over both of his shoulders. “Oh, my sensory panels. Yeah. I did. Figured it was time for a change.” He shrugged and sat down in the seat Blurr offered him. “Wanted to be different. Look different. That kind of thing.”

“Oh. Well, it’s good. I mean, it’s a good look for ya.” Jazz coughed again, and of all things, his visor flashed. “Good luck with your interview.”

“Thanks!”

Jazz tipped his helm toward Blurr and then he vanished. Like into the shadows and everything, so quickly Blurr was half-wondering if he’d been there at all.

That was… well, that was odd.
“He’s so nice,” Bluestreak said in a thoughtful tone. “Almost hard to believe he’s the scourge of the Decepticons, but that’s how it is, I guess. Everybody’s got two sides to ‘em. But you’d know that, wouldn’t you, sir?”

Blurr blinked. “You don’t have to call me ‘sir’,” he said, and shifted his weight. “And what do you mean?”

“You’re dating Starscream, aren’t you?” Bluestreak asked, all big blue optics and complete innocence in his expression. “He’s more than what people think of him, right? I mean, he can’t just be mean and vindictive and a traitor. That’s just the surface. What he shows people.” His lips curled in a soft smile. “Jazz is like that, too, I’ll bet.”

Blurr tilted his helm. “Except Jazz is charming on the surface.”

“Makes you wonder what he’s like underneath, doesn’t it?”

Well, that was surprisingly insightful for someone who had first appeared to be all naivety and sunshine. Blurr cycled his optics again.

“Oh, I’m sorry, that was off-topic,” Bluestreak said, and ducked his head as if abashed. He even rubbed the back of his neck, his shoulder armor twitching as though he missed the weight of his sensory panels. “What did you want to ask me?”

Honestly, that right there? Was really all Blurr needed to know. If Bluestreak could look beyond the layers of Starscream, could imagine there were more to Jazz, then he was perfect for the job, no matter what else his experience.

Blurr coughed a ventilation and leaned forward. He tapped his fingers across the datapad. “Nothing. That’s all I needed. You’re hired.”

Bluestreak’s optics rounded even further. He leaned forward, a big smile on his lips. “Really? I’m hired? But--”

“You’ll learn,” Blurr said, and found himself smiling, too. “Mixing engex can be taught. It’s just formulas and a pretty smile, and you’ve got the last one down.”

Bluestreak’s cheeks pinked, but he nodded. “I’ll study hard, I promise. And thank you! Wow, I can’t believe it. I kind of figured this was a lost cause, you know. I’m not really good at anything but killing people and I’m pretty sure you don’t have any use for that, and I don’t have any other experience.”

Killing people…?

Oh, right. Bluestreak was a sniper.

Blurr chose to ignore that little aside in the middle of the stream of babble. At least Bluestreak would be able to charm the patrons. Customers liked a bartender who would chat with them. And with Bluestreak’s obvious empathy, he’d be a good listener, too.

“The war’s over,” Blurr said. “And we’re all struggling to figure out what that means for us. If working in my bar is what you want to try, then I’m happy to hire you.”

Bluestreak wriggled in his chair, his field bursting with an infectious glee. “Thank you so much, sir! I mean, um, Blurr. Thank you, Blurr.” He paused and looked crestfallen a bit. “But does that mean I have to get rid of this?” He pointed to the Autobot badge on his chassis.
Blurr shook his helm. “No. You can keep it, just be aware that Maccadam’s will serve all factions regardless and some may not like the idea of taking engex from an Autobot. If that happens, just call for someone else. Or me. Preferably me.”

“Okay.” The tension eased out of Bluestreak. “It’s not that I’m against Decepticons or Neutrals or neither, I just, you know. It’s still kind of a part of me. I’d feel weird without it. The Autobots’re the only family I have left.”

That Blurr could understand.

He nodded. “When can you start?”

“Whenever you need me!” Bluestreak beamed again.

Primus, he was adorable. How did a sweet mech like this survive the war? How did he become a sniper? It was so hard to connect the two.

“Tomorrow too soon?” Blurr asked as he made several notations on his datapad, adding Bluestreak to the schedule and moving a few things around to accommodate training him first.

Granted New Maccadam’s was a couple weeks away from opening, but still, it never hurt to have all his bases covered. He was up to his crest in debt right now, even with the creds they’d ‘acquired’ in Obsidian’s base. He needed the grand opening to go as smooth as transsteel.

“I’ll be here.” Bluestreak’s shoulder armor wriggled again. He lurched out of his chair, leaning across the table, his hand thrust toward Blurr. “Thank you so much. You have no idea how much this means to me.”

Actually, Blurr was starting to buy a clue.

He shook Bluestreak’s hand. “You’re very welcome. See you in the morning.”

“Yes, sir! I mean, Blurr.” Bluestreak beamed and then spun on a heelstrut, all but bouncing out of Blurr’s office. He seemed to leave bursts of sunshine and rainbow in his wake, taking the heavy weight of dread out of Blurr’s office.

Weird.

Blurr shook his helm, keyed Bluestreak into the schedule, and pinged Jazz. He had two more interviews for the day before he could call it quits, pay one last visit to the construction overseer, and then meet with Starscream for the promised tour. He had a dinner date he didn’t want to miss.

“You rang?” Jazz’s helm popped into view, disembodied as the rest of his frame wasn’t visible.

Blurr arched an orbital ridge. “What are you doing? Get in here.”

Jazz straightened and eased inside as though in the middle of a minefield. “Just making sure ya weren’t otherwise occupied.”

Blurr squinted at him. “And why would I be? I’m interviewing people to work in my bar, not for a new berthmate.”

“Right. Of course.” Jazz bounced on his heelstruts. “Guess I should send the next one in then? We’re still out of luck?”

“Yes, send the next one in. I still have one open position.”
“Gotcha.” Jazz spun around only to pause. He looked over his shoulder. “Wait. One?”

“I hired Bluestreak.” Why was Jazz acting so weird? Blurr peered at him again. “Is that a problem?”

“No, of course not.” Jazz chuckled and of all things, it sounded nervous. Jazz did not do nervous. “I’ll just grab the next one. Back soon!”

And then Jazz was gone, leaving Blurr to stare after him in confusion. He frowned, optics narrowing, fingers rapping on the desktop. He doubted asking Jazz would get him anywhere. But maybe Starscream would have some insight.

He’d have to ask later.

First up, he had this interviewee. He had work to do. Then he could meet up with his partner.

He had a date he didn’t want to miss.
Man in the Mirror

Chapter Summary

Starscream visits his new office, has a talk with Rattrap, and attends a meeting with his new council.

Starscream tingled long after Blurr left. He thought unkind words in Jazz’s direction, muttering subvocally.

He had a whole list of things to do today. Was it so wrong to want to take some time to enjoy his lover before he had to dive into the fray?

Especially since the main event was spending too much time in Bumblebee and Soundwave’s company. While he would grudgingly concede that forming the council was a much-needed and good idea, Starscream still hated it. He couldn’t help it. He hated sharing power, especially power he’d struggled to acquire.

Blech.

Starscream loitered around the apartment for a few minutes more, getting twitchier and twitchier, until he decided he could put it off no longer. He wanted to check on his new office, hopefully in better shape than his last one, and make sure that Jazz hadn’t left any surprises behind, such as the surveillance type.

He couldn’t trust Jazz. Not anymore. He should have known better from the start.

He took the balcony exit, Wheeljack’s warning still echoing in his processor, but surely he’d rested enough overnight that a short flight would do him little harm. He didn’t even transform, though flying in root-mode was far slower.

By the time he arrived at the balcony entrance to his new office, Starscream had to concede that Wheeljack was right. His vents heaved, condensation slicked his armor, and he felt dizzy. He staggered to the door, let the field reader scan him, and stumbled into his office, feeling weak and out of sorts.

Clearly, he was far from recovered. But at least he had an office.

As Starscream’s vents heaved, he sent the command to online the lights, setting them to half-power. It smelled fresh in here, like cleanser and paint and recent welds. His computer console was powered down, a ready light blinking steadily in the corner.

Starscream staggered to his desk and pulled out his backless chair, sinking into it with an ex-vent of relief. Jazz, or perhaps Blurr, had thought of everything. His hands trembled as he rested them on the desktop, his vision a touch wobbly.

He would be walking to the council meeting, he supposed. He thanked Primus that no one was here to see his weakness.

“It’s about time you escaped that pod. And yet, it’s been a day and I ain’t heard a word one from
Starscream froze. He straightened, sending the command for full-power to the lights. They illuminated the room, washing out all the shadows, revealing Rattrap leaning against the wall near the door. Starscream hadn’t even seen the glow of his biolights, or the gleam of his optics, either pair. Neither had he smelled one whiff of Rattrap’s presence.

He pretended he wasn’t startled, burying his shock in a distracted search of his desk. If they’d duplicated his previous office, then he should have some rations stashed around here somewhere. Jazz would know the importance of emergency fuel at least.

“I had assumed you were busy,” Starscream said in a mild tone as his fingers located a few mil-rats tucked into the back of the bottommost drawer. They were foul things, no better than medical grade, but they would have to do. “And you would announce yourself as you do.”

