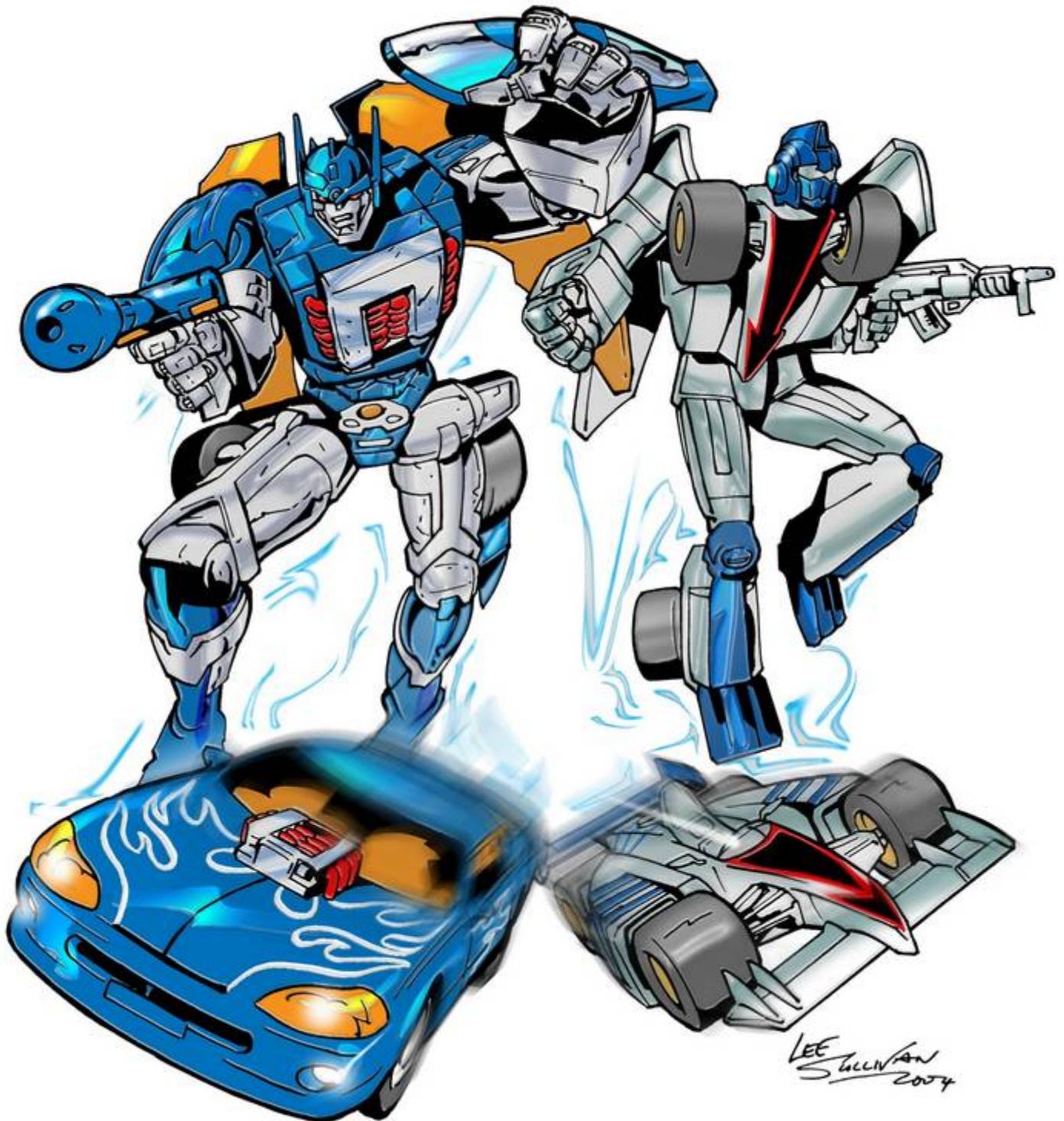


CYBERTRONIAN TIMES

THE OFFICIAL FANZINE OF AUTO ASSEMBLY

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

David Kaye and Bob Forward
Interviewed!
Simon Furman Writes!

**TRANS
FORMERS**

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Introduction

Hi and welcome to the sixth issue of the Cybertronian Times, available exclusively as part of registrations at Auto Assembly 2004.

I am proud to say that every issue of The Cybertronian Times up until this point has sold out, which makes it a better seller than the Star Trek and Amiga zine stable mates that were put out by us at Infinite Frontiers. I hope you enjoy the zine and would like to appeal for letters whether they are to ask questions or comment on the zine itself. We really do need all the feedback we can get to continue to improve CT.

I am afraid the balance in this issue may have been upset a little by the lack of TransFormers: Unlimited content (well at least at the time of writing...) as it was supposed to be in the delayed comic, the shift to full colour and having to re-examine the way the mag is presented due to these changes.

I would imagine that most of you will be reading this after Auto Assembly 2004 or possibly whilst having a brief quiet moment at the event itself, in which case I hope AA2004 has been enjoyable and we look forward to seeing you next year.

THANKS!

Finally I would like to thank a few people;

Firstly our AA2004 guests; Wally Wingert (Side Burn and Mirage from RiD), Simon Furman (Comic writer and Beast Wars episode writer), Andrew Wildman (comic artist), Lee Sullivan (comic artist), Jane & Jo from Metrodome (G1 TV show DVD producers), Alex from Maximum Entertainment (RiD TV show DVD producers), Simon Williams and the Atari reps we are expecting to show us the new Armada based game for the PS2 – a big thank you to them for giving up their weekend for the fans.

A second thanks goes to Wally for the voice work on the site along with his friend, Neil Kaplan (RiD Optimus Prime).

A massive thank you goes to Simon Plumble for essentially running the event for me with very little interference from me whilst allowing me to overview essentially all the creative aspects of AA, CT and TransFormers: Unlimited (I promise Simon that now things are a bit more settled, that I will have more to do with things next year!).

Thanks to the contributors to this magazine - Pete Billingham, Simon Chiddington, Keith Cooper, Andrew Hettig, and last but not least, Simon Furman for his article and Lee Sullivan for the brilliant cover art!

Thank you also to the websites that helped spread the word about AA2004, especially TransFormers At The Moon (<http://www.transformertoys.co.uk>) and TransFormers.Net (<http://www.transformers.net>).

The following people have also helped out both visibly and behind the scenes on things to do with Auto Assembly 2004 and CT, be it directly or by keeping me, especially, sane; My wife Claire and my three, suddenly into TransFormers, children – Sophie, Will and Daniel, my father, Tony, my mom, Ann, my brother, Stefan plus Tim Smith and Matt Jackson, and all the silly sods who volunteered to help out at AA itself.

A final thank you goes out to everyone who has registered for Auto Assembly 2004. We are grateful to you, as without you AA would never have got past the first event, and unlike other events, especially those for science fiction fan bases, we intend never to lose sight of the fact that our job as organisers of an event such as AA is to do our best to make the event as enjoyable as possible for you, our attendees!

See you all next year!

Sven Harvey

"Megatron: Terrorize!"

**David Kaye Interviewed
by Simon Plumbe**

We were fortunate enough to be able to interview Transformers voice acting legend David Kaye recently following his involvement with this year's Auto Assembly and our charity auction.

Simon: First, could you tell our readers something about yourself?

David: Oh man!! Well... I was born in Canada (Peterborough, Ontario) I'm of Welsh/English and American Decent. We reside in British Columbia in West Vancouver and also have a place in Los Angeles as I find myself travelling between the two cities quite a bit. I love skiing (POWDER!!) I'm a bit of a gym rat and also love tennis... Oh yeah, I do some voice acting too.

Simon: When did you realise that you wanted to become an actor?

David: I basically fell into it. I guess when I was in radio years ago, I felt there was something more out there for me. I acquired an agent due to a bit of a fluke (commercial modelling course of all things) he sent me out to an audition for G.I. Joe. I landed the part of General Hawk. From there on in I was exposed to "the industry." Started theatre, got some on camera exposure, a few small parts which led to larger roles and more voice work. I also started a business providing station identification and promotional branding for radio and television around the world. That keeps me insanely busy everyday too. I must say I'm very happy with what I do for a living now. It's a blast.

Simon: Which would you say that you get a greater sense of satisfaction from doing? On-screen appearances or voice acting?

David: VOICE ACTING!!!!!!

Simon: Do you tend to watch your own work after it is broadcast, studying it critically and do you ever feel that you could have done things differently?

David: Of course. I'm never completely satisfied, but there are times when I think...."cool, that sounded awesome." I LIKE those moments.

Simon: You have a wonderful talent for performing a fantastic range of accents. Do you have any particular favourite dialects to speak in or use for characters?

David: I love Irish, Welsh, British and slight Spanish accents as well as the southern drawls of the various regions of America. That's always fun.

Simon: Are there any roles - on screen or voiceovers - that you have turned down or would refuse to take?

David: Well, on camera I won't do anymore reporter roles. I bore easily and I've done my share. In voice, mostly I've turned down things because the money just isn't there. I love to do as much as I can. It's all fun.

Simon: You've done a lot of work for voiceover work in advertising. Are there any products you would refuse to advertise?

David: Obviously if it were for the KKK or Al-Qaeda, I wouldn't have anything to do with it. Otherwise I'm open.

Simon: Were you familiar with Transformers before being cast in the role of Megatron?

David: Not really

Simon: Aside from Megatron, who would you say was your favourite character from Beast Wars?

David: Tarantulas. He's just a FREAK !!!!

Simon: The reaction from fans to Beast Machines was lukewarm at best. Did you or any of the other cast have concerns while recording it?

David: YESSSSS!! I thought we lost the humor in the writing of that particular series, but just the same it was a cool looking show.

Simon: After doing Beast Wars and Beast Machines, were you surprised that you weren't cast as Megatron for Robots In Disguise?

David: I don't know too much about that at all to be honest. I guess I WOULD'VE been surprised if I would have known. ARMADA came along and we were back at it. Energon now of course.

Simon: How have you found the response you have received from Transformers fans to your work on the shows?

David: Incredible. I didn't realize what an impact it has.

Simon: It's been mentioned on your website in the past that you like Megatron so much

that sometimes you even think that you ARE Megatron! Would it be safe to say that he's your favourite of all of the characters you have portrayed?

David: YESSSSSS...again

Simon: Do you think that it's more rewarding to play "bad guys" rather than heroic characters?

David: Sure. There are a lot of different personality levels to a guy who thinks what he's doing is for the best even though WE all know he's a nut case.

Simon: Of all of the characters you have portrayed so far, both on-screen and in terms of voices, what would you say was the strangest so far?



David: I did some work early on for Monster Rancher (due to commitments I couldn't continue) that show's just WHACKED !! Some of the characters on that show are bizarre, but in a way loveable too.

Simon: For Japanese shows I know that you have to dub over existing animation, but for other series such as Beast Wars or X-Men Evolution were the voices recorded prior to the characters being animated?

David: Yes

Simon: Do you have much scope to ad-lib when you are recording dialogue or do you have to stick to the scripts rigidly?

David: Sometimes. If the line works and is funny and fits. They'll keep it in.

Simon: In addition to

animation, you've voiced characters for various video games. How would you say this differs from recording animated shows such as Beast Wars?

David: Not much anymore. Doing a video game character is not much different than cartoons anymore aside from the fact that sometimes you have a tremendous amount of prompts to say in a game as it can go many different ways.

Simon: One of the games you have just done is the new Transformers game for the Playstation 2 for Atari. How did working on this differ from voicing Megatron on Armada and Energon?

David: Not different at all except we went into the studio one at a time.

Simon: Apart from specific characters, which of your performances - on film, television or stage - are you the most proud of to-date and which is your least favourite?

David: On camera I'm uber critical, but I did have a funny moment in CARPOOL as a "reporter" nonetheless. It was just kinda funny. First take and they printed it. Behind the mic Megatron/Prof. X most notable. On stage I love doing the play "Harvey." I don't have many moments I want to forget. Even if they did seem sub par to me at the time, it's all part of my unfinished life story and it's fun to see it play out before you.

Simon: When you're doing voice work for a series, do you interact with other cast members or is it usually a case of recording your own dialogue in a studio on your own?

David: We interact together in a series normally. But there are times (adr, separate sessions) that we don't see one another so you have to have the director read the line before you and then react or just give your best reaction after reading the previous line yourself.

Simon: Looking at your resumé, a large portion of your on-screen work seems to be in the sci-fi and fantasy genres. Is this an area you have a particular interest in?

David: No, not really just luck.

Simon: When you're not working in the studio, what do you tend to do to unwind?

David: I hit the gym, swim in the pool, try and relax. Reading is good too and just spending as much time as I can with my family.

Simon: Would you have any advice for any budding actors thinking about getting into the business?

David: Give yourself some time and develop your "ear" skills. You need to be able to direct yourself. You need to know if what you just did can be improved upon. It's tough to do, but crucial. Any acting classes, Shakespeare, other classics, modern classics, plays. Whatever you can do to expose yourself to the industry is good.

Simon: Thank you for sparing your time for this interview.

David: Not a problem. Sorry it took soooooo loooong to get done.



Auto Assembly 2004 Guest Profiles

We are incredibly fortunate this year for Auto Assembly to be joined by more guests than ever, including our first ever voice actor. We thought it was probably a good idea to introduce you to some of them...

Wally Wingert

Born in Des Moines, Iowa and reared in the Great Plains of South Dakota, Wally developed a love for performing at an early age. From elementary school through High School, he kept busy writing, perfecting impersonations and developing a repertoire of characters. Wally became a regular in school plays and talent shows.

In Wally's late teens, his dream was to become a Muppeteer. Though he never pursued that goal, his puppeteering experience was primarily responsible for getting him his "SAG" (Screen Actor's Guild) card. For in late 1993 he landed an episodic role on CBS-TV's "Murphy Brown." His performance as the irrepressible Kelbo remains one of the most-seen "Murphy Brown" clips ever.



At the age of 16 he entered the only field his Midwestern surroundings had to offer in

regard to making money from his abilities...radio. While DJing, Wally kept his hand at other performing interests; singing, acting, puppeteering and writing. Unfortunately, in South Dakota, making a decent living from performing was an impossibility. So in 1987, at the age of 26, Wally moved to Los Angeles.

Submitting a string of parody songs to the syndicated "Dr. Demento Show" would pay off, because through the help of Dr. Demento himself, Wally was hired at Westwood One Radio Network. On weekends he also worked at a jazz station called The Wave.

In 1989 Batmania swept the nation with anticipation of a new Batman film from Warner Brothers. When Adam West, Wally's childhood hero, was not re-cast as the title character in the film, he spoke out the best way he knew. The song "Adam West" was a parody of the number one dance song "Wild Wild West", and wove a humorous tale of a disgruntled Bat-Fan whose hero was overlooked for the big screen version of the comic book hero. The song immediately went number one on "The Dr. Demento Show," and was in demand by radio stations all over the world. Wally and his "protest" song were featured on a segment of "A Current Affair" and in a "Rolling Stones" article.

Also in 1989, Wally left Westwood One to take a full-time position as air personality at The Wave. After four years, he left the station to pursue aspirations in acting, singing and the field of voice-over.

At the start of 1994, Wally was hired at Universal Studios Hollywood to portray Beetlejuice in the live stage-show "Beetlejuice's Graveyard Revue." Initially, Wally got voice-work in such films as "Batman and Robin," TV shows like "The Fresh Prince," and animated shows like Nickelodeon's "Angry Beaver." Now, his body of work has become so vast he's considered one of the top talents in the voice-over industry. And his resume proves it.

His on-camera TV appearances include "Just Shoot Me," "The Martin Short Show," "The E! True Hollywood Story," "Vicki!," and an

appearance on NBC-TV's "Saved By The Bell; The New Class" as "Daffy" Don Lewis. In film, he's appeared in "The Bogus Witch Project," "Crime And Passion," "Brotha'Hood," and he put in a critically acclaimed performance as Jesus Christ in the award-winning short "Art Of The Deal."

In his on-camera endeavors, Wally is a man of 1000 faces. Drawing on his fascination with Lon Chaney Sr.'s groundbreaking make-up techniques, he utilizes prosthetics, wigs and a wide range of physicalities to make his characters vastly different from one another. It is in tribute to his work that Wally designed The Chaney Room.



Wally has become known to Transformers fans as the voices of Side Burn and Mirage in Transformers: Robots In Disguise and has worked on countless other animated TV shows including the new hit series Astro Boy currently showing on BBC1, Family Guy, Rugrats, and many more and recently voiced the green-eyed skeleton in Scooby Doo 2.

Wally has also done extensive voice work for video games including starring roles in many Star Wars games including the Starfighter series, Enter The Matrix, the Tony Hawks Pro

Skater games, the forthcoming Doom III, and is the lead role in the Maximo games.

Wally's hobbies include collecting animation art, drawing, costuming, collectible toys, rock and roll and beautiful women (not necessarily in that order). He has been active in several charities including the Christian Broadcast Network, the Los Angeles Mission, the Union Rescue Mission, AIDS Project Los Angeles, the Ronald McDonald House, the Jaycees, Special Olympics, various children's charities and others.

