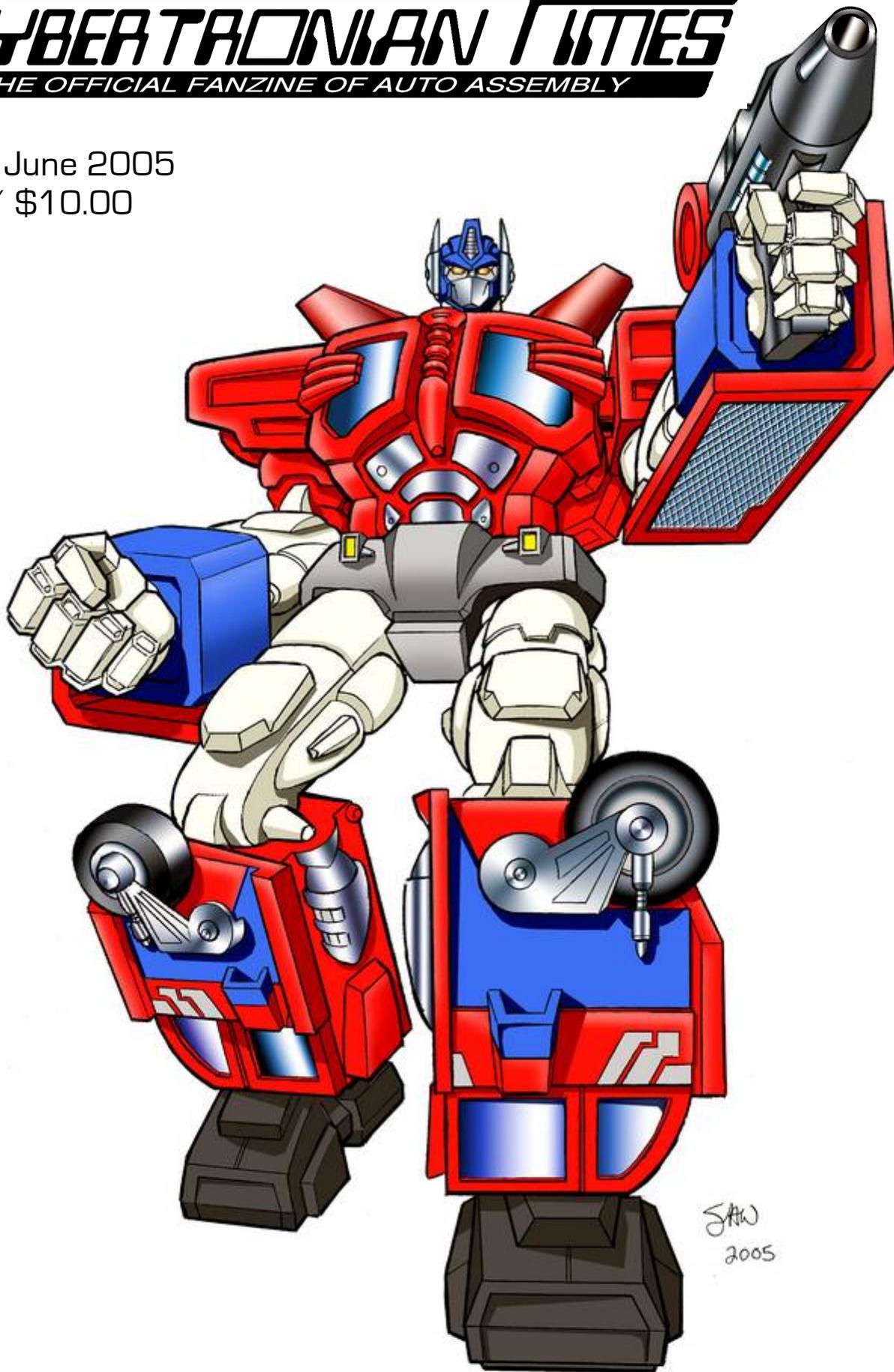


CYBERTRONIAN TIMES

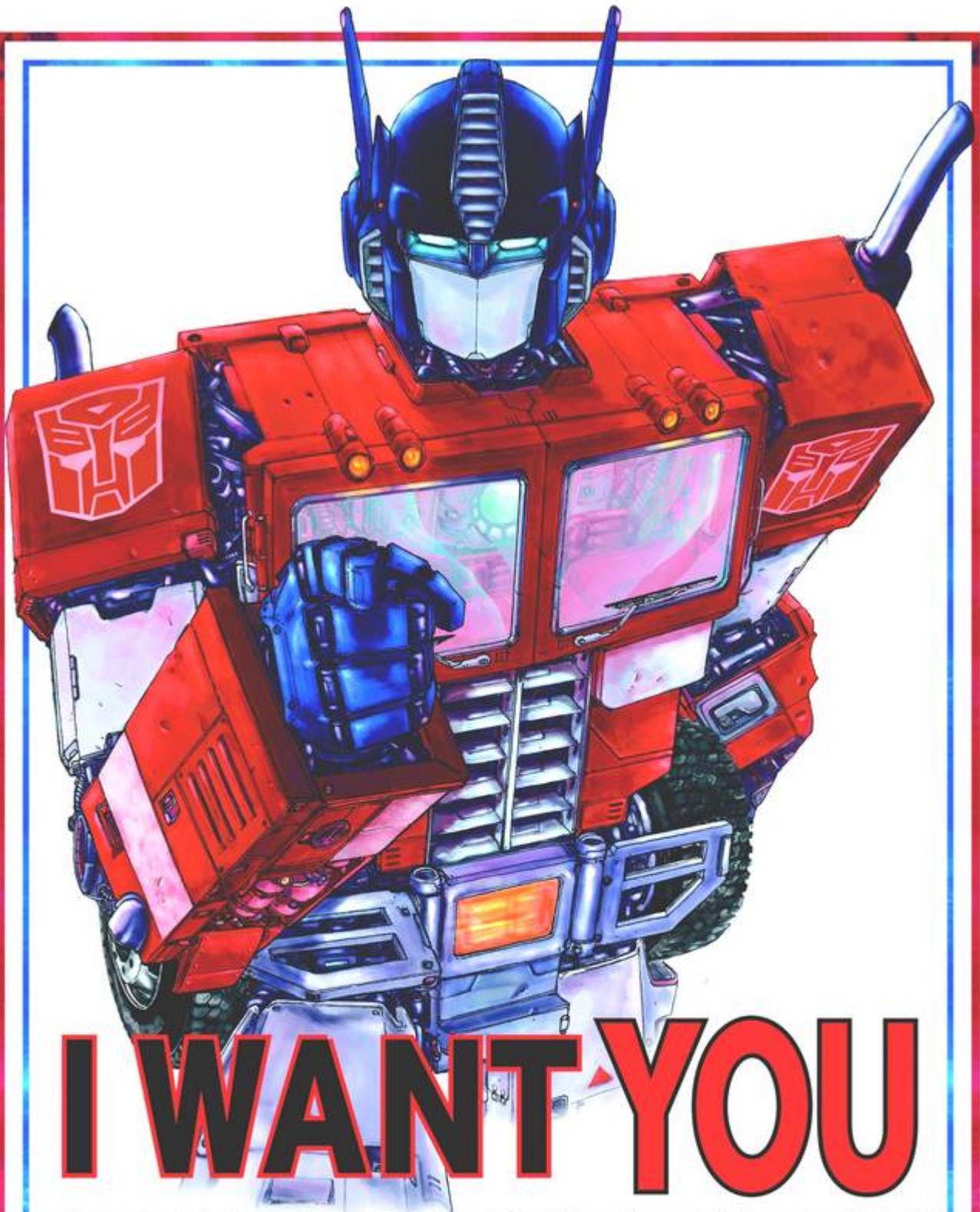
THE OFFICIAL FANZINE OF AUTO ASSEMBLY

Issue 7, June 2005
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**TRANS
FORMERS**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:
Wally Wingert Interviewed! Reviews,
News, Art, Fiction, Articles and more...!



I WANT YOU

THE **TRANSFORMERS**

IDW PUBLISHING

OCTOBER 2005

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**AUTO
ASSEMBLY**

Introduction

Welcome to issue 7 of The Cybertronian Times, with added extra stories to try and make up for last issue! Hopefully you will enjoy the tales from TransFormers: Unlimited, a universe which is still being built up. Fortunately, almost all of the previous TransFormers: Unlimited stories are available in our MiniCT releases (£1 each + PayPal/postage where applicable) - there are two of which are available at this time.

Also in this issue is an overview of Binaltech thus far (I do rather a major preference for Binaltech over Alternators to be honest!) and brief introduction of TransFormers Cybertron (to go with the Galaxy Force review you may be reading in Model & Collectors Mart!).

For those of you reading this at Auto Assembly 2005, firstly, thanks for coming and buying this fanzine! Secondly I feel due to come feedback from time to time, that we have to underline a couple of things. Auto Assembly is run by Infinite Frontiers, which is a NON-PROFIT making group. Neither

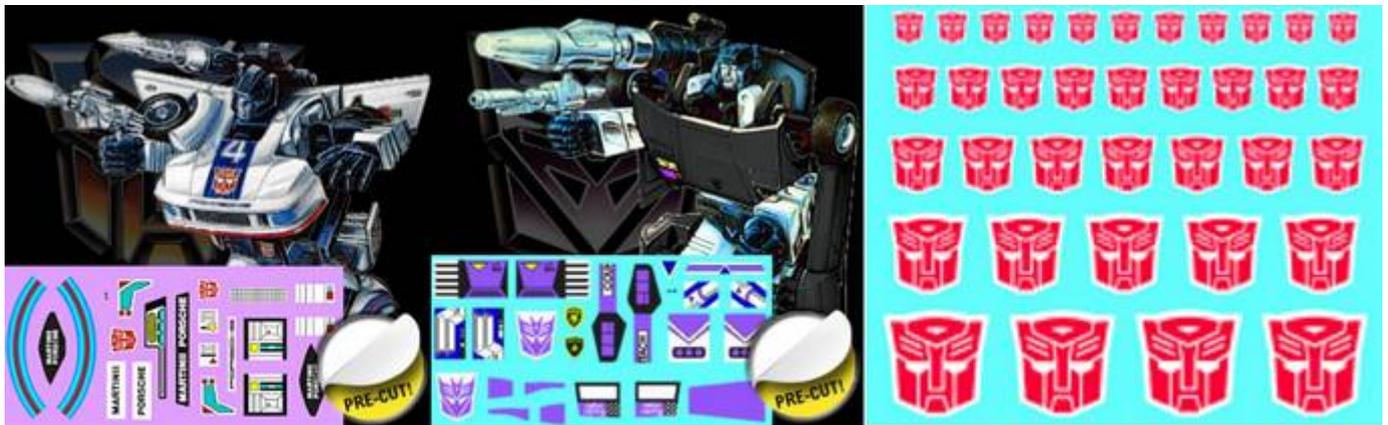
myself, nor Simon, nor any other team member is paid for the work they put into the event and these fanzines.

Auto Assembly, this 'zine and everything we put out are all amateur, non-profit making by fans for fans. Please be aware that occasionally things do go wrong, something happens unexpected and as a result an article, or event item may have to be dropped, and don't forget we are all raising money for the NSPCC and Acorns Children's Hospice at Auto Assembly 2005, and likewise all future Auto Assembly events will be raising money for children's charities (seems fair being as we are keep the toys to ourselves!).

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this issue, and feel free to write, write FOR us and do artwork for us. If you want to work on TransFormers: Unlimited, please contact us to get the writers/artist guide before starting work!

Many thanks

Sven Harvey
sven@cybertron.org.uk



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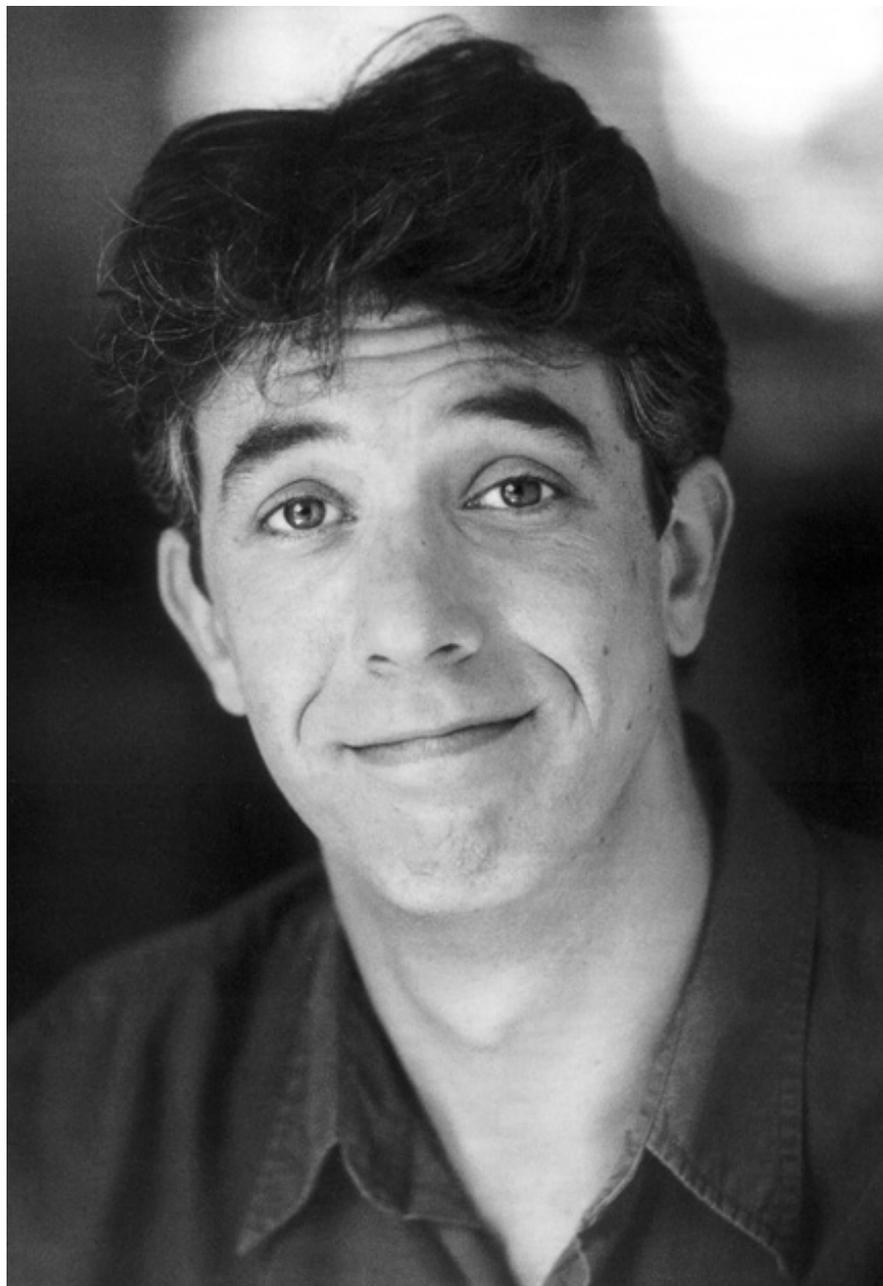


Auto Assembly 2005 Guest Profiles

We are incredibly fortunate this year to be joined by a varied mix of guests from the TransFormers universe including comic and TV guests! As always, we thought it was probably a good idea to introduce you to them...

NEIL KAPLAN

Neil Kaplan, contrary to recent rumour is in fact the youngest of three boys. Born outside of New York City, and raised in the tiny hamlet of San Jose, California. Neil truly feels as though both American coasts are his home. (As well as the home to millions of others. DUH!)



Neil has been doing character voices and sound effects since the age of 8, starting with Donald Duck. He estimates himself to have over 300 voices.

He trained in theatre, musical comedy, and stand-up with San Jose Children's Musical Theater, the University of Southern California, the National High School Institute at Northwestern University, and the American Musical and Dramatic Academy.

Neil's been featured on about 100 video games and animated projects since 1996. Among his favorites were the cult hit "the Mouse & the Monster," "Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic," and of course "Transformers: Robots in Disguise."

In that time he has played bears, dogs, stomachs, villains, strange sidekicks, lambs, Wookies, Tuskan Raiders, Beaker, an evil bottle of squeeze mustard, Battle Droids, Gungans, birthday clowns, grandfathers, robots, dental drills, Japanese Vampires and many other people and things.

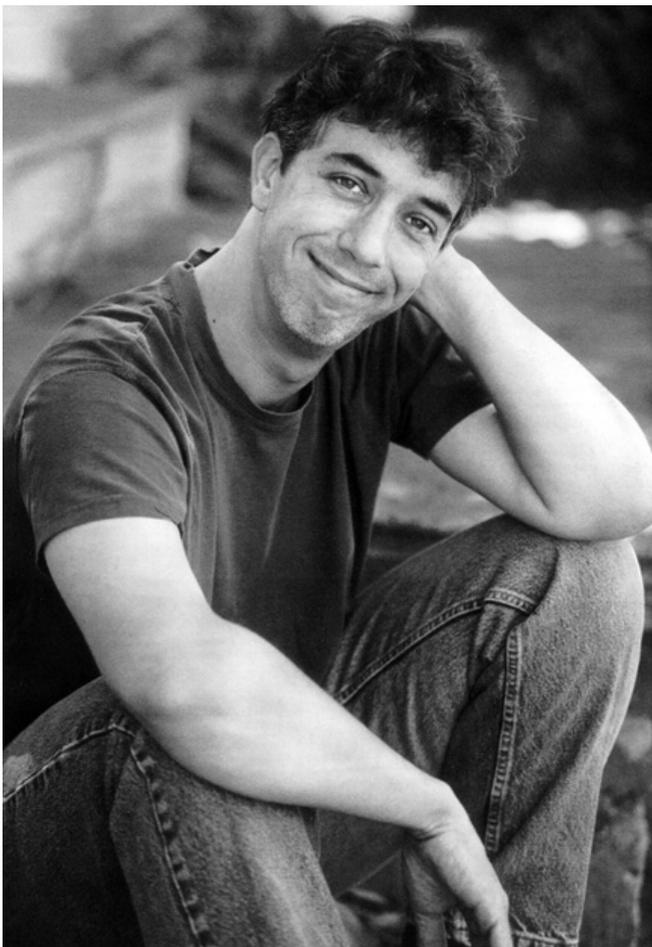
Neil is thrilled to have been invited back to visit the European Transfans again. Especially now that they have seen "R.i.D."

He is quite proud to have been a reader for the blind and dyslexic for several years. He is also enthusiastically involved in the "Jewish Big Brothers" program back in Los Angeles. Neil is single... and well... he's single.

Currently, besides continuing his voice work, Neil is working on several projects as a writer and creative force. He was one of the head writer's on Wally Wingert's pilot "Uncle Davver's Really Scarey Movie Show."

His own projects include the highly entertaining self created edu-

tainment pilot, "The Way it WASN'T." Transfans should be thrilled to know Neil is also working on an original graphic novel due out in 2006 entitled "Wolf/Man."



For more information about Neil, his charity work, and his upcoming projects check out www.nekap.net and the soon to be up and running www.anyaisle.com

Auto Assembly 2005 is Neil's second appearance in the UK, previously attending BotCon Europe back in 2002. Neil also worked with us providing some of the promotional speech clips for Auto Assembly 2004 along with last year's guest of honour and fellow RiD cast member Wally Wingert which can still be heard over on the Auto Assembly website at www.autoassembly.org.uk

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, Deathshead, 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 also returned to the

world of Transforming by contributing pencil art to the 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.

SIMON FURMAN

Simon Furman cut his comic book teeth editorially on *Scream!* (for 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 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* and *Thundercats*.

Work on the UK *Transformers* comic followed, and shortly thereafter he 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, he 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*. He 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 illustrations for the style guide.

Looking for a new challenge meant a move



into the games industry. After 3 years as Head of Art and Graphics at UK based game company *Rebellion* where he designed characters and in-game graphics, Wildman returned to the world of freelance illustration working on children's books and comics. Having completed a run on the Panini *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.

JASON CARDY

Jason is a professional comic colourist and having cut his teeth in *Transformers* fandom, has been working for Panini on their *Transformers: Armada* and *Spectacular Spider-Man Adventures* titles alongside Simon Williams.

