BEAST WARS
UPRISING

THE INEXORABLE MARCH

BY JIM SORENSON AND DAVID BISHOP
ART BY GUIDO GUIDI

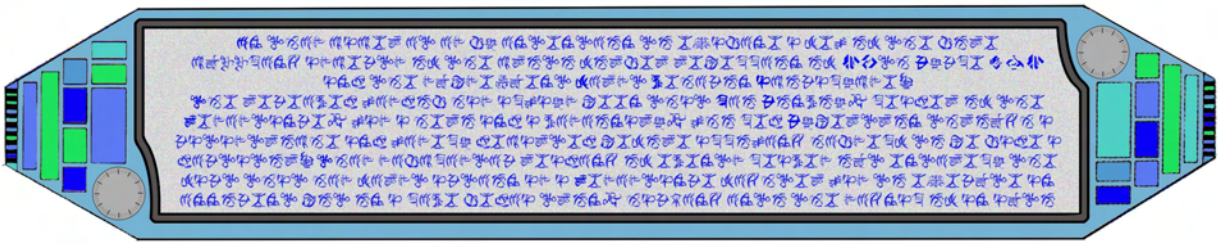
U Plus 0 Solar Cycles
Dragon's Bane Cathedral, Hyperious

Bang went the gavel. "The measure passes, thirteen in favor, two opposed, one abstention," declared Stiletto, who had been chosen to chair the newly-empowered Cybertronian Parliament. She had been a compromise choice, selected because she had less external authority of any of the other delegates. Megatron had angled hard for the chair, and Stiletto was certain that she'd made an enemy this solar cycle. But that was a problem for another day. This was a time for joy. "Today," she continued, in her most solemn tone, "25 solar cycles since the destruction of the Grand Mal, six stellar cycles, four orbital cycles, and fifteen solar cycles since the Grand Uprising was declared and the Fourth Cybertronian War came to our embattled world, the war officially comes to a close. All grievances shall be considered settled. All borders shall be considered fixed. Further, in celebration of this momentous occasion, we declare today to be Unity Day, and a planet-wide holiday henceforth."

The gallery erupted in spontaneous cheering, a celebratory ovation that was echoed all over Cybertron via the surviving media networks. With the help of Parliamentarian Riker, whatever ICS resources that had survived the Vehicon apocalypse had been distributed to Radio Free Cybertron, Voice of Maximals, and the currently theoretical Predacus Today network that the Tripredacus Alliance was attempting to build under the auspices of the unfortunately—if aptly—named newsbot, Slugline. Stiletto privately thought that Predacus Today would have an uphill slog; fellow Parliamentarian Optimal had been the director of VoM before being tapped for his current position, underscoring exactly how important propaganda was to the Maximal Nation. Then again, she was learning that one underestimated Ram Horn at one's peril.

When the raucous applause had mostly died down, Stiletto gaveled the chamber into silence. "My fellow Cybertronians, we are witness to a rare thing. Cybertron is at peace, and all of the various stakeholders have agreed that this is a state worth fighting for. Peace is far more fragile than war, more easily shattered, harder to obtain. I shall do my best, as chair of the Cybertronian Parliament for the next seven stellar cycles, to see that this peace is maintained. But I urge each of you, be you Maximal or Predacon, Autobot or Decepticon, male or female, rich or poor, large or small, beast or vehicle, to make choices every day that further cooperation and understanding rather than conflict and bellicosity. We are all neighbors, all fellow travelers on this spinning metal globe. I brook no illusions that it shall endure from now until the end of time, but every solar cycle, every decacycle, every orbital cycle, every stellar cycle, every decade, every century, every millennium we can maintain it is a great victory for all Cybertronians, as great as any victory achieved on the field of battle."

The recording of this the first motion passed by Cybertronian Parliament, would survive for ten thousand years, and every frame would be pored over by future historians.



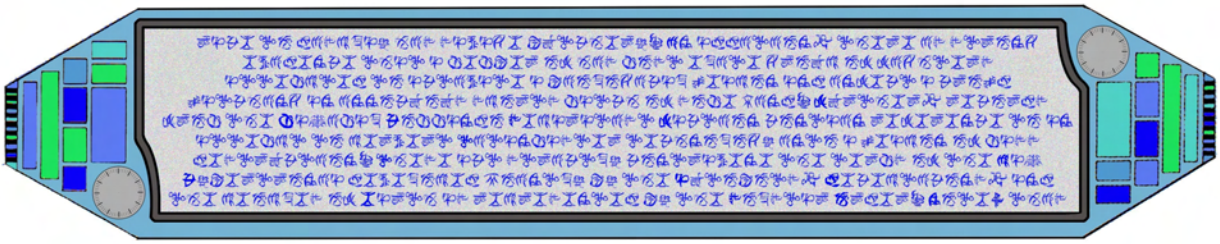
U Plus 1 Solar Cycle
The Chamber of the Ancients, Iacon

The past orbital cycle or so, exploring the labyrinthine tunnels under the Chamber of the Ancients the devs had so lovingly crafted, had been one of the most exciting of Bisk's short life. Scores of trash MOBs had followed him in, proving a tenacious if predictable enemy. At some point there was a bugfix, because they started exhibiting new and more balanced behavior loops. Eventually, though, he left them all behind, diving deeper and deeper into the level. Before long he began to encounter a series of intricate puzzles and dungeon-specific monsters. Over the next decacycle he battled energy leeches, mutant retrorats, and giant bolt-bats. All of those were challenging enough, but it was the thirteen olive green elites—he dubbed them Centurions—that pushed Bisk's problem-solving skills to their limits. At first he had thought the devs had simply lost their minds, throwing him up against an enemy with no vulnerabilities. They shrugged off his every shot with no apparent damage, and without even slowing down. For several solar cycles he initiated the encounter again and again, trying every mechanic he could think of: looking for a weak spot, systematically utilizing everything in his inventory, even looking for something in the environment that might be able to take them out. Nada.

He had just about concluded that perhaps he had initiated this encounter without first having the proper gear when he remembered the trash MOBs. He looped around, managed to draw several squads of them deeper into the tunnels, and kicked off an epic fight between the numerous but weak drones and the few but powerful Centurions. While the immovable object met the unstoppable force, Bisk slipped in deeper, making his way towards the heart of the dungeon. And finally, after another decacycle or more of solid gameplay—Bisk always lost track when he found a new quest—he had encountered what had to be the end boss, a giant spiderbot in a web over an endless chasm. This fight was tough but fair, and relatively simple after he figured out he was supposed to attack the web, not the monster, and sent the mechanimal boss plummeting into Cybertron's interior. That was sad, he'd hoped he'd be able to harvest the cyber venom glands. But there was still one more door left in this dungeon, the one the arachnotron had been guarding, so surely whatever loot he'd earned would be right behind it.

The giant set of doors was scaled to Builders, no doubt for purposes of backstory and atmosphere. It was covered in an intricate filigree, festooned with cyberglyphic runes that Bisk couldn't read. He took a quick screenshot just in case it proved important later; in his experience, there was always a helpful seer or ancient lurking around just waiting to deliver an infodump to move the plot along. The portal resisted his efforts for a few nanokliks, just long enough to be dramatic. When it swung open, it kicked up a plume of dust in the chamber he was entering. Automatic lights built into the floor of the periphery of the hexagonal room switched on in sequence, outer to inner, drawing him in further. And then the treasure revealed itself as an overhead spotlight activated, illuminating a spinning golden disk floating in a weak suspension field. It was covered in the same ancient symbols as the door and, even as Bisk watched, the sigils changed in a seemingly random pattern, with one incomprehensible rune fading out, replaced by another.

As he reverentially took it and filed it into his inventory, Bisk felt certain that the devs had many, many more adventures for him in the future.



U Plus 1 Decacycle
Galvatron's Secret Base, The Rad Zone

Oh, how Nucleon had protested when Galvatron had first dragged him and his two useless companions to the fallback base he'd hidden in the Rad Zone so many centuries before. "Conditions inimical to life," Nucleon whined, and, "Unpredictable long-term consequences." But he was Galvatron; what cared he for long term consequences? Was he not the only Micromaster to take the Beast Upgrade? Even then, Nucleon had objected; "Incompatible with Builder cranial architecture," or some such nonsense. It was true, his head wasn't quite the same as it was before the Upgrade, but then, Galvatron had been through so many quantum mental shifts that he'd long ago stopped keeping track.