Lee Sullivan

Lee Sullivan trained as a wildlife and technical illustrator at Barnfield College, then spent five years as a graphic artist for British Aerospace in Stevenage, England.



He freelanced for a further five years, providing art for the advertising and magazine publishing industries; then in 1988 he was introduced to the comics world by artist John

Higgins. Since then, titles he has worked on include:

Transformers, Thundercats, Deathhead, Doctor Who Magazine (from 1989 onwards), RoboCop (US), Wildcards, William Shatner's TekWorld (US), 2000AD (Judge Dredd; Mercy Heights; Blacklight; Futureshocks; Vector 13, Megazine), Radio Times Doctor Who strip, Marvel UK reprint covers, Action Man, Transformers Armada (UK) and Thunderbirds Magazine (currently).

He regularly produces work for educational and magazine publications and has supplied storyboard art for the BBC and development designs for animation companies.

Some of his most recent work is BBC Cult's successful series of online Doctor Who webcasts: 'Death Comes to Time'; 'Real Time'; and 'Shada' which was written by the late Douglas Adams. He has also returned to the world of Transforming by contributing pencil art to the forthcoming Atari PS2 game mini-comic; this time working for the mighty Wildfur corporation.

In what he laughingly refers to as his 'spare time', Lee continues to frighten his wife, cat and neighbours with an increasingly noisy saxophone fetish, though these days this is increasingly spilling out to venues around the land - see:

www.rockpirates.co.uk and
www.bryanferrytribute.com

He can be contacted at:
LeeSullivanArt@aol.com

and has a website with all kinds of stuff on it:
www.leesullivan.co.uk

Simon Furman

Simon Furman cut his comic book teeth editorially on *Scream!* (a junior horror title published in 1985 by IPC Magazines) and *Captain Britain Monthly* (for Marvel UK), and his first script work - bar a few short stories in UK horror comic *Scream!* - appeared in *Transformers* (UK, issue #13).

While continuing to edit titles such as *Thundercats*, Furman wrote numerous (too numerous to list here) *Transformers* stories and scripts for *Zoids*, *Doctor Who Monthly* and the US-format comic books *Death's Head* and *Dragon's Claws*. Furman then took over the script duties on the US *Transformers* book with issue #56, and has since written *Alpha Flight*, *She-Hulk*, *What If?*, *Transformers: Generation 2* and *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*.

Now working primarily in TV animation, Furman has scripted episodes of *Beast Wars*, *Roswell Conspiracies*, *X-Men: Evolution* and *Dan Dare: Pilot of the Future*.



Andrew (left) and Simon (right)

Andrew Wildman

Andrew Wildman graduated with a degree in Graphic Design from Leicester Polytechnic, and after working as a designer for a few years moved into the world of comics, his artwork appearing in various Marvel UK titles such as *Ghostbusters*, *Thundercats* and *Galaxy Rangers*.

Work on the UK *Transformers* comic followed, and shortly thereafter Wildman moved over to the US equivalent (as of *Transformers* #69), remaining as regular artist throughout the rest of the book's run. Firmly ensconced at Marvel US, Wildman worked on a number of their titles, including *GI Joe*, *X-Men Adventures*, *The Hulk*, *Spider-Man*, *Venom*, *Force Works*, *Fantastic Four Unplugged* and *Spider-Man 2099*. Wildman also drew *NightMan* for Malibu Comics. A significant period of work on *ACTION MAN*

followed with art chores for many issues of the comic, two Christmas annuals and many illustrations for the style guide.

Ever looking for a new challenge meant a move into the computer games industry. After 3 years as Head of Art and Graphics at UK based computer game company Rebellion where he designed characters and ingame graphics, Wildman returned to the world of freelance illustration working on children's books and comics. Having completed a run on the Panini published TRANSFORMERS ARMADA and the six issue Dreamwave book TRANSFORMERS: THE WAR WITHIN Wildman is now working in the animation industry. Character designs for a new children's TV animated series, LEGEND OF THE DRAGON have been complete and new projects beckon.

Simon Williams

Simon is a professional comic illustrator, who has worked on such titles as Panini Comics' Transformers Armada, Action Man, and most currently Spectacular Spider-man Adventures. He is currently in talks with Metrodome DVD, to produce artwork for their upcoming Transformers boxsets. His artwork, including Transformers work can be found on his website, <http://soulmaninc.freewebspace.com>.



His next ambition in comics is to bring back the original Death's Head, who he has already managed to sneak in a

cameo in a recent issue of Spectacular Spider-Man!

Metrodome

Jane Lawson (pictured) and Joanna Moher from Metrodome will be back with us again for their second visit to Auto Assembly and will be filming the convention to appear on the G1 Season 3/4 DVD box set!

Joanna is responsible for production and distribution and Jane looks after marketing for Metrodome. Jane has worked for Metrodome Distribution for five years and looks after VHS and DVD marketing.

Metrodome are an independent film distributor and their output is extremely varied, everything from feature film, classic stage productions to kids and of course Jane's favourite -Transformers.



They are pleased to be at Auto Assembly again and will around all weekend to answer any questions and listen to any suggestions you have for improving their DVDs.

Finally, we are also being joined for the weekend by Alex Mitchison and David MulQueen from Maximum Entertainment. We hope you'll make all our guests feel welcome.

Creating The Ultimate Guide... by Simon Furman

About this time last year I was approached by Simon Beecroft at [publishers] Dorling Kindersley, who asked me if I'd be up for writing **Transformers: The Ultimate Guide** for them. He followed up with a copy of **Superman: The Ultimate Guide to the Man of Steel**. I was impressed. Great design, very colourful; a real, substantial, coffee table-type book. But I wavered. As lovely as the (sample) book appeared, it looked like something else as well... a LOT of work!

Most books start life as a manuscript, a stack of typed paper or a Word file. Not so with the DK Ultimate Guides. Because design and illustration are paramount, that's pretty much where they start. Each spread is planned, designed and laid out before a single word has been written. That seemed a strange way around to me, and I could immediately see the potential limitations. What if a particular section or picture plainly required more text than had been allowed for? What then? Was I going to be word-counting every step of way, continually trimming every block of text, every caption?

The more I thought about it the more monumental the task seemed. Six generations (at the time, Energon seemed a distant prospect, perhaps just a footnote) across 144 pages, of which maybe eight made up the front and end matter. That left 136 pages, 68 spreads. I was right. It was a LOT of work, and I was very busy otherwise (with *The War Within*, *Armada*, *NecroWar*, *Wildfur*, *Titan*, etc, etc), did I really want to take on such a colossal undertaking on top of all that? In the end what swayed me was the thought that another author just end up talking to me lot anyway? I may as well do it myself and get paid!

So I took it on. And boy, was I ever right. It was an awful lot of work. First the book's overall structure had to be nailed down... how many pages for this, how many for that? And then how the book would progress... in external generations, by story evolution, by toy release dates? Would it be done as if the world of TRANSFORMERS was a complete

fictionalized entity or a product, packaged, marketed and sold (in a variety of media) over a number of years? Once I'd wrestled with that for a while and decided that no one approach would do, could accurately tell the whole story, and that I'd have to drop in and out of the fictional world and the real world as the book demanded, I then wondered how to unite the disparate continuities... the TV storyline, the movie, the original Marvel US and UK comic books and the new Dreamwave saga. And what to do with *Robots in Disguise*? A few 'cheats' would definitely be needed, and a degree of plain honesty. Powermaster Prime, for example, was dropped squarely into the realm of an alternate reality, and Armada was billed as an entirely new continuity.

In the end, after much agonizing and deleting and reinstating I produced a breakdown which looked something like this extract:

pp8-9: Title: GENERATION 1

pp10-11: **Cybertron** ((map of the world, key locations, internal cutaway*, planetary history))

pp12-13: **Iacon** ((key locations, the Prime lineage))

pp14-15: **Civil War** ((outbreak, energon, early skirmishes, key battles, casualties, war timeline))

16-17pp: **The Ark** ((threat to Cybertron, Ark schematic and cutaway inc. Autobot shuttlecraft, crash-landing/awakening, reconfiguration))

And so on, right through Generation 1 (the bulk of the book) to Gen 2, Beast Wars. Beast Machines, RiD and Armada (and ultimately Energon, forcing us to scale back other sections, RiD in particular). That initial breakdown was then expanded to include specifics for the new illustrations that would need to be commissioned and looked something like this:

pp8-9: Title: GENERATION 1

pp10-11: **Cybertron** ((map of the world, key locations, internal cutaway*, planetary history))

*Cutaway to feature, in descending order: planetary turbines/engine room (from TWW #2-6), the Dome of Vector Sigma (TWW #4, p2-3) and the Matrix Well (TWW vol2, #1), at the very core of Cybertron.

pp12-13: **lacon** ((key locations: The High Council Pavilions, Chamber of the Ancients, Stellar Galleries, The Tower of Pion (all TWW #1-2) and Maccadam's Old Oil House (TF Target 2006 -- Titan), the Prime lineage))

Even then some of that was refined further. For the Cybertron map (as it became, rather than a cutaway) I literally drew it out in rough (based on every specified location I could find) and passed it on to the artist with a key. Next step was to go into fairly minute detail, spread-by-spread, picture-by-picture, text by text. So...

CYBERTRON (p10-11):

INTRO TEXT

Box-out 1: PLANETARY HISTORY (visual ref: opening page of The War Within, vol1, issue #4), charting the origins of the planet as a giant, space-going vessel, non-inhabited).

Box-out 2: Expanded view of THE WELL OF ALL SPARKS (visual ref: TWW, vol2, issue #1, p22) and text.

Box-out 3: Expanded view of the Decepticon base at KAON (visual ref TWW, vol1, issue #1, p2-3) and text.

Box-out 4: Expanded view of the SONIC CANYONS (a/w needed), see accompanying description.

Box-out 5: EVOLUTION (visual ref: TF Dark Designs, Titan, 'The Power and the Glory p6), creation of the TF race.

After that, and maybe three or four day long meetings at the DK offices in London to nail

down what we had and hadn't got by way of visuals and gradually refine the page plan and initial spread designs, I actually started writing. First run spreads would come through dressed in Latin and missing this or that image, with notes on what was needed, and I would start to piece together the jigsaw of text to be inserted into sharply defined areas. I tried to make the text flow across the spread, developing as if a continuing story was being told (albeit in fragmented pieces). I did word counts of the Latin dummy text, tried to match those with my actual text. Rarely did I get it spot on. I'd turn in something like this intro to TV season 3:

Season 3's thirty episodes followed directly on from *Transformers: The Movie*, focusing entirely on the future cast. Here, TV series and comics go in radically different directions, each establishing their own distinct origin of the TRANSFORMERS. Certainly, there's little relation between the occasionally pantomime villain version of Galvatron in the TV series and the spitting mad engine of destruction in the comics, hence the problems when Marvel UK had to run an adaptation of the Season 3 episode, 'The Big Broadcast of 2006'. The entire season was originally aired (not always in the right order) over two months in late 1986, and generally divided fans, many of whom pined for the classic Generation 1 characters. Though technically counted as Season 4, the three-episode 'Rebirth' story, which introduces the Headmasters and Targetmasters, is included here...

And it would be refined and trimmed (either by me or Simon B) to:

The 30 episodes of Season 3, which aired over two months in late 1986, followed directly on from *Transformers: The Movie* and focused entirely on the future cast. Here, the TV series and comics go in radically different directions, each establishing their own origin of the TRANSFORMERS. Certainly, Galvatron in the TV series barely resembles the spitting-mad engine of destruction in the comics. Though counted as Season 4, the three-episode "Rebirth" story, which introduces the Headmasters and Targetmasters, is largely an extension of Season 3.

And so it went, right through the book. The planning, the research (trawling through books, comics, toy guides, DVDs, the Internet, talking to Ben Yee a lot), the writing (I started with the first spread and worked my progressively through the whole book, regardless of how threadbare some spreads were looking... so as to get a real sense of evolution going) and the refining (endless requests to cut and pad and fill this cranny or that nook, or add a caption here or there), the proofing (reading every bit of printed text line by line, word by word) took nearly three whole months (if you were to lump it all together), a huge chunk of my working year.

I'm glad that I didn't know then (back when Simon Beecroft offered me the job) what I knew by the time it was all done. I probably would have turned it down flat. I'm very pleased to say, though, that the final printed and bound book was worth all the pain and late nights and fear... if ever a project had to be factually correct and crowd-pleasing, it was this one (my rep depended on it). I'm glad I decided to take it on. It's something I'm very proud of. Hope you enjoy the end result.

Simon Furman
April 2004

The TransFormers Unlimited Comic by Sven Harvey

Several years ago when I started the Cybertronian Times, I really wanted to have a full comic strip for the stories I wrote, and even though I managed to draw a single page for the first issue and the odd bit and piece for later issues, it was clear that neither was I a good enough artist nor had the time to draw the strips.

I did however continue to develop the TransFormers Unlimited universe (formerly "Alternative TransFormers") through the stories I wrote for the Cybertronian Times 'zine. Simon suggested the idea of breaking TransFormers: Unlimited out into its own comic just after Auto Assembly 2003, and I was sceptical to say the least. I felt that I may lose control of "my baby" as it were, as it was clear that I wouldn't have time to write all the

stories or do the artwork for such a publication.

However using a writers guide or bible would ensure that a few basic rules could be followed to try and maintain the route that I wanted for the continuity. A preliminary version of the writers bible was made available to interested parties a while ago and two stories to my knowledge have already been submitted. However the big sticking point has been artists, or rather the lack of them. Currently we have no-one willing to draw entire strips for the comic, and as a result the comic isn't ready for Auto Assembly 2004, and currently the plan is to release the comic half way between Auto Assembly 2004 and Auto Assembly 2005.

However we need a lot of help. We still need stories and most assuredly need artists to draw the strips. The biggest drawback here of course is that this is all just for fun, and no profit can be made from any unlicensed TransFormers publication - though Hasbro did give permission many many years ago for fanzines to be produced so long as they don't make a profit and no-one is paid. Infinite Frontiers is itself a non-profit making organisation and any money that was raised from a comic would be ploughed back into AA 2005, and in turn any money made by AA 2005 would be donated to charity once all the costs are met. As a result of all of that we can't go around hiring artists to produce the comic, and need voluntary contributions of time from artists to produce the comic strips and artwork for the comic. What do you get in return? Well the satisfaction of your artwork appearing in a publication (that's actually a bigger thing for your ego that it may sound, trust me!) plus if you are in the market to try and get some work as an artist, having a copy of the comic in your portfolio won't hurt.

So in short:

ARTISTS: WE NEED YOU!!!!

By the way, Andrew Wildman just happens to be doing the cover art for the first issue if you'd like to have your work seen alongside his!

TransFormers: Binaltech by Sven Harvey

There have been rumours, literally for years that Hasbro and Takara were developing a plan to bring back the styling of the original TransFormers toys from 1984-6 when the main toys the grabbed peoples attention the die-cast Autobot cars (the likes of the original Smokescreen and Jazz were still in the range in 1986 in the UK whilst they had been dropped in the USA).

Admittedly looking back, though the vehicle modes on these toys were brilliant, they weren't exactly huge toys (Sunstreaker, Trailbreaker and Hoist being the biggest) and their robot modes were usually utterly unposeable from the waist down. Surely with 21st Century technology we could at least get TransFormers at a similar standard? Then there was the problem of licensing. Hasbro had real problems with a certain car manufacturer when Side Burn hit the shelves from the Transformers: Robots In Disguise line, and things these days are a lot more complicated as car manufacturers have learned to tightly control the use of facsimilies of their models as not only can money be made from licensing, but they can control the quality of products that are being sold with their designs or logos on.

Of course this means a lot of negotiations, so it was with a little surprise that in early 2003 a prototype of a Subaru 2003 Rally Car that transformed into Smokescreen appeared on websites around the world and started making the worlds TransFormers fans drool...

This was a Takara prototype for their new BinalTech line, with a good amount of die cast metal making up a damn good chunk of the toys construction, similarly to the original Autobot cars that grabbed all that attention back in the mid-eighties. But this new Smokescreen looked bigger and a darn sight more poseable than what had gone before.

The moment it was made clear that the toy would be released in Japan, I sorted out my order – in fact I decided to get two as there was a variation – as Subaru had a team with two cars out on the rally circuits, Takara did

two versions of the release – one with a number 7 and one with a number 8 with the appropriate driver and co-driver names in the right places.

Soon after I placed my order for the Japanese version I was dismay to find that Hasbro would soon release the toy themselves. Thinking that I was wasting money, I almost cancelled my order. I am glad I didn't as it was soon revealed that the US and eventual UK versions of the toy would be 100% plastic.

This was a huge let down and is the major if not the only difference between Takara's Japanese TransFormers: Binaltech and Hasbros American (and European) TransFormers: Alternators.

Smokescreen

It really strikes you that this is quite possibly the best 1/24 scale 2003 WRC Subaru Impreza you can get (in fact I recently tested this by popping into a couple of model shops – the die cast models at this scale simply aren't as detailed as this Autobot!). The MOST IMPORTANT detail however is the fact that there is something missing, that has never been missing before from a TransFormer disguise mode. There isn't a single graphical suggestion ANYWHERE on Smokescreen's car mode to suggest he is an Autobot. Not a single Autobot symbol, nothing. The only time that he gives himself away is if you look under the bonnet to find the crimson Autobot logo on the engine of transform him.

