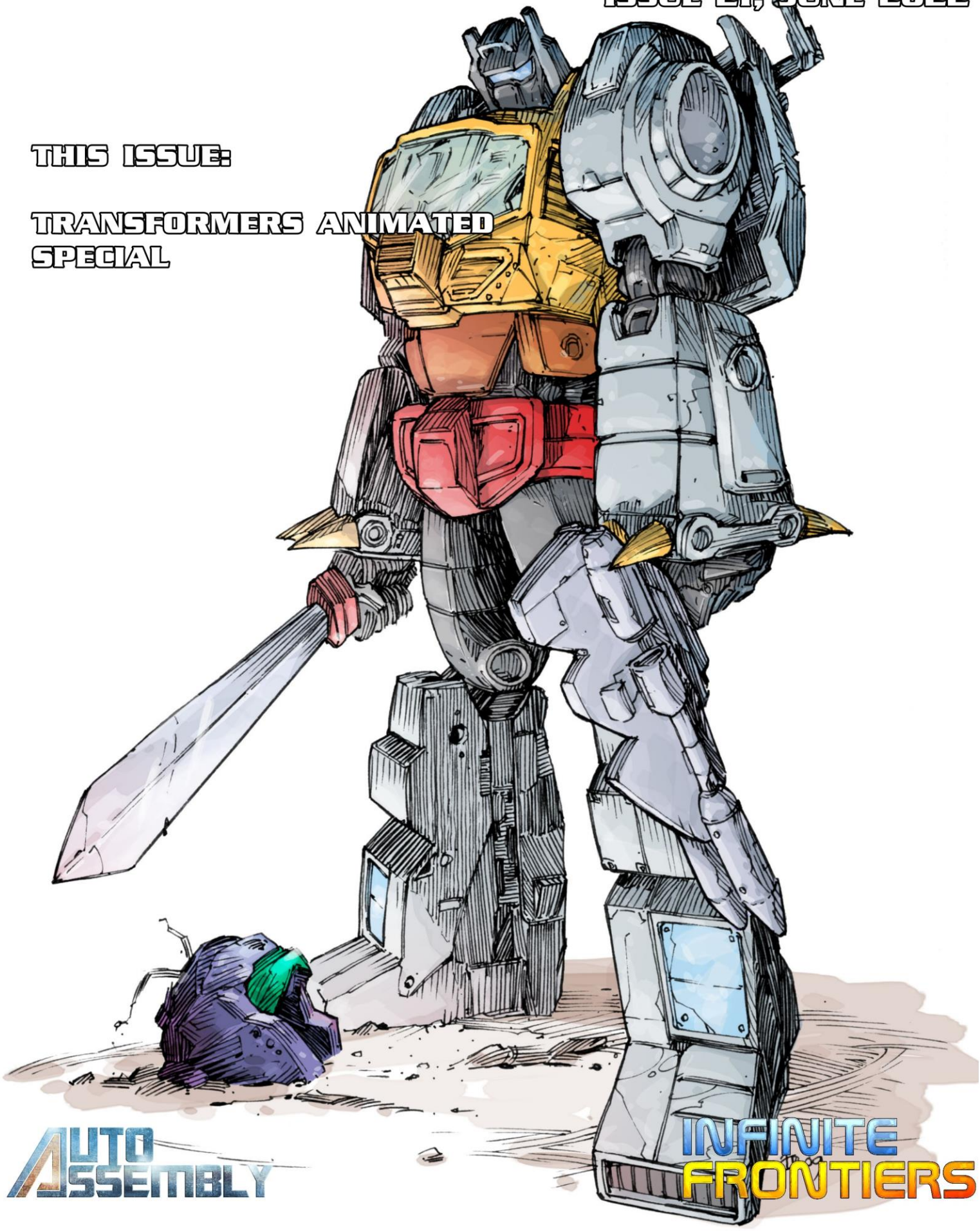
THE CYBERTRONIAN TIMES

ISSUE 21, JUNE 2022



THIS ISSUE:

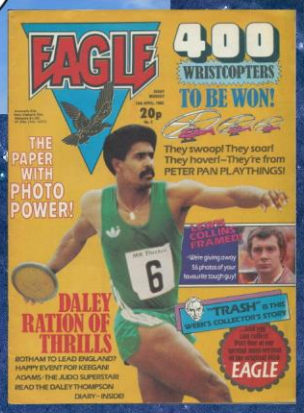
TRANSFORMERS ANIMATED SPECIAL

AUTO ASSEMBLY

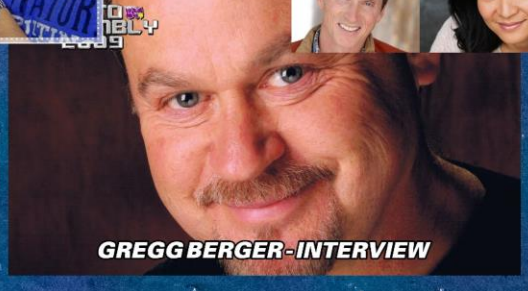
INFINITE FRONTIERS

INFINITE FRONTIERS

Your one-stop geek website for video games, sci-fi, movies, reviews, toys, television, and much, much more!



Our YouTube channel has modern and retro game reviews, vlogs, unboxings, convention footage, interviews and more!



https://www.infinitefrontiers.org.uk
https://www.youtube/com/c/infinitefrontiers

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INTRODUCTION

We're back with another issue and it's all change again here at The Cybertronian Times. For the last few issues we've been running an experiment with the fanzine, as we shifted focus towards fiction and comic strips. While it's been fun doing this, we've decided to revert back to our original format, mixing the fiction and comic strips with articles, reviews and other content.

In the long run, this will be easier for us to create the magazine for you, our readers. While we have ample fiction and comic strips in our archives to see us through for a long time to come, we know that this won't last forever. Without plenty of new material, sooner or later we'd have to make a shift in focus or spend more time looking for new contributors than we'd have time to write content ourselves. At least now we can do what we do best and hopefully write great features for you.

We also want to apologise for the delay in the release of this issue. Many of our team have had some matters to deal with in their personal lives which have left us short staffed across all of our projects resulting in both this and our other fanzine, Vita Player Magazine, running behind schedule. We do hope to be back to more frequent releases very soon though.

On a sad note, we were heartbroken to learn of the passing of Transformers Animated Art Director Derrick J Wyatt. Derrick joined us at our convention back in 2010, courtesy of a sponsorship arrangement from Steve and Dave Mapes. He delighted fans in attendance with talk of his work on Transformers Animated and the creation of all the designs used on of the show. His passing will leave a vast hole in the lives of everyone who met him. As a tribute, this issue will feature a selection of artwork and comic strips in memory of this kind, generous man.

As part of this, we're looking back to our old digital-only fanzine *CT Alpha* to bring you some of the comic strips that were exclusive to that publication starting with a Transformers Animated tale set in what could have been the show's fourth season. Sadly this ongoing story only reached four chapters, with the second story left unfinished but we want to bring this here to you so you can enjoy what many of you may have missed first time around.

And keeping with the Transformers Animated theme, we also have a couple of single-page strips from comic artist Lee Bradley from our 2012 comic that is now out-of-print.

Unfortunately, we’re not able to bring you the return of Combat Colin as promised for this issue. Lew Stringer's hapless wannabe soldier *will* be making a return to The Cybertronian Times very soon, but unfortunately Lew’s busy schedule meant that it wasn’t possible this time.

Simon Plumbe
Editor

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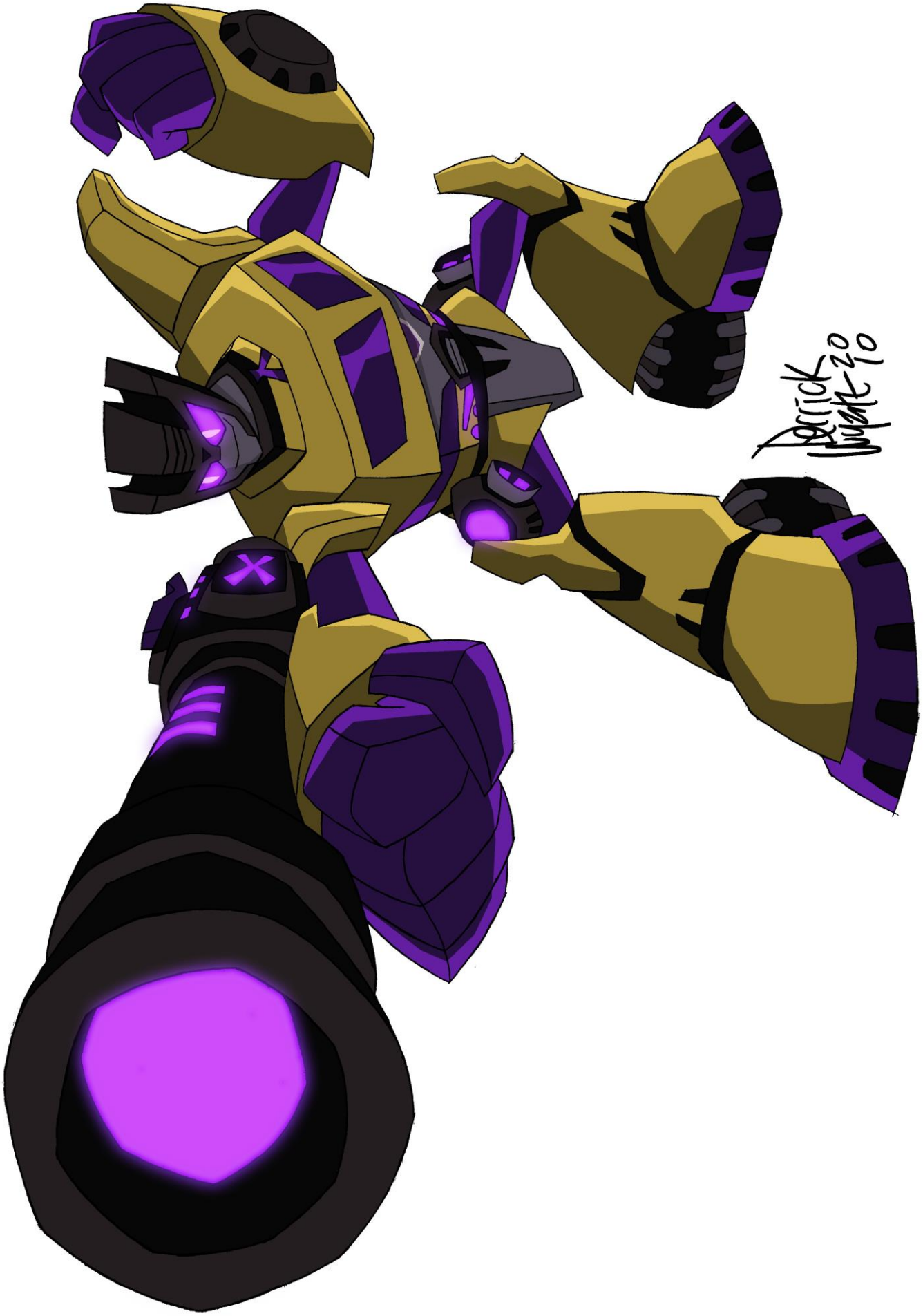
“SWINDLE”
by Derrick J Wyatt



"ROLL-CALL"
SCRIPT / ART / COLOURS
LEE BRADLEY

www.leebradley.com

THE CYBERTRONIAN TIMES AND SUSTAINABILITY
by Simon Plumbe

When you think about geek culture, you don't immediately think about the environmental impact that your hobby might have on the world around you. But it's something that we've been thinking about more and more here at Infinite Frontiers. And we're going to be covering the subject of sustainability across all our platforms in the coming months in an extensive series of articles and special features…

While many of you only know us from this fanzine or the Auto Assembly convention or website, Infinite Frontiers has been an active organisation for over 30 years. We started back in August 1989 as a small Doctor Who fan club and since that time we've run fan clubs, conventions, produced paper and digital fanzines, websites and even software.

