



TRANSFORMERS™ TIMELINES™ PRESENTS

EYE *in the* SKY



WHALEN | 08

Transformers Timelines Presents:

Eye in the Sky

A Transformers: Shattered Glass Story

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“...esident assured the press corps that the blackout over the Eastern seaboard has not impeded the national defense structure, and stated emphatically that the unveiling of his promised expansion of the defense program will go forward as promised on Thursday. Sources within the Joint Chiefs went on record stating-”

“‘Defense’ my artificial eye,” Professor Arkeville muttered as he flicked off the van’s radio. The Arizona desert buzzed past them as he pressed his foot firmly onto the van’s accelerator, tinting red as the sun began its decent under the horizon.

“Jeeze, Prof, what’s the big rush?” a voice from the back seat called. A sleepy-eyed face framed with ash-brown locks came into the rearview mirror’s reflection. “It’s just a rock.”

“Will, please try and muster at least a little curiosity. A meteorite doesn’t fall to Earth every day.”

The raven-haired young woman in the passenger’s seat looked up from her PDA and gave the Professor an odd look. “Erm, actually...”

Arkeville rolled his natural eye and chuckled. “Okay, yes, Sephie, they do. But they rarely make it to the ground. This one also happened to strike on the same night a massive magnetic pulse knocked out this hemisphere’s satellites and half the country’s electronics. Personally, I’m not a big believer in coincidence.”

Another face peeked into the rearview. “But, Professor, how does a meteor knock out satellites and electronics on that kind of scale? It’s just a big chunk of iron and rock, right?”

“I don’t think it is, and that blackout is why I’m in a rush, Rick,” Arkeville replied. “I’d like to get to this one before the military starts nosing around wondering the same thing. If it were a normal instance, I wouldn’t be interested. Well, not *this* interested,” he chuckled before Sephie could voice her retort.

Will slumped back into the seat. “Hey, Rick, can you get me another sandwich out of the cooler?”

“Another one?” Rick ran his fingers through his short-cropped auburn hair and sighed. “I swear, if I ate like you, I’d weigh twice what I do now. Where do you put it all?”

“If the Prof wants us to be digging out some rock in the middle of the desert, I gotta keep my strength up.”

“We eat later. We’re here.” Arkeville smiled grimly as the van rumbled to halt. All around, the desert showed signs of the impact; deep grooves where rocks had been thrown with incredible force into the dirt, lingering dust, the sparse plant life blasted flat down.

The four piled out of the van, each one turning to stare at the mountain ahead of them. The entire face of the mountain had collapsed, massive slabs shattered off and tumbled into a pile hundreds of feet tall.

“We gotta dig through that?!” Will gasped. “Does the internship cover this?”

“The internship covers *science*. That means getting your hands dirty.”

“But... there’s tons of rock! How’re we gonna find a single specific rock in all that?”

The Professor rummaged through the van’s storage space until he withdrew a small, hand-held sensor attached to a metal box. A soft crackling emerged from it as he waved it towards the landslide. “With this. Our prize is thankfully radioactive... not to a dangerous level, but we’ll have to watch the counter.”

“Shouldn’t we have suits or something?” Sephie asked.

“Oh, c’mon Sephie, it’s not like it’s deadly. We probably get more rads at the dentist,” Rick grinned. “Let’s do this thing.”

“The meteor must have come in at an angle, blown straight into the side of the mountain and caused an avalanche,” Arkeville muttered as the kids pulled out picks and shovels. “No wonder the boys in green haven’t come sniffing around. With the satellites down and radar jammed, they probably couldn’t track it, and assumed it burned up in the atmosphere.”

Will gazed at a rising plume of dust in the distance. While the others busied themselves with the equipment in the back of the jeep, he took the Professor’s binoculars from the passenger seat and gazed through them.

“Uh... Professor...”

“Yes, Rick, what is it?”

“There’s a big ol’ missile truck heading right towards us!”

“Oh, crap, the men in green!” Will gasped. “Let’s get out of here before they see us!”

“Wait, this doesn’t sound right. Only one? That’s not military protocol.” Sephie grabbed Will’s sleeve to stop his retreat, taking the binoculars from Rick. “That’s a Stompbox Mobile Missile Deployer, all right... but I’ve never seen one in red and blue before, have you? That’s not standard military issue by any means.”

“I don’t think *that’s* standard military issue either,” Rick muttered, pointing. “Eleven o’clock.”

Will grabbed another pair of binoculars from the back, following his friend’s direction. He caught a white civilian-model van in his sights, rounding a rock on an intercept course for the missile truck. The tinted windows prevented him

from seeing into it, but the unmistakably glam-rock mural plastered along its side made him suspicious enough. “Wait, are the Misfits are working undercover for the man or something?”

“Those aren’t the Misfits,” Sephie replied casually. “Their van is bright pink with three screaming banshees on the side. That’s Cold Slither’s mural.” She paused and gave each of them a lightly-challenging stare. “What?”

Rick perked up. “You think it’s the rebels?”

“Whoever they are, this is highly suspicious,” Arkeville replied. “We might want to get to some cover... just in case.”

“Hey... the van’s stopped... and no-one’s getting out,” Will called out.

Arkeville’s mechanical eye telescoped slightly as the lens turned red. “They aren’t getting out because no one is there. Both vehicles are... *empty*.”

“I wish I had infrared vision,” Sephie sighed in awe.

“The events leading to my prosthetics were highly unpleasant, young lady. I don’t recommend it. To say nothing of the maintenance.”

“So... remote-control vehicles, one a rock band, one fake military,” Rick mulled. “Maybe they’re shooting a music video?”

Sephie trained her binoculars on the missile truck. “Remote control vehicles. Wonderful!”

“Meh, I’ve seen it done on TV a hundred times,” Will responded.

“I still want one.”

“You want everything mechanical.”

Arkeville ignored his interns and watched the two vehicles carefully. “They’re just sitting there... facing each other.” The Stompbox’s missile rack swung towards the hill, back and forth, as if gesturing. “What’s going on here? Who are they?”

“HAI!”

All four spun around at the outburst. Silhouetted against the setting sun, a large cat perched on a rock above them, head tilted at a curious angle. As their eyes adjusted, it became clear that the creature wasn’t organic; its silhouette was all sleek lines, white metal reflecting the sunlight back, with a pair of large glowing yellow eyes.

“Don’t... move...” Arkeville whispered. “Maybe it won’t-”

“I can has humanz?” the feline yowled.

“RUN!”

The mechanical cat giggled madly as it watched the four creatures scramble away. It leapt into the air effortlessly, bounding after the fleeing humans.

“Ell-oh-ell!”



“If this is supposed to be my heist, why are you two lamers following me?” Butch Witwicky snarled as he fingered the lockpicking gear concealed in the hidden pockets of his leather jacket. It seemed like no matter where he went, his brothers were always right there, too. His father often used the term “thick as thieves,” and Butch had to agree... especially on the “thick” part.

“So you don’t screw it up,” the eldest Witwicky brother sniffed dismissively, watching the horizon for cars, one hand pushed deep into the grubby pocket of a military jacket. Scruffy brown hair waved in the cool night air as he scratched at the sparse hints of beard-stubble around his chin. “Dad’d be seriously torqued if you couldn’t lift your own birthday present.”

“Yeah,” the mass of muscle barely restrained by a simple tee shirt behind Spike uttered after a moment.

“Spike, you are such a scuzz. You know I can break into any car I want without a mark or single sound. You just haven’t got the fashion sense to get anything worth stealing. I do. Buster, I’d insult you too, but I’d have to explain myself four times before you got it. Quit riding my coattails. You two are staining ‘em.”

Spike answered by spitting at the ground, while Buster simply looked at nothing in particular. Butch rolled his eyes and continued to stalk along the darkened parking lot, casting nasty glances back at his two brothers until something shiny caught his eye. "Hey, look at this..."