Along with Smokescreen himself in the box is the instruction manual with full colour sections, a bioprofile and tech specs card plus a full colour flyer for the TransFormers Generation 1 video game from Japan. Its also worth noting that the instruction booklet also contains a little bit about the Binaltech story (which has been adapted for our very own TransFormers: Unlimited storylines.)

Smokescreen's transformation is complex and fiddly and is all the better for it, this is what TransFormers should always be about! The balance is perfect too the transformation

is difficult, but the end result is certainly worthy of it! The only drawback is that the die cast parts by nature are a little prone to paint chipping – but that can be dealt with by simply being careful with the toy, and lets face it its probably going on display in the living room in one mode or another.



The styling of the robot is undeniably G1. In fact the best way of describing this toy is that it is what G1 would have been today if TransFormers had been coming out now for the first time using brand new technology for the moulds.

Smokescreen's robot mode is stunning. The figure is very well articulated, allowing a wide range of poses, thanks to multiple ball and socket joints as well as a full set of elbow and knee joints! The head is sculpted to closely resemble the TV show representation of the original Smokescreen, which in turn was based on the toy, but with an extra flange around the bottom of the head to help distinguish the character from Prowl and Bluestreak.

The scale of Smokescreen does rule out the possibility of poseable fingers, but both the thumbs and index fingers are semi-poseable, which allows a little more emotion to the poses, and better positioning of his rifle, which adds to the look of the robot mode.

The die cast metal construction gives the figure a great deal of stability, which the Alternators version simply doesn't have. Next to each other, though probably not noticeable from photos or when the toys aren't next to each other, the all-plastic Alternators version does look a lot more "flat" than this superior Japanese release.

When this arrived, I was surprised by the weight, and highly impressed by the car mode, and the robot mode is the coup-de-grace. The only worry is that the Binaltech range peaked too early as was difficult to see how anything could top this! (Ok so Streak managed it just...) BinalTech Smokescreen is one of my favourite Transformers releases of all time. I can't really recommend this release enough!!!

One word of warning though is that the UK Alternators release really isn't up to par with the Japanese release. It's the same design, but isn't as well balanced as the die cast version and certainly doesn't look as good.

Lambor

BT-02, the second release in Takara's Binaltech range is a red viper, and is an upgrade of the G1 toy that was released as Sideswipe in the US and UK. There is a degree less plastic in the construction of this release compared with Smokescreen, but its still quite substantial. Having said all that its still a degree better looking and weighted than the Alternators Sideswipe which is his all-plastic American counterpart which we pay get eventually, depending, I guess, on whether the Viper car actually gets released in the UK, as is the current plan for late this year. As it stands at the moment the information from Hasbro UK suggests that our next Alternators release will be Silverstreak (more on him later!)

Sideswipe as I will call him, being as Lambor means little to the readers of this magazine I am guessing, arrives in vehicle mode in packaging very similar to that of Smokescreen. The vehicle mode is of a soft-top/convertible Dodge Viper SRT-10, with the top down and no way to give him a roof. This would be OK except for the cardinal sin of putting an Autobot insignia on the cover for where the soft top roof would be stored – highly unnecessary! To add insult to injury rather than a more normal number plate as with Smokescreen, the single rear plate on Sideswipe says “SIDE SWP” with another Autobot logo in the middle. Suffice to say that he really isn't that well disguised!

The vehicle mode is good, and the transformation satisfyingly complex, but I have to say that Sideswipes robot mode is nowhere near as good as Smokescreens. One real niggle with the robot mode is the fact that he can't be stood up straight. This is due to the way the front grill of the car folds behind the feet, and is quite annoying.

He is however very poseable, and again as with Smokescreen the visible engine part comes out to transform into his weapon, but its with Sideswipe that you start wondering where the shoulder mounted missile launchers have gone that were the staple of the original Autobot cars. Again though you do have to say that this toy is better than the original Sideswipe, if only based on the fact that his legs can be posed...



Streak

To be named Silverstreak when released as an Alternator, this is essentially G1 Bluestreak brought up to date. As a Subaru Impreza WRX Streak is based on the road-going version of the car that Smokescreen is based on, again just like in G1 as both characters back then were very similar Datsuns (Nissans).



I was quite worried when I received Smokescreen that he couldn't be topped, but Streak is better. The removal of the racing graphics from the fusilage is quite pleasing to the eye (as is the silver livery), but coupled with the change in physical detailing, and, indeed, more detail on the head sculpt, the whole figure is enhanced just a little - but frankly there is no excuse to not have both Streak and Smokescreen!

Hound

The logical update of the G1 Jeep would be as a Jeep., so armed with a license from Daimler Chrysler whom own Jeep, the brand new 2004 Jeep Wrangler got Autobotised.

Ironically the Binaltech version of Hound is the tallest of the Binaltech toys, in robot mode, thus far produced which is in sharp contrast with the fact that G1 Hound was by far the smallest of the Autobot cars released!



However the release has a couple of drawbacks. The gun is miniscule and gets lost in the overall profile of the robot, looking more like a pea shooter than a powerful side arm or rifle. Also of concern is the lack of articulation in the arms. There is severe restriction on the ball and socket joint that appears to hold the arm onto the body, and Hound just doesn't stand right especially next to Smokescreen or Streak.



Tracks

Tracks couldn't really be anything other than the new 2004 Corvette! The images of Tracks

suggest he will very much resemble the original G1 Tracks, but in a yellow livery.

Dead End?

A re-tooled version of the Viper, this time with a roof, was first shown with an Autobot logo on the robot chest as a test shot leaked onto eBay, but Hasbro then piped up and revealed the mould with a Decepticon logo on the chest and named the mould Dead End for the Stunticon from 1986. However its pretty clear that this should have been Sunstreaker from the head sculpt. Now Hasbro have repeatedly said that they would be releasing Decepticons in the Alternators range, but they would be based on cars. Takara have said no such thing, and though some online retailers importing the Takara releases have assumed that the Japanese Binatltech version of the mould will also be Dead End, the existence of a version of the mould with an Autobot symbol on the chest suggests that the very Sunstreaker looking head may not be as much of a red herring as current thought.

Sunstreaker?

The first few pictures of the altered Viper mould leaked out via eBay, and featured a red-ish colour scheme, and a very clearly Sunstreaker-like head as well as the obvious Autobot logo on the robot chest. Could a Japanese release of this altered mould as Sunstreaker be on the cards?

Meister?

The Mazda RX-8 gives the Autobot secret agent a new form (shouldn't he be a Porsche or an Aston Martin?), but it is Hasbro that have suggested a name in one of their Q&A sessions. The Meister moniker will mean little to most people, but it is in fact the Japanese name for Jazz. Of course trying to copyright Jazz is a little difficult (for the G1 reissue the full name "Autobot Jazz" was used).

Mustang?

Ford's Mustang is another USA car that means little to us and little to the Japanese. If a license has been set up with Ford how about sorting a few licenses with their

subsidiaries – Jaguar, Aston Martin and Land Rover (Brawn anyone?)

My thought on the Mustang (and bear in mind no names have been suggested as yet), is that thanks to the influences on Hasbro in that the name Wheeljack should be a Decepticon name, that a dark coloured Mustang would fit Wheeljack...

Rollbar or Swindle?

A tan coloured version of Hound would work well as the G1 Combaticon, Swindle, but its also possible that the Throttlebot may also get a makeover... Mind you the Swindle toy was released in RID as a Decepticon Military Combiner using the name Roll-Bar... Confused?

Honda S200

Very recently, a Chinese Hasbro distributor let it slip that they are expecting an Alternators toy based on the Honda S200, which will undoubtedly be released in a die-cast edition in Binaltech first! There is of course the usual speculation on the net as to the eventual name and Cliffjumper seems to be the main runner.

Future?

Well the future for Binaltech looks more than bright. The original plan was for 6 cars each used twice with retooling to create a line of 12 characters. Of course we now have a confirmed line up of 7 cars with even further rumours and the secondary characters for each car on well on track. The questions that do some to mind are who are going to be the repaints for the remaining cars – the Mazda RX-8 in black as Stepper? The Corvette as one of the other Stunticons? Plus there are the other licenses that are said to be in the works. Nissan Micra as Bumblebee anyone? The European car companies seem to be generally unimpressed with the idea, but with Ford entering the fray and MG Rover interested in anything like this from what I am told by the Longbridge faithful, coupled with the ludicrous success of Binaltech (and Alternators) suggests there are far more to come.

There are other factors that may be looked into as well. Nothing stands in the way of a third or even fourth retool and recolor of any of the designs and lets face it a retool and Met livery paint job of the Streak/Smokescreen moulds would provide a damn good Prowl! Takara also seem to be reluctant to repaint the Binaltech cars as Decepticons, which Hasbro definitely is doing. Could it possible that the Viper retool could be Dead End in the USA and Sunstreaker in Japan? There are also suggestions from Japan that Takara are so happy with the sales figure for Binaltech so far, as well as Masterpiece Convoy, that they may well be looking into the possibility of capitalising on the success and unlike Hasbro seem to have their eye on a long term plan, and possibly get themselves a bit more in the way of input into the forthcoming Transformers live action film... Takara may well keep the Binaltech series very much alive even if Hasbro bring the curtain down on Alternators, though this may prove difficult without Hasbro's financial muscle.

In short, long live BinalTech!

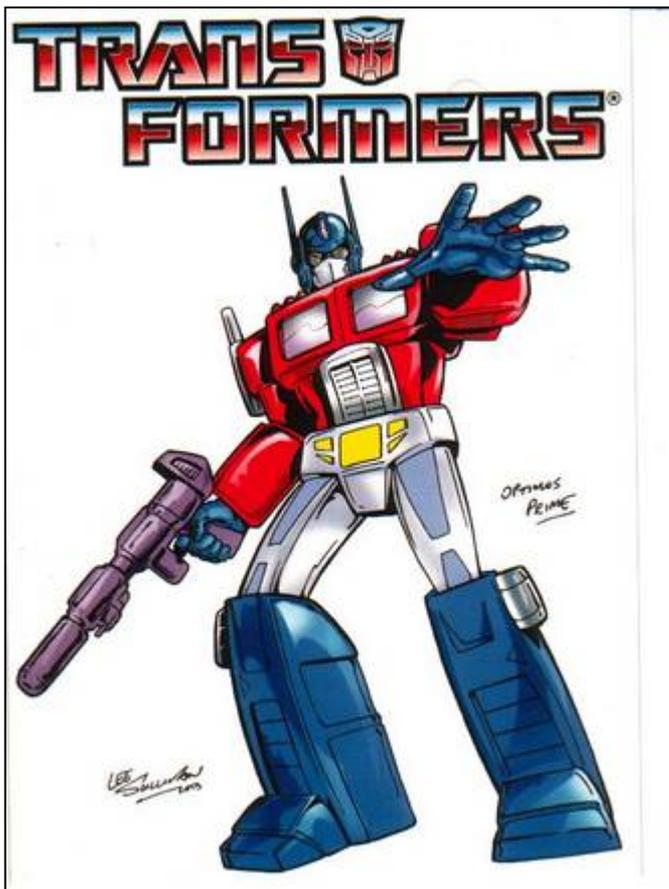
DVD Reviews

G1 - Season 2, Part 2 (Region 2) Reviewed by Simon Plumbe

Metrodome have just released the second half of G1's second season onto DVD in this 3-disc box set and once again they've produced another packed set with plenty of UK exclusive extras to back up the episodes.

This three DVD set contains the remaining episodes from G1's second season, a set of postcards featuring brand new artwork from TF comic veteran Andrew Wildman, plus a brand new comic commissioned for the set.

On inserting the discs, you immediately notice an improvement from the first half of the season. The menus have been improved and feature better animation, seem easier to navigate and are generally better on the eye. The improvements aren't by any means major but it is noticeable.



(One of the AA2003 exclusive postcards - the only way you can get the complete set!)

Picture and sound quality is superb as it was in the previous release and all the episodes have been digitally remastered. The sound has been remixed and there is an option to listen to it in 5.1 surround and while not everyone prefers the new sound mixes on the episodes, I think the new versions sound fantastic and is a vast improvement over the original.

There are instances where the picture is grainy or there are colour problems although this is primarily down to the original sources and Metrodome can't be faulted for this. Considering the source material, the quality is excellent.

At times while watching the episodes there are times where the picture does become blocky for a moment due to MPEG encoding problems. However, this is something that most viewers won't notice and it is something that you will encounter with the majority of DVD releases. I guess I'm a bit picky when it comes to things like this!

Then we have to come onto the episodes themselves and I have to be honest and say that overall they are pretty awful. G1 was never the strongest Transformers show on TV, but it did get progressively worse as the show continued.

The first season wasn't too bad, and the first half of the second season was okay, but it went downhill rapidly. There are some truly atrocious episodes here and very few of merit.

I have to say that this box set contains some of the worst 25 minutes of television that I have ever seen in my life! Some of the worst examples start off on Disc 1 and include **"Child's Play"** where Optimus and several other Autobots and a group of Decepticons travel through the Spacebridge and end up on an alien world in a child's bedroom as part of his toy collection.

Sadly it gets worse with **"Kremzeek"** where the entire episode revolves around the Autobots chasing after a creature composed out of pure energy whose entire vocabulary consists of the word "kremzeek". Yes, as hard as it is to believe, this episode actually features a character that is more annoying than Wheelie!

Still with the first disc and we then get **"Sea Change"** where the Autobots encounter an underwater colony and Seaspray gets turned into a human! And just when you thought that it couldn't get any worse, the second disc carries on with more of the same...

"Auto-Bop" is probably the most cringe-worthy on the second disc and sees Blaster and Tracks heading off to a disco where they discover a Decepticon operation to control humans through subliminal signals in music - an interesting idea if it wasn't for the idea of seeing the Autobots actually ON the dance floor!

And finishing off the "highlights" of the turkey-shoot is **"Hoist Goes To Hollywood"** where Hoist ends up becoming a star in a Hollywood movie. Need I say more...?!



mixture of parts of different characters, you get nothing. Fairly simple and you'll get bored of this after one or two goes.

Just two other things on the disc. One is a video trailer for the Transformers game for the Playstation 2 from Atari which looks absolutely stunning and the remaining feature are scripts to the episodes in this set. Unlike the previous set, this time the scripts are all on the disc as a DVD-ROM section as PDF files so you can read them at your leisure rather than trying to read them off the screen. This was something that Metrodome were criticised for last time and it's refreshing to see that they have responded to the fans comments.

You can't fault Metrodome for the episodes on this set as they are only releasing what exists and from a collectors point of view, it still makes for an essential purchase to complete the collection. Credit must be given to them for really making the effort to offer a great all-round package with a good selection of original UK sourced extras, postcards, a comic and more making this a great purchase... if only the episodes weren't sooo bad!

The extras on Disc 3 go some way towards making up for the episodes, but even a couple of discs full of extras probably couldn't compensate for them completely but once again, Metrodome have delivered the goods and done us UK fans proud.

Some of the Special Features will be familiar to those of you who purchased the previous set, and others are brand new this time around. Once again there is a Fan Art Gallery, but this time it has been expanded considerably with a lot more artwork and a much better control system. You can now move through the images at your own pace and it's all the better for it.

The Quiz is back again and although there is no reward this time for completing it, there are a lot more questions this time and there is even a question on there about Auto Assembly! That definitely gets a "thumbs up" from me there!

There is now a Transformers Game added to the disc which is a fairly simple affair and seems fairly random. Just press the play button and if you get the timing right a picture of a character will appear in a window on screen. If the picture is of a complete character, a clip will play. If the character is a





Masterpiece Convoy Vs 20th Anniversary Optimus Prime by Sven Harvey

I am not going to attempt to review either of the releases here, but as undoubtedly they will be on sale at Auto Assembly, a quick guide to the differences may be a good idea.

The Japanese release, Masterpiece Convoy has full length smokestacks, and a clean pristine and brilliant paint job. Add to this the great instruction booklet and superior box and you have a great package.

Convoy's main drawbacks to some are the price (usually a good deal more than the USA release) and the fact that many don't like the grey gun and prefer the black gun that comes with most of the USA released versions made available thus far.

come with the more accurate black gun, but to be honest as it still has the light blue insert in the rear of the gun just like the Japanese version but the contrast on the American one is too great.

Major pluses for the Hasbro version are the cost - it's usually a bit cheaper than the Japanese version and the suggestion from Hasbro UK that the release will finally get a UK release, but not until next year.