During that as well as evolving what we have produced, we've had to deal with the changing nature of what we create and its impact on the environment. Right from the start we produced paper fanzines - our Doctor Who club produced a small newsletter/magazine for our members, designed on an old Amstrad CPC6128 and photocopied. At its peak it was only 12 pages in size and had a relatively small print run but we sold spare copies at another local club. But some 30+ years later and we *still* have some of these spares leftover…

In the 1990s, our focus was on Star Trek - running a club, convention, paper fanzines and creating The Final Frontier. This was a disk-based magazine for the Amiga range of 16-bit computers. While we made this available freely, we also sold copies directly and through companies across the world. But with each issue spanning as many as five 3.5" disks and lasting for ten issues, you can imagine the resources it took up. Even with the title being copied freely across the globe, there were still thousands of disks being used worldwide for the magazine to be circulated. Bear in mind that back then, disks were copied and *mailed* worldwide for most users rather than distributed by any other means.

Moving on again and our biggest project in recent years has been the Transformers convention Auto Assembly, which ran from 2000-2015 and at its peak drew over 1,000 fans from all over the world to the event. A weekend celebrating the Transformers franchise with traders, fans and guests from the comic and television shows became a firm fixture on the convention circuit. One thing that we did each year was produce a series of postcards to give to all our attendees, as well as this magazine, The Cybertronian Times. As the event grew in size, at our peak it meant us handing out 1,000 magazines, 1,000 self-created comics and 4,000 postcards. Not to mention the personalised name badges/passes. Despite the quality of them, it's safe to assume that not all of these were kept after the convention.

We've since shifted focus with our work, and since 2015 everything we do is online. We run three websites (at one point we had five although two of these were closed down) and our YouTube channel. All of our old software is still available for those who are interested, but only as digital downloads and we've stopped producing printed fanzines.

As you're reading this, it's obvious that The Cybertronian Times continued after the convention ended. However, it is now a free digital only release. With the change in distribution model, we don't know what the readership is, but even with energy consumption requirements for hosting the file on our server it's a lot less harmful than the damage done by a printed copy.

This brings me on to our latest title - Vita Player Magazine - released late last year. As soon as we announced it, we were asked if a paper version was going to happen. As much as we loved the idea of a print-based magazine dedicated to the PlayStation Vita the reality is that it's no longer a sensible move for us to think about physical fanzine production here at Infinite Frontiers.

We're not the same team we were back in 1989 or even back in the early 2000s. Our work now is targeted at a global audience and that brings new challenges. If we went down the print-based route we'd have the complications of shipping, complicated further by new tax regulations recently introduced that affect anything shipped out of the UK. That's before even considering the environmental impact of actually sending magazines around the world.

But from a production standpoint, there's still the issue of resources. Our goal with Vita Player Magazine was to produce a new issue every two months, with at least 48 pages in each. Even if we were to print this in A5 format, that's 12 sheet of paper *per copy*.

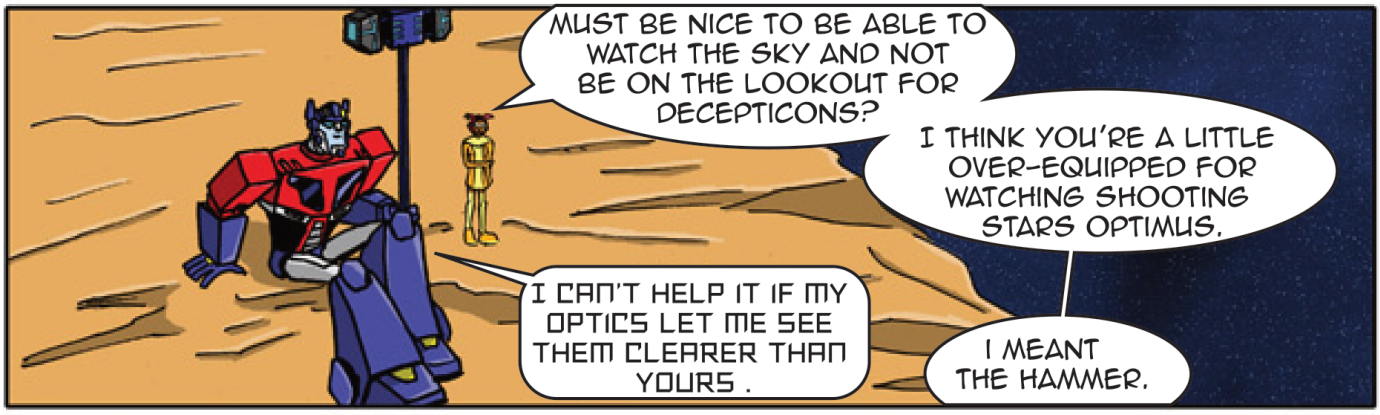
We don't know what sort of print run we would have to anticipate but based on the interest we've had online, we'd certainly look at 1,000 for a comfortable first print. 12,000 sheets of paper. But that's not the most serious point. Regardless of whatever we might print, we'd still have to *sell* those copies and have additional packing material to contend with.

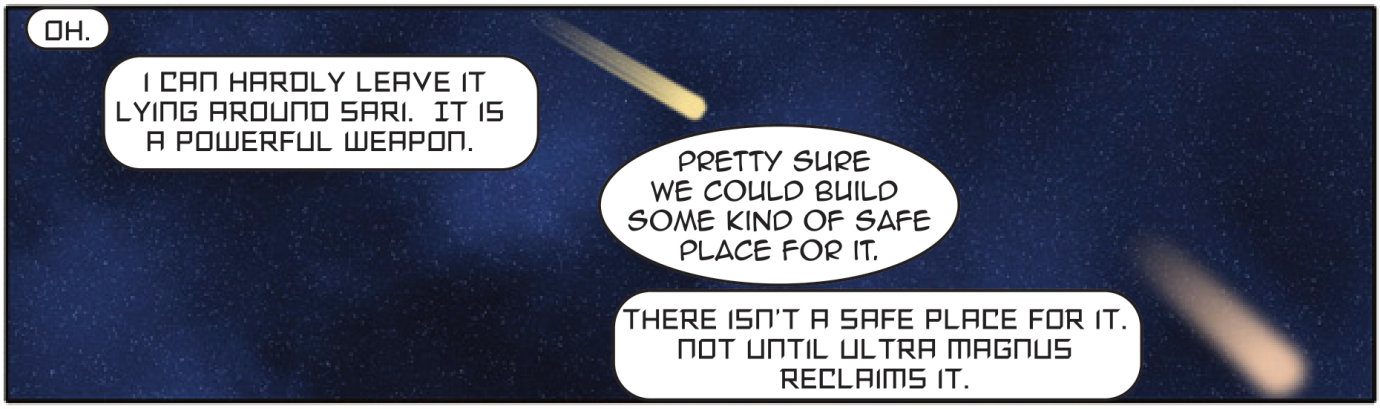
There may still be a healthy fanbase for the PS Vita, but if those copies don't sell then we are stuck with magazines that will eventually be sent for recycling or just left in storage gathering dust. We faced the same problem with Auto Assembly and The Cybertronian Times. Most printers work in fixed quantities, and these rarely matched up with what we needed so we had little choice but to order more than our requirements and we've got surplus stocks dating back over a decade. They can't be resold and with no further events coming from us, these will eventually head to the local recycling centre.

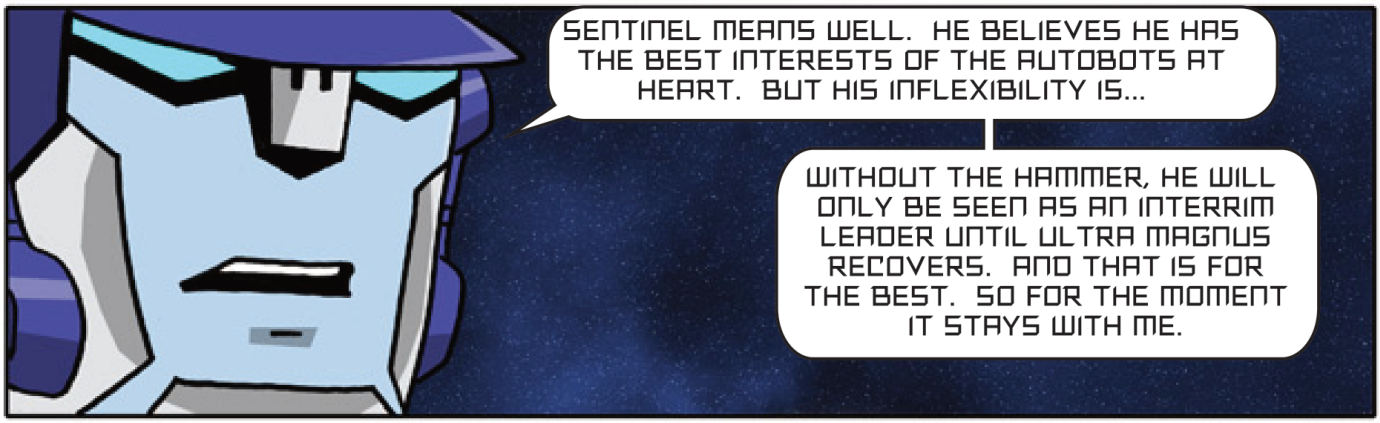
So, for Vita Player Magazine and The Cybertronian Times we made the conscious decision to produce them as digital only releases. From a creative point of view digital has removed an incredible number of restrictions we had in the past. We're not constrained by page counts (although we do work in multiples of four as if we were creating for print), but we also no longer print off proofs to test the magazines while they're in development. As the finished titles are being released as PDF files, we simply create pre-release PDFs to check as we're going along.

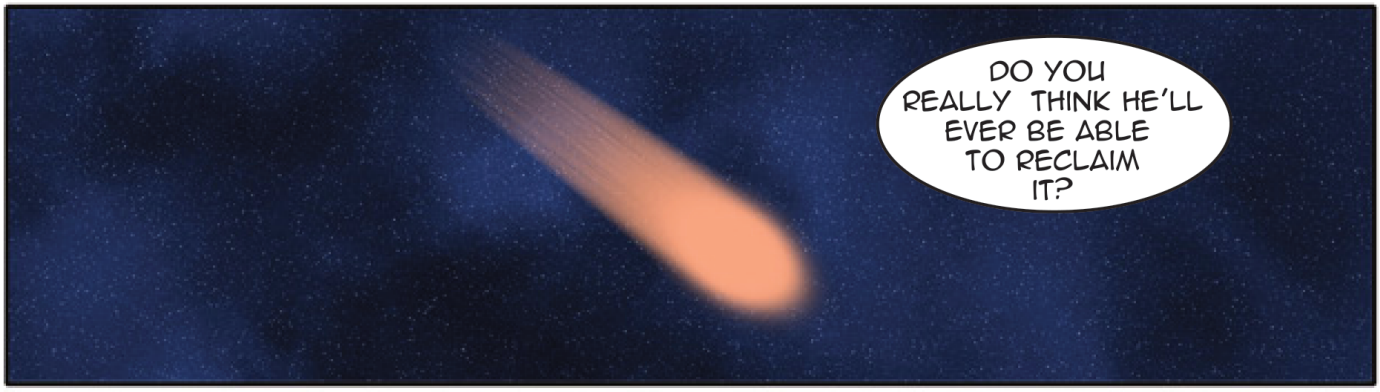
The finished magazines are hosted on our own server, but we make then available to download and read offline. The files are small enough to enable us to keep a large library available at all times, while keeping download times down to a minimum, saving energy usage for readers.