Rattrap chuckled that raspy laugh and pushed himself off the wall. “There is that.” He approached the desk, resting his hands on the edge of it and leaning forward. “Ya got the luck of Unicron in ya. Woulda thought ya dead when Obsidian was through.”

“As Megatron learned, I am quite hard to kill.” Starscream leaned back, in case Rattrap was feeling particularly odorous today. “I presume you’re here because you have some information for me?”

“Funnily enough, no. Not this time.” Rattrap shook his helm, giving Starscream a denta-filled grin. “Ya don’t need a spy or a rat fer a little bit so I’m havin’ myself a breather. Got prey of my own ta catch, if ya know what I mean.”

“I’m fairly certain I don’t, and I’d like to keep it that way.” Starscream rapped the fingers of one hand on the table. He tilted his helm. “Why are you loyal to me, Rattrap?”

The other mech blinked. For once, he looked surprised.

Rattrap pushed off the desk and folded his arms over his chest. “That’s an odd and sudden question.”

“But a relevant one.” Starscream crossed one ankle over the opposite knee and folded his hands in his lap. “It occurred to me that I’ve never asked, just as it occurred to me I have trusted you without precedent.”

“Does everythin’ gotta have an explanation?”

Starscream lifted his chin. “In this instance, yes.”

Rattrap fidgeted. Starscream, for once, caught wisps of his energy field, but it was there and gone again so quickly he didn’t have time to identify them.

“Y’know,” he said, after a long moment. “I don’t like ya very much.”

Starscream barked a laugh. “Yes, well, I’m told that’s a fairly large club that is constantly accepting members. That doesn’t answer my question, however. If anything, it only leaves more.”

Rattrap’s mouth twisted, somewhere between a frown and a smirk. “I don’t like ya,” he repeated. “But I’m fairly certain yer the only one that can keep Cybertron movin’ in the proper direction.”

“Thanks. I think,” Starscream drawled. “Your vote of confidence in me is overwhelming.”
Rattrap tilted his helm, his field all but radiating smugness. “That and well, if it wasn’t fer you, I wouldn’t have met my pretty new challenge, so I guess you ain’t all bad.”

Pretty new challenge? Starscream mouthed the words before he decided he didn’t want to know. Not one bit. Some things were better left a mystery.

“Besides,” Rattrap said with a smirk, “If ya wanted praise, ya would’ve gone to yer lackeys.”

Starscream chuckled. “There are some who would consider you to be one of those ‘lackeys.’” He unfolded his leg and leaned forward. “But speaking of which, whatever happened to my contingent of loyal supporters?”

Rattrap snorted. “Gone. If they know what’s best fer ‘em. Though I’ll bet ya couldn’t even name one of ‘em even if they were around.”

Starscream frowned. He leaned against the desk, balancing his elbows on the edge. There had been about a dozen of them, badgeless mechs who were always around, at every rally, every speech, every public appearance. He’d grown used to seeing them. He remembered they were laborers, former soldiers, a mix of former Autobots, Decepticons, and Neutrals.

But no, he did not know a single one of their names.

“That’s what I thought.” Rattrap shook his helm slowly, hissing air through his denta. “Y’see. Yer so damn used to using the mechs around ya that ya forget they’re actually people and not tools. And that’s why yer where ya are now.”

Starscream narrowed his optics. “And where, pray tell, am I? Why don’t you tell me since you seem to know all there is about me.”

“Ya blame Jazz for losing yer city to a council, but the truth is, Starscream, yer so-called people have lost their confidence in ya, and if ya want it back, ya gotta earn it.” Rattrap affixed him with a firm glare, one that glimmered at an intelligence Starscream had not seen until now. Or perhaps he had chosen not to see. “A prophecy and a dead Metrotitan aren’t enough anymore.”

Starscream laced his fingers together, his spark throbbing an uncertain beat within him. He felt as though he’d just been chastised, and he didn’t much approve of it, for all that Rattrap might be right.

And oh, how much he loathed that revelation.

“It was enough for you,” Starscream pointed out.

Rattrap smirked. “Nah. I don’t believe in that mystical slag. Yer just the right mech for the job.”

“Mmm. Others would disagree.”

“Then prove ‘em wrong.”

Starscream cycled his optics. He stared at Rattrap, and honestly, he swore it was the first time he looked at the mech. This was a stranger standing in front of him. He’d almost accuse him of being an imposter, save that he couldn’t think of anyone else willing to bear that disgusting alt-mode.

Rattrap shrugged. “Ya keep listenin’ to what others say andlettin’ it define ya. Instead of diggin’ in, why not do somethin’ bout it? The same old tactics ain’t gonna work, Commander. Ya gotta be better.”
Starscream’s wings twitched. “I am better,” he growled.

Rattrap lifted his shoulders in another shrug. “Prove it,” he repeated, and dropped his arms. He spun on a heelstrut, waving a hand over his shoulder. “Anyhow, I’m out. Got a hot date ‘nd all. But ya know where ta find me.”

Starscream made a noncommittal noise. He folded his arms on the desktop, chewing on Rattrap’s words as the mech slunk out without a sound. The door locked behind him with a quiet beep.

He’d have to see about getting better security for his office, too, it seemed. He’d rather not have the vermin creeping in here as well.

Starscream rested one elbow on the desk and rested his cheek against his knuckles. Fingers of his other hand rapped on the desktop, the quiet staccato cutting into the silence of his office. There was a stack of datapads on the corner, the topmost one as new as the rest of the furniture placed in here. His console continued to beep a ready light at him.

Three weeks he’d been in that regeneration pod. Three weeks he’d let his city lead itself. He didn’t even know who would have stepped in had Soundwave and Bumblebee not decided on their own to do so. He supposed he should be grateful they weren’t all right back where they started, squabbling for the tiniest specks of power.

This entire building was now to be used for administrative purposes. Starscream’s own office was on the top floor as a matter of course, and the levels below would have to be staffed. Eventually. With mechs he could trust.

Except in all the weeks and months since taking leadership of Cybertron, Starscream had never found anyone he could trust. Anyone he thought he might offer an office someday.

New Iacon was not that large. It should not be so difficult to lead on his own. But even in the Decepticons, Starscream had underlings and subordinates and seconds. Others to pick up the slack.

Perhaps there was some truth in Rattrap’s words. Perhaps he had been going about this all wrong. Perhaps he needed to remember he was no longer Commander Starscream, desperate to prove his worth while screeching at a mech deaf to his voice.

New Iacon was not the Decepticons. Starscream was not trying to lead a military unit. It was a city. *His* city.

He needed to do different. *Be* different. And if that meant bringing this council into the fold, so be it.

For there was no better way to prove everyone wrong than to shove their faces into evidence of his success. Let the former Optimus Prime return to Cybertron, having expected destruction, only to see that the people don’t need him or his Autobots anymore. Let Megatron go to trial, to pay for his crimes, and see that he had no allies on Cybertron, not anymore.

And let them see that Starscream hadn’t needed either of their methods to accomplish his goals.

Starscream rose from his desk, the tremble in his limbs finally eased. He was at once glad that they’d agreed to use the large meeting room in this building for the first council session. Though session was a strong word. It was more or less a time to clear the air, to set boundaries and figure out what having a council actually meant.

He downed one more of the emergency mil-rats and tucked the rest away in his desk. He scooped
a datapad out of a drawer, one marked empty, and tucked it under an arm. He supposed he would scan for surveillance equipment later.

Starscream left his office and took the lift down two floors to the ground level, which contained a reception desk, a break room, and of course, the massive meeting room where he would now hold any kind of leadership meeting necessary.

All was quiet and still. Empty. He wondered if the rest of the rooms had been furnished as well. Perhaps, perhaps not. That, too, would have to change.

But someone, maybe Jazz, had arranged for furniture to be brought to the meeting room. Where once it had been an open, empty space, there was now a table and a selection of chairs, most sized for the average mech, but a few that were adjustable as well.

Starscream was not late. If anything, he was ridiculously early. Even so, he was the last to arrive.

Well, that explained the purple and chartreuse frames he’d seen loitering out the front doors when he stepped out of the lift. Didn’t the Constructicons have work to do? Or could they not bear to be too far from their new obsession?

Bumblebee and Prowl were both present, perched at one end of the table, far from Soundwave and the mech he’d brought as his second. There was something vaguely familiar about this Decepticon, though Starscream couldn’t immediately place him.

“Well,” Starscream said with a half-smile. “I’ve never seen a group of mechs so eager for a political conversation.” He moved toward a chair in the center of the table and set his datapad down on the table in front of it with a quiet click. “Are you early on purpose or because you had nothing better to do?”

“Good morning to you, too,” Bumblebee said as he folded his hands on the table. He looked different. Bolder. More confident somehow. Good for him. “And we’re early because we’re all eager to lay some ground rules.”

“We’re all tired of waiting,” Soundwave’s Decepticon friend said.

“Affirmative,” Soundwave agreed.

“And my time is valuable. There is much to do, much work you’ve left, so if we could make this quick, that would be preferable,” Prowl said. He stood behind Bumblebee’s left shoulder, posture stiff and unyielding.

