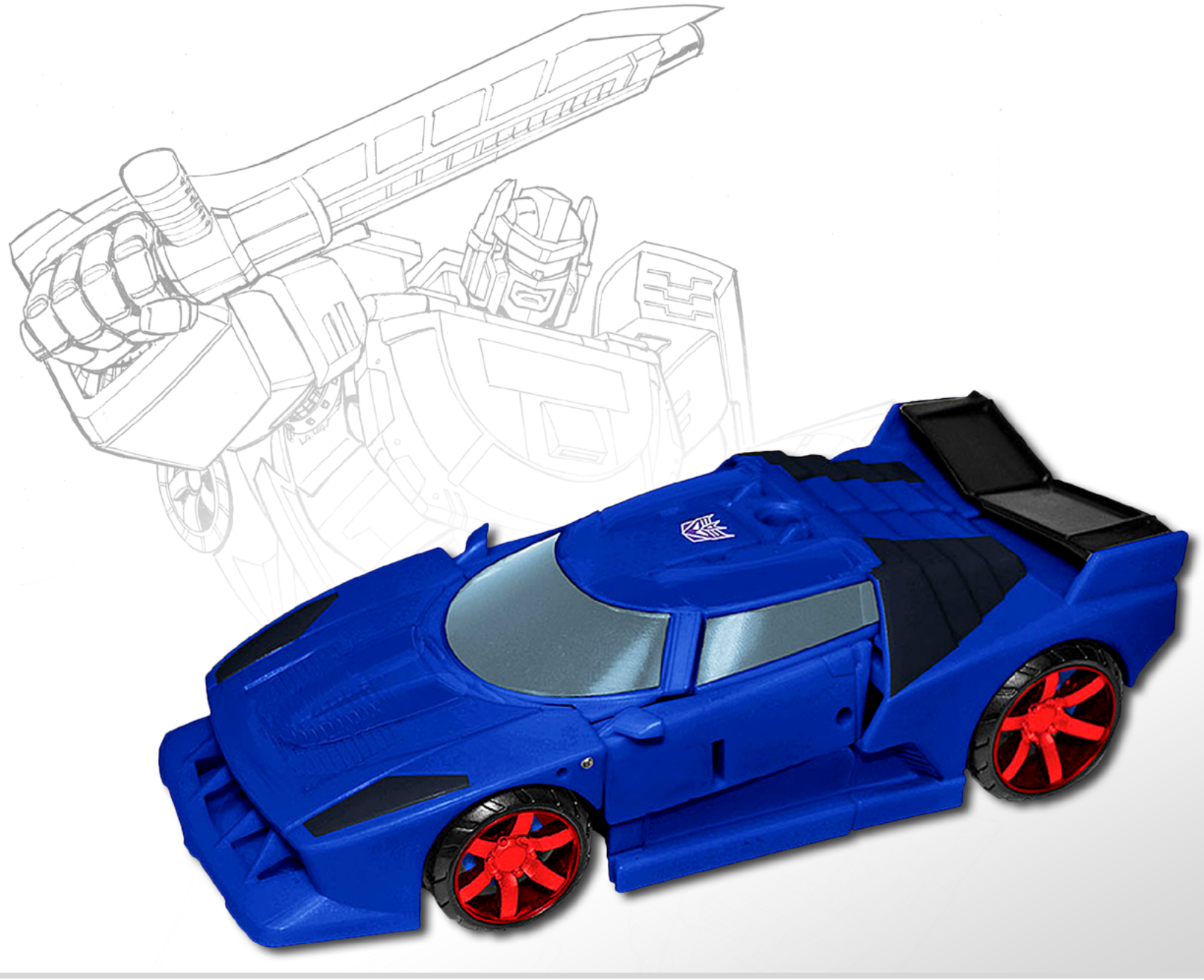
TRANSFORMERS TIMELINES PRESENTS:

THE TRUTH WE MAKE

A TALE FROM OF MASTERS AND MAYHEM



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THE TRUTH WE MAKE

To say that war is inescapable, that it seeps into and corrodes the sparks of even the best of us — this is not a revelation.