SIMON WILLIAMS

Simon is a professional comic illustrator, who has worked on such titles as Panini's Transformers Armada, Action Man, and Spectacular Spider-man Adventures. His artwork, including Transformers work can be found at <http://soulmaninc.freewebspace.com>



METRODOME

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

MAXIMUM ENTERTAINMENT

Maximum Entertainment are responsible for the release of TransFormers: Robots In Disguise on DVD for the UK.

News

Movie

Michael Bay (Armageddon, Bad Boys, Pearl Harbour) is set to direct the new big screen live action/cgi mix movie from Dreamworks and Paramount. Producers Don Murphy (From Hell, League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen), Tom deSanto (X-Men, X-men 2) and some bloke called Steven Spielberg (do I need to mention any movies?) are getting this one out for Thanksgiving 2006 in the USA (probably means Paramount will have it out

for Christmas/Boxing Day here).

The writing staff include John Rogers (Catwoman, The Core) who did the first draft script, with Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci (both of whom worked on Alias and Hercules TV Series) working on the second draft with input from Spielberg and deSanto

One thing you shouldn't expect is a pure G1 movie. It is going to be based on G1 - Jazz will be around, Soundwave will be turning into a music device if Hasbro get their way, but don't expect an Ark, a 4 million year stasis lock, or hordes of Autobots! The Creation Matrix may well have been renamed the Energon Matrix. The best thing I have heard is that Megs will turn into a Tank (which hopefully will be a Challenger II - the fastest gun on treads!) which lets face it makes more sense than a P-38 anyway.

Comics

IDW Publishing now have the rights to produce comics based on the TransFormers franchise. Though not confirmed it is believed that the license covers all TransFormers toy lines and continuities.

However the information that has come through is that a new ongoing TransFormers Generation One comic is on its way with a special teaser issue 0 due out in October and the first issue proper in early 2006. The G1 universe will be "rebooted" once more to make it more accessible to readers of all ages (it is thought by many that Dreamwave's stories were a bit too adult orientated and not up to standard!). One good piece of news to go with that is that the lead writer is a certain Mr. Furman. A new G1 with Simon at the helm from the start? This can only be a good thing, but lets all hope that more of the "real" G1 (as in the original UK Marvel comic, people!) that we know and love shows through, along with slightly less concentration on Grimlock!

For up to minute news, we recommend the TransFormers@TheMoon website which includes newsfeeds from 8 main TransFormers sites. Visit them at <http://www.transformertoys.co.uk>

TRANSFORMERS: CYBERTRON

An Introduction

by Sven Harvey

Already released as TransFormers: Galaxy Force in Japan and slowly starting to appear in the states, around about... NOW.

Generally it's a good range and certainly better in my opinion than Energon or Armada (especially Prime).

The initial range will look like this (GF - this denotes the original Galaxy Force name for the character.)

Basics - £6.99?

Overhaul (GF: Jack Shot)
Ransack (GF: Gasket)
Scattershot (GF: Backpack)

Deluxes - £9.99?



Hot Shot (GF: Excellion)
Dirt Boss (GF: Inch Up)
Thundercracker (GF: Thunder Cracker)
Landmine (GF: Guard Shell)

Voyagers - £19.99?

Crumplezone (GF: Landbullet)
Vector Prime (with Safeguard) (GF: Vector Prime and Roots)



Ultras - £24.99-29.99?

Jetfire (GF: Dread Rock)
Scourge (GF: Flame Convoy)

Leaders - £39.99?

Optimus Prime (GF: Galaxy Convoy)
Megatron (GF: Master Megatron)

One toy from Galaxy Force not being released it would seem is a standard (Voyager Size?) Starscream, though a Supreme sized version of this toy should follow on along with the following:

Override (Deluxe, GF: Nitro Convoy)
Cloaker (Basic, GF: Skids)
Breakdown (Basic, GF: Auto Lander)
Red Alert (Deluxe, GF: First Aid)
Snarl (Deluxe, GF: Fang Wolf)



Rumours suggest these may appear earlier than expected, but to be honest plan to see them in late January (new Argos catalogue!) or Early February... Of course Hasbro will now make me look stupid by their appearance in the Autumn Winter 2005/06 Argos Catalogue ... grrr...!

Jack Shot (green 4WD) will become Overhaul at around £6 as a basic, and is a great basic toy - 8/10

The Micron Hop (helicopter), Bullet (sports car) and Bumper (4WD) team will become the

You can see review of some of the Galaxy Force toys in Model & Collectors Mart, but as a companion to those, here are a few words about some of the smaller Galaxy Force toys:
Cybertrons (Autobots)

Excellion (Blue Sports car) will become Hot Shot as a £10 deluxe, though you have to ask why he isn't red or yellow... Not too bad a toy - 7/10

Japanese Female character, Nitro Convoy (red/pink and white sports car) will become Override, as another deluxe at £10 and I doubt will retain her gender in Cybertron, but we will see. Not the best toy around as it's a bit too futuristic for my taste - 5/10



MiniCon/Micromaster team Jolt, Six Speed and Reverb. They are to be sold in Cybertron also as a set as a basic at £6-ish. Unfortunately they are possibly the worst looking Microns/MiniCons/Micromasters ever - avoid! - 3/10

of £6. Skids is quite a cool toy, but I wish he retained that name for the UK release as Cloaker doesn't make any sense. My favourite basic so far - 9/10

Auto Lander (brown/yellow drag racer) will be renamed Brakedown as a Cybertron £6 Basic. Auto Lander certainly has a very Beast Machines look about him but don't hold that against him. The vehicle mode is a little too unrealistic for me though - 6/10



First Aid (4WD Ambulance/Rescue Vehicle) will be Red Alert (£10 Deluxe) and is the same character as the Armada Red Alert. A lot of people who had this before me told me they thought it was awful, but I really don't see why. The toy isn't going to win any awards for beauty, but its got a rather unique transformation and I like it! - 7/10

Another Basic (£6 in the UK) is Backpack (Missile Launcher Armoured Vehicle) and will become Scattorshot. A bit chunky but of a high standard for the size, really - 7/10

Fang Wolf (the wolf, shockingly) will become Snarl also hitting at the Deluxe size/price point at £10. Not quite up to the standard of the Beast Wars Wolfgang in my opinion, and the force chip gimmick is pointless (facial movement!), but OK... 6/10

The 3 vehicular Microns (the blue, red and yellow cars), Shena, Slow and Gazenda have yet to be given their western names, assuming they appear in the line at all, but if they do it will be as a set at £6. Though they look reasonable the arms keep falling off. Not impressive - 4/10

Destrons (Decepticons)

Thundercracker (grey F16 type jet) will retain his name for the western series (Deluxe at £10) and has quite a brilliant vehicle mode. However the transformation leaves a lot to be desired and a huge missile launcher is one forearm. The robot mode therefore looks very silly. A shame - 5/10

Skids (white sports car) will be the Basic toy, Cloaker in the US/UK series with a UK price



Gasket (orange/red motorcycle) will become a Basic at £6 with the name, Ransack and isn't at all bad, even if it does look a bit anorexic in robot mode. - 6/10

Inch Up (Purple & Green 4WD) will be renamed Dirt Boss (Deluxe £10), and is a reasonable addition with a decent robot mode and a force chip gimmick that makes at least some sense! - 7/10

Dinoshout (Green Spinosaurus) becomes Wreckloose (Basic at £6.) The beast mode isn't at all bad - definitely a Spinosaur, but then it all goes horribly wrong. The "transformation" consists of putting his tail in his hand and standing him up more upright... hmmm.. Not impressed. - 3/10



Auto Assembly - Five Years On... by Simon Plumbe

It's hard to believe that this year is the fifth anniversary of Auto Assembly! Looking back, we've come along way from its origins of just a small gathering of fans here in Birmingham and has now become one of the largest Transformers events in Europe. But how did things get to where they are now, and what of the future for Auto Assembly...?

The idea for Auto Assembly came from Sven Harvey back in 2000 but has its origins dating back to 1989 for Infinite Frontiers! I founded the organisation originally as a Doctor Who fan club, although it quickly evolved into a general sci-fi fan club, meeting once a month. Sadly, after about a year the meetings ended but that wasn't the end...

We bounced back with something that was a world's first some 12 months later - an electronic Star Trek fanzine on disk for the Amiga computer called The Final Frontier which had a massive circulation worldwide and it was through this that I got to meet Sven where he promptly joined our international team of writers, artists, musicians and programmers. The success of this led to us talking the plunge and getting back into events and in 1996 this culminated in running a three-day Star Trek convention here in Birmingham - Delta Quadrant '96.

Things didn't go brilliantly with it (despite having a world premiere of an episode of Voyager before its US television broadcast) but it did lead to us launching a fan club that had monthly meetings with video screenings, dealers tables, occasional guests, quizzes and much more....

Our first foray into the world of Transformers came in 1998. For about a year we had been publishing paper-based fanzines - something we had wanted to move back into for some

time - and Sven had managed to convince me to give the go-ahead to Issue 1 of an experimental Transformers title, The Cybertronian Times. Unlike a lot of other fanzines we produced, CT1 was the first one to be a complete sell-out and actually went to a second and third printing!

So where does Auto Assembly come into all this? Well, in the first issue of The Cybertronian Times, we actually hinted at wanting to do a Transformers convention along similar lines to our Star Trek convention and we were asking for feedback and suggestions. At that point, things didn't get past the initial idea phase (although if it had happened, it would have been the UK's first TF event!), but the idea wasn't shelved completely...



Two years later and Sven decided that it was time to bring Auto Assembly out of mothballs! Our Star Trek club, Alpha Quadrant, was doing well and its meetings were becoming more like mini-conventions attracting around 30-40 people, showing videos on a 6-foot screen and lasting all day. Sven suggested the idea of trying a similar one-off event for Transformers so Auto Assembly was born.

After just a couple of months of planning and publicity, Auto Assembly took place on 22nd October 2000 at the Ibis Hotel here in Birmingham. It was only meant to be a one-off small scale club meeting and we were

happy with 15 people booking in advance... which ended up being doubled on the day to 30.

As a small gathering of fans, we didn't have any guests but we did have videos running on the same 6-foot screen and Dolby sound system we used for Alpha Quadrant), a toy display where Sven decided to take most of his collection along(!), a games area running a Playstation and the Beast Wars: Transmetals game, quizzes and even dealers! We used the day to launch Issue 3 of The Cybertronian Times (which everyone got as part of the admission price along with a keyring)... not forgetting bags of Transform-A-Snacks that we threw at people at random throughout the day!

Everyone seemed to enjoy the day and even though I wasn't a TransFormers fan at the time as I said in the last issue of CT, I was ready for another one and so it seemed were most of the fans attending....

Six months later and Auto Assembly 2001 took place on 4th March 2001, again at the Ibis Hotel. The room we had booked was fairly large, capable of holding up to 100 people theatre style and boy did we need it! We were surprised at the talk that had started to circulate about Auto Assembly following the first event so when AA2001 came around we had managed to get 30 pre-bookings which ended up in 61 people coming along in total - far more than we had ever seen at any Alpha Quadrant meeting!

We still had the same mix of dealers, guests, and activities (with another keyring and CT Issue 4 included in the admission price) but this time we wanted to try for a guest. Lew Stringer, writer and artist for the Combat Colin backup strip that appeared in the Marvel G1 comics was scheduled to make an

appearance as he just happens to live quite close to Birmingham. Sadly Lew had to pull out but everyone still had a great time despite me walking around with a video camera getting plenty of incriminating footage to use at a later date!

In 2002, my health took a turn for the worse with a big health scare through diabetes and epilepsy and a serious accident with my back that left me having problems walking for about 2 months. At the same time, we were going through a few internal problems with a former member of our team who had never really been involved in the Auto Assembly side of things so we had a year's hiatus.

So onto 2003 and Paul Cannon decided to have a break from running Transforce so it was clear that Auto Assembly 2003 was going to be the only UK event that year so we wanted to do something special so we knew that it was going to have to be the biggest and best Auto Assembly ever.... which meant ambitious plans!

Obviously, we knew that more people would be likely to attend so we needed a bigger venue so we settled on the Britannia Hotel and set the date for 2nd August 2003. Still in the centre of Birmingham but it's main function room could seat about 300 theatre style so it would be able to hold about 150



people or so and still have space for dealers... plus it had an all important bar!

The hotel wasn't perfect - no parking and not the best in terms of access for dealers, but it was fairly easy to find for attendees and it was affordable for what we wanted to offer and gave us distinctive areas for a seated theatre area near the bar for videos (still using a large screen/sound system), the main area which was now a large dealers hall, plus a massive toy and art display and still having games!

We started promoting it and things went well. There was a great buzz and once we managed to arrange for TF legends Simon Furman and Andrew Wildman to make their first of many appearances, bookings started to come in at a health pace. The promise of a free copy of CT 5 (sporting a full colour cover!) for pre-bookings didn't seem to hurt either! Then the guest line-up grew with the addition of Metrodome and things started to grow even beyond our expectations!

The next thing we introduced that year was the now infamous "goodie bag". We don't really know where the idea came from, but we decided to start approaching different companies for sponsorship to try to get free gifts to give away to attendees to give even more value for money for their admission price. I felt that if someone came to Auto Assembly and didn't buy anything, at least they'd still go home with something!

We spoke to local publisher Trinity Publications who sent us a supply of the latest issue of Model & Collector's Mart magazine, Panini gave us hundreds of copies of their Armada comic to give to everyone, Metrodome produced two exclusive postcards for all attendees featuring Lee Sullivan artwork featuring G1 Prime and Megatron, and courtesy of local snack company Red Mill, everyone had a bag of Transform-A-Snacks! In fact,

everyone who attended ended up going home with a goodie bag worth more than the cost of admission!!

If that wasn't enough, we had been talking to Metrodome prior to the day and had arranged to get some video footage of the day to be used on their G1 DVD box sets! It was an honour to be chosen as the first UK event to be featured in this way and although our footage wasn't used (a fan stepped in at the last minute as there seemed to be a problem with the digital tape we supplied) and it wasn't the best of footage, it was still great to be included!

The final icing on the cake were the numbers. We were astonished when we had 155 people pre-register but when we had even more people come along on the day taking the total to 233 we were left speechless. I know it was crowded in the hotel and the air conditioning and the fans were working overtime, but to get a figure like that was incredible!

One year later and we hit the 20th Anniversary of TransFormers and we wanted to do something very special. Paul Cannon was returning with another Transforce but we wanted AA2004 to be as ground-breaking as possible, at least in Auto Assembly terms. So straight after AA2003 we launched our discussion forum online to start getting ideas



for what people wanted but we already knew what we wanted to try to achieve... a two day convention! We had already done something on that scale for Star Trek, but we wanted to try and bring that type of event to TransFormers fandom...

We decided to hold it over the weekend of 8th - 9th May 2004 and again went to the Britannia Hotel. It was the biggest ever in terms of numbers with 220 pre-registering and a total attendance of 320. We were blessed with a massive guest line-up including our first ever voice actor - RiD's Wally Wingert, Simon Furman, Andrew Wildman, Lee Sullivan, Simon Williams, Metrodome making a return, and Maximum Entertainment.

We stepped up a gear with The Cybertronian Times as well. Instead of just having a colour cover, the zine went to full colour and the cover art was done for us by none other than Lee Sullivan! Things were already looking promising! The goodie bag was also the best ever with the return of the Transform-A-Snacks, packs of stickers, a PS2 demo disc and poster from Atari (who also gave us a Playstation 2 to give away and got involved in the event), postcards from Metrodome (which included the CT6 cover art), Model & Collectors Mart, and a pack of G1 stickers!

Wally Wingert turned out to be the surprise hit of the weekend despite a lot of fans having reservations beforehand not having seen much of RiD and his appearance was very much a chance happening. I had been talking to Wally for some time after approaching him for help for our Charity Auction (which combined with the raffle raised £1,000 for the NSPCC and Cancer Research) and in passing in one of our conversations I jokingly mentioned about how cool it would be for Wally to join us.

Our budget wasn't going to

stretch to a voice actor but thanks to sponsorship from Chris Abbott at www.c64audio.com we were able to cover Wally's costs especially when he offered to come over by economy class flight!

Generally people attending Auto Assembly 2004 seemed to enjoy themselves but it wasn't a weekend without it's problems. To be honest, looking back I think that UK fandom wasn't ready for a weekend-long event. I guess most people are used to events like Memorabilia and Collectormania and a large number booked for a single day instead of the weekend and as such, Sunday was much quieter - something that was noticed by all the dealers.

The venue caused us a lot of problems as well. First, with just a couple of weeks before, just as we were making the final payment of the balance for the hall hire, the hotel had decided to double book and hire out part of the rooms we had booked to someone else reducing the size of our Dealers Room by about 30% as well as another room. Luckily, it reduced our overall cost which we later needed, but it didn't help our plans.

Then on the Friday, the room layout hadn't been done for us the night before so it meant that Sven had to stay up all Friday night until around 4:00 am. None of the tables had been



set up in the dealers room, the main hall wasn't set up as we had asked and it meant that we were still doing work on the Saturday that should have been done for us. As a result, it was the only Auto Assembly not to have had a proper Toy Display although there were some items on show and the Art Display certainly wasn't what we had hoped for.

The hotel layout caused us problems as well. As the event was split over two floors it was difficult to manage and in hindsight this was a mistake. The hotel's notice board about function room use listed rooms from top to bottom so when people arrived they saw AA2004 listed on the 9th floor first... so they went straight there bypassing the 2nd floor for registrations and the check in point. We did have a number of staff to check for passes but as we were short-staffed we couldn't check everyone and people did get in without paying

We don't know exact figures but we would estimate that there were about 50+ gatecrashers over the weekend which hit us badly financially. As some of our team members were hit with illness over the weekend, we just didn't have the bodies to check, which is why we've done things differently this year.

The split floor also isolated dealers from the rest of the activities and did keep some parts of the event quiet at times and for me it was frustrating not being able to leave the main hall where the registration desk was. I barely had any time to visit the Dealers Room or talk to the guests at all during the weekend and I don't think I spoke to Simon Williams at all during his time there!

Then we had goodie bag hassles! Atari had promised to send us demo discs of the Transformers game for the PS2 and they didn't turn up... until 48 hours AFTER Auto



Assembly so we had to send them out in a separate mailing so it almost seemed as if it was one trial after another hitting us that year!

It was still an enjoyable weekend and it was great hearing the comments from everyone who enjoyed their time at AA2004 and it certainly didn't put us off running another despite the problems and the fact that overall we probably lost around £1,000 with the gatecrashers and other problems that cropped up. We just knew that some changes needed to be made...

There was one really special thing to remember though.... as anyone who saw the 30 minutes of footage from AA2004 on the Season 3/4 G1 box set would have found out!!

So that brings us up to this year.... After the problems with AA2004 there were a few main things that we knew right from the start. First, we were going back to the single day format until we knew that fandom was ready for it, and that we were NOT going back to the Britannia... ever... not in a million years... no way!!!

We wanted to set the date way in advance and start promoting it and take bookings quickly so we started looking around. We wanted to get the ticket price down as it was a single day and we knew most of our guests wanted to return so the basics were just a formality. After phoning around a few places

in Birmingham, we drew up a shortlist and the Clarendon Suites was the first we visited and after checking out the facilities they had to offer, and the price we decided that we had found the home for Auto Assembly 2005 and set the date... a year in advance!!

A couple of emails later and we'd sorted out our first few guests so we were ready to start taking bookings. With the growing importance of the net for Auto Assembly, we knew that we would have to start being able to take online bookings so it was a case of PayPal to the rescue for that and we were astonished at how quickly the bookings started to come in.

Immediately, talk soon turned to voice actors and everyone started to ask if Wally was coming back! Even if we could, we knew it wasn't really going to be practical as having the same voice actor two years running would spoil the "special" feel to having a big guest but we did have someone in mind... Obviously, keeping the ticket prices down meant that we needed a sponsor so we couldn't announce anything until that had been secured but we had a few actors interested in appearing and someone was very close to signing until a deal fell through at the last minute. And then Neil Kaplan contacted us....

Neil was very keen to do as many conventions as possible as there had been some interest and talk about him auditioning for a part in the upcoming live action movie so he offered to come over at cost and as he had a trip planned to Europe anyway he even offered to help towards his own flight costs! We worked through our budget and - based on the phenomenal rate bookings were coming in which was far faster than ever before - we could just afford him!