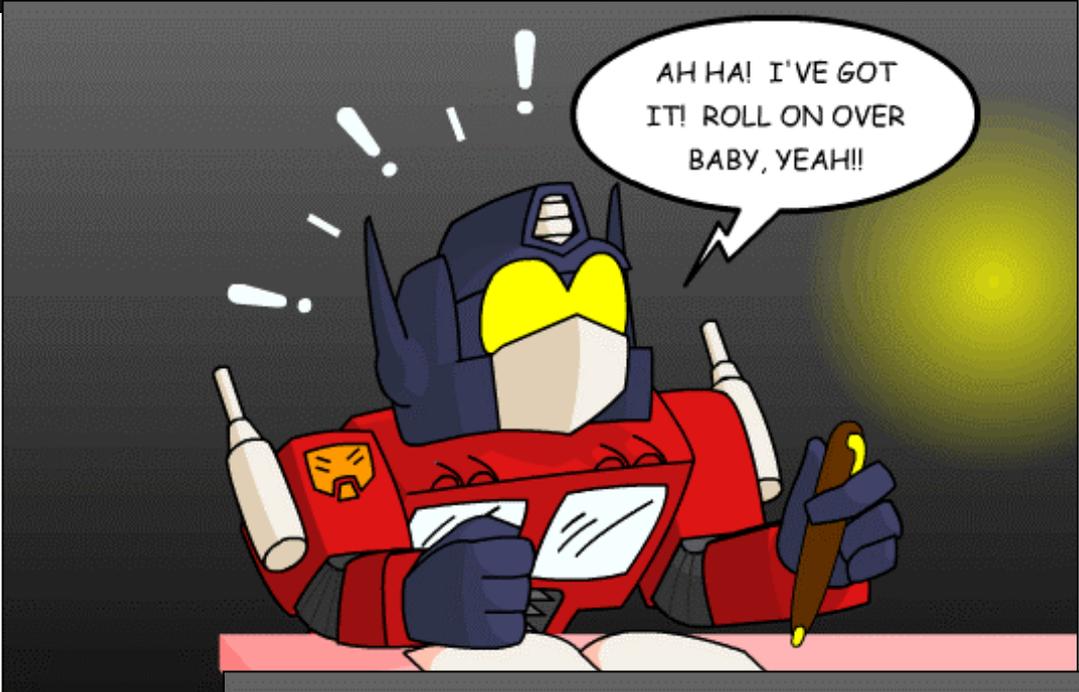
There are a couple of nasty drawbacks on the Hasbro version though. The smokestacks have been cut off, very similarly to the reissue of the original Optimus Prime toy that Toys R Us had exclusivity on. The other problem is that Hasbro for some bizarre unknown reason have sprayed Prime with a "battle damaged" look.



You probably get the gist of which I think it better, but if I were you take a look at both and make your choice. Being as the Japanese version is in a closed box - here is a pic of the insides to help you compare;

Happy hunting!

The USA release – 20th Anniversary Optimus Prime is pretty much the same release, comes in a window box, and in some cases comes with a poster. Most of the units also



Bob Forward Interviewed! by Simon Plumbe

Bob Forward is a legend amongst Beast Wars fans, being one of the Story Editors on the show, and responsible for some of the series' finest episodes including the stunning three-parter, "The Agenda". Bob spared us some time recently for this interview...

Simon: Bob, can you tell us a bit about yourself?

Bob: 45, married, two kids, two dogs, one cat, six computers. If you do the math, apparently the dogs need computers of their own. Actually, I often work on two or three at once. Numerous hobbies and obsessions, including amateur filmmaking, editing, and blowing stuff up. Shameless plug: check out www.detonationfilms.com for some of the work the kids and I have been doing.

Simon: With Larry DiTillio, you were a Story Editor on Beast Wars. What does being a Story Editor involve?

Bob: Many people ask that. Numerous executives have believed that they can be story editors by simply giving writers notes and getting new drafts until the script is to their satisfaction. Sometimes that works. Usually it doesn't. You can't beat a comedy writer into being a good action writer and vice-versa. The scripts tend to lack continuity between episodes, and the notes/rewrite morass is a killer for schedules. Many times they have had to hire new writers to take over for a previous writer, which kills the budget and introduces a whole new set of problems. This is why a story editor is valuable.

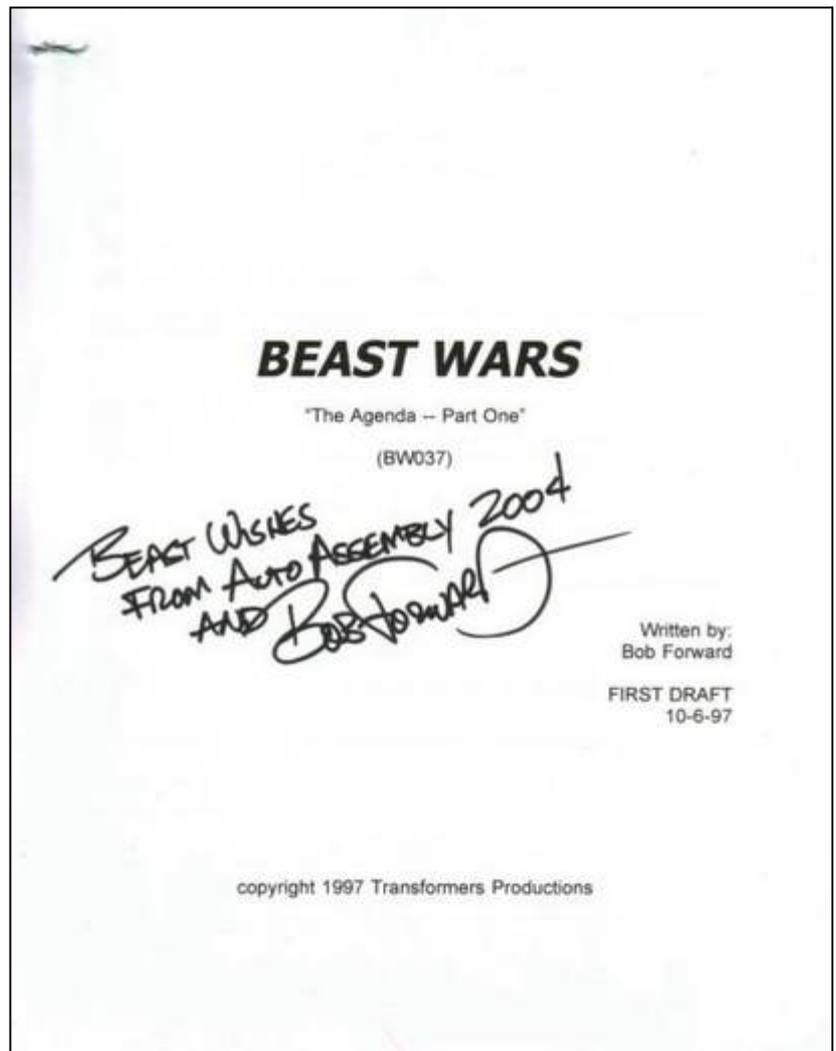
The story editor works out the arc, maintains the continuity, and will often hire a good comedy writer to write an action script because the story editor knows that he himself can plus up the action, and thus the script will be better for the joint effort. And above all, the script will be on time and on budget. No matter how many rewrites

it takes, the story editor does them as part of his job. And it will be on time. Larry and I have had writers flake on us with less than a day before the script was due & I've pulled all-nighters to write the entire script by the deadline, and I'm sure he has as well. This isn't unusual. Almost any story editor out there will have similar stories. And the story editor does that as part of the set fee.

Thus the script budget is set in stone, and the executives are free to concentrate on other aspects of the production, simply giving their input as they see fit and knowing that the story editor will see to it that their desires are implemented.

Simon: There are numerous references and links in the stories themselves to the original Transformers in Beast Wars. Was this intentional, or was it intended as a way of keeping G1 fans interested?

Bob: Actually, it was because there was just such a wealth of rich Transformers history out



there, and it seemed a shame not to utilize it. Really a win/win situation as far as we were concerned. It enriched the stories and helped give the whole series depth, plus brought a whole new generation of viewers into the whole TF mythos.

Simon: Reading the script to "The Agenda", you made a reference to Frank Welker in your notes. Obviously you're aware of the original series, but were you a fan?

Bob: Neither Larry nor I knew much about the original series when we started, but with the help of willing fans like Ben Yee (www.bwtf.com) and others, we were able to get a crash course not only in G1, but with excellent guidance in what were considered the most important issues by fans in general. We knew that Frank Welker was greatly respected and thus that note was put in the script, since we considered it to be an important issue.

Simon: Beast Wars, in terms of storytelling and dialogue, is undeniably the most mature of all of the Transformers series. Was this a move to separate Beast Wars from the original Transformers series?

Bob: Really it was simply how Larry and I wanted to write the series. With the limited number of characters we had available to use, we had to give them depth and maturity just to keep their characters growing. If it separated it from G1 (where they had a cast of thousands) it was unintentional.

Simon: There were countless contemporary references throughout the series. Whose idea was this?

Bob: That just grew from the writing. We had to assume that the characters were all speaking Cybertronian anyway, and that we were hearing a translated version, with references adjusted accordingly.

Simon: Early on, there was quite a dramatic change to Waspinator. He went from a Predacon warrior, to cannon fodder. Was there any reason why this happened?

Bob: Time! Waspinator's speech pattern drove Larry and I nuts, because we were required to use him in every episode but his buzzing drawl ate screen time and meant we had to cut important things elsewhere. To solve this while still staying within the letter of the requirement that he be in each episode, we took to slugging him early. This turned out to be such fun that it rapidly became a running gag and one of the highlights of the series.

Simon: The voice cast for Beast Wars seemed particularly strong. Did that help you in any way with writing the episodes?

Bob: Oh yeah. Once we learned that the acting (both voice and in the excellent animation work) could be relied upon to sell a point, we could push for stronger moments, knowing the actors and animators would be able to carry it off.

Simon: Do you have a favourite character, or a favourite to write for?

Bob: Dinobot and Megatron. But Optimus, Blackarachnia, and Silverbolt were close seconds.

Simon: Any favourite episodes?

Bob: "Code of Hero" and "The Agenda".

Simon: In Season Three, a number of new characters or variations on existing characters were introduced such as Optimal Optimus, Transmetal 2 Cheetor, and Transmetal 2 Dinobot. Was this your idea, or were Hasbro influencing the stories in anyway to coincide with new toy releases?

Bob: These characters always came from Hasbro. Part of our challenge was finding ways to make them work.

Simon: Were you given the opportunity to be involved in Beast Machines?

Bob: Nope. That was entirely Bob Skir and Marty Isenberg.

Simon: Beast Machines was generally disliked by Transformers fans. What did you think of it?

Bob: I only watched one episode. I think that Bob and Marty were trying very hard to keep something going, but Larry and I had ended the Beast Wars saga pretty definitively so they had their work cut out for them. I think they would have had better luck (and probably would have preferred) to start with entirely new characters. I also think they were being kept away from the fans due to new Hasbro concerns after the leaks that occasionally happened in BW, and this prevented them from utilizing the rich resource we'd had to draw upon.

Simon: Have you ever attended any Transformers conventions, and if so how did you find the reaction from the fans to your appearance?

Bob: I've been to several, and I've always been overwhelmed. Writing can be a very solitary experience and you don't always realize what a far-reaching effect it can have on the audience.

Simon: It's been five years since Beast Wars ended. What have you been doing since then?

Bob: Dan Dare, X-Men: Evolution, and of course Agent 12. (Time for another shameless plug! www.detonationfilms.com)

Simon: What projects are you currently working on?

Bob: "Thunderbirds"! And "The Return of Agent 12". Good luck with Auto Assembly 2004!

Many thanks to Bob Forward for sparing some time for this!

"The War Reborn, Part 2" by Andrew Hettig

(This is the conclusion to the two-part entry to the writing competition from AA2003.)

The two abruptly awoke thanks to a noise that was all too familiar - a low humming sound.

"Scourge," the man said, a large portion of displeasure was served in his voice. He turned to look at his daughter, she was already awake, "Stay in the cave," he said showing her his open hand before withdrawing his two guns once again and heading outside. Maria followed to the mouth of the cave but she never stepped out, sure enough, there was Scourge hovering just outside.

"There you are," he bellowed, "make a fool of me will you. I'll show you," The man brought his arms up, but was not ready for Scourge's next attack.

A secret compartment opened on his left side revealing a small gun that shot the man's weapons out of his hands. Maria gasped, then her eyes darted for a split second to the left as she thought that she had seen something, something that looked like a cloud of dust, she then focused on her father who was clutching his smoking hands.

Scourge laughed, and then parts of the hover craft began to flip over and under one another, parts twisted round and back on themselves and in about three seconds Scourge the hover craft had become Scourge the robot. The gigantic menace looked down at the man. "Puny flesh creature! I'll crush you into pieces!" He then brought his hand back then he thrust it forward towards the man.

"NNNOOOOOO!!!" Maria called out as she feared the worst for her father. Scourge's arm abruptly halted, accompanied by the sound of metal hitting metal. The Decepticon looked at his arm - there seemed to be a blue hand holding it keeping it in place - Scourge's face had anger written all over it.

"Grrrr. Who dares to-" Scourge had swung his head around to look at the 'fool' who dared to halt his attack but when he saw, his expression changed abruptly to one of fear. He could not believe his bad luck. The man looked up, he could not believe his good luck and Maria had no idea what was going on - this was all new to her.

All three of them saw the same thing. It was another robot, larger than Scourge in both size and proportion, with a red and blue colour scheme. Thanks to, what seemed like a metal plate over his mouth, only his eyes and a small part of his nose were visible on his face, and a small red face emblem decorated his left shoulder. Scourge made the fatal and foolish mistake of trying to punch his adversary in the face. With his free hand the assailant, grabbed the Decepticon's incoming attack. He then let go of the menace's other arm and grabbed the one that had attempted to strike him.

"You can tell your leader," he said in a voice that was gentle and yet authoritative at the same time, "that the Autobots have returned." He then spun a hundred and eighty degrees and let go of Scourge's arm. The Decepticon was sent flying into the distance until he was no more than a tiny speck.

"Wow," said Maria as she exited the cave, "Good arm!". She and her father could not help but notice that the Decepticons had quickly been driven away by the Autobots surprise attack. The one who had saved the man looked down at him.

"Are you alright?" he asked. The man looked up.

"Yeah, I'm fine and thank you," he paused to smile, before ending his sentence with, "Optimus Prime." the Autobot leader's optic sensors widened for a brief moment then returned to normal.

"But how?" he said.

"You don't recognise me do you?" the man said. Optimus took a closer look.

"You seem familiar though you are not in my

data banks." the man chuckled.

"Don't worry, I'll explain everything later, but-" Optimus showed him his palm in order to silence him.

"One moment please," the Autobot said before raising to his full standing height, "Go ahead," he said through an intercom. To Maria and her father it looked like he was doing nothing, Maria walked over to her father.

"Who is that?" she asked in a whispering voice.

"Optimus Prime, leader of the Autobots," he whispered back.

"What's he doing?"

"Talking."

"Intercom?"

"Right," Optimus then looked back at the two humans.

"Oh, hello," he said as he had not acquainted himself with Maria yet, "and who might you be?"

"I'm Maria, it's very nice to finally meet an Autobot."

"Well hello Maria, and it's a honour to meet you. So you've heard of us then?"

"Yeah, from my dad, he knows tons of stuff about you guys and the defecti-bums." Optimus chuckled.

"I'll have to remember that name," he said. His voice then returned to its regular tone. "That was Ultra Magnus just now," he paused to look at the man, "I trust you've heard of him?" he questioned, knowing perfectly well what the answer was, the man nodded. "Anyway it seems as though the other Autobots have managed to drive off the Decepticons or-" he paused again to look at Maria this time, "defecti-bums," he said, Maria gave him the thumbs up sign, "anyway all the Autobots have returned to

headquarters so I was wondering if you'd like to come and see them?"

"Oh wow, can we dad?" Maria said, hardly able to contain her excitement. Her father smiled and nodded.

"It'll be nice to see them all again."

Optimus was puzzled by the fact that this supposed stranger had used the word 'again' but this was one of the reasons he had invited him - he felt as though he knew him. "Alright, let's go," Optimus said, then parts of him began to flip over, under, around and through one another, and in about three seconds of twisting and turning Optimus Prime the robot was gone and Optimus Prime the futuristic lorry was in his place. The door on the right side swung open. "Climb in," he said.

Maria and her father did not need telling twice. Both climbed inside, Maria a little more hastily as she was eager to meet the Autobots her father had spoken so much about.

* * *

As they sped through the open land, silence filled the air, save for the usual sounds of nature. Optimus actually enjoyed it, they did not have such things as birds that sang songs or trees that rustled in the wind, they did not even have wind on his home world. After what seemed a long while a voice unfamiliar to Maria, but very familiar to her father spoke out. "Welcome back Optimus," said Ultra Magnus.

"Thank you Magnus," replied the Autobot leader, "One moment, I have a few guests." Magnus and a few other Autobots were puzzled, they had just got to earth and driven away the Decepticons and Optimus was already inviting guests. Optimus directed his next volley of words to Maria and her father.

"Have you two finished recharging? We're here."

"Huh... wha-" Maria said still half asleep. Optimus then opened his left door and the

Autobots saw two humans emerge, the smaller female one was completely unfamiliar, however the other one for some reason none of them could understand was. Optimus quickly transformed to his robot mode. Magnus walked over to him.

"So what's with the humans?" he asked. Prime turned his head to look at him.

