

# CYBERTRONIAN TIMES

THE OFFICIAL FANZINE OF AUTO ASSEMBLY

Issue 8, June 2006

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

A personal look at his involvement with Beast Wars by Simon Furman, Reviews, News, Artwork, Fiction, Articles and much more besides...!

**TRANS  
FORMERS**

**AUTO  
ASSEMBLY**  
TARGET, 2006

Optimus Prime

**TRANSFORMERS**



Pencil by Simon Williams

Colours by Jason Cardy

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## Introduction

Once again its that time of year where I end up trying to be in at least three places at once trying to make sure everyone is enjoying themselves whether they be attendee guest or even dealer. With a bit of luck, assuming you picked up your copy of this issue if CT at Auto Assembly you are probably reading this whilst having a break from the dealers table melee in the seating area (actually its more than likely that you have skipped this bit, so whenever you are reading this, this is all seemingly utterly pointless!).

What is Auto Assembly about? Well lets face it, its supposed to be fun, and hopefully the ability to meet a tonne of other TransFormers fans and collectors in itself is worth the journey, but hopefully the variety of dealers tables, plus the number of guests Simon has managed to pull together for your enjoyment, and lets face it the likelihood of us being able to better the guest line-up in a future event is pretty much nil! However one big chunk of Auto Assembly which puts it apart from almost every other TransFormers event anywhere else in the world is that any and all proceeds from the event, once all costs are paid, plus funds raised from the auction and the raffle will be going to **Acorns Childrens Hospice Trust** who run a number of sites primarily for life-limited children.

Unfortunately funding for the Hospices has been difficult to raise resulting in beds having to be closed. Auto Assembly: Target 2006 and BRMBs Big Brum Walk as the only two reasonable sized events raising money for the Trust that I am aware of this year so I can only ask for as much help as you can offer to help out these kids. And don't forget next time someone has a go at you for being a loser or sad for enjoying TransFormers or coming to Auto Assembly, you can always state quite clearly "When was the last time you helped out some ill kids?"

On behalf of the Acorns Childrens Hospices I would like to thank you for your support of Auto Assembly: Target 2006, and indeed Auto Assembly 2005, when half of the money raised from the event went to Acorns (the other half went to the NSPCC).

I hope you enjoy the event and though we are not announcing Auto Assembly 2007 as an event quite yet, mainly due to the new live action film possibly causing headaches, I do intend there to be one next year, just don't expect a guest list like this years!

*Sven Harvey*  
*Founder, Auto Assembly*

I wasn't originally going to write anything here but as there was a little space, I thought I'd add a few words... This is an exciting time for me - it's 10 years since we did our first large scale convention here at Infinite Frontiers, it's the 10th Anniversary of Beast Wars and we're on target again to beat the attendance record for a European TransFormers convention and it's something that we couldn't have achieved without YOUR help.

And that's really what I wanted to add here - a few personal thanks to some people who have made this year's convention possible. First, I'd like to thank all our sponsors this year who have provided the free gifts for our goodie bag or who have helped us financially with the event - Spacebridge, Model & Collectors Mart, Red Mill Snack Foods, Titan Books, TF Auctions, and another sponsor who we can't name but who helped us immensely with our room hire costs (you know who you are - thanks Martin!).

Obviously, I want to thank Sven for all his hard work and effort he's put into the convention as always and making sure everything has run smoothly with the venue, all our volunteers, Lee Sullivan for his cover artwork, Guido Guidi, Simon Williams and Kat Nicholson for the postcard artwork, and finally my fiancée Heather who's kept me sane the last 12 months planning everything!

I'd also like to thank everyone who's entered our competitions this year. We've had so many entries to our fiction competition that we couldn't include them all here so if you look on the website soon we'll make a bonus fanzine available freely for downloading featuring the rest of the entries!

*Simon Plumbe*



## Auto Assembly: Target 2006 Guest Profiles

For this year's convention, we have what is probably our biggest and best guest line-up to-date with guests joining us from three continents covering all aspects of the TransFormers universe including - as always - comic and TV guests! Well, it's time we introduce them to you...

### DAVID KAYE

A man of a thousand voices -- and a growing number of faces - actor David Kaye was already a radio professional by the age of 16. Working summers and weekends during his high school years in Peterborough, Ontario, he dropped his plans for a psychology degree to pursue a full-time career on-air.

Kaye's breakthrough came as a radio personality on a station in London, Ontario, and he followed that with a move to Vancouver's CKLG. There he handled every shift before joining the popular "Morning Zoo" crew, for which he came up with zany characters like the drawling "Cowboy Dick" and "Stunt Boy" with the latter providing him an excuse for remote broadcasts from odd locations. Writing and improvising material for the Zoo soon gave him a taste for more challenging fare, so he undertook acting studies. "When I was still in radio," recalls Kaye with an uncontrollable smile, "somebody told me I would never make a living in this town doing voice-overs. That was all I needed to hear." Kaye has since worked non-stop as a voice actor. He began by supplying vocal personalities to cartoon characters on series like G.I. Joe (the Canadian's first cartoon character was as the "great American hero" GENERAL

HAWK!), G.I. Joe Extreme; David played the infamous MEGATRON on Beast Wars -- Transformers (Also Beast Machines; Transformers Armada etc.); D'Myna League (BARRY), Kleo The Misfit Unicorn (his character SLIM shares star-billing with a character voiced by Mickey Rooney), Street Fighter (AKUMA), Kong (RAMONE DE LA PORTA), Exo Squad (Hallas, Draconis) a series directed by Gordon Hunt (Helen Hunt's, of Mad About You fame, father). He was also cast as AKELA THE WOLF in a Russian adaptation of Jungle Book, starring Charlton Heston as the narrator, and is the narrator himself on MGM/Sony's Bible Stories series. And that was just the very beginning of his career. Fast-forward now through over a hundred characters to his most recent ones and you get to the voice of PROFESSOR XAVIER on WB Kid's animated X-Men: Evolution series; MAJOR POWERS for Hasbro's toy 'Major Powers'; DRAGON, in



Mattel's new cartoon Barbie as Rapunzel ("Another purple dragon," laughs Kaye); CLANK, in the popular Playstation 2 game, 'Ratchet and Clank'; SESSHOMARU in the new hot anime Inuyasha; and he's still MEGATRON, this time on Transformers Armada. Finally, fulfilling another lifelong ambition, David Kaye recently received his first paycheck from "the mouse", for a Disney Christmas project 'Mickey Mouse's Twice Upon A Christmas'. And this breakdown of characters only touches the list of voices Kaye has provided in animation ... A list impressive enough to land top talent agency, William Morris in both L.A. and in New York.

But more than 'toon-town beckoned. As part of North Vancouver's First Impressions theatre company, Kaye landed key roles in classic plays such as Noises Off, Of Mice and Men, Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?, A Streetcar Named Desire (he played STANLEY KOWALSKI), and Harvey (he played ELWOOD P. DOWD). Early television auditions yielded supporting roles in the series Northwood and M.A.N.T.I.S., and in TV-movies like Someone Else's Child and Zalinda's Story for ABC's Lifetime. On the big screen, he was often cast - not too surprisingly - as TV reporters (in Tailhook, Sliders, and Adam Sandler's Happy Gilmore, among others, he played glib commentators). Over the past six years, however, he has been recognized for his growing skills with lead, co-starring and guest starring roles in The Outer Limits, So Weird, The Sentinel, Viper, Dead Man's Gun, The Twilight Zone ; features such as Carpool, Prisoner Of Zenda Inc., Dead Like Me and the TV movies Murder In My Mind , Ladies and the Champs, MVP II: Most Valuable Primate, and Live From Baghdad. He performed the lead role in The Love Charm, a half-hour independent film which won the Best Short Film Award at the Leo Awards (Vancouver). The actor also co-starred in the TV movie Prince of Mirrors: The Rich Donato Story, and Mermaid (starring Ellen Burstyn) in which he played a supporting lead role.

Kaye counts guest-starring with Michael York on Dead Man's Gun as one of his best acting experiences. "I have been really lucky with the direction my career has taken... I've been

able to do my own thing." That "thing" includes dead-on comic timing and a flair for intense dramatics. The six-foot, brown-haired Kaye comes by his flamboyance naturally, since he counts Captain Blood - the infamous model for Errol Flynn's most swashbuckling role - as one of his family ancestors.

## SIMON FURMAN

**Simon Furman** is a writer for comic books and TV animation, his name inextricably linked to *Transformers*, the 80s toy phenomenon. He has written literally hundreds of stories about the war-torn 'robots in disguise', for Marvel Comics (US and UK), Dreamwave and most recently *Transformers: Infiltration* and *Beast Wars: The Gathering* for IDW Publishing. His other comic book credits include *Dragon's Claws*, *Death's Head*, *Alpha Flight*, *Turok*, *She-Hulk*, *Robocop* and *What If?*



In the TV animation field, Furman has written for shows such as *Beast Wars*, *Roswell Conspiracies*, *Dan Dare*, *X-Men: Evolution*, *Alien Races* and *A.T.O.M.*

Editorially, Furman oversees Titan Books' range of *Transformers* titles and their 'Comics Creators' series (which includes *Comics Creators on X-Men* and *Writers on Comics Scriptwriting 2*). Furman's other recent writing work includes *Ronan* and *Death's Head 3.0* (both for Marvel), *Power Rangers SPD*, *A.T.O.M* (the comic) and *Wallace & Gromit*.

He is also the author of *Transformers: The Ultimate Guide*, a lavish twentieth anniversary hardcover, and a *Dr. Who* audio adventure



('The Axis of Insanity'). Online creation *The Engine: Industrial Strength* can be viewed at [www.wildfur.net](http://www.wildfur.net) or [www.whorunstheengine.net](http://www.whorunstheengine.net)

### **GEOFF SENIOR (by Geoff Senior!)**

Since leaving the world of comic books around 12 years ago. I've been working as a storyboard artist in the world of advertising. The work is interesting as one day I may be working on a beer promotion and the next day a car or anything in between. I have enjoyed it as I've had to learn how to draw 'real' people and be aware of modern fashions and hairstyles etc .And as far as cars are concerned my cars no longer look like boxes with wheels!



I feel my work has improved leaps and bounds over the recent years because of the huge variety of subjects I've worked on. But I will always be grateful for the storytelling skills and experience I picked up from the drawing of Transformers, Dragons Claws, Deaths Head and Judge Dredd among others.

Recently, I've been busy starting up my own office/studio (Smudge Pencil) in central London. I have worked through other studios but decided to take the plunge and be my own boss.

I still draw the conventional way but now use Photoshop to colour in. I enjoy it and have put my inks and Magic Markers away for good I hope. Though like everyone else I haven't thrown them away, just in case.

On a social basis I regularly meet up with Robbie Morrison who lives up the road and Simon Furman who will be moving to an area nearby soon. I am thankful for the years on Transformers and the friends I made during that time. It is flattering to meet and shake the hand of a reader and to have been an important part of their childhood... Though they are very tall these days.

### **ANDREW WILDMAN**

**Andrew Wildman** is a designer/illustrator of some 25 years industry experience. His work has featured in numerous advertisements and publications, but it is in the field of comic book art that he is best known. Early work included strips in a host of Marvel UK titles, including

***The Real Ghostbusters***  
***Thundercats***  
***Galaxy Rangers***  
***Transformers***



Andrew graduated to the US **Transformers** comic (as of issue #69), handling the art chores throughout the rest of the book's run. Firmly ensconced at Marvel US, Andrew then worked on a number of their titles, including:

**G.I. Joe**

**X-Men Adventures**

**The Hulk**

**Spider-Man**

**Venom**

**Fantastic Four Unplugged**

**Spider-Man 2099**

as well as a brief stint on **Nightman** for Malibu Comics.

His other work includes character design and animated movie production for the video games industry, providing storyboards for **Wing Commander** and design/concept work on:

**The Mummy**

**Gunlok**

**Gunfighter**

**Delta Force**

**Largo Winch**

More recently, Andrew returned to comics with **Transformers: The War Within – The Dark Ages**, with long-time collaborator Simon Furman.

Andrew has recently designed characters for the animated TV show **Legend of the Dragon**, currently airing on Saturday morning BBC, animated movie **Ali Baba and The Forty Thieves** and **Kong: Return to The Jungle**. He is also currently producing all the art for the **Power Rangers** strip in the UK *Jetix* magazine and working on a new animated, pre-school children's television series with his wife Lesley and writer colleague Simon Jowett.

For further information visit [www.wildman.uk.com](http://www.wildman.uk.com)

## GUIDO GUIDI

Guido Guido is instantly a name that is recognised by Transformers comic book fans as well as Transformers fans in general.

Being able to mix old school with a new school twist makes his work simply "stunning". But he doesn't just stop at Transformers, his work ranges from Masters

Of The Universe to the recent Marvel Rampage comic books.

His range of work has been subject of many major companies including Dreamwave, Hasbro toys, 88 MPH, Panini Comics and most recently IDW Publishing. This is proof that he is one of the most respected and talented artists of his day.



Guido's recent work has seen him create the Hearts of Steel series, Transformers gone loco-motive in this amazing series set in the industrial era.

TFAuctions.com have also enlisted the help of Guido in creating their site mascot Cougar. As co-creator Guido was extremely happy with the outcome of Cougar and in his own words "nailed" the design first time.

Guido is making his Auto Assembly debut this year so please make him feel welcome!

## LEE SULLIVAN

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

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



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

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

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



Some of his most recent work is BBC Cult's successful series of online Doctor Who webcasts: 'Death Comes to Time'; 'Real Time'; and 'Shada' which was written by the late Douglas Adams. He 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 and performs regularly with the Roxy Music tribute band, Roxy Magic.

## MIKE COLLINS

Mike Collins is a writer/artist/storyboarder for comics, animation and film. He's worked in the business for 20 years now, drawing pretty much every major US and UK character- X-Men, Judge Dredd, Spider-Man, Batman, Superman...

However, his first regular assignment was drawing the Marvel UK TRANSFORMERS strip, and the Ladybird series of Transformers books. Big robots are rarely far from his work tho, and just this month, in his current gig as DOCTOR WHO MAGAZINE artist he's had the 10th Doctor face off against a Roman gladiator version of Optimus Prime!

Mike is making his Auto Assembly debut this year so please make him feel welcome!



## SIMON WILLIAMS

Simon Williams is probably best known for his artwork on Panini Comics' *Spectacular Spider-man Adventures* title, for which he has produced artwork for the past three years.

However, Simon is also known to have produced artwork for various Transformers related projects... varying from comics strips to giant-sized Cardboard Standees!

In 2003, Panini Comics were looking for artists for one of their new comics...

*Transformers Armada*. And it was at this time that they contacted Simon to see if he would be interested in doing some work for them. At the time, Simon was looking to break into the comics business, so naturally he jumped at the chance... as, not only was he a huge Transformers fan, but he would be working alongside such legendary Transformers creators as Simon Furman, Andrew Wildman and Lee Sullivan! Simon would produce posters, fact-file art and one comic strip during the titles' 9 issue run.



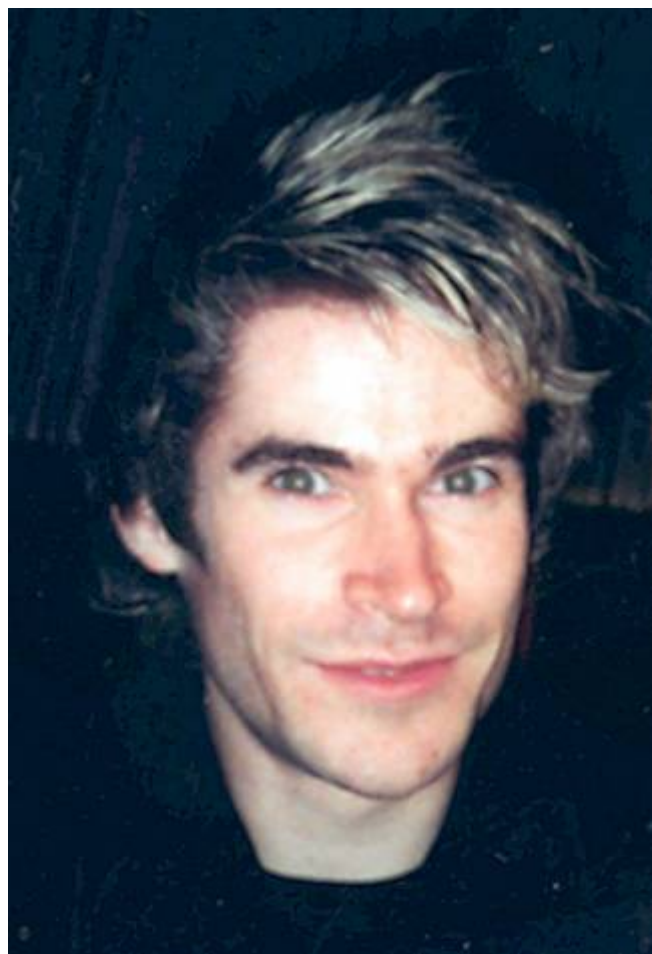
Since then, Simon has gone on to work on several different Panini titles... including *Action Man*, *Marvel Rampage* and of course *Spectacular Spider-man Adventures*. And since working for Panini, Simon has achieved two of his lifelong ambitions... to draw the Incredible Hulk (on the cover of Panini Book's *Incredible Hulk Annual 2005*), and to draw the Hulk vs the Thing from the Fantastic Four in an all-out slobberknocker (*Spectacular Spider-man Adventures* issue 100). Simon is still involved in the world of the Transformers

as well... having produced work for Metrodome's *Transformers* Season 3&4 boxset (which even features an interview with the 'idle of millions!'), and also artwork for the *Optimus Prime* and *Megatron* standees, produced by *CardboardCutout.Net*.

The idle of millions, DVD superstar and Welsh comic-book hero has but one ambition that he has yet to attain in comics: to work on a comic featuring the original Death's Head. After all, he's got to prove to the masses that Death's Head is indeed Welsh, not Russian... yes?

### JASON CARDY

Jason works in the comic industry as a colour artist, having cut his teeth a couple of years back on 'Transformers Armada UK' just before the series came to a premature end. Fortunately, the poster he and Simon Williams created for the final unpublished issue of Armada has transcended the death of the title.



He is responsible for digitally inking and colouring the official Hasbro Transformers

standees featuring Gen 1 Optimus Prime and Megatron, again collaborating with Simon Williams, which were available here in the UK and the States late last year.

At the moment Jason's colour work can be seen regularly in 'Spectacular Spiderman' and also the Simon Furman written title 'Action Man ATOM' in which he colours art by Jack Lawrence and Guido Guidi. He also coloured Guido's first strip for Panini Comics (Marvel UK) featuring the Fantastic Four.

If Jason was a Transformer, he would transform into a DVD/TV combo and play Transformers: The Movie on constant repeat.

## **Beast Wars: The Official Regeneration By Simon Furman**

I've been thinking a lot about **Beast Wars**...