The brilliant sheen of jet-black paneling drew Butch's eye. A low, sleek hot rod sat in the darkest corner of the lot, giving the impression of a predatory cat lurking patiently for its unsuspecting meal to pass by. The exposed engine block and spoiler only added to the feel of instant, lethal speed and power.

"Oh, man. Oh, *man*. Someone tricked this baby out to heaven and back. I think I'm in love."

"You're an idiot," Spike growled, motioning to the middle Witwicky brother. Buster lurched forward smacked the youngest brother on the back of the head with his open palm.

"What was that for?!"

"Tricked-out means 'traceable.' No amount of chopping is going to make this thing blend."

"I ain't here to blend," Butch grinned. "Unlike you no-style dipsticks, I'm gonna be *seen*. I can get a new spoiler, new deco, file the serials, have Buster there do his thing to the engine..."

"My thing?"

"Soup it up to heck and back."

"Oh." A few neurons fired in Buster's skull. "Yeah, I can do that easy."

"Bless your idiot savantness, brother. Now, much as I like the black... I'm thinking cherry-red... and that purple stuff's gotta go."

"It'll be weeks, months before you can dri-"

"Mind's made up, I'm taking this one." Butch pulled a cloth satchel from his inner pocket, carefully extracting a small electronic device from it. At the press of a button, a thin strip of metal foil popped from one side. "One popped lock and disabled alarm system coming up!... hey, wait a minute."

"Hurry up, man."

"Spike, there's no keyhole on this door!"

"Don't be an idiot. It's right..."

Butch turned, waving his free hand at the car's door. "Go on, right where? I'm telling you this car hasn't got a keyhole!"

"*Keyhole, huh? Good ta know.*"

The three boys spun wildly at the voice, yet found themselves alone in the parking lot. Spike fingered the blackjack hidden in his coat. "Oh, crap... who said that?"

"*I did.*"

The black car's lights flashed on, its engine revving like the roar of an animal, sending the boys stumbling back in shock. Suddenly, the machine split apart at the seams, reconfiguring itself into a towering humanoid shape. Spike tried to scramble upright, but the creature's left arm swung directly in his path, the screaming buzzsaw at the end gouging a deep groove in the concrete.

"We're dead," Butch whimpered, hiding behind Buster. "I'm sorry I tried to steal you! I didn't know! Please don't hurt me!"

Spike stared up into the robot's human-like face, which was watching them with a mixture of contempt and amused curiosity. "Wh-what do you want?"

"Take me to you guys's leader," the machine growled, red eyes glowing. "Oh, wait. That would be *me*."

Rick ran as quickly as he could, legs pistoning in a steady beat. As long as he focused on his breathing, the terror of the moment lost its edge. Fleeing a monster was just like coming back from the broken leg in third grade, he thought. Endurance, positive thinking and effort would see him through.

Will, on the other hand, was less optimistic and trailed his friend by a half meter. The two ducked behind a large boulder and leaned against it, neither one willing to look behind them to see if the creature had given chase.

"Dude, we're so dead," Will groaned between gasps for air.

"No way." Rick reached down and grabbed a fist-sized rock. "I'm going to look back. If it's there, I'll throw this at his head. Then I'll run into the desert, and you get Sephie and the Prof."

"What about you?"

"I'll be okay. And if I'm not... tell Sephie I think she's cute."

"Wait, what?"

Rick gritted his teeth and prepared to leap into the open when a loud series of tones broke the silence, causing him to stumble.

"Dude! Put it on silent!" Will hissed. "*Put it on silent!*"

Rick shoved the rock into Will's hands and grabbed for the cell phone in the pocket of his letter jacket, jabbing at the mute button. "Maybe it's the Professor?" his friend whispered.

Rick's face froze as he flipped the phone open and peered at the screen. Wordlessly, he turned it so Will could read the text message.

Hey im right over u do u see me? Im the metal cat waving at u on the big rock!

****posted by ravagekitteh via Yatter mobile web feed*

Both boys slowly, as if pulled by strings, lifted their heads to stare up at the feline form, which was unquestionably waving a forepaw at them.

"Lulz!"

"Hoof it!"

"It's toying with us!" Rick panted as they scrambled into the open. The two found themselves headed directly for the rock-mural van. "In here, maybe we can get away in that!"

The two teenagers slid to a stop a few feet from the white van. Panicked, Will grabbed at the van's driver-side door handle. "Open! Darn it, open!" Once he finally got a grip on the handle, the door popped open easily.

Will stopped himself before climbing into the van's driver's seat. The insides of the machine were twisting and shifting before his eyes, shearing apart and reforming into an immense humanoid shape. Will felt himself lift off the ground, suspended between two steel fingers by the back of his jacket as the white-and-blue robot stared at him from behind a featureless faceplate. A tattered yellow-green length of cloth wound around the robot's forehead like a bandana.

"Hey, that's a sensitive component, little dude," the machine's strange, synthetic voice hummed. "Most uncool."

"Metal monsters from the center of the earth!" Will yelped as he stared into the machine's visor. "The government said that'd never happen again!"

"Let my buddy go!" Rick grabbed a rock from the ground and prepared to throw.

"Whoah, little meaty dudes!" The machine raised its free hand in a gesture of peace. "Fear not, for we come from outer space."

"The government said *that* wouldn't happen again, either!" Will wailed.

The missile tank rumbled and, like its companion, assumed a humanoid form. Its facial features resembled those of a human, albeit one wearing sunglasses, and its bright red and blue coloration made it seem less imposing even though it stood a head taller than the van. "Soundwave, you're frightening him, let him down."

"Whoop, sorry, Heatwave." The first robot gently lowered Will to the earth and set him down. For a moment, Will considered grabbing his friend and running, but a quick glance ended that thought. The metallic panther was sitting on its haunches a few feet behind him, watching them with a look of pure amusement.

"I think the phrase is something like, 'we come in peace?'" The machine called Heatwave leaned over Will and Rick and gave an uneasy smile.

"Should we trust them?" Will hissed.

"No choice, really," Rick whispered back. "But if they wanted to squish us, they'd probably have done so already."

"You know, Ravage, you could have easily made this first encounter far less awkward if you didn't act like... well, you," an even voice toned out.

All five turned to the approaching speaker, a human-sized robot in bright blue and off-white. Professor Arkeville and Sephie flanked him, the latter's eyes wide with awe as she stared up at the Decepticons.

"Double-you-tee-ess?" the cat sniffed. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"What's 'double-you-tee-ess' supposed to mean?" the small robot shot back. "If it means what I think it does, wouldn't it be quicker to just say the actual phrase?"

The two boys stared at each other. "This is insane," Will mumbled.

“Your associate ‘Frenzy’ has explained everything to us,” Arkeville smiled, ignoring the two arguing mini-bots and holding his organic hand up to the two larger machines. “As a being of science and a believer in peace, allow me to cordially invite you all to our planet Earth. Would you like our assistance in digging out your friends?”



The sea wind howled through the dilapidated remains of skyscrapers and freeways. The desiccated remains of civilization called thoughts of home to Rodimus’s processor, even on this moist, rock-covered planet.

“Why are we here? There’s nothing left, hasn’t been for a decade or two,” Spike growled, looking out through Rodimus’s windshield. “Looters took what they could years ago. All the cities along Arizona Bay are long-deserted.”

“I don’t give a leaky gasket ‘bout the cities,” Rodimus replied. “What I’s after is underwater. I didn’t come alone, an’ I’m gonna need ‘em to take this planet.”

Butch slouched in the driver’s seat as Rodimus and Spike bickered. If someone had told him yesterday that hanging with a giant alien robot that turned into a sweet street racer would be boring, he would have laughed at them and then socked them in the mouth. But Rodimus’s constant badgering about day-to-day aspects of human life had gotten extremely dull after a few hours, and the machine was very close-lipped about his own world.