"Is it just me or does the elder of the two seem familiar?" Optimus had directed this question not just at Magnus but at all the Autobots currently standing there, and all of them could not disagree. Meanwhile Maria was in total awe, she had never seen anything like this. She felt like a bug compared to the size of this place. She did not usually stare at things for long periods of time but this time was different. She then noticed her father inhaling deeply, then to her and even the Autobots surprised he called out as loud as he could.

"HEY METROPLEX, HOW'S IT GOING?" Maria wondered what her father was doing, just then a deep booming gruff voice, that shook her insides replied.

"NOT TOO BAD, AT LEAST SOMEONE HAS THE DECENCY TO ASK, THANKS," it said.

"NO PROBLEM," the man called back, Maria walked up to him.

"Which one's Metroplex?" she enquired.

"You're standing in him." her father replied.

"Huh?"

"Okay, let me put it to you this way. How do you think the Autobots got an entire city of their scale here so fast?" The penny instantly dropped.

"WHAT?! You're telling me that we're standing IN an Autobot?" The man nodded. "That is way cool!" The man then turned to face the other Autobots. There was only a handful there but it filled him with joy to see even a small amount of them again.

"Hey Kup, can't wait to hear some of those

stories again,"

"Well thanks," the elderly Autobot replied, "Wait, have I ever told you any of my stories?"

"Many times," the man's reply only fuelled the Autobot's curiosity as did every thing else he said. "Brainstorm, still cooking up those crazy ideas? Cosmos, Springer, I can't tell you all how much I've missed you all!" he looked around, "Where's Hot Rod?" he asked.

Springer tilted his head slightly. If anyone else had said that line he would not have taken a single piece of notice, but there was something about the man in front of him saying that line that made it unusually familiar. He then stepped forward, "He's err..." pondering whether or not he should tell the familiar stranger the truth. Optimus then cut in,

"He's still on Cybertron," he said.

"Oh," just then a pink and white Autobot stepped out from behind the small crowd and walked towards the man. He noticed this and his eyes seemed to widen briefly, "Arcee!" he said, before continuing with, "Love the new look!"

"Thank you," the feminine Autobot replied. Just then Arcee noticed something. It was not something that she saw with her optics, nor did she hear it - she simply felt it, a feeling that was strange and yet soothingly familiar. She leaned closer to the man and her voice, with disbelief said, "Daniel?". The man looked straight up at her and said nothing. He simply smiled.

* * *

Elsewhere in the universe, on the distant planet of Charr, deep within the Decepticon city Trypticon, Scourge and Cyclonus were side by side on one knee each with their heads lowered as if they were bowing to royalty. The room they were in was well lit except for the area just in front of them which was covered in shadow. Then a voice spoke from within the veil of darkness, it sounded gruff and yet authoritative at the same time.

"The Autobots have returned?" it questioned. The two Decepticons looked up towards the direction of the voice.

"Yes my lord." Cyclonus replied.

"Fine, it was a lot earlier than I expected but it was just a matter of time before they came back. Oh and by the way. Next time you feel the urge to send one of my best teams after a useless flesh creature, don't."

"B-but he had weapons that penetrated straight through our hulls," said Cyclonus.

"And he took out the entire fleet of sweeps." added Scourge.

"Silence!" the voice said sharply, "You are Decepticons! Act that way. And as for the sweeps," he directed this next part to Scourge, "Use what's left of them for spare parts." The Decepticon tracker nodded.

Just then a purple glow slightly illuminated the dark area, though not enough to reveal the figure's identity. Scourge and Cyclonus both rose and backed away slowly, then it died down again.

"Good," the figure said, "I see your processing units still work," the two Decepticons relaxed again.

"So the war begins again?" said Cyclonus.

"No, the war never ended." the figure said.

"My lord?"

"Fate's processing server has simply downloaded the next chapter, and now destiny has opened the file, and this..." he paused for a brief second, "this is where the story gets..." he paused for one final time before closing his speech with, "interesting." he then began what seemed like an endless chuckle and as he did he illuminated two piercing, sinister, evil sharp red eyes.

THE END - FOR NOW...

A Late Starter And My Transformers Memories by Simon Plumbe

I was what you could call a late starter to Transformers. Sven had been trying to convert me for years, yet when we did our first Auto Assembly event in 2000, I still wasn't really a fan. I had been watching episodes of Beast Wars at Sven's house most times I visited and I have to say that it quickly grew on me, with the strong characters and great storylines, but I still didn't really think of myself as being a fan in the true sense of the word.

By the time Auto Assembly 2 came around a year later, I had started to get into things a bit more, and I had started to own some comics, Playstation and PC games, and even the odd toy... since then, I've got a small corner of my room taken over with a toy display, comics and DVDs everywhere Sven would be proud...

In such a relatively short space of time, Transformers has had an impact on my life and already has a lot of fond memories for me. Probably the one memory that sticks out more than anything else goes back several years ago to when I actually owned my first Transformer - long before I was a converted fan - and once again it was Sven's fault...!

It was my birthday and I was spending it with Sven and another friend, Tim Smith who is looking after the video programme for us at AA this weekend. As a joke, they decided to buy me a Transformer, namely the G2 gobot, Blowout.

As you can imagine, as a big sci-fi fan and Star Trek fan and someone who wasn't too impressed with Transformers at the time, it didn't really become a prized possession! a few years later, I entered into business with Sven and we formed Stellar Dreams and not long after the still unopened Blowout was put into stock.

Over time, my appreciation of Transformers grew to the point that I've now got quite a good collection of approaching 100 toys ranging from G1 (original and reissues) right

up to Energon and I started to regret parting with Blowout, especially as my collection had absolutely NO G2 toys in it at all!

About 2 years ago, Sven bought my half of the business so he continued as a sole trader and when talking recently, I spoke to Sven about Blowout. He walked into another room and emerged a few minutes later holding it. Not another one, but MY Blowout! He had been holding onto it since I put it into stock all those years ago just incase he managed to convert me into a fan.

Granted, it had seen better days and the card was quite worn but it was a great feeling to have my very first Transformer back in my possession.

When Transformers were first released in the UK I was already a teenager so I guess it passed me by first time around, but when I got my hands on Blowout again, I know how kids must have felt when they got their first Transformer back in the 80s.

Preparing for Auto Assembly this year has had a similar effect on me as well. If someone had said to me this time last year that I would have been interviewing people like David Kaye or Bob Forward, being in touch with countless voice actors from all eras of Transformers or even being friends with Transformers voice actors, I would have thought that they were insane, but here I am, just 9 months after AA2003 doing just that!

Having been a Star Trek fan for most of my life, that "buzz" I used to get when I bought new merchandise has long gone, conventions have lost that "fun factor" and things have become so impersonal, but I can see a lot more great memories being forged as a Transformers fan for a long time to come.

This year is the 20th Anniversary of Transformers and it's definitely a year where we've all got something to celebrate, and I'm sure I'll be as enthusiastic as I am now when we are running the 25th Anniversary Auto Assembly convention in 2009!

Energon - A Collector's Guide by Sven Harvey

Transformers: Armada was a huge success in the USA, and equally popular here in the UK, and the follow up was inevitable.

Cue TransFormers: Energon. The storyline puts the action 10 years after the destruction of Unicron in the Armada storyline, along with the apparent death of Mega/Galvatron.

Cue excuse to change the look of all the characters!

The toys have once again reverted to the Beast Wars categories; Basics, Deluxes, Megs, Ultras, Supers and Supreme with the addition of the Armada style role-play price point.

I suspect that the pricing structure in the UK will follow something like; Basics at £5-7, Deluxes at £10-12, Megs at £20 ish, Ultras at £25-30, Supers at £35-40 with the Supreme toys at around £50-60, all depending, of course, on the exchange rates!

The MiniCons have being left almost completely behind as only two MiniCon sets feature in the toy line up along with a few packaged with larger toys (mainly repaints), and in their place is a bit of a shake up of the allegiances.

Terrorcons!

The smallest form of Decepticon in the toy line are the Terrorcons (a term resurrected from Hun-Grrs special team from 1987), which have been created or resurrected by a Quintesson, Alpha-Q who in turn has been reactivated by and is working for a semi-functional Unicron.

The Terrorcons are depicted, in the TV show at least, as hordes of drones sent to siphon Energon from selected targets and deal with those in the way be they Autobot or Decepticon (whom, by the way, are now working together under Optimus Prime). The only Terrorcon in the initial assortment was Battle Ravage complete with G1 homage...

Not Omnibots?

Opposite the Terrorcons as the basic form of Autobots are the Omnicons. Yes, you read that right - Omni**CONS**! What on Earth are Hasbro thinking? The Omnicons are all Autobots, so shouldn't they be Omnibots? The worst part is that they wouldn't be the first Omnibots, as long time TransFormers collectors would know.

In the early years of the TransFormers line, Hasbro and Takara offered three Autobot cars as mail away specials. The three characters, Camshaft, Downshift and Overdrive were essentially older Takara product that were a little too small to release as normal Autobot cars alongside the likes of Jazz and Prowl, but were reasonably expensive to manufacture being similar in construction to the other Autobot cars. Hasbro especially couldn't do a great deal with them as they didn't offer a good option as an assortment (and the idea of doing a three pack hadn't really dawned at the time).

These were the original Omnibots and its especially annoying that the name isn't being used as Downshift makes an appearance in Energon as a deluxe-sized toy (resembling G1 Wheeljack to boot!) Mind you this is coming from the company that seems to have lost records of sales of TransFormers in the UK in 1984...

Energon UK?

Now at one stage we were told by Hasbro UK that Energon should have been reaching the UK in May, but more recently there has been a bit more confusion, as consumers contacting Hasbro directly are being told autumn/winter whilst the retailers are being told end of May. Of course for many multiple retailers, to get stock into outlets for the Autumn would require the initial deliveries reaching them from Hasbro at the beginning of June. Translation - some of the smaller retailers getting stock directly from Hasbro and wholesalers may get the Energon toys during the Summer whilst Argos, Toys R Us and Woolworths should have them in place for the Autumn half term period, just in time for Christmas.

Thus far I have only managed to get my mits on a very small number of the first wave of Energon toys from the USA, so there is a little more detail below on those particular toys than those I have not had chance to see for myself thus far. I have not had the opportunity to avail myself of any of the deluxes so far – and the Aston Martin a-like Hot Shot is of interest, but information from certain suppliers suggest that these will be the first Energon toys to get onto UK shelves, possibly alongside the basics as the Armada basics have dried up pretty much already.

Japan Only?

A couple of releases that appear to be for Japan only are Kicker, a recolour of an old Takara Microman toy that matches the character from the TV show whilst he's in his armour, plus a "standard" version of Grand Convoy (Optimus Prime) that's a Deluxe sized toy, just like the "supercon" sized Optimus Prime from Armada. These two are also being released as a special TransFormers 20th Anniversary and Microman 30th Anniversary celebratory set two pack, but there is no sign of a release outside of Japan thus far, though Hasbro have listed a toy called Kicker in the USA...

Takara also have a special coloured version of the "Deluxe" sized Optimus coming out with a similarly metallic Rodimus which, as with all Autobots in Superlink and Energon of the same size can powerlink combine to create a worst nightmare scenario for Decepticons – the fusion of Optimus and Rodimus into one robot!

As you may be aware Hasbro run a news section at transformers.com with Q+As from time to time, and they have stated in there that they have no plans to release the Deluxe sized Optimus Prime (possibly due to the fact that the "Supercon" sized Optimus didn't sell too well in Armada compared with the other Supercons.

Also very recently announced in Japan is TransFormers Superlink Victory Saber, which has more than a passing resemblance to the Japan only Star Saber G1 toy.

The TransFormers: Armada Cyclonus toy which Hasbro had already recoloured to produce Powerlinx Cyclonus with a Springer-green livery, but to help close the gap between the series in the Japanese market, Takara did another recolour of the mould in a black and white livery along with another recolour of Demolishor for their initial wave.

However Hasbro skipped these two as many stores still had stock of the two Powerlinx editions from Armada running around, and with totally new bodies coming for both, it seemed sensible.

- BASICS -

Divebomb (Eagle)

Another drone from the show, Divebomb is vaguely reminiscent of the original G1 Predacon of the same name, and has a decent enough robot and beast mode, from the images I have seen thus far.

Cruelock (Velociraptor)

I'm sorry but in beast mode this reminds me so much of Dinobot from Beast Wars, its hard to take it seriously as a 'con! The toy looks good from what I have seen in both dino and robot mode.

Insecticon (Elephant beetle)

Reminiscent of G1 Insecticon, Bombshell, the Energon Insecticon looks a bit like some of the insectoid robot toys that were made by other companies to cash in on the G1 beast TransFormers, with seriously Zoid-inspired legs...

Battle Ravage (Panther)

Battle Ravage is a robotic Jaguar which instead of transforming into a cassette as with the original G1 Ravage, turns into a bipedal robot. From a pure fan point of view, it seems a shame that a character like Ravage has been reduced to drone status for Energon, but then again, they may have a commander...

The toy is reasonable, with the form of the big cat being quite impressive, and rather reminiscent of the old G1 animal TransFormers. The transformation is far too straight forward and as a result, the robot mode isn't a great achievement by any stretch of the imagination.



The transparent weapons, as with the other Energon basics, combine to form a larger weapon (which in this case is a little reminiscent of G1 Megatron). Not a bad toy, but considering these guys go around in packs, its probably worth waiting until they are available at a good price before getting your hordes ready – especially as a desert camo recolour is also on the way, at least as a limited release in Japan!

SkyBlast (Jet Fighter)

A very futuristic trans-atmospheric jet fighter, my only real gripe about the toy is the fact that the vehicle mode is a bit too unrealistic and I would be happier if he was more like a current jet fighter. That said, the vehicle mode is well detailed and screams play value, even with the slightly strange looking long needle like gun stuck out in front of the nosecone. The transformation is all twists, with what will be the chest spinning around and revealing the robots face.

The face is a bit of a revelation, as it IS Skyfire from the G1 TV series (who was in turn based on the Jetfire toy but had to be altered due to the Jetfire toy actually being a Bandai Macross toy on loan...)

The robot mode is pretty damn good and poseable, and the energon weapon parts include a gun which combines with two blades (which can be attached to SkyBlast's

wing tips) to form a sword/spear like melee weapon.

Definitely the star of the basic assortment so far, if not the entire of the first wave that I have seen thus far!



Strongarm (Jeep)

Starting off as jeep-like four wheel drive car, which in itself has reasonable play value as a car, even if it does look a little too toy-like for fans and collectors, a simple transformation puts Strongarm into robot mode. To be honest, he's a bit bulky in the body with wimpy looking thin arms, especially as he has such a long weapon(!)

The spare tire from the vehicle mode can wither become battle armour for his arms, or combine with his gun to form a rather nasty looking (in a good way) axe.

Again not, a bad toy – could have been better, but could have easily been ten times worse, but is already scheduled for a refreshing recolour in the Summer in the USA...

Signal Flare (Satellite tracking vehicle)

With a great big gun for an arm, the robot mode is less than inspiring, but one thing I have learned over the years is to not judge a new toy on the images put out by Hasbro! A re-colour of this toy is coming out in the USA too.

Arcee (Motorcycle)

Obviously very much based on the original Arcee character from TransFormers: The Movie, she is a bike. No comments please...



Seriously though I don't think there is any long term TransFormers fan or collector who will pass up getting this toy, as the images from Hasbro show that she looks pretty stunning in both modes!



Energon Saber (re-tooled Armada Star Saber)

Ah, now this is a retool of the set of three Minicons from Armada which either formed the Star Saber or the Dark Saber depending on which colour scheme they were wearing. This time along with a new paint job, all three have had at least a minor change to the mould to make the jets look a bit more futuristic (Energon is set around 2020) as well as new names – Skyboom, Wreckage and Scattor. They are however basically the same figures and combine the same way to form

the Energon Saber. Considering the recolour used for Armada and multiple recolours for Japanese release of the original forms of these moulds, it's a shame Hasbro had to put these out again. They are worth a purchase if you don't have their predecessors though

Perceptor (based on Armada Perceptor)

Highwire, Grindor and Sureshock have had a bit of an upgrade since Armada, now being a more obvious motorbike, a quad bike and a hovercraft of some kind. As in their original forms the three MiniCons combine to form Perceptor as well as having their own individual robot forms.

- DELUXES -

Inferno (Fire Engine)

Big blocky toy alert! Well that was the general response as these images of Inferno were some of the first images of Energon toys to be made available and it really put a few people off.

However as with many "official" toy images, it may not be a fair representation of the toy, and to be honest, the main function of Inferno is usually to be Powerlinx Hot Shots legs.



HotShot (Sportscar)

New improved Hot Shot! The vehicle mode looks rather Aston Martin like, which is always a bonus and the robot mode looks far better proportioned than the neckless wonder that was released in Armada. A recolour is already in the works too.

Rodimus (Fire Truck)

Now talk about improving on the original. Compared with the original Rodimus Prime toy, this is truly brilliant! Depicted in the Japanese storyline at least as Infernos brother, its interesting to note that it combines very happily with the deluxe sized Optimus Prime toy and that a special gold edition of Deluxe Prime and a silver version of Rodimus will be released - definitely something I will be looking out for! One drawback on the toy that is neatly avoided in the official pictures, is the fact that the legs are proportionally very large compared with the rest of the body.