This was going to be fun.

Starscream’s gaze drifted between the two parties. “Then I suppose the first order of business would be to establish what, exactly, this council’s intended purpose is.” He tapped the datapad in front of him. “I’ve read the charter. I’ve read the official statement. Now I want the truth.”

“The truth, Starscream, is that we’re all tired of fighting. All we want is peace. To move on from war and remember how it is to live again,” the unnamed Decepticon said with a heated ex-vent. “No lies. No tricks. No deceits. Just… stop fighting like a bunch of stupid Emptyies and actually work together for once. You think you can do that?”

Starscream cycled his optics. He stared at the mech. “I do believe that was the gist of my previous declaration when I cast out both the Autobots and the Decepticons, so yes, I know that I can. The
“Needlenose,” the mech supplied, and his visor flashed. “And I’m not surprised you don’t remember who I am.” His gaze drifted down the length of the table. “Though Bumblebee should, since it was on his order that my *conjunx* was executed.”

“For someone who professes an interest in working together, you seem quick to point fingers and cause dissension,” Prowl said icily. His sensory panels arched, high and rigid behind him.

Needlenose shook his helm. One finger tapped the table. “I’m laying it all out. Letting you know where I stand and where I come from.” He leaned forward, glare firm and unyielding. “I’ll never forgive ya for what ya did to Horri-bull. But if getting the peace me and him both wanted means I gotta work with ya peaceably, I’ll do it.”

Horri-bull. Ah, yes. Now Starscream remembered. One of the first Decepticons who fell victim to Bumblebee’s I/D chip implant. He’d been executed for assaulting a NAIL, as far as Starscream recalled.

No wonder Needlenose was familiar to him. Interesting turn of events.

Starscream arched an orbital ridge. “And is this how you feel, Soundwave?”

“Starscream knows this. Conversation already had,” Soundwave replied in that infernal monotone Starscream had always loathed. “Peace sought.”

“And not, perchance, hopes of accessing your dearly imprisoned former lord Megatron?” Starscream proposed, leaning forward against the table.

Soundwave’s reply was as flat as his field. “Negative.” The glow of his visor was a steady, warning crimson.

“I find that hard to believe, given your centuries-long loyalty to him,” Prowl said, narrowing his optics.

Silence.

Not that Starscream expected an answer. Soundwave never was one for arguing, especially when he felt he’d already made his point. And he was especially not one to get into a verbal spar with a mech like Prowl.

“Yes, well, as far as I’m aware, mechs change,” Starscream cut in with a drawl. His gaze shifted to the Autobots. “Your precious Prime, after all, decided to take the selfish route and leave the mess for you to clean up, didn’t he?”

Bumblebee’s engine growled. “That is oversimplifying it, don’t you think?”

Starscream waved a dismissing hand. “My point, little Bee, is that we are all coming from a place where our prior convictions and/or loyalties must be set aside or ignored if we are to at all move forward. Or is deigning to trust a handful of former Decepticons too much to bear on that Autobot badge?”

Prowl frowned so deeply it formed a crease in his dermal metal. Bumblebee’s expression was harder to read behind the facemask.

“We would not be here if we didn’t think we could work with you, with all of you,” Bumblebee finally said, with that same diplomacy he’d tried before. “So instead of trying to feed the tension,
Starscream pulled his lips into a sly grin. “That, dear Bumblebee, is a fine idea.” He gestured toward Prowl. “Why don’t you have a seat, Prowl? We should all be comfortable. I suspect we’re going to be here for quite some time today.”

“Fantastic,” Prowl bit out, his armor clamped so tightly to his frame, he had to be overheating. “I cannot imagine anywhere else I’d rather be.” Yet, he still pulled out a chair next to Bumblebee and sat in it stiffly.

Starscream took the opportunity to sit as well. “Good to know,” he purred, and leaned his elbows on the table, clasping his hands together. “Now, I’ve read the document Jazz provided and while I utterly loathe the idea of this council, I have to admit it will serve a purpose.”

“The feeling’s mutual,” Bumblebee muttered.

Starscream fought the urge to laugh aloud. “To that end, I would like to offer each one of you an office in this building. The top floor is, of course, mine. But there are several offices throughout multiple levels that you can claim for your own.”

“Is that how it’s going to be?” Needlenose asked as he leaned back in his chair. “You issue the orders and we go along with it like good, little drones.”

“Far from it.” Starscream snorted. “For one thing, I doubt any of you have the ability to be obedient. But I am Speaker of this council, am I not? So it would make sense I should lead it.”

Prowl sighed aloud and scrubbed a hand down his face. “How did it come to this?” he asked, pinching his nasal ridge. “We won.”

“You didn’t win,” Starscream bit out, his wings going rigid behind him. “You took advantage of a situation to throw those of us that survived madness into a prison cell. And then you couldn’t manage to hold on to that power.”

Bumblebee blew air through his vents. “Leadership is more than just dictating actions and expecting obedience,” he said, diplomatically trying to get them back on track.

Good mech, that one. Pity that Starscream had to steal his city from him. Bumblebee really did always have the best intentions, even if he was an aft about it.

Fragging Autobots and their insistence that they were morally superior in every way.

Starscream spread his hands. “I welcome advice, feedback, suggestions. Any actions must be approved by majority vote, of course. This isn’t a dictatorship.” Anymore, unfortunately.

“Then why does it feel like one?” Needlenose asked.

“Council in name only,” Soundwave offered. His gaze remained unerringly locked on Starscream as though a constant reminder. “Neutrals outnumber warring factions still. Our presence likely to ignite tensions if not deference to Starscream.”

Starscream’s lips curled into a smirk. “My emotionless friend here is absolutely correct.” He tried not to preen. “Your little squabbles got you exiled in the first place. For now, my leadership is the only thing allowing your return to my city.”

“Your city,” Prowl echoed and his frame visibly vibrated. He spoke it as though with distaste. “Clearly the universe has gone mad.”
“Yes, well, that is still up for debate,” Starscream replied tartly. He sat up, wings arching high behind him. “Now can we get down to business or does anyone else want to keep bemoaning the fact you don’t have your own crown?”

Silence. And a sullen one at that.

Primus. It wasn’t much different than a Decepticon staff meeting, to be perfectly honest. All Starscream needed was someone to throw the first punch and he’d feel like he’d stepped right back in the past.

Maybe he needed a second in command, too, if he was going to be corralling a handful of younglings and sparklings throwing themselves pity parties.

“I’ll take your silence as concession,” Starscream said dryly. “Especially since I, for one, have plans after this meeting and don’t want it to drag any longer than necessary.”

“Plans with Blurr?” Bumblebee asked, and my, wasn’t he a forward one?

Starscream’s wings fluttered before he could stop them. Damn things. “If you must know, yes,” he said and then cycled his vocalizer. “Now, I have several items up for discussion, but is there something any of you would like to add to the agenda?”

“Housing and medical supplies,” Needlenose bit out, wriggling about in his chair as though intended to get comfortable.

“Order of ascension,” Prowl said.

“Megatron,” Bumblebee offered.

“Responsibilities,” Soundwave said.

All things Starscream had already put on the list. Nice to know they were on the same page. He made notes on his datapad.

“Then we’ll tackle each one of those before the day is through,” Starscream said and made himself comfortable as well. If his aft was going to be planted in this chair for the better part of the day, he wanted to be able to get up later. “If there’s one thing I refuse to do, it’s repeat the mistakes of the Senate and the Primacy that brought us all here.”

That, he hoped, was something they could all agree on. Prowl looked as if the very thought curdled the energon on his tanks, but he nodded curtly.

Good enough. For now.

Starscream could only hope the rest of the meeting would go much more smoothly than the beginning. Otherwise he might lose his mind.
Blurr's dating Starscream. Jazz has a crush. And here Wheeljack is, trying to wire flashing lights into a control panel. Ain’t nothing what anyone could have expected.

Starscream was late.

This was not at all surprising to Blurr. It was too optimistic to believe that a meeting with the council members would do anything but drag into infinity. By the time Starscream arrived, he was in no state for the promised tour.

He tried to apologize. Blurr cut him off before he could.

“It’s fine,” he said with a kiss to Starscream’s cheek. “You’ve got a lot to catch up on. So long as you don’t miss the grand opening, I won’t complain too loudly.”

“Complaining is pretty much my job anyway,” Starscream said with a chuckle. He smiled, but he couldn’t hide the shiver of exhaustion in his field.

His wings drooped, his armor was loose, not because he was unguarded, but because he didn’t have the energy to spare in being restrained. He needed rest, not to be running around New Iacon. But then, he wouldn’t be Starscream if he happily constrained himself to a berth.

“Well, you’re allowed to do that every now and again,” Blurr said. He grabbed Starscream’s hand and towed him into the apartment, the balcony door sliding shut behind him. “Though maybe you should think about not flying for once.”

“Don’t have to tell me twice.” Starscream ex-vented noisily. “Primus, I’m exhausted.”

“Good thing I’m prepared then.” Blurr tugged Starscream to the futon in the main room and gave him a nudge toward it. “Sit. I’ll be right back.”

Starscream sat, for once obeying without question. He really must be tired then. Then again, he probably hadn’t recharged well.