Maybe that's fitting, what with this being the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its launch. Not that back in 1996 I'd even heard of **Beast Wars**. It was a whole year later before I even realised it was happening at all, another year or more after that when I wrote part 2 of 'Nemesis' (which turned out to be the last ever episode of the **Beast Wars** TV series). For me, 1996 was just another year without **Transformers**, Generation 1 and Generation 2 having come and gone for me (UK and US-wise) a year or more before. This was pre-Internet (at least for me) and I had no idea that not only had **Transformers** fandom grown and flourished in the interim but **Transformers** itself had returned as **Beast Wars**.

It was Glen Hallit (he of 3H and, for many years, Botcon) who finally gave me the heads-up. His call (this was pre-email, just) came out of the blue. Would I (and Andrew Wildman) be interested in attending a **Transformers** convention in Rochester, New York? And more, would we be interested in collaborating on a special convention comic featuring **Beast Wars**? Well sure. It was only afterwards that I thought... what's **Beast Wars**?

One crash course later, *Tales From the Beast Wars* #1 (featuring the story 'Ground Zero')

and convention exclusive toys Fractyl and Packrat) was born. I wouldn't say I was exactly up to speed at that point, but I knew who the main characters were and the gist of what was what. The convention itself introduced me to **Beast Wars** script editor Bob Forward, and by the time the next convention (in Anaheim, CA) rolled around we were talking possible storylines for my episode of the **Beast Wars** TV show. Lots of ideas, all G1-centric, were floated (including one that later became the 'Meeting of Minds' short story in the i-Books compilation *Transformers Legends*) and ultimately rejected, largely due to budgetary considerations. By the end of 1998, 'Nemesis pt2' was written and (well) received, and—bar more convention comics for Glen—my brief involvement with **Beast Wars** was at end. When will I learn? It *never* ends...

So here we are, 2006. *Beast Wars: The Gathering* is—at time of writing—already three issues to the good. By the time you read this, the entire miniseries will be out. And boy is it looking good. Don (Figueroa) has excelled himself, ably assisted on colour duties by Josh Burcham. But the genesis of this series is mired in the bitter recriminations of Dreamwave's demise. I won't go into details here, but when the series was first offered to me I had no idea of the financial hole Dreamwave was already in, and was told that James (McDonough) and Adam (Patyk) has left the project due to, for want of a better description, a clash of personalities. The chance to work with Don again and on **Beast Wars** was just too good to pass up. I took the assignment, whereupon the first problem reared its head.

I had no idea exactly what James and Adam had had in mind for the series, and yet somehow I had to work the extant Summer Special story into whatever I was going to do. So, with machinations akin my original weaving together of Marvel US and Marvel UK stories, I wove a tale that meshed the *Summer Special* Rattrap interlude into a larger story that I wanted to tell. So far so good. Next problem: where to set this story and how to reconcile that with the TV series, which was done and dusted (to my complete satisfaction). I realised I was going to have to



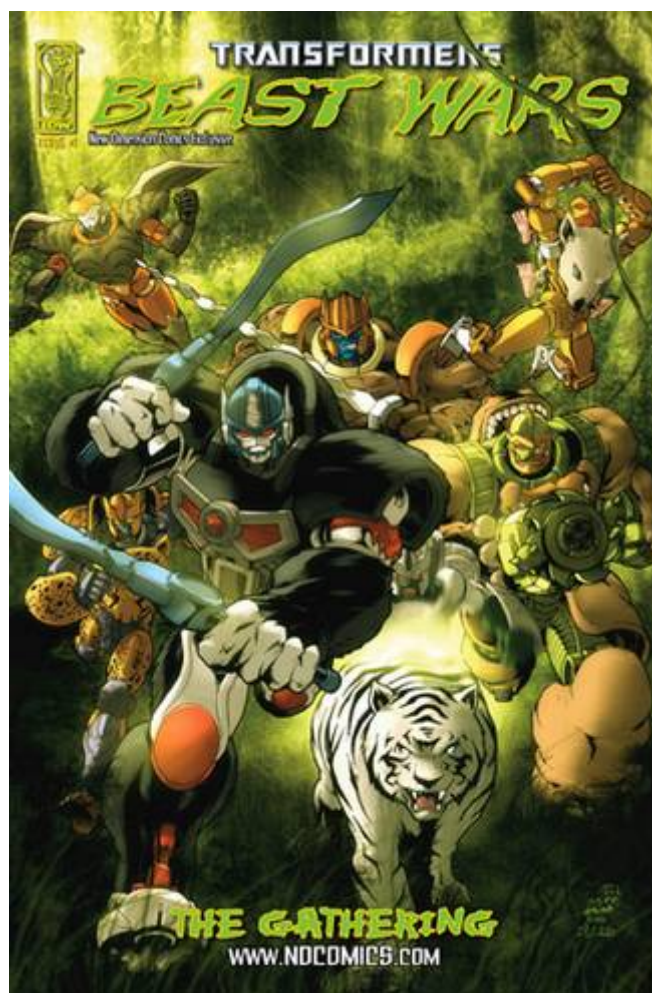
somehow abort the takeoff we'd all seen at the end of 'Nemesis pt2' and get the characters back down to Earth. I figured they could all blast off again at a later date and still make it back to Cybertron in time for **Beast Machines**.

The story I wanted to tell was the story of Magmatron and his efforts to reap the harvest of discarded (and unaccounted for in the TV show) stasis pods, the story I did end up telling in the 'The Gathering.' The Dreamwave variant of this tale was a full on meeting of TV show and comic book cast. Two issues were written. The first issue was drawn, the second started. I may even have mapped out issue #3. Then Dreamwave closed its doors and that was that. No **Beast Wars**, no money and—pretty much—no work. I was angry, not least because the stuff we'd done on **Beast Wars** was, in my humble opinion, good... damn good.

At this point in my somewhat rambling tale, I must digress. You'll understand why as we get further on. It's here I should mention Ben Yee (consultant on the original **Beast Wars** TV series and webmaster of the excellent resource site [bwtf.com](http://bwtf.com)). I'd met Ben originally back at one of the Botcons (maybe even the first), and a few chats here and there had evolved into a firm friendship. When I first started work on the (then Dreamwave) **Beast Wars** series, Ben was the man I went to for advice and help. Ben is an absolute mine of **Beast Wars** information, and was invaluable in terms of pulling together a cast and rationalizing what I wanted to do in the series. On an unofficial (though paid) basis, he became my consultant on the series. Had the Dreamwave series survived and thrived, he would have received due credit. When it all crashed and burned I felt particularly sorry for Ben, whose first (comics) credit this would have been (he has since scripted the excellent 'Descent into Evil' story in the Botcon 2005 convention comic/program).

Anyway, as it turned out, the groundwork he'd done for me hadn't been wasted. When IDW snagged the **Transformers** (comics) license and a **Beast Wars** series was again mooted, I salvaged the core Magmatron story and reapplied it, without the whole 'meeting the

TV show cast' angle. Issue #1 was written again, from scratch, and Don redrew every panel, even where possibly he could have integrated a scene here or a scene there from the original art. There are two reasons, by the way, that we didn't simply go with the story as had been previously planned and executed (apart from any potential legal issues resulting from material caught up directly in the Dreamwave bankruptcy proceedings). The first reason was, I had always felt the *Summer Special* story was shoehorned in, and while the fit was as good as I could get it, it still felt slightly uncomfortable. The second was, the series was now four issues instead of the original six (which is what the Dreamwave version was always planned to be). As was, the story plainly wouldn't fit in four issues. Something had to go.



So, I started to look at ways to sidestep the whole continuity issue. Was it possible to have a whole new **Beast Wars**? Maybe after Optimus Primal and Co., left Earth? Or maybe they're right there, in amongst it all, and no one notices. Could that be done? I remembered an episode of *Star Trek: The*

*Next Generation*, the name escapes me ('The Next Phase?'), where Geordi and Ensign Ro are stuck in choral phase, a second or two removed from the rest of the crew. I decided to 'make it so,' and now The Gathering (as it had become known) had a rationale that would allow it to fit in with the existing TV show and cast, without impacting directly on them. We just have to assume, as he got ignominiously trounced, Megatron wouldn't have mentioned his run-in with Magmatron.

So, that pretty much brings us up to date. The Gathering (and its Dreamwave forerunner) meant that I had to get my **Beast Wars** general knowledge right up to scratch. But, as it turns out, that's only the beginning. While I was familiarising myself with the non-show cast (of US characters), it became clear I was going to have to at least dip into the Japanese incarnations/variations of the show/toys. The drawback with cramming all the US non-show characters into the front line of The Gathering was that, for flashback scenes on Cybertron, I needed extra cast. Maybe, without naming names, I could pluck a character or three from **Beast Wars II** (The Second) and **Beast Wars Neo**, and have them (in wholly Cybertronian modes) holding the fort. I know (from the *War Within* experience) how much Don loves retro-designing characters, so I figured he'd be game. Unsurprisingly, he was.

I largely assumed, though, that that would be that. I wouldn't have to get too much deeper into the often contradictory worlds of **Beast Wars II** or **Neo**. Wrong again. With The Gathering done, a new project (or two) looms. These I can't discuss in any detail, in one case because I have no details to offer yet, and in the other because I may be stealing IDW's thunder to do so. But, suffice to say, a whole lot more research (into all incarnations of **Beast Wars**) needed to be done. In fact, I soon realised that I needed help. I just couldn't do this alone. There really was only one choice: Ben Yee. Ben had everything I needed right there, at hand, and I felt together we could actually make sense of it all, turn it into one big cohesive **Beast Wars** chronology/structure.

So we started talking, rationalizing, re-jigging (as necessary) and generally streamlining the entirety of the phenomenon that is **Beast Wars** (east and west). So now I know my Bump from my Armordillo and my Drill Bit from Drill Nuts. I know all about Angolmois and Gung-Ho and Gaea and what Magmatron was up to before I ever dreamed of dropping him into the Earthbound **Beast Wars**. I know about Insectrons and Jointrons and Seacons and Autorollers and Blendtrons. And the fruits of all these labours you will see later this year (and by the time you read this, you may already know what's coming).

So, like I said, I've been thinking a lot about **Beast Wars**. More than I ever thought I would. And you know what, I'm having an absolute blast. The Gathering got us off to a great start, but it's true what they say... the best is yet to come!

**Simon Furman, April 2006.**



# TRANSFORMERS

## UNLIMITED

### Prologue...

A team of Autobots led by Meister and including Flashback and the Micromaster Nightstick had discovered an abandoned Decepticon base. There they found the missing Autobot warrior and fusilateral sibling of Meister, Flashback, Jazz and Stepper. Ricochet has been strapped to a VVH for thousands of years barely alive...

### **TransFormers: Unlimited** **"Reunion"** **By Sven Harvey**

Jazz and Stepper stood by Lake Huron taking in the view of the construction of the first Autobot city on Earth, awaiting the shuttle.

A few days earlier Earthforce has received word from Autobase that their final set of recruits to protect Earth would be with them soon. With two years of construction still ahead of them before Autobot City would be fully operational, it was important to ensure the Decepticons couldn't undo all the work that had been done. Ultra Magnus was due to take command of the city once complete, but his work was still cut out with rebuilding the Autobots crack commando squad, The Wreckers, and spearheading the fight to reclaim Cybertron, starting with the two moons.

The surprise in the message sent over from Twincast was that the new recruits would include not only a new team of 4 minibots to join Blaster now that Rewind, Eject, Raindance and Grand slam were stationed at Autobase permanently but also Meister, Flashback and the newly rescued Ricochet.

Earthforce though primarily based in British Columbia, in Canada, (a base set up when Grimlock was in command for the team) was been split up somewhat with two further staging grounds being set up in Japan and

England to ensure the fastest possible response to any danger or 'Con infringement on Terran territory.

Mach Alert was due to take command of Earthforce Tokyo in a secret base under the city in an agreement with the Japanese government. Meanwhile in the Cotswolds a small base was to be set up headed up by Meister.

The unmistakeable sound of an Autobot shuttle pulled the 'bot gaze skywards as they watched the shuttle approach the landing pad already completed at the construction site.

The side door opened up and Meister led off the new Earthforce team members and the shuttle crew. Twincast had come along to share some new protocols with Blaster as well as bring Noise, Graphy, Dial and Zaurus.

Ricochet's optic sensors immediately had problems with the bright light, and he brought his hand up to shield his eyes.

"He's still not fully recovered Jazz" whispered Meister to his commander.  
"C'mon, lets get him home" replied Jazz.

\* \* \*

Leaving the rest of the arrivals to tour the Autobot City site, Jazz took Meister, Ricochet and Flashback back to homebase, all three new arrivals transformed into their Porsche modes forming a convoy behind Jazz, all three finding some difficulty with their new modes and the terrain.

As the weather worsened, the further north they went Jazz made the decision to walk through the snow. Strolling through the snow, they talked.

"Brothers" Said Jazz "That's the human word for our similarity, or rather the closest term



they have for being of the same design from the same production line.”

“From what I understand that assumes we are what they call “male”” Replied Meister. “Well most of the humans we have had dealings with say that we tend to all fall into the male category based it would appear on the sounds of our voices more than anything, but you try telling them that we are genderless!”

The group finally arrive at Earthforce base and were greeted by Stepper and the rest of the Autobot Earth protectors. Stepper and Jazz showed Flashback, Meister and Ricochet to their quarters to rest up for a while.

\* \* \*

Some time later at the posted time the Earthforce Autobots headed for the main briefing room.

Filing into the hall were the specially selected Earth aware Autobots, charged with the protection of the people of Earth: Stepper, Ricochet, Flashback, Wheeljack, Hound, Sideswipe, Sunstreaker, Red Alert, Clamp Down, Deep Cover, Tigertrack, Speedbreaker, Sideburn, Smokescreen, Silverstreak, Bluestreak, Inferno, Artfire, Grapple, Road Hauler, X-Brawn, Wildride, Hoist, Tracks, Road Rage, Crosscut, Skids, Skid-Z, Tow Line, Grimlock (from the Build Team), High Tower, Wedge, Heavy Load (Build Team), Midnight Express, Railspike, Rapid Run, and Blaster.

Jazz was joined at the front of the briefing room by Mach Alert and Meister as the commanders of the two new Earthforce chapters in the UK and Japan that were soon to take up their postings.

“Good evening Autobots” started Jazz “I am sure you will welcome our new team members, who bring out numbers up to what we need to man the two new bases.”

“A big thankyou and farewell to our team members rejoining Prime at Autobase who will be leaving shortly with Twincast. Ramhorn, Steeljaw, Rewind, Eject, thank you

for all your hard work and for protecting the people of Earth.”

The assembled Autobots all showed their appreciation to the Cassettebots as hand units clapped together...

Jazz looked around the room, realising the enormity he had taken on as the new supreme Earthforce Commander. Ramhorn, Steeljaw, Rewind and Eject were sat next to Dial, Saurus, Graphy and Noise, their replacements with the commanders and the assembled group was one of the largest units in the Autobot Army.

“The new bases are perfectly positioned along with this one and Autobot City once it is completed to offer swift reaction to any Decepticon incursion anywhere on the planet.”

“Ultra Magnus is currently heading up the Wreckers efforts to take the Cybertronian Moons, but is due to take command of Autobot City when completed in 18 months time... sorry... that’s around 4.6 MegaCycles (46MegaBreems to those of you from the Northern City States). By which time I intend to leave the Decepticons with no impression other than that Earth is totally off limits and not worth them attacking!”

“We accidentally made the Decepticons aware of Earth and its up to us to protect this planet and its people... After all they have some really cool tunes!”

The other Ark-crew Autobots in the room immediately put their heads in their hands and mumble “oh Primus” as another voice rings out:

“I hear that Bro!”

Wheeljack looks at Blaster doing the international finger circle gesture of being a mental-case.

\* \* \*

Some time later...

Jazz, Meister, Flashback, and Stepper met in Jazz’s quarters...

"So he's a bit messed up then?"

"Yep, Jazz. He'd literally been strapped to a VVH for vorns... hell who wouldn't be a psychological mess? He is as fully repaired as possible, though there was nothing the medics could do about his optics..."

"I noticed they were red... rather than the gold they used to be"

"He needs time... A lot of the time in that VVH he was alone, we estimate that the Decepticons who were torturing him left at least 100 vorns ago."

"Over eight thousand years.... Earth maybe a shock to him... the humans technology moves so fast. Hell we awoke in 1984... twenty years ago, and so much has changed."

"At least we are here for him, he needs company right now, but he needs to slowly get used to it."

The Four Autobots left Jazz's quarters and Flashback raced ahead.

"Hey Zoom-Zoom slow down" yelled Meister "hey... that's not funny... why do people keep saying that" replied Flashback

"dunno" "dunno" "dunno" came the response from the other three.

As Flashback turned away they looked at each other knowingly.

Flashback knocked on Ricochet's door.

"You coming to the fuelling hall?" asked Flashback

"Hmmm... do you have to be so loud all the time?" replied the deep voice of the dark Autobot.

"Hey, dude, we have to bring you up to speed on Earth culture, at least you look the part now" said Jazz

"And Nightstick is probably waiting for you" added Meister.

"Very well" Ricochet rose from his recliner, switching off his personal terminal. "One thing though Jazz..." His left optic brow ridge rose.. "Whats a Dude?"

**END**

### **The story so far:**

Having completed their training to join the elite Autobot commando squad, the Wreckers, new recruits Pipes, Outback and

Tailgate travelled to Earth to receive their new augmented Binaltech bodies. Teaming up with fellow Autobot Hubcap, who also received a Binaltech body after being seriously injured in a Decepticon attack, the new Wreckers successfully defend the human Binaltech facility from the Combaticons. Taking Hubcap, who is AWOL from his post on Earth, along with them, the new Wreckers return to Cybertron...

## **"Prison Break"**

**By Keith Cooper**

Claustrophobia was a sensation that Pipes had never experienced before. The logic circuits of a Transformer simply didn't compute the illogical fear of enclosed spaces that biological creatures sometimes exhibited, some kind of instinctual behaviour wrapped in their genetic make-up, derived from millions of years of evolution and survival impulses.

So Pipes was trying very hard to figure out why he felt such fear of the enclosed space of the prison cell around him, the walls and low ceiling pressing down on him, crushing his spirits. But, in that lonely, bare cell, Pipes had plenty of time to think and ponder, and allow his fears to worm their way into the chinks of his personality. Eventually, despondently, he reckoned that his claustrophobia emanated not from an evolutionary instinct, but from the very real feeling of events transpiring around him, his options disappearing one by one until there was no hope left, and the harsh cruelties of life left him trapped and helpless.

His cell was more like a cubby hole, barely twice his width, and with just a short bench to sit on. Bars of energy that extended from the floor to the ceiling, generating a force field that kept him trapped, blocked the entrance. Pipes couldn't even see the other cells beyond that housed his comrades, Outback and Tailgate, though a prison guard occasionally walked past on his security check. The rest of the Wreckers were being housed in a different prison facility all together, as far as Pipes could gather. It would help if Pipes could understand why this was all happening. At first he was sure it had been a mistake. But Prowl hadn't given him any answers during his interrogation, just lots

of questions that Pipes didn't have the answer to.

Pipes tried to tell himself that it could be worse. Then he actually thought about what he was telling himself, and decided that no, it couldn't actually get any worse. His world had collapsed around him.