Prowl (Police sports car)

Since when did the police use indy cars or formula one racers? I am not quite sure how they could put the name of Prowl on this, but he has little in common with any of the previous Prowl toys, and I am not awfully impressed by what I can see...

Downshift (sportscar)

Downshift? Downshift?!? Surely this was supposed to be Wheeljack with a paint job and overall look like that!

With a rather generic looking sports car mode, it's the robot mode that is the star here, and it looks damn good.

Starscream

Thought to be a retool of the G2 Smokescreen jet that came as part of the ATB Stealth Bomber set (and was incidentally due to be repainted as Starscream when the larger plane in the set was supposed to be

Megatron). If this is indeed based on that toy. A great deal of retooling has been done on the toy, resulting in a MiniCon powerlinx port appearing in the top of the plane and little details all over the robot mode to make it much more Starscream-like!



Rapid Run

A bright yellow recolour of Armada's Sideways, but now most definitely a Decepticon. Only worth getting if you are a completist or didn't get Sideways.

Demolishor

The new form for Demolishor is far superior to the strange tank mode he had as an Armada toy, though I don't think its quite up to the standard of the Build Team, from Car Robots/RiD.



Snowcat

Due to be the reformatted Cyclonus in the TV show, it's a bit of a come down from being a jet copter. I am not awfully impressed by the toy from the photos to be honest...



Sharkticon

Now more of a great white shark rather than a bulky blob of a semi-fish like thing that the G1 Sharkticon was, Sharkticon looks like a really nasty piece of work, with a very refined robot mode - perfect really.

Slugslinger

Here is another Energon toy that is a pure homage to an original G1 toy, this time the 1987 Decepticon Targetmaster. The jet mode is very very reminiscent of the original Slugslinger twin nose jet, whilst the robot mode appears to be a major upgrade. One to look out for!

Tow-line

What the hell is this? A crap looking camper van that turns into a substandard robot. Hasbro, what were you thinking?

- MEGAS -

Ironhide (4WD SUV)

Oh lord he's chunky. This is a big plastic block of a (mega sized) toy, and looks very much like a toy. Unfortunately the robots head is visible in vehicle form sticking out of the top of the turret next to the main turret gun. So much for robots in disguise then.



After a transformation that wouldn't look out of place on a basic sized toy, you get a big chunky robot. At least the kids like him, but with very basic electronics in the form of a sound chip making a ratcheting noise as the turret moves and a missile firing sound when he fires a missile, he's not really recommended to the adult collectors.

Jetfire

Far too blocky and the shuttle mode just doesn't compare to the Armada version. Oh dear. Not one I am going to rush to buy – just make sure you have an Armada Jetfire – preferably in the original colour scheme.



Cliffjumper

Hmm. Well the dune buggy mode makes me think of the G1 triple changer Autobot, Sandstorm, and by the looks of things Cliffjumper has a very straight forward transformation. Having said all that I know Simon really likes the look of this toy.

Treadbolt

Armadas Scavenger gets the repaint treatment to create Treadbolt with a slightly more realistic yellow and grey paint job. As with Rapid Run, only worth getting if you haven't got Scavenger or you are a completist.

Shockblast



Hasbro can't use the Shockwave name any more, but its obvious who Shockblast is based on. Initially this toy with a heavily Japanese inspired robot form seemed just what any Shockwave fan would have wanted – a new space gun form (a "Star Wars" type strategic defense satellite platform) and a tank mode as well as what looked like a very poseable robot mode. However that gun arm

apparently makes him look very off-balance. A shame.

Mirage

Now this is a very nasty looking robot mode, in the good way – definitely a Decepticon! The speedboat mode is a little outlandish, mind you Energon is set around 2020...



Sixshot

I haven't been able to get a picture of Sixshot to take a look at so I can't really comment on Sixshot here, but I don't think he'll be a six changer like the original!

- ULTRAS -

Ultra Magnus

Armadas Overload gets a re-colour and a set of minicons included for this Ultra Magnus release. If you have Overload, its only worth getting if you want the full set!

Landmine

I am not going to try and work out what kind of vehicle Landmine is supposed to be, but even with a basic looking robot mode, he's at least an upgrade from the Pretender Landmine.

Bulkhead

This helicopter comes with an interesting base unit, but shouldn't he really be called Springer, especially with the helicopter mode looking like it does?



Scorponok

The scorpion and robot modes certainly look the part, but the jet mode is certainly interesting if perhaps a rather inappropriate addition for old Zarak features.



Tidal Wave

Like many of the early Energon toys, Tidal Wave is a re-colour, this time a primarily white version of the same character from Armada.

- SUPERS -

Optimus Prime (Truck)

Oh Prime, what have they done to you? In vehicle mode Prime looks almost OK - the truck cab is a bit weird, but passable and the trailer looks a bit like a four port rocket launcher on wheels, but hey, not too bad. Then you transform him...

The transformation, is again, very simple - the legs swing down, the arms swing out and with a little kibble repositioning and flipping up the head you have the robot mode. Who ate all the Energon Pies then? That has to be the plumpest Optimus in history, and its no wonder that some of the fan community have renamed him Fattimus Prime... They have even given him a mouth!!! Mind you Hasbro did realise the error of their ways and later version of this toy, including, I imagine, the UK issues will have lost the mouth cut out



and returned to a more classic Optimus look.

The trailer is then opened and you realise why others refer to him as Thunderbird prime - nestling within the trailer are four drone vehicles - a

"Mole" like digger, a submarine, a helicopter and a fire engine (its like a roll call of Thunderbirds 2s pod inhabitants!)

The next thing to do is to combine the four vehicles, or Prime Force, with the Optimus Prime robot and the combination is a little too reminiscent of a Megazord from Power Rangers - as each of the vehicles simple fits over the end of each of Prime's normal limbs to extend and enhance them, whilst a cowl flips up and over his head, to make his head look a bit bigger and more like Powermaster Optimus Prime. To conclude the combination,

Optimus' chest opens to reveal a light up Matrix of sorts.



The electronics in the toy as well as giving the light up Matrix also provide a few sound effects, one for Prime's blaster (I assume!?) plus one for each of the Prime Force vehicles.

Again, as with Strongarm and Ironhide, this release is very very toy like, with little to interest a toy collector, with blocky, chunky forms for little hands and little refinement to admire.

Megatron

Megatron? Megatron? Who do Hasbro think they are kidding? Look at the robot mode. This is Galvatron pure and simple. He looks like the original Galvatron, just a bit more deadly thanks to having two cannons instead of one. Oh and he turns into a jet fighter, so you can't really run away either. Bwahahhah! It interesting to note that Takara released this toy in 2/3 scale as Galvatron, without the electronics.

- SUPREMES -

Omega Supreme

Supplied in his huge 16inch robot mode, Omega Supreme decombines into a military vehicle train and aircraft carrier and somehow

is alleged to combine with the Energon Optimus Prime toy...



Unicron

Repainted in dark grey/black with hints of green and red this is the resurrected form of the dark god

- ROLEPLAY -

The role play swords based on the Star Saber and Dark Saber released as TransFormers: Armada toys were quite popular in the USA (though they failed to set the UK alight) so their Energon replacements build on the idea.



They do look like fun. I wonder if that blaster fires water...

For Children Only?

TransFormers: Energon may well be a natural successor to Armada storywise, but

thus far, the toy releases are disappointing. However putting that into perspective, as this is the first year (in the USA) that there are ranges of TransFormers **specifically** for children (ie TransFormers: Energon and TransFormers: Gobots from Playskool) whilst the TransFormers: Universe, the G1 Reissues and TransFormers: Legends Of Cybertron are a bit more generic and TransFormers: Alternators is specifically aimed at Adult collectors (allegedly at least).

The range is being polarised. The Gobots pick up the really young 'uns whilst Energon appears to be aimed at the under elevens. This does suggest a bit of a shift though, as it was at the age of eleven that I **really** got into TransFormers, thanks to the developments in the UK comic (Target 2006) and TransFormers: The Movie, though I had had my Optimus Prime for two years by that point.

It's also a shame that considering that the Alternators are allegedly aimed specifically at the adult collectors, that Hasbro chose to go all plastic as its those self-same collectors who would happily pay the extra for the die cast versions - and do, losing sales for Hasbro to Takara.

Cover Vision by Keith Cooper

Comic book fans have seen a flurry of eighties nostalgia books hit the store shelves in recent years with titles including *Thundercats* and *G.I. Joe*. The comeback of eighties franchises is mirrored by the current trend for nostalgia in many areas of life, such as music. In the mid-eighties one group rose to the top of the UK music charts with three Number Ones and a Number Two in quick succession. This success of this group, *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*, was down to a mixture of bombastic pop which had little depth beneath its admittedly catchy wall-to-wall sound production, clever marketing strategies, a little healthy controversy and the release of multiple remixes of the same songs. The remixes weren't just straight remixes, but often they were brand new orchestrations made in the recording studio with the original song at their heart. The fans

bought all of them, no doubt helping to keep *Relax* at Number One for five weeks, and *Two Tribes* at the top of the charts for nine weeks.

So what does all this have to do with Transformers, you ask, aside from the coincidence that *Frankie* first shot to fame in 1984, the same year that Transformers were unleashed upon an unsuspecting world? Well, it's all to do with the covers.

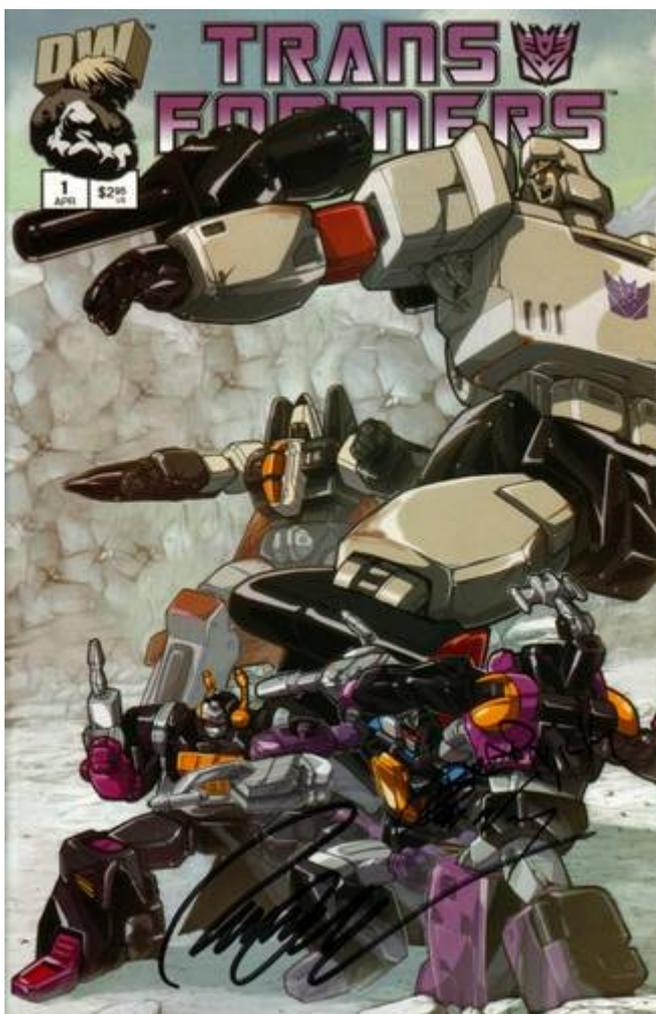
During the original Marvel run of the Transformers comic, there were some excellent covers. But there was only ever one cover per issue. Well, that's what you would expect isn't it? But when Dreamwave bought the rights to produce Transformers comics for the new millennium, they turned this logic upside down, and produced many alternative covers for the same issue. The result was that they stormed to the top of the comic book charts, amazing almost everyone in the industry, and proving that the Transformers still had life left in them as a comic book franchise.

At the end of the initial six-issue run of Dreamwave's G1 comic, they had sold more than half a million comics worldwide. Bearing in mind that Dreamwave were still a small company based in Canada, and their comics were, and still are in some cases, hard to come across outside of Canada or the USA, this was quite an achievement. But many fans had bought more than one copy of each issue, and this helped to inflate their sales, as it had *Frankie's* in the eighties. As a piece of marketing, it was a masterstroke on behalf of Dreamwave.

Releasing alternative covers is nothing new; other comic books have done it, though rarely on the same scale as Dreamwave. Some fans are ridiculed for purchasing all the covers, but they are buying the covers because genuine care has been taken with each one. Whatever you might say about the content on the pages inside, the covers have always been excellent, whether they have been illustrated by Pat Lee, Don Figueroa, Guido Guidi, Andy Wildman or any of the other Dreamwave artists. They are so good, many of them have been turned into posters.

So here is a brief guide to the different covers, and there are a lot more of them than you may think.

Dreamwave's Transformers comic first hit the shelves with their preview issue. A dealer's only edition was available alongside a direct edition. The dealer's version had an image of Soundwave being dug out of the ice (the only cover from G1 Volume One which actually bore any relevance to the story!), whilst the direct edition had a dynamic image of Optimus Prime. When the first issue proper hit the shelves, there were eventually six cover variants.



The first two were the standard Autobot or Decepticon covers showing their respective armies. Another cover was the holofoil cover depicting a battle between the Autobots and Decepticons, and you can still pick this up for anywhere between £5 and £15. The fourth cover is rarer, and could set you back today somewhere between £20-£30, being an incentive cover that dealers were provided with if they bought a certain number of boxes

of comics from Dreamwave's distributors. This pushed the sales figures up even more, as dealers had to purchase a certain number of comics if they wanted the incentive cover too.

The other covers for issue one were for the second and third prints, as the comic rapidly sold out. The second print had Optimus Prime and a vehicle mode Bumblebee on the cover, whilst the third print had a gigantic Omega Supreme fighting with tiny Decepticons. There were also second prints of issue two and issue five, to go along with the standard Autobot/Decepticon covers on the first prints. Some of the covers that really stood out were Jazz, Prowl and Mirage on the cover of issue two, and Inferno and Red Alert on issue six.

With the success of Volume One, a second volume was inevitable. This time there were at least TEN alternative covers for the first issue! The standard covers still came as Autobot/Decepticon versions, but this time they were actually relevant to the story being told. As an added bonus, the standard covers for each issue could be placed side by side to form a larger picture, for example the Dinobots duking it out with the Decepticon Triple Changers in issue three. For Volume Two issue one, the two standard covers could be joined by an incentive cover of Shockwave placed in the middle to create one big picture, which has since been released as a giant poster depicting Shockwave's Cybertronians facing off against Optimus' Autobots on one side and Megatron's Decepticons on the other.

A fourth cover was another holofoil cover by Pat Lee, showing a picture of a battered Megatron floating through space following Starscream's treachery, an image reminiscent of Transformers- The Movie.

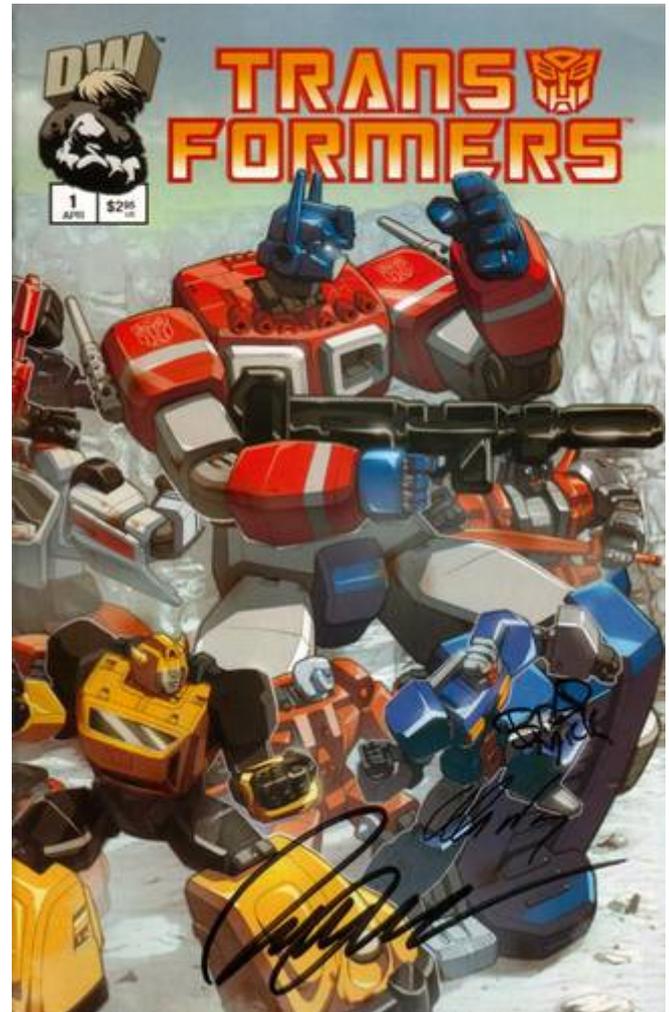
The remaining five are variations of the Dynamic Forces (DF) cover for issue one. Dynamic Forces are an independent company that specialise in doing collectable limited edition covers for existing comic books. So far Dynamic Forces have also contributed to issue one of the G1 ongoing series, The War Within- The Dark Ages issue

one, Transformers/G.I.Joe issue one and the upcoming Micromasters comic (with a cover illustrated by Andy Wildman). For G1 Volume Two, artist Bill Sienkiewicz came up with a stylised picture of Shockwave pounding on Megatron. This is the standard DF cover for this issue. There also exists a foil version, a purple foil version (of which there are only 2,000 worldwide), and covers signed individually by Pat Lee and Sienkiewicz, and together.