Even still, war has changed me more than most.

You see, there was actually a time when our planet was a peaceful one, even though the idea might seem unbelievable now. Back in those days, I had another name, and I had another job.

I was an actor.

If you were constructed cold after the fighting broke out, if war is all you've ever known in your life, you might not believe me. It's true, though. We used to have actors. And musicians. And artists. And so many other things that nobody remembers anymore.

I'm telling you this because it's important. It's important to remember where we've come from. It's important to know where I came from.

As an actor, you're always somebody else. Somebody with a different life, a different past. You take a script, you find your character, and you make them sing. You take what's on the page and you embellish it. You infuse even the smallest bit-parts with as much life as you can muster, and you make them real. When the audience can no longer discern where you end and the character begins…that's magic. I reveled in that magic. I never wanted to do anything else.

But then, the Decepticons happened. And my life, like so many others, changed irrevocably.

I was the first from my city, Harmonex, to sign up with the Autobots. Most of my friends and colleagues didn't take the Decepticons seriously. It's unfathomable now, in hindsight, but at the time they didn't seem like much of a real threat. Still, I felt it necessary to give back, to help protect the things in my life that I treasured. The night before I shipped out, we celebrated. We laughed, we drank, and we planned a new production to be based on my adventures to come. Something to look forward to. The next day, I said my goodbyes, and promised to come home as soon as these Decepticon punks were put down.

I never made it back. 27 solar cycles later, Harmonex, the city of the singing crystals, was a smoldering crater in the surface of the planet. There were no survivors.

What began as a few skirmishes with radicals had become a full-blown war, seemingly overnight. My unit — full of new recruits for whom soldier was an incredibly generous description — was scared, but my own fear of dying horribly was offset by a burning desire for vengeance. If I could never return to my home, I would make sure as many Decepticons as possible suffered the same fate.

I was lost, angry, and not at all equipped for what lay ahead of me. My first engagement went about as well as could be expected. What should have been a routine patrol mission went south amazingly quickly. I couldn't even tell you how it happened. What I can tell you is that it ended with the entire squad dead. Including me.

At least, the 'bot I was. He died after falling thirteen stories onto a girder that pierced his torso and left him paralyzed.
In my final moments, I dreamt of Harmonex.

And then I woke up.

The doctors told me that I was lucky to be alive, but I didn't feel too lucky. I didn't feel much of anything. I had lost my home, my friends, and now, my mobility. I had failed. Spectacularly.

And that's when he showed up. A crimson-clad doctor from…I don't remember, actually. I suppose it isn't important.

What is important is he had an offer for me. Something that would let me make up for my failings, and allow me to take advantage of my "inherent talents." There was no room for theatre in war, but that didn't mean there wasn't still one character left to play. See, it turned out that I was pretty special. After the accident, it was discovered that my t-cog was one-in-a-trillion. I can't really explain the science behind it, but apparently it had…what did he say? "Extraneous segmentation in the root configuration." As he explained it, it meant that I had the incredibly rare potential for supporting a second primary form. This, combined with my skill as an actor, made me uniquely suited for a very special assignment. High Command was looking for someone who could infiltrate the Decepticons, and who better than a 'bot who could actually become one?

So, that's how I became Punch, Autobot infiltration expert, and Counterpunch, Decepticon warrior.

I tried to bury myself alongside my grief and let these characters consume me so completely, become so real, that after a while I stopped being able to tell where I ended and they began.

Survival demands evolution, and on a long enough timeline, not even truth remains immutable. To try to atone for our sins, my people take the past and we twist it and turn it, creating new history out of the dirt at our feet. We change our past as much as we change anything, fashioning reality out of fantasy, because we can't bear the weight of the truth. We call ourselves champions, defenders, heroes, anything to justify what we've done, but our planet is dying or dead and sometimes I think that the worst thing to happen to our world wasn't the war.

It was us.

* * *

BANG. BANG.