It did not help that having a tricked-out hot rod was no fun when the car drove itself and avoided anyplace where the chicks could see him.

Spike was halfway through explaining that humans need to eat more than once a day when a blue light flashed on Rodimus’s dashboard. “What was that?”

“We been spotted.”

Peering out the tinted front window, Butch could make out four vehicles heading in fast, kicking up clouds of dust behind them. In the lead was a jet-black sports car with bright yellow detailing, looking a fair bit like the one they were riding in. The racer was followed by a cloth-top black roadster of a design from well before his time, a green military jeep with what looked like a combination crane-boom and cannon on its back end, and a grayish dune buggy with an unmistakably large gun turret.

“Scavengers,” Buster grumbled from the back seat. “Pickin’ over the coast towns.”

“You gots no idea.” Rodimus’s voice betrayed his glee. His steering wheel jerked to the left and he swerved to a stop, blocking both lanes of traffic.

The quintet of vehicles continued at full speed. Twenty yards from Rodimus’s parked form the sports car unfolded, shifting and twisting into a towering robotic shape that skidded to a halt with surprising grace for something so huge. It glared down at Rodimus with large, red eyes that, combined with its lack of a mouth or nose, gave the impression of an insect’s face. The other three assumed their own forms, sliding into flanking positions. The roadster robot was just as faceless as the sports car, but there was something in the way it stood that made it seem relaxed and parental. The jeep’s face was more humanoid, as was the dune buggy’s, but their similarities ended there. The jeep was icy and detached looking, while the dune buggy twitched and glanced about nervously.

“Rodimus... friends of yours I hope?” Spike hissed.

“Eyyyy! Goldbug, Big Daddy, Brawn, Beachcomber! Great ta see ya functional! I was just-”

He cut short as each Autobot brought their weapons to bear on him.

“I was afraid we’d never see you again, Rodimus,” the insect-faced one snarled. “Fortuitous, wonderful, outstanding. Brawn, make him transform to robot mode, then rip his arms out of his sockets.”

The jeep-bot clenched and unclenched its fists repeatedly as it stepped forward.

“Whoah, Goldbug! Wait, wait! Look what I gots!” Rodimus unfolded, dumping the three humans out of his passenger space as he assumed humanoid form.

“Cats in the cradle!” the dune buggy snarled, head twitching, eyeing the humans. “*And* the silver spoon! Now’s your time to burn your mind!”

“Shut up, Beachcomber.” Goldbug merely sniffed and turned his attention back to Rodimus “So you have an infestation. Congratulations. Vape them all.”

“Will you wait a fraggin’ cycle? Have you *looked* at the planet we’s on? It ain’t nothin’ like what we thought it was! I caught what happened as my pod was fallin’... the Decepticons got *naked!* Shot down out of high orbit by the humans!”

The Autobots turned to each other in shock. Only Goldbug stayed still, his gaze leveled at Rodimus.

“These three kids know the planet... and better yet, they knows how the government works, cuz they’re like us!”

“What a revolting thought,” Goldbug growled.

“They’s criminals! They tried to steal me!” Rodimus laughed. “There ain’t nothin’ more quintespecially Autobot than that!”

“Lad’s got a point,” Big Daddy hummed, black armor gleaming in the harsh light. “Theft is a good old-fashioned Autobot faction value.”

Rodimus looked at the crew carefully. “Look, why don’t we all go back to the *Ark* an’ talk? I gots me a killer plan...”



Large portions of the *Ark* were in shambles or filled with seawater. There was no question the craft would never fly again, even if they could somehow dredge it up from the ocean depths. The Autobots that had made it through the wreck functioning were busy shoring up walls, working pumps, and searching out other Autobots who’d been knocked offline in the crash. They had managed to rig the ship’s boarding tube to burrow into the cliff wall, allowing them to drill a tunnel to the surface.

Wheeljack and Blaster cast nasty glares at Rodimus as he entered the bridge, followed quickly by Goldbug and the others.

“Oh. *He* iss back,” Blaster snorted as he returned to his work. “How vunderful.”

Wheeljack nodded at Goldbug. “We’ve only got about 35% of the main bridge functions operating. At least 80% of the ship is still inaccessible. We found six more ‘bots, all of them are in emergency stasis now. And a box of Scrounges.”

“Old ship held up pretty well considerin’,” Rodimus mused, assessing the damage. “I’ll be scrappeded if we’s stayin’ long, tho. I been scoutin’ out some new bases, an’ I think I found some nice ones.”

A loud, distorted tone echoed through the bridge. Goldbug, never pulling his gaze from Rodimus, waved a hand idly. “Wheeljack, open the airlock.”

A few moments later, the bridge’s main door rumbled open, revealing a hulking, hunched-over form. A number of human-sized knapsacks and bags nestled in the creature’s long, claw-like arms.

“You weren’t the only one... *scouting*,” Goldbug growled at Rodimus as the blue-and-black machine lumbered in. “The ocean floor here is littered with ruined cities. There must be energy, weapons, something we can use. Welcome back, Seaspray. What have you found?”

“The first treasures, salvaged from the ebon depths, the eternal night of-”

“Yes, yes, whatever. Get on with it.”

The monster made a disappointed-sounding burbling noise, unceremoniously dropping his cargo. Among the wet impacts of canvas was the cold, sharp clang of metal on metal. The last bag to drop, a heavy blue-and-white gym bag, popped open as it fell. The bag disgorged a torrent of water-logged bundles of greenish paper.

“These were prized from the cold bosom of the unforgiving briny-” He caught Goldbug’s glare and paused. “I... found these behind strong vaulted doors. Such precautions indicate value... yet no warming energy do they give. I am vexed.”

“Oh, it sure gives me a warm feeling! It’s money!” Spike howled. The three humans waded into the flood of bills, scooping what they could into their arms. “You musta found a sunken bank or cash depository! Millions in untraceable cash!”

Rodimus kneeled, scooping up some of the haul gingerly with his buzzsaw-hand. “What’s money?”

“What’s *money*?! What do you bots do when you need to gas up?”

“Find whoever’s got some, shake ‘em down and take it all,” Rodimus replied matter-of-factly. The other Autobots nodded in agreement.

Butch gave them a critical look. “So what happens when you run out of people to take it from?”

“Ve come *here*,” Blaster grinned.

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Spike gave the robot a long, weary look. “You said your planet was drained of energy, right? Ever stop and think maybe the reason for that is the way you operate? Pillage and plunder don’t work. My family’s been stealing a long, long time.”

“Ve haff been operatingk in zis vay for millions of solar cycles!” Blaster huffed.

“And look at where it’s gotten you. Look, the big thing is you don’t take *everything*. You take just the good stuff, the choice stuff, and move on to someone else!”

“That seems... wasteful,” Goldbug grumbled, but his tone betrayed uncertainty. “Why not take it all?”

“Because if you leave the first chump enough stuff, they can build back up, get more good stuff once again,” Butch grinned. “Which means you can come back rob ‘em again! And again and again! It’s like farming!”

“What’s farming?”

The three Witwickies looked up at the assembled robots, who were staring at the humans with a uniform look of rapt incomprehension.

“This may take a while,” Buster rumbled.



“They shot us out of the sky with a slaggin’ *nuke!*” Cliffjumper eyed the humans with intense distrust, particularly Arkeville. Something about that one in particular made his solenoids itch, but he couldn’t figure out why for the life of him. The bright red compact-car robot groaned as he worked a few kinks out of his neck. “I been hit with a lotta stuff in my time, but that was a new one on me.”

The *Nemesis* had survived the crash moderately intact, though only a minute fraction of its systems were functional. The crash itself had weakened its superstructure, and the following avalanche had crushed many of its compartments. The heavily-shielded bridge had suffered the least amount of damage. Cliffjumper and Starscream, the only two Decepticons who hadn’t abandoned ship so they could steer the ship into an unpopulated area, had used its crash compartments to survive impact with only a few dings and dents.