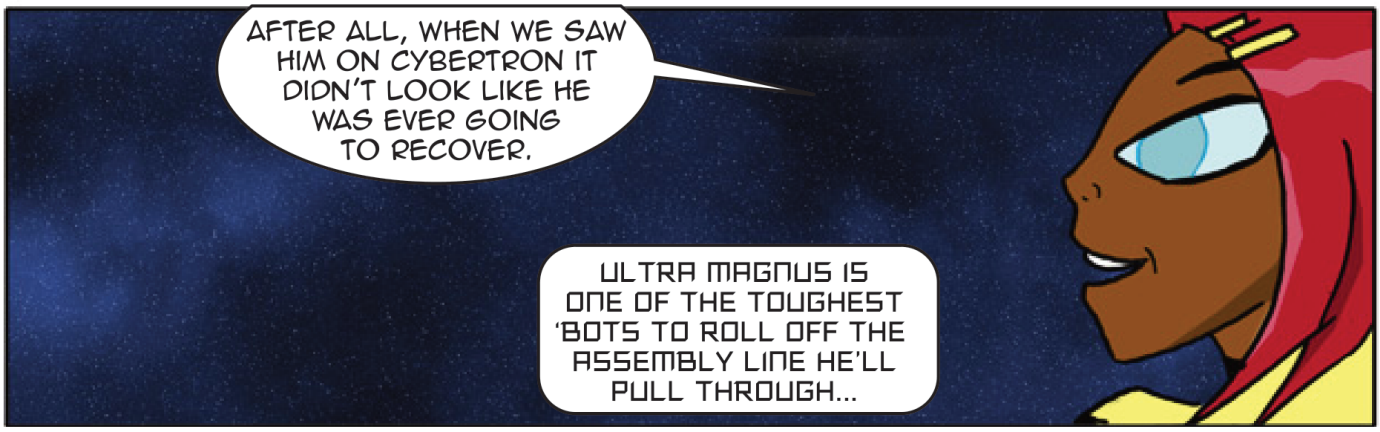
We know there are probably more things that we can do to improve both magazines further in the future and be even more efficient in the way they are produced and distributed. But for now, this new approach marks an exciting time for us as we move our publishing arm into the future.


MUST BE NICE TO BE ABLE TO WATCH THE SKY AND NOT BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR DECEPTICONS?
I THINK YOU'RE A LITTLE OVER-EQUIPPED FOR WATCHING SHOOTING STARS OPTIMUS.
I CAN'T HELP IT IF MY OPTICS LET ME SEE THEM CLEARER THAN YOURS .
I MEANT THE HAMMER.

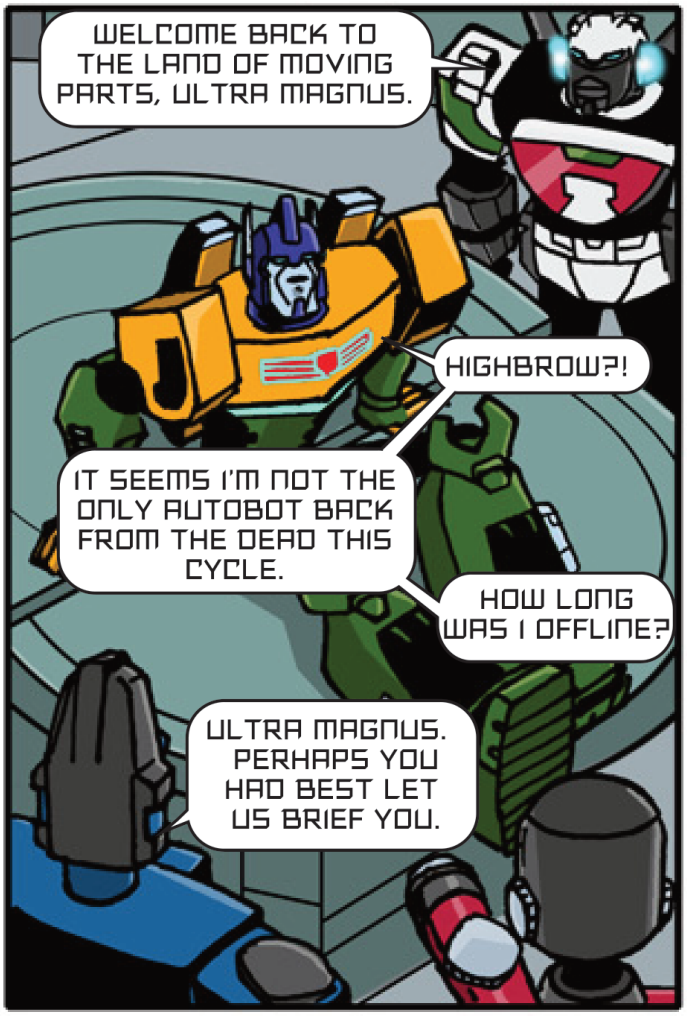

OH.
I CAN HARDLY LEAVE IT LYING AROUND SARI. IT IS A POWERFUL WEAPON.
PRETTY SURE WE COULD BUILD SOME KIND OF SAFE PLACE FOR IT.
THERE ISN'T A SAFE PLACE FOR IT. NOT UNTIL ULTRA MAGNUS RECLAIMS IT.


SENTINEL MEANS WELL. HE BELIEVES HE HAS THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE AUTOBOTS AT HEART. BUT HIS INFLEXIBILITY IS...
WITHOUT THE HAMMER, HE WILL ONLY BE SEEN AS AN INTERRIM LEADER UNTIL ULTRA MAGNUS RECOVERS. AND THAT IS FOR THE BEST. SO FOR THE MOMENT IT STAYS WITH ME.


DO YOU REALLY THINK HE'LL EVER BE ABLE TO RECLAIM IT?


AFTER ALL, WHEN WE SAW HIM ON CYBERTRON IT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE HE WAS EVER GOING TO RECOVER.
ULTRA MAGNUS IS ONE OF THE TOUGHEST 'BOTS TO ROLL OFF THE ASSEMBLY LINE HE'LL PULL THROUGH...

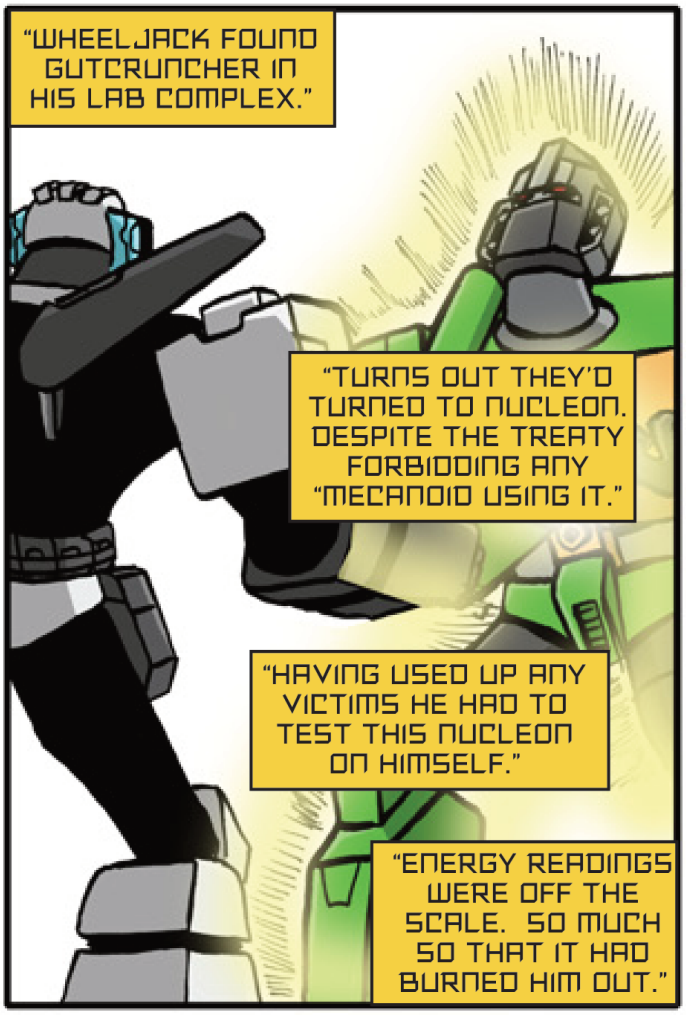
TRYPTICON PRISON, CYBERTON.
HHUUUUHH!

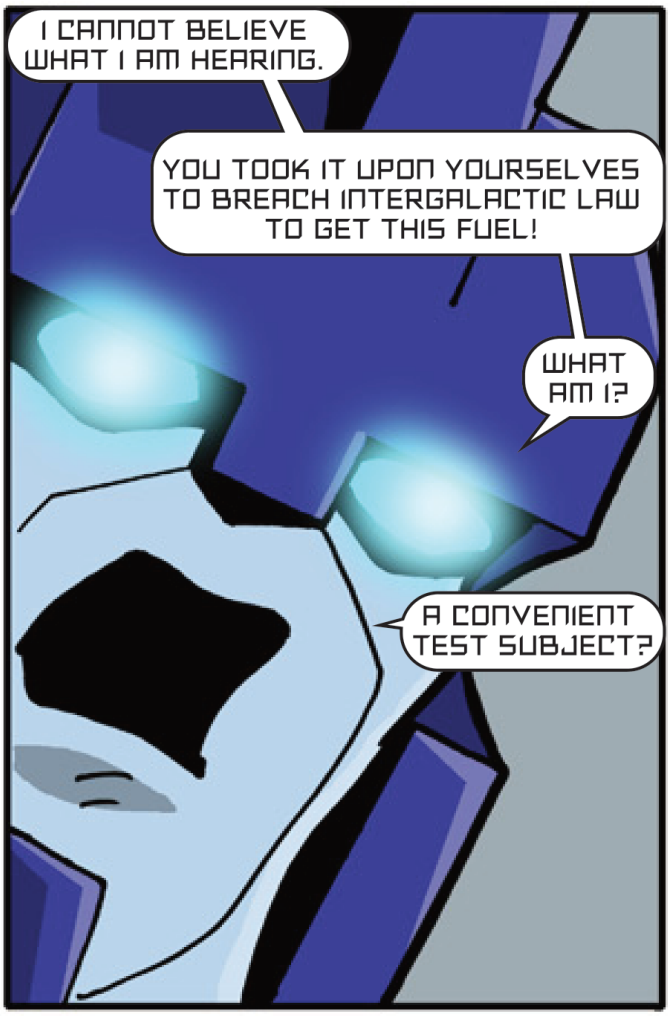

WELCOME BACK TO THE LAND OF MOVING PARTS, ULTRA MAGNUS.
HIGHBROW?!
IT SEEMS I'M NOT THE ONLY AUTOBOT BACK FROM THE DEAD THIS CYCLE.
HOW LONG WAS I OFFLINE?
ULTRA MAGNUS. PERHAPS YOU HAD BEST LET US BRIEF YOU.