The sound is sudden and violent. Enough that it disrupts my recharge cycle, snapping the world into view as the last remnants of my dreams dissolve into the dim, orange ceiling before their final acts can be revealed. A fleeting moment of desperation as I try to keep them on the edge of my thoughts gives way to —

BANG. BANG.

Panic. In my post-recharge stupor, the world is fuzzy. Indistinct. My thoughts race. Has our outpost been discovered? Are we under attack? I bolt upright and swing my legs to the side, finding the floor beneath my feet. I stand. I'm ready, Decepticons. Let's sa—

BANG. BANG.

"Punch, get up! The commander wants to see you. Now!"

I recognize the voice. It's Firecracker. One of ours, though you'd be forgiven for guessing otherwise. He's loud, brash, and one of the angriest 'bots I've ever met. Between that and the way his bright red armor seems to give off an eerie glow in just the right light, I'm fairly convinced he's contracted some permanent, non-communicable strain of a hate plague and has just decided to own it.

"Y-yeah. Okay. I'm coming. Just…just give me a moment."

It's been a rough morning, and as a result my reply is uncharacteristically shaky. I can tell that this catches Firecracker off guard because he doesn't have an angry retort, which if I'm being honest is probably the most unsettling thing about this entire encounter. After a brief moment of stunned silence, his footsteps echoing down the hall tell me it's safe to come out.

Wits gathered and nerves calmed, I exit my room into the sparse gray hallway, and head toward the commander's office. On the one hand, I'm relieved that our base remains safe, but on the other I wonder if spending my morning with the commander is really that preferable to a Decepticon assault force.

* * *

I arrive to find Firecracker standing guard outside the commander's office, which is odd. Both because this level of security is unusual and because I've never seen Firecracker stand so still. I can't imagine he's all too happy about his present post. I should probably make up for earlier.

"Hey, Firecracker. What are you doing posted up here? Run out of things to punch?"

His gaze meets mine with such intensity, I'm not entirely convinced he isn't trying to spontaneously develop laser eyes.

Actually, I'm not sure he doesn't have laser eyes.

"Are you offering your face, Punch!? Maybe it's time it better reflected your name!"

That…doesn't even make sense.

"That doesn't even make sense, but points for trying. Enough with the pleasantries. The chief beckoned, and I'm here. Mind stepping aside?"

Firecracker looks me up and down, I suspect to envision what it might be like to slice me into pieces with his laser eyes. He knocks on the commander's door with the back of his hand, though I'm not sure if he's trying to get the commander's attention or if he's trying to break the door down.

The door slides open, and Firecracker steps aside, keeping his stare locked on me as I enter the commander's office. Once through, the doors slide closed behind me, but I'm willing to bet that jerk is still glaring at me through the heavy steel.

Maybe it's not laser eyes. Maybe he's got x-ray vision.

I glance around the office. It's immaculate. Sterile, even. Aside from a few datapads stacked on the desk, you wouldn't think that anybody's moved in yet.

Well, the datapads and the 'bot behind the desk. You'd be forgiven for missing him, between his diminutive stature and the gray armor that tends to blend in amongst the similarly drab decor that is most of the base. His name is Suppressor, and he's the field commander, neat freak, and overall head honcho of our outpost here on Gargoid. It's okay if you've never heard of it. Most haven't, which makes it the perfect place for a super-secret base housing the Autobot's number one infiltration specialist.

I'm talking about myself there, in case that wasn't obvious. Not to brag. Even Suppressor will tell you, though I'm sure it would pain him greatly. He's not my biggest fan, though trust is generally hard to come by in my field of work.

"Punch, nice of you to stop by. Please, have a seat."

He speaks without looking up from the datapad he's holding, gesturing halfheartedly with his other hand to a chair on the opposite side of his desk.

"Didn't seem like I had much of a choice. And I'd prefer to stand."

I shift my weight from left to right. My arms are crossed. I'm doing my best to imply I'm utterly uncomfortable. Well, I am uncomfortable, but I want the chief to know it.

"Mind telling me what this is about? I'm not used to all this hospitality."

I'm eager to get this over with.