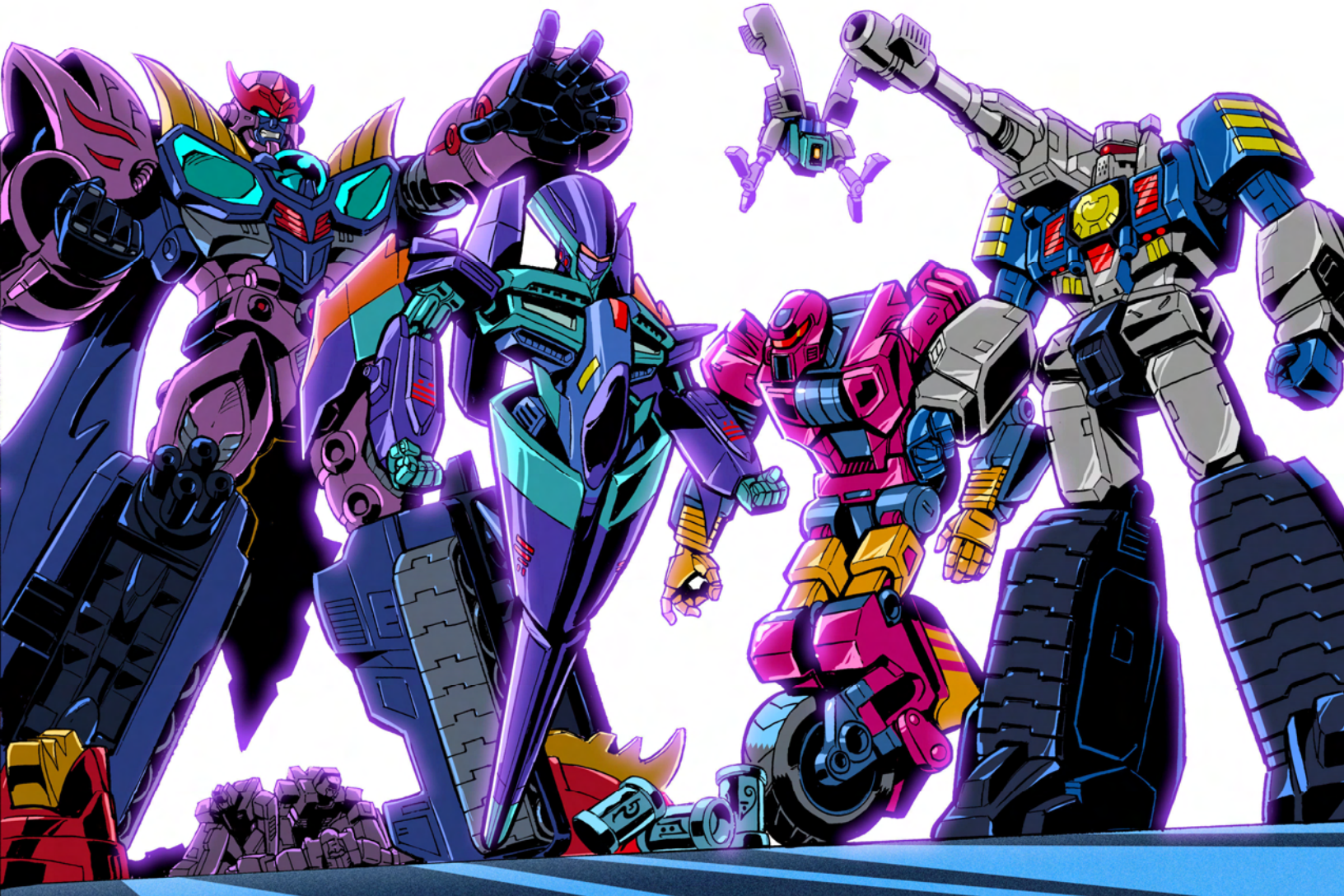
Were he inclined to be fair, he'd have noted that Nucleon's engineering brilliance had enabled him to deconstruct and reconstruct the three proto-scale Vehicons they'd envenomed, rebuilding them into the command-and-control units that were now before him. Further, Krunix and Doomshot had been incredibly useful for stellar cycles, diverting to Galvatron the resources he needed to establish himself in this brave new world he'd awakened to. Sadly, for them,

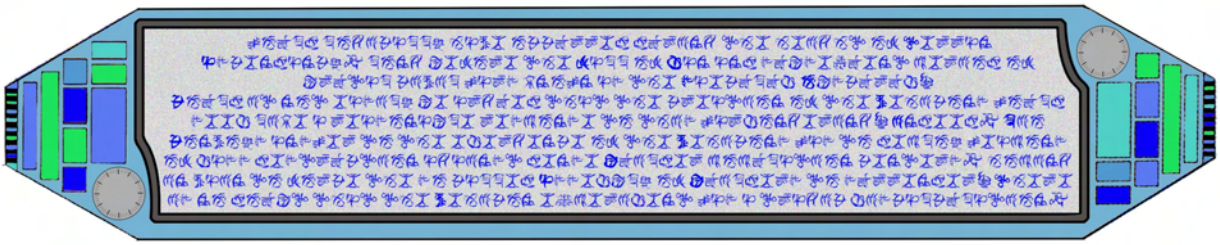
Galvatron had never had much use for fairness. Once he'd decided he had no further use for them—at least, not in their current forms—dispatching them had been a foregone conclusion.

But all that was mere prologue. No, the future stood before him in the forms of three sparkling Vehicons. A modified tank drone, cycle drone, and aero drone were suspended before him, awaiting the spark of new life. Because, for all the genius of the Vehicon design, they remained mere mindless puppets. And puppets were always at risk of having someone else yank their strings. These three, now, they were the missing link, the bridge to connect the anti-life that was the Vehicons with the scorching incandescence of Galvatron's own will. These three generals—Vehicon generals—would be powered by sparks loyal to him. Extensions of his unyielding, uncompromising, unparalleled force of personality.

At his word, the three sparks he'd prepared floated from their containers and entered the three newly prepared Vehicons' bodies. They shuddered to life, limbs making minute twitches, optics turning from black to red. One by one he addressed them. "Tankor, Thrustor, Jetstorm… we shall accomplish grand things together!"

As three new minions chortled with laughter, plans within plans within plans began to spin deep in the rotten pathways of Galvatron's diseased metaprocessor.





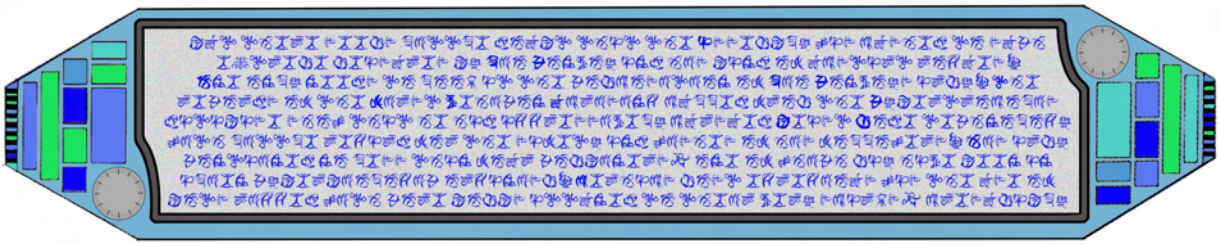
U Plus 1 Orbital Cycle
~~Rubbish's Scrapyard~~ Constructicon Training Grounds, Hexima

"Alright," Buckethead announced, "You're not auditioning for 'Eurythma's Got Talent', we need hard, strong bots. You need a bit about yourself, so the combination process don't twist your melon too much, and most of all, you need to be able to drink *nearly* as much engex as me without falling over. Reckon you've got what it takes?"