MASQUERADING AS LONGARM PRIME, SHOCKWAVE WAS ABLE TO CAPTURE ME.
USING INFORMATION TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM MY OWN PROCESSOR HE WAS ABLE TO STAY HIDDEN AND BECOME OUR INTELLIGENCE OFFICER.
AND WITH THAT INFORMATION...

"HE WAS ABLE TO ENSURE HE WAS PERFECTLY PLACED TO ASSASINATE YOU."
"YOU MEAN ATTEMPT?"
"NO. ULTRA MAGNUS YOU WERE QUITE DEAD."
"DECEPTICON INGENUITY KILLED YOU, BUT IT WAS BY DECEPTICON INGENUITY THAT YOU WERE REVIVED."

"WE'D KNOWN FOR CYCLES THAT THE DECEPTICONS HAD FOUND SOME "WONDER FUEL" THAT GAVE RISE TO SOME...INTERESTING RESULTS."


"WHEELJACK FOUND GUTCRUNCHER IN HIS LAB COMPLEX."
"TURNS OUT THEY'D TURNED TO NUCLEON. DESPITE THE TREATY FORBIDDING ANY "MECANOID USING IT."
"HAVING USED UP ANY VICTIMS HE HAD TO TEST THIS NUCLEON ON HIMSELF."
"ENERGY READINGS WERE OFF THE SCALE. SO MUCH SO THAT IT HAD BURNED HIM OUT."


I CANNOT BELIEVE WHAT I AM HEARING.
YOU TOOK IT UPON YOURSELVES TO BREACH INTERGALACTIC LAW TO GET THIS FUEL!
WHAT AM I?
A CONVENIENT TEST SUBJECT?

"THIS WAS NO RASH MOVE MAGNUS."
"WHEELJACK SIFTED THROUGH GUTCRUNCHER'S MEMCORE AND IMPROVED ON THE MAKEUP OF THE NUCLEON."
"THE FACT YOU ARE ALIVE, AND HE IS NOT, IS PROOF ENOUGH OF HIS GOOD WORK."

EXACTLY! PROOF!
YOU GET TO HEROICALLY UNVEIL THE REBORN ULTRA MAGNUS AND THEN THE QUESTIONS GET ASKED.
YOU FOOLS WOULD BRING DOWN THE AUTOBOT COUNCIL AND ELITE GUARD.
YOUR SUCCESSOR, SENTINEL PRIME IS DOING A GOOD ENOUGH JOB OF THAT ALREADY!

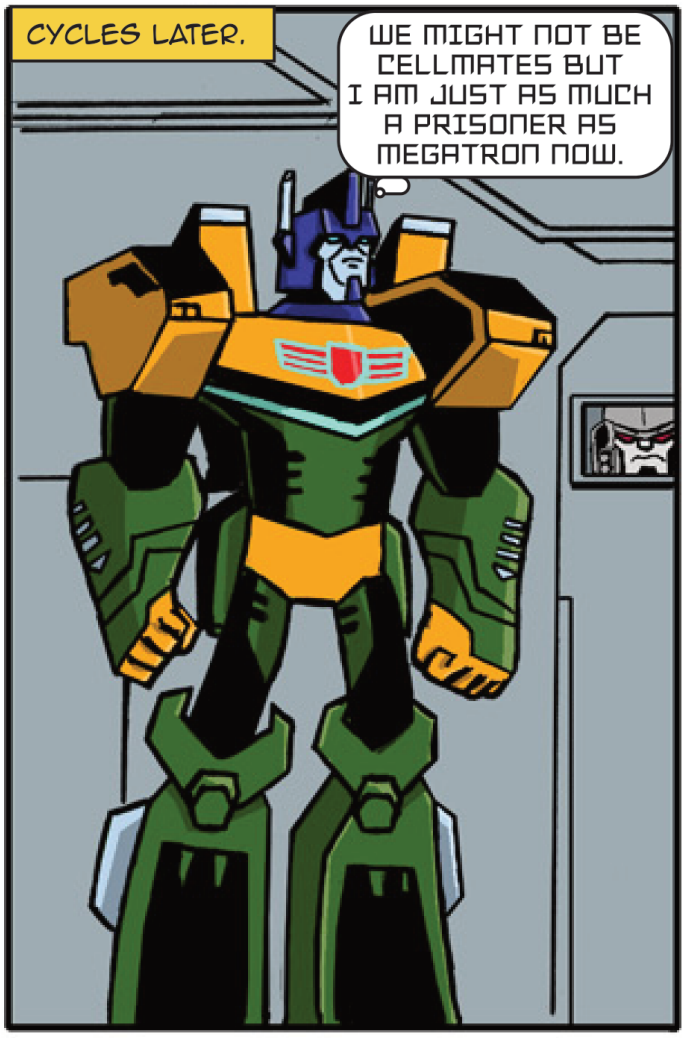
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHAT OUR WORLD WAS LIKE BEFORE?
CYBERTRON NEEDS YOU BACK.
IT NEEDS YOU MORE THAN SOME OUTDATED TREATY THAT THE REST OF THE GALAXY PAYS LIP SERVICE TO.

BY THE ALLSPARK!
WE ARE AUTOBOTS! WE ARE MEANT TO BE BETTER THAN THIS!
URK!!

WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO DO?
KILL YOU?
GOTTA TELL YOU. WITH THAT JUICE FLOWING THROUGH YOU, THAT'S GONNA BE MORE DIFFICULT THAN EVER.
BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

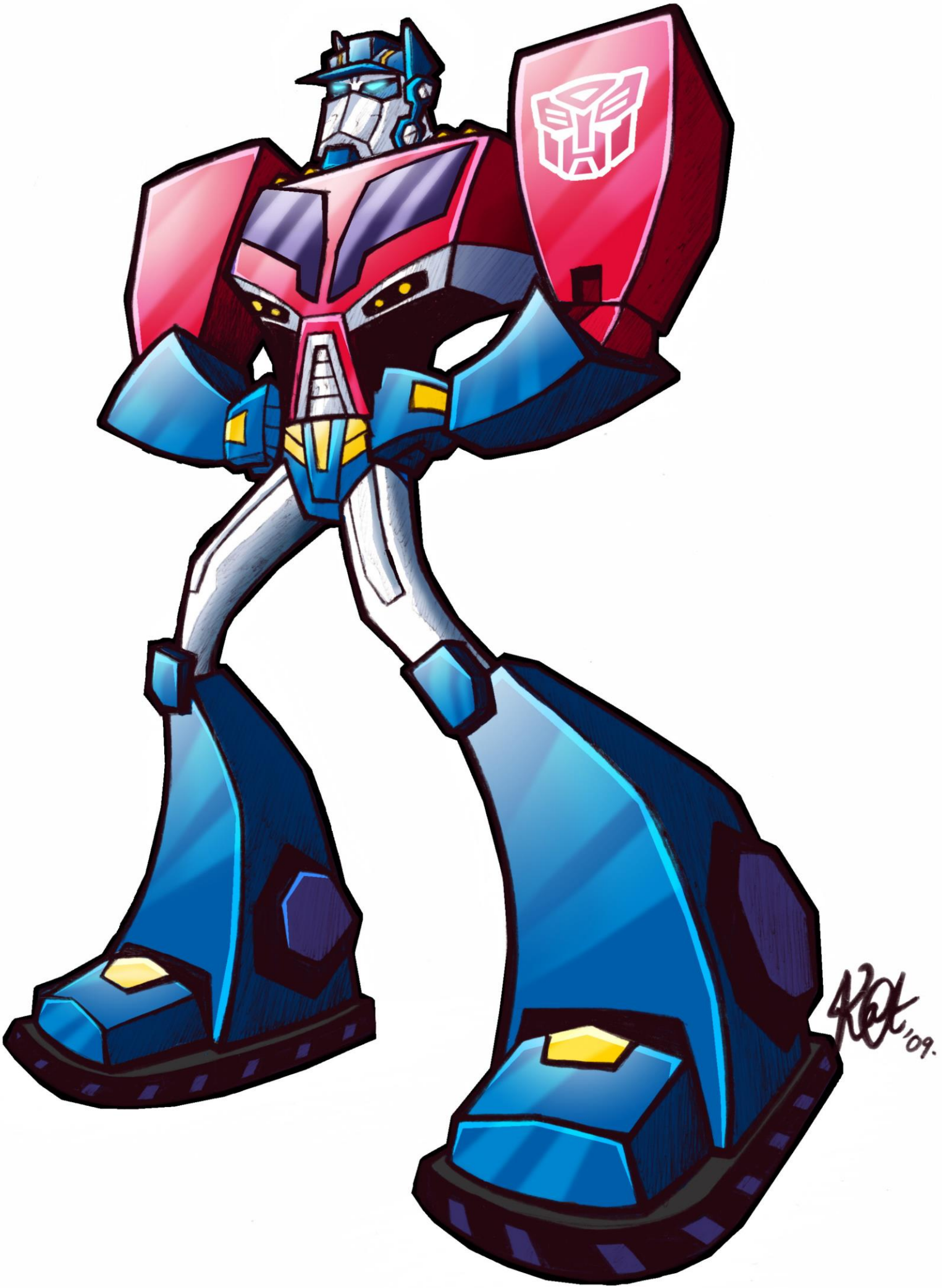
YOU'LL DO NOTHING. AND NEITHER WILL I.
I WILL NOT BE THE ONE TO BRING DOWN OUR WAY OF LIFE.
YOU THOUGHT TO BRING ME BACK SO THAT SENTINEL PRIME COULD BE PUT IN HIS PLACE AGAIN.
FOR AN AUTOBOT TO VALUE LIFE SO CHEAPLY, SADDENS ME GREATLY.

SENTINEL PRIME MAY NOT BE THE LEADER I WAS. BUT IT TOOK ME CYCLES TO LEARN HOW WHAT MAKES A TRUE LEADER. HE MUST BE ALLOWED TO LEARN.
YOU HAVE ACTED WORSE THAN THE DECEPTICONS WE HAVE KEPT INCARCERATED HERE .
I WILL SHARE THEIR PRISON AS MY OWN. I WILL NOT RISK KNOWLEDGE OF MY REBIRTH AND HOW IT CAME ABOUT SPREADING.
YOU WILL SPEAK OF THIS TO NOONE.
THE PEOPLE WILL BE TOLD THAT I SUCCUMBED TO MY INJURIES.


CYCLES LATER.
WE MIGHT NOT BE CELLMATES BUT I AM JUST AS MUCH A PRISONER AS MEGATRON NOW.

ALL TOO EASY ULTRA MAGNUS. YOU ARE AS WEAK MINDED AS OPTIMUS.

EARTH.
"MUST BE NICE TO BE ABLE TO WATCH THE SKY AND NOT BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR DECEPTICONS?"
TRANSFORMERS
ANIMATED
Season Four: Prologue
RALPH BURNS
STORY, INKS
ANDY TURNBULL
KITCHEN SINK!


'09.

"ROCK AND A HARD PLACE"
by Aimee Morgan

It was, Perceptor concluded, an area where his isolating calculus and statistics corroded and withered. He'd just returned his rifle to its rack, still awkward with its purpose as much as weight, when Verity burst in, gasping.

"...that thing... not s'posed to talk about... happening again."

He hastened down the hallway, leaving Verity without a word, running algorithms through his head to calm his circuits. Taking a nanosec at the now buckled doors, he entered the hardcode... and stepped into a chasm of darkness. Claw, clutch, pull, slam, and for all his "celebrated" upgrades, Perceptor was, again, at the mercy of his "savior" flat on his back.