He never did answer Blurr’s question about nightmares.

Blurr hustled into the storage room, grabbed the tray of treats and energon he’d set aside, and returned to the main room. Starscream had motivated himself enough to turn on the big vidscreen and some kind of show played quietly in the background. Obsidian might have brought New Iacon temporarily to its knees, but they still had decent programming.

“Find something good?” he asked as he set the tray on the table.

Starscream leaned forward, grabbing a handful of goodies. “It’s noise,” he said.

Blurr nudged the cube toward him. “It’s not medical grade this time. Promise.”

“I’m trusting you,” Starscream said with a side-eyed look, but he accepted the cube and leaned
Blurr chuckled, grabbed his own cube and handful of treats, and leaned back as well. He was not at all surprised when seconds later, Starscream tilted against his side, wings flicked back and out of the way. His frame hummed softly, his field a quiescent purr against Blurr's.

“Long day?”

“As they will be for the next several months, I imagine,” Starscream said dryly. “My so-called council can’t stand me or each other. I anticipate many processor aches in my future.”

Blurr sipped at his energon. He rested his free hand on Starscream’s nearest thigh, stroking slowly toward his knee. “You’ll make it work. You all want the same thing, at least.”

“There is that.” Starscream’s helm rubbed against his shoulder before he sighed an ex-vent. “What about you?”

Blurr chuckled before he could stop himself. “Funny you should ask because Jazz was acting really weird today.”

“How so?”

Blurr shifted his weight and slung an arm over Starscream’s shoulders, tucking his Seeker against his side. It was nice to sit like this, Star warm and peaceful next to him. No arguing. No fussing. No worries.

“He was skittish. Clumsy. Tripping over his words and himself.” Blurr shook his helm. “Weirdest thing I’d ever seen.”

“Hmm.” Starscream snuggled in closer, his free hand sliding across Blurr’s belly, claws tickling into his seams. “What were the circumstances?”

“I was interviewing a new bartender. Hired him as a matter of fact.”

“Anyone I know?”

“Former Autobot Sniper. Name of Bluestreak.”

“No, don’t know him. That is odd though.” Starscream chuckled, the amusement rumbling in his chassis. “I might have to meet this Bluestreak if he can turn Jazz into a jabbering idiot. I might be able to use that.”

Blurr rolled his optics. “I will never understand you two,” he said as he let his fingers drag across the back plane of Starscream’s nearest wing.

“It’s complicated,” Starscream murmured. His helm rested on Blurr’s shoulder, his vents slowly softening.

“So you’ve said.”

Blurr stroked Starscream’s wing again, feeling them thrum beneath his fingertips. It was less arousal and more warmth. Comfort. The movie, whatever it was, continued to play in the background, a constant noise.

Starscream burrowed closer. His wings pushed toward Blurr’s fingers, his hand cupping Blurr’s side and simply resting there. “You know, I keep waiting for something to happen,” he murmured.
“It’s quiet right now and I’m not comforted by that.”

“I could always come up with an argument if that makes you feel better,” Blurr offered.

Starscream pinched him in the side, though it barely stung. “No, thanks,” he drawled. “I’d rather just recharge, if it’s all the same to you.”

“What an exciting and eventful life we have.” Blurr chuckled, but honestly, he had to agree with Starscream. He was exhausted, too.

“Tomorrow is going to be as draining as today,” Starscream sighed. “I think we only got through half the items on the agenda, and I plan on opening tomorrow with a discussion about the memorial service.”

“Memorial?”

“For all those Obsidian killed.” Starscream’s grip briefly tightened on him. His field washed with a mix of anger and regret. “My task force, Sky-Byte, the mechs who happened to be nearby when he bombed my office. All of them. I can’t let the people of this city think that their sparks should be forgotten.”

Blurr’s spark throbbed with warmth. “That’s a very good idea.”

“You’re surprised I thought of it, aren’t you?”

Blurr cycled a ventilation. He gently stroked Starscream’s wings. “I’m learning to expect the unexpected when it comes to you,” he said diplomatically, choosing his words with care. “But no, I’m not surprised. You’re not as cold as you pretend to be.”

Silence.

Starscream’s frame hummed next to his. He turned his helm, face buried against Blurr’s shoulder. His wing pushed harder against Blurr’s hand, and Blurr took the unstated request, petting it gently.

Blurr settled into the futon, turning his attention to the vidscreen and the soft sounds of whatever show Starscream had selected. Starscream was warm next to him, his field quietly humming, but nothing in it betraying his thoughts.

Until, a few minutes later, he said, “Thank you.”

Blurr leaned his helm against Starscream’s. He didn’t say anything.

He suspected he didn’t have to.

~

Blurr onlined slowly, muzzily, his frame enveloped in heat, and this time, he wasn’t alone. Starscream was sprawled atop him, fingers hooked into seams as was his wont, his helm pillowed on Blurr’s shoulder. Their legs tangled, their fields even more so.

Blurr’s spark fluttered.

Starscream was still out, his vents even, his optics shuttered. He barely twitched as Blurr’s free hand stroked him, down his back and across his aft before sliding up again.

“Star?”
“Nnn.”

Blurr chuckled softly. He stroked Starscream again, his field drizzling along Starscream’s as well. Starscream was so hot, his frame billowing the heat of someone whose self-repair was working in overdrive. Blurr’s fans clicked on, trying to ease the temperature increase.

“Star, wake up.”

Talons hooked harder into Blurr’s seams, stinging the cables beneath. Starscream’s optics remained shuttered. But the quiet hum and click of his systems grew a little louder.

“You have work to do, and I’m overheating,” Blurr said with a pinch to Starscream’s aileron flap.

The wing twitched in his grip. Starscream wriggled atop of him, but made no moves to get up. His face didn’t so much as twitch.

“I’m going to grope you if you don’t wake up,” Blurr warned and put action to words, sliding his hand down until he cupped Starscream’s aft, giving it a light pat.

Nothing. Well, unless he counted the quiet little purr that Starscream’s engine started. Starscream’s fans clicked on, whirring softly.

If that was how he wanted to play it…

Blurr shifted minutely beneath Starscream, working a knee between Starscream’s thighs, and both of his hands around Starscream’s frame. There were benefits to Starscream being lighter than him.

Blurr grinned.

And flipped.

It was awkward, clumsy, and Starscream nearly ended up on the floor, but in the end, Blurr succeeded. He had Starscream pinned beneath him, wings pressed to the berth cover, and talons miraculously still hooked in Blurr’s seams.

Clingy Seeker.

“Star, wake up,” Blurr said a bit louder as he nuzzled Starscream’s face.

“No,” Starscream murmured without unshuttering his optics.

He knew the fragger was awake. He was just being difficult.

Blurr chuckled and nudged his knee higher, rubbing it against the apex of Starscream’s thighs, which parted to accommodate him. Here it was even warmer. How curious.

Blurr pressed a kiss to the tip of Starscream’s nasal ridge. “Stop being cute.”

Amusement hummed in Starscream’s field. His hips rolled just a smidge, rubbing over Blurr’s knee. His wingflaps fluttered.

“Is this your way of asking for incentive to get up?” Blurr asked as he shifted his weight, freeing up one hand to slide down Starscream’s side.

He briefly flirted with Starscream’s hip joint before scrubbing the heel of his palm over Starscream’s interface array. Here it was very hot indeed, and Blurr grinned as he traced the seams with his fingertips, trying to coax them open. Not that they needed much coaxing.
A few passes of Blurr’s fingertips and both panels spiraled open, a very eager spike pressurizing into Blurr’s palm as the sweet scent of lubricant floated to his nasal ridge.

“Well, someone is eager to see me this morning,” Blurr teased as he nuzzled into Starscream’s intake, laving it with nips and kisses.

He squeezed Starscream’s spike in greeting, flirted with the crown of it, before he allowed himself to tease Starscream’s valve. The Seeker was already wet and swelling with arousal, the first ring of calipers fluttering around Blurr’s fingertips.

“Oh.” A low moan rose in Starscream’s intake, his ex-vents fluctuating.

Blurr slid two fingers into his Seeker, up to the second knuckle, and curved them just right, rubbing over a cluster of nodes he’d discovered awhile ago. Starscream’s backstrut arched, his talons tightening to a scrape on Blurr’s cables. He shivered.

But he didn’t unshutter his optics, the little sneak.

Blurr nipped at his intake cables before he dragged his mouth back to Starscream’s. “Star, wake up,” he said against Starscream’s lips. “Can I get a little participation here?”

“Mmmm, you’re doing fine on your own,” Starscream murmured, but his optics unshuttered into narrow slits of crimson.

“Lazy aft.” Blurr captured Starscream’s lips for a soft and sweet kiss, the tips of their glossa touching as their lips moved together.

Blurr slid his fingers free and cupped Starscream’s aft, stroking the barely-there curve of it. He shifted his weight, nudged himself between Starscream’s thighs, and finally freed his spike to the humid air between them. The head of it nudged at the swollen rim of Starscream’s valve, lubricant wetting the crown.

“See? Doing just fine,” Starscream murmured as he canted his hips upward, his legs enclosing Blurr’s lower half, urging him onward.