Looking around the junkyard, she surveyed the motley crew of hopefuls with a critical optic. There was Sledge, Skipjack, Steam Hammer, Wideload, Drill-Bit, and Road Hauler; they all had the credentials, the brawn, and most were even more or less the right color, but their faces didn't fit yet. She had them transform and go through a series of strength and construction based tasks. She could tell right away that Sledge and Drill-Bit wouldn't make it—they were too focused on the "devastation" part of forming Devastator and she needed bots who were enthusiastic about helping with the post-Unity reconstruction. They already had multiple contracts in the Maximal Nation, the Independent Predacus States, and the newly formed League of Autonomous Proto-States, which had replaced the area marked Resistance Territory on maps ever since the treaty had been signed. That is, the bits of it that were left standing, and that weren't covered by hordes of migrating Vehicon musters. Oi, but there was a lot of work to be done!

Buckethead sighed as she watched the trials, the endless succession of transform-ups and obstacle courses and feats of strength. There was an insidious part of her that just wanted to flunk them all and walk away. No one could ever replace Bone Crusher, Hightower, or Long Haul. Why bother with any of it? But then she looked again at their hopeful faceplates, at the crumbled wreckage of war still untouched all around Hexima, and realized just how selfish that part of her was. Things would never be what they were, but bots still wanted to join up and help each other. That had to be worth something.

"All right, hang on." She said, waving her arms to get them to stop. Obediently they formed a semicircle. "You're doing well but you're competing too much. I want a team, not a bloody scrum. Right, let's try something else..."



Wideload beamed with pride. He had been chosen to become Devastator's right leg. The conversion process still left him woozy, but he suspected he'd get used to it in time. It had been a strange journey, from Autobot Macromaster Throttlebot to Decepticon Micromaster Constructicon. Sledge, his fellow Demolition Patrol survivor, hadn't made the cut, which was a shame because he really did look smashing in Constructicon green, and the new translucent blue weaponry he'd picked up complimented it nicely. Unconsciously, Wideload brushed some dust from one of the huge tires that made up his chest architecture. Autobot or Decepticon, his vanity remained a constant.

To his right was Road Hauler, who was Devastator's new left arm. Like him, Hauler had started the war as an Aubotot. Unlike him, he'd stayed that way. Wideload had initially worried that there might be some tension due to that, but this truly did seem to be a post-factional alliance. Perhaps it was because Autobots and Decepticons were now so vastly outnumbered. Part of him realized he was lucky that the Maximals and Predacons had allowed the Builders to retain control of Hexima, have a voice on the Parliament, but most of him didn't spend time considering the geopolitical implications of his day-to-day survival.

To his left was Steam Hammer, the final new member, who helped make up Devastator's back and torso. He was the real surprise from training. The bot looked like he should be hauling boulders from one pit to the next—indeed, he was very good at such things—but he had a processor on him that rivaled Quickmix, the other big brain on the team, and a real knack for puzzles and ciphers. In the end that was probably enough to edge out the other contenders.

The ceremony was drawing to a close. Buckethead, Skavenger, and Quickmix had each said their piece, and now Hot Rod was pontificating about something or other. Truth be told, Rodimus Prime was the reason Wideload had quit the Aubobots in the first place, so to see him here, giving a commencement to a class of Constructicons, was borderline bizarre. Still, looking at the rather packed bleachers, it was clear that this ceremony had some kind of resonance for the demoralized and (mostly) relocated Builders. Obviously the Constructicons represented some kind of hope, or there wouldn't—

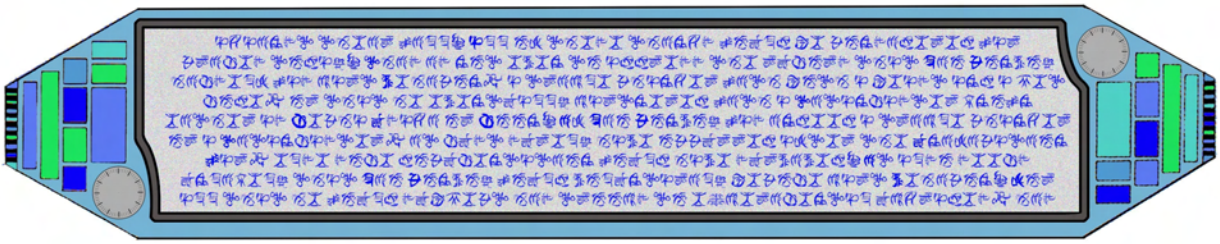
His train of thought was broken. There, in the small area of the stands devoted to Macromaster-scale builders, was a gleaming gold carapace. It couldn't be, but… but it was.

Goldbug had come to see him off. The last time they'd exchanged words, Goldbug had called him a traitor. It was one of the last sentences the Throttlebot commander ever spoken with his own vocoder. Wideload hadn't even realized he'd survived the Uprising. He felt himself succumb to a torrent of emotions, not all of which he could identify. With a few mental commands, he tightbeamed his old squad leader and sent a quick 'thank you'.

"~~~You can go your own way… go your own way~~~" came the melodic tones of Lindsey Buckingham, though Wideload wouldn't be able to identify the singer by name. But the feelings the snippet of music provoked, those were real. He looked back to the podium just as Hot Rod finished his address.

"You heard the plonker," declared Buckethead. "Constructicons, unite!"

Wideload lost himself as he merged into the collected consciousness that had for centuries been known as Devastator. That he was down to a single original member was no matter, Devastator was Devastator. A somewhat smarter, somewhat more constructive Devastator, but Devastator nonetheless. He looked out over the gathered Builders and raised both arms into the air, eliciting more cheers. He was their champion, and he would do them proud.



U Plus 1 Stellar Cycle
Shockwave's Secret Research Bunker Gamma IV, Ultrix

Deluge dozed in the half-light. He was finding it more and more difficult to stay online for long periods now, and his memory was becoming fragmented and glitchy. The room was lit only by a number of energon candles dotted at irregular intervals and his optics were not as sharp as they had been, so it took a moment for him to spot the huge spiked figure lurking in the shadow.

"Come out, my son," He said, in a voice with more static than it used to have, "Let me look at you." The figure stepped forward, silently. "Sit," he urged, "Come sit with me."

The other bot drew a chair up to Deluge's exo-walker and, without saying anything, pulled out the little tray Deluge would still use from time to time to work on things. Onto this he placed, quite deliberately, two glasses and a bottle of Visco.

"And you've brought a present," Deluge beamed inwardly, although his faceplate barely moved any longer. "How lovely. Tell me, what do they call you now?"

The newcomer slowly, gently, poured a generous measure into each tumbler, only then did he look into Deluge's optics. "Rampage," he rumbled.

Deluge laughed, "Rampage! I say, a fine lineage, back to the very Predacons I once fought beside. I'll drink to that." He gave a mental command and a thin, clawed appendage extended from the walker and grasped the tumbler, bringing it to his immobile mouth. "No doubt you are here to kill me."

"Something like that," Rampage said.

"But you have some questions first, yes?" Deluge ordered the walker closer and the Builder's shadow loomed over the smaller proto-former.

Rampage lifted his drink and chugged it. "Why?" he asked, pouring another.

"An interesting question," Deluge mused. "A number of reasons I suppose."

"I've got the time."

Deluge chuckled again. "Indeed—in fact, I imagine that's rather your point?" He looked into the shadows and his voice grew far away, "Tell me, do you know the story of the Chaos Bringer? Not the version from the Covenant, not the fairy story they format protoforms with, the real story of the battle that nearly destroyed us all?"

Rampage shrugged. "I know enough."

"Do you, I wonder?" Deluge asked, "It was the very height of the Great War. Ideological hatred between the Autobots and Decepticons could not have been greater, but when the Chaos Bringer came, all Cybertron rallied to defeat it. There was no alternative."

Rampage drained another glass. "A history lesson," he said, flatly.

"I apologize, but it is important to put events in their proper context. As I was saying: Autobots, Decepticons, what neutrals remained, all battled together against the Chaos Bringer. It was an unprecedented show of unity in the darkest of hours. Not dissimilar to the battle last year in Nova Cronum, from what I'm to understand."

"The point being?" Rampage asked. Deluge could sense his creation's patience starting to waver, and so hurried his narrative.