The other actor we had been talking to? Well, why do you think the ticket price has gone up for AA2006?!

The goodie bag has seen some interesting developments. Some potentially exciting items have fallen through at the last minute, but we've gone into producing our own and we've been pretty excited about the first postcards we've done ourselves. We've done pin badges which we think you'll love, and we have a lot more programme items than ever before offering something for everyone!

It's been a wild journey getting to this year's event but we hope you think it's been worth it - we think that it's going to be the best Auto Assembly yet!

So that's the past but what of the future? Well as you've probably read, we're already confirmed the date for Auto Assembly 2006 and we're hoping to make it bigger and better than ever. It's the year of the live action movie, the year that one of the most influential comic stories ever was set (Target: 2006) and more significantly it's the tenth anniversary of Beast Wars so it's a year where we're going to have plenty to celebrate and we hope you'll all join us once again!

TRANSFORMERS

UNLIMITED

A TransFormers continuity for fans of all generations, where the only boundary is your imagination...

“Created” by Sven Harvey, encapsulating story threads from the writing of Bob Budiansky, Simon Furman, Larry DiTillio, and Bob Forward as well as elements from Matt Dallas, Martin McVay, James Roberts, Garry Bodsworth and other TMUK writers. (In other words, I let everyone else do the hard work, took all the bits I liked and made a cohesive whole... honest...)

The following section is made up of stories from the TransFormers: Unlimited universe, and expanding on the core ideas of providing stories that are accessible as possible - we still don't have any artists (well, lets face it I ain't very good...) hence the lack of imagery (though I would love to see some comic strips eventually!).

If you would like to get involved, please contact us - we are always looking for writers and artists, to help us out, and if you enjoy these stories, you may want to pick up MiniCT (issues 1 and 2 are out) which have the other stories thus far...

I hope you enjoy, and I hope to see some letters!!!!

Sven Harvey

"The BinalTech Secret" by Keith Cooper

The early morning sky was crystal clear over the steep mountains of the Japanese island of Hokkaido, as birds soared serenely through the chilled air, through the valleys and gorges around the three thousand metre tall Mount Asahi, from whose peak one could make out the Sea of Okhotsk to the north, or to the south-west the bustling cities of Asahikawa and Sapporo, the emerald blue-

green ribbon of the Ishikari weaving and threading its way between them. Black specks moved down the river, fishing boats from the rural communities, on their way to the cities to sell their catches. Life on the island seemed to be continuing as it had done on every morning for decades.

The peace of the morning was suddenly and disruptively shattered by the crashing thunder of a sonic boom reverberating through the mountains. Birds shrieked as they flew from the trees in one huge wave of flapping wings, deer and mountain goats fled to find cover, and the few hardy farmers who farmed the mountain slopes were forced to clamp their hands over their ears as they looked up into the deep, mesmerising blue sky. A delta shaped silhouette glided over them, banking sharply in a series of S-shaped turns to shed de-orbital delta-V. The white, pencil thin plumes of vapour trails emanating from its sleek wing tips traced its path gracefully through the sky, its fuselage glinting brightly in the light of the rising sun, and soon it was gone, disappearing behind the mountains. Aside from the sonic boom, its passage had been otherwise silent, and the birds flocked back to the trees, the deer and mountain goats cautiously crept out of their hiding places, and the farmers shrugged and got on with their ploughing.

The craft was on course to land at a military base just east of Mount Asahi, a base located on the wide valley floor between two smaller mountains. The runway was nearly two kilometres long, and a runaway this long was only required for one of two things- either craft which were very, very big, or for craft which had travelled from space.

The Americans could, in times of crisis, use the base as an emergency runway for their space shuttle, and had an agreement with the Japanese government over that very issue. However, the Americans had never needed it, and the Japanese certainly hadn't built it just

for the Americans. It was here that the Japanese were testing their space shuttle prototype, as the space race heated up. America and Europe were still out in front making advances, and now that next-door China was making waves, Japan could no longer stand still or it would miss out.

Today however, the base was not even being used by the prototype shuttle. This morning, something else was landing. Something not of this Earth.

Guards stood to attention at the end of the runway, adorned in sandy coloured uniforms, and topped off with blue helmets. They each carried rifles, and they waited patiently as from down the runway the craft, as large as a 747, taxied towards them, heat dissipating from its fuselage in the shimmering air around it, whilst from the other direction where a series of large, concrete hangars stood, a convoy of jeeps, military police and black limousines drove to meet the craft. They arrived roughly at the same time, slowing to a halt, facing each other. Immediately the doors to the various cars opened up, and people got out, some in military uniform with medals dangling proudly from their chests, others resplendent in smart suits and tasteful neckties, whilst one notable man, perhaps in his sixties, was seated in a wheelchair, his bald head shiny in the morning sunlight.

Together the group approached the shuttlecraft. Despite its size it was certainly sleeker than any space vehicle humans had built. Its hull was a dull grey and appeared seamless, its wings were swept back and its nose was softly rounded. It did not perch itself on wheels, but instead on some mysterious kind of invisible force field. Skeletal landing legs emerged from the bowels of the craft's undercarriage, touching the runway to steady the ship. Then the forward hull began to split, where no split had been evident before, and bright light glared out from inside the ship. A ramp lowered onto the ground, wider than a highway road, and three giant silhouettes appeared at the top of the ramp, black against the inside light of the ship. They walked down the ramp together, and into the fresh air of the Japanese mountainside, where they became clear to see.

Three Autobots emerged, none of whom were particularly the largest of their race, perhaps three or four times taller than a human, but nevertheless giants in comparison to their welcoming committee of humans. They looked around, taking in the breathtaking scenery. Aside from the ugly military base with its hangars and tarmac runways and ungainly satellite dishes, the environment in the locality was splendid and relatively untouched, barring a few villages dotted here and their and mountain roads linking them together.

The Autobots now approached the humans, who waited patiently, showing no fear or trepidation unlike many of the fellows in other parts of the world, and the guards had their guns lowered. Everyone seemed to be at ease.

"Greetings," said one of the Autobots, speaking in fluent Japanese. "My name is Pipes. To my left is Outback, to my right is Tailgate. On behalf of the Cybertrons, we come in peace." The Cybertrons was of course the term used by the Japanese when referring to the Autobots. The Decepticons were known as Destrons.

The old man in the wheelchair had maneuvered himself to be at the front of the group of humans. He smiled at the Autobots. "And on behalf of the Japanese nation and the scientific community, I welcome you to Japan. I am Professor Isao Kojima," he said. He motioned to the other people around him. "This is Mr. Shigeta, our country's defence minister, and Ms. Takawara, our science minister. Alongside them are various representatives of the automobile corporations who have aligned themselves with the project."

They all exchanged pleasantries, before Pipes spoke directly to Professor Kojima. "Professor, word of your work is well know in the echelons of our high council, and your presence comes with their recommendation and gratitude. The process that you have developed is simply revolutionary, to such an extent that it even exceeds our own science. You are to be congratulated, Professor."

Kojima smiled politely at the compliment. "The Binaltech process should hopefully benefit us as much as it does you," he said. "Naturally by upgrading your capabilities you stand a greater chance at protecting us from the Destrons, and for my government and the automobile companies who have helped sponsor this initiative it cannot harm their profit margins for the people of Japan to see their heroes appear like the latest models in the car showrooms. Your people are held in very high esteem indeed in my country." "We are extremely grateful, but I have to admit that we are a little anxious regarding the operation. We would appreciate a tour around the plant, to see first hand what we are letting ourselves in for," replied Pipes. "Certainly," nodded Kojima. "If you would please follow us back to the base."

"Thank you," said Pipes.

The humans gathered back in their cars and jeeps and limousines, while in the meantime Outback reached out and put a hand on Pipes arm. Pipes stopped as Outback bent forward to speak to him quietly.

"Do you trust him?" asked Outback suspiciously.

"Who?" asked Pipes, puzzled at Outback's question.

"The Professor."

Pipes threw a disappointed look at Outback. "Why shouldn't we trust him? Other Autobots have gone through the process. If you're having second doubts Outback, you should have said something before we came here." "I'm not having second doubts, its just that-" "It's just that Ultra Magnus, our commander, sent us here," finished Pipes for him. "If you want to be one of the Wreckers, you have to do this."

"Fine, fine," shrugged Outback. "I won't argue. I'm not afraid of the process, having my spark disembodied and stored in some foreign computer whilst my body is discarded doesn't worry me in the slightest. I do think Professor Kojima is hiding something."

"Outback, you don't trust anyone," said Tailgate, who was stood behind them impatiently, and in a rare moment, possibly prompted by the anxiety they all felt, decided to show it. "Now if you don't mind, the humans have already gone, and we should be following them don't you think?"

Pipes agreed, and he transformed into chunky semi-cab mode for what perhaps would be the last time in this body. Sighing inwardly, Outback followed suit, as did Tailgate, and together they sped down the inclined road that ran down the hill descending from the runway to the base, following behind the human convoy.

* * *

The base was ringed by a perimeter fence that was in parts more than two or three kilometres from the main buildings and hangars. The need for such security was down to maintaining secrecy. The Americans had their Area 51, whilst the Japanese had this base, simply called Facility 5, a title even less snappy than the American's unimaginative counterpart. Of course, what was happening inside the base was anything but unimaginative, and that was what they wanted to keep secret. A whole host of spies, particularly from America, Russia and China, were no doubt snooping around to get intelligence at every opportunity. The Americans knew about the base and what went on there, of course, as did the Europeans, but naturally neither of them trusted the Japanese to reveal every detail. Even the car manufacturers who had acted as co-sponsors of the project did not know all the aspects of the project. They provided the blueprints of the cars, and it was down to the Japanese scientists to retool the designs to become transforming vehicles.

It wasn't only other nations on Earth who the Japanese were wary of. The Decepticons undoubtedly knew of Binaltech technology, having come across the previous recipients of it, Smokescreen, Sideswipe, Hound and Tracks, during battle and come off worst. They would do anything to get their hands on the technology to rebalance the odds in the war once more. Instigating every precaution to prevent them from doing so, the Autobots had shown the Japanese how to scan workers for Bombshell's implanted cerebro shells, or unusual brain patterns stimulated by hypnosis or brain-washing from Mindwipe or Soundwave. The Autobots told them of the most likely Decepticon candidates to try and sneak into the base- Ravage and

Laserbeak. There was even an automated defence probe that orbited ten kilometres up in a geo-stationary orbit that could disable and destroy any spy satellites that encroached over that particular region of Japan.

Despite all the hi-tech wizardry, when it came to patrolling the perimeter fence good old-fashioned legwork was the order of the day. Guards, wearing the same khaki-uniforms and blue helmets walked up and down repeatedly, whilst some made tours of the grounds in jeeps, bouncing up and over the rough, untouched terrain inside and outside the fence. Camera's covered the land around the fence with saturated coverage. There was one set of gates, to the south of the base, where a moderately large command post sat, made up of two guard-posts on either side of the gates. The gates opened out onto a road, one of the roads that linked up the small villages in the region, weaving through the mountainous terrain.

A kilometre or so down that road, a bright yellow Porsche 924 Turbo was parked up on the side of the road, encroaching onto the grass verge. Strangely it seemed abandoned, and the driver of a ramshackle truck that chugged past stared at it in disbelief that anyone could so carelessly leave such a nice car like that abandoned. Yet the driver of the truck had no need for a Porsche- he was a farmer, not a flash city yuppie with a mobile phone and more fashion sense than common sense, and so he continued on past, politely smiling and waving to the soldiers at the guard posts, who ignored him.

The Porsche had not been abandoned however, for there was no one to abandon it. It was as freethinking and free-willed as any human driver could be. At least, Hubcap liked to think so anyway.

However, the truth was that Hubcap had become something of a nobody inside the Autobot camp. He'd been stationed with Autobot Earthforce as a communications officer, but he had started to feel more and more marginalized as time had passed. He wasn't a good fighter, and wasn't even confident about his skills as a

communications officer. The other Autobots would gently rib him, until the point where the joke had gone on for so long that he'd left. No doubt his commanding officer, Jazz, was not too pleased about his going AWOL, but that was too bad. Hubcap had to do what he'd always been best at, and that was looking after himself because no one else was going to do it for him.

In the end that had drawn him to this base. Whilst he had been in Earthforce he hadn't ranked high enough to be privy to the knowledge of its location, and it had taken him weeks of searching, tracking down rumours until he had found it. Even then he hadn't been certain it was the right place until earlier this morning when he had seen that Autobot shuttle fly in. That could have only meant one thing- that there were more volunteers for the process.

The process. That was all that concerned him now. To undergo the Binaltech operation was his big chance. He was tired of being a weakling, of being generally unskilled and laughed at. With a Binaltech body he could change all that forever. The others would have no choice but to respect him, and the Decepticons would have no choice but to fear him in combat as they did with Smokescreen and the others. All the adulation that he so desperately yearned for would come to him. It was who he wanted to be.

First though he had to bluff his way into the base. It shouldn't be too hard, he thought, he was an Autobot after all, and these were only humans. If he was good at anything, Hubcap was a good conman.

He drove away from the grass verge at the side of the fence where he had been parked, acutely aware that the base cameras were no doubt watching him. Racing towards the gate, he slowed down a hundred metres from the guard-post, slowing to stop outside of it. Two guards stepped out from the gatepost to meet him, when he suddenly transformed into robot mode, and instantly another half a dozen soldiers leapt out, guns raised at him aggressively. They yelled orders at him, demanding to know who he was and what business he had here.

“Whoa, easy on the guns!” said Hubcap, feigning mock-alarm. “I’m Hubcap. An Auto-err, a Cybertron. See?” He pointed to his Autobot insignia displayed on his chest. Although he was a mini-bot, and only twice as tall as the humans, they evidently saw him as some sort of a threat, which actually Hubcap thought of as a compliment as it showed they respected him at least.

“Anyway,” Hubcap continued. “I’m here for my Binaltech upgrade, thanks very much. Professor Kojima asked me to report here on my way in.”

The guards had relaxed slightly upon seeing his Autobot insignia, but the senior officer in the group suddenly stiffened when he heard what Hubcap’s explanation for why he was here. He looked at his fellow guards, who all looked at each other in bewilderment, their expressions puzzled. None of them had been informed that Hubcap’s was due to arrive.

The senior guard asked one of his subordinates to go back into the guard-post and radio the base to confirm this, whilst the senior guard apologised to Hubcap but explained he was not permitted to pass onto the base until confirmation arrived.

Hubcap waved a hand blithely. “There’s no need to bother the Professor or the base commanders, I’m sure they are all busy men. Oh my, look at the time, I’m already late. We don’t want to keep the Professor waiting do we? I’ll just head on in. Is it this way?” He began to step past the perplexed guards, who suddenly became rather annoyed at his antics and raced out to block his way, when they were distracted by a noise emanating from the sky above. It was a deep rumbling roar, a roar distinct to jet engines. Hubcap followed the soldiers’ gazes.

A jet soared high in the sky, its design instantly familiar to Hubcap. It was a Decepticon jet named Thrust. Instantly, Hubcap realised what had happened. The Decepticons had been searching for this base ever since the superior Binaltech Autobots had begun overwhelming them in battle. They must have learnt of Hubcap’s search for it, and decided to let the Autobot find the base for them, whilst they just followed him discretely until he led them here. Now they knew the location of the base, and it was *his*

fault! He felt a deep surge of guilt and responsibility shake through him. His fellow Autobots would never forgive him for this blunder.

Unless he made it right.

Without stopping to hesitate or consider the consequences, Hubcap transformed and raced away in pursuit of Thrust, who was beginning to sweep away from the base in a wide arc. He would be out of range long before any response from the Japanese air force could get in the air, and the Decepticon had cloaking technology that effectively shielded them from radar. The only one who could prevent Thrust from escaping with the information was Hubcap. Having to live with the knowledge that he had let the Decepticons get access to the technology was something he dare not contemplate.

The road he raced down ran around the lower edge of a mountain, winding and spiraling its way up. Thrust’s trajectory was going to take him over the road, and Hubcap watched as the Decepticon thundered towards him. Transforming back to robot mode, Hubcap raised his blaster, and began to fire as Thrust rocketed overhead, but the Decepticon proved too quick and easily evaded Hubcap’s attempts to ground him. Frustrated, Hubcap returned to vehicle mode, and set off in rapid pursuit.

Thrust knew he could easily outrun the Autobot, but that would spoil the fun of the chase. Plus, after all, it was only a mini-bot, and what possible harm could a mini-bot cause Thrust? On the other hand, Thrust could cause a lot of harm to Hubcap. He inwardly grinned savagely at that macabre thought. Banking sharply, Thrust piled on the acceleration as he turned back to rush towards the oncoming Hubcap far below. Diving downwards, Hubcap apparently had not anticipated such a move on Thrust’s behalf- braking heavily, smoke rising up from his scuffed tyres, the diminutive Autobot didn’t know what to do. He was stuck here, a glaring target for Thrust, with nowhere obvious to hide. Whilst his mind scrambled to find an escape route, he hesitated, and that hesitation proved fatal. The roar of Thrust’s

engines closed in on him as the Decepticon dived downwards, over which came the hiss of air-to-ground missiles being launched, their destructive force let loose on the Autobot. Thrust had left it late before he had fired, enjoying the crazed feeling of excitement from the kill, but he pulled up at the last second as the missiles thundered into poor Hubcap, engulfing him in an incandescent ball of fire and debris, and as Thrust receded into the distance, what was left of Hubcap clattered to the floor, a smattering of smoking metal and the burning husk of a vehicle chassis.

* * *

Pipes, Tailgate and Outback hurried into the operating room as swiftly as they could when they heard the news. The operating room was more like a converted hangar, one of the only buildings on the base big enough to house any substantial number of Transformers. In this hangar there were no vehicles or planes or any other modes of aircraft, but there were half a dozen slabs of metal that looked like gigantic operating tables. Along their sides were cranes that ran on rigs, the arms of the cranes tipped by platforms upon which human engineers could stand. At the top of the table, large structures of scaffolding were erected, upon which masses of computer equipment, laser welding tools, cutters, scalpels, and crane arms were fixed, huge vice-like hands capable of gripping slabs of metal at the ends of the arms. Technicians in their white lab-coats complemented by their white hard-hats, worked along the scaffolding, studiously clutching at clipboards. One of the senior technicians was a young woman who happened to be Professor Kojima's daughter, and she was co-ordinating affairs when the three Autobots hurried into the operating room, followed by the Professor himself, moving along effortlessly in his motorised wheelchair.

On one of the gigantic tables lay the wreckage of Hubcap. He'd tried to transform back into robot mode after the missiles had struck and he'd still had consciousness, but his injuries had been so great that he had been unable to finish the transformation

before darkness had enveloped him. He was black and charred, and the acrid smell of his rubber tyres burning hung in the air like a suffocating cloud. His left arm was completely missing, ripped off by the force of the explosion which engulfed him, whilst all that was left of his left leg below the knee joint was a knotted tangle of mashed wires and pistons. Various other serious injuries covered what was left of his body, the wounds cutting deep into his internal mechanics. The lights were out in his eyes. He didn't seem alive.

"Can you save him?" asked Pipes, concern etched over his face. He didn't know Hubcap too well, and his reputation preceded him; yet he was a fellow Autobot who had suffered grave injuries.

"Your friend was lucky," explained Kojima's attractive and intelligent looking daughter, Maeko. "We got him back just in time to extract his spark from his dying body. This wreckage you see is nothing more than an empty cadaver now. However, he was reported to have attempted to breach security on the base earlier this morning, and it was he who led the Destrons here."

Outback grew outraged as he stood beside Pipes and Tailgate and listened to the woman talk. He slammed his fist down hard on the metal table, so heavily the table vibrated, shaking a few technicians to their feet as the clamped their ears to block the noise of his fist against the metal. The whack had left a dint in the table.

"Are you saying you are unwilling to save his life because of one indiscretion?" raged Outback. "What kind of people are you?" Pipes raised an arm, a calming influence on his more tempestuous friend. "Outback, please, you're not helping the situation." Outback's eyes narrowed as he looked at Pipes, but he remained silent after that, brooding away inside. Pipes returned to addressing the humans.