“I apologize. I fear our government doesn’t have a great track record of dealing with outside threats,” Arkeville sighed. “Come to think of it, they don’t deal well with internal threats... or even imagined threats.”

“We certainly weren’t expecting this level of technology,” the gleaming-white alien-jet-form robot called Starscream sighed, looking up from the status report scrolling up one of the bridge’s few operational screens. “We had intercepted your ‘television’ transmissions back on our homeworld of Cybertron... apparently they were a bit out of date. We thought that your space ranger Pete Prometheus was the best you could throw at the Autobots... and knew it wouldn’t be enough.”

“No, especially since we call that ‘science fiction’... and that old serial is very light on the ‘science’ and heavy on the ‘fiction’. My father really enjoyed it, as a kid, though.”

“Why are you guys here?” Sephie asked, head threatening to come off as she looked at the technological marvels surrounding her.

“Truthfully, we would have left your planet alone were it up to us,” Starscream sighed. “But our enemies, the Autobots, were intent on plundering this planet’s energy and enslaving your people, our war having sucked our home planet of Cybertron dry. If they manage to get a hold of Earth’s resources, there will be nothing to stop them from conquering the galaxy.”

“We managed to disable their ship, though unfortunately they fell into your ocean,” Heatwave added. “We’d hoped to stop them before they could get planetside and return home without disrupting you. But, well...”

“Are there others coming?” The hope in Sephie’s voice was palpable.



“Err... no, I’m afraid not. Even if we had the resources to send another ship, which we don’t, our planet is not in a fixed orbit. Its path of travel has put it through a strand of a nebula that interferes with our transwarp navigation and communications. We’re out of touch with them for at least one of your orbital cycles.”

Arkeville nodded. “Well, we’ll do what we can to help you return and make this planet your home until then.”

“Hold it, hold it, hold it!” Cliffjumper interjected. “What is up with this planet? Where’s California? What happened to all the people?”

“Forgive us. Cliffjumper hails from an alternate different dimension,” Starscream said, as if it was perfectly natural. “Apparently this Earth is considerably different than the Earth of his universe.”

“And confusing!”

“Another universe?” Arkeville gasped in surprise. “Amazing... we’ve certainly seen the theories, and I would be fascinated to talk to you more about this... but later. As for your current confusion, I can only assume that your Earth’s history has been less... tumultuous, than ours. The late 1980’s were very rough on us. No offense intended, but I can’t say I’m looking forward to a repeat. Perhaps we could assist you in stopping your enemies.”

“Fortuitously, there’s nobody left to stop,” Starscream smiled. “The Autobots took a hard dive straight into the ocean, in a critically-crippled ship. Our primary concern now is finding our scattered crew and getting our ship prepped for a return flight to Cybertron.”

“I don’t buy it,” Cliffjumper growled.

“Buy?”

“I don’t buy that the Autobots are done for. I mean, we got hit with a nuclear bomb and we’re still in one piece. A little swim ain’t gonna put ‘em out of the game. Even if the crash knocked the entire crew offline, which isn’t real likely, one underwater earthquake or accidental discovery by a team of human divers’ll reactivate at least one. And he’ll wake up the whole lot of them.”

“Total bummer, Cliffdude, bad vibes all around,” Soundwave tutted. “You need to process positive.”

“I’m not being pessimistic. I’m learning from experience. We need to make *sure* they’re toast before we leave. I’ve had too many million-to-one chances turn around and bite me in the bumper to trust they’re gone for good.”

Starscream stroked his chin. “Cliffjumper is right. It would be ethically irresponsible of us to leave without confirming the Autobots’ destruction. In either case, we need to recover our crew as fast as possible. Sadly, the ship’s reconfiguration matrix is completely and irrevocably out of commission and there are no functional pods left... which

means my jet-form will be immediately recognized as alien by the authorities. It's up to the rest of you to find our fallen comrades."

"Can we help?" Rick smiled. "If anything, you guys'll need to have someone in your driver's seats so no-one gets suspicious." He stopped, looking askance at Heatwave. "Well, too suspicious."

"I don't know. I'm loathe to involve innocents in our battle... the risks are..."

"Truthfully, Starscream, now that we've contacted you, we're already at risk," Arkeville sighed, arms folded. "Rick, Will, Sephie... it's your decision if you want to--"

"We're in," Will interrupted, arms folded across his chest.

"You bet," Rick added, looking at his friend with a little surprise and admiration.

"Couldn't tear me away," Sephie smiled.

"Thank you all. As for me... Starscream, your people's technology is astounding. If I may, I'd like to stay here. I'd greatly appreciate the opportunity to learn more about you."

"Indeed... I think there's much we can teach other. Your knowledge of Earth will be invaluable, as the first thing we need to do is locate a place for a new base of operations. If you found us, others can. With a few more reactivated Decepticons, we can get most of the *Nemesis* broken down and moved... the rest we can destroy."

Sephie's eyes lit up, her face split into a grin as she stared up at the assembled robots. "Does that mean you're staying here long-term?"

"Quite possibly. The *Nemesis* is grounded permanently, and even without the possibility of the Autobots surviving, it will take quite a lot of time to--"

"Awesome!"



"But... but *ze plundering!*"

Rodimus resisted the urge to shove his buzzsaw into Blaster's face. "Look, we scrappin' left Cybertron to form a galaxy-conquerin' empire, right? Earth's resources is the key, right? So just completely wastin' this... *re-new-a-ble re-source*," -the unfamiliar words left an odd taste in his mouth- "is just stupid, right? You really wanna be sittin' on yet another useless husk of a planet? We was lucky to get off the last one! We wanna keep a steady stream of energy close ta home so's we don't run out again! We don't lay waste to the whole planet! We don't do the mass slaughter thing! *We don't scrappin' do things Optimus's way, alright?! We leave the humans enough to keep on livin', an' more importantly, keep on producin'!*"

"People are sheep," Spike smiled. "They've gotten used to living under the current government. Oh, they whine and complain, but they do that all the time anyway, and won't really lift a finger to change things. At this point, what's the diff if it's a buncha giant alien robots instead? They say the only two constants in life are death and taxes. We're just the new tax collectors is all."

"We?" Goldbug hissed.

"You're gonna need intermediaries," Butch replied. "Having humans to deal with will make it a little easier for the proles."

"Unt if zey refuse to pay zese 'taxes'?"

Buster smacked an oversized fist into his open palm and ground it slowly. Rodimus turned from the display and gave Blaster a feral grin. "We give 'em a taste of the *other* constant. After all, gotta remind 'em why we's the new boss. Happy now?"

Silence claimed the room for a few moments as Goldbug glared at Rodimus, the other Autobots keeping a respectful distance between the two. "I'll grant that your idea has merit, Rodimus..." he began slowly. "But you are still out of your element!" Goldbug pointed accusingly at the Autobot. "How do you intend to subvert control of this world with only the crew of this ship? Most of our warriors are in critical stasis, and will take megacycles to bring to even nominal operating condition, let alone get them combat-ready! The humans possess far greater weapons technology than we were lead to believe, and the *Ark* is never going to fly again!"

“So what?” Rodimus grinned. “As it stands, I already got a plan. Spike, mash play on that recordin’ device of yours.”

The human fished into his leather jacket, pulling out a tiny device that was little more than a screen with a single diamond-shaped button below. He pushed one corner of the button with his thumbs a few times.

“Audio signal received from external source,” a cold female voice intoned over the room’s speakers.

“Put it through the main speakers, Teletraan-X,” Rodimus smiled.

“*My fellow Americans, today the United States of America became the unrivaled dominant military power in the world.*”

“Heh. Wait’ll he gets a load of us.”