"The point being, my dear boy, is that it *wasn't enough*. What most of those poor bots accomplished was to die, consumed whole or crushed underfoot. The Chaos Bringer was brought low not by strength of numbers but by the heroic actions of a small number of extremely powerful individuals. You know many of them from your history, individuals forged with unique sparks, sparks that granted them capabilities far beyond those of ordinary bots like myself.

"As the fragile ceasefire brought about by the defeat of the Chaos Bringer inevitably collapsed and the war became even more savage and destructive, I worked on understanding just what it was that made a spark this way. It was known that only about a tenth of a percent of Cybertronians were forged with these abilities, but whether it was a mere quirk of cyber-biology or even the touch of Primus' divine hand was completely unknown to science. Others had looked into it of course: Shockwave spent a few millennia on the matter, and Vivisector the

Loudpedal before him. I think on the other side Leatherhide and Proxima conducted a few experiments before their funding was cut by the Autobot High Command. I read as much as I could, but it became clear I needed intact specimens. Luckily, if you can call it that, the escalation of the conflict was providing a great many casualties who could be obtained with no questions asked." He coughed and visco mixed with some congealing mech fluid spotted his chin. "Sorry, could you?"

Rampage leaned forward and wiped the ancient scientist's face with his hand.

"Thank you," Deluge said, "I must say, you are *considerably* more patient than I remember, from, hehe, last time."

Rampage's optics burned brightly even as his expression remained unchanged. Deluge imagined he must be remembering the desperately, violent slaughter of Rampage's forging and subsequent escape. Deluge had thought of it often, the greatest in a long line of regrets and failed experiments. "I have learned much since my creation. Patience is occasionally useful."

Deluge's expression didn't, couldn't, change, but his voice smiled. "I am so glad," he said, "I thought for a long time that your path would be only one of violence." Deluge felt pride swell in the irregular pulse of his spark.

Rampage drained his glass. "I've had my share," he said, "But enough about me."

"Of course, of course. Where was I? Yes, so I was working on various techniques which I hoped would increase the probability of a 0.1 percenter spark being created and felt that I was having some success, although it was a slow and difficult process, lots of trial and error. I... I don't like to think about the failed attempts... very sad. Anyway, I was getting close, but then everything changed. Against all the odds, *peace* of all things, broke out. Or was imposed. It mattered little to me. My research was ended immediately of course. Now we were sharing the recharge slab with the Autobots it was deemed unseemly to conduct such experiments."

"That didn't seem to stop you," Rampage said, pointedly.

"As the energon crisis worsened and the necessity for a new, more efficient breed of Cybertronians became clear, I found my expertise useful once more. I assisted with their biological development, which was satisfying. Over time, though, as the Maximals and Predacons began to emerge and take their place in society, I felt troubled." He trailed off, lost in thought. The memory of a pleasant afternoon, sunning himself with Hydradread on the beaches of Loneedo, intruded on him. He could still remember the hint of gadolinium on the oil he was served.

"Go on."

Deluge sighed. "It was the overwhelming consensus that the time of the 0.1 percenter was over. The proto-races would be smaller, more efficient but also less... noisy... than we Macromasters had been. I thought back to the crises we had faced, quite apart from the war: the Swarm, the Underbase, the Star Harvester, the Rending, the Hate Plague and, of course, the Chaos Bringer. You'll notice that Cybertronians do not speak much of any of these things. We are blessed with near immortality and I believe that it has become a natural psychological by-product of that to adopt a sort of... sliding scale when it comes to recall, especially of particularly traumatic events, so now you will find bots arguing about whether the Unicron incident could have been a hoax, or a trick of the light, or some such, despite the fact that

thousands of bots died and the face of the planet will forever bear the scars of the conflict. It is like collective, voluntary amnesia, and most troubling.

“I, fortunately, do not seem to suffer from such information creep, so, fearing that such cataclysmic events would inevitably come once more to trouble Cybertron, given a long enough time horizon, I took it upon myself to alter a few sparks among the protoformers as they were being forged, lest their strength be needed once again. Most, as I'm sure you're already aware, did not survive the process, but two did, you and... your sister, how is she?"

Rampage looked directly into Deluge's misty optics, his expression neutral. “She is none of your concern.”

Deluge sighed sadly, “No, I suppose not, nonetheless, I think of you both often. Despite all my research you were really the only 0.1 percenter sparks I ever successfully produced. Good thing for us you were enough!”

Rampage set his glass down carefully, as though worried he would lose control and break it. “I suppose you think that the Vehicon Apocalypse justifies what you did to us?”

“Doesn't it?” Deluge asked.

“You didn't know it was coming. You couldn't know.” Rampage's voice was low, dangerous. The shadows in the room seemed to lengthen.

“No, not the specific details, but I knew something was coming. Something *always* comes, and I was right—you *were* needed and, if I do say so myself, thanks to me, you were here.”

Rampage drew himself up to his full height. He was large for a proto-former, and standing his face was about level with Deluge's cranial unit, slumped atop his useless exo-frame. “You had no right.”

“I had no right?” Deluge asked. “I had no right to grant you power beyond measure? I had no right to take steps to save my planet—they planet I love—from catastrophe? I gave you greatness. You're welcome.”

“You gave me no *CHOICE*!” Rampage's voice rang out as he grabbed the Decepticon by the throat, “You took my life before it had even begun.”

“What choice do any of us have but play the holo-cards we're dealt?” Deluge asked. “I'm no functionist—how could I be?—I started the war as an Autobot, of all things, inventing force fields and matter integrity enhancers—but we all of us have our roles to play. I merely... guided yours a little.”

“You condemned me, us, to madness, torture, imprisonment, exile. You can't know what it was like.” Rampage fixed him with a furious stare. “You can never know what you did to us.”

“No, but I want to... oh but I want to... but I don't suppose I have the time now, do I? The visco, it was poisoned. Cyber venom, yes?” Deluge asked, mildly.

Rampage shrugged. “Yes.”

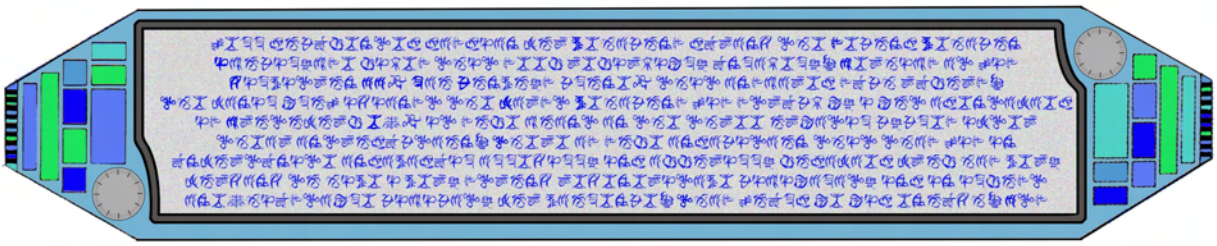
“I thought so. I have a lot of aches and pains these days, of course, but I felt they had gotten rather worse in the last few cycles.”

Rampage turned away. “They're about to get a whole lot worse.”

“Yes,” said Deluge, “I have made a study of the substance. If you only knew how many great mechs it had brought down… I congratulate you on your choice of revenge. On someone with as slow a metabolism as me, it could be megacycles.”

“Don't worry father,” Rampage told him, “It won't be.”

He hefted his enormous three barreled rocket launcher and fired it point blank. “Thank you,” Deluge said, as his spark faltered once and then winked out, “my son.”