Suppressor sets the datapad down, places his elbows on his desk, and clasps his hands together. He moves methodically, as is his style. He's obviously not eager to get this over with.

"Approximately 24 megacycles ago, our outpost on Athenia was attacked by Decepticons. As of now, the entire facility is gone. Razed to the ground. There were, near as we can tell, no survivors."

The boss has a knack for delivering bad news. He doesn't need to explain to me the significance of losing Athenia. It's not common knowledge, but Suppressor knows that I know that the war has taken a turn for the worse, and

the work being done on Athenia…to say it was our last hope in light of this news casts an unbearable shadow, so I hesitate, but…it might have been our last hope.

"What? How…how did the Decepticons even know that base was there? After everything we've done to hide it…"

"I've been working closely with High Command during the investigation, and we have a working theory. There's just a few loose ends we need to tie up, which is why I've asked you here this morning."

"I'd like to help, chief, but whatever channels the 'cons used to plan this op were obviously locked up tight. Nothing I've seen or heard even hinted at the possibility that Athenia had been compromised."

Suppressor leans back in his chair, folding his arms across his chest.

"According to your reports, your alter-ego, Counterpunch, had weaseled his way into a position of some respect and confidence among our enemies. One of Scorponok's most trusted advisors, I recall."

I had a bad feeling about this conversation before it started, but now I have a very bad feeling about it.

"Suppressor, sir…what are you saying? Do you think I knew about this? You think I would let this happen?"

"Punch, I've never liked you. Someone that spends that much time behind enemy lines without a scratch to show for it? Personally, I don't trust you. However, High Command seems to hold you in high esteem. Which is why I've been directed to let you provide an alibi."

"An alibi? What's going on here?"

"Can you provide your whereabouts from 43462.5 through today?"

"Excuse me, sir?"

"Before Athenia went dark, we received this subspace transmission."

Suppressor leans forward and hands me the datapad he was looking at earlier. On it, a short video plays in a loop. It's the security office on Athenia. At first, it's empty. Then, after a few seconds, the officer on duty walks backwards into view, his arms raised. He looks like he's trying to say something, but is stopped by a beam of laser fire that bolts in from off-camera, tearing a hole through his chest. I wince. He clutches the gaping wound as he stumbles backwards into the wall and slides to the ground, decorating the room in vibrant purple streaks of Energon. You can just barely make out the glow from his optics before it fades. He's dead.

Then, the perpetrator enters the view.

What happens next in the video is that this 'bot heads to the control panel without so much as giving his victim a passing glance. Once at the controls, he enters what is presumably the security code that shuts down the base's defenses. I assume this because the video feed shuts off immediately afterwards.

What happens next in Suppressor's office is that time slows down. I drop the datapad, and after several hours in descent, it crashes hard against the floor, sending a shower of metal and glass in all directions.

The perpetrator in the video, the one responsible for enabling the destruction of Athenia…

Is me.

Suppressor speaks. Things fast-forward and then, in a instant, time returns to normal. At some point he's chosen to stand up. I didn't notice that happen.

"We've analyzed the footage. It's authentic. Additionally, we know that the access codes used were ones keyed to you."

"Suppressor, sir…you saw me yesterday. We spoke right here, in your office. This is obviously a trick."

Suppressor tilts his head, narrowing his optics.

"Punch, I haven't seen you in four days."

That's impossible, but I check my internal chronometer anyway. He's right.

"Hang on. This doesn't make sense. There's got to be some kind of explanation."

"I think we both know that we already have one, Punch."

* * *

The brig is unnecessarily dim. After being labeled a traitor, I wouldn't expect a 5-star experience, but you'd think they could have at least turned the lights on for me.

Traitor. That's what Suppressor called me. After so long spent fighting against the rising tide of the Decepticons, after seeing my world burn, after watching my friends die, after giving up everything I was to become an instrument for the Autobot cause…traitor is a hard label to stomach.

Admittedly, the footage from Athenia is damning. It's a trick, though. A hologram. An illusion. We have 'bots that could pull something like that off, so surely…

…but that alone wouldn't explain the security codes, and it certainly doesn't explain my missing time.