“*Last week’s launch of the shuttle Defiant carried a special payload. At this time, the United States possesses a Global Orbiting Defense Satellite equipped with a 10.8 exawatt laser system. This engine of defense is capable of vaporizing any hostile entity on, or underneath, this planet. If we had had such a defense in 1988, millions on the Western seaboard might have survived. Any act of aggression, active or otherwise, against this nation by any hostile force, terrestrial, sub-terrestrial or extraterrestrial, will bring the wrath of the Global Orbiting Defense Satellite.*”

“So the humans now possess a super-weapon,” Goldbug mumbled. “When reinforcements arrive, they’ll have something cleaner than a nuclear blast to knock them out of the sky with. Brilliant.”

“We got *lots* of super-weapons,” Buster rumbled.

“Anything humans can build, we can steal. And once we gots control of their orbitin’ laser, we’ll rule this planet unquestioned. Cherry, huh?” Rodimus grinned, arms wide.

“Irrelevant, superfluous, meaningless!” Goldbug shouted. “You don’t have the sense to execute this plan of yours, even if you had the leadership of the Autobots.”

The temperature of the room suddenly dropped. The other Autobots shifted slowly, ready to head for cover. “What’s dat supposed to mean?” Rodimus eventually replied, his tone level. “So who’s in charge den? Beachcomber?”

Goldbug bristled. “*I am the one who is most fit to lead! I have the rank, I have the seniority, I have the experience, I have the tactical genius!*”

Rodimus listened to Goldbug’s speech without reacting. As soon as the raving Autobot had finished his tirade, Rodimus took a step forward and, in one smooth motion, backhanded Goldbug with his good hand, dropping the Autobot to the ground.

“You gots the *mouth*, dat’s for sure, but dat ain’t leadership.”

“What do you know about leadership?!” the struck Autobot shrieked, getting to his feet. “You bailed on us as we crashed! Abandoned us!”

“I gots the sense to jump a fallin’ ship, you mean,” Rodimus grinned. “You wants to make a bid for leadership, then challenge me.”

“As you wish!”

Goldbug lunged with surprising speed, catching Rodimus in the jaw and sending him careening into the far wall. Rodimus swung his buzzsaw-arm wildly, forcing Goldbug to swerve and miss with his followup attack. Arms and legs sailed in wide arcs, sending sparks with every connection.

“Why don’tcha use your blasters, Goldbug?” Rodimus grinned as his saw caught Goldbug’s arm.

“Trying to goad me into using a gun in a leadership duel?” Goldbug lunged at his opponent and pinned him against the far wall. “I’m not some idiot who will lose on technicality!”

“Then you’s an idiot what will lose the old fashioned way!” Rodimus freed himself with a head butt and followed through with a kick to the midsection. Goldbug fell a foot from Butch’s position in the crowd, sending the young human scurrying back behind Big Daddy.

“You normally solve arguments like this?” Buster gasped in fascination.

“Little roughhousing keeps the processor sharp and the sparkplugs firin’,” Big Daddy replied with a casual tone, kicking back against a console. “And if one of ‘em happens to deactivate the other, well, we call that a lesson learned on both sides.”

“I *like* you bots.”

Goldbug regained his feet quickly, blocking his head with his arm-shields and charging. Rodimus sidestepped, but not fast enough, catching a glancing blow that spun him.

“We’re too evenly matched,” Goldbug snarled, skidding to a halt. “But you forgot one thing.”

“What’s dat?”

“Fuel economy. You’re getting tired.” Goldbug made a desperate leap and pinned Rodimus against a security console. In one smooth motion he twisted Rodimus around and locked his buzz saw hand behind his back. “I, however, am feeling quite energetic, invigorated, pumped. Got any words for the commander of the Autobots, Rodimus?”

“Yeah... a few,” Rodimus grinned. “Teletraan-X, delete personnel file designate Goldbug.”

The ship’s lights flickered for a few moments before the *Ark*’s computer responded. “File deleted. Unidentified Cybertronian intruder on the bridge. Preparing *restraints*.” Panels across the bridge opened up, revealing tentacle-like mechanical arms. Each one darted with lightning speed, wrapping around Goldbug’s biceps, thighs and midsection, jerking him violently into the air.

“Undelete! *Undelete!*” the captive Autobot shrieked, thrashing wildly.

“Command authorization not recognized,” Teletraan-X responded. “Further struggle will only increase the severity of your agony.”

“Chicanery, duplicity, fraudulence!” Goldbug wheezed out as the tentacles tightened around him. “You cheated!”

“Shyeah, right,” Rodimus sneered, massaging his buzzsaw arm, swaggering towards the new prisoner. “Rules say servos and handheld weapons. Don’t say nothin’ ‘bout who’s servos bring the victory... or maybe yous forgot how Optimus won right to rule over his brudder.” Rodimus spun his buzzsaw up to full speed and held it mere millimeters from Goldbug’s neck. “Now we just figger out how this is gonna end, huh?”

“I yield! *I yield!*” Goldbug howled, trying to pull away from the whirling disc.

Rodimus grinned and the blade stopped its spin. “Beautiful.”

“Granted, of course... I remain *second* in command.”

The crowd began to murmur amongst themselves.

“Check the bolts on this guy, eh?” Rodimus grinned as he turned to face the Autobots. “Fair ‘nuff... Teletraan-X, release the prisoner.”

“Prisoner has not apologized for transgression,” the computer snapped.

“What?! That’s asinuuuuurk *I’m sorry!*”

The ship dropped Goldbug unceremoniously to the ground.

“So, now dat we gots dat out of the way... gets your feet and start pullin’ together a mission team. We’s about to move up in the world.”

“Hrrm... as you command, Rodimus.”

“As you command, Rodimus *Prime*.”

Goldbug’s visor dimmed, fists clenching. “Yes... Rodimus *Prime*.”

The newly-crowned Prime smirked as Goldbug skulked away through one of the side-doors. “Teletraan-X’s sensor net still workin’, Blaster?”

“Ja...er, ja, Rodimuz Prime.”

“Have it home in on that satellite control base. It’s gonna be pumpin’ out plenty of instructions to the laser in the sky, shouldn’t be hard ta spot. Wheeljack?”

“Yes? What is it *now*?”

“I think it’d best if only you and me gots voice command control over Teletraan, eh?”

“Oh, of course.”

“Uhh... boss?”

Rodimus spun around for the source of the voice.

“Down here.”

“Oh, heh. Yeah, Spike?”

“You sure you should let that guy live?” He turned to the door Goldbug had passed through. “I mean, he’s all but said outright he’s gonna kill you.”

“Fuhgeddaboutit. I know ‘im. As long as he’s at my back, he ain’t lettin’ anyone else get close to it. He won’t let no-one knife me in the back but him... and I ain’t scared of him.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m *Rodimus-scrapping-Prime*.”



Seven pairs of optics and three pairs of eyes peered over the red rocks, carefully watching the rather nondescript installation known as Burpleson Air Force Base a few miles away, across a vast, featureless plain of sand. A few jeeps rumbled on patrol, with a handful of troops standing around a large satellite dish.

Big Daddy hummed, clutching his rifle by the barrel and swinging the butt a few inches from the desert floor. “Looks simple enough, but appearances can be deceiving.”

“Indeed. These humans are fascinating,” Side Burn nodded. “They’ve proven quite surprising.”

Brawn slipped one of his nucleon shock gauntlets over his right fist. “So, what is our plan of attack?”

“Ve zimply zend in ze Zcrounges,” Blaster huffed.

“Not yet we don’t.” Rodimus jabbed a finger against Blaster’s chest. “I knows the Scrounges is disposable, but they ain’t *that* disposable, ‘specially since we ain’t even got the full complement operational. Plus, we don’t know what all the humans are packin’. Remember the nuke? Sumptin’ like this, they’re gonna have better security than what we’s seein’ here. We gotta be sneaky, an’ that means our human allies’re gonna help us get in there.”