What began as a dim vibration that Pipes paid scant attention to suddenly began to increase in sound and ferocity, and he looked around his cell in alarm. The cell was shaking, and the ceiling began to crack, small pieces of debris rapidly turning into a torrent of heavy wreckage falling around him. He hadn't literally expected his world to collapse around him! As panicked shouts from down the corridor began to reach him, the ceiling finally caved in on top of him as darkness suddenly fell.

\* \* \*

Forty breems earlier

Maccaddams Old Oil House hadn't changed much since the last time Hubcap had visited the establishment. Raucous crowds gathered around the bar area, jostling, jousting, and joking with one another, devouring copious amounts of energon together, whatever their allegiance. The crowd thinned out slightly at the seated area, where bots engaged in meetings, renewed social acquaintances, drowned their sorrows or raised their voices in one kind of argument or another. Hubcap recognised some of the faces from his last visit – he wagered that many of them hadn't even *left* Maccaddams in the time Hubcap had been away. They probably didn't remember Hubcap from the last time and probably wouldn't recognise him in his new Binaltech body, but just in case he kept to the edges of the crowd, trying not to mingle, keeping his head down and simply waiting for his contact to emerge.

His contact was late. Hubcap watched his internal chronometer obsessively, acutely aware of the unfriendly environment around him, and time played on his mind. He distinctly remembered the trouble he'd got into the last time he'd been here, and he certainly didn't want a repeat of that incident. Personally, he didn't want to be there at all, but sometimes, some things you just have to

do. Even if Hubcap wasn't totally sure *why* he was doing this.

A small bot, no Autobot or Decepticon insignia visible, approached Hubcap from the wall of people in the drunken, noisy crowd. Without speaking a word, he handed a data pad to Hubcap, and disappeared into the crowd as quickly as he had appeared.

Hubcap watched the neutral bot go with bemusement, before looking down at the data pad in his hands. It was a basic device, and as Hubcap flicked it on, the screen lit up with life, revealing a simple written message: "Table 25. Now."

Hubcap pondered the message briefly. It must have come from his contact who was surely now sat waiting for him at table 25. Not half as confident as he pretended to be, Hubcap delved into the crowd and, asking a downtrodden-looking waiter for directions, headed for table 25.

He was dismayed to find a squat, burly looking Decepticon seated at the table, surrounded by a group of smaller servitors and sycophants that buzzed around him like parasites, feeding off his power and reputation. Hubcap recognised him immediately. Sidonimus Magnus. A member of the Decepticon mafia, Sidonimus had sponsored Lord Straxus whilst Trannis ruled Cybertron with a metal glove, and when Trannis was assassinated and Straxus rose to power in his place, Sidonimus was allowed to thrive in depravity and suffering, herding the civilians of Cybertron, the neutrals, around like animals, organising them into work gangs, selling them as slaves and using the wealth he subsequently achieved to cement his position at the top of the Decepticon mafia cartel. Rumour had it he'd even bought out some leading figures in the Autobot resistance, which was the reason why he was allowed to remain in Iacon. And now, grown fat on his power, this gluttonous slimeball was seated before Hubcap, staring at him hard. Behind, the crowds blocked any escape route. If Hubcap had been able to run away, he'd have done so by now.

"I don't know you, Autobot," said Sidonimus, his voice a slow monosyllabic growl. He was eying Hubcap suspiciously. "You're not from around here. You look too clean and polished to be wallowing in the grime and decay of Maccaddams. You don't



belong, and you're not guzzling energon. If you're not here to guzzle, why are you here?"

Hubcap thought about lying. But Sidonimus was right, Hubcap did look conspicuous; he still hadn't adapted to his new Binatlech form, and still had to adjust to the fact that his outward appearance had changed. To Sidonimus, Hubcap must look like a member of the higher echelons of the Autobot army, and definitely not the type to go dredging an existence guzzling energon in Maccaddams. So there was no point in lying, but he wasn't about to tell the Decepticon crimelord too much. Sidonimus probably didn't know about Binatlech technology, but Hubcap couldn't take that chance: he didn't want to risk getting captured by the Decepticons and literally hand them the secret of Binatlech.

"I'm here to meet someone," replied Hubcap, trying to sound confident.

"Really? Who? An informant? Are you spying? If so it was inadvisable of you to come here – an amateurish mistake." Sidonimus paused, glancing beyond Hubcap. "Ah, there is someone I'd like you to meet."

Hubcap felt, rather than saw, the large presence behind him, his sensors tingling ominously. Having a good idea what to expect, he slowly turned around to face the biggest Decepticon in Maccaddams: a brute with armoured carapace plating and bristling with inbuilt sheaths from where energo weapons would undoubtedly extend. He bared fangs as he smiled maliciously at Hubcap, and Hubcap blanched- why the heck would a Decepticon require fangs, other than to use them as a weapon? Though in his Binatlech form Hubcap had the physical capability to hold his own, he certainly didn't feel an equivalent mental toughness.

"His name is Fang," said Sidonimus. "I'm sure you can see why. Fang, say hello to our Autobot guest."

Fang reached out an arm and grabbed Hubcap's shoulder, lifting him clean into the air, his feet dangling. An alarmed Hubcap flapped his arms helplessly. "Err... hello?" was all he could think to say.

All of a sudden there was another figure stood before them, smaller than both of them, but someone whose diminutive size didn't seem to stop him from brokering an acquaintance with Sidonimus.

"Sid, Sid, my good friend, I see you have met," the newcomer crooned, walking around him attentively, the servitors parting for him.

Sidonimus turned his head suspiciously, trying to follow the newcomer. "Do you know this Autobot?" he asked.

"Yes, well, err, we have a meeting arranged for this time. So if Fang could please let go of him..."

"Who is this Autobot?" Sidonimus demanded to know. "What kind of meeting?"

"Well, let me see." The newcomer was making a story up on the fly. "This Autobot is looking to get into the weapons trade, obviously with a war on there's a lot of money to be made in this kind of business, and he's had a, uh, disagreement with his superiors and wants to go it alone selling weapons stolen from the Autobot armoury. Now, I'm looking to buy and he's here so we can discuss terms for the initial shipment."

Sidonimus looked disgusted. "You plan on conducting a business deal here in secret? Why was I not informed? I demand royalties. You know the rules."

"Ah, well I was going to inform you of course Sid, but I thought it would be best to wait until a deal had been agreed, you know how these things can go, there can be disagreements that can cause one side to renege on its offer, and I just didn't want to tell you and then have to come back with bad news."

"I want seventy percent."

"Sixty Sid, come on, be fair now. That's your usual rate."

"That was before you decided to hide things from me. Seventy percent, or I will have your head."

"Ah. Well, if you insist. Seventy percent it is."

Sidonimus stared at the newcomer, as though he were wondering whether to believe him or just hack his head off right there. For one tense moment Hubcap thought Sidonimus would lash out, but eventually the gangster's gaze lowered and he motioned towards Fang.

"Let him go."

Fang released his grip on Hubcap, and dropped him to the floor, where he landed heavily in a heap. Picking himself up, the newcomer put a protective arm around him

and led him away from the nefarious Sidonimus and his bodyguard brute, Fang.

"Where have you been, Double Dealer?" demanded Hubcap as the pair found a small table of their own. "I could have been food for Fang back there."

"Better late than never, eh?" answered Double Dealer, a twinkle in his eye.

"How'd you come to know Sidonimus Magnus and his protection racket anyway?"

"I've had dealings with him in the past. In my position, it's useful to know as much as I can about these people," Double Dealer explained. "But, what's your story? You look like a prince come down from the palace with a sparkling new armoured body. No wonder you were noticed by Sidonimus, you hardly look like the energon guzzling type. So spill the details, where'd you get the new body? You steal it?"

"No... NO!" protested Hubcap. "Never mind where I got the body. I need your help, DD. The Wreckers, why have they been arrested?"

Double Dealer leaned back and caught the attention of a passing waiter to order some energon. "The rumour mill has it that they went renegade, and attacked a civilian population on an alien world."

Hubcap shook his head. "I don't believe that."

"Regardless of what you believe, they've pleaded guilty. And your three friends are being held prisoner because of their association with the Wreckers, even if they didn't participate in the raid themselves."

Hubcap thought it over. It all seemed so unbelievable. The Wreckers were the Autobot's finest commandoes, they wouldn't just turn renegade like that. There had to be something more to this than met the eye.

"Let's assume that it's not true," he said. "Why would the Wreckers lie?"

Double Dealer shrugged. "From what I can gather, their leader, Springer, is still on the loose. Maybe they're lying to protect him. But why would the Wreckers lie to the Autobots?"

"I don't know," replied Hubcap, honestly. "All I know is that my friends are caught up in the middle of it. I have to rescue them."

"It's not like you to have friends, Hubcap," commented Double Dealer. Hubcap didn't answer directly.

"Will you help me or not?" Hubcap asked.

"Why should I?"

"The information you can get from infiltrating Autobot Security Central can be sold to the Decepticons. I'm sure they'd pay handsomely for information on plans, schematics, guardposts, ways in, ways out; I suspect there's a large number of their own troops being held prisoner there."

Double Dealer considered it. "Even if we did attempt a prison break, we'd barely step foot in the restricted areas before we trip the alarms. They run continuous sweeps for sparks, and any sparks discovered in areas they shouldn't be will raise the alarm."

Hubcap nodded, prepared for this argument. "I can get us in so far. To go beyond that, we'll have to use someone who doesn't have a spark to trip the alarms."

Double Dealer looked at Hubcap as though he'd gone mad. "A Transformer without a spark? Right. That would be a dead Transformer then."

Hubcap smiled. "Not necessarily. When I was acting as communications officer on Earth I used to take receipt of messages containing classified information."

"And of course you sneaked a look at them."

"Naturally," replied Hubcap. He enjoyed playing the role of conspirator.

"According to the information that I... intercepted... the Autobots had been running a secret operation called 'Project: Powerdasher'. With resources running low on Cybertron, Autobot High Command wanted to utilise resources in space, those within carbonaceous asteroids that are rich in metals and volatiles. Trouble is, any mining expedition would need to be heavily protected from Decepticon attack, but there weren't the troops to spare. Also, long term exposure to cosmic rays and solar flares would frazzle the circuits of any bot after a while, turning them into empties, so no one wanted the job anyway. To get around both problems, 'Project: Powerdasher' was initiated, with the aim of building an army of non-sentient remotes that could be controlled by users on Cybertron, were highly versatile, fast and

powerful, and were equipped for mining work in zero-gravity. They could defend themselves if necessary, and if they were destroyed, they could just be replaced by a new droid."

Double Dealer eyed Hubcap carefully. "You're not just making this up are you, playing a con on me?"

"Not this time, DD," Hubcap replied soberly.

"So what happened to the project?"

"Apparently the remote connection wasn't so great – something in the Powerdashers' control systems resulted in them being too difficult to control over such large distances. Instead, the prototype Powerdashers were put to work on construction sites on Cybertron, and given simple programming. The construction workers don't know what they were originally intended for, and they control them remotely only over short range. We can 'borrow' one of the Powerdasher drills, and he can burrow his way into the restricted areas without tripping the spark sweep."

Double Dealer shook his head, dubious about the whole plan. A waiter brought him his energon, and he glanced up in acknowledgement. "The big problem that I can see," he said, "Is that I can't get within five clicks of Security Central without the cameras catching my face. You think they're stupid enough to let me anywhere near there?"

"No problem," grinned Hubcap. "You're just going to have to wear a bag over your head."

\* \* \*

Autobot Security Central was an imposing, blocky building that gleamed white amidst sparkling magnificence of the renovated golden spires of Iacon. It was armed like a fort, with gun turrets lining the walls like gargoyles, while force fields shielding the most sensitive regions glimmered a faint blue. Blacked out windows ran in rows around the building, and as Hubcap stood before its entrance, his vision moved upwards to the peak of the towering building, a flattened pyramid with landing pads on the top. Small shuttlecraft buzzed around it, taking off or landing. Steeling

himself, Hubcap moved onward, the Powerdasher following behind obediently carrying a case of equipment.

Barely moments after passing the security perimeter two guards moved across his path and demanded to see identification. Hubcap moved his hand and dipped a digit into a reading device attached to the perimeter fence, through which he uploaded his faked identification into the security mainframe, which reported back to the guards. He'd hacked into the Cybertronian General Register beforehand and placed his fake ID. No one knew he had an unauthorised code to get into the register, it was something else he'd pilfered from the classified communiqués that passed through his office in his old life. The security mainframe wouldn't recognise it as a fake ID just from a regular security check, although a more detailed analysis would reveal that the ID had only existed for fifteen breems. But as long as he did nothing to arouse suspicion, it should work.

Hubcap laughed to himself. He was about to commit a jailbreak from the most secure facility on Cybertron, and at the same time try and avoid suspicion. Best of luck Hubcap, he told himself.

"Back again, eh?" asked one of the guards.

Hubcap glanced at the guard, thinking he hadn't heard him right. "Huh?"

"You guys were here just a cycle ago."

"Ah, yes, of course. Well, with so many highly prominent prisoners currently in the stockade at present, Prowl thinks that frequent security checks are paramount. I'm going to be running over your alarm system today boys, so don't panic if alert breaks out."

"So who's this?" asked the guard, pointing rudely at the Powerdasher.

Hubcap turned around and put his hand on the Powerdasher's shoulder. The Powerdasher didn't react, its expression blank.

"This, my friends, is a Powerdasher droid, a non-sentient automaton that's going to help me test your alarm system. He won't set off your spark sweeps, allowing me to put your secondary security alarm under the microscope."

The other guard grinned. "So you reckon the Wreckers might try and break out?"

Hubcap stopped and strode over to the guard, face to face. "The presence of the Wreckers within the prison is classified information soldier, and I suggest you don't discuss it openly," he said, scolding the guard.

The guard suddenly looked hurt. "Aw, come on, everyone knows-"

"They may think they know," said Hubcap. "It's not the same as knowing for sure. Until High Command wishes to release the information officially, the information remains classified. If you have a problem with that I'm happy to go and discuss it with your senior officer."

The guard stood straight. "That won't be necessary sir."

Hubcap stood back, satisfied. "Very well. Carry on."

"Yes sir!" replied the guards and Hubcap moved on. With his show of authority he'd managed to bluff his way past the guards and they'd been so eager to avoid disciplinary action that they'd forgotten to search the case the Powerdasher carried. Moving on from the guards, they passed through a series of automated scans, and then they were through to the levels of Security Central that only required delta clearance.

He found an empty storeroom and stepped in, the Powerdasher following mindlessly inside, and he locked the door behind them. Opening up the case that the Powerdasher had carried, he pulled out various pieces of equipment that would allow him to patch into the security mainframe and operate the alarms. Then he reached back inside the case and pulled out a black box that had a lid fastened with a catch, which he carefully opened. Moving some other boxes of nondescript equipment that were being housed in the storeroom out of the way to free up some space on a tabletop, Hubcap placed Double Dealer's head on the silvery metal tabletop.

There seemed to be no life in Double Dealer's cranium, his eyes were dark and his expression lifeless. He looked liked he was dead, but in truth it was quite the opposite. Lifting up a small panel at the back of Double

Dealer's head, Hubcap briefly fiddled with some electronics, and instantaneously Double Dealer's eyes lit up and he burst into life.

"Did we make it?" he blurted out.

"Relax," said Hubcap, stepping back to stand next to the Powerdasher so Double Dealer could see him from the tabletop.

"I can't believe you convinced me to do this," moaned Double Dealer.

"You know me," Hubcap replied. "I can convince anybody to do anything. The only way to sneak you inside was to detach your head and put you on standby. I think it would've been a tad more difficult to smuggle your entire body in here. Either way, I need you to operate the Powerdasher while I maintain the illusion that I'm here to run security checks."

"In a way, that's what I'm going to be doing too," pointed out Double Dealer.

"Technically, yeah."

Double Dealer considered what he was about to do. "Ok, so how do I gain control over this thing?"

Hubcap glanced at the Powerdasher, before pulling another piece of equipment from the case, this one instrument smaller than the rest of the equipment he'd brought with him. It was a small grey box with an interface port on one side. Taking hold of Double Dealer's head, much to the decapitated Autobot's consternation, Hubcap lifted up another panel and plugged in the grey box. LED lights on top began to flicker red, green and yellow, indicating it was operational.

"This interface is tuned to the Powerdasher's operating frequency," explained Hubcap. "Try sending a signal through it."

"Like what?"

"I don't know," said Hubcap, exasperated. Until now he'd managed to keep his nervousness in check. He swiftly regained his composure. "A command. Like, lift your left arm."

Double Dealer looked at the Powerdasher. A moment later, it lifted its left arm.

"Cool. It works," he said. "It feels a little weird. I see myself in the Powerdasher, but I can't *feel* it. It's like part of me is floating without a body."



Hubcap looked at Double Dealer's disembodied head. "That so? Look, maybe we should try a few more tests, make sure the connection is stable."

"Eh, don't worry about it. I want to spend as little time in this place as possible. Let's get going. Where are your friends being held?"

Hubcap looked a little put out that his suggestion had been ignored in favour of Double Dealer's eagerness to get going. He'd done well to exude confidence but truthfully, inside, Hubcap was trembling.

Hubcap was accessing the security mainframe. "Five levels down. I think. That's the only wing I can't access prisoner details for, and they're not listed anywhere else. I'm transferring the schematics over to you now."

Double Dealer's eyes flickered as he assimilated the data, and he became as familiar with the layout of the building as though he had spent his entire life there. Instantly he knew the route he must take.

"Four levels above there's an access port to a maintenance tube. Drilling straight down should bring me right on top of the cells," he said.

Hubcap nodded silently, and steeled himself. "I'll try and deactivate some of the alarm systems in the meantime. You had better get going."

The Powerdasher turned sharply, and left the storage room, leaving Hubcap and Double Dealer's head, communicating with the Powerdasher via remote control, alone to await the success or failure of their daring prison break.

\* \* \*

Pipes struggled underneath the rubble as the ceiling collapsed directly on him. Somewhere, amidst the chaos, he could hear something electrical sparking in the distance, and the power went out, casting the cellblock into darkness. Something hit the floor beside him with a loud thud, he couldn't tell if it was more wreckage or something else.

Frantically he pushed through the rubble on top of him and clambered to his feet. Dim red emergency lighting had come on, made even darker by the still settling dust. He looked to his side, and saw a figure transforming from a drill tank into an upright

stance. Pipes took a defensive posture, unsure if the newcomer was friend or foe. It looked like a construction droid, and just stood there, unmoving and unspeaking, waiting for Pipes to make a move.

There were shouts outside his cell as the guards panicked, and for the first time Pipes realised that the energy barrier at the entrance had been deactivated, probably when the power was cut. Above his head, he could perceive a huge black hole where the ceiling had been drilled through, and severed cables sparked, the flashes of blue light illuminating the hole sufficiently to show that it extended up several levels.