Blurr chuckled. “Guess I’m stuck doing all the work then.” He rocked forward, spike easing into the welcome embrace of Starscream’s valve.

He shivered as warm, slick heat enveloped his spike. His sensor nodes lit with pleasure, and a heated ex-vent escaped his lips. His field throbbed with warmth, pulsing in tune to Starscream’s.

There was something to be said about taking it slow and steady.

Blurr pressed his forehelm to Starscream’s, ventilating evenly as he slowly pushed deeper and deeper, until the base of his spike notched against Starscream’s rim, and he nudged Starscream’s ceiling node. And then he lingered, he waited, just throbbing within Starscream’s valve as calipers fluttered around his spike and wreaked havoc on his sensor nodes.

Starscream made a humming noise in his chassis. His talons unhooked from Blurr’s seams, his arms encircling Blurr’s chassis instead. He shivered, optics fully unshuttering.

“I’m pretty sure this is medically inadvisable.” Starscream murmured, however, his backstrut arched until their chestplates touched, and Blurr could feel the steady pulse of Starscream’s spark through the armor separating them.
Blurr nuzzled Starscream’s face. “Oh? Is that so? I should stop then.” He shifted his weight, made to pull back, only for Starscream’s arms and legs to clamp around him.

“Don’t you dare,” Starscream hissed. His hand slid up, curving around the back of Blurr’s helm. “I’m fine.” He tugged Blurr’s helm down, until their mouths collided again.

Blurr moaned into the kiss, his glossa tangling with Starscream’s. He started moving again, slow and steady pushes into Starscream’s valve, charge echoing between receptors and nodes.

“I thought you’d say that,” Blurr said against Starscream’s lips. He rolled his hips forward, less thrusting and more rocking into Starscream.

Every tiny retreat was a pull against the grip of Starscream’s calipers. Every small push forward was a surge of charge that sent tingles racing up his spinal strut, and heat drizzling down his lines.

Starscream’s grip on him tightened, pulling him so close he could barely move, could barely do anything more than tiny rocks. Until every inch of them was pressed together, hot metal to hot metal, and Blurr ex-vented warm gusts of air into Starscream’s intake.

His Seeker smelled of hot metal and weldfire and that fancy cleanser he insisted on using. Blurr swore he could hear Starscream’s sparkbeat, steady and strong, and it was such a relief. It chased away the last echoes of that terrible image, the one seemingly burned into his memory core, and the moment Blurr realized that Starscream had ceased being a political partner for him, and had instead become something more.

Starscream’s engine purred, vibrating their frames, and Blurr’s own responded in kind, a deeper, resonating growl. Pleasure unspooled inside of him, soft and sweet and blazing hot, until it throbbed through his spark as much as it throbbed through his array.

Starscream moaned, his field pulsing with need as it burrowed into Blurr’s, until he couldn’t see the edges between them anymore. Blurr panted and dragged his mouth back to Starscream’s, his entire frame shaking, not that he could put a reason on why. He pressed his forehelm to Starscream’s again, his optics shuttering as he focused on sensation and little else.

Starscream ventilating beneath him, making little breathy, pleasured noises. His hands gripping Blurr, not tight enough to hurt, but enough to keep him right where he was. His valve fluttering and spitting charge at Blurr’s spike, as he rocked his hips and ground deep, circling a steady pressure against Starscream’s ceiling node.

Until his ex-vents became Starscream’s in-vents and vice-versa, and their fields pulsed in synch. He barely moved, save to rock into Starscream, and the heat building between them was almost suffocating, save that it embraced rather than stifled.

Blurr claimed Starscream’s mouth again, for another soft and sweet kiss, and heard Starscream moan beneath him. Arms and legs clamped tightly around him, fingers sinking into a seam on his dorsum, talons scraping his cables as if in claim. Starscream shuddered and his valve rippled, squeezing oh-so-tight.

Blurr’s spark throbbed. Overload took him by surprise, not because it came so suddenly, but because it poured over him in waves of liquid heat that flooded his frame from his pedes to his crest. He moaned into the kiss, spike spilling deep into Starscream, even as his Seeker’s embrace tightened to the point of armor creaking, and Starscream overloaded, too.

Blurr pressed his forehelm to Starscream’s shoulder as his frame trembled and his cooling fans roared, struggling to find cooler air in the middle of the heat. Starscream’s valve remained snug
and welcoming around his spike, but the embrace eased, giving him some ventilating room.

That had been… different.

Starscream’s hand slid from the back of his helm to cup the back of his neck. His thumb rubbed soothing circles at the base of Blurr’s helm. Blurr’s engine purred and he lifted his helm to look into Starscream’s optics.

“Good morning,” Blurr said, for lack of anything else to say. Because honestly, he didn’t have any words. Except, apparently, the awkward ones.

Starscream cycled his optics, and then his lips curved. He laughed. “Good morning,” he echoed and laughed again. “Yes, it is.” He lowered his legs from Blurr’s waist, pedes resting on the berth again. “I should have you as an alarm clock every morning.”

“Something tells me that’s not very efficient.” Blurr rubbed their nasal ridges together. “Feel okay?”

“Oh, no, I feel terrible,” Starscream said, deadpan. “Clearly that very vigorous and aggressive round of interfacing popped a weld or two.”

Blurr rolled his optics. “Excuse me for caring.” He shifted his weight, bracing a hand on the berth to lift his weight off Starscream. “You are still healing, you know.”

“I know.” Starscream cupped the back of his helm firmly, stopping his retreat. “For the record, I feel fine.” He leaned up and brushed his lips over Blurr’s. “Could use a run through the washracks and a cube of energon – not medical grade – but otherwise, I’m fine. I’ve survived worse.”

“That’s not the point.” Blurr bit back a sigh, and swallowed down a retort. No use in pressing the issue.

He pressed a kiss to Starscream’s forehelm and gently slid back, his softening spike easing from Starscream’s valve. They could both use a swing through the washrack, along with a polish session or two.

“I know, it’s not,” Starscream said. His other hand drifted down, cupping Blurr’s left hip gently. “What about you?”

Blurr cycled his optics again. “Not in any pain,” he answered, hoping that he hid his surprise. He cracked a grin. “Though maybe next time you do all the work.”

“Sounds fair. For now…” Starscream squirmed on the berth, his wings twitching. “I need to get clean and my chronometer has been flashing at me for five minutes.”

Blurr slid back and free of the berth, giving Starscream room to sit up and scoot his way free as well. “Another meeting?”

“Yes. Endlessly.” Starscream sighed and offered him a crooked smile. “Huzzah for another day of listening to a half-dozen mechs squabble and bicker like younglings.”

Blurr slid an arm around Starscream’s waist and nuzzled the Seeker’s helm. “You could always take them over a knee.”

Starscream barked a laugh. “Prowl could certainly use a swat or two, but can you imagine me fitting Soundwave over my lap?”
Blurr shrugged. “He’d probably like it.” Though honestly, thinking of Soundwave in any kind of sexual capacity sort of broke Blurr’s brain a little.

“Ew. No. This conversation stops right here.” Starscream shuddered and slid free of Blurr’s hold, only to grab his hand and start tugging on it. “Come on. I need to get clean.”

Bemused, Blurr let himself be pulled. “And you expect me to scrub you, is that?”

“Yes.” Firm, no nonsense, not even leaving room for discussion.

Blurr chuckled. He’d go along with it this time. But he’d add it to the tally of things Starscream owed him. He’d get his pampering eventually. For now, though, that web of weldlines and patchwork armor was enough for Blurr to obey.

Starscream had been through the Pit.

Blurr could stand to spoil him a little longer. Besides, he had work of his own to do. He couldn’t stand in the penthouse snarking with Starscream all day.

One of them had to earn a paycheck.

Less than an hour later, the lift beeped and deposited Blurr on the ground floor. He scrubbed a hand down his face and forced himself to step out. He had work to do, despite the desire to spin on a heelstrut and go love on his Seeker some more.

The washrack had turned into round two but Blurr entirely blamed Starscream for that. How was he supposed to resist when he was putting his hands all over silky crimson armor in desperate need of a scrub? How could he pretend disinterest with Starscream giving him flirty looks and inciting smiles?

“There he is! The mech I’ve been looking for!”

Blurr groaned. That voice and it felt like someone had doused him in a bucket of icy solvent. He dropped his hand.

“What do you want, Swindle?” he asked as he turned to greet the conmech, who shouldn’t have been allowed into New Maccadams in the first place. They weren’t even open!

Whoever had allowed Swindle inside was going to hear it from Blurr.

Swindle grinned and made a broad gesture. “Now is that any way to greet the mech financing half of this venture?” He sparkled and shone, all but blinding in the overhead lights.

But of course! Swindle was one of the few to come out of the Obsidian debacle better than he’d gone into it. He’d actually profited, the leech.

Swindle held out his arms and Blurr glared at him. No. Not anymore.

“Touch me again and lose a hand,” Blurr said coldly. “You’ve got half my debt, but that’s it.”

Swindle never lost a stride, nor did his smile falter. “Never said I wanted anything more, my mech.” His visor half-darkened in a wink. “You’re getting awfully paranoid there. Been spending too much time cozied up to your Seeker?”