The remainder of the Volume Two covers came in the standard Autobot/Decepticon pairing, that is up until issue six when in addition to the standard covers there was also a Pat Lee incentive cover. With only a thousand of these published, it immediately became a collectors item, not only because of its rarity but also because it showed a white, Optimus-esque Ultra Magnus bursting out of his exterior armour, an image that sent fanboy's tongues wagging everywhere. Although the plot point wasn't accepted by everybody, the cover did at least have that added novelty factor.

Now the G1 story has continued as an ongoing series. There were two issue zeros, either with Megatron or an incentive version with Galvatron, though how the spawn of Unicron is going to fit into the Dreamwave story remains to be seen. Again, issue one proper had a plethora of covers, though some of these are a lot more exclusive than others. Fortunately, for the sake of our wallets, there is only one standard cover per issue of the ongoing, like there is with Dreamwave's other Transformers series. Issue one had Jazz in the vicelike grip of Bruticus, whilst there was also a gatefold cover with Optimus, Starscream and various gestalts in the background. Further more, there was a Pat Lee incentive cover of the mysterious character Sunstorm, a special cover done for a Canadian convention, another Pat Lee cover done for the Canadian comic book specialists 'Silver Snail', and the now obligatory DF covers. Subsequent issues are mostly one-cover deals, with the exception of issue four which will see another Pat Lee dealer incentive cover.

The Transformers-Armada comic book has proved to be more sedate on the matter of alternate covers. With the exception of the holofoil cover on issue one, the issue four second print and the issue seven Pat Lee incentive cover with Starscream wielding a sword, there have been no other alternate covers in its twenty-odd book run, not even during its evolution into Transformers-Energon.



Perhaps the reason for this is that Armada and Energon are two of the current Transformers toy lines, and thus children are more likely to buy these comics than they are to buy the G1 comics. The G1 comics are aimed at the older reader who grew up with Transformers in the eighties, and now have their own disposable income and can afford the various covers. Thus, Dreamwave are proving they are sensible when it comes to their marketing, knowing the dangers of marketing too much to young children.

The other Dreamwave Transformers series are Simon Furman's The War Within and the

Transformers/G.I.Joe crossover. The first volume of *The War Within* started off slowly with the alternate covers, providing only a lenticular cover for issue one (which also exists as a signed copy), and a Pat Lee dealer incentive for issue five.

The sequel, *The Dark Ages*, exploded into the world with a number of variant covers for issue one, a wraparound cover by Don Figueroa, a Pat Lee cover with Grimlock and the Dinobots prominent, a Pat Lee dealer incentive portraying the evil new character, *The Fallen*, plus two DF covers, the same picture but coloured slightly different. The DF cover is nice, with the Autobots gathered around a memorial for Optimus Prime, his image softly faint in the background, his eyes either blue or red foil, depending on which variation you get.

The Transformers/G.I.Joe covers also had a number of variants for issue one, but petered out in subsequent issues. The holofoil cover is one of the best of the variants for this series, but unfortunately overall they are perhaps not quite as good as they should be, resembling the murky art inside the comics.

Despite this, Dreamwave continue to release more covers, with five planned for issue one of the *Micromasters* beginning this summer. So far, Dreamwave have released almost eighty Transformers comic books, with a grand total of one hundred and thirty five variant covers. That's almost as many covers as *Relax* had mixes. Well, maybe I'm exaggerating, but whereas *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* split up in 1987, Transformers have outlasted them and the Dreamwave policy of variant covers is proving both successful and popular amongst the fans who like to buy them all. Now, if only my bank manager could agree!

20 Years Of Transformers, 21 Years Of Me by Ian Arrowsmith

As I have grown older the toys may have been sold off and others broken but I have remained a Transformers fan. I have in Transformers something in common with

many people of my generation, and a cast of characters that I have seen develop just as I have grown up and developed.

It was 1984 before Transformers had been correctly packaged and sent out in to the world; by then I was one year old. However I was to wait until I was 3 before I would obtain my first Transformer toy.

Any toy franchise existing for 20 years, two decades, has to be a significant event. Transformers have seen 2 Gulf wars, the fall of the Berlin wall, Britain's first lady Prime minister and many more historical events. A lot happens in two decades. The toys had help though; comics, cartoons, annuals and movies have all served to make the universe of transformers more than just plastic and metal assembled together.

If I were to say that through all that transformers did not shape me one bit in my journey from infant to the young adult I am today, I would probably be making a huge understatement. Of course a lot of it has been subconscious. The large amount of transformers media that has passed my eyes during my 21 years has no doubt affected me in ways that I am not fully aware of. With respect to some things I can only guess as to how I have been affected by the Transformers universe. However I do know of some.

December 1986, Christmas day, was to have a significant influence on my upbringing, something that I have only become aware of in recent years. Like any young child I was excited, Christmas day meant gifts, and new toys to play with. It was a long time ago and I cant remember all the presents I would have frantically unwrapped on that day, for all I know Father Christmas or Santa Clause, or however I was referring to him in those days, had only delivered one gift on that day.

I opened one of my presents to find a Transformer, Sandstorm, a triple changer that could be a helicopter, a sand buggy, and a robot. It was something new to me. Before a car would be a car, a helicopter would be a helicopter and a robot would be a robot. They would each be separate, helicopters flew cars

didn't and neither of them had a face like a robot. Now in Sandstorm they were all combined, no longer did I need to have three toys with me, I only needed one and I could get more enjoyment out of that single toy than the three that it represented. It was more than the sum of its parts. I don't think I have ever been as interested in a Christmas present to since then as I was with Sandstorm on that fateful day.

From then on Transformers were to be my favourite series of toys, someone always had a Transformer I wanted and I could never get enough of them, such is the way with these things, I have never been more influenced as a person than any other toy.

My Father was a diplomat our family would often relocate to different parts of the world; my Transformers toys were one of the few things that could travel with me where my friends could not. In Cameroon I had an impressive collection of Transformers including, Ultra Magnus, Hot Rod, Dogfight and Siren. Siren would actually become the next figure of Transformers to inspire something of me, just as Sandstorm had unlocked a part of my imagination, Siren would unlock something more of me.

Siren, a headmaster, was a toy that I took brought back to England, during a break from our family's travels. I was attending an infant school; it was the last day of term before the Easter break. Each of us was allowed to bring a toy in on that day. I took Siren in with me; he was to be my accomplice for the day.

The time came for every child and their toy to go outside and relax for the rest of the day. Naturally I was somewhat interested in the toys that some of my friends had brought in, some of them were even keen to show me how they worked. Siren however stayed firmly clasped within my small hands as if it were a rope hanging from a cliff in place to stop me falling to my doom. Things settled and everyone was contently playing either in groups or with their respective toys.

A boy approached me, I'm sure he was no different to any boy of that age, sadly today his image has become the epiphany of evil in my minds eye. He wanted to play with my Transformer Siren; I did not want anyone else

playing with Siren. Not through a childhood lack of the concept of sharing, as I had shared Transformers with my neighbour in the past. This was through a lack of trust; I wanted my toy to stay in pristine condition. It was not to be. He fought me for it, and Siren was damaged. It was the first time that I can remember that I have been moved to stand up for what I wanted, and myself. All over a piece of plastic, sounds pathetic, but it is the truth, these pieces of plastic had become more to me than that. With a little help from a cartoon and comic, the toys had come to life. Proud of my victory to have the toy yet sad to have damaged it at the same time, I was a little annoyed at what had transpired, but at the same time I had realised that I now had a voice in this world and people would listen.

It would not be long before Transformers would have a part to play in another milestone of my life. I accompanied my dad to a game of softball in Yaoundé, as I was not playing the game just watching I had brought some toy cars and a Throttlebot Transformer. I played with them, they had races; the Throttlebot was their ringleader it was he who would say when the race would start and where it would go. The car park to the softball pitch became a desert for these cars to race upon. The only break came from when my dad's turn to bat came up.

I had lined all my toys up ready for the next race. While I was watching my dad prepare for the pitch, my back was turned from my cars waiting at the race line. My dad had hit the ball and managed to run off it. I turned around to resume my car's races, only to find that some of my cars were missing. I could see a figure in the distance running away, in that instant I decided to chase after them. I ran and ran and ran but my running had no direction I was just chasing and I didn't know the streets as well as my target did.

Eventually I had a choice to make, run after the boy that had stolen my cars further and risk getting lost in an unknown area, or, cut my losses and head back to the safety of the car park. Being only 6 years old I didn't fancy my chances getting lost in an African city so I stopped. As I stood standing their catching my breath consoling myself that I had made a

good stand for myself, a man approached. He asked me if I had lost some cars in a kind of matter of fact way. I didn't know what else to say so I just said "yes". The man said that he had some of them for me and preceded to pass them to me, he apologised for not being able to give them all back. I thanked him and walked back to the car park. All right so I had learned a hard lesson to look after my stuff, but through that incident I had learnt that people weren't just nasty, they were also nice too, something which was also echoed in the transformers cartoon shows and comics. For every evil scheme that Megatron would come up with Optimus Prime always had a way to save the day.

Time passed, my enthusiasm did not wane. When I moved to Australia, I found out that I could watch the Transformers cartoons when I got home from school. I got into a habit. After a hard day at school in the Australian summers I would come back home to watch some episodes of Transformers.

The episodes added depth to my Toy's personas; after the shows finished I could carry on their lives, with a little imagination, around my house. As I discovered later in life a lot of my vocabulary was developed from watching Transformers on TV. Each character had its own personality and its own way with words, through each of them I would learn ways to express different things. Blaster and Jazz would demonstrate limitless ways to express appreciation of all things musical; Perceptor would introduce numerous scientific terms in to the show.

One day I came across the title in the video store, it was to become one of the movies I have watched more times than any other, Transformers The Movie. It was and is one of the best-animated films I have seen. So I watched this feature over and over again and eventually it occurred to me that I had learnt things from it. I was using words like "reciprocate". Watching the film one day I realised where I had picked up the word from.

Kup and Hot Rod are on the planet of Quintessa

Kup: Watch. I'll have them eating out of my hand: Bah weep granah weep nini bong!

Hot Rod: Bah weep granah weep nini bong?

Alligaticons: Bah weep granah weep nini bong!

Kup: See? The universal greeting works every time. Now, without making any sudden moves, offer them an energon goodie. (Kup opens a metal box and feeds energon to the Alligaticons. Hot Rod proceeds to also.)

Hot Rod: This is getting expensive.

Kup: Don't worry. They'll reciprocate.

(The Alligaticons make hand gestures to request more.)

Hot Rod: I thought they were supposed to reciprocate. No more.

Kup: Empty.

(The Alligaticons capture Hot Rod and Kup and lead them to a structure. A small orange car - Wheelie - witnesses the event.)

Kup: Reminds me of the Nitith Slave Mines on Galganas 7.

In that short scene of events an illustration of the word reciprocate had taken place. Illustrations of words are by far a more effective to increase vocabulary than purely reading a dictionary. If a cartoon and a series of toys can help me better my vocabulary then so be it.

I have only been able to mention a few of the ways in which I know Transformers have influenced areas of my life, other than spending habits, but who knows there may be others. For all I know my moral code may well have been influenced by Optimus Prime. It certainly got me to read a large amount of comics. Now at 21 I have begun to see that I am not the only one that Transformers have influenced. The man in America, who, for his 30th birthday changed his name to Optimus Prime, is just one example.

I may not buy the toys anymore but I still read the comics and occasionally watch the cartoon shows. The characters are still with me, I still like them, I don't know how they will affect me in the rest of my life, but if its anything like the first 21 years I don't think I can complain too much. With Transformers at 20 and me at 21, I feel like I will not forget the orange coloured piece of plastic I received as a Christmas gift in 1986.

AA2004 Attendees

We wanted to take a break from this issue of The Cybetronian Times for a moment to take the opportunity to thank all of you who have pre-registered for Auto Assembly this year and who have helped make this our biggest convention ever! We've listed everyone in the order they've booked!

Hardial Bhogal, Kulwant Bhogal, Rashpal Bhogal, Amman Bhogal, Rupinder Bhogal, Keith Cooper, Sven Harvey, Claire Harvey, Sophie Harvey, William Harvey, Daniel Harvey, Ann Harvey, Tony Harvey, Stefan Harvey, Simon Plumbe, Matt Jackson, Peter Hodgson, Evan Blades, Christopher Mead, Mark Fletcher, Michael Shrivell, Joby Reeve, Stuart Webb, Emma-Louise Buckton, Guy Lewis, William Lamont, Kyle Lamont, Mary Bellamy, Magali Perret, Gordon Packer, Rhiannon Rees-Jones, Adam Bishop, David Mapes, Steven Mapes, Richard Kershaw, Joanne Wright, Steven Cox, Nigel Mably, Roger Mably, Simon Chiddington, Jamie Harris, Jon Goodall, David Ellis, Karon Ansell, Jonathan Hope, Nikitta Chau, Adam Perry, Ryan King, Paul Williams, Steve De Anda, Michael Prime, Michael Hall, Victoria Hall, Andrew Jones, Ian Arrowsmith, Colin Pringle, Chris Cassidy, Peter Langford, Ian Collister, Kevin Clarke, Veronica Clarke, Chris Slater, Steph Slater, Martin Slater, Jon Slater, Danny Courtney, Paul Martin, Tracey Preston, Jonathan Francis, Rebecca Norris, Joshua Francis, Jonathan Lemmon, Emma Rose, Chris Pudney, Nathan Cox, Paul Horwood, Ian Newman, Rasmus Hardiker, Jason Parry, Claire Roberts, Ryan Downie, Simon Prior, Alex Cole, Timothy Gaunt, Christopher Gaunt, Caroline Eldridge, John Eldridge, Christopher Eldridge, Dylan Gibson, Jamie Dunlop, Andrew Lockyer, Keith Page, Sarah Page, Steven Mair, Steven Clarke, Stephen Sutcliffe, Emma Williams, James Williams, Omar Shefta, James McCurley, Julian Lemel, Hayley Jamieson, Darren Jamieson, Robbie Jamieson, Kira Jamieson, Casey Jamieson, Gareth Doe, Craig Harris, John Robinson, Nick Westwood, Daniel Westwood, Lisa Clayton-Halls, Danny Mansfield, Dave Baron, Michael O'Rourke, Sarah Gray, Steve Haines, Kamran Keenan, Will Bishop, Rob Bishop, Jason Crompton, Dean Evans, Adam

Edwards, Jonathan Kenyon, Paul Hitchens, Simon Stiles, Altan Cetinkaya, Don McNaughton, Stephen Bates, Sallyann Daly, Bao Lei, Yang Yang, Huang Ming Zhan, M Goddard, S Goddard, N Goddard, Andrew Mahoney, David Wallace, Philip Cuthbertson, Lisa Thompson, Robert Higgins, Joe Higgins, Jackson Woodruffe, Pete Billingham, Jonathan Hudson, Philip Richardson, Sharon Richardson, Neil Richardson, Sarah Higgs, Ye Ming Shum, Tai Wai Shum, Cheryl Leung, Steve La, Vince Birt, Debra Birt, Philip Lyon, Mark Lonsdale, Philip McMillan, Peter Lowe, Ross Fitzpatrick, Paul Hamilton, Alastair Foster, Adrian Foster, Coral Tassi, Andrew Hettig, James Hettig, Steven Marshall, Dale Black, Jerome Danvers, Ian Harris, Clark Gardiner, Olly Pallatina, Adam Clifford, Rick Clifford, Darren Clarke, Paul James, David C Jones, Donna Jones, David A Jones, Mike Webb, May Webb, Simon Hughes, Melanie Briney, Bernadette Stuart, Stephen Stuart, Michael Stuart, Rebecca Stuart, Stephen Roberts, Mark Higgs, Lee Degg, Ian Bowyer, James Roberts, Sami Sadek, Denise Sadek, Brigant Mitchison.