Carefully eying the silent Powerdasher, Pipes decided that it was a friend. He took a step out into the corridor, doing exactly the same thing as the dozen or so other prisoners in their cellblock. Tailgate and Outback were there, right next to him. The rest, all around them, were Decepticons, a collection of murderous, vicious, backstabbing, angry and vengeful individuals. The handful of scared-looking prison guards between them and the exit at the end of the corridor wielded their batons, ready to fight back.

As the fighting broke out, Pipes dragged Outback and Tailgate together, and showed them the Powerdasher.

"I think someone is helping us escape," Pipes surmised. "This is our chance, we have to take it."

"What about the guards? We can't just leave them to the Decepticons," said Tailgate as the Decepticon prisoners began to overwhelm the guards, who cried out for help, pleading for mercy.

Pipes had a pained expression as he considered the dilemma. If they left now, the guards would surely die at the hands of the Decepticons. As the emergency alarms came on, all exits were automatically locked, leaving the guards nowhere to retreat to. If the Wreckers remained to help the guards, they would not have a chance to escape before more troops arrived and secured the area.

The Decepticons, focused solely on clobbering the guards, hadn't paid any attention to the three Wreckers yet. One large 'Con with huge hands reached down and ripped one of the guards' heads from his torso, and casually tossed it behind him. It

rolled on the floor up to Pipes' feet. Pipes couldn't look; he wasn't squeamish, but he hated the choice he was faced with. That's part of being a leader, he guessed.

"Someone's gone to a lot of trouble to try and get us out of here," he told the other two. "There's only a narrow margin for escape, and we have to take it."

"I don't believe this!" exclaimed Outback. "We're Wreckers, we don't just leave people to die!"

"Outback's right," agreed Tailgate. In Pipes' cell, the Powerdasher was silently beckoning them to make a move, the first expression it had made since crashing in through the ceiling.

Pipes looked over towards the commotion. If something were to be done, it had to be done fast, and be clinical, but that was part of the Wrecker's modus operandi anyway. What's more, Tailgate and Outback were right.

"Okay, Tailgate, Outback, you go with the drill guy and get out of here. Now."

"And what will you be doing?" questioned Outback.

"Saving some lives," Pipes responded gravely. "Now go!"

The Powerdasher, in a flurry of limbs and mechanical movements, transformed back into its drill tank mode and cut through the floor of Pipes cell like it were paper, not steel alloy. Tailgate and Outback were slightly hesitant, glancing one last time at Pipes, before jumping into the hole after the Powerdasher, and where ever it took them, leaving Pipes alone to face a dozen rampaging Decepticons.

The guards hadn't done too badly, taking out four of the Decepticons with their energo batons, the prisoners lying on the floor, stunned. But now only two of the five guards remained standing, weakened and leaking lubricant from their injuries. The Decepticons loomed over them in the murky light of the corridor.

"Hey, how'd you want a piece of me instead?" called out Pipes, loud enough to make the Decepticons stop and turn to look at him.

"Yeah, fellas, that's right. Why don't you try picking on someone your own size?"

As the two guards took the opportunity to slink away into a small alcove, the

Decepticons laughed, and began to move menacingly towards Pipes, but were halted by a blinding light as Pipes switched on his headlights. In the time it took for the Decepticons to adjust their optical sensors, Pipes transformed to his Binaltech Volvo VHD truck mode, and raced down the corridor towards the Decepticons at full tilt, barrelling into them as though they were skittles. Those at the front of the pack received the full brunt of the impact, and they were flung backwards into the others behind, the shockwave of Pipes head on collision running through the Decepticon ranks like a concertina. Pipes followed through, his tyres running over some of them, the sound of metal crunching beneath him, and then he transformed back to robot mode. Two Decepticons were still able to stand, but Pipes knocked one down with a right hook, before taking out the second with a spinning kick, the Decepticon sent careening into the wall with the force of the kick.

All around Pipes the Decepticons lay on the floor, some motionless, others stirring, attempting to get back to their feet, like prize fighters knocked down but not out. He called out the two surviving guards from the alcove they'd hidden in.

Pipes beckoned to them. "If you want to live, come with me."

Hastily the three of them strode down the corridor to the location where the Powerdasher had drilled into the lower levels, deep beneath the surface of Iacon. Peering down, Pipes could see nothing but darkness, and even illumination with his headlights revealed nothing but impenetrable murk. Switching to infrared vision, he bravely leapt in to the hole, and plummeted for several seconds before he saw the ground rushing towards him, and he landed in a crumpled heap, rolling to try and take the energy out of the landing. Moments later, the two guards followed him down.

They found themselves in a tunnel that seemed to stretch to infinity in either direction. It was barren, with a thick layer of dust and grime and dirt. Faint infrared tracks revealed the direction the others had taken in vehicular form. Pipes transformed and set off after them, the guards tentatively following suit. Before long, they'd caught up with Outback, Tailgate and the Powerdasher drill.

"What happened to the Decepticons?" asked Outback.

"They're taking a nap," quipped Pipes.

"Any idea where we are?" asked Tailgate, driving between Outback and the Powerdasher leading the way at the front, driving on its tank tracks. "Our friend that brought us down here seems to have a vow of silence."

Pipes had already come up with a theory. "I think we're in one of the old trade tunnels that were used to smuggle weapons and supplies into Iacon whilst the Decepticons laid siege on the city borders. Most people had forgotten these tunnels even existed."

They drove continuously down the arrow-straight tunnel for several breems, and all too suddenly they reached the end, forcing them to break hard, metres from a sheer cliff face. They transformed, and looked out at the view in awe.

At the end of the tunnel was a small balcony that looked out across a great chasm, a rift that split Cybertron open. A strong breeze seemed to blow upwards to the top of the chasm, a kilometre above their heads. Pipes looked over the edge of the balcony, and peered down into the depths, the wind blowing around his audio sensors. Like the tunnel they had just emerged from, the abyss seemed to descend into eternity. It was over a kilometre to the other side of the chasm. Eerie whispers seemed to stretch up from the depths and wrap themselves around him like the voices of ghosts, sounds from far below echoing and reverberating towards the surface. Pipes felt his circuits chill. These were the Sonic Canyons, great tears in the Cybertron's surface that cut into the core of the planet itself. Some said they had been used by Primus himself, vast energy gathering systems that absorbed as much information as energy. Primus was gone, but the Canyons remained, and Pipes couldn't shake the feeling that something ancient and ominous still survived down there.

Attached to the cliff beside the balcony was an elevator out of repair, and a rusting walkway leading from the balcony and zig-zagging up the cliff face to the surface. Bizarrely placed on the balcony at the bottom of the walkway was a headless body that

Outback was checking out. The Powerdasher was staring at the body longingly.

Footsteps could be heard as someone descended down the walkway. Moving back into the shadows of the tunnel, the group prepared for anything, although with the Powerdasher still stood out in the open, hiding seemed a bit pointless.

From the walkway stepped Hubcap, carrying Double Dealer's head in his hands, and Pipes stepped out from the shadows in relief at seeing a friend, followed by the others. Hubcap nodded in greeting, and knelt down to reattach Double Dealer's head to his shoulders.

"I take it you're the one to thank for our escape?" asked Pipes.

Hubcap glanced up at Pipes as he worked on Double Dealer. "Yeah. So what do you think of my plan?"

Pipes smiled. "Good job."

Hubcap's face beamed in response to the praise, but it was soon interrupted by Outback who barged between the two of them as Double Dealer, his head reconnected, sat back up, and the Powerdasher went limp. "Don't think this means you're part of our team," glowered Outback. "You're a sorry excuse for a soldier, never should have gotten a Binaltech body, and you're working with this slaggin' traitor."

That last barbed comment was directed at Double Dealer who, without apprehension, went faceplate to faceplate with Outback. "Now look you-

Pipes pushed them apart. "Enough! Let's just be grateful we're free for now."

"But we're still fugitives," pointed out Tailgate.

Pipes nodded, remembering for the first time that the two prison guards were still accompanying them. Double Dealer raised the issue.

"Don't you think we should lose the guards?" he asked, pointing.

Pipes nodded and spoke to them. "You can head back to Iacon. Reinforcements should have quelled the Decepticon prisoners by now. It'll be safe."

Not needing to be told twice, the guards transformed into their hovercar modes, and spun around to zoom off into the depths of the tunnel.

"Wait a minute, they'll tell the authorities where we are!" exclaimed Hubcap.

"What was I meant to do with them?" asked Pipes.

"You should never have brought them with you in the first place," replied Double Dealer harshly.

It made Pipes angry for the first time. "I wasn't going to leave them to die! I'm guessing that was you controlling the drill tank via remote control, so you were there, you saw what it was like."

Hubcap moved towards the walkway. "It doesn't matter now. We should go before someone comes looking for us. We managed to slip out of Security Central during the commotion after I'd disabled a few alarms, but I'm sure they've already figured out what happened and are looking for me as we speak."

Pipes indicated for Hubcap to lead the way, and they began the long steep walk up the zig-zagging walkway, Pipes sandwiched between Hubcap and Double Dealer, with Outback and Tailgate taking up the rear. Each of them was acutely aware they were unarmed – if they encountered an Autobot patrol they'd be in trouble. They trudged along up the walkway, mostly in silence until Double Dealer deemed it necessary to ask Pipes a question.

"So why were you in prison?" he asked. "Given that we've risked our necks to get you out, I'd like to know the full story."

Pipes sighed. It was a sentiment he felt just as strongly. "I'd like to know too. They never told us. They just kept asking the same questions."

"Which were?" urged Double Dealer.

"They wanted to know if we'd been to a planet called Tantiv 5. They wanted to know where Springer was. They wanted to know whom we'd discussed the Binaltech process with. It was the same questions, over and over." Pipes flung his arms in to the air in frustration.

Double Dealer was firing his own questions at Pipes. "What were the answers?"

Pipes glared at Double Dealer, tired of being constantly questioned. "I don't know. Based on the nature of the questions, I suspect the Wreckers went on some kind of off-world mission to Tantiv 5, a mission we

weren't told about. Something happened there, something went wrong, and for some reason Springer didn't come back with the others."

"And Binaltech is a part of it?"

Pipes nodded. "Yeah. Seems so."

Hubcap glanced over his shoulder at Pipes. "So what are we going to do?" he asked.

Pipes stopped on the walkway, causing the others to stop too and surround him. He'd been thinking about that question long before Hubcap had asked it, thinking long and hard, and he'd already come to a decision of sorts.

"We can't go back to the Autobots," he said. "We're now outcasts, fugitives, and without answers we can never return. Whatever is at the bottom of all this is can be found on Tantiv 5, I'm sure of it. We have to go there."

"Great," said Outback, unconvinced. "And how do we do that? Its not like we can just go to the spaceport and ask to be provided with a liner to this planet."

Pipes looked deflated, knowing the fatal flaw in his plan had been exposed. He shrugged "I don't know," he replied honestly.

"Why not just steal a ship?" suggested Double Dealer.

"That's just the way of scum like you," spat Outback. "No morals, no allegiance, no loyalty, no respect for anyone or anything."

"If you haven't already noticed, we're already criminals in the eyes of the law," retorted Double Dealer. "We've got nothing to lose anymore by acting like criminals. In fact, it might give us the edge we need to get out of this mess."

"That's easy for a career crook like you to say," replied Outback.

"Y'know, I didn't have to do this, we could have left your worthless hide back in your prison cell."

Outback went for Double Dealer again. Grappling monetarily, Outback's hands around the other's neck, it took both Hubcap and Pipes to pull him off Double Dealer, with great effort dragging him away, though he continued to hurl insults.

"So why did you help free us?" Tailgate asked as soon as Outback had quietened down sufficiently.



Throughout his constant arguing with Outback, Double Dealer hadn't been short on words. The moment Tailgate asked that question, he uncharacteristically fell silent. Everyone waited for an answer, but none was forthcoming; Double Dealer threw a glance towards Hubcap.

"He helped because I asked him," said Hubcap, stepping forward. "If that's a problem for anyone, I'm sorry. Right now we have to decide what we're going to do."

Pipes remembered something. "The Decepticons have a small airbase twenty clicks from here, on the far side of the Sonic Canyons. They used it to launch scouting missions on Iacon's borders during the most recent conflict. We'll take one of their ships. I assume no one here is ethically-opposed to stealing from the Decepticons." Pipes looked around at everyone's faces, Hubcap's feigning confidence to hide his fear, Double Dealer's displaying edginess, Outback's subdued but still angry face, and Tailgate's usual unreadable visage. None of them disagreed. "Good. That's our plan. Let's move on it."

\* \* \*

At the surface, a fleet of white icebergs, sparkling in the light of Alpha Centauri, drifted across the repeller field of the Sonic Canyons. The field was a broad expanse of anti-gravitic static energy, a manifestation of the resonant energy fields that reverberated all the way through the canyons to the core itself, where Primus himself had once slept.

It was all technobabble to Pipes, and with Primus gone this ancient cosmic energy receiver had become virtually irrelevant to their world. The icebergs were easier to explain away. The static electricity of the field would trap dust particles in its grasp, like an insect in a spider's web, and the particles would just hang in midair. More dust would accrete, forming dust bunnies, and in the cold of the planet's northern latitudes water moisture would freeze onto the dust, building up and getting bigger until you had the surreal sight of giant icebergs drifting in midair. There were tens of thousands of them, of various shapes and sizes, spanning the chasm like stepping-stones to the other

side. But it was a long fall, all the way down to the planet's centre.

Having reached the surface and pushed their way through the repeller field, the group of fugitive Autobots were steadily making their way around the edge of this particular part of the Sonic Canyons, towards the Predigeon Arch that crossed one of the narrower stretches of the canyon system. Soon, it was in sight on the horizon, like the icebergs it glinted white with Alpha Centauri's light, but with a pale yellow mixed in from Alpha's binary, Beta, which was beginning to rise just over the limb of the planet.

"We've got incoming," declared Tailgate from the rear of the group.

Pipes looked out across the ocean of icebergs. Tailgate was right. Three objects were moving towards them at rapid speed, skimming the repeller field, cutting a wake of shimmering blue energy as they traversed it, cutting off the route to the Predigeon Arch. Pipes' optical sensors zoomed in, and he recognised a flight of Autobots transformed into skimmers, each one manned by another Autobot in robot mode. Security livery adorned the fuselages of the skimmers, which were making up ground rather quickly.

"Run!" yelled Pipes, but simply running back the way they came didn't seem an option; the skimmers would surely catch up with them. Outgunned, they had to think of another way.

A kilometre or so away, across the canyon, was Decepticon territory, though admittedly not for much longer. Their latest attempt to lay siege to Iacon had failed, the Autobots having fought valiantly and pushed them back with the help of the new Binaltech warriors. The Decepticons were in the process of retreating from their staging areas around Iacon, including the Tygun Span on the other side of the canyon. But they were still present, and the skimmers would be wary of trespassing beyond their borders, particularly as the ceasefire treaty forbid it. Pipes didn't share their inhibitions.

"We go across the canyon," he told the others who stared at him incredulously. "Leap from iceberg to iceberg. There's no time to discuss it. Go. Now!"

He led the way jumping onto the nearest iceberg. He could feel it shift under his feet, his inertia sending it gliding across

the low-friction repeller field, and he had to be careful to keep his grip on the ice. Quickly, but with care, he leapt for the next iceberg. Made it. Looked around for the next one. Jumped. Landed, slipping slightly. Jumped again. And again.

The others had done the same, Outback and Tailgate taking at it with enthusiasm, Hubcap and Double Dealer less so, but still with skill. Hurried glances behind them showed that the skimmers were right on their tail. They had spun around, and elevated themselves a dozen or so metres, and like incandescent snakes their energon lassos uncurled from their underside, to catch the renegade Autobots with. The Autobots riding atop the skimmers raised their pistols, and in formation they charged at the Autobots.

Energion lassos shot out. Hubcap narrowly avoided one as he dived to his feet on one of the larger icebergs, and the lasso swung narrowly over his head. With more grace, Double Dealer slid across the ice like he was on skates, deftly avoiding his intended lasso. But Tailgate was more unfortunate, and like a precision marksman a skimmer and its rider lassoed the Wrecker whilst he was in midair, attempting to leap from one iceberg to another. The skimmer carried him away, letting him dangle in midair. The energon lasso was bound around his arms and waist, and he cried out for help.

Outback and Pipes, half way across the chasm now, turned and went to Tailgate's aid. Another skimmer however had made a quick turnaround and was back in pursuit of Hubcap. It fired its lasso and again Hubcap avoided it, but as he did he slipped on the ice, falling tumultuously over the edge of the berg. Infinity expanded below him.

A hand reaching out and grabbing his right wrist halted his fall. Pipes stretched out, lying flat on the iceberg that he'd dived on to catch Hubcap, but now Pipes was also hanging over the edge precariously, struggling for grip on the ice, straining to hold Hubcap's weight.

Hubcap looked down. He couldn't see the bottom of the chasm, there was just murky darkness, and those ghostly voices again, interspersed by the engines of the skimmers zooming above their heads.

Already Hubcap was slipping from Pipes' grasp.

Hubcap looked up into Pipes' optical sensors. "Please don't let me fall," he pleaded as he felt himself beginning to slip. Pipes tried to reach down with his other hand and grab Hubcap, but he felt himself slip further over the edge. At this rate, they were both going to fall.

"I won't let you fall," he said. "I promise. You've already saved us once today, and by Primus I'm not going to let you fall. Just a word of advice: don't look down."

The three skimmers still buzzed around, Tailgate dangling from one. Outback leapt swiftly across three or four icebergs, and then knelt down to lift one of the bergs out of the repeller field. With his Binaltech-augmented strength, he hurled the iceberg at the skimmer holding Tailgate, striking it a clear blow, damaging the skimmer and knocking off the rider, who tumbled to safety on one of the icebergs. The skimmer wavered in the air, and the lasso uncurled, letting Tailgate go. He landed like a cat, falling into a roll that almost took him over the edge of an iceberg. As the skimmer was forced to transform to land safely on another berg, Tailgate gave Outback the thumbs up.

"No time to waste," shouted Outback. "Where's Pipes?"

He looked around. Double Dealer was playing chicken with another one of the skimmers, and the third skimmer was heading away from them, towards a figure laid flat on an iceberg. It was Pipes, realised Outback.

The rider of the skimmer he'd just damaged transformed into a skimmer himself, and the other Autobot now became the rider as they chased after Outback and Tailgate, who were already making moves, deftly leaping across the icebergs. The other side of the canyon, Decepticon territory and relative safety, wasn't far away now.

Pipes was struggling to see how he was going to keep his promise to Hubcap. Hubcap's hand was slipping from Pipes' grasp, inch by inch. He could see the look of terror in Hubcap's eyes. Hubcap had undoubtedly committed a brave and perhaps foolhardy escapade to free Pipes, Outback and Tailgate from prison, but Pipes wondered how confident Hubcap had been through it

all. Underneath the Binaltech glitz, behind the pretence of his conman persona, was a scared young Autobot who really shouldn't be in the army. And like hell was he going to let him fall.

Hubcap's hand finally slipped away, but Pipes reached down with his left hand and caught him again. Unfortunately that meant Pipes lost his grip on the ice, and Hubcap's weight pulled him over the edge. For a moment he thought they were instant goners, but he managed to grab the edge of the iceberg with his right hand, while still holding Hubcap with his left hand. The iceberg was starting to tilt towards them now, pulled over by their combined weight. He dug his metallic fingers as far into the ice as he could force them, and prayed for a miracle.