Four days.

Obviously, I've been compromised. The Decepticons found me out. They extracted my codes somehow. Erased my memories. Set up an elaborate plot to…to what? Why would they go through the trouble? It doesn't make any sense. Even if they discovered that Counterpunch was an Autobot, they'd just have killed me. Right? Something

about this doesn't add up.

"Oh, Punch. You just don't get it, do you."

Startled, I spring to my feet, keeping my back to the wall.

"Who's there?"

I strain my optics to see into the darkness, but there's nothing there. Until I see a figure step into the lit half of the cell. Black wisps of shadow coil off of his frame like tendrils of smoke, as though he is being fashioned by the darkness he emerges from.

"Come now, surely you recognize me."

Seeing him sends a wave of vertigo rippling through my entire body, threatening to send me rocketing towards the floor. I reach out to the adjacent wall for stability. Something is very, very wrong. This is actually impossible.

Before me, stands…me. As Counterpunch.

I am very clearly losing my mind.

"How right you are. I've been chasing you for a long, long time now, and it's time to say goodbye."

His words hang heavy in the air. They're suffocating.

"I don't know what you're going on about, and I don't know who or what you are, but I do know that Counterpunch can't be here. I invented him. He's me."

Counterpunch, or whoever this is, laughs so hard I feel it reverberate throughout my whole body. It shakes my spark.

"See, that's where you're wrong. I'm not you, Punch. You're me. I invented you."

Somehow, his words hurt. Physically. With one arm against the wall and another bracing my chest, it takes all my strength to stay standing.

"What…are you?"

Counterpunch takes a few steps toward me. The room is somehow getting darker. Smaller.

"I'm you. The real you. The one who started this whole charade. You think that you're an Autobot, that I'm a work of fiction you dreamed up, but you've got it backwards."

Every word he speaks bounces around my brain like a bullet. I fall to one knee. Nothing he says makes sense.

"Do you ever wonder why you've never met anybody who'd ever been to Harmonex, Punch? Why nobody remembers it the way you do?"

"Harmonex was a tragedy. It…it hurts too much. It's easier to forget than to remember what was lost."

"Harmonex never existed. We made it up, and then we carved a scar into the planet where we claimed it stood. We made a tragedy so terrible that nobody would dare question it, all to make a spy so believable that nobody would question him, either."

"That's not possible. I remember it."

"You remember it because to you, it happened. You live with a story for long enough and it becomes indistinguishable from truth. You tell the world that a few thousand innocents were erased off the face of the planet…who would dare argue with that? Who would do those sparks such a disservice? The truth is, everything about your life is a work of fiction, created to make you seem real."

I'm down on both knees, cradling my head in my hands. It feels like it's going to explode.

"Unfortunately, along the way you became a little too real, somehow. But it's over now. It's time for your story to end."

My whole body is on fire.

I glance up as the other me raises his weapon, touching it to my forehead.

"Goodnight, Punch."

* * *

BANG. BANG.

The noise is sudden and violent. Enough that it disrupts my recharge cycle, snapping the world into view.

I don't remember falling asleep.

BANG. BANG.

In my post-recharge stupor, the world is still a bit fuzzy and indistinct, but I can tell the brightly-lit room I'm in is shaking. Dramatically.

BANG. BANG.

I rise from the floor where I've apparently just spent the evening. Slowly, because wow does my head hurt.

Well, at least the ruckus has stopp—

My thought is interrupted by the wall in front of me spontaneously and dramatically disappearing in a cloud of smoke and debris. I raise my arms to protect myself, but the rubble is stopped short of colliding with my face by an energy field that stands between the cell I'm in from the rest of the brig.

Wait. Cell? Brig? I'm in a brig?

Before I can adequately make sense of the situation I'm in, several 'bots step through the layer of smoke that was, until now, a wall. The one in front is about half my size. Teal and white, with a large "4x" across her chest. She looks like a sportscar, maybe. Flanking her are two that are slightly larger — one is grey and blue, the other black and purple with yellow trim. From what I can tell, they look like they turn into jets. Behind them, a larger blue and silver one with twin rotor blades across his chest in a V formation. Then, there's the big one. Purple, pink, and black, he practically needs to crawl to make it through. He's almost as big as the room.