"Outback does have a point though," he said. "Hubcap's life is in your hands. Despite what Hubcap has done, will you not save him?" "Hubcap's actions may well lead to the Destron's capturing the secret of Binaltech," explained the Professor, choosing his words carefully. "Undoubtedly they will attack soon. Nevertheless, we are not callous here. We understand that we must work together if we

are to defeat the Destrons. Your friend is fortunate. We do have one spare prototype Binaltech body to save his life.”

Pipes nodded. “Thank you Professor. We are extremely grateful, and I am sure Hubcap will be too. However I don’t think we can allow ourselves to wait much longer; the Decepticons will surely attack soon and it is imperative that we be ready for them. We have no more time to waste- prepare us for the operation!”

The three Autobots laid themselves out onto the tables alongside Hubcap, as the technicians who had been milling around were spurred into action, an entire army of the white-coated techs having been summoned by Professor Kojima. They swarmed around the prone Autobots, and began inserting cables into strategic parts of their bodies- connecting to the neural cluster, motor functions, and most importantly, the spark chamber.

The spark of a Transformer could be considered as essentially a Transformer’s consciousness, or even its soul. Though no metaphysical properties are entwined in its existence (in Autobots and Decepticons at least), it can exist outside the body, for it is nothing more than the life-giving computer code inputted by the Creation Matrix at the time of birth. The spark is however very delicate and once it is extinguished, the Transformer is truly dead. So long as the spark endures, so does the Transformer, no matter how grave his injuries. Nevertheless, as in Hubcap’s case, the nature of the injuries can threaten the survival of the spark as circuit overloads fuse the neural circuitry pathways of a Transformer brain module, which can prevent the spark from operating, causing it to crash permanently. The technicians had got to Hubcap just in time and by evacuating his spark and containing it in a specially designed computer with an exceptionally high processing rate and internal memory, his spark could be kept safe.

The computer used to house the disembodied spark was created from technology invented by Professor Kojima, the father of Binaltech technology. The technology was far in advance of the rest of

technology on Earth, and in many ways even more advanced than Cybertronian technology. Kojima, known amongst the scientific community as a respected particle physicist rather than an engineer, refused to disclose exactly how he came across the secret of Binaltech, but when the Autobots required it to save the lives of some of their soldiers who had been seriously injured whilst protecting Japanese civilians from Decepticon attack, Kojima felt he had to help. He patented his new technology, and after a presentation to his government and senior Autobots, he offered to aid the stricken Autobots. Kojima even came up with an ingenious way to fund the project, offering well-known automobile manufacturers the chance to have the new Transformer bodies resemble their latest models. Companies such as Subaru would fund the project, along with the Japanese government and the military, to the tune of billions of yen

Kojima watched as Maeko supervised the multiple operations. Kojima marvelled at her, at how brilliantly masterful she was at co-ordinating the four complex operations all at once. She had previously been working in industry, but the bias against females from the company executives had led to her getting stuck in lower-level management. Here, under her father’s protection, she had free reign to let her skills flow to their full extent. Ordinarily they would have conducted one operation at a time, but Pipes had been correct- time was running out before the Decepticons would surely attack.

Pipes, Tailgate and Outback, who in particular had grumbled all the while, mentally switched off all their internal functions, effectively sending them into self-induced comas. At that point it became safe to crack the neural cluster, in which the spark chamber was embedded. A cable was plugged in, and noiselessly the individual sparks were evacuated, and stored in the mega-computer along with Hubcap’s spark. Inside the computer, a simulation was running in which the sparks could regain consciousness and keep track of how the operations were proceeding. Kojima had little idea how that must have felt like- previous patients Smokescreen and Sideswipe had

described it as a similar sensation to floating through empty space. They could see everything outside, relayed by cameras, but it was passive, with no interaction. All they could do was wait apprehensively for the results.

With their sparks evacuated, their old bodies could be discarded. The tables were fitted to sets of wheels, and four small cargo haulers chugged into the hangar, and were attached to the tables, before wheeling them out. The scaffolding rigs detached, along with all the equipment, and the technicians waited for the new bodies. These were wheeled in on four new tables, and once in place the scaffolding was re-attached to these tables, which were in every other way identical to the old ones, bar the new Binaltech bodies laid on them, covered in shiny, opaque polythene sheets.

Referring to the Autobot's sparks, Maeko told the other technicians, "Lets get them plugged back in, people." Their sparks need loading into the new bodies, followed by a series of diagnostic tests and calibration to make sure their sparks did not reject the new bodies, the same way a human body can reject a transplanted organ. But the new bodies had been designed very carefully, according to the designated specifics written into their spark code, and so the problems should be limited. Pipes', Outback's and Tailgate's bodies had been on the drawing board for several months now, Kojima liaising with Autobot medical, scientific and engineering staff such as Wheeljack and Perceptor. The only question mark would be over Hubcap's new form- it had been a test model, based around the new Ford GT. Thus, as a spare prototype, it had not been tooled to fit any one spark. Now Hubcap was going to have to reside in it, and there was even less guarantee that he would be compatible than with the others, who were already taking big risks. For Hubcap, only time would tell.

Pipes had previously been an old semi-cab; Tailgate a Pontiac Trans-am; Outback a Land Rover Defender and Hubcap a Porsche 928. Kojima wasn't sure how their previous Earthly designs had been created, and while he was no purveyor of automobiles, even he could see that their new modes were far more

appealing- a Volvo VHD, a Ford GT, a new Landrover and a Peugeot hatchback.

He smiled to himself as his daughter continued to expertly supervise the other technicians. The process only took a few hours: the bodies had been constructed on the very same tables weeks ago, hence the presence of the cutting and welding equipment, the robotic arms and the laser scalpels. All that was needed now was the insertion of the spark. In a short while the new Binaltech Wreckers would be complete, and it would not be a moment too soon.

* * *

Increased patrols had been initiated around the perimeter fence of the base following the aerial incursion by Thrust. The Japanese authorities, expecting a Decepticon attack to be imminent, had mobilized their military. A squadron of F-15 fighters had been sent into the area, but surely they would have little chance against Decepticon seekers. Japanese fighter pilots were inexperienced, and due to their small region of airspace around Japan in which they could perform combat simulations in, they were limited to the amount of combat simulations and manoeuvres they could practice. Land forces were massing, tanks and infantry, but the best they could do would be to hold the Decepticons at bay until Autobot Earthforce could arrive. Help had been requested from them, but that help was still an hour or two away. On the other hand there was nothing to stop the Decepticons from arriving at the base within a minute or two, depending on how close their forces were.

As it happened, they were close.

The guards at the perimeter fence were patrolling the grounds with grave faces, nervous sweat running down their foreheads, when the call came in. Contact had been lost with an E-2C early warning aircraft, seventy kilometres north-east of the base, and the F-15's had spotted approaching aircraft which were maintaining radio silence. They had moved to intercept, but none of the soldiers who were hurriedly securing the base and taking up defensive positions in strategic

spots had any delusions that the F-15's were going to be able to stop the Decepticons. At best all they could be expected to do was delay the enemy.

After an apprehensive ten minutes wait, trouble was spotted on the horizon as three objects throttled towards the base at high velocity. At first they were merely dots on the skyline, but they quickly grew into distinct silhouettes, and then the defined forms of three Decepticon jets- Dirge and Ramjet, and Thrust on his return to the base. Hanging from cables beneath Dirge and Ramjet was a large cargo container, which, as they swept over the base, was released along with the cables, were cut from the two Decepticons, and it plummeted to the ground. Airbags ballooned outwards, making it look like a huge, bizarre beach ball. It smashed into the ground, the bags bursting as the ground struck hard, but they did manage to soften the blow. Despite this, the container still managed to crack apart, and without a moments notice five Decepticon's piled out of its wreckage, all five armed to the teeth and hungry for battle.

"I'm pleased to be back, humans," mocked Thrust. "This time I've brought a few friends. Humans, feel honoured to meet the Combaticons! They'll be the death of you, I'm sure!"

The Japanese military responded by directing a squadron made up of half a dozen tanks in the direction of the emerging Combaticons. The Combaticons appeared to disregard the tanks presumptuously, but that changed when the most advanced tank let loose a shell from its mighty turret cannon, which smashed straight into the midriff of Swindle, blowing him backwards with some venom. Swindle clattered to the ground, his torso smoking and dented, but he didn't stay down, leaping back to his feet quickly.

"Ha!" laughed Swindle's Combaticon colleague, Brawl. "That's not firepower! Anyone can knock down Swindle! *This* is real firepower!"

From robot mode he jumped and transformed into his Leopard tank mode, with added sonic cannons, and fired several shells towards the oncoming human tanks. The shells landed

amidst the tanks with enough force to uproot three or four of the tanks, blowing their treads off which flapped away like vicious shrapnel, and they landed on their sides before crumpling and rolling upside down.

Above the battlefield, Vortex was busy shooting down Japanese gunship helicopters, whilst Blast-Off ran strafing runs along with Thrust, Dirge and Ramjet, blowing aircraft hangars, gun turrets and other assorted buildings to pieces. Combaticon leader Onslaught directed the ground battle, as the Japanese resistance swiftly and brutally fell before them. After scant few minutes, nothing now stood between the Decepticons and the secret of Binaltech.

The Decepticons had just about proclaimed victory, and Thrust, Ramjet and Dirge transformed to robot mode and returned to the ground. They should be able to steal the Binaltech technology and be long gone before Autobot Earthforce showed up.

At that moment the large doors to the main hangar began to slowly lift, their concertina structure rising into the hangar roof. The Decepticons paused, expecting more tanks, but were stunned to see four Autobots leap out, Autobots they had never seen before. The Autobots roared into instantaneous action, their expressions fierce and determined, and their war cry spine-chillingly familiar to the Decepticons.

"Wreck and rule!" yelled Pipes, his robot form now much more advanced- taller, more powerful, and quicker than before, with the ability to transform into a Volvo VHD truck. He raised his blaster and started firing at the Decepticons, who leapt desperately out of the way. But beside Pipes, Hubcap was ready for their evasive movements. Restored to full health in his new Binaltech body, he targeted Onslaught and blasted him with his concussion blaster, causing the Combaticon to rear up in agony.

"Hah," chuckled Hubcap. "This is almost going to be worth getting blown up for!" The truth was, Hubcap had never felt more confident. His new Binaltech body provided him with everything he had craved for. He

could almost literally feel the fearful respect he generated in his enemy.

Sprawled on the floor, smoke rising from the wound on his chest, Onslaught took in the changing battle. These must be Autobots who had recently undergone the Binaltech treatment, and history taught him that any Decepticons who went into battle with Binaltech-powered Autobots inevitably lost. Then again, none of those Decepticons had fielded the ability to combine and form a gestalt entity like Bruticus.

“Combaticons, form Bruticus!” Onslaught commanded.

Grouping together, the Combaticons suddenly began to leap on top of one another, their torsos twisting, pistons pumping, robotic tendons flexing as they twisted and contorted and meshed unto one another, interlocking and merging until within scant moments the gestalt entity, Bruticus, stood towering over the battlefield, the look in his eyes revealing a bloodthirsty gleam reflecting the violent minds of his component personalities. Automatically everyone backed away from him, everyone except Outback.

“What’s wrong guys?” he yelled to his retreating comrades. “We’re Wreckers, and with our new bodies we at least stand a chance of taking this oversized tin can down!”

Bruticus roared in menacing, mocking laughter. “I see you have a sense of humour Autobot. For your sake I hope you enjoy pain.”

Outback raised his rifle and loosed off a volley of shots that simply bounced off Bruticus’ thick armour. Bruticus was more than the sum of his parts- their combined power increased exponentially when they were merged. Still, as the shots struck Swindle, Bruticus heard the whiny Decepticon’s voice complaining in his mind and had to force him back into subservience to be able to function efficiently.

“You’ll need more power than what is in those pea-shooters if you think you are going to bring me down,” boasted Bruticus, and with a

swing of his left leg he kicked out at Outback, catching him firmly in the midriff and sending him flying through the air, crashing down onto a burning outhouse, his impact rending the outhouse finally asunder in splinters of debris.

Pipes had fallen back along with everyone else when Bruticus had merged, and was staring open-mouthed at the giant that now lumbered over the burning battlefield. The only hope of the sanctity of the Binaltech technology now lay with somehow defeating Bruticus, but Pipes was darned if he knew how- he had no experience at fighting something like *this*.

Hubcap was crouched beside him, sheltered behind an upturned tank along with its battered and bruised crew. He looked at Pipes in desperation. “What do we do?” he asked. “We can’t stop anything like that!” Pipes threw a sideways glance at Hubcap. “You did say that you wanted to undergo the Binaltech operation because it would improve your prowess in combat. Well, here’s your big chance.”

Hubcap looked annoyed, but chose not to say anything else. Privately though Pipe was beginning to think Hubcap might be right. They couldn’t fight something like Bruticus. Even though their Binaltech forms were at the peak of Autobot and human technology, they were still lacking compared to a gestalt. He thought about what Bruticus had said, about how they needed more power than they had to bring him down.

Pipes suddenly glanced over Bruticus’ head. Power lines ran over him, coming down from the mountains, to a transformer station on the base. Of course, the base did not rely solely on these power lines for it had its own emergency electrical generators that were fully capable of powering the entire base should needs be. But the power lines themselves were also a sufficient source of power...

An idea, admittedly a desperate idea, sprang into Pipes’ mind. As Bruticus stepped beneath the power lines, Pipes fired at one of the pylons, severing the electricity cables.

They swung down before Bruticus could even react, and struck him on the back. Thousands of volts flooded through the gestalt and he stiffened with the crackling insurgence of electricity, and his back burned and smoked. Bruticus pulled away from the flailing power lines in shock, and for a moment he looked slack and weak, but crucially he was still standing.

“What do we have to do to bring this guy down?” asked Pipes incredulously. Bruticus was still staggering around, attempting to regain his composure. Inside his frail mind five voices screamed at one another chaotically, as Bruticus struggled to calm them all down. “Wreckers, humans, fire!” commanded Pipes. “Hit him with everything we’ve got whilst he’s still wounded!”

The remaining tanks advanced on Bruticus and began firing shells, whilst combat helicopters swooped in, their machine guns rattling off a bewildering number of bullets that traced a line across Bruticus’ metal hide. Tailgate charged forwards, picking out Bruticus’ weak spots with his blaster. Bruticus roared and flailed, swinging his arms about madly. Then Swindle suddenly decided that he’d had enough, much to the fury of his comrades, and physically and mentally split from Bruticus. The split was acrimonious and painful for a sharp second, but at least he was free to retreat under his own initiative.

However, Swindle had made up Bruticus’ left leg, and without Swindle underneath to hold him upright, Bruticus toppled over, crashing into the grassy surface, creating a mini crater where he dug into the dirt beneath. Bruticus fell apart, separating into the individual Combaticons. With the combined Autobot and human forces with a second wind in their sails, the Combaticons unanimously decided it was the appropriate time for them all to retreat.

Pipes finally stood before a horrified Thrust, Ramjet and Dirge. Hubcap and Tailgate were with him, whilst Outback was still picking himself out of the destroyed outhouse. Pipes was an image of power and confidence. “Now the muscle you brought with you has scurried off back to hide in whatever deep

dark hole it came from, how’d you like to take us on face-to-face?” Pipes asked. “I’m sure Hubcap here owes you a thing or two.”

Ramjet and Dirge looked worriedly at Thrust, who seemed panicked and unsure. He stuttered, unable to spit out any coherent words, and only ended up making himself look ridiculous.

“I think the words you’re looking for are, ‘Decepticons, retreat’,” Pipes suggested helpfully.

Dirge and Ramjet nodded to each other, and swiftly leapt into the air, transforming to jet mode and blasting into the sky. Thrust looked completely helpless, before becoming annoyed. “One day Autobots,” he promised. “One day we’ll crush your pitiful hopes beneath our boots.” Then he turned and transformed into jet mode, and followed Ramjet and Dirge in shameful defeat.

“It looks like the Binaltech secret will remain secret,” commented Tailgate.

Pipes watched as the Decepticons fled away into the horizon, over the hills and mountains, their thunderous jet engines deafening the wildlife and mountain farmers who had become accustomed by now to such interruptions to their peaceful lives. “It remains secret for now,” replied Pipes thoughtfully. “But for how long remains another question.”

* * *

At the Earthforce base in the United States, Jazz had already sent a task force to head to Japan to defend the Binaltech facility. However, with the danger over for now, Pipes was required to send a communiqué back to Jazz to inform him assistance was no longer required.

“Don’t tell him I’m here,” pleaded Hubcap as Pipes prepared to relay the message. “What choice do I have?” asked Pipes. “You are technically AWOL from your post Hubcap; that’s a serious offence. Jazz is your commanding officer, it is my duty to inform him.”

Hubcap looked at Pipes pleadingly. They were alone in the cockpit of the Wrecker's shuttle, parked up on the runway adjoined to the base. The cockpit was cramped; Hubcap had been forced to push past Pipes to be able to sit down.

"I... I know," admitted Hubcap. "I just didn't fit in at Earthforce."

"And who's fault is that?" asked Pipes, perhaps a little too condescendingly, but Hubcap let it go.

"What I'm trying to ask for is a new start. Let me come with you. I have more in common now with you guys than with anyone at Earthforce. Maybe I can even become a Wrecker."

Pipes had to chuckle at that. "I'm sorry Hubcap, but you've got a long way to go before you could even think about becoming a Wrecker."

"At least let me return to Cybertron with you," said Hubcap. "Please."

Pipes sighed and gave in. "Alright, you can come with us, and I won't tell Jazz that you are here. I'll warn you now though that once we arrive back on Cybertron you'll most likely get sent straight back to Earth. You may even get court-martialled."

"Well, I'm already in trouble, so that won't make any difference," Hubcap commented.

"Thank you, Pipes."

Pipes shook his head and wagged a finger.

"No, don't thank me. You've still got a heck of a lot to learn before you can be considered a good Autobot warrior. I'm doing this because we are both Binaltech, that's all."

Hubcap nodded solemnly. Unfortunately for him, he didn't yet realise the extent of the lengths he would have to go to prove himself. But that's another story.

* * *

Epilogue

Personal diary, Professor Isao Kojima.

8th May 2004

The Binaltech procedure has once more proved a success. The four Cybertrons who received the treatment successfully defended the facility against a Destron attack. There was no time before the battle to conduct their physical and psychological tests, but

thankfully they seem to be functioning well, and subsequent test results imply that to be the case. My only concern is for the one called Hubcap, though his poor psych test results are apparently to do with an inherent flaw within his spark rather than any malfunction of the Binaltech. It will be up to him to resolve his own mental crisis, but this entire episode has reminded me that we all have our flaws...

Today we came critically close to losing the secret of Binaltech. I am beginning to wonder if it is worth the risk I have taken. I only wish I could tell Maeko the truth of my dishonour. She believes entirely in me, maybe as one would expect from a daughter, and it would pain me to reveal the truth to her. I am not an engineer, I am a particle physicist. I conducted experiments in a particle accelerator, ignoring the safety statutes and threatening the lives of many in attempting to reach energies decreed as dangerous. But in doing so I opened up a gateway to... somewhere, a dimension I haven't thoroughly identified as of yet. In doing so it became a two-way street. The being I met gave me the secret of Binaltech, and told me to use it to aid the Cybertrons. He told me that under no circumstances should his domain be revealed to anyone else, and if the Destrons found the gateway there it would surely spell disaster.

The keeper of this place told me to use Binaltech, and so I did. I lied to my government, to the Cybertrons, even to my own daughter, to protect her from the truth that her father is a fraud. I did not invent Binaltech, and despite what the keeper told me, it does not sit well with me. But the Keeper insists that Binaltech may be the Cybertrons only hope.

I only wish I knew why.

Profile: Hubcap

"Weapons can win battles, but words can win wars."

Hubcap is a con artist; there is no other way to describe him, though that is not to say he is in any way evil, or inherently bad. But he is

a fairly weak, poor warrior, and thus he has to gain attention by other means. In conversion Hubcap is affable, charming and will give everyone a smile. But underneath his pleasant exterior he is always trying to get something from the people around him, to con people out of what they have, because they won't give him it through any other means. Hubcap feels forgotten about, which is why he resorts to these measures, but it is because he acts like this that the other Autobots are wary of him. It is a vicious circle that Hubcap can't quite comprehend. Nevertheless, he would be lying if he said that he didn't enjoy some of what he does- as a con artist he is very good, and he enjoys doing things well. But above all, like everyone else really, he just wants to be liked and respected.