Outback, meanwhile, knew they couldn't remain out in the open for much longer before the skimmers picked them off. He yelled at one of the skimmers, which turned sharply and sped towards him, lasso at the ready. Outback didn't move, waiting, waiting, and just as the skimmer was about to launch its lasso he jumped at it, clinging to one of the engine pods on the side of its sleek black fuselage, the lasso unable to contort and stretch around to reach him. The rider, slightly alarmed by this assault, tried to kick him off, but Outback narrowly swung out of the way, moving towards the back of the skimmer. The skimmer and its rider tried to shake Outback off, twisting and turning and banking sharply, but Outback had a firm hold, climbing up the back of the skimmer behind the rider, who he took hold off, wrestling. The rider raised his pistol and got a shot off, the blast fizzing over Outback's left shoulder. Outback went for the pistol, forcing it out of the rider's hands and into his grasp. With a mighty heave, Outback threw the unfortunate rider from the skimmer, who tumbled away, screaming as he dropped between the gaps in the icebergs with enough motion to pass through the repeller field and plummet into the depths below.

"If you don't want your fried to die, you'd better go after him," Outback yelled at the skimmer he was riding, tossing the pistol to Tailgate, stood on an iceberg as they flew past. Outback leapt off onto another large iceberg, and the skimmer immediately dived

down, penetrating the repeller field, to catch the falling rider far below.

Tailgate, with pinpoint accuracy, aimed the pistol at one of the two remaining skimmers at a range of around 300 metres. Double Dealer dangled from a lasso like Tailgate had a few moments before. Tailgate blew out one of the anti-grav generators on the skimmer with his shot, sparks flaring like lightening. The lasso faltered and vanished, dropping Double Dealer onto an iceberg, and with black smoke pouring from the wound in the skimmer and its rider already damaged when Outback flung an iceberg at him earlier, they were forced to retreat. Two down, thought Tailgate. The remaining skimmer turned in a wide arc and maintained its attack.

Pipes' grasp on the ice was slipping. Hubcap's hold on Pipes' hand was slipping. As the ice broke between Pipes' fingers, he knew doom was only seconds away.

"I can't hold on much longer," he said. "Looks like I won't be able to keep that promise."

Hubcap was too afraid to look up or down. "That's ok. We tried our best."

The ice finally gave way, Pipes' fingers slipping through it and then they were grasping thin air as they fell. Suddenly Pipes felt like something had yanked his right arm out of its socket, and all of a sudden someone had hold of him, pulling both of them up. It was Outback, who'd hurried across the icebergs to their rescue, grabbing hold of Pipes' hand at the last moment. With Double Dealer's help, he pulled Pipes and Hubcap back onto the iceberg.

"Thank you," Hubcap said, relieved.

"Don't mention it," replied Outback, though not with much feeling.

Tailgate had dealt with the third skimmer, shooting out its anti-grav generators too, forcing it to set down on an iceberg. Its rider fired shots back at Tailgate, which impacted on the ice around his feet; the heat of the blasts causing the ice to melt and the berg began to crack into two halves. Tailgate shot back, wounding the rider, and jumped off the iceberg just as the two halves separated.

The other side of the canyon wasn't far away now. Dark ruins lay in shadow, ideal territory in which to lay low and hide. Pipes, without indulging in a moment to take stock,



immediately began to move for the solid land of the Tygun Span. Hopping from iceberg to iceberg, the five Autobots swiftly made their way across the final reaches of the Sonic Canyon, and into the dark, forbidding Decepticon territory.

\* \* \*

The Decepticon's continued to maintain a presence in the Tygun Span, but it was dwindling. The ceasefire treaty they had signed with the Autobots allowed the Decepticons ten solar cycles to pack up their siege weapons, call back their troops and retreat to their strongholds of Altihex and Polyhex. As such, Decepticon patrols in the region were light, and the five Autobots easily slipped through their borders, and quickly came upon the airbase.

Crouched behind a ridge overlooking the main runway, the Autobots could see a few ships parked on the landing strip or with their noses poking out of hangars. A few scattered crewbots and workers could be seen around the ships, but otherwise there was little resistance, not even any soldiers. All the troops must have left the area already, leaving only the non-military staff behind to dismantle the infrastructure they'd put in place for the siege of Iacon.

A raucous voice could be heard emanating from below. Straining their necks the Autobots peered over the ridge, and saw Sidonimus Magnus and his party of stooges and sycophants walk out onto the runway, heading towards a luxury private yacht. As long as Sidonimus had remained a guest at Maccaddams, which was deemed neutral territory by all sides of the war, and had several influential Autobot high councillors in his pocket, it had been difficult for the security services to arrest him. Now though, with the Decepticon withdrawal, Sidonimus had apparently gotten cold feet about remaining in Iacon alone and had decided to leave, probably through one of the same smuggling routes the Autobots had used to escape from the prison.

"Sidonimus is your ticket to get off Cybertron," said Double Dealer.

"You're not coming with us?" asked Pipes.

"Uh-huh. I did my job. I helped get you out of jail. Waltzing across the Galaxy to some forsaken mudball of a planet wasn't part of the deal. You've got to do what you've got to do, but it doesn't involve me."

"But DD-" started Hubcap, but Pipes cut him off.

"No, its ok Hubcap," he said. "Double Dealer's done a lot for us today. We owe him. But he's right, this is our battle, not his. It's not even yours Hubcap. Tantiv 5 may be dangerous. You don't have to come if you don't want to."

Hubcap thought about it for a moment. "I want to come," he decided. "I want to prove myself to you and the other Autobots that I've got what it takes. And Binaltech stick with Binaltech, right?"

Outback smothered a laugh, but Pipes nodded, albeit somewhat uncertainly. "Right."

Double Dealer led them down from the ridge, staying as low as possible to avoid detection. Even if there were scanners sweeping the area, with all the soldiers gone there was probably nobody monitoring them, but the Autobots didn't want to take the risk of being seen by one of the ground crew.

They shuffled between various ships, sticking to the shadows, until they were near Sidonimus' yacht. Sidonimus was stood at the bottom of the boarding ramp, yelling to a member of the ground crew. His associates, feeding off his power as he raged at the crewbot, crowded around him like parasites. "What do you mean the pilot is on a rest period?! I want to leave for Altihex now! Go and find him!" he raged.

Double Dealer stepped out into the open, and walked over to where Sidonimus Magnus was stood.

"Sid, am I glad to see you!" he beamed. Sidonimus, slowly turned around as the crewbot scurried off to find the missing pilot. When he saw Double Dealer, he stared at him suspiciously.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, sneering at Double Dealer.

Double Dealer opened his arms out wide in an expression to show he wasn't hiding anything. "The same reason you are; I want to get out of Iacon. It's got too hot in there for me now. The weapons deal I was planning at Maccaddams was a set-up. Can you believe it? So now I'm on the run."

"How'd you get here?"

"Same way as you did, through the smuggling shafts. Look, come over here. I've brought something with me that you might want to see," said Double Dealer, enticing Sidonimus into the trap. He began to move away, beckoning the Decepticon to come with him. Sidonimus followed him warily, and rounded the corner of another shuttle. There stood Tailgate and Hubcap, Tailgate pointing the pistol at Sidonimus.

He barely had chance to react before Outback had bashed him over the head from behind, knocking him cold, whilst Pipes took out Sidonimus' bodyguard, Fang, swiftly in a flurry of close combat moves, relieving him of his gun before rounding up the rest of Sidonimus' feeble rabble and forcing them to lie on the ground, face down. Given the all clear, Tailgate, Outback and Hubcap quickly boarded the shuttle, and began to heat up the engines.

Pipes approached Double Dealer one last time, and put his hand on the other's shoulder. "Thank you for everything you've done today, Double Dealer, you've been a hero. Are you going to be ok? You can still come with us."

Double Dealer nodded. "No, thanks, I'll be fine. I've had dealings with the Decepticons before remember? I know a few people who can arrange to get me to friendly territory. Good luck on Tantiv 5, I hope you find what you need."

"So do I," replied Pipes. "Goodbye."

With that, Pipes boarded the yacht, and the ramp closed up. Moments later, with Tailgate in the pilot's seat, the yacht manoeuvred on the runway, its primary engines fired, and the ship's long, sleek black shape rose into the sky and towards the stars.

As Double Dealer watched them disappear into the starry sky, Alpha Centauri now setting, dimmer Beta high in Cybertron's airless sky, a large shadow loomed over him from behind. He noticed it, and slowly turned around.

Stood before him was a huge Decepticon, three times his height. Huge, trunk-like legs with tracks on the back rose up into a mighty torso, with two powermaster engines plugged in. Armament sprang out from shoulders and abdomen, and a black

stealth craft hung from his left arm, part of the whole but able to detach and act as a separate unit. Red eyes stared out from a stern, dark face, looking down with menace upon Double Dealer.

Overlord.

"Ah, Double Dealer," greeted Overlord, his voice a deep, menacing rumble, a hint of mockery mixed in. "I see your friends got away safely. Now, tell me *everything* you know."

Double Dealer, hugely intimidated, nodded, and began to divulge everything to Overlord. From hero to traitor in less than breem, such was the life of a double agent. And as he betrayed the friends he'd helped set free, the blue light of their ship's ion engine flaring high above before fading, indistinguishable to the other suns in the constellations that patterned the sky. The four Autobots proceeded towards Tantiv 5 and the unknown danger that awaited them there.

To be continued...

## **"A Mech's Best Friend"**

**By Kylie Austin**

"Well, it's 4.23 in the afternoon, and for all you lucky people watching the clock and waiting to go home... it's a beeeautiful day!" The radio announced from the ambulance dashboard. "Temperature is perfect, just a light breeze from the south, and if you gotta be stuck in peak hour traffic, at least you gonna have blue skies! Does it get any better than this?! Next up we have a new single from an old favourite, and after that all the latest news, including the latest Decepticon attack on Sherman Dam..."

Ratchet abruptly shut the radio off, muttering something dark about over-enthusiastic DJ's.

"Jazz, you there?"

"Hey, Ratchet, m'man! What can I do you for? Heh, y' probably heard the haps from Sherman Dam, yeah?"

"I'm on the way back to the Ark now, what's the damage? And why wasn't I contacted?"

No need, Doc! The boys showed up n' the Cons split. Seems it was just the Seekers havin' a bit of fun. All's well, even your pal Sideswipe, Wheeljack can handle the dents n'scratches."

"Hhmmph, we'll see. I'll be about 20 minutes. Ratchet out."

The ambulance accelerated through the woods, the light flashing through the tall redwoods. At least the DJ was right, Ratchet thought to himself, it was a beautiful autumn day, not that it would help Sideswipe if he found himself at the Autobot medic's mercies. Again.

It was rare enough that he managed to get a day off, let alone have the med-bay empty so he could take it. And if that slagger Sideswipe had got himself half scrapped, by Primus, Spike was going to get that MP3 player he'd wanted for so long.

After spending who-knows-how-many hours piecing together one or the other of the Lamborghinis, he was sure he could find at least one interesting way to reformat the young punks aft.

Ratchet amused himself thinking of technical possibilities, that didn't include jet packs, as he negotiated the winding road smoothly. Then, just at the edge of the trees, something moved in the road.

"Slag!" And again, "Slag,slag SLAG!"

He braked desperately, swerving to avoid what looked like a chewed up bit up of... something, and then everything seemed to happen all at once. His rear tyres lost grip and slid sideways, threatening to overtake the front, as the medic corrected for the slide he was confronted by the edge of the road looming threateningly. Then his tyres chose that exact moment to grip suddenly, and the ground and sky swapped places in his vision, accompanied by a grinding crash and a 'thumping' sensation that rattled his entire frame.

Ratchet transformed as he lay in the ditch at the side of the road, berating himself

for the lack of concentration that allowed his speed to get that high.

"Well", he mused to himself, "might as well see what it was that landed me here."

He got to his feet hesitantly, waiting to see if anything was more seriously damaged than he first thought. Apart from a few creaks and groans he didn't like the sound of, he seemed to have escaped with little more than damaged armour.

However the amount of leaves and mud plastered to his frame did little to improve his appearance. But, that could wait, he had to see what animal it was in the road. First and foremost, he was a medic, dedicated to preserving life, all life.

Ratchet knelt slowly by the bedraggled little lump. It was hard to tell what it actually was beneath all the forest debris and mud that plastered it from head to tail. But clear to see, was the blood that seeped slowly from several gashes. He wondered if the poor thing was still even alive. As he was about to hesitantly feel for a heartbeat, a pair of the brightest blue eyes he had ever seen opened slowly and fixed on him, regarding him steadily, without fear.

"mew" the cat queried.

"O, slag."

\* \* \*

The other Autobots gave the medic wide berth as he walked with long urgent strides towards the med-bay, casting curious glances towards his ditch-decorated paint job, dented and gouged armour, and... was that a cat??

Ratchet stalked into the med-bay quickly running a critical eye over every mech that was currently gathered there from the recent skirmish. Jazz apparently had been right, and his good friend 'Jack had almost completed all the minor repairs.

Although Sunstreaker as usual was griping about a buffed out scratch not being totally invisible.

Sideswipe glanced up, looked down, and rapidly looked back up again at the tiny bundle that Ratchet cradled carefully in his arm.

“Hey, bro, look, it’s a cat!” He cried excitedly, nudging his yellow twin.

Sunstreaker irritably checked his buff, glaring at his brother for disturbing his perfectly glossed finish. “Yes, and looked what it dragged in” He replied nervously running his eyes up and down Ratchet’s normally white exterior. “He’s not coming anywhere near me! I’m already having enough trouble with this scratch right in the middle of my chest plate...”

“Right, everyone out, NOW!” Ratchet cut Sunstreaker off before he could get started. He glared about the room, daring anyone to say a word. Wisely they didn’t, they simply sidestepped around him as they vacated. As someone once said, you do not want to annoy someone who knows exactly how to hit you to cause the most pain. But that didn’t stop the whispers and giggles as soon as they got out of range.

Ratchet grabbed Wheeljack’s arm with his free hand as he passed.

“Ah, ‘Jack, I’m gonna need your help...” Ratchet said simply gesturing towards his parcel.

“Sure thing, Ratchet, what can I do?” the scientist replied, his faceplates flashing softly. Wheeljack was possibly the gruff medics best friend, and one of the few mechs who understood that Ratchet yelling at his patients was simply his way of dealing with his concern for them as friends. The more he got attached to them, the worse he threatened them when he had to repair them. And no-one could ever doubt the gentleness of his hands, even if not his words.

Ratchet knew he could always count on Wheeljack to help, no matter how seemingly out of character his request was. Besides, ‘Jack owed him a few favours too, for all the repairs after the scientist’s ‘experiments’.

Quickly the tiny animal was gently laid on one of the massive Autobot operating tables, and anaesthetised for surgery. Ratchet knew already that shock was a risk, having carried out a quick examination on the road, and inserted a drip into one of the cat’s veins. The blue colour of it’s gums and eyelids worried him, he knew it meant massive blood loss. He had to work out where the blood was coming from underneath all the mud and leaves.

“Jack, hand me a scalpel? And bring up everything we have on feline anatomy and trauma.”

The two friends worked quickly together, anticipating each other’s moves, an efficiency born from much practice in life and death situations. The matted fur was removed on almost all of the emaciated, little body, displaying extensive cuts and deep lacerations, but most concerning was a mangled back leg. It was beyond broken, it was smashed and hanging by a flap of skin. This was where most of the blood had been lost from.

“Poor, kitty! It looks like it got hit by a car! What were you doing in the road, little one?”

“I don’t know where it came from, ‘Jack. It was just there. I’m gonna have to amputate this leg. Can you start suturing those other cuts? I want her out of anaesthesia as soon as possible.”

Wheeljack looked at his friend curiously as he retrieved the suture kit they held on hand in case of human injuries. “Her?”

Ratchet simply nodded, he was already carefully cutting away the layers of mangled tissue. His attention totally devoted to the task at hand.

In short order, the cat had a few incision lines that would meet together neatly over where it’s back leg would normally be. Ratchet halted, surveying his careful work, he grunted, satisfied that it was the best possible



outcome. As he bent to resume his work, a hand touched his arm and he looked up to Wheeljack's amused eyes. Ratchet had forgotten that his friend was even there, he tended to get that wrapped up in his work.

"Why don't you go get cleaned up, you've done all the internal stitches. I can closeup."

Ratchet wryly looked down his own frame, and the trail he'd left through the normally immaculate med-bay "I suppose I could afford to do that."

Wheeljack chuckled lightly, and tilting his head removed a clump of needles from the chevron on Ratchets forehead. "Yeah, well, I didn't want to say it at the time, but Sunstreaker had a point. You two made quite a pair. "He said gesturing towards the sleeping cat. "Go, I can handle this from here, by the time you get back it'll be done, and I can have a go at getting you straightened out!"

Having shooed Ratchet away, Wheeljack gently finished suturing the amputation site neatly together. "I'll have to ring Spike and get him to bring some cat food up for you, little one. Poor skinny little thing, you been out on your own for a while, huh? Well, you're in good hands now. If I'm not mistaken ol' Doc Ratchet's quite taken with you, not that he'd admit it, stubborn old goat." He turned off the anaesthetic and bundled the groggily stirring cat into a warm blanket as he spoke, before putting it in a box where it could recover quietly.

He rung Spike and asked if he would mind delivering cat food, litter and a tray, assuring him he would explain when he got there. Spike was puzzled by the request but seeing how Wheeljack's faceplates were flashing in barely restrained good humour, knew that he would have to wait to find out, and assured him that he would be there shortly.

Wheeljack had just finished cleaning up the med-bay when he heard his friends footsteps.

"Better?" He asked, as he looked up he saw the medic properly. The barely restrained good humour could no longer be restrained, it was all he do to laugh quietly.

Wheeljack plopped down onto a table before he fell over and laughed until it hurt. Every time he looked at Ratchet standing there glaring at him, he started laughing again.

Eventually he got himself under control.

"You still look like the cat!" he said still giggling. Eyeing the gouges and ripped armour that adorned the white frame.

Ratchet crossed his arms over his chest and glared harder, his patented 'do-not-try-me' glare that ensured immediate obedience from all. It seemed that Wheeljack was immune, he just started giving out little hiccups of laughter again.

"I do not look like the cat!" Ratchet was doing his best to seem outraged, but seeing 'Jack trying to bite back further laughter, unconsciously his lips started twitching into a smile.

"How many times did you roll?" Accompanied by bursts of giggles.

"Twice. I think" A shrug dislodged a loose piece of shoulder armour that rang on the ground. They looked at each other, and this time they both burst out laughing, Ratchet sitting as Wheeljack moved over for him.

"Jack, I gotta stop taking time off, this R 'n' R thing is gonna kill me!" He said fingering a crack in his windscreen.

"Heheh, stay there and I'll get the welder, you can tell me about it."