The little one speaks.

"Ey, lookit what we've got here, boys! Told ya he'd be waitin' for us!"

The black jetformer leans forward to get a better look at me.

"So you did, my dear Crash Test. I must say, Counterpunch, you are looking positively dreadful. What have these

savage Autobots done to you?"

Counterpunch. I'm Counterpunch.

Suddenly, it hits me. I'm me again. Whole and complete and…me.

"You wouldn't have survived the night in here, Wind Sheer. There's not a single reflective surface in the whole place."

The others all share a laugh at Wind Sheer's expense, who recoils from my barb. Well, except the big one. I decide to prod.

"What's the matter, Killswitch? Haven't strung up enough Autobots by their entrails today?"

Killswitch punches the wall to his left so hard I think that the whole base will come crashing down. Which is the plan, of course, though I'd like to be out of it before that happens.

"It has been an age since our paths last crossed, Counterpunch! I have mastered my sixth terrifying mode! And with this glorious ascent to murderous perfection, I have been rechristened by the clan of the six. I have taken the mantle of Hexadeathimal, the deathbringer!"

The others all begin to laugh again, Wind Sheer included this time, though they try to stifle it because they wisely aren't big fans of being ground into dust underneath Killswitch's fists.

"First of all, buddy, that doesn't really roll off the ol' vocal processors. Second, shouldn't you save that for your 16th mode?"

He snarls and punches the wall, again. Reign of sheer terror, this guy, though he's really only got the one setting. A small gray jetformer - somehow I know his name is "Skyfire" - lands behind him, pointing twin index fingers at the larger robot. Skyfire's visor-like eyes arch upward in a way that even the gruffest Decepticon would have to call "adorable."

"We've explained that, but you know how it goes. His head is so dense it's impossible to get an idea out once it burrows deep enough."

Killswitch rightly doesn't take kindly to the comment, and swings one of his massive arms. Skyfire deftly dodges the attack, having expected just such a reaction. Instead, Killswitch's arm collides with the other wall, leaving a dent as big as my entire body.

"Look, fellas, I'm glad to see you all, truly. But maybe we could save the gab for later, huh? How about busting me out of here so we can get on with the whole wiping-this-base-off-the-face-of-the-planet thing?"

Rotorbolt, who's been characteristically quiet, raises his rifle and shoots a single blast at the cell's control panel. With a pop and a fizzle, the forcefield dissipates, and I step outside the cell to join my Decepticon compatriots.

"Now, which one of you brought me my gun?"
* * *

"Nailed it!"

I glance over my shoulder just in time to watch the Autobot go down as a direct hit to the center of his forehead sends him flailing backwards. Crash Test is a hell of a shot. To my left, Skyfire and Wind Sheer stand back to back, bobbing and weaving through a rain of laser fire in perfect synchronicity, sending back a barrage of perfectly aimed shots. Ahead, Rotorbolt spins up the twin blades on his chest to grind the face of an Autobot unwise enough to charge him head-on. The crunching sound it makes is beautiful. Doesn't talk much, that one, but the sounds his enemies make as they fall tell you everything you need to know. Brutal and efficient. I respect that. As I pause to take in the symphony of destruction that surrounds me, Killswitch — er, Hexadeathimal, I guess — comes stomping in. He is positively drenched in mech fluid, and is wearing a bandolier made of Autobot heads. I like a good massacre as well as anybody, but this guy is seriously terrifying.

"These Autobots are too fragile! They fall too quickly! There's not enough fight in their sparks! Is it any wonder we have run rampant over them! Ha ha!"

It's all come to this. One final rally. As my squadron and I fight our way out, the rest of the assault force pushes in from the outside. If all goes according to plan, scenes just like this one should be playing out across the cosmos, as the Decepticons engage in what is sure to be the final campaign of this sad little war. By dawn, the Autobots will have fallen, and the Decepticons will be victorious.