"Outback, that you?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Gnnnnnggg!.... Lad, thought I lost you... was worried... you were gone...! They reached for me but I fought them... don't wander off… it'll overload… stay inside, leave the heads off..." Kup continued to ramble, agitated, as Perceptor cautious to the heightened situation sat up.

The precarious position Prowl had cornered him in had become a balancing act between psychologist, scientist, and warrior. There were only so many masks he could wear and fake simultaneously. Witness to all the carnage, experimentation, and effort on Kup's behalf to restore the comatose war hero, Perceptor alone saw through the crafted facade. The twisted echo of what he once was, a micron drag away from raving.

"... have something to confess...keep getting visions of you, lad...half a shell of who you were... burned into my optics... being stuck here on this planet's messin' with m'processor! Still, it'll be alright...terrible way to go..."

"Fancy that."

Kup laughed. Not his familiar, time-worn, jovial chuckle. It was loud, maniacal, proving his volatile state of mind. Perceptor located his one lifeline but was instantly paralyzed when the old veteran grabbed his shoulders with enthusiasm.

"Nota'worry, lad, we'll get out of here alive... hey..." Recognition bloomed in the seasoned bot's face, an instant crumbling of drunken happiness to darkened hostility. "...you're not Outback!"

With speed mimicking Blurr, Perceptor knocked Kup across the room and dove toward the cygar. With conscientious precision, a risk he was banking his life on, he rolled the small object across the floor to where Kup rose. It tapped his foot lightly.

"Eh?" Apprehensive from his vulnerable position, Perceptor watched Kup reach down, pick the cygar up, recognize it, and smoothly return the pacifier to its perch. "Where's Outback! What have you done with him!" For a brief moment the mirror image of Kup stood valiant over him.

"Kup... it's me, Perceptor." Holding up his hands non-defensively as possible, and revealing real fear in his voice, "Outback ... is gone... remember?" Watching with scrutiny as the drug seeped back into his system, he observed once again the grim realization in Kup's face as the chilling fantasy dissolved, powerless to ease the concrete truth. Perceptor rocked back on his heels in relief, having dodged another bullet. Poignant thoughts rattling his resolve, the real Kup who had schooled a generation of bots had never really returned. He'd died in Kimia. Just as Outback had died on that planet. And

Perceptor was entangled in the parallel, struggling and lost himself.

Walking onto the mostly deserted bridge a cycle later, Verity questioned from the communications station. “Who is Outback? And why does this keep happening to Kup?”

“Some sins of the past can’t be undone.”

“You aren’t going to explain are you?” Verity huffed.

Perceptor flashed her a telling glance, went to the adjacent console, and routinely began to fill out a report to Prowl.

***

“This is a direct order from a superior officer.”

“Superior?”

“In this matter, absolutely.”

“Springer, it’s wrong of us to do this him.” Perceptor reasoned with him.

“You had your chance to voice a protest. What happened? You didn’t and then you ripped those subroutines out of your skull when you decided to play soldier! You just realized who the scrap he used to be…? It’s a bit late to start growing a slaggin’ driveshaft...”

“I can’t continue to do this. I thought I could, but...”

“Don’t think anything, soldier. Magnus is on board. I just tell him what you’ve done, disobeying my explicit order... and Prowl’s... you’ll face charges...”

“And what of your discretions, Springer? Or Prowl’s?”

“You really think Prowl doesn’t have our servos covered?” He paused for effect, it reminded Perceptor eerily of Prowl, as if he was speaking through Springer. “Who do you think contacted me the micron he received your suggestion of full disclosure?” Perceptor’s shoulders slumped in defeat. “You realize if you tell Kup everything, all the gory details... he remembers, and you might as well be aiding his suicide! There’s no room for a conscience here. If you feel burdened by Kup, you won’t be the only one watching him at this point...”

“The point is, it’s ethically wrong.”

“The point is, you didn’t care.”

Perceptor felt several tons of iron on his shoulders as Springer left the room, hanging on his final statement. Had it been because he didn’t care or that he couldn’t bear to see Kup and all the sacrifices for his rescue spent in vain? Or was it something more? His discomfort rose another several notches, his spark felt like it was being crunched between two screws. How much more could he endure before he’d fall beneath the weight?

***

Verity kept concealed as she over heard the tense conversation between the two metal behemoths. It was easy to eavesdrop on this ship, it made her smile at the irony. Antsy to get to her console and use the encryption programs Ultra Magnus had shown her how to use several months before, she waited until Perceptor left before moving. By then her muscles were cramping, but her mind was spinning with possibilities. What secrets would be revealed if she used them on Perceptor’s communiqués with Prowl? Or on the dataspace Magnus had allocated for him when he and the Wreckers had come aboard? Probably good reading, and her curiosity was killing her.

***

“It’s a hypothetical question.” Verity bit her lip as she fished for answers. She knew too much and couldn’t sit and do nothing, but the dilemma was how to ask for advice without actually ‘spilling the beans’. Dealing in secrets was complicated

business, that these were the supposed "good guys" only made it worse.

Her glorified conscience with the firepower to level cities, was reduced to wearily holding his head in his hands. "And again… why are you asking me this?" Magnus was always the investigator, even though his corroded book of laws had clearly not had the hindsight to include a chapter on "Avoiding Verity."

"Look, I don't know what information you've acquired, I dread to ask what it is this time. You attract trouble like a gravity field because you meddle." He pointed his finger at her the same way he had over the last few months, more times than she could count. She responded with a winning smile and further grinned to see Magnus almost wince. "But since you've obviously come here for advice, which probably means you are already involved, I'll give you some. If you really care about a friend, you'll warn them before they do something stupid. Especially if you are privy to information they have tried so hard to conceal. If it affects others, you have a moral obligation to say something. But let them make the choices, don't get entangled in their personal affairs."

"Thanks, Uncle Maggie! You're the best!" She fist-bumped his shoulder, jumped down from the console, and headed toward the doorway satisfied. He hadn't necessarily told her to avoid the problem at all costs. In fact, better. He'd actually given her something useful to work with. And now she had an idea.

"Please, tell me this isn't going to delay our departure for Igue-Moor?" He pleaded as she reached the outer hallway.

***

"You ever wonder why you need that cygar, Kup?" She had found him bringing in supplies through the airlock. He seemed in good spirits, sharp and focused, the exact opposite of his increasingly regular episodes with Perceptor. Hard to believe the frightening side of him only hours before was locked down with a little piece of ordinary metal ornamentation. And whatever was inside it.

"Eh? This thing...?" He took it out and looked at it a moment, and shrugged. "It's... part of my therapy." He placed it back in his mouth.

"For?"

"I got injured a while back." He walked across the room continuing his task, she persisted.

"What happened exactly?"

"Oh, the usual." He reached down and opened a storage locker on the floor. Then paused and laughed a little to himself. "I honestly can't remember it."

"You still injured and running with the Wreckers?" She climbed up onto a bunch of freshly stacked storage lockers and sat down.

"Eh... no."

"So why do you still need it?" He turned to her with a slightly turned up lip.

"You ask a lot of questions..."

"I think you don't ask enough..."

Kup chuckled, "Let's just say I start asking questions, what would you suggest I do with the answers?"

"Make your own choices. Don't let others make them for you. Until then, I think I'd make sure to keep that cygar as if the lives of those around you depended on it."

"You know something I don't?" He took the cygar out of his mouth and looked at it skeptically.

"Does it matter what I know, if it's just some friendly advice?"

"Nah." He went back to his work. And after watching him in silence for a few minutes,

Verity Carlo climbed down from her perch and started to exit the room.

“Hey Kid,” She turned back to see him smiling. “you’re alright.”

And as Kup turned back to his work, Verity saw him look again at the cygar. Telling the truth is hard, but trading realities was even harder.

***

“I gave him a choice. And it isn’t your burden anymore.”

“You told him?!” Perceptor was aghast, ready to run down the hall and find Kup immediately before he did something. His mind raced.

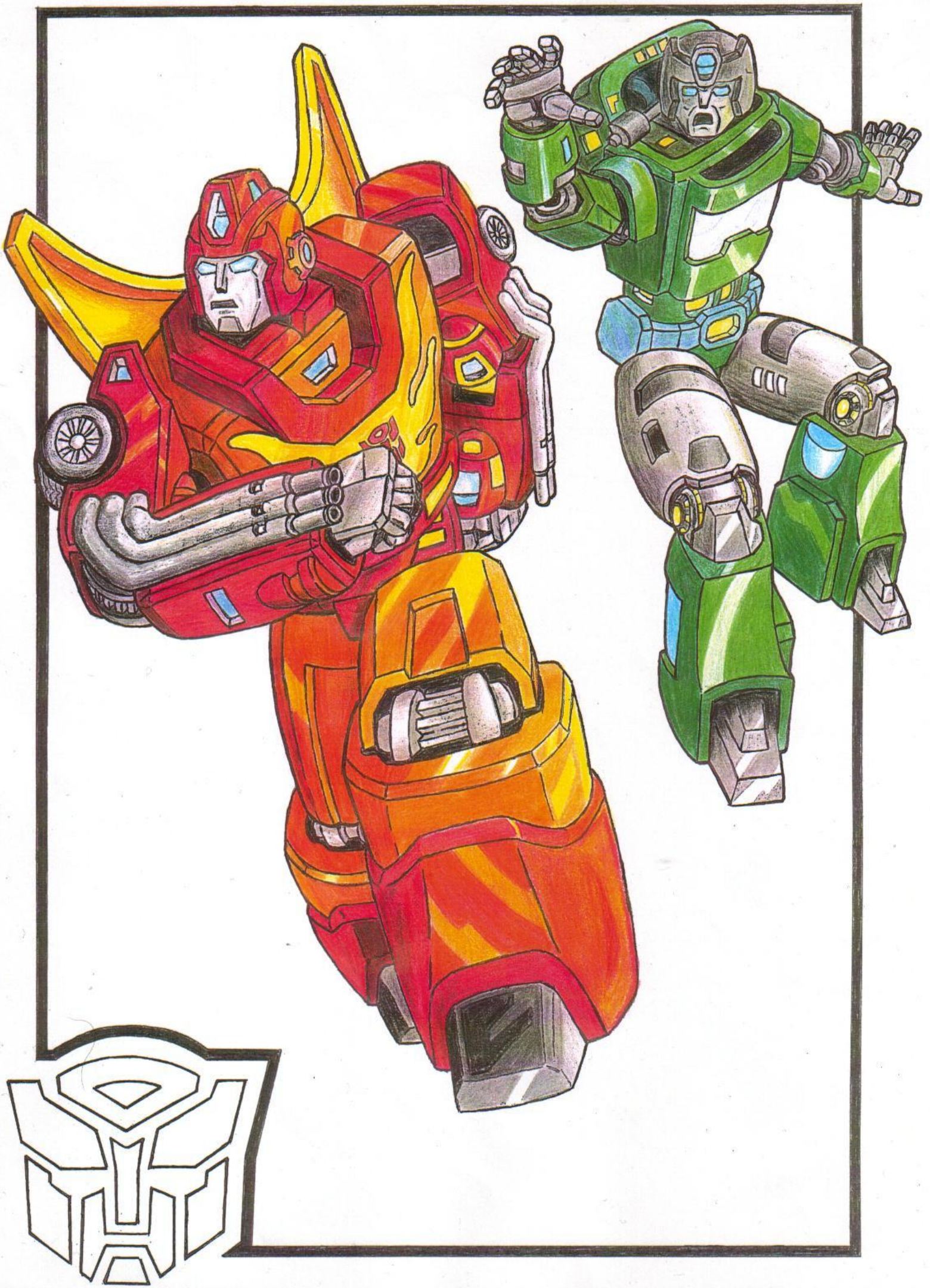
“Not exactly. But enough.” He fought grabbing the small human, and shaking the truth out of her. “Now you can tell Prowl it’s his problem. So he doesn’t keep it over you and make you baby sit him all the time.” She spoke the words naively. No bot told Prowl to do anything. He rattled computations again in his head and it occurred to him she may have given him a glimmer of hope. But it felt too good to be true.