Hubcap is also prone to daydreaming, and lacking concentration, and often doesn't hear what other people are trying to say to him. He's also somewhat lazy, doing things on whims rather than because they need doing. Despite this he is quite intelligent, and possesses a curiosity about the universe around him, and somewhere deep down lurks a noble Autobot, which at times does surface as Hubcap shows what he is capable of, though the other Autobots have learnt never to count on him to help them. He transforms into a sports car.

Amendment

Hubcap was seriously injured during an engagement with the Decepticons, and as a result had to undergo the Binaltech process to save his life. In this respect he was lucky for he had been longing for a Binaltech body ever since the process was first developed by human scientists. Now with a body as fast and as strong and as powerful as any other Autobot, he has the means to win his comrades respect, but he has a long way to go to before he learns that it will take more than that for them to truly respect him.

Profile: Pipes

"One being's Junk is another's art."

Pipes is a collector of anything. Trinkets, gadgets, souvenirs, you name it. They remind him that there can be life outside of war, a life in which it is possible to have the luxury to enjoy these otherwise irrelevant objects. Yet in having a hobby, Pipes has the chance, unlike many of his fellow Autobots, to relax and forget about preoccupancy of all out war for a while. As a result, when on duty he has an air of calm about him, which makes him a little standoffish to the other Autobots, and to an extent they resent this in him. Pipes though has turned this around, utilising this distance between he and the other Autobots to generate an aura of assuredness and authority to his personality. He is not afraid to lead by example, or to take risks, knowing that the vast majority of Autobots already dislike him.

In combat, Pipes is an assured warrior. While he is certainly nothing like a veteran, his skills and his actions on the battlefield belie his relatively youthful age. He transforms into a semi-cab, and in robot mode his twin exhaust stacks become arm-mounted cannons that can emit a corrosive gas, which can melt through a two-inch thick plate of steel in just over a breem. He possesses armour shielding to protect himself from his own weapon. Pipes is very powerfully built, and in hand-to-hand combat this physical strength is to be feared by the enemy. Nor is Pipes afraid of stepping in and getting physical when he has to. However, his strength only counterbalances his lack of speed and gracefulness.

Amendment

Previously an Autobot cadet, he graduated into the elite Wreckers, and was promptly rewarded with a new Binaltech body, which retains the strength of his old body, whilst increasing his agility and speed at the same time, making him an even more competent warrior. Now he is in the Wreckers he finds that the few close friends that he has, the likes of Tailgate and Outback, look towards him for leadership even more, but only time will tell whether Pipes can overcome the more serious challenges posed to him as a consequence of being a member of the Wreckers.

"Stepper's Story" by Sven Harvey

Thrown from the Ark as it crashed down into the planet that would become known as Earth the Autobots reactivated 4 million years later had to assume Stepper had been destroyed either during the battle with the Decepticons or during the crash.

However, Stepper had dropped to land half a world away from the Ark and lay dormant... a virtual pile of scrap that ended up buried and dormant,

Fate would not leave Stepper alone, however. Through a combination of tectonic activity, human intervention and luck his form ended up at a small scrap yard and as fate would have it, entangled with a car that had been involved in a nasty accident. The car had been written off and its black chassis ended up with Stepper. Both sets of metal had a black colour scheme so it was little wonder that even with the rust, that they would be mistaken as part of each other.

Fortunately for Stepper, a teenager worked part time at the scrap yard, whilst studying to be an engineer and designer. Yoichi Sato was fascinated by cars and he was sure that this black Porsche 935 turbo would be repaired and brought back to life. His boss, a kind hearted man had given him leave to repair it if he could, so long as he paid for the parts, as the car was little known in their area, and with the little pay he could afford to give Yoichi for all his hard work, it only seemed fair to give him what was essentially to him a pile of scrap. Neither knew quite what the future had in store.

Finally the day came that Yoichi got the Porsche running. Little did he know that the parts he didn't recognise, but managed to fit in (they all belonged, right?). Decorated in an unusual flame style Yoichi was proud of his achievement. It wouldn't be long before he would need it to get to his design placement at Mazda that he was in the running for (assuming he would get it)...

Then one day... there was a huge commotion down by the bay. Robots, huge robots,

seemed to be knocking parts out of each other. Yoichi was about to dismiss the spectacle as a publicity stunt for the next big movie release. Well at least until his Porsche sounded like it cried out and started driving off on its own, him still inside.

The shock was compounded somewhat by the view of a Martini Racing Porsche 953 turbo running alongside. Ok these cars were very rare in this part of the world, so Yoichi, already wondering what the hell was going on was taken back a bit. Both Porsches tore around a blind corner and Yoichi suddenly became aware that the white Porsche running alongside them had no driver... Then it just got weirder... A group of robots were up ahead and the white Porsche suddenly seemed to jump up and, well... transform. A 35 foot robot took the place of the Porsche and turned, a rifle of some kind aimed at Yoichi's car...

"OK human..." enquired Jazz, "why were you following me?"

Stunned, Yoichi manged so stammer out "I didn't"

Wheeljack, scanner in hand stepped forward..." err.... Jazz... I am reading lifesigns from this car.

"Something nesting in it? It can get warm!" replied Jazz eyes not leaving Yoichi and his Porsche.

"err.. not exactly, they are Cybertronian..." puzzled Wheeljack

"What?" Jazz lowered his weapon and took a step towards the vehicle, Yoichi looked concerned. "Don't worry, I won't harm you... but your car appears to be more than it seems... Wheeljack take a look will ya?"

"Jazz... there is an Autobot in here! But he isn't complete... a run through the ECU should sort him out though! Better not tell Grimlock though...!"

"Well, human... fancy a trip abroad?" Jazz enquired...

* * *

A few hours later at Earthforce base

"and as you can see, we have to protect Earth from the Decepticons..."

"Well Jazz, I can understand why it hasn't exactly become common knowledge" agreed Yoichi

Wheeljack entered the room...

"Well, its taken a lot longer to deal with the reconstruction matrix for the ECU than I thought... but the repair cycle should be complete within the hour. Plenty of time before the Dinobots start barging around the place again..."

"I welcome the peace and quiet 'Jack, time to catch up on some tunes... What kinda music do you like Yoichi?"

* * *

The cycle complete, Yoichis Porsche rolled off the conveyor. Yoichi ran over to the gleaming car...

"Your looking good, better than ever! Wished I had one of these when I was rebuilding you!"

"Thanks Yoichi!" replied the car

The black Porsche rose up just as Jazz did and a 35 foot robot emerged out as the front of the car became a chest and so on...

"By Primus!" sighed Jazz "Is that you? After all this time?"

"Hi Jazz... it's been a while!"

Yoichi was in shock again. The Porsche had become a close replica of Jazz, just inverted, colour wise...

"Stepper!" cried Wheeljack running in from the observation bay.

"The Ark crew is complete once again!" said Prowl as he walked in behind Prowl...

"I wondered why the computer reverted to your structure read out Jazz for the reconstruction... Heh it makes sense now".

Stepper turned to Yoichi

"Yoichi, this is my true form, I am an Autobot sharpshooter! However I was deactivated millions of years ago and if it wasn't for you rebuilding my core components into your Porsche... well..."

"Stepper? Is it?" Yoichi replied...

"Yeah... finally good to meet you properly Yoichi!"

"How cool is this... my cars a robot from another world!!!" revelled Yoichi

"Yeah, but lets not be telling anyone!!!" responded Jazz...

And that was it... Stepper was brought back fully online and returned to Japan for a short while absorbing the culture. Yoichi ended up becoming a designer at Mazda and became friends with the Autobots in Earthforce and a certain Professor Kojima at his old university. All their paths would converge once more in the new millennium...

"Getting Wrecked" by Keith Cooper

Today, the planet of Cybertron is a battle-worn, burnt out husk of a planet, charred and scarred from aeons of furious civil war. Looking at the devastated cities, the smouldering ruins and the millions of refugees scattered across the planet, it is hard to believe that there once was a time before war spread to this marvellous world. Back in those faraway times, now merely distant, nostalgic memories to many of the survivors today, combat belonged in the realm of the gladiators, warriors who fought adhering to an honourable code, whose epic bouts would enthral the hundreds of thousands who packed into the arenas to watch the cream of Cybertron's athletes duke it out with each other, gasp in awe as each

blow was struck, cheer in joy as their heroes proved victorious. Until today, the raptures of the crowds were a long-forgotten memory, reverberating around the abandoned amphitheatres akin to whispers of ghosts.

Today, the sounds of battle ringing out were all too real.

Situated in old downtown Iacon, the great amphitheatre, perforated with holes created by neglect and rockets, its ruins jagged and savage, played host to a fierce battle. The amphitheatre, now known colloquially as Debris, acted as the headquarters of the elite Autobot commandos, the Wreckers, a name universally feared by the Decepticons. Unfortunately that had not proved to be enough to prevent the current invasion of the Wrecker's base.

Shockwave's Mayhem Attack Squad had entered through an ancient utility duct that ran through the city of Iacon and passed beneath Debris. With a great deal of persistence they burned their way through a dozen solid titanium barriers, swiftly killed the unknowing guards before they had a chance to react and raise the alarm, and poured out into one of the large grandstands that encircled the great arena, a dozen highly trained, heavily armed and utterly deadly killers. Like a juggernaut careening along the highway they powered through the ranks of the Wreckers, unprepared for the attack. The Wreckers all fell within a breem, hacked down mercilessly, leaving only three cadets to stand in the way of the Decepticon advance.

Outback grappled with a Decepticon, standing twice as tall as himself, whilst bodies littered the ground around him in the arena. What he lacked in size he made up for in brute force and sheer arrogance. As he saw two Decepticon hunter-killers swoop down from high in the stands, gliding on bat-like wings, sneaking up behind his compatriot Tailgate, Outback grew tired of his own wrestling match, and launched into a vicious head-butt that smashed into his opponents midriff, crumpling the Decepticon's armour plating. Finishing the Decepticon off with an uppercut that sent the enemy bowling over and crashing into the ground, Outback

transformed to his rugged, all-terrain vehicle mode, plasma cannon housed on top like a tank turret, and he raced to Tailgate's rescue, frying the two swooping Decepticons with bursts of superheated plasma energy. Tailgate didn't even glance back as he took aim with his blaster and with a pinpoint shot took out another Decepticon as the tide of the battle turned.

In another corner of the arena, the third cadet, Pipes, held his own against the Decepticons with aplomb. He'd relieved one Decepticon of their energy axe, which he swung around his head in a wide swoop, forcing the ring of Decepticons around him back, every so often reaching out to slice off an arm or a leg of one of the enemy. Soon he had cut their number from six to three, and they turned to run. Pipes let go of the axe and sent it flying through the air, spinning on its end before impaling itself into the back of one of the fleeing Decepticons, bursting out the other side through the Decepticon's chest. The other two staggered, tripping over the impaled Decepticon's corpse, and Pipes bounded after them, punching one squarely in the face, stunning him before picking him up and throwing him at the other Decepticon, and they both went down in a bundle.

But as he bent down to pick up one of the Decepticon's guns that had been dropped on the ground, he failed to detect the other Decepticon that was stealthily sneaking up behind him. A gun blast rang out across the arena, and the Decepticon dropped to the floor. Pipes looked up, mildly surprised, and saw Tailgate stood, on the other side of the arena, but close enough for his pinpoint marksmanship to take out the Decepticon, as Outback finished off the final invader.

"Wreckers, cease fire!"

The call came from above. Stood on an anti-grav platform, Ultra Magnus, commander of the Wreckers, looked on from where he had been assessing the cadet's performances. Beside him was a technician, who had been collecting the data and vital statistics of the battle for analysis later, and who was currently operating the controls to bring the platform steadily down to the ground. The

cadets dropped their weapons and stood to attention as Magnus descended, his hands on his hips, calculatingly eyeing them up. When the platform had reached the surface, hovering on its invisible anti-gravity cushion just above the rubble-strewn ground, Magnus stepped from it and approached the cadets, who had grouped together, their arms straight at the sides, their backs stiff, watching nervously as their commander approached.

“At ease, cadets,” Magnus told them calmly. The cadets tried to relax but they visibly failed to do so, but as this was their final test it was perhaps understandable. Their performance on this mock battlefield was to be the final judge of their abilities, the final obstacle before they could enter the elite cadre of the Wreckers.

“Congratulations, that was an exemplary performance,” continued Magnus. “Although a truer test of your abilities would be against real Decepticon foes, rather than these facsimiles, the purpose of these tests is to ascertain whether you are ready to go out onto a real battlefield with the Wreckers. I now need to take time to analyse your performance, not just here today but throughout your recent training, and to confer with my senior officers, before any judgement can be made. However, for what it is worth, I have been impressed with you.

“You deserve some rest. Go and get well-oiled, then meet back here in fifty breems for final debriefing.”

The three cadets all gave Magnus a stiff salute, before turning sharply and marching towards the nearest exit within the amphitheatre. Only when they were outside the confines of Debris did they feel comfortable to loosen up, if just a little.

Inside Debris, Magnus strolled over to where his lieutenant commander, Springer, sat on the floor. To simulate a real attack, Springer and his fellow Wreckers had been required to play a part and act, pretending to be killed in the first wave of the attack. Springer had taken it upon himself to fight against a trio of brutish looking facsimiles, before pretending

to go down in the most heroic and dramatic manner possible.

“So, how was my performance?” he asked casually, a wry grin on his face.

“I wouldn’t give up the day job,” remarked Magnus nonchalantly, not even looking at Springer. Concern was etched across his face, and Springer clambered up to stand beside him.

“What’s wrong Commander? I thought the cadets gave an excellent display.”

Magnus looked at him, and nodded in agreement. “Yes, so did I. But, unknown to them, they still have one test to go. You and I both know that part of the Wrecker’s job is to be up to the task in battle. But a Wrecker also has to be able to think for himself, to use initiative, and to act responsibly and maintain our standards. Tailgate, Pipes and Outback have all qualified this far because they possess the right qualities, but don’t forget, before they came to us, all their previous commanders warned us against them. Their records were full of insubordination, and their reports suggested they failed to fit in with others.”

“But you saw something in them that the others didn’t,” said Springer. “And you were right.”

“I hope so,” replied Magnus. “This final test will determine whether I am.”

* * *

Folklore spoke of Maccadams Old Oil House in words of myth and wonder. To the uninitiated it looked simply like an oil house – a grand looking oil house, it had to be said – replete with flickering neon lighting over the entrance, set into the side of the building down a few steps, cast in shadow. An intoxicated Transformer, of indiscernible allegiance, was slumped by the entrance, looking a shadow of his former self. Above, the neon lighting flickered intermittently, advertising enriched fuel and refreshing oil baths. The doorman was big and surly, probably of Decepticon leanings but employed solely by Maccadams. He nodded at Tailgate, Pipes and Outback as they passed down the steps, for in Maccadams Autobot and Decepticon badges were left outside. The oil house was open to all,

perhaps the only place of its kind left on Cybertron and, as such, it had garnered a mythical reputation from those with bright, wide eyes who longed for the war to end and for there to be something better, something greater. They spoke in hushed whispers about how Maccadam, the famed and seldom seen owner of the oil house, was one of the thirteen original Transformers from aeons ago, and that the oil house itself was somehow divorced from the space-time continuum, made invulnerable to the ongoing war around it. Of course, the story was simply a clever ruse by the owner to bring in business. Or at least most people *suspected* it was a ruse.

There was a cacophony of joviality as the three Autobots entered the bar. In one corner a duke-box-bot played tunes written largely before the war during Cybertron's artistic renaissance. Virtually every seat was filled as the bar staff worked busily. Spotting a table just vacated in the far corner of the bar, Tailgate ushered his friends over.

A prompt and efficient waiter-bot waddled over to them the moment they sat in their seats, and he took their orders before waddling away again, quickly lost in the crowd of boisterous Transformers. The three Autobots closed ranks around the table, and discussed their chances.

"So what do you guys reckon?" asked Tailgate. "Are we in?"

Pipes nodded in affirmation. "I think so. We've passed all the previous tests, and my own strategic analysis of the final test showed that we scored above ninety percent."

The waiter hurried back with their drinks, a canister of high grade oil for Pipes, and bottles of spiked fuel for Tailgate and Outback. He nodded curtly at them as they thanked the waiter, and once again he vanished into the crowd to the next table that required service.

"What about you, Outback?" asked Tailgate. "You look as miserable as a Dinobot on a peace march."

"I dunno, I just can't help but think that I screwed something up on last test," he replied.

"That's nonsense," responded Tailgate. "You're just being pessimistic, once again. Get that fuel down you, then you'll feel better."

"Be careful!" warned Pipes. "We all know from experience that spiked fuel is extremely intoxicating. If we are going to be Wreckers we have to show that we are able to set an example. We have standards to uphold." Outback frowned at Pipes. "And who made you leader?"

"Wait, wait," interjected Tailgate. "Pipes is right. We don't want to return to Debris unable to stand up straight."

Outback considered it – the urge to get blind drunk was strong, for some reason there was a nagging thought in his mind that he'd already failed the test, so getting drunk and making a fool of himself wouldn't matter anyway. Besides, getting drunk was an easy way to forget the nagging worry. At the same time though he had to think of his friends. "Alright," he conceded. "I'll stay relatively sober, on this one occasion."

Tailgate and Pipes both grinned, and the mood relaxed somewhat.

Behind them two more Autobots took up seats, and began to talk loudly. They both looked battle-worn, with carbon scoring on their chassis', as though they had just returned from battle. And well they could have, troops were being replenished on the front lines all the time, with troops granted periods of R and R on rotation. However, these two particular Autobots definitely had chips weighing down on their shoulders, and it was blindingly obvious they were intoxicated.

"It's always the same," moaned one of the Autobots. "We have to spend vorns on the front line, constantly in the line of fire, not knowing if the next round your audio sensors detect is going to be the round that takes you out..."

"Yeah, we have to do the dirty work," replied the other. "All the hard work, getting shot to scrap, and what thanks do we get? What recognition? None. We should get parades in Iacon."

"Like those tin-headed Wreckers?" asked the first Autobot rhetorically, before commencing

on another rant. "What do they ever do, except show up at the end of a battle, after we've done all the legwork, and they then claim they've won the victory."

"Yeah, it makes me sick. Waiter, get me another bottle!"

Their words were loud enough that they carried across their immediate vicinity in the bar. Outback heard them, and clenched his fists.

"Why, those cheap, lying..." he cursed to himself. "I don't know about you two, but I'm all for going over there and knocking their heads together!"

Outback was getting to his feet, and Pipes and Tailgate were forced to pull him back down. "Who cares what they think?" Pipes told him. "Ultra Magnus knows what we can do, that's all that counts."

"They need to learn some respect!" clamoured Outback.

"Not from us," Tailgate said. "I'm sure sooner or later that task will fall to a Decepticon. Besides, the front lines aren't fairing well at the moment. The Decepticons have advanced back into Kalis, if what I hear is correct. They've got a right to be feeling bitter. They're just drunk."

"Like you used to get," pointed out Pipes.

"Like we all used to get."

Outback nodded in resignation. "I guess you're right." He returned, sourly, to guzzling his fuel through the fuelling cap located on his chest.

Soon the two complaining Autobots grew quiet and eventually they moved away. The bar never seemed to get empty, but maintained a constant business. It was probably the only really successful commercial enterprise left on Cybertron. Despite that, it was a bar, and no bar could stake a claim to fame without having the odd epic bar fight. Normally the doormen would watch for a while, getting enjoyment from the spectacle before removing the protagonists and allowing them to continue outside, where they could do less damage. Today was certainly no different to any other day.

The commotion began in the middle of the big room, instigated by a large, beefy Decepticon that began pushing a small neutral Transformer around. Two of the Decepticons drunekn associates crowded around the

defenceless neutral, and began kicking him to scrap. Everyone around stood back, unwilling to get involved due to the sheer size and ferocity of the three Decepticons, whilst the doormen just looked on and laughed. It appeared to have something to do with the small neutral spilling the big Decepticons bottle of fuel.

"Hey, three against one, that's nor fair," observed Outback, and he began to get out of his seat once more, eager to find the fight he'd been looking for earlier. Once again, Tailgate and Pipes tried to drag him back down, but this time Outback was having none of it. He waved a finger in their faces.