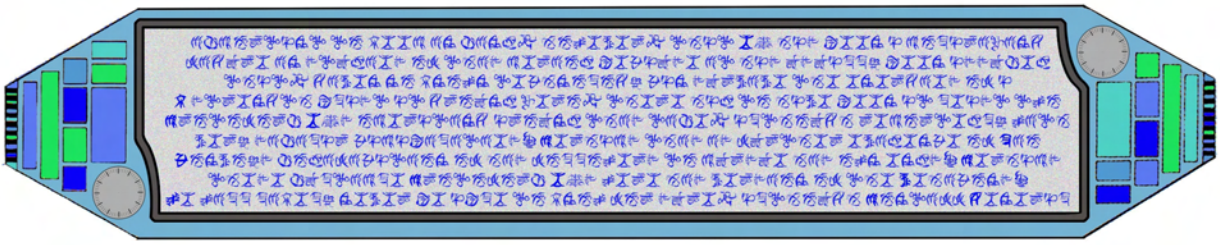
Rampage left the lab burning behind him. The recon mission he had undertaken before the Vehicons emerged had told him exactly what needed to be hit to destroy both the lab and Deluge's twisted experiments within. The deviant old scientist had even manacled a couple of recovered Vehicons to his wall and had been trying to analyze the anti-sparks that drove them. As soon as he was clear he heard his comms. A long, hissing silence came through, and Rampage knew who it was. Finally, she spoke. “Is it done?”

Rampage nodded and kept going. “Your information was accurate,” he said, and paused. They’d been working together on this for so long, and part of him feared that she’d cease using Dinosaur City’s lone tachyon array to keep in contact after the task was complete. But he pushed such insecurities aside as unworthy. “It's done,” he finally confirmed.

Trans-Mutate paused to examine the weight of what had happened. “Do you think it will make a difference?” she asked.

Rampage considered Deluge's words about playing the holo-cards he had been dealt. “Nope,” he said, “But it needed doing.”

“Yes...” Trans-Mutate trailed off again and Rampage imagined she was lost in unbidden recall. The files, the pictures, she had found and shown him of the failed experiments, the hundreds of twisted exo-frames—the vid-clips of agonized bodies with failing sparks. “I know it did.”



U Plus 1 Decade
Dinosaur City, Metascan Omega

"Call on line one," announced Dnavi. Longrack told her to transfer the call in a cycle, then continued to gaze out his window. His office had once been the observation deck of the *Dinosaur*, back when it had been a starship and not a city, and he never got tired of the view. After fifteen stellar cycles, Dinosaur City had expanded from more than just the remains of the ship, the Decepticon called Trypticon, to a spread of factories and warehouses and residential units and laboratories and hotels and, especially, commercial units. A goodly number of the residents were Cybertronian, of course, seeking a new start. But many of them were not. All were welcome on Metascan Omega, and its ancient secrets drew scientists, philosophers, entrepreneurs, archaeologists, and even tourists. He had something of a boom town on his hands, and that suited him just fine. Yes, gazing out over the bustle of Dinosaur City, he'd really built something special.

The flashing intercom indicated that his cycle was up, so he dutifully returned to his opulent desk—a gift from *his great honour, the third Kolar rector of matters judicial and metabolic*—and took the call. "Governor Longrack," announced Randy, the watch officer on what used to be the bridge of the ship, "I just got a call from customs. They caught someone trying to come through, a Cybertronian."

Longrack rolled his optics. "We get hundreds of Cybertronians coming through every day. Is this some kind of fugitive or criminal?"

There was several nanokliks of silence. "Well, no, but…"

This was becoming annoying. Didn't Randy realize how *busy* Longrack was? "But what, Bump? Don't leave me in suspense." There was no answer. "Randy? Randy?"

"I'm sorry, sir," came the cheerful tones of Dnavi. "We appear to have been cut off."

"Well, get him… back," Longrack started to order, but trailed off. Three glowing, colorful, skull-like faces with wavering tendrils were descending from the sky. All activity in the city came to a halt; people stopped their transactions, vehicles pulled to the side of the road or simply stopped in the middle of the street, and the regular mechanical action of condensers whirring and sensors sweeping halted.

"We are the Vok," boomed the lead skull-creature, who was colored a brilliant Egyptian blue.

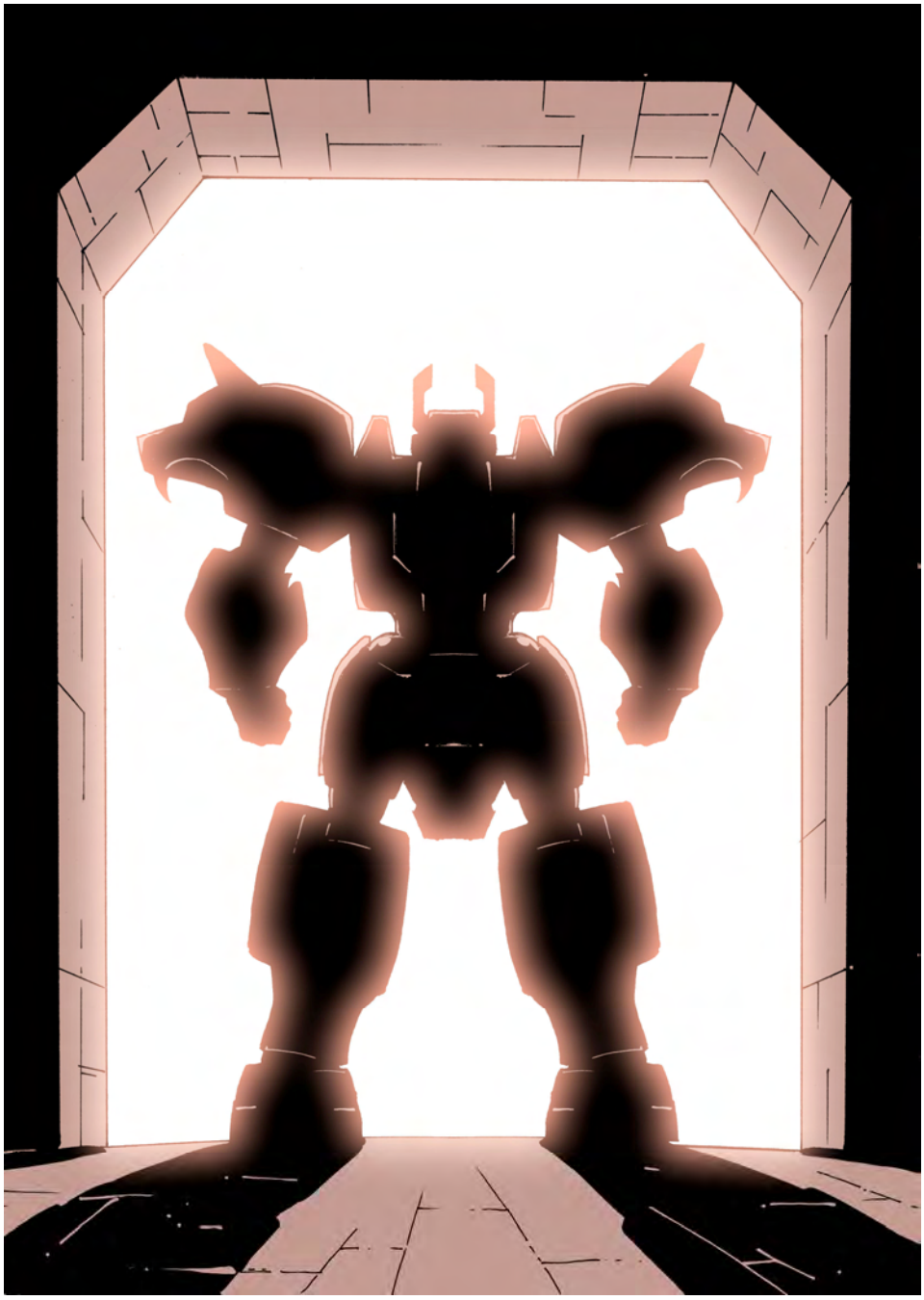
"Metascan Omega was never intended for mortal creatures," announced the goldenrod one, off to the left.

“Make preparations to prove your cosmic worth,” declared the deep Tyrian purple creature, off to the right.

“Should you fail, sterilization will commence in one solar rotation,” announced the first creature. Then all three descended into the ziggurat containing their access to the Logicon’s ancient system and began to orbit about it in a leisurely fashion.