“Why would you do this?”

“Well,” She smiled. “You were stuck between a rock and a hard place. And what are friends for? Besides, I’m sure you helped Kup for the same reason.”

Perceptor stood frozen for a long time after the spunky girl had left the room. For a moment he felt strangely buoyant, as if the weight on his shoulders had been oppositely magnetized. Then hollow, as the truth set in. Nothing had really changed, but the promise of resolution was in place. He was still lost, but it had nothing to do with Verity, Prowl, or Kup. It had to do with his choices and the impossible situation he was in. All the pressures were components in the experiment that was his life. And his life was survival, with costs along the way.

There were no easy answers or fixes, or upgrades to save him from the consequences. While he could see the parallels of his situation similar to Kup’s, the real truth was the playing field had been leveled. It was up to them to dig themselves out. Sure there would be mistakes made along the way, but none of them were really alone?



"ROBOT WAR: WAR OF THE BEASTS"
by Sven Harvey

My name is Optimus Primal, commander of the late CMS Axalon. I am sending out this message in the hope that someone picks it up and can warn others of the evils I experienced in the mission that seems to be ending after over 3 years of bitter conflict on ancient Earth...

***

We had left Cybertron and were about to enter Transwarp. A priority alert message came through. The renegade Predacon mastermind, Megatron, speech impediment and all, and a small band of 5 of his followers had stolen the Golden Discs of Iacon, revered relics kept in the Cybertronian Archives. Since then I have learned that the Golden Discs were actually recordings sent out by the human inhabitants of the organic world called Earth. Sent out by Earth's NASA space programme, the discs contained information about Earth, its inhabitants and location.

The Maximal Elders had insisted that all Maximal spacecraft in range pursued the fleeing "Darkside" and its crew. Puzzled I questioned the order and my mentor made it very VERY clear to me that the recovery of the discs took priority over EVERYTHING. We managed to lock onto the transwarp signature and followed it. The exploratory target planet was forgotten as we caught the Darkside in the transwarp corridor and opened fire. The course of events ran over and over in my head and I wondered why these discs were so damned important.

Of course now I know the truth and as an Optimus and part of the line of Convoys sent out into space, I knew my names heritage. It was on Earth that the first Optimus, the legendary Optimus Prime, founder of the Matrix Council, had battled the original Megatron. Megatron, after being stranded by Prime along with a contingent of Autobots and Decepticons (the assumed ancestors of the Maximals and Predacons respectively), had discovered numerous sources of energon. Energon is a power source that could be used to power equipment, ships and the Autobots and Decepticons themselves if the preferred fuel was not available. We still use energon as a power source but it is used in minute quantities in our bodies. We use fuel primarily and when endowed with an organic disguise mode we can ingest organic food to fuel our forms. Of course, a large source of energon can be used to power an army of conquest, hence Megatron's..., heh... BOTH Megatron's, interest.

Our era's Megatron had made no secret that he followed in the footsteps of the Decepticon founder. I concluded he may be in the depths of a plan to continue the original Megatron's vision. How little did I know...

We came out of transwarp near an organic planet, teeming with life. It wasn't our target planet - that had 3 moons and this planet only had the 2... The star system was hauntingly familiar though... and in that brief moment my mind wondered... In normal circumstances I would have ordered a full scan but we didn't have time as we traded blasts with the renegade Predacon's vessel. Both of our ships were badly damaged as we both struck with powerful plasma cannon fire and fell out of control into the planet's atmosphere. Our main crew, as per standard procedure for our type of exploration mission, were in stasis pods, resting as "protoforms" ready for reforming with disguise modes to match the target planets life. Our bridge was well shielded, but the stasis hold wasn't! As we wrestled to control our descent, we managed to get the stasis pods into a safe orbit, but we could do nothing to stop the Axalon plummeting to the surface of the planet... My 3 main bridge crew and I braced for impact and I found myself wishing that at least 2 of my protoform

crew members, both of whom former Autobots, had been on the bridge to at least advise me!

The Axalons descent was somewhat direct as we managed to pull her nose up at the last minute, landing somewhat the worse for wear some clicks away from the Predacon's ship. Both vessels were very badly damaged. A scan of the planet with what was left of our equipment revealed a surprising and potentially lethal attribute. Massive amounts of energon were scattered around the planet. That's why Megatron came here! But the concentration was so high that only a few minutes of exposure of our robot-like forms to the planet's atmosphere would short out any Maximal or Predacon and send them into stasis-lock! Bizarrely the kind of disguise modes we use on our exploration missions offered protection from the effects of the massive energon fields. The DNA scanners were fired up and scanned the area. My bridge crew chose the forms of a rat, a cheetah and rhinoceros, forms identified by the Axalons computers as being indigenous to Earth, Altair III and a few other similar planets, though the rat form was larger than the Earthen ones but smaller than the similar rodent population of Altair III! I chose the form of a great ape, a primate type creature known on Earth as a gorilla, whose strength and agility I hoped I would find useful...

***

I assumed the Predacons had taken similar steps, taking local forms to deal with the massive amounts of energon radiation. Our first conflict proved my hypothesis and we had hoped that one of the Predacons had been destroyed in the crash when only Megatron, Terrorsaur, Scorponok, Tarantulas and Waspinator engaged myself, Cheetor, Rattrap and Rhinox. We were outnumbered and forced to retreat... On our way back to the Axalon we were confronted by the missing Predacon, Dinobot, who revealed that he had left Megatron's group to challenge me for command of the Axalon's Maximals! The Predacons had followed and interfered in our combat, resulting in Dinobot joining the Maximals. With our numbers equalled Megatron and his Predacons remained locked into a stalemate with us for some time...

***

Shallow victories were won by both sides as falling stasis pods were either rescued by ourselves or stolen by Megatron's troops and twisted into Predacons such as Blackarachnia and Inferno. Fortunately, our ranks were equally swelled by the arrival of Tigatron and Airrazor.

***

After one solar orbit for the planet of our exile we discovered that the planet was the site for an experiment by an advanced alien race. Interference by both the Maximals and Predacons had apparently soiled the experiment, as I found out whilst held prisoner by the mysterious alien's probe.

The aliens set a destruct device in motion to sterilise the planet which was something I could not allow...

The treacherous arachnid partners of Tarantulas and Blackarchania whom we had we captured with a stasis pod had a plan to escape the planet. We adjusted the pod and rigged it to produce a transwarp explosion which we hoped would destroy the very large energy weapon which was being formed from one of the planets "moons".

I launched myself in the pod towards the weapon but its systems had somehow fallen under the influence of Megatron. I could not escape the pod before detonation and I was consumed in the explosion. My physical structure was atomised but somehow my spark kept pulsing retaining the gorilla DNA structure information used for my beast form as I became lost in transwarp space...

***

Apparently, the explosion did its job and removed the danger of the moon-weapon. However, the explosion sent a massive quantum surge across the planet which damaged both the Axalon and Darkside even more than before. Scorponok and Terrorsaur were not seen again after that and the surge mutated the forms of a number of troops on either side. Tarantulas, Megatron, Cheetor and Rattrap had been changed, with new armoured forms and alternative modes. All of the stasis pods were knocked out of orbit and sent plummeting to the planet below, and the quantum surge affected some of the protoforms. Some pods landed safely, damaged in many cases, but many more were not recovered by either the Maximals or Predacons. One pod containing a blank protoform which had been hit full-on by the quantum surge landed near the Axalon. Whilst two more landed in the Predacons territory, with damaged computer systems.

Rhinox somehow managed to retrieve my spark from transwarp space and placed it into the blank protoform. The mixture of the retained gorilla DNA and the effect from the quantum surge resulted in what Rhinox referred to as a Transmetal body as with Rattrap, Cheetor and the others affected.

The damaged computer systems in the two pods that fell near the Darkside malfunctioned badly mixing two animal DNA structures into one in both cases. The two protoforms known as Quickstrike and Silverbolt were persuaded by Megatron to join the Predacons. It was soon clear to Silverbolt however that he did not follow the Predacon nature and quickly defected to the Maximals.

***

Only 3 further pods were recovered and the remainder presumed destroyed. Unfortunately, the first pod we found contained Protoform X who I had hoped had been destroyed. This failed Maximal experiment had escaped the confines of his pod and had taken on a crab like Transmetal form and the name Rampage and was forced by Megatron to join the Predacons.

The second was badly damaged, its systems failing. The Maximal that came forth, named Transmutate, was a confused and twisted being... with incredible power. The poor creature's neural centres had been badly compromised and the resultant intelligence was somewhat below par. She bonded in a way with Silverbolt and to a lesser extent with Rampage. The situation came to a head with SIlverbolt and Rampage exchanging fire and the Transmutate creature attempting to intervene. She was destroyed as the full firepower of the Maximal and Predacon struck her form. To be honest it was probably for the best.

The last pod that survived was another 'blank' which Megatron used to create a new Dinobot after the first had died protecting the original proto-human settlement from an assault by all of the Predacons - initiated as Megatron wanted to prevent the human-race becoming established and getting in the way of the Decepticons in the future, as it had become clear that we were on ancient Earth. It is to be noted that though he was a Predacon, Dinobot's heroism probably saved the human race and with it the future fate of the Earth-bound Autobots led by Optimus Prime.

However the true intent of Megatron was to become clear. Predacon agent Ravage, a former Decepticon under the original Megatron's command, arrived to take Megatron into custody and rescue us to consolidate the diplomacy between the Maximals and Predacons back home. Unfortunately the revelation that Megatron was following the orders, in a way, of the Decepticon leader swayed Ravage to join him and instead of terminating the renegade Predacon leader joined him in an assault on us. His plan unfurled before us as the Ark, the spaceship that had crash landed carrying a small number of Autobots and Decepticons including

Optimus Prime and Megatron, was discovered. Megatron infiltrated the craft.

We gave chase but as we entered the Ark, what can only be described as a 'time-storm' erupted changing the fabric of our existence. It did subside somewhat, which was apparently down to the intervention of Silverbolt and Blackarachnia. We soon discovered that Megatron had attempted to murder Optimus Prime whilst his remained in stasis - not much was left of Prime's head module, though he was now on life support from the Ark. It was thought by Rhinox that Prime would not survive the trauma of a full repair cycle so we had to move his spark to protect it. The only solution was to move his spark into my body. Painful though it was I managed to coax Prime's spark within myself, and Rhinox started the repairs.

The temporary rehousing of Optimus Primes spark in my form had a rather drastic side effect. To accommodate both sparks somehow my body grew in size and metamorphosed me to have 4 modes - robot, gorilla, jet and ground assault. Upon our meeting following this transformation Megatron referred to me as Optimal Optimus... We managed to save Optimus Prime and the ark but the Axalon was destroyed and sent to the bottom of a very deep lake by Megatron's forces. We were forced as a group to take up residence in the ark to protect its inhabitants.