“Them?!” Goldbug sniffed. “Preposterous, ridiculous, asinine. How?”

“We got an in,” Spike grinned.

“An’ it’s a sweet one,” Rodimus smiled. “I’m leadin’ an infiltration team. The rest of you’s is gonna attack on my signal as a distraction while we takes over the control room. Once we gotts the satellite, they gotts no choice but to give up or get blasted.”

Goldbug tapped his chin. “The timing of this mission is critical. That is why-”

“*Blaster’ll* be leadin’ th’ diversionary attack. Youse is comin’ in with me an’ Wheeljack.”

“...what?”

Rodimus smiled at his second-in-command, but there was nothing friendly in it. “Blaster’s the coordinator. An he’s wound up tight, he’ll be exactly on-time. You’s is right, this mission’s critical, an’ it’d go real bad for the infiltration team if the assault team just happened to be *late*.”



Lieutenant McMillan was not having a good day.

The installation of the new weapons system relay had the entire base on edge. The security sweep beforehand had turned up seventeen minor violations and McMillan didn’t have time for even one and the presence of a super-weapon on U.S. soil meant trouble with the Soviets. Every hand on the base was bracing for a fourth World War. Most of the troops were jumpy or anxious, but the General’s usual bravado seemed to grow every minute.

Between wrangling dozens of anxious soldiers, dealing with the President’s personal vanguard from the Pentagon and pushing, unsuccessfully, for the General to report to his psychiatrist, the Lieutenant was at the end of his rope.

And now he had to deal with a bunch of joyriding idiots.

The three hot rodders had given McMillan and the MPs a merry chase through the restricted area, but his jeep did better on rough terrain than their roadsters. The jeep’s machine gun also helped hammer home the need to pull over.

“Aww, c’mon man, we were just havin’ some fun.”

McMillan glared at the speaker, the youngest of the three boys and former driver of a black sportscar with an exposed motor and a massive spoiler, decked out with purple flames. All three were sitting across the table in the stark gray interrogation room, and not a one of them looked the least bit phased. The kids’ aliases told McMillan enough. “Butch”? “Buster”? “Spike”? A bunch of no-good career-criminal wannabes out looking for trouble, the lot of them. They made his fists itch.

“I don’t know what you think fun is, mister, but maybe you saw a sign out there? ‘No trespassing’? Sound familiar?”

The taller blonde one laughed. “Oh, is that what it says? A delinquent like me don’t get to school much. I gotta work on my three ‘R’s, right guys?” The three kids broke in to sarcastic laughter, though the largest of the three joined in a few seconds after the other two.

“Fine, you want to be tough guys? Well, how’s this? Your cars are evidence. We’ve got ‘em locked up in the motor pool. Oh, don’t worry, you’ll get your wheels back after you fill out the proper paperwork... shouldn’t take more than two, three years to process. We might even let you fill out the paperwork now, because I’m sure we can get enough on you kids to keep you in jail for at least that long.”

“Oooo, I’m real scared,” the youngest of the three smirked.

“You just don’t know when to qu-”

McMillan’s speech was cut short by the muted thud of a distant explosion and the flickering of the lights. A second later the building shook suddenly.

“Lieutenant, keep an eye on these punks.” McMillan nodded to the MP at the door. “I’ll be back.”

The instant he left the room, he reached out with one arm, grabbing a random soldier by the sleeve. “Soldier, what the heaven is going on?”

“Wheels!” the young man gasped. “Giant wheels with guns have breached the perimeter!”

“You’ve got to be-”

McMillan’s retort was cut short as the base shook once again. “Where’s the General?”

“Manning the topside guns, sir!”

“Of course.”



“Good of you to join us, Lieutenant!” the General snarled as he surveyed the battlefield from the turret’s viewscreen. “Looks like someone finally decided to make the cold war hot again! Exciting times!”

“Good grief...” McMillan whispered as he caught sight of the attackers. Each was about twelve feet tall and consisted of a single silver wheel that rolled forward under its own power. On the left side of each was a gun mount bristling with weapons. “What are those things?”

“Who the heaven cares?” The General clenched his cigar in his teeth as he shouted. “These guns’ll blow a redwood in half, they can handle some Commie windup toys!”

“Sir, I don’t think those are Russian. It might be the rebels, or... another attack from outside.”

“Rebels, aliens, monsters from underground...” the General grinned. “Doesn’t matter... Semper fi, we do, they die!”

“Are those civilian vehicles?!” McMillan gasped, peering through his binoculars. A black soft-top roadster, a design from before his time, weaved through the explosions of the battlefield, a massive cannon strapped to each side. A quick turn showed a riced-up sports car, followed by a military jeep. McMillan was about to radio to see what idiot had been so foolish to engage the attackers at close range when the jeep skidded to the side, revealing its empty driver’s area.

“What is going on h-”

Another explosion shook the base, but this time much closer. McMillan spun towards the base’s inner open area, eyes drawn towards the motor pool. The three vehicles that had been recently impounded had sprouted cannons, and were blasting holes in the parked vehicles.

“General, they’re inside the base!”

“Enough o’ dis!” a voice boomed over the din of battle. “Autobots, transform and roll over these insects!”

The black sportscar with purple markings shuddered, the wheel boots snapping free, its form changing into a gigantic humanoid. With a laugh, it leveled a massive flame-cannon at one of the base supply copters, blasting the machine to bits. The other two vehicles followed suit, the blue one smashing its way into a wall and returning to car mode to enter the building proper.

Outside the base, wheels and cars alike were changing shape, transforming and continuing their assault. Any maneuverability they lost in the process was more than made up for in psychological advantage, as soldiers panicked and fled at the sight of them.

“Waitaminute,” McMillan breathed. “If those machines are... then those kids...”

The Lieutenant leapt from the turret and broke into a dead run.

“Well, I’ll be raptured...” The General felt a short twinge of an unfamiliar emotion. Something about the lifelike way that the machines moved filled him with a dread that blotted out his bravado and combat lust. Something in him said to run from the sneering black-and-purple monstrosity and its companions.

That something was soon silenced by a rush of adrenaline and the vague anticipation of medals and commendations, posthumous or otherwise. “They’ve gone and made it interesting. Gunner! Open fire on the hostiles on-base!”

The gunner turned to face the robots with a look of stark fear on his face. “Sir, I-“

“I said fire, soldier! You gone yellow on us?” The General ran to the turret and shoved the trembling gunner aside, aiming for the face of the black and purple robot. “I’m gonna nail that thing right in its Commie Van Dyke!”

Nothing happened.

The General grabbed the gunner by the collar and pulled him clear of the turret just as the robot blasted the weapon encampment. A slap and a few insults later the General and the gunner were fleeing the base walls.

“You should have told me the gun was jammed!”

“It’s not that, sir... no one else is firing anymore!” the gunner stammered. “The controls are out for the whole sector!”

“Sabotage!” the General spat.

McMillan stumbled as another blast shook the hallway. Techs were popping open access panels, trying desperately to restore power to the topside turrets, but the Lieutenant’s gut told him it was too late.

Turning the last corner, his gut sank further at the sight of the interrogation room door wide open, the MP lying in a groaning pile just inside. A quick glance confirmed McMillan’s fears. The prisoners were gone, as were the MP’s weapons. They had fallen for the old Trojan Horse gambit.

McMillan took a moment to radio a medic for the unconscious MP before taking to the hallways on his own rapid search. The kids must have been enemy agents. Civilians, even extremely clever ones, couldn’t cause this kind of chaos. They wouldn’t know where to start, and they’d never go so unnoticed. McMillan drew his weapon and prepared for the worst: elaborate disguises, hostages, black-ops tactics.

Halfway to the communications room, McMillan saw his prey. His brief sense of accomplishment dimmed to disappointment. The three punks were stalking sullenly with their hands behind their back, captives of one of the base MPs, a young Sergeant so green that if you cut him he would bleed sap.