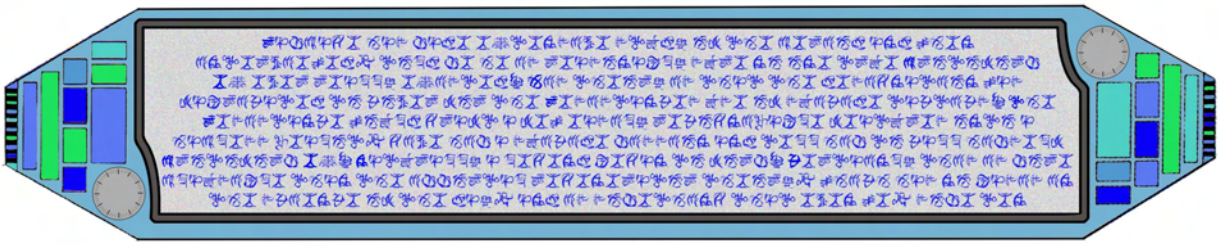
Longrack was in a state of panic. Who were these creatures, these ‘Vok,’ to make such demands on him, on Dinosaur City? He wouldn’t stand for it, no. He ran out of his office and caught Dnavi staring out the window along with several other members of the gubernatorial staff.

“Dnavi, get me Saberback and Apelinq,” he was in a near panic, casting about for the names of anyone who might be helpful, “umm, Trans-Mutate, Glyph, Fractyl, Rossum, ummm, Gigastorm, Dead-End, Hydrax… am I forgetting anyone?”



A deeply resonant voice, supremely confident in itself, filled the room. “Perhaps I can be of assistance as well during this dark time, Governor Longrack.” Longrack felt the optics of his staff fall on this newcomer, someone who had clearly just arrived on the planet and yet was already commanding respect. So this was who Randy had tried to warn him about.

Lio Convoy had come to Metascan Omega.



U Plus 1 Century
The Intersection of Shi-Lai Migratory Channel and the Confederation of Terran Worlds

The Problem of Infinities rocked as another Magog-class missile slammed into her hull. “One more impact like that,” stated Pox, the ship’s AI, currently manifesting as a human child of about six years of age wearing footie pajamas, “and our hull will be breached. Perhaps we should consider the possibility of surrender.”

“Not while it’s my writ, Pox,” declared Captain Una. She’d harbored suspicions that the Shi-Lai were harboring a secret agenda for quite some time, though she never expected to have it confirmed quite so… dramatically. *Infinities* was an older ship; the schism between the Celestials and the Traditionalists was drawing more and more resources from the CTCF. Nevertheless, it was still quite formidable. “Reverse polarity of shields, invert the power core coupling output, and rotate frequencies on our weapons array.”

At operations, Ne’ll rushed to comply. Her circ implants allowed her to interface with the ship much faster than Una could ever hope to. “Done, Captain, plus equalized port and starboard shields, should minim vulnerspace.”

“Hail coming in in seventeen seconds,” announced B-Tom. Una had long since learned that a psychal’s precognition was close enough to infallible as to have no relevant distinction. “So let’s try to survive that long,” he added impishly.

The holographic display showed three Shi-Lai gladius-class dreadnaughts, backed up by no fewer than five falchion-class harrowers. They had thoroughly bracketed *The Problems of Infinities*, closing off any possibility of retreat with their dampener field. Una had managed to uncover evidence of their violation of the Treat of Prysmos, and they obviously had no intention of letting her report back to Earth with her data. From out of the holographic frame, a bolt of energy slammed into one of the Shi-Lai ships. The vaguely cetacean shape began to spark and its engine lights sputtered and winked out. Improbably, the ship began to list.

“This is T-Wrecks, captain of the *Rusty Mace*,” announced a gravelly voice over the comms system. “Looks like you Terrans needed a back door.” His ship, a Preditron-class cruiser, flitted

into the edge of the frame and fired another blast, though this time the Shi-Lai ship was ready and managed to deflect the incoming energy with its rondache-field.

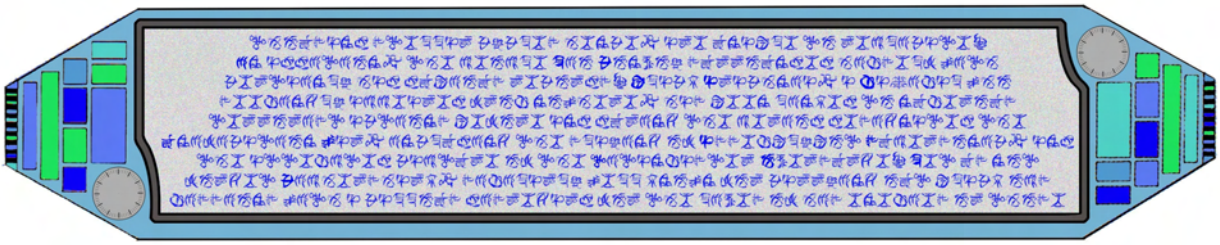
“Cybertronians? Playacting crusaders?” asked Ne’ll incredulously.

“Just spin with it,” Una ordered. Fortunately, Ne’ll was a professional; she had already plotted the course when Una gave the order to kick into FTL, vectoring the hole the *Rusty Mace* had punched through the Shi-Lai dampener field.

Once safely underway, she opened a channel to the Cybertronian vessel. “Thanks, uh, T-Wrecks, looks like we giri you.”

The wide orange face of the Maximal filled the bridge monitor, and behind him could be glimpsed a bridge in a low-level state of pandemonium. “May have to call that in right away. Those blowholes—” Una found herself tensing at the epithet, “—did a number of my drive unit and we’re low on repair supplies. Any chance you could help us out?”

B-Tom and Ne’ll both looked to her. It was against protocol, but some laws were more ancient, and more sacred, than Fleet regs. “I’ll send someone over in half an hour. No vaudeville or we go asymmetrical on you.”



The Old Woman had sent Ne’ll over, owing to her own familiarity with Cybertronian tech. Ne’ll didn’t say anything, but somehow the Captain knew that she was nervous. “Don’t worry, I don’t expect a blackguard play. And if they do, we’ll bounce you out in a femto and turn their ship to plasma.” When she arrived, it was immediately clear to her that this was no ruse; her microcircuitry-enhanced glomerulus caught the mixture of pungent ammonia and cloying coolant and the not-quite ozone scent of spilled energon, like pepper struck by lightning. There was little doubt that the *Rusty Mace* had taken several hits. The crew of Maximals and Predacons were busy trying to hold it all together.

“Thanks for coming,” said T-Wrecks, and the way he tried to suppress the urgency in his voice made her certain he meant it. “Our transwarp cell was knocked out, so we’re using an old tachyon gate inducer, one of the mark threes.”

She was equal parts impressed and horrified. “For a ship this size? How—“

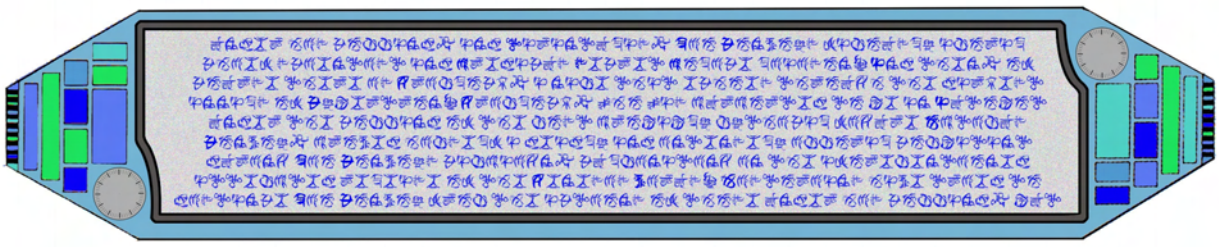
“Touchy as the Inferno but gets the job done,” came the cultured tones of a new arrival. He was a silvery-blue mech, a riot of jagged angles and a face that was all teeth. “Rapticon, chief engineer.” He offered her a hand and, after a moment, she took it. She’d never actually touched one of them before, and was surprised to find him warm, bordering on hot, rather than cold as she’d expected. The moment stretched longer than it should have. “Shall we get to work?” he asked, and she felt herself startled back to reality.

Despite the strangeness of the situation, Ne’ll found herself warming to the task. Rapticon was clearly brilliant, and had made a thousand modifications to the ship and its components. Untangling them all was a most delightful puzzle; it was clear that even he had forgotten half of the systems he’d bypassed and code he’d cobbled together. Soon she was getting into the spirit of things, and when she’d proposed attempting to fix the cracked transwarp cell Rapticon was enthusiastically on-board.