***

Our forces were bolstered eventually after the arrival of Depth Charge. Though his search for Justice in respect to the destroyer of the colony of Omicron Theta, Protoform X and dislike of me led him to take his own path for some time he eventually realised the crucial nature of the mission that had been thrust upon us.

***

Megatron experimented with a technology based on a 'driver' of alien origin. Dubbed Transmetal 2s the technological metamorphosis was tested at first on cloned velociraptors, nick-named cyber-raptors and then used in conjunction with a DNA sample from Dinobot and the captured 'blank' protoform to create a new Transmetal 2 Dinobot. Unfortunately a battle between Megatron, Waspinator, the new Dinobot, Depth Charge and Cheetor, soon after the emergence of the new Dinobot, resulted in Cheetor being thrown into the still active Transmetal 2 creation systems... A massive explosion resulted and Depth Charge returned to the base, Cheetor seemingly destroyed.

Cheetor did survive however but went through a particularly nasty metamorphosis into a Transmetal 2. The driver fell into the hands of Blackarachnia also, who though she was on the Maximals side wanted the Transmetal 2 power for herself. Her experiments with the 'driver' backfired and she almost went permanently off-line, but she came though it becoming a Maximal and Transmetal 2 in the process.

***

In the course of events, Megatron managed to gain entry to the Ark once again in an effort to give himself the advantage that I had gained whilst carrying Prime's spark. His stole the spark of the Decepticon leader, Megatron in the hope that he too would be transformed. Before the any change could take place though he was betrayed by Tarantulas and Quickstrike and was thrown into one of Mount St. Hillary's lava pits.

Tarantulas attempted to destroy the Ark and his inhabitants and in the process he revealed that the Tripredacus council as well as himself, and probably others did not have their origins from the Autobots and Decepticons... a puzzling revelation at best! We managed to stop Tarantulas from his completing his plan even following the reappearance of Megatron from the lava, now as nearly as large as myself with an alternative form as a huge mythical beast that the humans called a Dragon if I recall correctly. Megatron escaped with the original Megatron's spark.

***

Things seemed to have taken a turn for the worse for us until the Vok, who were responsible for the previous 'alien' encounters sent an emissary created by the merging of the bodies of the missing Tigertron and Airrazor, who had been scouring the Earth for the missing stasis pods before losing contact with us. This Tigerhawk arrived and immediately destroyed the Darkside, leaving the Predacons baseless. Tigerhawk however was somehow captured by Tarantulas and the Vok influence removed. However, the process backfired and as Cheetor and a mysterious double-spark appeared the Vok beings that had been infesting Tigerhawk destroyed Tarantulas utterly.

Cheetor dragged Tigerhawk's form from the maniac Predacon's lair as a massive explosion tore through its surroundings. The double-spark merged with Tigerhawk's form as it became clear that the double-spark was Tigertron and Airrazor together and they in Tigerhawk's form took their place alongside us in the struggle against Megatron's Predacons.

***

Baseless and intrigued by Tarantulas' seemingly interesting work away from the now destroyed Predacon base Megatron discovered that Tarantulas had found the former Decepticon flagship, the Nemesis. Determined to use the craft to destroy the Maximals, Megatron took its power to the sky.

Depth Charge and Rampage had seemingly destroyed each other in underwater combat as Depth Charge raced to stop Megatron's salvage of the Nemesis from its watery resting place. Though I protested, Tigerhawk was determined to take on the Nemesis alone and was seemingly destroyed also as Megatron ordered the Nemesis to the co-ordinates of the Ark.

The Maximals, Autobots and Decepticons and I aboard the Ark seemed doomed as the Nemesis appeared within firing range of the Ark. Thanks to Megatron's ongoing ego surge I managed to get aboard the Nemesis and took on Megatron in his empowered and insane state. I fared badly, but I could not allow myself to give up with so much at stake. Regarding the fight between Megatron and myself and the near cataclysm the new Dinobot had suddenly become somewhat more like the former Dinobot. Betraying Megatron, Dinobot transmitted information about an Autobot Shuttlecraft that was aboard the ark, though no record of it was in the history books. The Maximals found the craft and Rhinox launched the craft from the Ark and straight through the bridge of the Nemesis.

The battle and the "Beast Wars" were over and we captured Megatron in a very weakened state and returned the original Megatron's spark to his body. The Autobot and Decepticon residents of the Ark were left in stasis, ready for their awakening some few million years later.

The history records showed that no shuttle was aboard the ark when the reactivation of the Autobots and Decepticons took place, so it was logical to suggest that we had participated in a pre-destination paradox and we were meant to use the shuttlecraft to get home. Rhinox managed to fit a Transwarp core to the shuttle so we could travel home. We strapped Megatron to the shuttle roof and blasted off for home, with the hope that we had left Earth as it should be...

Things seemed well on the journey back but as we approached OUR Cybertron's time zone Megatron managed to get loose and a power surge disrupted the shuttle systems. Megatron was gone and as we came out of Transwarp we came under fire seemingly from our own home planet... We are having to make an emergency landing so I sending out this emergency log buoy in the hope that someone will find it and inform the Maximal elders on Cybertron...

Log ends.

I SHOULD HAVE BEEN CALLED STINGER.
SOMETHING THAT FITS MY STYLE!
OR WASP!
THAT WOULD BE COOL!
YELLOWJACKET.
HORNET.
EVEN BUZZ!
BUT NO, I GET STUCK WITH...
BUMBLEBEE.
HEY!
AT LEAST YOU'RE NOT CALLED BULKHEAD!
IF THE NAME FITS...!

THE CYBERTRONIAN TIMES
YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS WANTED / COMPETITION

It's not easy producing a fanzine on a regular basis, let alone six issues a year which is what we aim to do with The Cybertronian Times. While we have our own team of writers who work on all our projects, as well as an extensive archive of unused material and aim to reprint work from our out-of-print titles, this will only go so far.

So, as with any fanzine, we're asking for the help of YOU, our readers…

Let's Get Creative!

As a fanzine, The Cybertronian Times is all about giving fans the chance to show their love of Transformers and express their creativity at the same time. Whether it's original artwork, fiction, reviews, articles, comic strips - we want to actively encourage our readers to be a part of the fanzine and it wouldn't exist without YOU.

Since the early days of this fanzine it's featured a mix of content created in house and by attendees of the Auto Assembly convention. We've run art and fiction competitions, invited submissions of articles and reviews and been happy for anyone to be involved. And now is the time for us to reinforce this as we move into 2022 and beyond.

What Do We Want?

We're looking for a wide range of submissions for the magazine, both one-off and ongoing works covering a diverse range of content. To give you an idea, here's what we're looking for:

Articles

Articles can be about any subject related to any aspect of Transformers. It doesn't matter what era and it can cover the toys, comics, television shows, movies… absolutely anything you like. If in doubt, just ask us!

Reviews

As long as we haven't covered it in The Cybertronian Times before, we're eager to cover anything Transformers related. Your favourite toy, comic, television episode or piece of merchandise. The only exception here are video games as we're covering them as part of our ongoing series although we may make exceptions.

Artwork

If you're an artist (traditional, digital or 3D), then why not send in some of your work for our art competition? We're looking for artwork to feature in The Cybertronian Times both as internal illustrations and as cover art. It can be full colour, black and white and from any era of Transformers.

Fiction

We're looking for original text stories from any Transformers era. They don't need to fit into existing canon, and can be crossover stories, but please state if they are your own fan variations on established continuity. Stories can be of any length but try to keep the PG-13 rated!

Comic Strips

As with the fiction, they can be from any Transformers era. We are looking for single page shorts, longer stories or even longer serialised pieces. Comic strips can be in colour or black and white but need to be illustrated and lettered. We will also accept photo stories if you feel creative with a camera!

Letters Page

We're also after reader's letters for our letter's page *Jazz Jives*. There will be a prize on offer for our Star Letter in each issue!

Competitions?

To link in with all of this, we're also going to be running a series of competitions for anyone who does get involved. Each issue we will look at all of the submissions that we publish and we'll choose the best piece published and they'll receive a mystery prize. Depending on the amount of reader submissions we receive, we may hand out multiple prizes some issues but we'll make sure there are some great items on offer.

Winners will be announced in each issue of The Cybertronian Times and with six issues planned each year you'll have plenty of chances to enter!

The Prizes

We're going to be giving away some great prizes, with mystery items up for grabs for the best submissions published in each issue including toys, autographs and much more. We don't want to spoil things too much but to kick things off, the first winner will receive this great prize...

Submitting Your Work

We want to keep things as simple as possible so there are just a few basic guidelines for submissions:

1. Text must be supplied as a Word file with just essential formatting only, using single line spacing and Arial 12 font.

2. Artwork is to be supplied as a PNG or JPG file, preferably at an image size of 2480 x 3508 pixels.

3. Comic strip entries need to have file names containing the story title then page numbers in order.

4. There is no limit on the number of submissions you can send for any issue. Each will be considered towards the competitions. If you submit a serialised comic strip or story, each chapter will be considered separately.

5. We reserve the right to publish all submissions in The Cybertronian Times, regardless of whether or not they are prize winners

6. If we receive fewer than three letters, then there will be no Star Letter prize for that particular issue.

All submissions should be sent via email to contact@autoassembly.org.uk with "Cybertronian Times Submissions " in the subject line. Make sure you detail what you are sending along with your real name and contact details. We won't need a mailing address from you unless you are chosen as one a prize winner so there's no need to send it initially.

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Obviously you're already reading this issue, but to get more issues visit The Cybertronian Times page on our website where you can download more of our FREE issues right now!

Have fun creating and good luck!!

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THE HISTORY OF TRANSFORMERS VIDEO GAMES, PART 1
By Simon Plumbe

Computer and video games have now become just as much a part of mainstream entertainment today as going to the cinema or buying / renting movies was back in the 80s when Transformers first burst onto the scene. However, while Transformers in their various incarnations have been around since the start of the 1980s with the Diaclone and Microman ranges, the video games industry was still in its formative years when the Transformers line itself was launched in 1984 and games based on licensed properties weren't as commonplace as they are today...

Growing up as a gamer in the 1980s was certainly an exciting time. The hardware may have been primitive by today's standards, but it has been argued that games were more original, publishers were more willing to take risks on more unusual games that had more limited appeal and shelves in game stores weren't flooded with countless sequels that inevitably appear year after year.

In the early 80s, games based on film and television licenses weren't a particularly common sight. Most games were produced by small development teams, usually consisting of a programmer, an artist and a musician and could be produced in just a couple of months ready for release. A lot were still developed by "bedroom" programmers - quite literally a single person writing games at home on their own handling all of the creative tasks involved in a game and this formed the backbone of the games industry.

For any game based on an arcade machine or a licensed properly, publishers often weren't willing to invest money without a guaranteed return when other games could be produced quickly and cheaply and arcade clones were the norm with almost every publisher releasing a Pac Man or Space Invaders clone at one time or another.

What licensed properties that did make it onto the market were mainly limited to major arcade titles and a limited number of film tie-ins in the early 1980s. Atari and their third-party publishers invested significant resources to release a large number of such titles for the Atari 2600 console. However, many of these were sub-standard games including the ill-fated game based on ET which (along with other titles) was produced in such large quantities that it caused the company significant financial strain.

At the same time, the entire video games industry in America suffered a major decline. With a vast number of rival games consoles being released, and the Atari 2600 suffering because of its age and facing declining game sales and exaggerated projections about the strength of the industry, the market entered a devastating slump that almost crippled the games industry Stateside between 1983 and 1984 which saw the value of the video game industry fall to a degree that saw the situation be dubbed the "Great Video Game Crash".