Also to all our dealers:

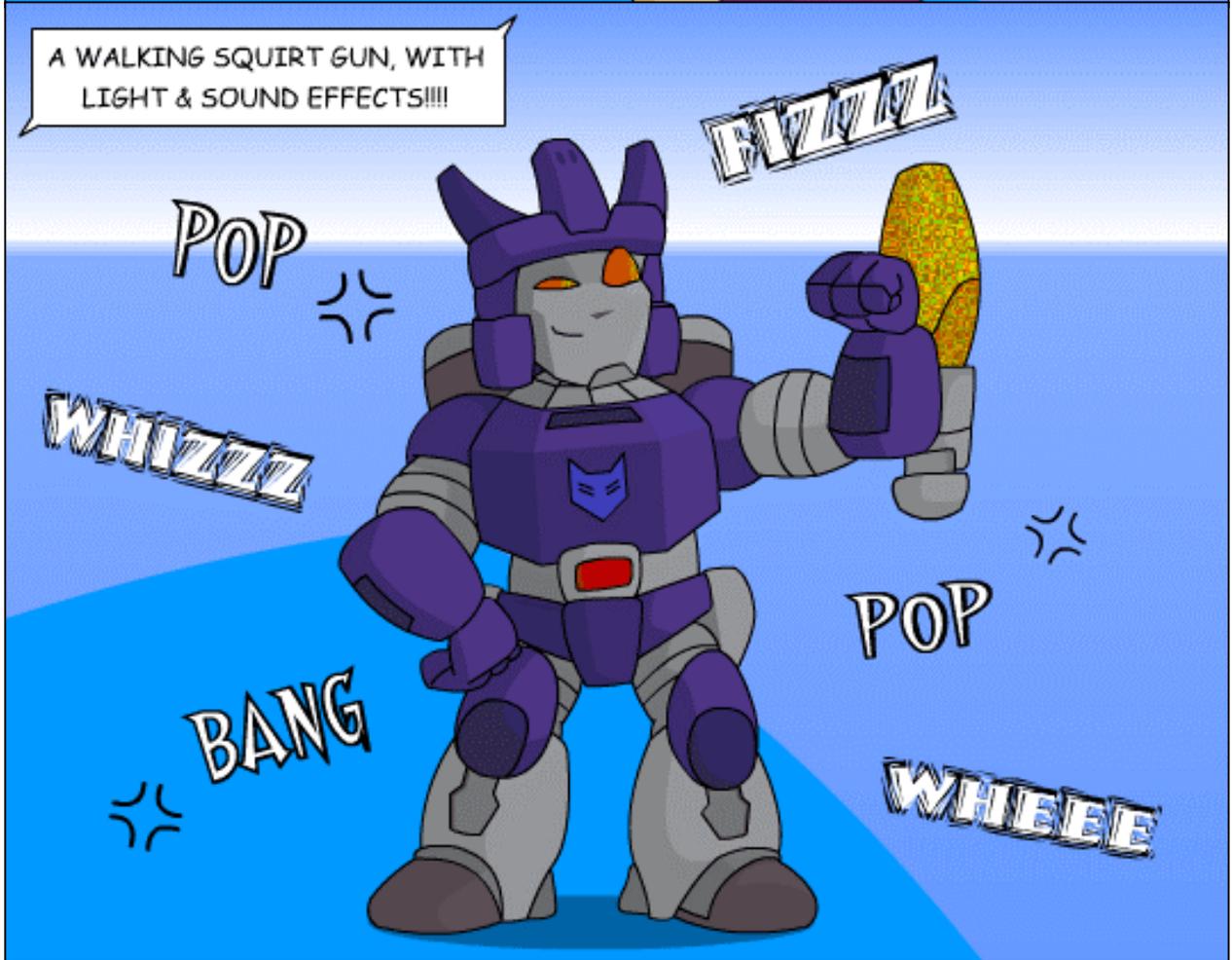
CAM Collectables, Ellis Models, Fanboy Comics, Infinity & Beyond, Nigel Mably, Space Bridge. Specimen 17 Trading, Stellar Dreams, T-4-E

And finally, to all of our special guests who have joined us this weekend:-

Wally Wingert, Simon Furman, Jane Lawson, Alex Mitchison, Joanna Moher, David MulQueen, Lee Sullivan, Andrew Wildman, and Simon Williams

We hope you enjoy the weekend and that you'll all join us next year for

Auto Assembly 2005!





Robots In Disguise by Simon Plumbe

Auto Assembly is being joined by one of the cast of Robots In Disguise this weekend, Wally Wingert, and as you will have seen from the programme of events, we have given some considerable coverage to this underrated Transformers show this weekend.

RiD is one of the most unusual Transformers ranges and television shows to reach the Western audiences for some time and is a mish-mash of ideas and a TV series of 100% Japanese origin, it has had a mixed reaction from fans, and certainly not the level of public awareness and support that it deserves.

The Robots In Disguise range started off as a filler range in Japan under the Car Robots name. A number of products were issued in Japan for the first time from other ranges, most notably repaints of some of the Transmetal 2 Beast Wars toys that had not

been featured in the series and G1/G2 cars which formed what we know as the Predacons and Decepticons. The Autobots on the other hand, were all new moulds with the exception of the Spychangers which were repaints of the G2 Gobots.

Being a range developed primarily for the Japanese market, the series followed suit and was very much an anime influenced series, and was unusual in the fact that it was based on an existing toy range rather than being produced in conjunction with the development of a toy range as had been the case with the other Transformers TV shows that had come before it.

The anime style was evident throughout the series not only in terms of the quality of the animation, but in terms of the story telling and aspects of it.

One element that some fans did find annoying was that characters often openly

declared what weapons they were going to use and attacks they were going to make in advance. It soon becomes annoying although it's quite common in anime. It's something you do get used to after a while, but if you're new to RiD, it can be something of a culture shock to experience for the first time in a Transformers show!

There was very little in terms of story build-up for the series. All of the characters were already on Earth and there was very little in the way of explanation as to how they arrived and why. It was mentioned in episode one, "Battle Protocol" that Megatron intercepted Earth broadcasts and arrived in search of energy sources, but the question has to be asked why were the Autobots already there and a part of society?

What was interesting about the series was the mix of characters. Initially the series' characters were split into two factions - the Autobots and the Predacons. The Predacons were like their Beast Wars namesakes and were animal-based while the Autobots were all vehicle based and it made for an interesting mix.

What was strange early on was how the Predacons ever posed any real threat to Earth. To start off, the Predacons consisted of Megatron, Sky-Byte, Slapper, Gas-Skunk and Darkscream - hardly a large army and they were certainly no match for the Autobots.



It wasn't until the Decepticons were introduced part way through the series that their numbers were increased into double figures but by that time, the Autobot forces

had also increased considerably and Megatron was still outnumbered two-to-one.

One unique aspect of RiD was the use of the vehicle mode for the Autobots. While all of the other shows used the disguise modes just to blend in with their surroundings, RiD took this a step further and the characters became integrated into Earth society. Optimus (now a fire truck - much to the annoyance of many fans) was often seen answering calls to fires, X-Brawn had a human driver from time to time, Prowl served with the police force and so on.

In the case of Tow-Line, he could often be found towing vehicles away and during the series he probably spent more time doing that than performing his duties as an Autobot! What was interesting to see was that the personalities of these Autobots tended to reflect the roles of the vehicles they resembled.

The tone of the series is much lighter than many of the other shows and does have some characters that are mainly there for comic relief and this does seem to be a common theme with many Japanese shows that make it overseas. The Predacons remind me in many ways of a lot of the characters that you would find in Power Rangers or its numerous spin-off shows.

Once the Decepticons were introduced into the series, the Predacons were relegated almost completely to the role of comedic characters and of these, Sky-Byte was probably the most appreciated of them all amongst fans. While the trio of Slapper, GasSkunk and Darkscream were just inept, Sky-Byte had enough personality and charm to be a likeable character in his own right.

While many of the episodes did have serious overtones, you can't deny the need for more light-hearted moments in any series and in RiD this was accomplished admirably with Sky-Byte and to a lesser degree Side Burn and probably some of the best one-liners in the whole series can be credited to these two!

The series seemed to draw heavily on other incarnations of Transformers for its influence.

Obviously, the Autobots we're clearly showing their G1 origins but the Beast Wars Influences went much further than just the repainted toys and the Predacon name that was adopted for the series.

Probably the strongest links to Beast Wars, at least in terms of concepts, were highlighted in the episode "The Decepticons". An Autobot ship is discovered containing six Stasis Pods each containing Autobot Protoforms, comrades of Optimus. When Megatron obtained these, he reprogrammed them to create the Decepticons and in order to gain control of them and to turn them from their Autobot forms, he used his own Spark. All elements first introduced in Beast Wars.



Something that did surprise a lot of fans for the English language version was the absence of any of the cast from Beast Wars / Beast Machines. In fact, with the exception of Mike McConnohie who voiced Cosmos and Tracks in G1, it was a completely new voice cast and the RiD cast have not done any other Transformers work since, but why was that?

The answer to that lay with the production of the English language version of the show. RiD was not an original series and was basically a re-scripted and re-dubbed version of Car Robots. Episodes were slightly re-written and then simply revoiced.

The English language version of the series was produced by Saban Entertainment who have

handled a lot of the animated shows based on Marvel comic characters although they have been mostly known for the Power Rangers shows and they had little or no reason to use existing cast members from past Transformers shows.

One thing of note with regards to the cast was that they were also hired on a different basis to other shows. As they were being hired simply to dub an existing show rather than to voice new work, the series was produced on a lower budget and the cast were paid one-off fees and not the usual ongoing residual fees for re-runs and video releases as cast members for many shows do.

The show faced a number of problems when it came to being broadcast, both in the US and here in the UK. Part way through the series in America were the events of September 11th which resulted in a number of episodes being cancelled or being rescheduled and even today many fans haven't seen all of them. In the UK, fans fared even worse...

The show was only broadcast on Fox Kids and it had a relatively short run with just a couple of re-runs. This happened when Fox Kids was a relatively new channel and this was before it had mainstream distribution on satellite and cable networks and was only available as part of selected packages so not even all Sky viewers could get to see the series. If that wasn't bad enough, it is the only



UK language Transformers series for almost a decade that has not had a terrestrial broadcast in the UK so many people haven't even seen a single episode. In fact, I'm sure there are a lot of people at Auto Assembly this weekend who will be seeing RiD for the very first time.

The toy range never really made an impact on the UK market, with some toys still acting as shelf-warmers now, kids not knowing who the characters are, and the series never really getting the exposure it needed.

Things are changing though and the entire series is being released here in the UK on DVD by Maximum Entertainment starting in July. Initially the series is being released on two-disc sets, each containing 8 episodes plus special features, which will mean that the entire 39-episode series will be released in just 5 volumes.

It is a first for the UK and because of the ownership issues of Fox Kids and Saban

Entertainment in the US, there is still no word on when this will get an American release!

I wasn't too sure about the series when I first saw it, but I gave it a chance and I really do enjoy it. It makes a refreshing change from Beast Wars, the humour is intentional unlike the original series where you laugh at it because it is so bad, and there are characters you can generally warm to quite quickly.

I hope you manage to find the time this weekend to watch some episodes of this series and take the opportunity to talk to Wally Wingert and if you're reading this after the convention that you have seen and enjoyed some of the series.

It's a show that deserved more exposure that it received in the UK and I certainly hope that it gets the recognition it deserves once the DVDs hit the shelves later this year.



AUTO  TRANSFORMERS
ASSEMBLY COLLECTORS FAIR
2004



"...IF THAT MALFUNCTIONING
SPACE-BRIDGE DROPS ME IN
A SWAMP ONE MORE TIME!!!"

Botcon Minibots by Simon Plumbe

Botcon in the US (and subsequently OTFCC) have been known for making a number of exclusive toys available to attendees. While these are generally recoloured toys from different ranges, they still seem to be quite popular. I've never really been able to afford convention exclusive toys - usually they've been in the region of £50 plus by the time they've hit the UK - but recently I had the chance to pick up a couple from 2002 when a few minibots were produced...

Tap-Out

Tap-Out, produced for Botcon 2002 is a G1 toy and is a recolour of the Cliffjumper minibot. To keep costs down and use a better quality mould, it's based on the keyring version released in 2002 and comes with the keyring part as well as the figure itself. While there are a lot of physical similarities between Cliffjumper and Bumblebee, it's still quite a good toy for it's size.

The recolour sees Tap-Out sporting a green paint job, with the windows now sporting a light grey shade instead of black. Apart from that, the toy is identical, right down to the rubber tyres from the original toy release.

Packaging is very basic, with the toy shipping in a sealed polybag. The convention date, venue and toy name are printed on the bag. Inside the bag is a small card of the toy featuring artwork on one side and a brief profile and tech specs on the rear. It's nothing special but the card and specs are a nice touch. Granted, it's not as impressive as the other exclusives, often shipping in boxes sporting new designs and artwork, but for the price I guess they couldn't really offer much more. One thing that did stand out was that the keyring part doesn't come attached to the car unlike the regular range and instead is inside it's own bag in the package. It's a good way of keeping the main toy in good condition without the risk of scratches.

I quite liked this toy and it does make a good addition to the collection. I've already got the original keyring but this is still a good recolour

to buy. The colour scheme is significantly different enough to the original to justify the purchase, and the profile and tech specs really do help to distinguish this as a character in its own right rather than just Cliffjumper with cosmetic changes.

If you see this anywhere, it's worth adding to your G1 collection and it's certainly the cheapest way to get a convention exclusive!

Rook

As well as being the first licenced convention to be held in the UK, Botcon 2002 Europe also brought the first convention exclusive toy to fans outside the US. As with all the convention exclusives in the States, it is just an existing toy re-coloured, but it's still nice to get something a little different to the toys you'd find in Toys R Us!

As Tap-Out was to Cliffjumper, this is a recolour of the Windcharger minibot keyring and comes with the keyring part of the toy as well as the figure itself. I have to be honest and say that I was never impressed with Windcharger. While it looked good in car mode, as a robot it was pretty awful. Even for the time, there were a lot better toys available to buy.

The new colour scheme sees the bulk of the car in light grey rather than the original sports car red. The windows themselves have also been recoloured in blue, with the Autobot insignia still in the same place as on the original toy, located on the car's bonnet.

Again, as with Tap-Out, packaging is very basic, with the toy again in a polybag but this time there are no tech-specs.

To be honest, I have mixed feelings about this one. There was a lot of controversy that surrounded the distribution of this (not being available at the convention itself and being sold on the US website before European fans received their toys) and it is one of the weaker toys in the G1 range generally. Still, it's great to be able to add a convention exclusive to the collection - just watch out for the pricing on it though. I've seen these trading on eBay for as much as \$50 each!

Auto Assembly 2005 - Where Next?

Okay, so Auto Assembly 2004 is finally over so you may be asking yourself what do we have planned for next year and are we actually thinking of doing another convention.

Well, we are already looking into plans for Auto Assembly 2005, but once again it will be different to this year's convention. We don't know much at the moment.

What we do know is that it will be roughly the same time next year - on a Saturday around April / May - and it will be back to the single day format and will be held somewhere in Birmingham.

We are reverting back to the single day format primarily because the two-day structure was a special this year to coincide with the 20th Anniversary of Transformers, although next year will probably be a longer day, perhaps running until the early evening.

We don't know what will happen in terms of guests or prices but as always there will be discounts for children and on-the-door places. We don't know if we will be able to bring a voice actor to Birmingham again next year although we do know of a few who would like to attend but this all depends on how much we charge for tickets, how many of you pre-register (this is essential) and how much we have available to spend on guests!

We'll still have our usual mix of dealers, guests, activities, videos and more and as always we're open to ideas and suggestions and we'll try to offer something new. We'll definitely do another goodie bag and who knows what surprises we'll come up with next time!

With regards to The Cybetronian Times, we are considering making this an optional extra next year so it may not be included in the ticket price but be an add-on instead. That way, we can put more of the admission price towards venue and guest costs, but again this is something we need to think about.

We will be at a new venue next year however and that is the main reason why we aren't

able to take pre-bookings this weekend. We are going to be visiting venues soon to see what we are offered in terms of space, facilities, cost etc. and we will get the best overall venue we can while still making sure we can give you a good event and offer YOU good value for money and we hope we've done that for you all this year.

If you are interested in attending next year, we are going to be offering discounts to everyone who is with us this weekend. In your AA2004 pack you will have found a ticket regarding AA2005. Send this to the address on this page along with an SAE and when the booking forms are printed for next year we'll send a special AA2004 attendee version to you which will entitle you to a 10% discount.

Alternatively, keep an eye out on the AA website and we'll post news and information as it happens!

Simon and Sven
Auto Assembly



<http://uk.geocities.com/mangohero1978>

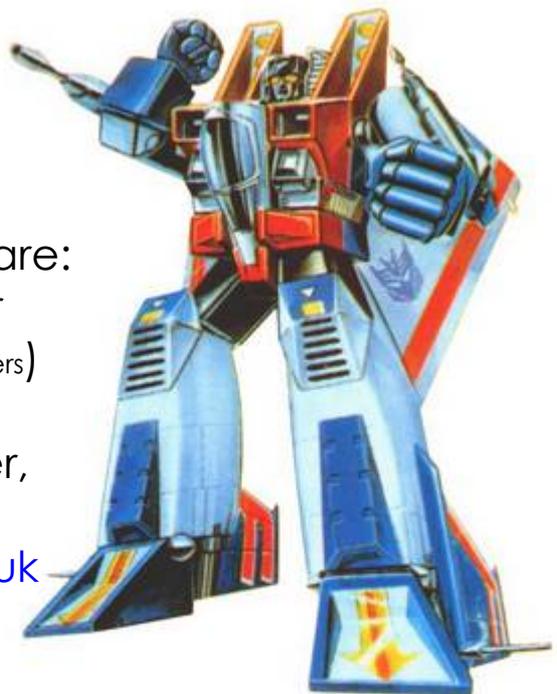


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