A part of me feels…sad? I consider, for a moment, a future without war. One of peace and prosperity. Our people, left to finally live as we choose. Without oppression, without persecution. I wonder, what place is there in such a world for someone like me? For any of us? After eons of violence, can we ever return to who we once were? Or do those 'bots no longer exist, having been buried beneath the bloodlust we have let ourselves be consumed by, necessary as it was to achieve this victory?

Will it have been worth it?

My thoughts are interrupted by a jolt to the back of my skull that sends me crashing face first into the broken steel and wet fluid that coats the floor.

"TRAITOR! I'LL KILL YOU!"

As I prop myself up, I raise a hand to indicate to the others that they should refrain from returning fire. I know that voice. He's mine.

I rise up and turn slowly to see him standing in the entryway, bracing himself against the frame with one hand and holding a rifle in the other. His body is beaten, with several wounds deep enough that I can see the thin skeletal structure beneath the layers of his crimson armor. He's been through hell to get here. I'm flattered.

"Firecracker! And here I thought somebody else would get to kill you. It really is my lucky day."

"You…you did this. This is all your fault."

His voice is full of static, probably due to the sparking gash across his throat.

"What a compliment! I can't take all the credit for the picturesque wonder you see before you, but yes, I suppose I did play an instrumental part."

"You betrayed us. You betrayed everything that you claimed to stand for. I always said you were a son of a glitch."

"Ah, that's where you are mistaken. It was all a ruse from the very beginning. I never stood with the Autobots. You should have killed me when you had a chance, but you never would have. For all your talk, even you wouldn't have killed a fellow Autobot. Not even one you didn't like."

"I guess you're up for grabs now, then!"

In a flash, he's sprinting towards me. He's fast. I try to move, but I can't. I tell my arm to raise my weapon but it doesn't respond. Firecracker pulls his arm back to ready his fist for my face, and I can't seem to do a damn thing about it.

Suddenly, his optics go wide. His movement slows, his arm falls. He crashes into me and instinctively, I catch him as his momentum carries us both to the floor. Smoke rises from his back.

"C'mon, Counterpunch! Stop messin' around, that guy coulda turned ya' face into pulp! Let's keep movin'! We gotta base ta' eradicate!"

Crash Test holsters her rifle and turns to exit the mess hall with the others in tow. Her casual disregard towards Firecracker's murder is unsettling. Why? I look down at the body in my arms. Firecracker, on the edge of death, finds the last remnant of his energy and uses it to lift his head to meet my gaze. He smiles, briefly, before his spark goes dark. Even at the end, he couldn't let me win.

I lift the empty, heavy chassis that had once held the angriest Autobot I've ever known, roll it off of me and onto the floor, and I stand.

Except I'm not doing any of this.

I feel my body shift, turning inside out. I try to resist, to hold back the conversion, but it's no use. I'm losing control. Wind Sheer turns back to see why I haven't joined the rest of the squad, and he watches as I twist and turn, unwillingly, into my secondary robot form, becoming Punch once again.

"Counterpunch? What are you doing?"

"I'm…not…Counterpunch."

I hear myself speak the words, but I'm not the one saying them.

"I don't know what's real…but I know who I am, and that's truth enough for me. You destroyed my home. You killed my friends. You took my life from me."

I am a passenger in my own body, watching helplessly as it acts of its own accord.

"Counterpunch, what're ya on about? We've just about won! Stop foolin' around and come on, will ya?"

Crash Test takes a few steps toward me. I try to warn her, but the words remain trapped within my head. My arm springs up, and I pull the trigger. The blast hits her dead center, and she goes down hard.

"I'd rather die an Autobot than live as a Decepticon! Come on! Let's finish this!"

The others might not fully grasp what's happening, but after seeing me take down Crash Test, they are all too eager

to oblige my request. Skyfire, Wind Sheer, Killswitch, and Rotorbolt all raise their weapons, and without hesitation, open fire.