“Lieutenant McMillan!” the soldier nodded, keeping his rifle aimed at the prisoners’ backs. “Found these Commies digging through the communications room.”

“Good job, soldier.” McMillan suppressed the urge to shoot the captives dead on the spot and approached the one called Spike. “All right, you worthless cuss, I want answers and I want them now!”

“Sure thing, pops, don’t get your bee-dee-yoos in a twist.” Spike held his arrogant smile as he spoke. “You wanna know what’s going on? See, me and my friends, we’re working for an alien empire that’s going to take over the planet, and we’ve sabotaged your base so they can steal your satellite.”

“Aliens?” McMillan snarled. “Please. Fess up the truth, who built those robot horrors out there? Moscow? Istanbul? London?...”

Spike just kept smiling.

McMillan smiled back. “Oh... I get it... real cute... you’re working for aliens. Let me guess... Aliens from M.A.R.S.-” McMillan pushed his pointer finger into the saboteur’s chest once per letter to make his point. “-made those machines.”

“Sure, you got it, smart guy.” Spike could barely contain his laughter.

“M-a-r-s... Mars?” The big one called Buster scratched his head with his left hand. “I thought they said they was from Cybertron.”

McMillan stared for a brief moment at the near-giant’s wrist. The handcuff on it dangled loose. Even the closed side that was still locked around his wrist was only tight enough to look convincing at a few paces away.

Lieutenant McMillan managed to raise his gun a few inches before the soldier lunged forward, helmet catching McMillan in the face. He went sprawling to the floor, his pistol clattering to the ground where the youngest of the three, Butch, snatched it up. The Lieutenant heard the click of a firearm being cocked as he hit the linoleum.

“Cuff him. He’s a good hostage,” the Sergeant snapped.

“That’s how you punks did this!” McMillan’s struggle to prevent Spike from cuffing him was abruptly ended by a punch to his solar plexus, delivered effectively by Buster.

“Yeah, pops, that’s how... no better way to get away with anything than by being handcuffed and at gunpoint.” Spike laughed as he tightened the handcuffs around the older man’s wrists.

“How could you do this to us?!” McMillan turned his attention to the sergeant, howling through his bloodied nose.

“Sure, I love my country to the extent that the law demands... but family, *family* comes first,” First Sergeant Bruce “Buzz” Witwicky smiled.



Functionality returned amid a cascade of sparks. As the kaleidoscope of electrical impulses faded, vision returned. Through the distorted haze of a failed boot procedure, a mechanoid shape coalesced, surrounded by a halo of golden light.

“-found the pod. I’ve opened it and done a... reboot thingy. Looks like it’ll be okay. Zero in on my coordinates... Bay’s Demolition Yard. Heatwave, you’d better sneak in from the back just so the attendant doesn’t get suspicious.”

“Now *that* was a ride,” the lithe white robot rasped as the light began to fade around her. She rose unsteadily, groaning as she looked around. Acres of rusting auto chassis and bent metal surrounded them, piled up higher than the Cybertronian’s head in places. The escape pod had landed atop one of the lower mounds, a small green light in the side blinking in a steady pattern.

“Whoah, settle down there. Looks like your pod cracked during the fall.” The figure grew more distinct. She could make out the colors now, a red shape with silver features and blue optics, framed by a bright blue sky and barely blocking a brilliant yellow sun behind it. Closer was a smaller, decidedly non-mechanoid face, staring at her through ash-brown locks. “You got banged up a bit, so I rebooted you. I don’t know much about this kinda thing, but I’m pretty sure you shouldn’t move yet.”

Save for traces of static, vision was normal now. “I recognize you... you’re Cliffjumper. The other good Autobot.”

“Welcome back online... um... er...”

“Crasher.”

“Oy, that’s apt.”

“Sorry?”

“Nothing. Sorry ‘bout the memory failure there. They only recently started making bots like you back in my dimension, you’d think it’d help me remember you better.”

Crasher gave him a quizzical stare. “Bots like me?”

“Well, yeah, because... uh... I mean you’re...” He waved his hands in a vague hourglass shape, suddenly finding himself feeling a whole new variety of uncomfortable than the normal sort he’d felt since arriving in this dimension. “That is, you’ve... y’see... there’s bots and then there’s... oh, hey, look Heatwave’s here!”

Heatwave stalked around a corner carefully, carrying Rick in his palm.

“So these are humans?” Crasher groaned, craning her neck. “They’re smaller than expected.”

“I’m Rick, that’s Will,” the larger one smiled. “Man, a girl-bot? Sephie’s gonna love you.”

“Speak of the devil,” Will chuckled as Soundwave skidded to a halt in vehicle mode.

“Who?”

“*Squee!*” Sephie squealed as she leapt from Soundwave’s driver’s compartment. “You ‘bots just get cooler and cooler!”

“Most righteous!” Soundwave flexed as he shifted back to robot mode. “The iron maiden is back... and is she ready to rock?”

“Just point me at the Autobots,” Crasher grinned, “And I’ll show you just how ready to rock I am.”

“If we’re lucky, that won’t be necessary.” Heatwave looked out over the rusting acres. “We’ve not heard anything to indicate the Autobots are functional yet, and they’re not exactly subtle.”

“I give it twenty-four hours,” Cliffjumper sighed.



The four Cybertronians rolled down the city streets, Cliffjumper in the lead. Heatwave's military vehicle form drew the occasional stare, but aside from that, few paid them much heed as they went about their lives.

"Why is this place so *calm*?" Cliffjumper's voice was filled with incredulity.

"What?" Will replied. "What were you expecting?"

"Look, where I come from, the Autobots are the good guys, and the Decepticons are the bad guys. And the humans... well, okay, they didn't much like either of us, to be honest. A few of 'em even tried to take all of us out. But they mostly just went about their business not hurtin' anyone. Just like here! This dimension's supposed to be backwards, I kinda expected the Earthlings to be a little more... violent? Heavily-armed? I don't know!"

"Uh... sorry?"

"I mean, the California thing, yeah, but I'm more surprised that hasn't happened in *my* dimension yet! There's gotta be something else to this Earth that's off!"

As if on cue, the wall of televisions in a shop window to Cliffjumper's left erupted in white noise. All around them, people pulled out their phones in confusion, the air filling with dozens of simultaneous ringtones.

The interference on the televisions cleared up, revealing the sneering face of Rodimus. Cliffjumper skidded to a halt, the others veering and braking to prevent a pile-up.

"Greetings, humans. My name is Rodimus Prime. Feel free to touch that dial, I'm on every channel."

"He's even transmitting through the web!" Sephie gasped. "I'm getting this on my oPod as well!"

"And my cell phone!" came Rick's voice over inter-Decepticon comm.

"Blaster," Soundwave growled.

Rodimus's visage leered at them through a dozen screens. "I'm sure you're all confused, so let me gets to the point. My friends and I, the Autocratic Robotic Empire, are alien machine-life far more advanced than anythin' yous can come up with. An' dis planet is now our turf.

"You wanna ship cargo? We gets a cut, paid in fuel. You wanna move freely? We gets a cut. Yous can keep your governments and scrap, I don't care how yous feed yourselves or what you do with your waste... but from now on, every human leader answers to an Autobot governor. In exchange, yous gets Autobot protection.



“*But Rodimus Prime! Protection from what?*” he squeaked out in a mocking falsetto. “From *dis*.”

The video frame containing Rodimus’s face shrank to fill the top lefthand corner of the screen. The remainder of the screen was filled with the image of New York City’s main bay. Rodimus waved his good hand, signaling an unseen compatriot.

Two seconds later, a pure-white bolt of light struck a small island, point-blank on the head of a tall effigy of a robed human female carrying a sword. The statue exploded from within, massive chunks of shrapnel flying across the harbor. The upraised arm, largely undamaged despite being broken off at the elbow, scythed through the air and smashed through a cargo ship.