Blurr folded his arms over his chest. “What do you want? And talk fast, I have work to do.”
“Want? Oh, you misunderstand me.” Swindle’s smile was sugar-coated. “I just came to check on the progress. See if you had a date for a grand opening. That sort of thing. You know, curious about how my creds were spent and all.” He bounced on his heelstruts. “What about a private tour, eh?”

Blurr ground his denta. “No.” He jerked his helm toward another one of his new hires, a former Con with a tank alt-mode who was utterly delighted to be working security. “Brawl would be happy to show you around if you want.”

Oh, and he also happened to be Swindle’s former teammate. No love lost there.

Blurr would never admit aloud how much satisfaction he took in watching Swindle pale under his visor. His smile dipped at the edges.

“I’m not that curious,” he said with a nervous smile. He planted his hands on his hips and looked up at Blurr. “You know, it’s not wise to threaten the mech who owns half your aft.”

Blurr arched an orbital ridge. “Who said anything about threats? I’m trying to get my business running here. So sorry that I don’t have time to give you a personal tour.” He grinned, and if it was razor-sharp, all the better.

Swindle huffed a ventilation. He peered at Blurr. “Your Seeker is rubbing off on you.”

“Failing to see how that’s a bad thing.” Blurr dropped his arms and half-turned. “I’m sure you can see yourself out the same way you conned yourself in. I’ve got work to do.”

He let that stand as dismissal, and hoped it wouldn’t come back to bite him in the aft later. Fortunately, he’d had the foresight to draw up a contract that Jazz approved before Blurr let himself borrow creds from Swindle. He wasn’t in danger of losing his bar, or being forced to pay it all back in a sudden lump sum.

But it also meant he didn’t have to pretend to cater to Swindle either. Yeah, he was grateful Swindle pulled his aft out of the fire once upon a time. Gratitude, however, didn’t mean he had to put up with Swindle being a sleaze.

He left Swindle behind him, ignored how much his back armor twitched, and went in search of a distraction. He found it in Wheeljack, who was behind the DJ stage and fiddling with the fuse box.

“Something wrong?” Blurr asked.

Wheeljack startled and whirled around, as the box crackled and spat sparks behind him. In one hand, he held a fistful of wires. And now a guilty look.

“Uh, there wasn’t,” he said with a sheepish laugh. He lifted his hand, the wires dangling from his fingers. “Now there is.”

Blurr palmed his face. “Were you making improvements?”

“I had an idea!” Wheeljack’s winglets fluttered, his field bursting with amusement. “It hit me late last night, and I figured, well, who doesn’t want the ability to control colored lights for a dance floor. Right?”

Right.
Blurr nibbled on his bottom lip and tried not to laugh. “Isn’t there something more important for you to do?”

Wheeljack shrugged and tucked the wires into a compartment on his other arm. “Well, yes. I mean, our infrastructure is shot, we need a better holding cell for Megatron, and two of the energon processors are down.” He cycled a ventilation and rubbed the back of his helm. “But this was easy. And quick. And fun. And… better.”

In that moment, Blurr felt like an aft. He cycled a ventilation and grinned. “Feel free to poke around then,” he said, and made a wide gesture to the whole of his bar. “Anything you want to play with, you have my permission.”

“Really?” Wheeljack’s winglets wriggled, his indicators lighting up brightly.

Blurr’s grin widened. “Of course. I trust you.”

No sooner had the words left his mouth then he got an armful of Wheeljack, an enthusiastic embrace of hands patting his back and Wheeljack squeezing tight.

“Thank you!” Wheeljack all but gushed before he drew back from Blurr, his hands on Blurr’s shoulders. “You would not believe the ideas I have.”

“I think I have a notion.” Blurr coughed into his hand and squirmed out of Wheeljack’s reach. His face heated and he chanced a look over his shoulder, hoping none of his new employees caught that embarrassing moment.

No. No one was looking their way. However, he did see something very interesting instead. Blurr’s orbital ridges lifted as he half-turned to get a better look.

Bluestreak was behind the primary bar, practicing his cocktails. Not that he really needed it. He was a bit of a natural already. He looked entirely focused as his hands moved among the different engexes, mixes, and flavors.

He wasn’t what had caught Blurr’s attention.

It was Jazz.

Jazz who had come around the corner, spotted Bluestreak, and nearly tripped over his own pede as he slammed to a halt. He looked left and right, as if checking for witnesses, before he squared his shoulders and approached the counter.

Bluestreak looked up as Jazz got closer and smiled brightly. He said something Blurr couldn’t catch from this far away, but it was probably a greeting.

“What’re you looking at?” Wheeljack asked as he stepped up next to Blurr.

“A trainwreck,” Blurr said with a laugh.

Jazz grinned back at Bluestreak, and Blurr knew that grin. It was Jazz’s super-confident, super-sly grin. He leaned forward, one hand reaching for the counter.

And he missed.

Blurr watched, with a sense of both horror and amusement, as Jazz realized his mistake a nanosecond too late. He grasped for the counter, missed it by millimeters, and fell to the ground, knocking over several stools in the process, with a loud, echoing clatter.
“Did... did Jazz just fall?” Wheeljack asked. “I’ve never known him to be clumsy.”

Bluestreak’s optics rounded. He leaned over the counter, mouth moving, his expression one of concern.

“It’s a new thing apparently,” Blurr commented with a chuckle.

He watched as Jazz scrambled to his pedes, dusting off his frame with all the grace and dignity someone who’d just made a fool of himself could muster. He righted the stools, nearly tipping another one over in his haste.

Bluestreak said something and Jazz shook his helm, grin lop-sided, and backed away from the counter. One thumb gestured over his shoulder, in a vague direction, before Jazz spun on a heelstrut and walked away.

Rather quickly, if you asked Blurr.

“Huh. Never thought I’d see the day Jazz fell head over heels,” Wheeljack said only to pause and laugh. “Literally,” he added.

Blurr cocked his helm.

Huh.

He supposed Wheeljack was right.

Bluestreak cycled his optics before he shrugged and went back to mixing. His lips remained curved in the suggestion of a smile. Blurr suspected he was probably humming to himself. It seemed like something Bluestreak would do.

“There’s a first time for everything,” Blurr said.

“If that isn’t the truth, I don’t know what is.” Wheeljack clapped him on the shoulder and turned back to the fuse box. “Starscream’s leading Cybertron, working hand in hand with Bumblebee and Soundwave. Megatron’s in handcuffs. Optimus is off doing Primus knows what.”

Wheeljack’s vocals echoed as he buried his helm in the fuse box.

“You’re dating Starscream. Jazz has a crush. And here I am, trying to wire flashing lights into a control panel. Ain’t nothing what anyone could have expected.”

Blurr chuckled. “You’re right about that.”

And Blurr was certainly glad for it.
Defying Gravity

Chapter Summary

A memorial in progress, a speech no one will ever forget, a bar's grand opening, and dancing with his partner -- the perfect day.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

One week after Starscream emerged from the regen chamber, he stood in the shadow of a building prepped for construction, while a crowd gathered in front of a stage. He stood behind the podium, feeling the weight of hundreds of stares, his wings twitching as they registered the optics watching him from behind as well.


For this right here, this memorial, was something they could all agree on. No convincing had been involved, unless you counted acquiring the necessary credits from Swindle.

Starscream cycled a ventilation and tried not to revel in the moment. He was here for a somber reason, but he couldn’t deny how good it felt. He held onto control of Cybertron, for all that he shared it with a council now, and he remained their leader. Those looking up at him did so, not with disdain, but with something akin to respect.

And it was glorious.

Starscream forced himself to focus, to bring on the sobriety he needed for this speech. It was one for the archives, if he did say so himself.

It was time.

Starscream lifted his chin and a hand, silently calling for attention. He was given it, a wave of quiet sweeping through the crowd, which had been murmuring to itself. There was a sea of faces in front of him, a sea of color and shapes and faction badges.

All here. Standing as one.

Glorious.

“My fellow Cybertronians,” Starscream began, his vocals easily carrying thanks to the system Soundwave had wired for this occasion. “We stand here today to do something we have allowed ourselves to forget in several long millennia. Traditions we’ve let slide aside in the wake of other matters. Traditions we must recover if we’ve any hope of learning to move forward.”

Starscream rested his hands on the edge of the podium. He let his gaze travel across the crowd, looking into faces familiar and not. He had their attention. Now he had to keep it.

“We assemble today to honor the sparks lost. Specifically, those who perished in the terrorist attacks, but also, to begin building toward remembering those we’ve lost during the course of our
“Over thirty mechs died in Obsidian’s bid to destroy everything we’ve been building. They were Autobots. Decepticons. Neutrals. Badgeless. But they were all killed for the same reason – they believed in a Cybertron that could one day be united. Obsidian sought to destroy that unity, and we showed him otherwise.”

Starscream gestured over his shoulder, first to his left and then to his right. “Thanks to the aid of those we had once outcast, we were able to restore peace and order to our city. As appreciation, the Autobots and the Decepticons both have been allowed to return. And no, I didn’t require that they surrender their badges. For now.”