"No, don't even think about stopping me this time," he declared.

Pipes looked incredulous. "Outback, we can't get involved in a bar brawl, not now."

"Fine," replied Outback. "You can stay here. I thought as Wreckers it was our duty to protect the innocent. Maybe I was wrong, but as I'm not going to graduate anyway, I've got nothing to lose."

Leaving Tailgate and Pipes to consider his words, Outback left the table and strode over to the centre of the room, barging past the crowd of onlookers filled with bloodlust, loudly cheering on the aggressors as they beat the smaller robot into another incarnation. Some shouted at Outback as he pushed past them before entering the middle of the circle that the crowd had formed. The three Decepticons hadn't even noticed him. Barely missing a beat, he stepped up and tapped the biggest of the three Decepticons, who were all hefty brutes, on the back.

"Excuse me," he said, in a sarcastically polite tone.

At first the Decepticon, so engrossed in the violence, didn't notice him, forcing Outback to grab hold of the 'Con by the arm twirling him around forcibly. A right hook floored the Decepticon, who didn't get back up. Suddenly the room fell silent, everyone aghast by Outback's actions. The Decepticon's associates also gradually came to cease their onslaught, and the little robot, battered and beaten, took the opportunity to scurry away to safety, between the legs of the onlookers. Outback turned round to look at Tailgate and Pipes, and shrugged, surprised that it had been so easy. Outback was mistaken. One of the other 'Cons jumped on him, clobbering

him on the back, and Outback collapsed to the floor, but in an instant Tailgate intervened, a flurry of blows leaving the helpless Decepticon pleading for him to stop. However, others in the crowd began to get into the spirit of things, and suddenly chairs and tables and body parts were flying left and right, as the fight turned into a bar brawl of some legendary status, encompassing the entire bar. As bar staff ducked from flying bottles, and the doormen were finally forced to intervene before Macaddams was completely totalled, Oitback clambered back to his feet, in the middle of the chaos, touching the back of his head sorely where he had been hit, feeling the large dent there. Looking around, somewhat bemused at the chaos he'd caused, he shrugged once more before joining in.

* * *

Half a cycle later, the three cadets stood before their commander, Ultra Magnus. His optic sensors moved over each cadet, glaring, noting all their bumps, scratches, dents and broken fenders. Outback was struggling to stand up straight, but then again, that wasn't so unusual. Pipes had his arm in a sling, having had it torn from his rotator so that it hung limply; Magnus hadn't allowed them to visit the infirmary yet. Instead he'd brought them here, back to Debris, for debriefing. The arena was empty, in stark contrast to the mock battle earlier, with only the four of them stood in the centre of the amphitheatre. Each of the cadets was looking at the ground, rather glumly, as Magnus spoke. "When we last saw each other, you were all in somewhat better shape," commented Magnus. If that was meant to sound sarcastic then it failed to do so. "You also believed that your tests were complete. Not so. "As Wreckers you have to be able to show courage and skill on the battlefield, but as our elite commandos we require from you restraint and self-control away from the battlefield too. The two Autobots in Macaddams who you encountered decrying the Wreckers were sent there by me, as one final test for you. In that situation you exercised admirable restraint in face of potent

verbal provocation. However, what happened at Macaddams afterwards was not planned." The three cadets could feel Magnus' optical sensors boring into them as he spoke, and they felt the inevitable weight of failure pressing, crushingly, down on them. "Macaddams will reportedly be closed for a full ten cycles while they repair the extensive damage. The brawl has already gone down in myth as one of the most violent brawls in the bar. The manager of Macaddams is demanding damages from both the Autobots and the Decepticon High Command, and rumour has it the Decepticons have paid up – they were afraid of their troops revolting if Macaddams was not reopened promptly. We will also contribute compensation for them, and you three have been banned from the establishment. Because you were the only three left standing at the end of it, you were the most recognisable to the bar staff." Magnus paused. He knew what the cadets were thinking, and he felt a brief guilty stab for toying with them like this. "However, had I have been there, my actions would have been the same as yours." He observed the reactions of the cadets, who looked up at him for the first time, not sure how to react to his statement. "As Wreckers it is our duty to protect the innocent, and those unable to defend themselves from hostility. Even though you knew the consequences of your actions might not be favourable for you, you disregarded the risk to protect an innocent, and uphold your ideals. I'm pleased to say you have proved you have what it takes to call yourselves Wreckers." The response of the cadets was somewhat slow, and Magnus hoped they'd be quicker in battle. Then grins on all three broke out across their faceplates. "Now go and get yourselves patched up, and I expect you back here fully fit to begin your training with the rest of the Wreckers as a fully-fledged member of their ranks." "Yes sir!" chorused the three new Wreckers, who saluted before turning and limping sorely away to the infirmary. Watching them go, Magnus felt a twinge of anticipation in him as he contemplated their futures amongst the Wreckers. He had high hopes for them. "Good luck guys," he murmured to himself. "Welcome to the Wreckers!"

Profile: Tailgate

"Let my fellow mechanical beings go!"

Tailgate is an Autobot of few words. But his lack of words does not hide his great bravery and courage in battle. If there is a battle to be one, or an injustice to be corrected, Tailgate is at the front of the queue. Having said that, his willingness to help those in need often lands him in trouble, as he is prone to making misjudgements regarding the situation. For a long time he believed that human vehicles were sentient beings just like Transformers were, and he couldn't understand why the humans and his fellow Autobots treated these vehicles so ashamedly. It was only when he visited Earth for the first time, and observed these vehicles directly, that he finally understood that these machines were merely nothing more than tools. However, by that point he had become the laughing stock of the Autobots as he had firmly proclaimed he was going to free the automobile race. Thus, this highlights his weakness of jumping to conclusions too early, and not considering the situation objectively. The older Autobots put this down to a lack of experience on the more youthful Tailgate's part. But on the rare occasions he is correct, the Autobots would not rather have anyone else by their side for the commitment and courage that Tailgate shows in abundance.

Tailgate transforms into a sports car. Tailgate is also a crack shot and his ability to hit a target with a firearm easily rivals other Autobots such as Stepper, Pointblank, Sureshot and Crosshairs.

Amendment

Since joining the Wreckers, Tailgate has undergone the Binaltech process just like his co-Wreckers Pipes and Outback.

"Rescue" by Sven Harvey

He had been there for a lifetime. Strapped and chained into a Variable Voltage Harness, a nasty piece of equipment designed specifically to torture Cybertronians.

How long had it been since his Decepticon captors had left him, the VVH still online and periodically zapping him, leaving him in agony. Perhaps he wasn't meant to survive as long as he had. Fortunately he had survived longer than the power supply for the damned thing. He however could feel the damage done to his visual receptors and his visor... everything had a red haze now.

Resigned to eternal near darkness in his living tomb, the end was anticipated. Death must be better than this living hell of loneliness and silence. He had tried... tried for vorns and vorns to loosen his bonds, but to no avail. Perhaps he didn't have the energy to break free... or was his mechanical musculature just non-functional...

Despair ravaged his Neural Net...

Time passed... his energy levels dropped. Ever ebbing away.

Silence...

Silence...

Nothing....

...

...

What was that?

Must be hearing things... his audio receptors were starting to play tricks on him.

No... a scratching sound... what is that?

The door in front of him started to creak.

Slowly, ever so slowly it started to open... a crack of light seared into his visual receptors, the feedback causing him pain... he tried to cry out, but nothing happened...

No! The 'cons are back... Must get free...

Struggling with all his might, he managed to do little more than make the odd sound his energy levels not allowing more.

The door was open a little way and he heard a voice. A small Cybertronian was entering the room, gun raised..

The little bot shouted back through the door, over his shoulder..

"Hey, bots, I think there is someone in here"

"Don't be ridiculous Nightstick! No-ones been here for a thousand Vorns or more since the 'cons abandoned this entire sector. You MicroMasters brain modules are as small as your bodies!"

Nightstick shrugged off the comment, he knew he was right, someone was moving, though only a little down here.

"Seriously guys there is someone here... Flashback come in here and cover me just in case"

"Flashback???" thought the prisoner... "it can't be, I saw him die..."

A full sized red Cybertronian entered behind him.

"Who died and made you Prime?" remarked Flashback

The prisoner heard him but couldn't focus on the figure, all the "activity" was taking its toll on his overstretched body. He tried to analyse the voice, but his audio receptors couldn't do more than make out the words.

"Give us some light over here" asked Nightstick.

The prisoner realised Nightstick was getting ever closer, and hoped he was in fact an Autobot.

Flashback ignited his "headlamps" in his chest revealing a bare corner, much to his disgust.

"There's nothing in here Nightstick"..

"I am not so sure Flashback, swing over here a bit"

The beams of lights traverse around the cell, revealing the prisoner, and temporarily blinding him.

"By Primus... Flashback help me get this guy out of this VVH!!!"

Flashback stood there speechless looking at the black mirror form of himself...

Flashbacks vocaliser finally kicked in "By.... The... Matrix... "

"FLASHBACK!" cried Nightstick

Finally Flashbacks snapped back to functionality and ran over

"Don't worry Ricochet... we'll get you out of here..." he whispered to his brother. Turning to the door whilst tearing away the fragile ancient bonds from the VVH, Flashback cried out; "Meister... get in here... Quick... Family Emergency!!!!"

The white form of Meister ran through the door, surprised as Flashback by the sight.

His first response; to cry out to his comms officer

"Contact Autobase, warn Ratchet we have a priority patient for him..."

Turning to Flashback

"Lets get him out of here"

DVD Reviews

Robots In Disguise - Box Set 1 Review by Jonathan Hope

The Heroic Autobots and the Evil Predacons are locked in a desperate struggle for supremacy on Earth.

The Autobots are led by the mighty Optimus Prime, who are earths only defence against the nefarious Megatron and his band of Predacons who are desperately trying to

obtain energy and to that means they have kidnapped Dr Kenneth Onishi the world leader in the research of energy Resources in an attempt to discover and plunder Earth's resources and make their fortress mobile to destroy the Autobots once and for all.

The Box Set is the first of two and contains 3 DVDs each one containing 7 or 6 episodes, that makes an outstanding 20 episodes for your viewing delectation!

The first thing anyone new to this series will realise is that it isn't an from an original English Series, - taken from the Japanese Car Robots series, Robots In Disguise (or RID) is very heavily Japan influenced, no more is this shown than when before any special move is performed a cry is heard explaining the move he is about to perform.

This makes for some cringe-worthy moments as you listen to ridiculousness as "right laser, left laser, centre laser!" before every shot . However some more of the younger viewers should now be used to this style of animation after watching Power Rangers or Dragonball Z and even us old hacks will end up not minding it after a while.

"But Optimus isn't a fire engine" I hear you cry! Don't worry, this Optimus is pretty cool as it goes with his ability to combine to form "battle mode" Prime - not quite the classic juggernaut but he's better than any monkey! And Neil Kaplan plays the voice well, in-fact the whole cast do a pretty good job when you consider it was originally a Japanese script!

Right, on with the Episode guide!

Episode 1: Battle Protocol

Dr Onishi is heading a worlds meeting on the development of energy resources, however just as he is about to address the crowd the earth shakes and from out of a skyscraper a flying robotic hand descends upon them. The Awesome six-changer and leader of the Predacons, Megatron, has arrived on Earth backed up by his Predacon troops, Gasskunk, Darkscream and Slapper and after identifying Dr Onishi attempt to kidnap him - on live TV!

Dr Onishi's son, Koji attempts to contact his father, but his call is intercepted by Optimus Prime himself!

But Optimus isn't alone, He call upon the 3 Autobot Brothers - Prowl, Sideburn and X-Brawn who manage to beat off the Predacons, - but not before Megatron transforms into a jet and captures Dr Onishi!

Episode 2: An Explosive Situation

What's this? A flying shark? Yes the evil Predacon Skybyte has been ordered to retrieve a bomb that is powerful enough to satisfy Megatron's plans.

Of course the Autobots with Optimus Prime foil his plans after consulting TAI - the Autobot's Tactical Artificial Intelligence blasting the bomb into outer space along with Skybyte!

Episode 3: Bullet Train To The Rescue!

A new bullet train has been produced and today is the maiden voyage! Koji is onboard but little does he know that the Predacons have disabled the trains controls and are tearing apart the track!

Fortunately, Optimus tells TAI to call upon the Bullet Train team, Railspike, Rapid Run and Midnight Express who manage to connect to the train and slow it down to a standstill, with a little help from Optimus in battle mode!

Episode 4: Spy Changers To The Rescue!

Six Autobots; Crosswire, Mirage, R.E.V., Ironhide, WARS and Hotshot, are dispatched when Skybyte stills a Plutonium generator, These Autobots have the ability to seemingly defy gravity and even become invisible! They maybe small, but what they lack in strength they make up for in cunning! Switching the generator for a fake they let Skybyte get back to Megatron thinking that he has the plutonium. Unfortunately for Skybyte, Megatron is less than impressed by the wreck he is left with...

Episode 5: The Hunt for the Black Pyramid

Skybyte leads his Predacon brethren underwater to attempt to steal a mysterious power amplifier called "the black pyramid". Unfortunately Koji is on a research ship in the area and is attacked by the Predacons! Optimus Prime and the Autobots are dispatched over the global spacebridge to try to rescue them.. Unfortunately at first Prime seems no match in Skybyte's natural environment under the sea.

Episode 6: The Secret of the Ruins

Megatron hatches an evil scheme after discovering an important clue to a powerful energy source by reading Dr Onishi's mind. He distracts the Autobots by attacking the City while Skybyte visits an ancient ruin that is supposed to hold some mysterious power. However Koji and Sideburn are out exploring the mines themselves and are able to alert Optimus Prime to help assist them thwart Skybyte while the Bullet Train Team prove that they can match Megatron for power when combined into the super robot Rail-Racer!

The mysterious power turns out to be a microchip hidden in a family picture.

Episode 7: Sideburn's Obsession

Megatron tricks Sideburn into becoming captured by disguising himself as Sideburns greatest weakness... Red Sports cars! Once he has Sideburn, Megatron goes on to use him as bait for an ambush on Optimus Prime who he knows will try to save him. Fortunately for Prime he has the Autobot Brothers and the Spychangers to back him up.

That's the first disc and the first 7 episodes try to bring in the main characters - Optimus and his Autobots and Megatron and the Predacons. Rather than swamp you with an enormous amount of robots, the episodes introduce you to the main players bit by bit - although you will struggle to remember the names of all 6 of the Spychangers by the end of the 3 discs!

Don't worry though if you think this is the extent of the armies... The playing field is about to get much wider in the next disc with the introduction of ... the Decepticons!

Disc two...

Episode 8: Secret Weapon: D5!

The Predacons read Onishi's mind once more and discover what they think is an "ultimate weapon" in an old steam train! Unfortunately Koji is having a trip on that very steam train when the Predacons attack! Luckily Midnight Express and the other members of Team Bullet Train are there to rescue Koji and protect the old relic.

Episode 9: Mirage's Betrayal

The Autobot Spychangers are in the middle of training in a computer simulation, when Mirage complains that it is unrealistic - there are two Darkscreams! He leaves the training in disgust.

Meanwhile after watching a news report Megatron plots to steal a ruby so he can create a powerful laser. Suspicious of Megatron's plans, Optimus assigns the Spychangers to guard the Ruby. This plan soon pays dividends as the Predacons attack the building and try to steal the Ruby! The Spychangers attack but they manage to get away - even though Mirage had a clean shot but didn't fire.

It seems his teammates can no longer trust him so the Predacons give Mirage another choice - He could join them! - At first it seems Mirage has accepted the offer and leads the Spychangers into an ambush and up against the Mega-laser.

Unfortunately for the Predacons it seems that Mirage was double-bluffing and at the last second turns and defeats the Predacons by using their own weapons awesome power against them.

Episode 10: Skidz' Choice

Skid-z arrives on earth and tries to choose a vehicle to bond with. Unfortunately he bonds

with a Formula one car whose driver was a world champion. He becomes completely obsessed with having to win every single race, be it formula one, or even a kids 10 metre dash! Optimus and TAI finally seem to get him to appease his desire, by joining the International Grand Prix.

Episode 11: TowLine Goes Haywire

Apparently there is another Autobot hidden on Earth - Towline. He seems to be compulsive traffic warden gone mad and tows as many cars as possible. The Predacons see this weakness and re-program Towline into towing as many Autobots as possible!

Episode 12: The Ultimate Robot Warrior

The Predacons see a movie on TV and mistakenly think that the humans have an ultimate robot (it's really a movie prop). Megatron dispatches his Predacons to try to convince this "robot" to join with them. The robot is in a cave which may hold real treasures. However Optimus makes the most of the opportunity and disguises himself as the Robot Warrior to try to keep the Predacons away and guard the cave.

Episode 13: Hope For The Future

The first clip show in this Disc set. The Autobots review their situation by looking at past battles with the Predacons - Little do they know that in the very next episode any plans they have will be scuppered by the arrival of...

Episode 14: The Decepticons

The Autobots are in their headquarters when TAI reports that she has finished decoding Dr. Onishi's microchip, and it points to a very important location called Castle Peak, where a UFO was reported to have crashed 60 years ago.

Optimus Prime and the Autobots travel to the site as fast as possible. Unfortunately they discover when they get there the Predacons have got there first, a fight ensues that causes an explosion - uncovering an old Autobot Shuttle.

Optimus scans the ship to find six protoforms inside the ship, still in stasis pods.

The Autobots valiantly defend the pods against the Predacons but from nowhere Megatron appears, transforms into his flying hand and picks up all the pods and steals the autobot protoforms! The Autobots attempt to pursue Megatron but the Predacons: Slapper and GasSkunk, Sky-Byte, DarkScream manage to hold off the Autobots while Megatron escapes back to his base.

Megatron reveals his plan to make the protoforms as powerful as possible by bonding them with Military vehicles at an air force base. While they are there Megatron attempts to bond the protoforms with the vehicles.

TAI manages to discover the Predacons plans and launches the Autobots in an attempt to stop them, but they get there just in time to see Megatron infuse his spark with a flatbed truck armed with huge cannons... Mega Octane - the first new Decepticon is created!

Optimus first welcomes Mega-Octane, in the vain hope that there is still the chance of him becoming a Autobot. Unfortunately Mega-Octane responds with a double-barrelled attack, which sends Optimus Prime flying on his back.

Mega-Octane holds off the autobots while Megatron and the Predacons continue to scan further vehicles. Slapper scans a tank - which becomes Armourhide, Gasskunk scans a jeep which becomes Rollbar and Darkscream scans a Helicopter which becomes Ro-Tor, while Skybyte accidentally scans up in the air - and scans a Space Shuttle!

Megatron turns them all into Decepticons, but there is still one remaining. Prime and the Autobots try desperately to retrieve the remaining protoform but the new Decepticons firepower is so much that they cant get near!

A Human - caught up the fire-fight attempts to escape by stealing a tanker and driving away.

Unfortunately for her the tanker is filled with rocket fuel - and Megatron has it in his sights!!

Being full of fuel this will become the most powerful Decepticon of all and both Megatron and Prime know it. As Megatron scans the truck Optimus dives to make the save - and the pod scans both the tanker and Optimus Prime!

The new Decepticon transforms - and he looks like a black version of Optimus Prime! infused with the spark of both Optimus and Megatron, Optimus tries to reason with the new robot.

Unfortunately the robot claims he serves only Megatron and announces his name as Scourge! The leader of the Decepticons! The Autobots are stunned, but even more stunned by the sheer power of the new Decepticons as they move out leaving the Autobots shaken, and now - seriously out-gunned.

I was disappointed with a lot of this disc. It seems that an awful lot of the episodes were just to introduce Hasbro toys as characters that only seem to appear once in the entire box set! And to include a clip-show as well really brings worry into how good this series is going to be...

Fortunately the entire disc is saved by the truly amazing final episode - and the birth of the Decepticons!

I know what happens in the third disc of this three disc set.. so don't worry.. it all gets great from here!

Disc 3...

Episode 13: Commandos

Autobots vs Decepticons on Sherma Dam! Now that brings back memories!

The Decepticons are ordered to blow up hydroelectric dams to force the humans to surrender their resources. Scourge and the Commandos find themselves setting charges to destroy the enormous dam but their work

doesn't go unnoticed and soon the Autobot brothers attempt to foil their scheme. Unfortunately the firepower of the Decepticons appears just too much - especially when the Commandos combine to form their super-robot Ruination! However the Predacons who are jealous of the new Decepticons and their standing with Megatron, have disguised themselves as Autobots thwart their plans and it seems the Predacons may have got things their own way... Until the real Optimus Prime turns up!