\* \* \*

The cat recovered fairly quickly, over the next few days, and regained a fair amount of weight. No doubt helped by the constant stream of mechs finding some excuse to visit

the med-bay, and just happening to have some treat that perhaps the cat might like? In turn, the cat regally accepted all said tidbits with a gracious purr.

Ratchet, being used to Autobots doing anything possible to stay out of the medical facility, was not quite sure what to make of the constant visitations. He supposed if he had any serious injuries to attend to, it would have been definitely irritating and possibly even resulted in him throwing something at an offending mech's head. However, it was currently quiet on the Decepticon front after the most recent Sherman Dam incident, and he found that having the Bots willingly front up for their routine check-ups was a refreshing change.

Especially his current 'client' Bluestreak, who usually had to be dragged in by a violently twitching door wing. Ratchet couldn't really blame him, the poor guy had spent enough time in medical bays as the only survivor when his whole city was destroyed.

Even he had nearly not made it. Bluestreak had only survived by hiding his own half scrapped carcass amongst the wreckage of his dead friends until Prowl had found him and kept him alive long enough for medical aid to reach them. Which went a long way towards explaining the close bond between the young gunner and tactical commander, as well as his aversion to medical facilities and characteristic nervous chattiness.

So, when the silver Datsun had appeared hesitantly on some made up errand, Ratchet had immediately decided to take the opportunity and get his skidplate on a table. Seeing his door wings twitching nervously and the way he looked around like something was going to leap out of the corners made the medic feel for the Young mech. But, he'd rather have him go out to battle in fighting trim and survive, than save his feelings.

"Quit squirming, Bluestreak! How can I get this done if you insist on fidgeting?"

"I'm not squirming, I had an itch. Squirming's a funny word anyway. How do you suppose humans came up with a funny word like squirming? Squirm rhymes with worm, and worms kind of wriggle, do you think that's how it happened? I suppose it's not really important but it's kind of interesting to think about. Don't you think, Ratchet? I guess I should ask Prowl, he'll probably know. He knows all sorts of interesting things. I don't know where he learns them from, but it sure would be good to know half the things that he does. You'd always have something interesting to think about, wouldn't you?"

Ratchet was trying to work out which question he was supposed to answer before Bluestreak piped up again. "I hope you can keep the cat. I like her." Ratchet was waiting for the rest of Bluestreak's speech, when he realised the other mech was looking at him curiously, waiting for a reply. "The cat must belong to someone, Bluestreak. Spike has posted fliers up in the town, and sooner or later we're going to find her owners."

Bluestreak absently stroked the cat with his left hand, as it lay curled up next to his warmth, rumbling softly like a small engine.

"I know, I guess. But it must be kind of nice to have the company down here."

"What makes you think I need company?" Ratchet was puzzled by the change in Bluestreak's manner, despite the twitching doors and rambling, nervous conversation, he seemed almost calm. In fact the only time Ratchet could remember him being so subdued was when he was off-line, or in the middle of battle.

The gunner shrugged, "I don't know. Just... I don't like it here, and I wouldn't think many other bots would just pop in. I just thought it might be nice to have someone else around. And she seems to have got the hang of only having three legs. I bet sometimes she must like to play with things and climb around now. That must be fun to watch! But it's nice to have her just sit with you and pat her too, yeah? I mean like now,

it's nice to have something else to think about in here apart from... well, it's just nice." Bluestreak trailed off with another shrug and looked away with a haunted expression in his eyes.

Ratchet kept working, trying not to show his interest in what the mech had nearly said.

"She does like to climb on the shelves. It's not really set up for cats down here, so I have to watch she doesn't get anywhere unsafe. She got into the air vents yesterday.

Had a heap of trouble getting her back out, I had to wait until she got hungry and came out for food. Nothing but trouble, if you ask me." Ratchet hesitated, looking at the twitching young mech. Then plunged ahead, not quite sure if he was saying the right thing, "You know, I don't really have the time to play with her, so, maybe, you could. Until we find her owners, that is."

Bluestreak jumped and looked nervously, "What, me?"

"You see anyone else here? Yeah, you. Unless you don't want to."

"Ah, it's not that, it's just... well," Bluestreak looked away to his hand still slowly stroking the cat's new, gray fur. Ratchet groaned inwardly, he believed that he wasn't just responsible for the Autobots physical health, but their morale as well. And he felt that any chance he had of getting the amiable gunner to open up had just fled.

"Listen, don't worry about it." "Ratchet... I...I don't mean I don't want to. You just, took me by surprise. Heh.

Yeah, I'll come play with her, and I'll make sure not to get in the way, or make too much noise. Does she have any toys? Of course not. I'll see if I can find some toys for her. Spike will know what cats like. I think they like to chase things, they're predators right? And I heard about something called catnip, you think that's food? When I heard about it, it didn't sound like food. But it's called nip. Why would something be called nip if it wasn't food? I'll have to ask Prowl that too. Wow, I'm going to have a lot of questions

to ask Prowl tonight. I hope he doesn't get annoyed with me. Sometimes he gets a funny look on his face, and his left door twitches when I ask him a lot of questions. You know how he does that? It's kind of like the way you're looking me, only you don't have doors that twitch in robot..."

"Bluestreak, you're finished. Go."

"Yeah, ok. Bye bye, pussycat! I'll see you later, Ratchet. Don't worry, I'll find lots of things for her to play with, and I won't let her get into any more trouble. Maybe Sideswipe will let me use his computer to look on the internet? For stuff about cats, you know?"

Bluestreak happily hopped off the table and trotted to the door, oblivious to the frown creasing Ratchet's forehead. He turned around in the door with a grin plastered all over his face, but Ratchet noticed it didn't hide the shadows in his eyes.

"Ah, thanks, Ratchet. For... you know. Everything"

"Get out of here, Blue'."

Bluestreak grinned and waved, before trotting off up the hall towards the quarters that the two lamborghinis shared. Ratchet turned to the cat, still curled on the table, looking back at him through half-slitted eyes.

"That's just great! Do you see what you made me do?"

The cat blinked, and purred. "mew?"

"Primus, you are nothing but trouble! What have I got myself in for."

\* \* \*

"Hey, Ratchet! Got another call for you, about the cat."

"Thanks, Ironhide. Patch it through down here, can you? I hope it's not another false alarm."

"Sure thing, doc."

Ratchet had gotten tired of the calls from distressed owners sure that the cat on the fliers was theirs, only to realise after a few minutes that some detail didn't match. He'd even had a couple arrive to pick 'their' cat up, discovering on closer inspection that it was much larger than their own. Hopefully, this call would be the real deal.

"Uh, hello?" asked a middle-aged male voice on the phone line.

"Hello. This is Ratchet. I understand you're calling about the cat on the fliers?"

"Yeah. My name's Tom. I think I might be able to help you with your problem."

"If you could give me some information about your missing animal, I can tell you if the description fits?"

Tom chuckled wryly, "I don't think you understand, Ratchet. The problem is, I know your cat. I used to see her everyday, she belonged to my elderly neighbour."

"Great! If you can tell me the address, I'll drop the cat straight around."

"Ah, it's not that simple. You see, the lady in question is now deceased. She died about three weeks ago, and I hadn't heard anything about her cat since. Until I saw the poster down the street."

"Oh, I see." Ratchet didn't know what to do, what was he supposed to say? "I imagine this must be a difficult time, but perhaps the lady's family would like to keep her pet?"

"As far as I know, she didn't have any surviving relatives. No-one ever visited her, and she never spoke of having any children. To all appearances, it was just her and her cat. God knows if I could, I'd take that cat, bluest eyes I ever seen! But my son's allergic."

Ratchet sighed and scrubbed his face with his hand, "Thanks, Tom. I appreciate your call. Would you mind passing on my details to any family that you happen to come across? I just want the cat to go to a good home. We can't keep it, I'm sure you understand."

"I don't mind doing that at all." Tom laughed wryly, "I can imagine that keeping a cat is not your favourite idea. But no-one's been around to take care of her estate, and I believe she left everything to charity. Hey, you never know, someone in the neighbourhood might be looking for a cat. If something pops up I'll give you a call back. It's good to know she's ok for now though. You know, I spent half the day just trying to think of that cat's name? I'm not sure she even has one."

After Ratchet had ended the call, he sunk his head onto the bench hopelessly.

What was he supposed to do? He'd saved the vulnerable animal when otherwise She would certainly have died. According to many earthen traditions, her life was now his responsibility forever. For all of the mysterious 'Tom's' optimism, Ratchet was less hopeful about one of the neighbours taking the cat. Surely, if they were that concerned, they would have rung themselves.

Ratchet had to admit, he'd become accustomed to the slight form arching along a benchtop and snaking around his wrist in a quiet moment. She was certainly a better patient than most, uncomplaining during her frequent dressing changes. And even Bluestreak's nervous visitations had become less noticeable. Apart from the odd sight of Blue' himself down on the ground teasingly rolling a ball just out of the cats reach, and laughing when a paw snaked out from under a bench to dab lightly at the toy.

He had one more card to play, and if that didn't work? He looked at the smoky grey wraith, limp now hardly noticeable, as she slinked towards him to settle on his lap. It was totally unfeasible to keep a cat in a fighting unit. Wasn't it?

\* \* \*

As Ratchet had expected, Tom never rang back that week, or the week after. He'd been busy with his own attempts to find a home for the ever more adventurous kitty. He'd tried every animal shelter in the nearby town, and then every one in an ever increasing radius, only to meet the same reponse. The current one was a perfect example.

Having asked for one of the vets to meet him outside, he'd waited for about an hour before finally having a tired young man in a white lab coat meet him outside. Ratchet explained the situation, while the vet carried out a roadside examination of the cat.

"Well, Ratchet is it?, if you ever get sick of repairing Autobots, we could use you here, that's for sure. This is nice work! Just, I'm not sure we can rehome this animal.

You see, some people can overlook her only having three legs, but, I'm not sure how to say this..."



Ratchet interrupted gruffly, "How about the same way every other vet has said it. She's too old, we don't rehome 15 year old cats with three legs, we can pass on your details to anyone who comes in looking for this sort of animal, but if you were to leave her in our care we would have her put down. Is that about it, or have I forgotten part of it?"

At the vets guilty blush, the medic immediately felt embarrassed for his outburst.

"I'm sorry, but we have so many animals here all the time, there's nothing I can do. I wish it was different, but, I already have five dogs that I've taken home, and we can't help every single hard luck story that comes our way. I wish we could."

Ratchet looked at the pavement, "I guess I wouldn't want her locked in a cage for Primus knows how long, 'til she found a home, anyway. I'm sorry, it's just she's got so much better. I don't want all that work to be in vain, it just seems so pointless!"

"Hey, I know where you're coming from. To fix an animal up, and find a home, then the same animal comes back in, in the same condition or worse? Sometimes I could hit the people that undid my work! I think all docs, animal, human, or Autobot, would understand what you mean"

Ratchet carefully took the cat back off the vet, stroking it's ears with the tip of his finger, before grinning ruefully at the vet, "Have you ever tried actually hitting them? Trust me, it relieves a lot of stress. My medical teacher told me that, and it really works. That, and threatening your patients. If they're scared of you, it makes them less eager to need your attention."

The vet laughed at the mental image, "I'd love to! I'm not certain it's totally legal, though. Look, not to be rude, it was great meeting you, and I hope sometime I can catch up with you again, but I've got an appointment due any minute, you know how it is."

"Yeah, yeah, thanks. I better get back too. No telling what's waiting for me."

"Nice to meet you too, puss, pretty little thing."

Shortly after getting on the main road back to the Ark, Ratchet decided that there was nothing else he could do. He radioed back to the control centre.

"Prowl here." Came the brisk reply.

"Hey, Prowl. I'm on the way back now. Would Prime be available in about an hour and a half?"

"Optimus is in a meeting and can't be disturbed. I can leave a message for him to see you when he gets out."

"Ok then. I'll see you when I get back." Ratchet prepared to cut the comm-link, but was stopped by Prowl's interruption.

"Did you happen to see Bluestreak before you left?"

"No. Has something happened to him? Is everything alright?"

"He's fine, nothing's wrong. Just, well, you'll see. Prowl out."

Ratchet puzzled over Prowl's question. He could have sworn he heard muffled laughter in the background, and it sounded like Prowl himself was smiling. All in all, very un-Prowl-like behaviour.

"Primus in a smelting pit! What's he gone and done now?! Well, I'll just have to wait and see. As if this day couldn't get any worse."

The cat turned around on his front seat a few times, before kneading it's paws into his seat cushion, and curling up, purring contentedly.

"Glad someone's happy."

As Ratchet walked into the Ark, his puzzlement grew. Every mech he passed started laughing, some made an effort to stifle it until he was at a safe distance away, some just outright howled. Ratchet was starting to wonder if all of them had been infected with a computer virus. He saw Sunstreaker up ahead smiling to himself, which was remarkable in itself, but at least he wasn't laughing.

"Sunstreaker, hey, what in the pit's name is going on?"

The tall, yellow warrior turned, and the smile broadened. "I was wondering when you'd get back."

"So?"

"So, what?"

"So, what in the pit's name is going on? Do you need your audio receivers retuned?"

"I'm not sure I know what you mean. Can't a mech just be in a good mood? Really, Ratchet, paranoia does not become you."

Looking at that impassive, albeit grinning, face, Ratchet knew he would get nothing further and he should just give up now.

He continued on his way grumbling. Just before he turned the corner, Sunstreaker called, "Give my love to my brother!"

Ratchet walked faster, a sinking feeling in the pit of his fuel-tank. Whatever was going on involved Sideswipe, and that spelled trouble. From around the corner behind him, came a sound so bizarre to his audio receptors it took Ratchet a moment to decipher it as Sunstreaker laughing.

As he approached his med-bay Jazz emerged, holding his sides and giggling. When he saw Ratchet striding purposefully towards the door he had to hang onto the wall as he was overcome by another frame shaking bout of laughter.

"Ra...Ratc... Ratchet!"

The medic stared at the black and white saboteur, leaning on the wall with tears streaming from under his visor as he looked on the verge of actually splitting a side.

"Sideswipe in there?"

Jazz nodded.

"Bluestreak, too?"

Jazz howled anew, and slid slowly down the wall. He managed to raise his arm and point to the door. "Ya... Ya gotta... thy've made..."

Ratchet didn't wait for him to choke out the rest. Stepping over the spluttering third in command, he entered the bay. Putting the cat down he walked towards the voices he heard at the back of the room.

"Yeah, just hold it there, nearly got it. Done. This is gonna be great."

"You really think this is a good idea? Everyone else is laughing."

"Oh, they just know how much the cat's gonna love it, trust me. This... is gonna... be great!"

Ratchet came into view of the two mechs. They worked with their backs to him, attaching great reams of carpet to a huge branching structure of posts and tunnels. Ratchet could feel his vocaliser freezing up in shock. His mouth opened and shut as he tried to get his mind to encompass the structure that spanned just about the entire back wall of his work facility. That was the thought that got his sluggish CPU and

vocaliser to co-operate again. His. Work. Facility.

Taking a wobbly step forward, his outraged bellow echoed around the quiet med-bay, out the door, and up the hall, where just about every single Autobot waited for the expected explosion.

"WHAT... THE SLAG... IS....THAT!"

The two mechs jumped and turned around, Bluestreak dropped a tool clattering to the ground and Sideswipe looked as though he was about to make a run for it. Ratchet set his arm firmly to the wall, blocking any potential escape routes.

Bluestreak was trying to pick up a staple gun with nerveless fingers, and only succeeded in repeatedly dropping it again. Sideswipe seemed to have resigned himself to his fate, but Ratchet wasn't taking his eyes off him for a second.

"Now," he growled, "are either of you planning to tell me just what, exactly, it is that you have found it necessary to fill MY med-bay with?"

"It's a scratching post." Bluestreak's words could hardly be heard over the rattling of his door wings. "I found out on the internet that cats like to scratch, and humans should get them scratching posts. And I wanted to get one for the cat, but Sideswipe saw someone throwing out carpet, and mesh and stuff, and thought we could build one better than we could buy, so we brought the stuff back here and built it, and I thought you'd like it, but now you're mad, and... and... I'm sorry."

Ratchet glared at Sideswipe. "So this is all your idea?"

"I thought it sounded like a good idea. For the cats welfare, you know." Sideswipe fixed Ratchet with his characteristic lop-sided grin.

"For the cats welfare."

Sideswipe shrugged. And grinned. Ratchet cursed him silently. Maybe he had been thinking of the cats well being, but he had also, sure as slag, been thinking of the infuriation caused to the medic.

"A scratching post."

"Yep. For the cats welfare. They need to scratch. And climbing will help her recovery. Unless you'd rather we pull it down and leave her climbing on the shelves, with your tools." The red Lamborghini was now

leaning on the wall with arms crossed and a cocky tilt to his head. Still grinning that damned, annoying, smug grin.

Ratchet knew he was beaten. "Did it have to be so fragging big?"

"We had the materials, seemed a shame to waste them." Ratchet made a mental note to carry out Sideswipe's next CPU defragging with a pipe wrench.

Looking back to Bluestreak who was still miserably clutching the staple gun and staring at the floor with his doors drooping disconsolately, Ratchet sighed and dropped his arm off the wall. He was still angry, but he knew that it was unfair to blame the kind-hearted gunner for being led along by a trouble making hooligan. And besides, he could make sure that Sideswipe got his.

"Next time, for Primus sake, just ask me first. And clean up this smelting mess when you're done!" He fixed Sideswipe with a glare that left him in no doubt just what the real score was, before turning and walking to his office. Every now and then he could make out a hushed cry of "what the slag is that?!" from up the hall, accompanied by the sound of stifled laughter. He shut the door behind him with a clang, shutting out the sound of their guffaws.

Pouring himself a container of energon, he sat heavily in a chair and settled back plonking his feet up the desk with ankles crossed.

"Well, cat," he said as the little creature arched over to him and stepped daintily onto his stomach, rumbling noisily, "let's drink to your fragging huge, outrageously big and Lamborghini-inspired scratching post." Raising the container in salute and tossing back a decent portion in one mouthful as the cat 'made bread' and blinked at him through half slitted eyes.

"Now, we wait to hear what Optimus has to say about this." He chuckled softly, having another mouthful of his energon "I wonder what he'll make of the scratching post. Should be interesting to see."

Optimus' imposing figure cast a shadow over the two mechs cleaning up the debris of their construction sometime later. They both looked up as he surveyed their handiwork impassively, Prowl standing unobtrusively in the background with one

door held higher than the other. Something only Bluestreak would recognise as amusement.

"Ah, hi, Optimus! Ah, Ratchet said we could build it, well, he didn't really say we could, but, he was here and he didn't throw us out, but, he was kinda mad. Well, he didn't tell us to stop, just to clean up when we finished," Bluestreak's doors went from raised to drooping and raised again as he tried to explain the structure to the red and blue Autobot commander.

Sideswipe wisely just grinned, and stayed out of the picture.

"Where is Ratchet?" Optimus prime's deep, resonant voice echoed around the room.

"He went into his office," Sideswipe replied simply.

Bluestreak smiled happily at Prowl, as the commander and second walked over to the office door. Optimus tapped gently on the door and waited, as he received no acknowledgment he looked at Sideswipe again.