The blasts come hard and fast. I feel each and every one. I fall. The last thing I see before the world goes dark is the ceiling giving way, promising to envelop me within the tomb in which I will be left to rust. This is how it ends.

In my final moments, I dreamt of Harmonex.

* * *

I see the light.

It's bright. Brighter than the brightest star. It consumes the totality of my vision. Is this what dying feels like?

"Oh. Good. You're awake."

The voice is soft. Reassuring. I try to turn my head to find the source, but something keeps me staring forward.

"Don't try to move. We had to restrain you in order to operate."

Operate? Where am I?

"You suffered quite a bit of damage. The injuries were mostly contained to just one mode, and lucky for you, it was the one you had a spare of. Anybody else would have been a goner."

Injuries? From what? The Decepticons? Did the Decepticons attack?

"Your primary forms had deep roots. Connections with your t-cog, that we expected. But your spark chamber, your brain? It's like there were two of you in there. I've never seen anything like it, and to be honest, I wasn't exactly sure what would happen, so I'm a bit relieved you're awake."

The light begins to dim.

"Anyway, we're going to induce stasis sleep, so that you can rest. Your friend will want to hear the good news."

My friend? Crash Test?

Wait…who's Crash Test?

Crash Test…shot me.

Because I was an Autobot?

But I'm…I'm…

…I'm so tired…

* * *

"I should have left you for dead, Decepticon."

My friend, everybody. Commander of the Wreckers, and newest pain in my skidplate.

Impactor.

"If I knew…if I knew the truth, I would have let you rot on that barren wasteland of a planet."

The truth he's referring to is the fact that Punch, the celebrated master spy of the Autobots, had actually been a Decepticon the whole time. Me.

Counterpunch.

After rusting under a former Autobot outpost for an indeterminate amount of time due to a series of events that I still don't entirely understand, Commander Sunshine there picked me up and brought me here, to Paradron. As the doctor explained it, they were able to save me by removing the damaged components, most of which comprised the Punch half of my body.

In theory, I should just be me again. Except I'm not entirely sure who I am anymore.

"Look…Counterpunch…here's the deal. Things have changed since you've been, uh, dead. There aren't many of us left anymore. On either side. Thunder Mayhem has seen to that. I'm…"

Impactor sighs. I can tell this conversation isn't easy for him.

"Even if you are a Decepticon, there's a bigger monster out there now. One that has to be stopped. One that's killed just as many of yours as it has mine. Under any other circumstances I'd drop you right here, right now, but the world has changed."

I let his words roll around inside my brain. I'm not a Decepticon. I'm an Autobot! I left my home to join the Autobots. Then I got hurt. Became a spy. I died standing up against the Decepticons at Gargoid…

But…I am a Decepticon. I remember being recruited. The painful surgery that turned me into a Doublespy. Spying for the Decepticons. The downfall of Athenia. I remember the slaughter of Gargoid, and how much I enjoyed it.

I remember everything. I see my reflection, and see Counterpunch. I feel like Counterpunch. Punch was invented, a false identity created to spy on the Autobots, and yet I remember being him. I remember the rage I felt when I learned my home had been destroyed.

I don't know where the truth ends and the fiction begins, anymore.

"Tell me, Impactor. Do you remember Harmonex?"

The question catches him off guard. For a moment, his defenses are lowered. He seems vulnerable, and despite knowing him for only a few minutes, I can tell that this is a rare sight.

"Harmonex. There's a name I haven't heard in a long, long time. City of the singing crystals, they called it. An example of Decepticon brutality if there ever was one. Did you ever visit? "

I nod. "I think...it's where I came from. At least, part of me. Maybe."

Impactor is bracing himself on the balcony's railing, staring out across the city, lost somewhere in his thoughts.

As the silence drags on, I wonder how hard is it for him to stand here, thinking of all the friends he's lost because of me. I wonder whether or not he's wrong.

Finally he speaks. "I think I remember passing through it once, but it's hard to be certain. It was so long ago. Like so many other things from before the war…I'm not entirely sure whether my memories or Harmonex are real, or just a dream."

Neither am I.