And the conversation while they worked! Rapticon, it seemed, was an avid student of humanity, among other things, and could riposte like few Ne’ll had ever met. It started with an innocuous remark about the harps of Akkad's moon Sargon; transitioned to a discussion of how a societies artforms evolved in tandem with their ethics; jumped to Operation Staple Gun and the morality of offering amnesty to the 731 captured Cobra scientists, engineers, and technicians who were sequestered into Sector Seven, the NSA, III, Skywatch, the CIA, and Unit:E; evolved into an exercising contrasting doctors Archibald Monev and Brian Bender with Professor Wernher von Braun; and was just starting to loop back to the god Apollo’s own predilection for the harp when it was interrupted by a rather insistent beeping.

The diagnostic they’d run had completed; the ludicrous modifications she had proposed and Rapticon had implemented had actually gotten their transwarp cell back online, something that wasn’t even theoretically possible! “Yes,” they both yelled in the same instant, as she found herself embracing him, her russet skin tones contrasting with his blue steel limbs. As she stared into his flickering emerald eyes, she wondered what the hell she was doing. Humans and Cybertronians had been enemies for centuries; if the last few decades had given them a bare tolerance for each other, that was all it was. And yet, as his warm silver-blue arms held her, she found she didn’t much care.

What came next would be immortalized in ten thousand poems, books, songs, plays, videos, holo-dramas, and other, more esoteric forms of media. A few of them were even accurate.



U Plus 1 Millennium
The Triangulum Galaxy

Against the magnificent spread of stars in the outer reaches of the Triangulum Galaxy, the fabric of space and time split open as a stolen space cruiser *Terrastar* punched its way through the membrane of real and unreal, completing in days a journey that would take light millions of stellar cycles. The Maladroid crew did this knowing full well that the Convoy Council had forbidden any departures from the Milky Way, ever since the massive Ammonite invasion precipitated by travel to the Andromeda Galaxy a few centuries back.

“Mechs and femmes,” began Lockjaw, who had been voted the captain despite Torsion’s machinations. “We’ve finally done it. Omega Trion’s dream is now a reality. We’ve reached a place where we can truly be free, free to pursue our own destiny, free to—“

“Hey, Cap,” interrupted Ragtop from the sensor array controls, “There’s a spacetime razo-distortion behind us.”

“We were followed!” growled Hammerhead at weapons control.

“Impossible!” declared Vapor Lock from the conn. “We took every precaution!”

From the science station, Malware gave a long, cackling laugh. “I’m not sure impossible means what you think it does.”

“Well, *Captain* Lockjaw,” rasped Torsion, who wasn’t at a station, opting instead to float about the bridge. “What do we do now?”

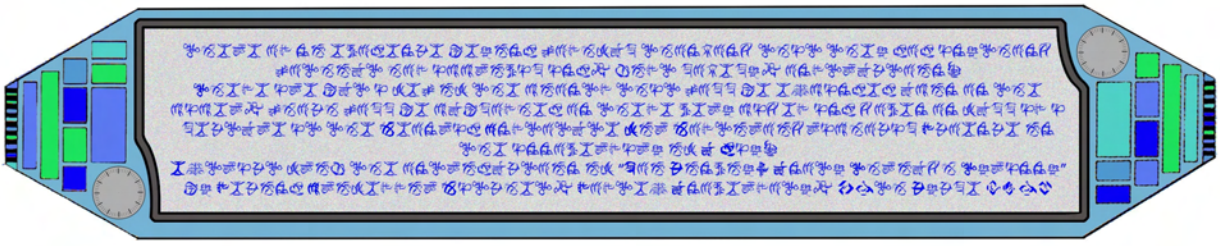
Lockjaw looked to the monitor. “There! We can hide behind that small blue-green planet.”

“And, should hiding prove a less than optimal strategy?” asked Torsion.

“I ain’t goin’ back,” stated Hammerhead, in a tone that brooked no argument.

Lockjaw thought about it. “If we must, we’ll fight, but it’s not my first choice.”

“We’re all gonna die,” gripped Ragtop as Vapor Lock plotted the course.



The Commandron colony ship juddered violently as it snapped back into realspace, following its haphazard journey. The *Hyperborea* had been the only ship close enough to lock onto the ship stolen by the Maladroids.

Astral Knight surveyed the scene before him. He hated retasking the *Hyperborea*, with its hold full of the mind engrams of ten-thousand Cybertronians in the form of crystalline control vessels, but Great Convoy had been clear. Extra-galactic travel was dangerous, and invited the notice of powers 'beyond the mortal ken', or so Rhetoric Convoy had phrased it. 'Lions and tigers and bears' was how Megalo Convoy put it. In fact, when he objected, the Convoy Council had been unanimous; Fire Convoy, Armada Convoy, Nitro Convoy, Live Convoy, Galaxy Convoy, even Vector Convoy had voted to dispatch him. Though when Vector Convoy cast his vote, it was with infinite sadness.

"Any sign of the *Terrastar*?" he asked after giving his crew a chance to recover their equilibrium.

"Wow," came Psychic Shortstop from navigation. "Look out the viewscreen… have you ever seen anything that beautiful?"

Indeed, the view was spectacular, a rich green nebular backdrop against which blazed a billion billion stars, stars which had never before been seen by Cybertronian optics.

"Hey, Shortstop, optics off the viewscreen and on your instruments," barked Wrath Thunder from tactical. Astral Knight's number two bot, he took the security of the ship—and its many colonists—*very* seriously.

"I think I've got 'em," said Deep Blue, from the science station. "Drive signature echoes coming from that planet up ahead." It was a gorgeous organic world, covered in sparkling blue oceans and emerald forests. Two moons were in orbit, one oversized and crater-scarred, another that was far more regular. Astral Knight glanced down at the sensor readings from the second moon; he was no expert, but they appeared highly unusual to him. But, more than that…

"Blue, are there angolmois capsules down on that planet?"

"Ummm… looks like a big fat maybe. How could they even get out this far? After we get the *Terrastar*, maybe we should—"

"Yes, *after.* For now, take us in," Astral Knight ordered. "And Blue, you may as well hail them. They already know we're here or they'd have stuck around, so no harm in trying to open a dialogue."

"Like that'll do any good," she snarked, but did as asked. As she predicted, no answer.

As they rounded the moon, klaxons came on automatically. Wrath Thunder's fingers flew across the consol. "We have incoming!"

"The *Terrastar*?" Astral Knight asked.

"Negative, looks alien, I—" Wrath Thunder's report was interrupted as the ship shook.

"Hull breach in sector seven… guidance systems failing!" reported Psychic Shortstop.

"This is ridiculous. We're an exploration ship, not a battle cruiser," complained Deep Blue.

"No choice," explained Astral Knight, "our ship was the only one that could lock onto the Maladroids' warp signature!"

"Shields are doing a major fade," reported Psychic Shortstop.

"Plasma cannons to full power," Astral Knight ordered. "Defend ourselves!"

"We're being hailed," reported Deep Blue.

The view of the blue-green planet was replaced with a jagged, organic looking creature, possibly of insectile pedigree. "We, the Skriix, have made known that this world is *our* domain. The forms have been observed, the blood sacrifices made. And yet you defile sacred Energoa and her Mother Computer with your impure technoorganic bodies! The penalty is death. We allow you one sofad to make your peace with your profane mongrel creator. Use it wisely." The spiked creature winked out of existence.

"Nuts and bolts to that," declared Wrath Thunder, and Astral Knight found himself agreeing.

"All plasma cannons: FIRE!" The *Hyperborea* began to blaze into alien vessel. Astral Knight got his first good look at it. It was curvy, with a chitinous-looking exterior. Long tentacles trailed from it, and it had four oblong red patches that looked like sensor pods. *Or eyes*, he thought ominously.

"I can't tell if we're doing any damage," growled Wrath Thunder, obviously frustrated. "And there's another missile incoming. Brace for collision!"