Sideswipe shrugged, "He went in there, and hasn't come out. We haven't heard anything from him."

Optimus knocked more firmly, "Ratchet? Prowl told me you wanted to speak to me." Again no reply.

The two were now becoming concerned. Prowl tried the door, finding it Unlocked they walked inside, and stopped as they saw the medic. Leaning back on the verge of toppling the chair, he was deep in recharge, with both feet still on the table and the cat curled on his stomach. The energon container in his left hand was precariously close to spilling and his other hand was next to the contented cat, as though he was stroking it as he fell asleep. Optimus crossed the room, his eyes betraying the smile underneath the mask, and removed the energon from it's precarious position in the medic's hand.

"Mmmph?" The medic queried groggily. Raising his head from his chest stiffly he met his leaders amused eyes and his legs hit the ground with a thud as he realised he'd fallen asleep waiting. "Sorry, Prime. Guess I just shut my eyes for a second and, Ow, remind me not to do that again." He said rubbing his neck ruefully.

"I can't believe you let them live. You must be getting soft." Optimus said tilting his head towards the office door.

"Heh, that rotten slagger Sideswipe blackmailed me with patient welfare. Primus below, you ever seen anything like it?"

"Negative." Optimus shook his head, "Prowl told me you wanted to speak to me, Ratchet, what seems to be the problem?"

As Prime seated himself, Prowl shut the door to give them all a little privacy, and Ratchet caught the Autobot leader up on all his attempts to relocate the cat.

"So, that's where it stands, Prime. I can't find anywhere that will take her and try to find a home. It seems that she's simply too old, and on top of the leg I had to amputate, her age is simply a death sentence."

"Hhmm. What did you have in mind?" Optimus appeared deep in thought, fingering his chin with his arms crossed.

"Well, I've got Spike and Sparkplug asking their friends if anyone could take her. No luck, so far but you never know." The medic shrugged. "And most of the shelters I visited said if they had anyone come in that was willing to take her, they would pass my details on."

Optimus stayed looking at Ratchet, "Prowl?"

The second in command stepped forward. "I advise against this, Optimus. I have no problem with Ratchet's reasoning, or the animal itself, but think of the precedent that we would be setting. We, like the shelters, cannot save every living creature that we come across."

Ratchet stood up, bristling, "I am not going to let a perfectly healthy animal be put down!" He raged, thumping his fist on the table's surface. "I mean, I just can not believe it's come to this! This cat's elderly owner dies, and she spends three weeks in a forest fending for herself before getting hit by a car. I find her in the nick of time and save her life, for what?! To get put down because we can't keep her for a while longer? This is not what I became a medic for!"

The cat rapidly vacated the area, slipping out the door as Ratchet crossed the room and opened it slightly for her. The two startled mechs in the larger bay looked to each other, the angry words clearly heard in the otherwise silent room.

Bluestreak held the little cat in his arm, quietly shushing it, as he cast anxious glances to the office door.

"Siders, you think they'll actually put her down?"

"Not over Ratchet's sparking carcass, Blue. He'll fight 'em to the death. But, I think it's better if we stay quiet and forgotten, they probably don't want to realise we can hear this."

Inside the office, Ratchet had sat back down dispiritedly. But still glaring at Prowl. "Prowl, she causes no harm. And the mechs actually seem to like coming here now! You saw Bluestreak out there, Bluestreak has been here every single day for Primus' sake. Voluntarily." The medic's glare softened, became almost pleading, "You know he nearly talked, I mean actually talk, not just ramble. He nearly told me about what happened in his city. Are you willing to trade a precedent for your friend?"

Prowl stiffened and his doors shot up. "We are a fighting unit, Ratchet. We are not a rescue society. We cannot have animals running about everywhere!"

Oblivious to the escalating volume of their discussion and the two mechs who could hear all but the quietest of their discussion, the medic and the logistical Commander squared off.

"I'm not suggesting we have 'animals running about everywhere', it's one little cat!"

"You know how much Mirage misses his tracking drones back at Iacon, he's got pictures of them all over his quarters. What if he wants to get a dog? And you of all people should remember Sideswipe's furbies?!"

"The furbies?!" Ratchet swore he would carry that image to his grave. The sight of his med-bay covered in thousands of furbies, all happily chattering Sideswipe-esque profanities had nearly made him short on the spot, "What have the glitching furbies got to do with it?"

"What if he took it into his head to get a parrot? Can you imagine the special brand of mayhem that would inspire? And Hound bringing every lost and hurt creature in here that has a sore paw. I'm talking about precedent, if it's allowed for one, it's allowed for all. Ratchet, it's Prime's decision, but as his adviser, I cannot agree."

As Prowl made his argument, his doors dropped and tilted back, his eyes searching Ratchet's. The medic understood suddenly. Prowl wanted to agree, wanted to have the little animal and the bit of laughter and warmth she brought with her, but couldn't think of a logical argument to back up that want. Time out from a bitter war could not outweigh the possible ensuing nightmare of unpredictability. Ratchet had to find something that carried more weight than logic, and he realised that Prowl had already given him the clues he needed.

"Yes, we are a fighting unit. And what are we fighting for? We crash landed here, and here we stay. We could have gone home, but instead we stay, and fight. Why?" Ratchet fixed his intense gaze on Optimus' face.

"Because it would be wrong to leave this planet to the Decepticons. Even if they simply gathered enough energy to follow us back, it would be wrong." Optimus thought he knew where Ratchet was heading with his questions, and silently applauded.

"Not just the humans, Optimus, but the whole planet." At Optimus' nod the medic continued. "Because all life is precious, not just sentient life. And we, as Autobots, are bound to protect it. Tell me, Prime, where does it say that?"

Optimus Prime's eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled. "The Autobot Charter."

"Ah, yes, the Charter, the one we all swear to uphold when we declare ourselves followers of the Autobot code. Namely, that we will hold all life sacred, and protect it's existence in all forms, at all costs. You think the Charter applies to cats on Earth, Prime? Ones that would get put down, unless they stay here, just until another place for them can be found?"

Prime chuckled and shook his head. "Affirmative. She stays, until another home is found."

"It might be a while. She is a three legged cat, an old, three legged cat."

"Until you find another home, no matter how long that takes. I can't go against the Charter now, can I?" Optimus eyes portrayed amusement as he found Ratchet's. And Ratchet knew that the cat's future was assured, she could stay as long as needed, as long as she lived.

Prowl spoke up, "Well, if this cat is going to stay here, she had better have another name, apart from 'the cat'. Any ideas?"

The other mechs looked at him and shook their heads.

"Never had the need to come up with names for someone else. You got any?" Ratchet asked the black and white, noting it was just like Prowl to have an argument, and once it was over just get straight down to brass tacks like nothing had happened.

"A lot of dogs seem to be called Spot. I don't know why it wouldn't be a good name for a cat."

"Spot? Why Spot?" Optimus asked curiously.

"Been nothing but a spot of trouble from day one as far as I can figure, and doesn't seem about to change."

The other Autobots laughed at Prowl's rare attempt at humour, recognising his effort to accept the newest member of the unit.

"Spot it is." Ratchet clapped Prowl on the shoulder.

"I just want you know, however, that the first time a mech walks in saying 'but it followed me home' I am still going to hold you both personally responsible!"

Outside Bluestreak relaxed his hold on the cat, "Spot. I like that, but you're not any trouble, I don't know why Prowl said that."

Sideswipe nudged Bluestreak, still stifling laughter. He remembered the furbies, how could someone ever forget a masterpiece of hilarity like that? "C'mon, we better make ourselves scarce in case they come out. I think you can leave Spot now. Let her have a go on the scratching post."

The two left with more stealth than most would give them credit for. Shortly after Prowl and Optimus re-emerged to find a grey wraith exploring the huge branching structure covering the wall. Prowl walked over after a moments hesitation, to where two blue, blue eyes peered at him from one of the many tunnels.

Extending a finger, he reached towards the little face "Nothing personal, you know. No hard feelings?"

The eyes blinked a couple of times and Prowl was about to turn away when she



stalked towards him and rubbed her lithe body back and forth against his finger, rumbling noisily.

"Hey, Optimus, how about that? She likes me."

Ratchet watched, leaning in the doorway to his office. "Yeah, fancy that." He said with a dry smile.

Prowl turned and smiled back before walking out with Optimus, leaving the medic and his cat in peace.

"It's just you and me again, Spot. So, what do you think of the monstrosity?"

The cat jumped up to the next level, at eye level with Ratchet, and peered at him intently. "mew" it queried.

"Good, huh? I'm glad, 'cos I think you're gonna be using it for awhile, unless I rip into one day after the lambos have done something stupid. You know, Prowl really does like you, it's just him being all logical. And the lambos? Much as I hate to admit, fragging glitches the pair of them, really aren't so bad either, once you get to know them. Just don't shed on Sunstreaker. In fact, best if you steer clear of him all together, and Wheeljack's lab too. Never find you again if you go in there, and you'd probably get blown up."

The cat was playing close attention, as though listening to every word. Its tail slowly flicked back and forth.

"And since when did I talk to cats anyway? Hey, let's be done with it, we're all a bunch of misfits really. Maybe that's why, after all the arguments and aggravation, we are such good friends." Ratchet regarded the cat, steadily regarding him, and reached out to rub the fur between its eyes, "Welcome to the funny farm, Spot, hope you have a great stay."

## Epilogue

Sideswipe's normally cheerful face showed deep thought as he lay on the top bunk in the quarters he shared with his brother. Something he had overheard from Ratchet's office that afternoon had stayed in his mind, every time he tried to go into shut-down it resurfaced and would not let him be.

"Sunny? You awake?"

"Slag off. Sleeping" The low growl came from the bottom bunk.

"What do you think about getting a parrot?"

"I said... slag off! Accompanied by a thump on the underneath of Sideswipe's bunk, Sunstreaker kicking it.

Sideswipe grinned. "Yeah, Prowl said after considering the furbies, could anyone imagine what I could do if I got a parrot."

A much more reverberating thump this time, both feet. Sideswipe's grin grew wider. "I really like macaws, they're so colourful. And they're real smart too apparently. There's a place out by the interstate that sells them."

Double thump and a feral growl, "Shut the slag up, you sonuvaglitch! I mean it, I'll get up there and twist your pit-damned head clean off!"

"Yeah, and I'd teach it to say nice things about you, but swear at everyone else. Can you imagine Prowl's face when a parrot swears at him on the comm-link?"

Silence.

Sideswipe slowly rolled over, and looked down at his brother, "Sunny?"

Sunstreaker's feral smile spread slowly over his face as he looked up at his brother peering over the edge of the bunk. "I like the red and green macaws."

## "Retreat" By Lola Gudgeon

It's peaceful here, real peaceful.

That's what it is, peaceful - always.

The sun is so warm. Another diurnal turn sitting in the warm sun, thinking about peace. Not that I don't think about it when it gets dark and I watch the stars wheeling overhead. Funny how, usually, you never notice the constellations swing and dip unless you are just sitting and watching.

The sea and sky are so blue, you can't tell where they meet. I once tried to find the place where they met, hoping to find him, but that was foolish of me. How can anyone touch the horizon? Even on a planet this small! But I remember trying; remember flying.

I haven't flown for a long, long time. Primus knows how long it's been!

It's peaceful here. I like peace.

I like the peace and quiet. I'll never forget the endless noise of the war, but the pain eases in the silence here. How can anyone ever forget that noise?

I never used to notice the sun rising over Cybertron. Strange to me now, of course, but not back then. That was the other me, the warrior. The fighting never stopped and I was expected to do my part, not while my time away dreaming. I never even noticed it when I was standing guard at the defences, because I was on guard.

And I never really noticed much when I was in the thick of it. Too busy trying to carry out my orders and too busy saving my hide.

The Front Line, they called it, and were proud that it'd got its own name. We were proud when we first arrived, fresh from training and wearing our shiny new badges. But you don't stay proud for long in a place like that, and you learn to dull down the shiny new badge and your personal identification livery if you don't want to give a sniper a nice and easy target.

Lost a lot of friends out there, on the Front Line.

Never thought of it before, but it was the Front Line and nothing more. It never went forwards and it never went backwards. Did the other side call it the Front Line, too?

Can I count how often I was damaged and ended up in repair? I'm a living machine, for Primus' sake, and I didn't bother counting after I got to three hundred.

I can remember the medals and commendations: forty-two of one, nineteen of the other. I can even remember what I got them for.

Maybe, since I can remember, I've not yet been forgiven.

It was war!

It was war!

They were already referring to it as the Great War before it was more than twenty vorns old. That's not long by the standards of some of the other wars we'd had, but we never had one so vicious before, so I suppose they were right. And prophetic, as it turned out.

Some individuals thought it was great and went on to make names for themselves. Rubyjet; Powerglide; Lineout; Deathmark; Shatterclaw. The heroes to one side were the villains to the other. I saw Prime once, striding through the battle just outside my position, the Autobot on his left shoulder and an energon sword in his hand.

It's so peaceful. What was I thinking about?

I like the peace and quiet. I'll never forget the endless noise of the war, but the pain eases in the silence here. How can anyone ever forget that noise?

Not an intermittent noise, not a sound followed by a pause and then another sound. Constant noise. It got so bad at times you'd practically have to turn your audio receptors off in order to think, and then you could still feel the air vibrating, to say nothing of the ground. It was like being inside a storm and some idiot god was playing an unstoppable roll.

I used to play the protolicon. Pleasant sound. He liked it.

I suppose someone noticed me, because I ended up being promoted to Squad Commander. Probably noticed me because I was still functional.

I led good soldiers to termination, again and again. The orders kept coming and we kept attacking. They used to send me new men every so often, to bring the unit back to full strength, but we usually ended up operating on less than minimum recommendations. Odd really; more of us survived when there were less of us, and we caused more damage to the enemy.

For a while, that was a good time. There was camaraderie. There was Bluesky.

It was good to find a wingmate. I wasn't looking, but I found him. No, tell the truth, he found me.

Thought I'd really had it. Lost my upper wing and half my stabiliser mechanism. It was a long way down. Tried to glide, but I was just delaying the inevitable. Then he appeared, telling me to go to robot mode – and I did, I really did, even though it meant I had even less hope of surviving the impact. He moved beneath me and I landed right on his back, and it must have hurt, because his engines really growled, but he got me down and into repair. Even waited to make sure I came out of the bay OK.

I told him he was a hero. He replied, no, you are the hero, and the hero is not supposed to die.

Primus, he was sweet! He moved like mercury, smooth and sure. Upswept wings of sapphire steel, trembling in the sun. Young and strong and fast, first of a new line. When we flew together, we knew only joy!

For a while...

I held him while he ceased to function, watching the lights going out and the lubricant seeping away. They had to drag me away from his shell.

I wasn't much use after that, and they sent me for reformatting and reprogramming. As if I'd let them take Bluesky from me!

That's when I knew it would never be over. I was sick of the fighting. It'd taken something from me, of me, and they would take what was left and recreate it and send it back to start again.

I made it into Iacon, dodging patrols from both sides, and I made it to the Temple.

I laid down my rifle on the steps of the altar, right there in front of the sacred flame. It was a big gun, black metal, worn with use. Ah-ha,

worn with overuse! To be honest, it was more replacement parts than the original I was issued with, but it was still my own gun, handed to me by my first commander. It *meant* to me. That's why I left it there, with the shadow of the fires making it look like a spilled patch of dark oil.

I wonder who found it? I wonder what he thought?

Just another symbol.

Is there a symbol of peace? I wish I knew. I would take it and offer it to eternity.

Is there a symbol of love? It would be blue, filled with laughter, filled with life.

I like the peace here. It's so blue.

What's that? Something is entering the upper atmosphere. Metal. Meteors? No, the configuration is wrong.

They've found me, then. I came so far, so very far, but they've found me. Guess it's possible to run, but, like they say, you can't hide forever. I could fly, I suppose, but what good would that do in the end? I jettisoned all my weapons and armaments before I landed here; I even ripped off my sigil. I wanted none of the accoutrements of war.

I'm so tired. My existence will end here, now. It's as good a place as any – and better than many.

I commend my Spark to the Light. 'Til all are One.

It's peaceful here.

Oh! Bluesky has come for me...

\* \* \*

"Yes, it's definitely a Cybertronian wavelength," Starscream told Skyfire via their radio link. "It's an old channel, early digital, so faint it's hard to lock onto."

Skyfire waited while his partner recalibrated, using tiny jet pulses to orient himself in

weightlessness. His own scanning array was too dedicated to research to pick up anything but the things it was now recording – the spectrum of the local sun, the number and type of its satellites, the clues about its age.

The Seeker suddenly became tense and pointed to the blue planet near them. "There!"

"I have no record of any prior exploration in this area," Skyfire said, frowning a little.

"It's not a repeating beacon, so there's definitely someone broadcasting."

Skyfire detected the sharpness that meant Starscream was feeling peeved at being doubted. "I suppose it could be a crash and a lone survivor," he mused, making an attempt at reconciliation. "Let's check."

Starscream had already transformed into pyramid jet mode and was heading for the planet. Patience was never one of his strong points.

Diving through the blue-tinged atmosphere (caesium, cobalt, several ferrous salts), Skyfire felt only the barest touch of heat, which was unusual, and set about recording data on the phenomenon. Then they were through, and there was warmth (72 degrees standard, inorganic chemistry only, no sign of native life). The planet was small, but beautifully formed, with irregular quartzine landmasses sparkling iridescently and an oleaginous, mineral sea rich in cobalt. There was any number of rare metals (!) in improbable abundance (!!). It was very blue and very quiet.

He heard Starscream give a surprised cry: "It's stopped! I've lost it."

At almost the same instant, Skyfire detected something out of place. There were obvious signs that one towering, blue crystalline structure had been cut into, its heart replaced with electronics that were glittering brightly on the edge of his scan. He did not even have to draw Starscream's attention to it, since the other had clearly noticed the same thing and was heading purposefully down.

"Be careful!" Skyfire shouted, knowing he was shouting to the wind.

When he reached the target, transforming to land, he found Starscream kneeling a little way inside the hollowed out area, checking a form sitting silent and still. Moving in for a better look, he saw that it was an old-type swing-wing, his colours so faded that only an overall impression of blue-grey remained. Two narrow grey cables snaked from the figure's chestplate to join an antique solar collection arc laid in the light-filled heart of the blue crystal cave.

"He's gone," said Starscream softly.

## **A Sideburn Obsession**

### **By Simon Plumbe**

Unlike a lot of fans, I entered Transformers collecting at a late stage not really collecting the toys on a large scale until 2003. While I do collect toys from across the range from G1 right up to Cybertron, I tend to focus primarily on toys I like and more importantly variations of my favourite characters which helps give my collection more focus and makes it far easier to choose what to buy. The main thrust of this in recent times has been Sideburn...

This probably started in 2004 when I built up a friendship with RiD voice actor Wally Wingert prior to his appearance at Auto Assembly 2004. When I was working on gathering items for the charity auction I emailed Wally and he replied almost instantly... we started emailing and I thought the least I could do was to find out more about Sideburn and I quickly got hooked on RiD and a certain blue sportscar...