Episode 14: Volcano

Megatron and the Predacons discover a Caribbean volcano with enough energy to repower their base. The Decepticons are sent to retrieve the energy but in doing so put a holiday resort based nearby into terrible jeopardy.

Optimus and the Spychangers are sent to stop the evildoers but the resulting firefight on the very cusp of the rim causes the volcano to erupt, sending Autobots, Decepticons and Predacons flying. Only some quick thinking by the Spychangers stop the lava from destroying the resort while Optimus is left to fight against Ruination AND stem the lava flow!

Episode 15: Attack From Outer Space!

The Decepticons launch Movor into space after switching him with a regular Earth Shuttle in an attempt to find out the location of the Autobots secret base. This causes chaos for the Autobots who find themselves targeted at every location. However Movor doesn't prove himself as the best of spies and leads the Decepticons into one place after another, never finding the base he was looking for!

(Apparently this episode was never aired in America)

Episode 16: The Test

The Decepticons come up with an insidious plan to discover the Autobots secret base. They pretend to betray Megatron and the Predacons by renouncing their allegiance and

instead side with the Autobots. They appeal to Prime's better nature and appear to have him duped. Fortunately the Autobot Brothers are more sceptical and devise a test for the scheming Decepticons. Prime agrees to this and soon Scourge and the Decepticons are helping them re-build the city.

However all the niceties begin to enrage the Evil Scourge and just as the Autobots come around to the idea that the Decepticons just might have gone good and welcome them into the base, Scourge goes mental and attacks the very structures he had been building before attacking the Autobot brothers. With both Scourge and the combined form of Ruination upon them, it seems that X-Brawn, Sideburn and Prowls days are numbered

Fortunately Prime - Enraged by the deceit of the Cons attacks them in battle mode at Maximum power, blowing away both Scourge and Ruination single handedly!

Both the Autobots and Scourge are amazed at Prime's power as the Decepticons retreat

Episode 17: The Fish Test

After taking an online personality test - "What fish are you" Skybyte is horrified to learn that he has been dubbed a "spineless Jellyfish" much to the amusement of his Predacon and Decepticon colleagues. Upon learning that Scourge got a better score he vows vengeance by attacking the Autobots single handedly.

However when he realises the futility in that approach he tries to turn the situation to his advantage by informing the Autobots where Scourge will strike next. Hoping to ridicule Scourge and the Deceptions so that he and his Predacons will win favour in Megatron's eyes.

Unfortunately for Skybyte he leads them to the wrong factory and Scourge betters him once again.

Episode 18: Wedges Short Fuse

This episode introduces the Autobot Build team. Ever wonder how the Autobots global space bridge was created? That's right! By these 4 Autobots - Wedge, Hightower, Heavyload and Grimlock.

However Wedge the youngest and the leader of the team, has become bored of just digging all the time and instead wants a piece of the Predacon-smashing action his cousins enjoy.

Unfortunately he ends up biting off a little bit more than he can chew and he and his team have to be rescued by Optimus and the other Autobots.

They do prove themselves as valuable warriors however and so Prime decided to allow them to train and fight the Predacons again (but in this episode)!

Profiles

As a little extra and a reward for getting through all three DVDs the kind people at Maximum Entertainment have included profiles of Optimus Prime, Megatron, X-Brawn, Prowl, Sideburn, Skybyte, the Predacon troops, Scourge, Koji and TAI.

So that rounds up the first box set of Robots In Disguise. Like its predecessors the episodes vary from being Excellent to mediocre. The animation throughout however is good and the characters are always distinct and different. Your view on the series will depend on two things - your familiarity to Japanese cartoons and your background on the history of Transformers.

As a Generation 1 nut this will never replace the original series, however because it is a separate reality and it never tries to be anything but itself I was able to sit back and enjoy this for what it is - a cartoon with a decent plot, great characters and a few laughs thrown in for good measure.

If you are new to Transformers but of a younger age this will appeal to you more than paying out for the original series or Beast

Wars, and you can feel proud that you are watching a cartoon far better and with far more action than Pokemon or Spongebobsquarewatsits.

So what do you do now? Why not go out and spend your money on RID - Part 2! And discover the new transformers - Ultra Magnus, Galvatron, Fortress Maximus and the powerful Omega Prime!

Wally Wingert Interview

by Jonathan Hope and Simon Plumbe

Wally Wingert, the voice of Sideburn and Mirage in Transformers: Robots In Disguise, was the smash hit guest at Auto Assembly 2004 and he very kindly spared some time to be interviewed for this issue of The Cybertronian Times....

Could you tell us a bit about yourself and where you come from?

I was born in Des Moines, IA but was raised in South Dakota. I left there in 1987 when I moved to LA to get into performing and acting. I've always been a rather goofy, creative type, and even though it's a wonderful state, South Dakota just doesn't have a great environment for people like me. So I had to move to an area where my skills were marketable.



Did you always aspire to become a voice actor?

Not a voice actor in particular, but some sort of performer/actor. Either that or a minister. The voice acting thing grew out of my interest in being an actor. I realized in 1989 that voice acting appealed to a lot of the aspects I enjoyed as a performer. In many ways, more so than on-camera acting.

How did you get into acting?

I was always a performer as a child, and when I got into high school I participated in all of the talent shows and plays. I also got into radio while I was in high school. Those were formative years, let me tell you! So I knew it would be the field I wanted to pursue from a young age. When I visited LA at the age of 16 with my family, it reaffirmed in my mind that this is where I need to spend the rest of my life.

What preparation do you do for any of the roles you play?

It depends on the role. Sometimes none, sometimes a lot. It depends if it's a sound-alike or an original character. The sound-alikes take a lot of work because you have to immerse yourself in the original voice and find all of the subtle nuances of the voice the original actor did. If it's an original, sometimes you get a crash course from the producer or director at the first session and you have to be able to process direction and information quickly.

Which is your favourite character that you have played to-date?

Boy, that's a hard question! It's like asking which one of your children is your favorite! One of my favorite jobs was a LIVE TV show on the Gameshow Network called "Throat and Neck." It involved puppetry, animation and improvisation. It spoke to most everything I like about performing. But unfortunately the show was WAY ahead of its time and only lasted about three months. I've also really enjoyed my character Tallest Red on "Invader Zim" and Dr. O'Shay in "Astro Boy." Those two characters were effortless

for me to perform and I enjoyed how fluidly they came out of me.

Do you find it frustrating when shows get cancelled early or when you settle into a role only to come to the end of it's run - for example, a series you are dubbing like Astro Boy or Transformers with a fixed number of episodes?



Yes, that's frustrating of course, because we know going in how many episodes we'll be doing. With regular animation (like *Invader Zim*, *Family Guy*, etc.) it's open ended, and gets particularly frustrating when the shows get cancelled and you KNOW they're good. I predicted the return of "Family Guy" years ago when I told producer Sherry Gunther to hold on. I said, "Someday we're gonna get the call to all come back to work. This show is going to pull a 'Rugrats' and be dusted off and put back on the air." I was right in that instance. The case for *Invader Zim* however, doesn't look so good.

Which do you prefer to do, on-screen or voice work, and why?

I like both because they appeal to different aspects of my interest in performing. But on-screen work only appeals to me if the

character is really interesting. I'm not interested at all in "playing my type" which seems to be permeating a great majority of the on-camera world today. Maybe it's just me, but I don't think those casting directors have much imagination anymore. Voice-over really lets you explore a wide range of characters without any regard to your "type." And voice-over casting directors are much more willing to explore a VO actor's range than on-camera casting directors. At least that's my experience. But I'd welcome any on-camera casting director to prove me wrong.

As well as the series work, you've also been doing a lot of game voiceovers. How does this differ from animation and does this give you the same sense of satisfaction as an actor?

It's considerably more work, because in the interactive world you have to give your character every possible reaction and response that the player may experience in the game. You have to do everything from victory yells to slow, bloody death gurgles. It's quite fun though when you get to do a character that's amazing and different. For example, in one videogame we had to make up an entire language. They wrote out the gibberish words on the script, but before the session started I wrote them phonetically in the side margin, and put accents on syllables that you wouldn't expect would have them. It gave it an otherworldly kind of sound.

You've done a fair amount of looping work, providing replacement voice work for existing actors such as covering some of Bruce Willis' dialogue for Armageddon. Do you find this strange stepping into someone else's shoes

when most people will never know that it was you doing the work?

Not at all. It's actually much harder work than your average acting or vo job because you're required to play within the confines of what another person has created. Even in anime dubbing you have a little more freedom, because the voice tone and quality is your own creation. But the money for looping is excellent because you get a portion of residuals and many performers enjoy the challenge of having to work within those confines.

Did you ever audition for a part that you thought was made for you only to lose it?

No, I learned not to get too attached to anything until I've actually gotten the job. You learn that early in the process otherwise you're setting yourself up for disappointment. In some cases, even after you've done the job, you can't get too attached to it. Because by the time it is released or airs, you find out you've been replaced by someone else. That's happened a few times before, so you learn not to love anything you do too much.

Did you ever get a part that you thought was great but it ended up being not what you hoped for or was there a part that - looking back - you'd say was one of the most embarrassing parts of your career?!

Not really, because I try to approach every job with a not of enthusiasm and positivity. I'm also able to find the good parts of every experience and take those good parts with me throughout me life. I don't think I'm embarrassed by anything I've done so far. Though maybe I should be.

What's the strangest character you've played so far?

Early on in my career I did the sounds of a skiing pig for a commercial. He had to sound like a real pig, but sound like a happy real pig. Though he was on skis going down the hill at a high rate of speed, they wanted him to sound like he was having fun and not in danger. That job was just weird, but it's all an experience.

Have you ever had any characters in any series named after you or based on you?

Yes, that's happened twice and it tickles me beyond belief. One of the first cartoons I ever worked on was a French cartoon called "Three Little Pigs," a retelling of the classic tale. The producer decided to name my character after me. Wally the Pig. I was honored. I think. Then in Astro Boy, the producers named the detective character after me...Wally Kisagari. That was very cool particularly when one of the other characters would call him Uncle Wally. My nephews and godson really enjoyed that.

How familiar were you with Transformers before getting the part of Sideburn on RiD?

I knew only two things...the franchise existed and was huge, and I HAD to get involved in it. I didn't have a television when G1 was popular so I hadn't been exposed to it much. But I knew I wanted to be a part of it in the worst way!

How much of yourself is there in Sideburn, or in any of your characters that you have played?

Well, we both really like the ladies...uh, I mean the little red sportscars! But I'm a little more responsible in my duties than he is. In that regard I'm probably more like Mirage. I would imagine there's a little bit of me in every character I do. They are just amplified versions of certain aspects of my personality. like I always say, "I used to have voices in my head, but then I got 'em all jobs!"

For RiD, as it was dubbing an existing series rather than recording lines prior to animating the show, did you find that you had much scope to ad-lib any lines or did you have to stick rigidly to the script?

We couldn't ad-lib much beyond the lines we were given, however we did have a certain amount of freedom if we wanted to change a line a bit. For example, I remember a session we did shortly after the 9-11 tragedy. The last words of one of the heroes on the flight that went down in the field in Pennsylvania

were "Let's roll." They were the last words Todd Beemer's wife heard him say on the cell phone as he and a bunch of other brave passengers were about to go kick the livin' crap out of those stupid terrorists. In his honor, I asked Steve Kramer (the RID director) if we could change Sideburn's line "Let's go" to "Let's roll." He agreed.

Were you surprised at the reaction you have received from Transformers fans to your work?

Not at all. That was one of the reasons I wanted to get involved in the Transformer franchise so badly in the first place. Because I knew the fans were so devoted and wonderful.

What were your fondest memories from working on Transformers?

The other guys; Kramer, Kaplan, Spellos, Spisak, Simone, Wankus, Joles, and the others. Because it was anime we didn't ever get to physically work together in the same room, but the "changeovers" (when one actor would leave and the next one would arrive) were delightful! And on those rare occasions when we could all get together (like the time we all appeared at a signing at Universal Studios' Citywalk) we made the most of it and had a blast. I wish it could have lasted forever!

Do you have a favourite episode of RiD?

I like "Mirage's Betrayal" quite a bit. Not sure why, but I just like that one a lot. Oh yeah, that and "Sideburn Gets His Butt Kicked." Wait, that's not a real episode is it?

Auto Assembly 2004 was your first Transformers convention

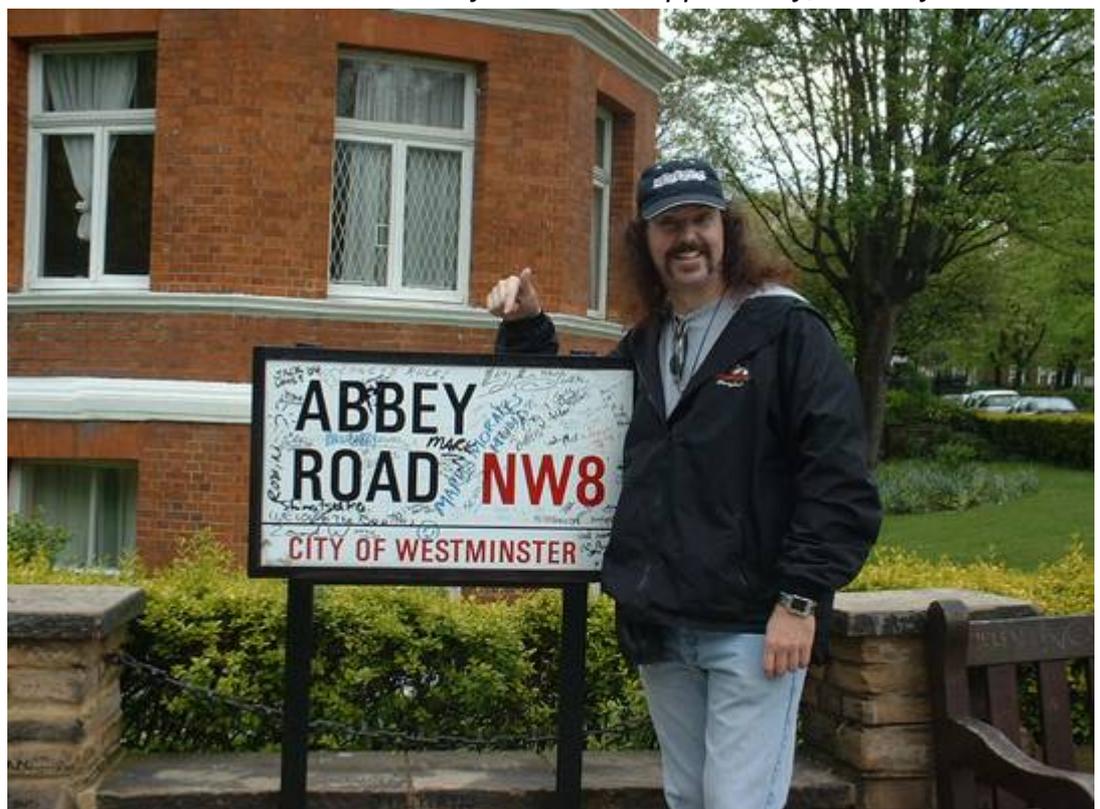
appearance outside of the USA. Did you find any differences between the fans in the US and UK?

No differences other than the accent. It's wonderful to me that something like Transformers can unite people from all over the planet in a single focus, regardless of their geographical location. It's marvelous that people continents away from each other are really no different from each other in their love for Transformers.

What were the most memorable parts of Auto Assembly and the time that you spent here in the UK for you?

Well, it's really hard to top walking across Abbey Road in my bare feet on my birthday! I will NEVER forget that as long as I live. And meeting all the fans from other countries was a big thrill for me. I'm in this industry to touch people, and getting the chance to get out of my immediate surroundings and reach out to fellow humans who have the same interests as me blows my mind. It's a great business, and I made some good friend while I was there. Even the lousy hotel couldn't dampen my spirits because the people were so awesome!

If you had the opportunity, would you ever



come back?!

You bet! But at a better hotel please.

With the new Transformers live action movie going into production, there have been some fans talking about you as a possible voice for the film along with Neil Kaplan. Would you be interested in getting involved in some way?

I would be honored to be chosen to participate in such an amazing project, and I'm even MORE amazed that the fans would petition the producers to include me. That boggles my mind beyond comprehension, and I'm very grateful!

Outside of acting, what do you do in your spare time?

I like collecting monster, sci-fi, and animation stuff. I'm constantly on ebay and checking out the local conventions for new additions to my collection. I also enjoy dabbling in new make-up techniques and of course spending time with all of my lovely Wally's Dollies. I'm also working on pitching two live-action TV projects to networks. "Uncle Davver's Really Scary Movie Show" is similar to "MST3K" but with horror movies and elements of "Rocky Horror." And "Livin' On A Prayer" is a fake reality show about an 80's cover band who are trying to ride the current wave of 80's nostalgia to fame and fortune, but nothing ever seems to work out for them.

At Auto Assembly last year, we had the first European screening of "Uncle Davver...". Were you pleased at the positive reaction to it both at the convention and the comments online afterwards?

Yes, even though the

comments were quite different from the enthusiastic comments from our American screenings in L.A. and New York. Apparently the whole TV horror show host legacy isn't something that you grew up with over there in the U.K., so a lot of the references we were making didn't make any sense to the U.K. audience. In the early days of television in the States, it was common for a TV station to dress up their weatherman in a goofy ghoul costume on Friday nights and have him host any number of really bad old horror movies. The host would usually pepper the proceedings with tons of goofy gags and delightfully putrid puns. That started the whole horror host tradition that's been going on ever since. A tradition later honored by people like Elvira. However it's a format that hasn't been explored in quite awhile and we believe it's time to resurrect that genre in the form of "Uncle Davver's Really Scary Movie Show."





We know you're a science fiction fan, but are you as much of a typical "geeky" merchandise collector as your typical Transformer fan?

Probably even more so. My geekiness is legendary in this area, and I was recently chosen to be one of the subjects in a new documentary called "The Secret Life of the Super Fan." It's a film that examines the very different lives of several different "fans" and how they came to be involved with what they love. The director shot several interview segments at Planet Wallywood (my house) with plenty of Wally's Dollies in attendance. Then he shot my recent birthday party at the Silent Movie Theatre in Hollywood. It was great because so many of my celebrity friends stopped by...Bruce Kulick, Yvonne Craig, Irwin Keyes, Neil Kaplan, Randy Carver, Lydia Cornell, Joe Pilato, Debbie Dutch and more! But in my eyes, ALL my friends are celebrities!

Finally, if someone wanted to take up acting or enter the profession doing voiceover work, would you have any advice to give them?

Get training! Training is multi-dimensional in this field. You have to train your instrument (your voice), your body (lungs and stamina), your attitude (be positive and enthusiastic at all times) and your mind (think, listen, process the direction and be able to produce results). It's rather like training to be a Jedi, except you're allowed to have a girlfriend. You must know how to produce certain types of sounds by using various microphone techniques, you must know the lingo so when you're being directed you know an "ABC" from a "3 pop," and you must be easy going, easy to work with, and adept in taking direction. You also need to know how to market yourself effectively because the competition is fierce! It amazes me that on-camera celebrities think they can just slide into this business effortlessly to pick up some extra money, and then are horrified to discover that voice-over

is actually HARD WORK! You have to be good for 3-4 hours, instead of just being good for 30 seconds while they get your shot. There's no disappearing to your trailer between takes in voice-over!

Many thanks to Wally for sparing his time for this interview!

Game Reviews

Transformers Armada - PS2 by Jonathan Hope

It took 20 years, but finally in its anniversary year Atari have finally released the first big-budget UK Transformers release, and thankfully for us Trans-fans they have done a pretty good job.

But don't worry if you're not familiar with either the 80's phenomenon, or the more recent Armada cartoon which this game is based on. The game is pick-up and play and is independent of either so you don't have to be familiar with the background to enjoy this.