It wasn't that simple though. Home computers were taking over and in America the likes of the Apple II, Vic 20 and Commodore's newly released Commodore 64 were establishing a new fan base of people who not only wanted to play games but wanted to be able to do something more practical at home at the same time. In contrast, over in Europe gamers had taken computers (especially the Spectrum and Commodore 64) to their hearts in ways that consoles never had so the crash avoided the European market almost completely.

An incredible rivalry had developed between owners of the Spectrum and Commodore 64, akin to the Playstation and XBox ranges today. More and more retailer across the UK were stocking games including major high street chains,

dedicated games stores and even newsagents and garages.

It was around that time that a publisher in Manchester decided to take a bold move in their attitude to games... Ocean Software had already started to establish themselves as one of the more professional companies in the business with their approach to marketing and publishing games. While the company directors weren't au fait with computer gaming, they were incredibly talented at what they did and managed to build Ocean up very quickly into one of the strongest publishers in the UK.

They first started licensing games with an arcade conversion of Hunchback in 1983 interspersed with original titles and a couple of brand tie-ins, but it wasn't until 1985 that Ocean proved that they had a real talent for acquiring the rights to popular films, television programmes, characters and hit arcade games but also managing (in most cases) good quality games and faithful home conversions. So only a year after the brand launched in America, the world was treated a Transformers game and - of all places - developed in the UK...

Released for the Spectrum and Commodore 64, it was developed by Liverpool-based Denton Designs who were better known at the time for their range of adventure games that they developed for other publishers including the icon-based classic Shadowfire.

I can remember seeing this game on the Commodore 64 when it was first released. In fact, it was one of the first games I owned for the machine back in the 80s. At the time, Ocean Software had a reputation for some technically impressive games and some great arcade conversions. The Commodore 64 version loaded up with what was an impressive title screen for the time featuring the Transformers logo, Soundwave and Jazz, revealing gradually while a great piece of music played composed by Ocean's in-house musician Martin Galway. Galway didn't to do the in-game music, leaving Denton Designs to use Fred Gray who worked on most of their games.

The game was a platform based affair and - as with all of the early Transformers games - focused on the Autobots. Taking control of one of a choice of characters (Optimus Prime, Jazz, Bumblebee, Mirage and Hound), you had to explore a maze of platforms collecting four pieces of the "Autobot Energon Cube" returning them to the Autobot Centre one by one (which look remarkable like quarters of the Autobot insignia!). Obviously, you were under fire from all manner of Decepticons so you either had to attack or evade them but that was about it. Once you collected all four segments, the game was complete. There was no proper ending and all you were left with was just having to play through it all again.

To help you, each Autobot has three modes of transport - walking, flight, or vehicle mode. Different modes are best used to negotiate different parts of the levels with some platforms only being accessible through flight. Naturally, driving around is one of the quickest ways to

explore the levels, but it is all too easy to drive too fast and end up going over the edge off a platform. You are open to attack in vehicle mode, but can shoot back in robot or flight mode, and different modes of transport offer different benefits and levels of control for manoeuvring around the levels themselves.

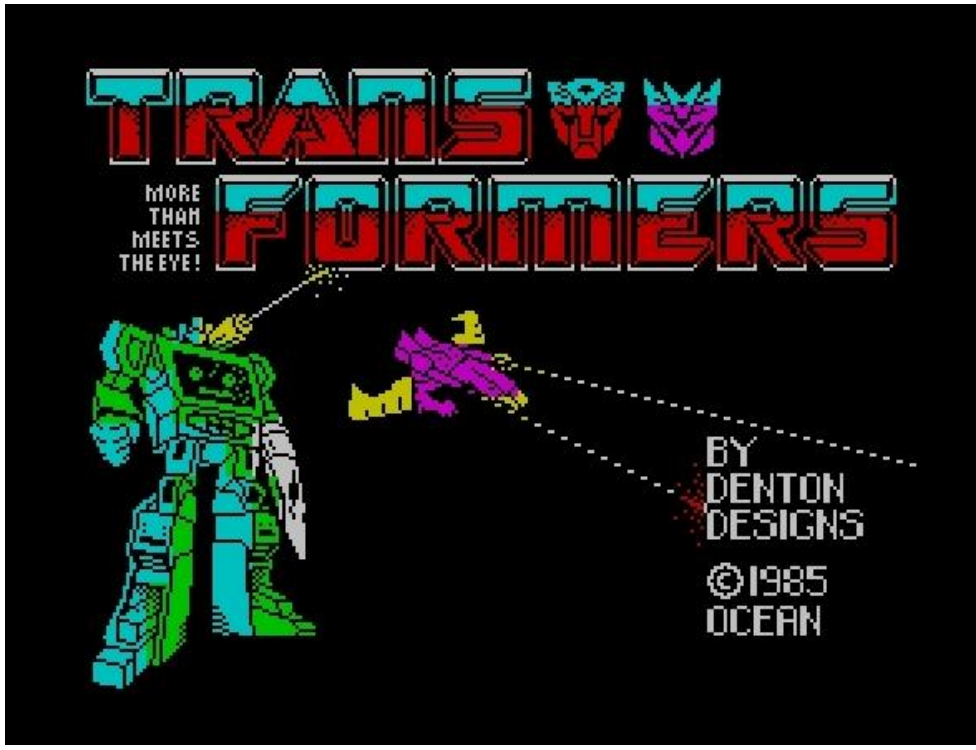
Irrespective of the gameplay, the fact that the Autobots can fly will have some fans seeing red. It's certainly taking artistic license a little too far when it comes to the characters and shows that only a token amount of research was done before development started. However, removing the flight capabilities would have also meant that one of the key gameplay mechanics wouldn't have worked. Characters that fly is an integral part of the game and I do get the feeling that a complete redesign may have been needed if it were true to the brand.

Each of the Autobots on offer give different advantages and disadvantages to the player. It is possible to switch between bots at any time during the game as long as you are able to stop and turn into a forward-facing position. Naturally, Optimus Prime is the best for firepower and damage resistance, but he is rather cumbersome when it comes to negotiating some of the trickier platforms. By the same token, Bumblebee is not a bot to use if you are expecting heavy combat, but because of his size, he can easily manoeuvre into areas that the other characters can't or at least manage far more easily. However, Jazz would appear to be the best all-rounder. If you run low on energy after taking too much damage, you can take a few minutes respite by taking cover in one of a number of defensa-pods scattered around the playing area which will protect you temporarily and also replenish your energy.

The graphics in the game are something of a mixed bag. The sprites are well drawn and well-animated, especially the transformation sequences, but the backgrounds are appalling. The platforms consist of little more than metallic pipes on a plain black background. Yes, the game scrolls smoothly enough, but when the screen doesn't even look interesting, the gameplay has to be exceptional to make you come back for that elusive "one more go".

Special mention - at least with the C64 version - has to go to the music by Fred Gray. He has managed to produce a faithful renditioning of the Transformers theme for the game, although there isn't a great deal of music during the game itself. However, the sound effects are rather sparse and what is there is rather lacklustre considering the Commodore's capabilities.

Overall, this game is too damn difficult for its own good for most gamers. It is a difficult game in its own right, but coupled with a frustrating control system that is unresponsive and, and an icon system that you need to use to change between characters (no doubt something that Denton Designs felt that they wanted to make use of in most of their games at the time) makes the game annoying to play (not to mention making transforming your bot difficult and not something that can be done in a hurry). Denton Designs were famed for their icon-based games but icons have no place in a platform game.



If that wasn't bad enough, there is some dubious collision detection, and as with many scrolling platform games, because of the speed that it moves at and the sheer speed of the Decepticons that are attacking you, it is impossible to tell what is coming from off the screen. All too often, you can be in flight mode and suddenly finding yourself crashing head first into an oncoming platform or being shot at from all angles.

While the Spectrum version was released simultaneously, and was also developed by Denton Designs that's generally where the similarities end between the two. The gameplay mechanics all remained the same but when the game was first released - as seemed to be Ocean's policy - the game retailed at £1 cheaper than the Commodore 64 version. While that may not seem like much back in the 80s that's the equivalent of a £8 difference between a PlayStation or XBox game today.

What Ocean tried to do in order to justify the price difference was to ship their Commodore releases in the larger plastic "clamshell" cases instead of single cassette cases. It was hardly enough to warrant the higher price but many companies adopted this pricing policy with Commodore 64 games back then, assuming that C64 owners were happier paying more for their games as their computer cost more. Eventually the same approach to pricing took hold for the Atari ST / Amiga (but that's another story altogether)...

The Spectrum version sadly plays the same way as the

Commodore version in every respect and that really is its main downfall. The controls are still unresponsive and it's far too easy to crash into the scenery or be killed by a Decepticon that you can't see because they're off the edge of the screen. When you're in vehicle mode, it's all too easy to drive straight off the edge of a platform to certain doom and if you're in robot mode and try to land on a platform, you have to be facing the right way or in the right position or you lose a life.

There are some differences between the two versions of the game but these are mainly cosmetic. The title screen now only features Soundwave and not Jazz, there is no music in the game at all. The platforms lose the metallic look, but instead to try to minimise the expected colour clash all of the Autobots are colour matched to their toy counterparts making them relatively easy to identify and the platforms - while monochromatic - alter their colour depending on the Autobot you use so the display is never confusing. Instead of scrolling, the game is now flip-screen. The latter is the biggest change and this is more a technical issue with the Spectrum as scrolling isn't its strongest point. However, this does make the game even more difficult than the Commodore 64 version as it's even harder to see what lies ahead or where you are going.

As much as it pains me to say it, the Spectrum version seemed to run considerably slower than the C64 version to the extent that in-air control was excrutiatingly frustrating. Despite it's faster processor and the simplistic visuals, the Spectrum struggled with what is a relatively simplistic game.

The reality is that this game was a critical flop when it was first released over 30 years ago and time certainly hasn't been kind to it. Despite its aggressive difficulty, the game's brevity is all too apparent. Expert players have been known to complete the game from start to finish in just a couple of minutes and after that point there's no fanfare, no real celebration to speak of - the game just loops and you have to complete it all over again not that you're likely to have the urge to do so.

For Transformers fans then yes, it's something that you're likely to want to own in your collection for its historical significance as the first Transformers video game produced. For Spectrum owners, sadly this is the *only* game to have been released and it has to be said that the machine deserved much better. Even back then, both computers were capable of much more both technically and in terms of gameplay and Ocean Software should have known better.

On either format it's not really a game that stood out back in 1985 as being anything particularly special and now the only real thing that either release has going for it is the historical significance of being the first ever Transformers game that was released.

***

Next time we move across the pond to America as Activision released their first Transformers game in 1986 for the Commodore 64… *Transformers: Battle To Save The Earth*.

Jazz Jives!

Still no Reader's Letters for Jazz Jives! Are you all shy or doesn't anyone have anything to say to us about *The Cybertronian Times* or Transformers in general?

Don't forget that we do offer a prize for the best letter we publish in each issue so get writing and send your letters in for Jazz Jives! by email to us at: contact@autoassembly.org.uk

You can use the same email address to contact us to send in artwork, fiction or original comic strips you'd like us to consider for publication.

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"Transformers Animated Sentinel Prime" - Alies Meerman

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Transformers: Animated - Season Four: Prologue" - Ralph Burns, Andy Turnbull

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(previously published in Auto Assembly 2012 convention comic)

"What's In A Name?" - Lee Bradley
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