Sideburn (or Speedbreaker as he was first known) was a blatant copy of the classic Dodge Viper - so close in fact that it landed Takara in trouble a short while after the range had been released. Initially, the range was launched in Japan by Takara under the name Car Robots and was intended as a "filler" line following on from the Beast Wars/Beast Machines lines while Armada was in the planning stages. It was intended to consist of a mixture of original moulds, repainted G2

toys, repainted Beast Wars toys with characters including vehicles (Autobots and Decepticons) and animal based (Predacons).

The range started in Japan in March 2000 and our favourite sportscar started life as a blue Dodge Viper called Speedbreaker (C-004), alongside his two "brothers", Mach Alert (a police car, later known as Prowl in RiD) and Wild Ride (4WD car, aka X-Brawn). But I digress... As the series progressed, all three of the Car Brothers underwent a change and had alternative "supercharged" modes. In the series, this gave the characters enhanced strength. From a toy point of view, this simply gave Takara a reason to release repaints, essential to offset the cost of developing new moulds. As a result, toy C-026 in the range - Super Speedbreaker - was released with a new red paint job (and also appeared in the newer style cardboard box packaging featured by Takara).



Staying with the standard releases under the Car Robots, there were a limited number of toys from the Car Robots range that were re-released in Korea, some as stand-alone toys and others in themed box sets. The Korean range were branded under the name Car Bots and while it didn't contain the full line, it did have a release of Speedbreaker as part of a set of all three Car Brothers.

The range then moved across to the US in 2001 accompanied by a re-dub of the series, and was now renamed Robots In Disguise by Hasbro and produced by Saban Entertainment. Speedbreaker was renamed Sideburn and in the series was voiced by Auto Assembly 2004's guest of honour, Wally Wingert. Apart from the packaging and the

name, the toy was pretty much the same apart from a slight re-tooling on the chest and subtle differences in the paint used for the bodywork and the fact that the toy now sported a large Autobot insignia on the roof!

A second edition of the blue Sideburn was released with the Dodge logo added to the front of the car. Dodge weren't aware of the toy existing when it was first released in the Car Robots line despite Speedbreaker obviously being based on the classic Viper design. After seeing the toy, Hasbro were approached and a licence agreement was signed with the car company to feature the logo and Dodge information on the packaging. This second edition was more widely distributed throughout Europe than in the US.



The red supercharged version of the toy was released in a single edition, with the agreement with Dodge being in place from the time the toy was released.

However, it must be noted that the Dodge logo was **not** featured on any of the Japanese releases of the toy, nor the Osaka Gift Set although it did appear on the OTFCC 2003 exclusives which I'll come onto.

As part of the RiD range, there were six Sychangers featured in the series were all repaints of the G2 Gobots. For the RiD toy range, this set of six were expanded by the addition of three double-packs. One featured smaller versions of X-Brawn and Scourge, one had Prowl 2 and Sideswipe (sporting a



rather strange green paint job!), and most significantly a Spychanger-sized Sideburn!



Sideburn had a similar styling to his full-size counterpart although he wasn't **quite** a Dodge this time and came complete with Daytonus, an orange/black Le Mans style sports car. The transformation was fairly basic, as was the entire Spychanger range, but it looks reasonably good for it's size. Of all the standard Spychanger toys (not counting the transparent rarities), this is the hardest set to find of all the basic toys released but should still be able to be found for under £10 for the Sideburn/Daytonus set.

Things may seem simple enough so far for the collector with just a handful of toys... until you get to the limited edition releases and convention exclusives.

The first of these is the Osaka Exclusive Gift Set. This is a beautiful set produced in 2001 for the Osaka Toy Fair in Japan and features clear plastic versions of the Supercharged versions of all three Car Brothers.

This set features brand new packaging with a very stylish box with some wonderful black and white artwork on it and the set was limited to just 1,500 pieces. Definitely one of the hardest to find of all the variants and it's currently selling for around £100.



The next limited edition release came at the Official TransFormers Collectors Convention (OTFCC). For some time, fans have been joking that Speedbreaker looked like a girl (even Sven commented on it when he first reviewed the toy here in The Cybertronian Times) so for one of their convention exclusive toys in 2003 they released a twin pack featuring Roulette and Shadow Striker - two FEMALE repaints of the Sideburn mould!

This was something of a departure for the toy. One was an Autobot, with the other being a Decepticon but both had a new head mould to give them a definite female look complete with what could only be described as lipstick!

Originally, this set sold for \$65 at the convention although as with most convention exclusives it has already risen in price steadily because of the high demand despite the somewhat sub-standard packaging. If you do find one of these anywhere, don't expect to pay less than £50 for it.

Following OTFCC, Sideburn's appearance took a strange twist when he made his debut appearance as a Mini-Con in the Armada range! With Hasbro's continued reliance on old character names to retain the copyright on them, Sideburn was reborn in the latter part of the Armada run. He was included as a yellow sports car (well, he HAD to be a sports car really, didn't he?!) as the Mini-Con for Predacon who was a repainted version of Beast Wars Transmetal Megatron that appears as one of the filler toys in the Armada range.

This is the second and final Sideburn toy to-date that didn't resemble the Dodge Viper. Predacon didn't sell as well as expected however and was relatively easy to find substantially discounted in a lot of stores until last year.

The final release of a toy bearing the Sideburn name so far - and the last ever use of the Dodge Viper mould (not counting the BinalTech/Alternator range) came in the repaint line Transformers: Universe. This time, Sideburn was sporting a new black, red and grey paint job with a grid paint effect on his bonnet. This is one of those repaints that you either love or hate. As with many toys in the Universe range, it came with a CD-ROM and was only distributed in the US. Not too easy to get hold of now so expect to pay in the region of £20 for one.

One final Speedbreaker worth mentioning is a quirky one as it's not really a repaint. The Japanese model company, Kabaya, picked up the rights to produce a short run of snap-fit kits of several Car Robots characters in robot mode. Five were chosen and each one had a basic frame in either grey or white, with semi-transparent pieces that attached to form the rest of the character adding the colour but giving a semi-clear look.



No prizes for guessing who was part of the range! I've only ever seen one of these on eBay ONCE in the last few years so they're not likely to come along very often so despite their simplicity again don't expect to pay less than about £15 for one.

I can't end this without mentioning the unofficial clones that have been released of the toy. To my knowledge, only one has been released so far and that was produced - as have most of the bootleg toys of all the Transformers toys - in China. Despite being unofficial, it will have some curiosity value and could be worth tracking down although naturally won't be of any real quality compared to the original toy either in terms of design, build quality or the materials used let alone regarding its legality.

One thing that is significant with Sideburn (along with Prowl and X-Brawn, the other Car Brothers) is that, like many of the G1 toys, the moulds are no longer in any shape for the toys to be reissued. Because of the number



of times they have been used in such a short space of time as Aaron Archer from Hasbro confirmed at BotCon in 2005 the mould for Sideburn has now worn out completely. What this means in simple terms is that the Sideburn toys that have been released to-date are it... it's the end of the road for our favourite sports car!

As a result, it's highly likely that most versions of the toy will start to increase in value steadily over time. As a collector, it has to be said that it is a great toy he looks fantastic in vehicle mode and while he does look somewhat effeminate and is incredibly frustrating to transform into robot mode, he is a must-have toy for any collector.

If you haven't got one in your collection, grab one while you still have the chance!

### **Dateline 1984: Was this the launch of TransFormers in the UK?** **By Sven Harvey**

Hasbro UK have maintained for several years that TransFormers were launched in the UK in 1985. When questioned at Toy Fair in 2004 they stated that the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Optimus Prime toy would not be launched here in the UK that year as our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary wasn't until 2005. This exasperated many fans as we all knew that the first wave of TransFormers officially released in the UK hit the shelves in spring 1984.

This first wave consisted of the Mini-Autobots and Optimus Prime, however as the summer



progressed the line expanded until ready for the Christmas market – the line in the UK for Christmas 1984 included the first six Mini Autobots, six Autobot cars, Optimus Prime, the original three Strike Planes, Ravage, Rumble, Frenzy, Laserbeak plus “Cassette Man” Soundwave (with Buzzsaw) positioned as the Decepticon leader.

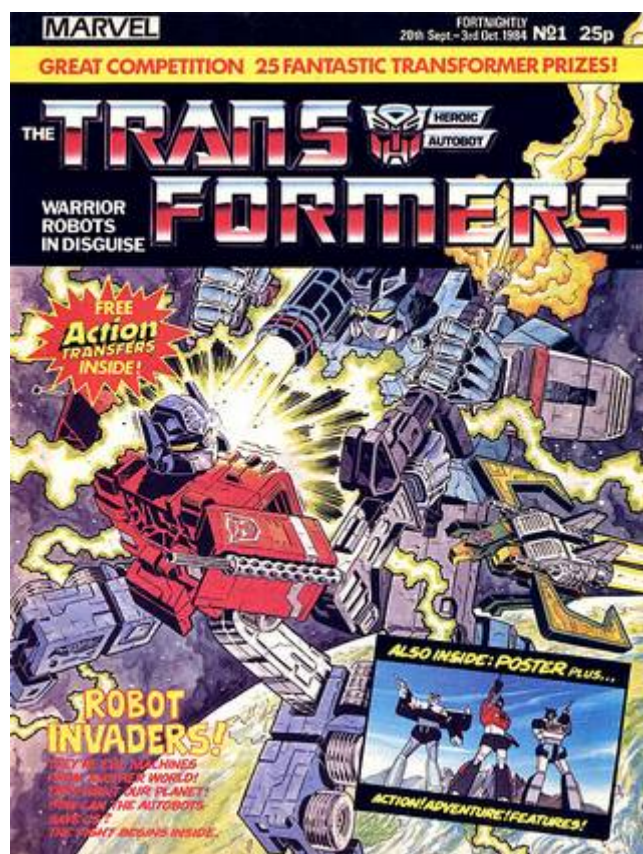
This is underlined most importantly by the official Hasbro Industries (UK) Ltd Catalogue as shown here. This was produced in late spring and included in the stock of the Autobot “Robot Cars” at the very least that



was aimed at the autumn/Christmas market (and very likely included in the Strike Planes, Soundwave, and the first lot of thin-gun/blue-roller Primes and the like.

What really confused things was that the UK stock was actually USA stock - the boxes and contents were identical with the UK catalogue inserted, so in some cases people got the USA catalogue or even both, whilst in others none was included at all. Of course this was worse in 1985 when the USA catalogue turned up in UK stock (still USA boxes mind) with a tonne of toys we would never get.

The full UK line was all backed up by the launch of the UK comic in September 1984, which included adverts from Hasbro. It is interesting that the company listed isn't Hasbro UK or Hasbro Europe, but is Hasbro Industries (UK) Ltd, of Wokingham (this was the detail stated on the adverts in the comic also).



However it is Hasbro UK/Europe whose records state that the launch was 1985. This is explainable easily however as TransFormers didn't in fact launch in Europe until 1985 (in some parts bizarrely Jetfire was

Autobot Commander and Optimus Prime was omitted from the range entirely).

However 1985 saw the UK line expand enormously with the rest of the USA 1984 range plus the 1985 Autobot Cars, 1985 Minibots, Jetfire, 1985 Strike Planes plus the Insecticons, Astrotrain, Blitzwing and four of the five Dinobots making an appearance on our shores.

## More Than A Convention... By Simon Plumbe

Most of you will know about Auto Assembly as being a convention that takes place every year and hopefully a lot of you will have joined us in the past and will be planning on joining us in 2007 and beyond. However, once each convention is over, we don't sit on our laurels until the next event - we keep ourselves busy throughout the year with quite a few activities that many of you might not be aware of...

### Fanzines

There's more to our fanzine output than what you hold in your hand right now! As well as The Cybertronian Times, we also produce a spin-off fiction based fanzine, MiniCT which features re-prints from some of the back issues of CT which are no longer available as well as new content and we are also going to be producing some FREE downloadable titles through the website starting with an Auto Assembly: Target 2006 fiction special available soon!

### Website

As well as being a source of information about the convention, the Auto Assembly website has articles, artwork, downloads, fiction, interviews and more! The website also acts as a portal for most of our online activities including our podcasts and forum...

### Podcasts

We couldn't resist really...! A couple of months ago, we took the plunge and entered the world on broadcasting and launched the



Auto Assembly Podcast. Originally intended to be full of news and information on the conventions and hosted by myself and Sven, they've evolved into online radio shows in their own right and each show is packed with Transformers chat, competitions, music, interviews, guest appearances from Transformers voice actors as well as convention news and updates... and even better, the MP3s are FREE to download!!

## Forum

This is the main hub of activity between conventions and it's a thriving community of Transformers fans! Launched almost three years ago (just after Auto Assembly 2003), it was original intended to be a support forum for the convention but has grown into a fully-fledged discussion board in its own right. Come along and join in the daily discussion about all aspects of Transformers and everything else you could possibly imagine... just be prepared to leave your sanity at the door!

## Meets

A spin-off that came about from the Forum... some of our members missed the social aspect of meeting up with other fans at the convention so we occasionally hold informal meet-ups in Birmingham and Leeds every couple of months. We usually just hang out, go toy shopping and grab something to eat together as a small group. Nothing elaborate, but still fun to see a group of TF fans stalking staff in Toys R Us on a Saturday afternoon...!

## Online Sales

Finally, throughout the year we sell convention merchandise such as pin badges, current and back issues of CT, postcards etc. through the Auto Assembly website, as well as a few other items including the TransformersCon 2004 Exclusive Comic. Any money we raise through this goes directly towards the next convention.

\* \* \*

While we know there are a lot of other Transformers fan groups active throughout

the UK as well as ourselves with several represented at the convention today, if you're in need of a Transformers fix from Auto Assembly, there's plenty to get your teeth into between conventions all year round and the starting point for all of it is at [www.autoassembly.org.uk](http://www.autoassembly.org.uk)

## Transformers: The (Live Action) Movie By Sven Harvey

It seems like an eternity since the first rumours of a live action/CGI movie based on the TransFormers franchise hit the fan community.

Mutliple fans had even started doing their own CG work based on characters we knew for "demo reels" and the like after Mainframe shoehorned CG renditions of some of the G1 characters into Beast Wars.

Then came the revelation that Steven Spielberg was involved. Its probably an urban legend that he actually went to Hasbro to ask for the license and being as DreamWorks who won the license got folded into Paramount this year, its at least looking like it was going to attract a decent budget.

This has been confirmed and the REAL driving force behind the project, Don Murphy and his partner-in-crime Tom DeSanto who have basically been trying to get the whole thing off the ground.



Well the film has been given a green light by Paramount and filming will just be underway

by the time you read this, with various locations being used. One major location announcement was that of White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico.

One massive piece of good news is that the effects are being handled by Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) who have minor productions such as Star Wars and Star Trek under their belts.

Michael Bay is apparently starting to audition members of the original TransFormers TV show and movie voice actor cast, so Peter Cullen and co may yet make it through to the movie, but the major concern is that they may sound too old now.

It appears the US Military are allowing the first film outing of the F-22 stealth fighter... Which is rather futuristic in at least one way - all the weaponry is hidden behind panels in the aircraft until being put into use... How very Cybertronian! That'll be Starscream then!

Prime apparently is a lorry still, but I am a little concerned that he may no longer be red. That would be a huge mistake and I hope that his final colouration is far more... well Optimus like! A battle currently exists in the script between Prime and Megatron in downtown Los Angeles. It will be interesting to see how much of Los Angeles will survive!

Scorponok is due to make an appearance at least in one desert scene turning soldiers into corpses through skewering and the odd blending. Oh and if Soundwave is still in the movie, he will not be a helicopter but won't be mass shifting (changing size) either. Let's look on the bright side though... Arcee didn't make it through the re-writes.

News on cast and crew is filtering through, so here is a digest for you (bear in mind that only one cast member seems to have a definite role, which is noted - all the others have had "fake" character names attached to throw people off the scent but their actual characters in the movie have yet to be revealed at the time of writing):

**"Headline" Crew:** (all confirmed)

Director: Michael Bay (The Rock, The Island, Bad Boys 1 & 2, Armageddon, and more worryingly, Pearl Harbour)

Screenplay Writer (First Draft): John Rogers (Catwoman, The Core, Jackie Chan Adventures TV Show)

Screenplay Co-Writer (final): Roberto Orci (The Island, Mission Impossible III, Legend Of Zorro, Alias TV show and is alleged to be following TransFormers with Star Trek XI... Don't even get me started on that!)

Screenplay Co-Writer (final): Alex Kurtzman (Orci's writing partner so CV is basically the same!)

Executive Producer: Steven Spielberg (there is not enough paper in the world to list the movies...)



Executive Producer: Brian Goldner (Exec from Hasbro)

Producer: Tom DeSanto (X-Men, X-Men 2)



Producer: Don Murphy (Natural Born Killers, League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen)

Producer: Lorenzo di Bonaventura (Matrix Revisited video, Constantine, Doom, Four Brothers)

“Line” Producer: Ian Bryce (Batman Returns, Speed, Saving Private Ryan, Spider-Man, The Island)

**Cast:** (NOT all confirmed)

Shia LaBeouf – Spike Witwicky (Constantine, Charlie's Angels Full Throttle, I Robot)



Jon Voight (Mission Impossible, Tomb Raider, National Treasure)

Josh Duhamel (Las Vegas Tv show, Win a Date with Tad Hamilton!)

Travis van Winkle (Confession)

John Robinson (Elephant, Lords Of Dogtown)

Megan Fox (Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen)



Michael Clarke Duncan (The Green Mile, Daredevil, Sin City)



Glen Morshower (24)

Kevin Dunn - Sparkplug Whitwicky (All The Kings Men, Godzilla)

Ethan Phillips (Star Trek: Voyager TV show, Star Trek: First Contact, The Island)

Bernie Mac (Oceans Eleven, Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle, Head of State)

Tyrese Gibson (Flight Of the Phoenix, 2 Fast 2 Furious, Four Brothers)

Amaury Nolasco (Prison Break)

John Turturro (Monk Tv Show, The Big Lebowski, Collateral Damage)

Rachael Taylor (See No Evil, Man-Thing)



## Toy Review - Landbullet By Sven Harvey

This Decepticon - known as Crumplezone (in Voyager size class at £20) in the west (has Cyclonus' Mini-Con been upgraded?), but begs the question... what the hell is he supposed to be? Reliant are making cars in the future again? Oh dear... hardly impressive is it?

Stick the force chip in the back and it actually gets worse with the engine turbines facing the wrong way and revealing that they are missile launchers.



Put it in robot mode... and... what the hell is that? I suppose if the vehicle mode had been half way sensible or decent this would be, but it isn't. Its Galaxy Force's Reliant Robin. Avoid.

If you absolutely HAVE to get this putrid mould at least avoid this puke coloured green and either go for the far less eye destroying Dark Crumplezone or try out the **BotCon** repaint with a new head mould... as Optimus Primal... but you have gotta ask... Optimus Primal??? Have the **BotCon** team completely lost it?

Landbullet - 2/10





Artwork by Guido Guidi

- [www.tfauctions.com](http://www.tfauctions.com) -

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