The Heroic Autobots and the Evil Decepticons are locked in a thousand year battle waging throughout the galaxy. Seemingly evenly matched, the two leaders

of the factions; the noble Optimus Prime and the evil Megatron desperately seek an upper hand to triumph over the other. As the armies clash a signal arrives from a long forgotten race of Transformers known as the mini-cons, these miniature robots have the ability to combine with their larger cousins and enhance their fighting abilities and so Megatron takes flight to gather as many as possible with the Autobots in close pursuit

To help him with this task Megatron has created a horde of "decepti-clones" - mindless drones sent to patrol and guard the area the signal came from, which they do en masse.

You play the part of the Heroic Autobots in a third person shoot-em-up that right from the start drops you in as one of the three playable characters (the immortal, heavily-armoured Optimus Prime, the all-rounder Red Alert, or the nimble but weak Hot Shot) against enormous odds with nothing but your thick metal hide and a small blaster.

Megatron obviously got there first and has been busy creating hordes of "Decepti-clones" for you to deal with, these come in three flavours, the small weak pink light-cons, the more deadly medium-class droids and the formidable Heavy Class droid that packs some real firepower and heavy armour.

On top of his own deadly Decepticon generals and a particularly nasty end of game boss, the odds thrown against you make for real "you against the world" scenario.

Right, that's the hype out of the way. It's obvious that fans of the genre are going to relish this game, but what about the general

game players? Are they going to get to grips with this?

After a short time playing on this game there are two things you will realise. The first is the size of the landscape - for this style of game the playing area is vast which gives the player a chance to really immerse themselves, in fact it's quite easy to travel in one direction for several minutes before coming to an impassable area. And even then it may not be as impassable as you think!



The second thing you realise are the amount of Decepti-clone enemies on screen at a time. The first couple you meet are small, weak and simple prey in a quick one on one - but things quickly get hectic when you get ambushed by 6 at once and you will quickly be finding yourself dodging between trees avoiding the laser fire.

This means that although there are plentiful enemies who outnumber and usually outgun you, there are always places to retreat or run to if you get pinned down, it also means that there are vast areas for you to explore which you can do in two ways, you can either drudge through the tundra blasting as you go, or - being transformers - speed through in either a heavy truck, All terrain SUV or a turbo charged sports car.

If this was the only aspect of the game that Transformers had to offer then it would be a dull offering, however there are other reasons to keep you blasting away!

The first level drops you into a dense Amazonian forest - perfect for sniping and hiding. Hidden among the vegetation are huge Aztec ruined temples and long deep ravines. These bring their own dangers and hindrances, the deep flowing rivers will slow you down and will sap at your energy if you

go too deep (though I have no idea why?) so you will have to keep to crossing bridges which are usually heavily guarded.

Later levels have your bot wading through blizzards and over ice-sheets in the Arctic Tundra, gliding over remote tropical islands and finally flying over the metallic homeland of the Transformers - Cybertron. Each location bringing its own traps and hindrances.

The main feature in the game are the numerous Minicons - 40 to be precise, These are little robots that you can find to enhance your own machine. These power ups vary from greater armour or upgrades for your blaster including multiple lock-on missiles, to heat vision or a sort of hang-glider that allows the Autobot to glide to previously impassable area and to find even more hidden goodies

These supply the game with a great tactical factor, only 4 minicons can be attached at any time, and then only certain minicons of certain power can be added together. To further increase the strategy certain combinations of Minicons can increase the health or power of the Transformer meaning that the player are pressed to choose between the ideal minicon to tackle the level they are on or a combination that will increase their robots power to an optimum.

If this sounds a little bit confusing don't worry, after a couple of attempts you will soon find a combination that suits your style of play.

Data-Cons are also well worth hunting down, although they have no actual in-game purpose, they do unlock hidden items in the "Extras" section within the main title screen.

These data-cons include Artist computer graphics of the various transformers, toy photos and instructions, artwork, and even the original

American TV safety commercials!

(Because knowing is half the battle!)

The controls are for the very responsive, the left analog stick controls basic movement and the right stick is used for changing perspective or for aiming.

Firing your different multiple weapons are made easy as they are all easily locatable on the various Left and right shoulder buttons. While other abilities such as transforming, entering into first person mode (for sniping) are controlled with the four main buttons. Though I did find the jump button particularly misplaced.

Graphically this game is surprisingly good, the robots look great and are surprisingly toy accurate with each limb and shiny metal panel reproduced with much more care than most game tie-ins. Energy blasts are clear bright and vibrant tying in with the robots against the backgrounds. The animation is for the most part pretty fluid especially when transforming. Each mechanised monster moves realistically and a "rag-doll" design is used whenever your robot gets blasted or falls off a cliff which will happen often but almost makes taking the shot worthwhile!

The landscape looks pleasing too when you consider the size of the domains, although they do begin to get a bit samey as you go through. Particularly the Arctic levels, - though I suppose there is only so much you can do with an ice plain.

The game is not perfect though. As I touched on before the scenery although pleasant does tend to repeat itself, the trees look rigid and



not a little un-natural and when progressing through the levels the game throws you back into the same environment again for a second level but in a different location.

This does affect the replay value of the game and feels a bit of a cheap shot – but the abundance of hidden datacons and the huge areas that you can explore really do help to minimise this.

The sound is just about adequate, with a remix of the classic theme song playing in the background which is pleasing if a little repetitive and the effects of missiles and laser fire are also good but not really all that inspiring.

Voicework for the most is generally kept just to the cut-scenes and mission briefings. However a big plus for fans is that

Armada/Energon voice actors Gary Chalk and David Kaye reprise their roles as Optimus Prime and Megatron respectively along with the other main roles.



Gameplay is heightened by the addition of the minicons and the ability to return to areas when your powered-up to decimate previously enemies that were too tough to take on by force before and discover whole new areas that you simply couldn't reach earlier.

The enemies are varied and you will enjoy blasting each variant as you progress - from the weak lower class droids to the heavy class Decepti-clones whose heavy footfall can knock you off your own feet. Of course the end of level Bosses are reserved for the Decepticons themselves, for those that know their bots these are Cyclonus, Starscream and of course Megatron, each one requiring a little more than just stand and shoot. Each one appears faster, tougher and to have better firepower than yourself, so your strategy against each has to be moulded to strike against their weaknesses.

Each Decepticon is also faithfully recreated from their cartoon counterpart which helps greatly with the "realism" of the game.

There are numerous moments in the game that stand out and will impress players - urging them to play on, The best example is one of the levels pits you raiding an aircraft carrier in search of Starscream and the minicons. After a fire-fight you are able to escape to safety, but not before the entire ship transforms into a giant 100 foot high mountainous robot firing barrages of homing missiles and lasers.

Little touches like these along with stealth robotic tigers appearing from nowhere and Drop-ships appearing from behind ambushing you with swathes of drones help keep the gameplay fresh and exciting.

Replayability is really where this game stands out. There are tons of Mini-Cons and Data-Cons to find, so you have lots of incentive to replay levels over and over again until you get all of them. As you progress through the levels the first time these extras are in plain view but are usually on top of un-climbable mountains or floating on top of spaceships - these mini-cons can't be obtained with your normal conventional tools so the only way you can reach them is later through the game when your powered up.

There are little niggles though that stop this from being a top game, For me the whole idea of Transformers is that you get to take command of a 20foot mechanical war machine capable of split second transformations into fast powerful vehicles. Unfortunately the levels don't relate to this, it seems a large amount of the design ideas have not been considered - the bridges are all Transformer sized and the Amazonian trees are all seemingly giant redwoods as they tower over the robots. Part of the fun of Transformers was the way they always towered over the humans - the Autobots protecting them and the Decepticons



squashing them. Yet human sized buildings and structures are few and far between. You just don't get the feeling of awe that I had hoped for.

The graphics, although very good, aren't quite as well polished as some games out there and it can suffer from slowdown a little when there is a lot on screen.

Also the ability of transforming is somewhat underused. Yes its useful to get you out of a jam and its fun to ram the Decepticons into oblivion or off cliffs but there are few times in the game when its actually useful to do so, other then a few crevices that you need to boost over there is almost nowhere that the designers have programmed in where your alt.modes are actually more beneficial then your robot mode.

Also it would have been nice if the Autobots were given a bit more variation, so that you *have* to use each Autobot different abilities for different missions, as it is although you can

use any of three for the first couple of levels - you will soon find yourself using Optimus simply because of the extra minicons he can carry.

Overall this is a good game that is bordering on a brilliant game. If you are a fan of Transformers this going to be an instant hit. If you aren't, but enjoy a good third person shooter then you can certainly do a lot worse then this.

Let's hope a sequel comes along that can iron out the little problems and really make this a special title.

Graphics: 90% - The robots look good, the cut-scenes are great, only minor niggles with slowdown and repetitive backgrounds stop this from getting a top score.

Sound: 83% - The remix of the classic theme tune is nice in the background and the effects are all good. Voice overs are a welcome

addition but there isn't really anything inside to get too excited about.

Gameplay: 92% - Lots and lots of fun to be had blasting all the different Decepticons, looking for Data-cons and collecting the mini-cons.

Longevity: 87% - Three levels of play, a strong plot and all the minicons mean that this has good replay value. The difficulty isn't too high, but it does increase as you get into the later levels. It won't take forever to get through, but it's not a game you'll complete in an hour

Overall: 88% - A game that fans will love, and non-fans should still enjoy.

The BinalTech World by Sven Harvey

Binaltech is growing, as the range expands, with the Japanese versions of the Binaltech/Alternator lines being preferred by many collectors, especially as the Alternator releases in the UK have been limited to say the least!

The release of Smokescreen in 2003 grabbed a lot of attention as though some car companies (particularly the German ones) didn't get involved, plenty of others, most notably Ford (who also own a controlling share in Mazda), jumped at the chance to get their cars turned into robots!

Mazda especially were enthusiastic. The company introduced an early concept for the Binaltech/Alternator Meister toy and placed it in their website on the lead up to a major American motor show. Appearing on their website as an animation of the RX-8 running around a city in both modes!

The range now consists of a quite a few releases, both Autobots and a somewhat lesser contingent of Decepticons;

To start with...

As most will be aware, BT-01 was Smokescreen, which was released in two

versions as the number 7 and number 8 Subaru Impreza from the 2003 World Rally Championship, (the Alternator version was only available with the number 8 decals).

Of course around the same time Masterpiece Convoy (and the western 20th Anniversary Optimus Prime version) were released. That release is quite special, but if you don't know about that already, where have you been?

Also BT-02 - Lambor aka Sideswipe which was a red Dodge Viper SRT-10, BT-03 was Streak, a silver Subaru Impreza WRX and Hound, a green Jeep Wrangler was BT-04

The best of those was probably Streak, but Takara was only getting started!

Autobot?

A remould of the Sideswipe BT-02 release was prepared for release as Sunstreaker complete with the correct head, to emulate the original toy and character. In fact the designers also had Trailbreaker on the way as a remould of the Jeep Wrangler.



However Hasbro were concerned that the Alternators range should have Decepticons also, and Sunstreaker and Trailbreaker suddenly became the special team members Dead End (Stunticons) and Swindle (Combaticons). The only problem with that being that every fan on the planet recognised

the Sunstreaker head and were disappointed... especially after early factory test shots of the toy with moulded Autobot logos had leaked out and photos of them got everywhere!

The resultant toys relieved a lukewarm reception in many quarters, but Takara did start filling in the gaps by providing a storyline which explained that bodies meant for Sunstreaker and Trailbreaker had been stolen by the Decepticons for use on Dead End and Swindle. I hope both Takara and Hasbro have the sense to put these out as they originally should have been, even if it is as store exclusives (as was suggested for Alternator Sunstreaker)

A Pair of Tracks

Fortunately though for those collecting the Binaltechs, after Dead End was released as BT-05, BT-06 was Tracks - a Chevrolet Corvette Z06. The only problem was that he was yellow instead of his original blue as in G1. This was down to the choice made by GM as they used yellow as the main marketing colour for the model. However when colour tests were being done on the all-plastic Alternator version it was found that the car doors were somewhat transparent, which spoiled the look somewhat, so Hasbro talked to General Motors about it and the Alternator version became blue.

This, in turn resulted in Takara doing another run of the Binaltech version, this time in blue and even included a flame decal sticker for the bonnet of the car to make it look even more like the original Tracks!

As with the other Binaltechs Tracks is mix of die cast and plastic and though suffers a little from restricted leg articulation (though nowhere near as bad as Sideswipe or Dead End), its still a great toy!

More Smokes!

BT-07 was another version of Smokecreen, this time based on the 2004 version of the rally Impreza and hence was a retool of the sold out BT-01. It has been suggested that the original license had been for a single run and when Takara wanted to do more, Subaru insisted that the toy be updated. Again two versions were available - number 1 and number 2, but were not released in Alternators.

Each BT-07 did however come with an extra accessory - a missile launcher. Though it would have been nice if the missile launcher had also been available separately so that each Smokescreen could have two, as could Silverstreak to make them look even more G1 like!

For most people, not worth a purchase if you have the earlier one, but if you didn't it's a must have!

Special Ops Agent

For those of you who don't know, Jazz' original Japanese name was Meister, and due to trademarking law in the USA, Hasbro can't use Jazz as a name for a TransFormer any more (this may be a combination of the fact that it's a type of music and that Honda



have a car called the Jazz). They got around this by calling the G1 reissue of Jazz "Autobot Jazz" but this was unfavoured by Hasbro generally. When Takara updated Meister as a Binaltech, they did want to go with a Porsche again, but the German company pulled out after the toy got to the prototype stage.

However Mazdas RX-8 proved to be more than adequate after winning more awards than its more expensive Porsche rival.

So the head moved to the RX-8, but Meister/Jazz was white and the RX-8 marketing colour was red, so a compromise was released - some red and some white BT-08 Meisters were released and the official story line introduced the red one as Meisters clone, Zoom-Zoom (after the Mazda marketing slogan). The Binaltech version still named Meister was released in white only.

The resultant toy even includes the unusual door mechanisms of the real car and the robot mode is brilliant and very Jazz-like! This

is coming out in the UK later this year (all plastic Alternator mind) and I hope sells like crazy! I just hope Hasbro UK can pull something out of the bag and call him Jazz here (that'll annoy the American collectors!)

A Ford Grimlock?

BT-09 was Swindles release and was followed by BT-10; Grimlock as a 2004 Ford Mustang GT complete with Energy Sword and twin blaster.

This feels like a big solid release and the vehicle is like a chunky American Aston Martin and allows me to hope that as Aston Martin Lagonda is owned by Ford that the Aston Martin DB9 may get used, especially as the MG SV/SV-R won't be now.

There are a few criticisms of Grimlock though; Due to the fact that the sword has to fit into the car mode... it looks more like a dagger, and the seats become his feet - which is a little weird, though quite an innovation. Oh and in picky picky land, there the fact that his eyes have never, ever been blue! They should be red!

Plus... Grimlock really should be a Tyrannosaurus Rex, or at a stretch, a tank!

Super Ravage!

BT-11 was a bit of a surprise when images leaked out of early tests. Basically a remoulded Tracks/Corvette, this time in black, the head mould is very reminiscent of the had of the X9 Jaguar toy from the Japanese Beast Wars Metals range. (Jaguar is the Japanese name for Ravage). In a bizarre twist Jaguar couldn't be used in Japan for this toy and he was initially named Battle Ravage (a name from Transformers Energon) before finally becoming just Ravage. Due to further





trademark issues in the Alternators range he retains the full moniker, Battle Ravage.

I particularly like the way that Takara worked Ravage into the story. The shattered and dead body of Ravage, uncovered after his death in Beast Wars is rebuilt into this body. A rogue faction of the humans building the Binaltech bodies hope to gain information from the rescued memories from within the ancient body.

Eager to give the Binaltech TransFormer life they manage to capture Ravage (no mean feat) and force him into cassette mode, and insert him into the facsimile of a cassette deck in the centre console of the Corvettes interior. The result is that the Spark of current day Ravage controls the body, and the humans thought they could control him through built in failsafes. However they have underestimated Ravage ad he regains full

control... and his own future selfs memories, making him the most dangerous Decepticon of all and one utterly loyal to Megatron to boot... That alters the timeline somewhat!

I have warmed to this toy after being rather unhappy with the images when they first appeared, but he does suffer from articulation restriction the same as Tracks.

A Magnetic Personality

At one stage Windcharger was to be the Ford Mustang... but this was put on hold and the mould became Grimlock and another Autobot.

Takara meanwhile had the Honda S2000 license sewn up and decided to update the Omnibot, Overdrive.

The head of this BT-12 Overdrive release is obviously the same character as the original Omnibot from 1985 (itself a reissue of an old

Diaclone toy). It unusual that Overdrive is used however as the Omnibot was in fact a mail away exclusive in both Japan and the States (and never available here in the UK)

However Hasbro in the USA thought that it would be better to go with a more appropriate name for the toy. The all-plastic Alternator version was named Windcharger (though he lost his gun barrel). Shame his head doesn't look like Windcharger, but at least it makes sense a character with magnetic powers having no metal in his bodywork! Bizarrely Alternator Windcharger was released in the UK through Argos before anywhere else in the world and several months before the Binaltech Overdrive release in May!

Another Masterpiece

In a sensible business move, Takara have recoloured the Masterpiece Convoy toy as



has been regained.) This meant that the Alternators version was released as Shockblast (also a name used in Energon).

Though again, it's a bit strange seeing Shockwave as a car (even more strange than the satellite weapons platform that the Energon version was), you can't deny that the robot mode is very Shockwave with the appropriate cyclopic head and gun arm!

Ultra Magnus. Many fans have objected to this, but to be honest I think its natural, and probably necessary to give us a hope of any further releases. Don't forget that the original Ultra Magnus toy was a white Optimus cab with a new trailer that just happened to merge with the cab to create a larger robot form. Thing is that Magnus only ever appeared in official media in his combined robot form (which I thought was a mistake in Target 2006 for instance). This was recently rectified in Dreamwave's G1 comic series, when Magnus' large robot form was damaged and he decombined.

Shocking

A second, this time blue/purple, Mazda RX-8 (but this time the uprated Mazda Speed II version) has been very recently released in Japan as BT-13; Laserwave.

For those not in the know, Laserwave was the Japanese name for Shockwave which in turn is another name lost to Hasbro due to trademarking reasons (though apparently, very, very recently, this



Coming soon

Already out in the USA Alternators range, but due in Japan as BT-14 by the time you read this is Wheeljack, a remould of the Ford Mustang GT as used for Grimlock.

The images of Wheeljack do show that he can be no other G1 character (except possibly the Decepticon Slicer).



BT-15 is the long awaited return of Prowl, Jazz' co-second in command under Optimus Prime. In a move that will delight some and annoy others, his form isn't related to that of Silverstreak/Bluestreak and Smokescreen as in the past, but he will take the form of a Honda Integra Police Car. Mind you the car does look quite Prowl like! The Binaltech release is due in July, alongside a second blue version of the toy - which is probably just a colour variation rather than another character.

Due in September as a Binaltech is the Stunticon Wildrider, as BT-16 - a hard top version of the Honda S2000. The Alternator version was though to be named Drag Strip, but as its imminent release approached he

was announced as Decepticharge. What were Hasbro thinking? Wildrider it is then!

A confirmed Alternator is Swerve, a red repaint and remould of the Corvette mould (Tracks/Ravage), but it is unknown at this time as to whether a Binaltech version will be forthcoming. However it is more likely than not, I believe.

The Future?

Well things could very much be up in the air at the moment. You see Takara and Tomy are said to be merging before the end of the year, which could put everything under re-examination with Zoids and TransFormers, plus the alleged return of Microchange and Diaclone brands. Apparently the 1:72 scale jet Binaltechs and Alternators, rumoured to be, unsurprisingly, led out by Starscream are still very much on the table...

Hopefully however Binaltech will continue with other Ford cars such as the Aston Martin DB9, maybe the odd Land Rover/Range Rover, but it's a shame we'll never see an MG SV, even after I tried to start the process of the MG supercar being licensed to Hasbro over a year ago.

Binaltech in TransFormers: Unlimited

As you will find in this issue the story of four minibots who have been Binalteched in addition to those actually released as toys. However this is not where it ends, as another character introduced this issue, Flashback is a good obvious match for on Binaltech release. Similarly the yellow Tracks could be Road Rage (the eHobby red Tracks) and it would make sense that Overdrive and Wincharger could be running around together, one with a poly-carbide and fibreglass body so he can use his magnetic powers...

The sky is the limit!



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