He leaned forward. This part was important, perhaps more so than anything else. He knew he took a risk allowing the factions to return and with their badges intact. But he had a promise to keep and he didn’t want to risk the repercussions if he didn’t follow through.

“I know for many of them, the badge is more than a faction symbol. It is a feeling of belonging, a sense of unity in one purpose. For many, the badge, the identity is all they ever knew. That is something that cannot be easily set aside. It is my hope that one day, these badges will be willingly cast aside, but to force someone to do so would go against everything our new Cybertron stands for.”

“We have a lot of anger and distrust to work through. We have centuries of war and baggage hanging over us. It won’t be easily overcome and it won’t be quickly forgotten. But it can be done.”

“Let this memorial be the start. Let it help us remember those who were lost in Obsidian’s madness, and let it remind us what we are capable of. That we can be united, that in the end, we aren’t our badges, but our sparks.”

“We are sparks who desperately want to belong, to find a home, to find a purpose apart from the chains that held us back before. We want to be that original vision, the one we all shared, no matter what faction we chose.”

“We can do it. I believe we can do it. Our newly formed Council, of which my esteemed colleagues behind me are a part of, believes we can do it. I hope you can believe it, too.”

Starscream paused to catch a vent. Someone took it upon themselves to start clapping, stomping their pedes, revving their engines.

So this, he realized, was what Megatron felt all those millennia ago when he first started gathering the Decepticons under his banner. This feeling of success, of validation, of respect.

It was addicting.

Starscream smiled, and only self-control kept it from being smug. “All are welcome to pay their respects. To add names to the growing list of those we lost. This memorial is for everyone. For those interested, New Maccadam’s, a haven for all those regardless of faction badges, is holding a reception and grand opening in an hour. Thank you.”

More applause. More cheers.

Starscream bathed in them for the space of several sparkbeats before he forced himself to step back from the podium. The thunderous noise seemed to vibrate through the floor of the stage, and up into his frame.
So this was what victory felt like. And he hadn’t even had to kill Megatron to acquire it.

Starscream turned away from the podium and Blurr was there to greet him. He was smiling, his optics bright with something akin to pride, and there in front of all and sundry, he pulled Starscream into an embrace, chaste though it was. It felt like a claim, a public acknowledgment that they were more than just political partners.

Starscream’s spark fluttered.

“That was great,” Blurr murmured into his audial, giving him a squeeze. “Even better than the rough draft you showed me.”

“Well, you had some good advice,” Starscream replied as Blurr drew back, though taking his hand in the process and squeezing it.

Blurr winked. “I do have some experience with handling crowds, remember?”

“I do.”

“Star!”

He turned to greet Jazz, who had the biggest grin on his face. The former Autobot stuck out his hand, prompting Starscream to shake it with his free one.

“Good speech,” Jazz said with a flash of his visor. “You almost sounded like ya believed it.”

Starscream gritted his denta. Jazz was becoming increasingly irritating as of late. “That’s because I do.”

Jazz’s smirk widened. “Good ta hear.” His fingers slid free of Starscream’s, though not without a lingering, tacky slide of his energy field. “Now I gotta get ta work before my boss fires me.” He winked, and then he was gone.

“What was that about?” Blurr asked, leaning in to his side and lowering his vocals.

“A warning,” Starscream bit out. He squeezed Blurr’s hand and offered him a thin smile. “Shouldn’t you get to your bar? It’s going to open soon.”

“We can go together,” Blurr said firmly. He tugged on Starscream’s hand. “Come on. Let Bumblebee and Needlenose say what they want to say. You can help me finish setting up.”

Starscream chuckled. “Sir, yes, sir.”

Behind him, Bumblebee stepped up to the podium. Prowl was not with him, probably a wiser choice as he remained very divisive among the population in New Iacon.

Starscream had read both Bumblebee and Needlenose’s speech, just as they’d read his. He didn’t need to stick around for them, which were more of the same as his: unity, respect, blah, blah, blah.

He’d rather be helping Blurr.

The grand opening of New Maccadams had turned into a huge, boisterous affair. Mechs had been desperate for some kind of return to normalcy, and Blurr’s bar counted as a part of that.

There was an air of infectious glee surrounding the building, which had been highlighted with bright spotlights and music pumping from outside speakers. Blurr had a DJ for the night as Jazz had turned down the offer to perform live.
Every bar was staffed and fully stocked. Blurr even had a few servers roaming the crowds to speed up the process.

Starscream took up a perch at the central bar on the ground floor, ordered a triple-distilled high grade, and made himself available if Blurr needed anything. It also gave him a great view of Bluestreak, happily serving the customers, and Jazz, circling in Bluestreak’s periphery like some kind of poor stalker.

This, Starscream decided, would be a source of ample amusement in the future.

The atmosphere was one of celebration and unity and Starscream reveled in it. He sipped on his high grade, enjoyed the music, occasionally chatted with mechs as they stopped by to speak with him, and waited for Blurr to ask for his help.

Not that it was needed. Blurr had organized this down to the fine details, and the grand opening went off without a hitch. It was well-staffed, well-supplied, and well-managed.

“You look proud,” Bluestreak said as he stopped by to offer Starscream a refill.

“You?” Starstruck chuckled and sipped at the sweet drink, his engine purring.

Bluestreak grinned and wiped a rag over the bar, not that it needed to be cleaned. He hadn’t spilled anything all night. “Yeah,” he said. “Happy, too. Guess everything’s working out for once, right?”

Starscream tilted his helm. Bluestreak’s smile was genuine, his expression open and honest.

But that was rather perceptive of him.

Hmm. Perhaps there was a reason Jazz was interested in this mech.

“Yes,” Starscream replied as he carefully rested his glass on the counter. “So it would seem.” He braced his chin on his knuckles, giving Bluestreak a long, calculating look. “You are an interesting mech, Bluestreak.”

He laughed, and it, too, was genuine. “No. Not really. I’m pretty boring actually. Nothing special about me.” He wiped the rag over the counter again before he turned and tossed it into a bin. “Let me know if you need anything else, sir. I’ll keep an audial out for you.”

Bluestreak answered the summons of a patron and left Starscream alone again at the end of the counter. Amusement flooded his spark as he watched the Autobot work, smiling for this customer and smoothly pouring the mech a drink. If he noticed that someone was flirting with him, it didn’t show.

Amused, Starscream sipped at his high grade again.

Interesting mech indeed.

~

He should have felt exhausted, but instead, a new surge of energy seemed to infect him once the last customer was ushered out and the doors were locked.

Blurr stood there, surveying a very successful grand opening despite the mess left behind, a small smile on his lips, and Starscream felt himself grinning, too. His spark throbbed with a mixture of
affection, pride… perhaps even happiness. Though sometimes he feared he didn’t know how to recognize the last.

“What?” Blurr asked once he caught Starscream looking at him.

Starscream shook his helm. “Just thinking.” He slid an arm around Blurr’s waist, tugging the Racer against him. “Congratulations. I’d say that was a rousing achievement.”

Blurr smirked. “We’ll see how successful I am once someone else manages to open a bar. But yes, so far so good. Thank you.” He leaned in close, lips brushing over the curve of Starscream’s jaw. “Congratulations to you, too.”

“For what?” Starscream’s fingers walked up Blurr’s spinal strut until the found the caudal edge of Blurr’s booster mounts.

“The memorial. The peace. The feeling of unity. Take your pick.” Blurr shrugged but it was far from dismissive. “You’re proving everyone wrong, succeeding where they thought you couldn’t, and I don’t know, I think that’s great.”

Starscream’s spark throbbed again. “I… thank you. That means a lot to me.” He didn’t know if he could vocalize how much.

He leaned in closer to Blurr, brushing their lips together. “How tired are you?”

Blurr chuckled against his lips. “Depends on what it is you have in mind.”

“Not cleaning this mess,” Starscream said with a laugh. He tilted his helm, and listened.

Someone had left music playing. And it occurred to him that he’d barely seen Blurr all night, save for in brief glances here and there. Blurr had been so busy, Starscream spent most of the evening chatting up his patrons and his bartenders.

“Dance with me?” Starscream asked.

Blurr’s engine rumbled. He visibly squirmed. “Uh, I don’t really do that.” His faceplate heated, and pinked at the edges.

Starscream cycled his optics. He leaned back, fully taking in Blurr’s expression. Was he… embarrassed? It certainly seemed like it.

“Well, no one’s watching. And if you step on my pedes, I promise not to tell,” he purred, nipping at Blurr’s chin. “Come on. One dance?”

Blurr cycled a ventilation. “I suppose,” he said, with the air of someone being dragged to their doom.

Starscream chuckled at him. He pulled Blurr onto the dance floor, where colorful lights still sprinkled over the ceiling and walls. Someone hadn’t turned them off yet.

All the better.

The song playing was something Starscream hadn’t heard before. It wasn’t Cybertronian in origin; he knew that much. But it was soft and sweet, and had the kind of slow, swaying beat he was looking for.

If he was going to act like a sappy idiot, he might as well make a full production out of it.
Starscream pulled Blurr into his arms and leaned in for a kiss, one that Blurr returned with a little humming purr of satisfaction. His arms draped around Starscream, his energy field like a secondary embrace, flush with affection and delight.