The ship gave another violent shake and Astral Knight felt the deck under him rattle. "Rupture! The stasis hold is failing!" reported Psychic Shortstop.

Deep Blue looked near panic. "We're going down..."

"Launch all crystal engrams," Astral Knight ordered, "Get them in safe orbit!" He was relieved to be able to visually confirm the crystals were launching into orbit in a desperate attempt to protect them from a potentially fatal landing.

“Skriix vessel closing,” reported Wrath Thunder. “We’ll never make it down.”

“Another vessel on the scopes… it’s the *Terrastar!*” reported Deep Blue. “It’s… it’s engaging with the Skriix!”

“Try to put down for repairs,” boomed an unfamiliar—but Maladroid-accented—voice over the ship’s speakers. “We’ll do our best to keep them off your backs.”

“Thanks, *Terrastar*,” said Astral Knight. “Helm, put us down!”

Psychic Shortstop did his best to comply, but the *Hyperborea* had taken too much damage. They lost sensors as they plummeted through the atmosphere, and had to rely on visuals. When they were halfway down, a second streak joined them in their plummet from the sky. The landing could charitably be described as a ‘crash’, but at least there were no casualties. The ship vented gas from its new, perhaps permanent, home on a rocky shelf overlooking a briskly moving river of liquid water.

Astral Knight picked himself up from the floor and fell back wearily into his chair. “Damage report.”

“Believe me,” quipped Psychic Shortstop, “You don't wanna know.”

“Any chance that the other ship we saw crashing was the Skriix?” he asked. “It’d be nice to know there’s another Cybertronian vessel up there, even if it is a stolen one crewed by Maladroids.”

Wrath Thunder shook his head. “No such luck. Viewtrax confirms it for the *Terrastar*.”

“Well, that’s just prime.” He surveyed the planet spread out before him. Off in the far distance, barely visible over the shimmer of the atmosphere, he spotted what appeared to be the ruins of a tower, overgrown with vegetation, with wires trailing off into the surrounding rock. Curiouser and curiouser.

He was but a humble ship captain, and not remotely qualified to handle a new world in a strange galaxy, complete with hostile aliens, a mysterious moon, a dangerous power source, ancient ruins, and a rogue band of criminals. And yet, what could he do but his best? He swore an oath, by Cog and Quill, that he would see his crew safely back to Cybertron.

Little did he know.

The End

Afterword

Well, after two years, that's it, the end of Beast Wars Uprising both as a story and constant presence in both our lives. What was originally pitched to us as “Beast Wars meets The Hunger Games” (lampshaded back in Broken Windshields) quickly spiralled into more than we ever could have imagined.

Truth be told, when we were first offered the chance to write “a Lio Convoy story” we had some small reluctance. The elevator pitch hadn’t grabbed us, and we don’t like to spend too much time on things that we’re not passionate about. Still, we were keen to explore the medium of prose, so we didn’t say no right away either. We said we wanted a few days to think it over, and spent them looking for a reason to say yes. We found them in the Ferguson unrest. The idea of a community clashing with the authority figures ostensibly there to protect and serve we found powerfully compelling. The bleak future posited by Beast Wars Uprising and lain out in Alone Together: Prologue (really the only bit of BWU fiction proper before we got involved. The rest of Alone Together, while compelling, takes place entirely off-world.) was a perfect vessel to explore such themes. And so we found our reason to say yes, and Broken Windshields got its start. The title Uprising was kicked off rather dramatically and the universe shifted into high gear.

Anyone who has read all twelve(!) of the stories (clocking in at about 600 pages!) may have noticed that the original presumed premise of the adventures of Lio Convoy and the Resistance rather took a back seat beyond the first couple of stories and the last arc. We tried to make sure the Resistance was always important, but must admit that in that middle section it is rarely if ever the focus. Both of us suffer from an excess of imagination when it comes to the Transformers multiverse and neither could resist the opportunity to explore the margins of our particular version of Cybertron. “Resistance vs Builders” quickly became “Ok, the Resistance has a point, but how do the more sympathetic Builders feel about this?”, “What about true neutrals? Or bots not comfortable on either side?”, “What if the Resistance actually goes too far?”, “What if the Builders do?”, “What if we just forgot all that and had space opera story about fighting a rogue AI?” and on and on.

We had a broad plan, of course, right from the beginning we knew we would set up the conflict in the early stories, explore various factions and mindsets in the middle, pay off Alone Together at some point, and then reach some kind of conclusion. The thing is, though, that Transformers means a lot to both of us, *all of it*, and we quickly realised that since we were enjoying writing Beast Wars Uprising and the fans seemed to enjoy reading it, we could experiment a little with the history of the brand and not only tell stories about different characters, but also play around with different genres, which is why you have things like the space opera *Intersectionality* alongside the Iacon Noir of *Trigger Warnings* and the heist piece that is *Not All Megatrons*.

Beast Wars Uprising has been called (we think as a compliment) “Transformers in a blender” and that is pretty accurate. Anyone who has read the stories and trawled tfwiki.net can see (and perhaps be appalled by) the way we gleefully stole characters and concepts from all corners of the multiverse. If a character was *ever* a Predacon, be it in *Robots In Disguise*, *Transformers Prime*, or, yes, even *Beast Wars*, they were a Predacon to us. If they were a Mini-Con, then maybe in this universe they might have been a Micromaster? Unless of course they had a beast mode, in which case Maximal or Predacon. Do these two characters have the same name? Maybe they’re the same guy! Does this guy go by two different names? Maybe he’s two different guys! And so on. We unapologetically loved playing around in this sandbox and stand by all of our decisions. Probably.

It wasn't all indulgence, however. In all our planning and back and forth writing sessions we always maintained the mantra that the characters were the important bit. If a character was boring,

inconsistent, or just didn't work, it didn't matter how cleverly we had mined the wiki, the story would be hollow. Lio Convoy, in particular, had a strong capacity to surprise. Several critical developments in Derailment occurred when Lio Convoy was faced with a situation and we tried to make him go left and he insisted on going right. K-Bombs? That was all his idea. Seriously! Not in our outline, and look how important they became. (It didn't hurt that Jesse sent us a mock-up of the unused toy.) It was also important that everyone be the hero of their own narrative. Sure, we had over-the-top baddies, but we mostly wanted bots who could look in the mirror and say "I'm doing what I'm doing because it's right/necessary/sensible." It was this sensibility that led to many of our middle stories, where we deliberately got into the heads of the MCSF collaborators, the PSP, the Micromasters, the Darksyders.

We particularly took delight in shining a spotlight on obscure characters, guys we found compelling but who had never really had their moment in the sun before. It's no accident that we don't introduce traditional heavy hitters like Grimlock and Hot Rod until the fourth story. Yeah, a few of those guys are still lingering around, but this is not *their* story. They've had their day. This is the time for the Stilettos and the Ser-Kets and the Bucketheads of the world. And that short list brings another consideration to our minds: gender! Transformers is ludicrously male-heavy, so we tried to feature prominently females in each of our story. Actually, one of our little goals was that each story should be able to pass the Bechdel test. Sometimes that meant gender-flipping an existing character, but based on the rules of the universe that evolved over the course of the first few stories, that felt reasonable.

Our goals were lofty, but then, why even bother if you're not going to push yourself? Whether we succeeded in transcending the minutia and delivering something worth reading is up to you guys, but it's been an absolute pleasure reaching for it. We'd like to extend our thanks to all of the many people who made this journey possible. That especially includes our copy editor Louis, our day-to-day editor Jesse (who suggested that we use cybertronix for the breaks, another hallmark of our series), and our long-suffering wives Jo and Ming-Li. These stories wouldn't be the same without our wonderful artists, so a huge thank-you to all of them as well. I'd especially like to thank Chris Colgin, who was our most frequent contributor. We should doff our hats to Joe Straczynski and Max Brooks, because we borrowed the structure of The Deconstruction of Falling Stars and World War Z for this and the prior tale. And finally, you, the audience! Everyone who read the stories, who commented about them, discussed them, and most of all cared about them: you made it possible, and we're eternally grateful. It's been a crazy couple of years for us, but then, sometimes crazy works.

Jim & Bish,
December 28, 2016