“Mmm. I’m thinking you had something specific you wanted,” Blurr said against his lips. His fingers teased over the edge of Starscream’s wings. “Care to share?”

Starscream’s hands rested on Blurr’s hips, his thumb rubbing circles into the joints and teasing the cables beneath. “Do you trust me?”

Blurr laughed, his forehelm pressing against Starscream’s. “You know, that kind of question usually means you’re about to ask for something really difficult.”

“I know.” Starscream’s glossa swept over his lips. He cycled a ventilation as his spark throbbed faster. “It’s valid, however.”

Blurr’s fingers toyed with his leading wing edge. “I trust you don’t intend to hurt me,” he murmured. “I trust you with my safety. And I’m trusting you with my spark. So yeah. I guess that means I trust you.”

Starscream brushed his nasal ridge over Blurr’s. “Would you spark share with me?”

Blurr’s field rippled with surprise. He leaned back to look into Starscream’s optics, but of disgust or outright denial, there was nothing in his field or expression.

“I don’t mean a full merge,” Starscream rushed to clarify. “Neither of us are ready for that.” His thumbs swept into Blurr’s hip joint again. “A surface share is enough. I know it’s a lot to ask but--”

“Yes.”

Starscream blinked. “Are you sure?”

“I wouldn’t have agreed if I wasn’t,” Blurr replied and pressed their forehelms together again. His ventilations audibly increased. “Show me that pretty spark, Star.”

“Pretty,” Starscream echoed. “You haven’t even seen it yet.”

“Never seen an ugly one either.” Blurr’s lips brushed over his cheek ridge. “You’re stalling.”

Starscream cycled a ventilation, a tremor vibrating up his spinal strut. He ignored the jagged burst of unwarranted jealousy. Who else’s spark had Blurr seen? It wasn’t any of his business.

“So are you,” he said instead.

Blurr smirked and his chestplates cracked, pale blue sparklight spilling through. Starscream felt the warmth of it against his own armor, and the first tendrils of energy wafted outward, teasing into his seams. He shivered, heat pooling southward, igniting a fire in his groin.

“Your turn,” Blurr said as he rubbed his cheek against Starscream’s.

Starscream’s hands shook where they gripped Blurr’s hip, and he hated himself for it. He hated the fear, the weakness. Spark sharing revealed absolutely nothing, except for the current emotional and processor state. He wouldn’t be opening Blurr to the horrors of his past.

Yet, he hesitated regardless. He wanted it. He feared it. But then, when had he ever run from
Starscream worked his intake and sent the commands to reveal his spark chamber, however minutely. Mechanisms whirred and hissed as primary and secondary armor layers shifted and slid aside, the pale blue of his sparklight peeking through.

Starscream’s ventilations stuttered as every survival instinct screamed at him to close his covers, that he was making himself vulnerable, that Blurr could kill him here and now, and who would blame him? Starscream’s grip tightened, talons scraping against Blurr’s cables, his frame flushing cold.

“I knew it,” Blurr murmured, seemingly oblivious to Starscream’s inner turmoil. He slid back, his mouth sliding down to the seam in Starscream’s chestplate. “Pretty.”

Starscream moaned, and his spark fluttered. He saw the reflections of it against Blurr’s faceplate. Need roared through his frame. He peeled his hands free of Blurr’s hip joint and grabbed his helm, pulling him up into a kiss. He pressed their frames together, felt the tickle of Blurr’s spark energies, and his own spark responded in kind. It leapt forward in his casing, surging toward the electric warmth Blurr offered.

Their glossa tangled. Blurr moaned, his arms shifting to encircle Starscream around the waist, bringing their chestplates into full contact. Only partially parted, they were kept from a full merge, but the tangling of the first outer ring was enough to send jagged waves of pleasure throughout Starscream’s frame.

Heat and affection seared into Starscream’s spark. There was amusement, awe, surprise, desire and even more affection. Blurr’s emotions were genuine, not a shade of untruth within them.

Starscream deepened the kiss, his field rising up and slamming against Blurr’s. His spark throbbed and pulsed, spinning faster, the branching tendrils knitting firmly with Blurr’s. He pulsed hard, and Blurr responded, electric fire racing between them.

Starscream moaned into the kiss, his spark pulsing faster and faster, charge racing up and down his frame faster than he could track. Electric fire spilled out from his substructure, leaping across the bare distance to spark over Blurr’s armor. The Racer’s engine revved, a low whine rising in his intake.

He drew in shuddery vent after shuddery vent, but it wasn’t enough to combat the heat racing through his frame. His legs trembled, knees wobbling, and he locked his joints to keep from falling, unless it was forward, into Blurr’s embrace. They barely moved, only rocking together, chestplates pressed until there was no space between them, their spark energies tangled together.

Like this, Starscream knew he wasn’t going to last.

Blurr trusted him. Blurr cared for him. Blurr’s spark pulsed against his, eager and hungry and content and full of pleasure.

Against that much desire, Starscream had no defense.

His spark flared as he overloaded, a rhythmic wave of charge that flooded against Blurr’s. He felt Blurr tremble, heard him cry out, as the pleasure doubled back in kind against Starscream when Blurr overloaded as well.

The pleasure seemed to sweep him up and swallow him whole, before spitting him out the other side, wrung and sated. He sagged against Blurr, his forehelm pressing to Blurr’s shoulder, his
hands still cupping Blurr’s face. Their sparks were still tangled, the most distant coronas knitted together, but the pulses exchanged were softer, like gentle strokes over the back of his wings.

The music had stopped at some point, Starscream realized. It was now an annoying, pulsing dance beat, and the lights reflected the happy cadence.

“I hate this song,” Blurr muttered as he leaned his helm against Starscream’s. His hands swept up and down Starscream’s back, just as soothing as the light pulses of their spark.

Starscream laughed. It burst out before he could stop it. His hands slid to Blurr’s shoulders and he leaned back, allowing his chestplates to close. Blurr’s did as well, shielding his spark from Starscream’s optics.

It, too, had been beautiful.

“Then why did you program it into the playlist?” Starscream asked.

“It’s popular. Other people like it.” Blurr shrugged. “You know how it is, anything for the customers.”

“Mm.” Starscream made a noncommittal noise. He swept his thumbs inward, stroking over the top of Blurr’s windshield. “Thank you for your trust.”

Blurr’s lips curved into a grin. “If anything, I should be thanking you.” He pressed his forehelm to Starscream’s, giving him nowhere to look but into Blurr’s optics. “Guess that means you like me, hmm?”

“It’s a little more than like,” Starscream said dryly. “I don’t share my berth, my apartment, and my entire building with just anyone, you know.” Or his spark for that matter.

“Maybe someday I can get you to admit what you really feel.” Blurr pressed a quick kiss to the tip of Starscream’s nasal ridge before he drew back, allowing them some cooler ventilating space.

Starscream grinned. “You first.”

Blurr laughed as he eased away, making a beeline for the DJ station and slamming his hand down on the panel. Mercifully, the obnoxious music shut off immediately, though the colorful lights continued to flash.

“Primus, that’s better,” Blurr said with a sigh of relief. He leaned back against the console, boosters and elbows hooked on the edge. “Mess aside, this has been a good day.”

“Careful, you’ll jinx it,” Starscream drawled. He resisted the urge to look over his shoulder for whatever terrible thing might happen next, all because he’d dare to feel happy for a moment.

Blurr smiled at him. “Impossible.” He lifted one hand, crooking a finger at Starscream. “Come here, you. Let’s get started on claiming every surface in my new bar?”

“You sure you’re up to that?” Starscream teased as he found himself drawn to that crooked finger and the even more crooked grin above it. “You look a bit tired there, lover.”

Blurr’s glossa swept over his lips. “I’m sure.”

Starscream’s spark did that flutter-surge thing again. He probably ought to get it looked at or something.
Tomorrow maybe.

Because Blurr was right. All in all, today had been a pretty good day. Starscream wasn’t used to having those.

He slid into Blurr’s arms and stole his lips for a kiss, pressing him hard against the DJ console. If Blurr wanted to play, then Starscream would. He hummed as he deepened the kiss, fingers sliding into seams for a lingering stroke as Blurr moaned beneath him.

And tomorrow, Starscream decided, tomorrow would be a good day, too.

Nothing could hold him back anymore.

Nothing at all.

Chapter End Notes

It is finished! -throws confetti-

Wow, it’s still hard to believe how far a single little prompted drabble could have taken me. 45 chapters later. Wow. And it's been a fun, feelsy, self-indulgent ride.

Thanks to everyone who has been reading, commenting, and enjoying this! A HUGE, MASSIVE thanks to ladydragon76 for their betawork and helping me smooth out some rough edges, and to theaircommand who helped me when I got stuck in some plot swamps and kept me motivated. Without these two lovelies, this fic would have lingered in in-progress hell (like so many others, RIP me).

I do have a sequel (or two) in mind, and I've got the skeletal outline already. If I can get out of this horrendous writer's block/funk, I'm going to get started on it. But it'll be awhile.

Anywho, thanks muchly everyone!

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