Rodimus let the camera sit, savoring the damage done; the statue was little more than the massive plinth it once stood on, blackened and twisted.

“Y’see, we’s secured control of your Global Orbital Defense Satellites. Very accurate, your government oughtta be proud. Now... yous gots twenty-four hours to surrender control to me an’ mine... or we withdraw our protection of yous again. And again. And *again*. Until you realize how much you needs this, for your own good.”

The howls of cheering Autobots filled the airwaves of the world. “Dis is Rodimus Prime, Overlord of the Autobots, signing out.”



“There it went,” Cliffjumper grumbled. “I was just waiting for the other brakepad to drop. And there it went. Just when I thought things were approaching normal, I find out the humans in this dimension have been building some slaggin’ satellite of doom.” Will felt Cliffjumper’s vehicle mode sink a few inches. “Just can’t catch a slaggin’ break.”

“*Rodimus Prime? Rodimus Prime? Overlord of the Autobots?*” Crasher turned slowly, bringing her front vehicle-mode sensors back to the group. “How long was I out?”

“Not that long,” Heatwave sighed. “Looks like your bad feeling was right, Cliffjumper.”

“Man, I wish I was wrong more often,” the Autobot grumbled.

“So, dudes and dudettes, what do we do about this?”

“We do what we always do,” Crasher said, the glee in her voice apparent. “We track him down and kick his skidplate.”

Each robot’s communicator crackled open. “Starscream to exploration team. Did you see that?”

“Hard to miss,” Cliffjumper sighed.

“I was afraid of this,” Arkeville cut in over the comm.

“You’d all better get back to the *Nemesis*. This is big. Starscream out.”



“I wish we knew where Astrotrain was. He could fly up there and take that thing out single-handedly.”

The assembled machines and humans paced around the bridge of the *Nemesis*. Starscream and Arkeville had torn apart many of the consoles. The end result had made the ship look worse than it had before the others left, but a few more of the ship’s functions were operational.

Starscream shook his head. “Regrettably, Heatwave, we don’t know where he went down... or even if he or his crew survived re-entry.”

Crasher tapped her chin. “Think that’s how he got control of the satellite?”

“I don’t think so. Autobots generally don’t fly.”

“This day just gets weirder,” Cliffjumper groaned. “Now you’re telling me something that actually *matches* how things are where I come from.”

“Err... yes. At any rate, I doubt Rodimus has any orbit-capable fliers, which means he would have had to have seized a ground-based control system.”

“He’s in a military base. The room he was in was definitely government issue,” Sephie piped up. She was sitting cross-legged on the floor, idly petting Ravage’s purring head. It was an unsettling sight simply because none among the Decepticons could remember the last time Ravage had been so still and so quiet.

“Thank you, um, Sephie.” Starscream nodded at the small, smiling human. She seemed ready to burst with excitement, though Starscream could not understand why. “Does that narrow things down?”

“Not really. But it helps.” Professor Arkeville turned his back on the group and focused his attention on the piles of refuse around him, all scavenged from the demolition yard. He began rummaging through the scrap, occasionally tossing a piece of electronics equipment or a disused tool over his shoulder. “Rick, give me a hand here, would you? I’m looking for a computer, a radio and about three feet of copper wire.”

“Sure thing. Uhh... why?”

“If I can patch together a dial-up modem and a radio, we can catch a wi-fi signal.” The professor grinned as he pulled a rusting car stereo out of a pile of junk.

“Or you can use my iPod.” Sephie pulled out a small black device the size of a wallet out of her purse.

“... er... yes. I suppose we could.” The Professor looked crestfallen and tossed the stereo back over his shoulder. “At any rate, perhaps our new friend Heatwave can use his talents to find out which base they’re using.”

Sephie gawped at the missile truck. “You can *talk* to machines?”

“I really don’t like talking to your infoweb,” Heatwave sighed as he took the offered device. “I feel like I need a decon wash after every connection.”

“Rilly?” Ravage replied. “I think it’s full of win.”

“Is that supposed to be a euphemism for-”

“Can we just get on with this?!” Cliffjumper howled. “I don’t know if you all forgot, but there’s a mad-mech with an orbital laser out there!”

“Heatwave, start looking. The rest of you... hit the recharge bays. We’re going to need to be at full for this.”

Several minutes later, Heatwave looked up from his console. “Well, it wasn’t easy, but I think I’ve got it. I asked every military base computer I could find for access. They all told me what I could do with myself... all of them except one. It didn’t say anything at all.”

“Then it’s offline...” Starscream mused.

Crasher grinned. “...And that means we know where they are.”

“Surely the Autobots will be ready for our attack,” Heatwave interrupted. “They’ll hit us with that orbital laser before we even get close!”

“Why should they be prepared?” Starscream smiled wide. “As far as Rodimus-so-called-Prime is aware, we’re nothing but space junk... irradiated dust and scrap floating in space thanks to that nuclear bomb. And while I may stick out like a mis-installed access panel, the rest of you are robots in disguise.”



“We’re definitely outnumbered here,” Crasher replied as she peered over the rock outcropping outside the satellite control bunker. “I counted four regular Autobots and a half-dozen of those Scrounges on my recon.”

“One of ‘em is that stick-up-the-pipe buzzkill Blaster, too,” Soundwave hummed. “He’s proly got some cassette buddies like me, no tellin’ how many.”

“I *like* these odds,” Crasher grinned.

“I don’t,” Cliffjumper growled. “Those are just the bots guarding the transmitter. I don’t see that slimeball Rodimus anywhere, which means he’s inside and has got to have guards. I think we’re close enough to where they won’t risk blasting us from the sky and hitting some underground part of their own base.” He tapped his communicator. “Starscream, Arkeville... what have you guys got?”

“We’ve been studying Rodimus’ transmission,” Starscream replied. “There’s probably not many Autobots inside the complex.”

“How do you figure that?”

“Our facilities were never built for the comfort of beings twenty to forty feet tall,” Arkeville cut in. “Playing back the video, Rodimus looks like he’s a little hunched. Notice the camera never really pulls back, probably to keep him from looking ridiculous crammed in a small space. He’s probably in the main control room, which would be bigger, but not too much bigger.”

“There’s a big satellite dish here,” Cliffjumper muttered. “Heatwave, think you can do anything with that?”

“If you can get me to that transmitter, I should be able to talk to the base system, see what I can do.”

“Do you think you can shut down the GODS from there?”

“I really don’t think so. Military systems are not very cooperative at all. I’m willing to bet stopping the satellite is going to have to be done from the control room. But I should at least be able to get into the security system and guide our infiltrators.”

“So we humans sneak in and do the job,” Sephie smiled.

“And do what?” Will growled. “Not to spit on your waffles, but we have no idea where anything is in there. We’d be going in blind, never mind the killer robots.”

Soundwave’s chest-window slid down, the Decepticon pulling two small flat rectangles from the machinery below. Tossing them into the air, the two forms unfolded and expanded into Frenzy and Ravage.

“We can help you inside the base,” Frenzy smiled. “Close-quarters combat is my specialty.”

“I can track down Rodimus!” Ravage mewed. “I totally remember his stench. Like, there was the time that I snuck into the Autobot base, and...”

Cliffjumper pinched the bridge of his nose. “Yeah, yeah, we know. Sephie, you better go with Ravage, since you’re the only one who can shut him up.”

“Colon open-parenthesis.”

“I’ll keep Rick and Will safe,” Frenzy nodded.

“So,” Will sighed. “Just how do we get in there?”



Side Burn sighed, watching the horizon with a disinterested air. The battle had been interesting, especially watching how the humans had scrambled to try and regain control in the face of what was assuredly an unstoppable force. They were doomed to failure, of course, but the persistence was impressive.

But this was boring. Guard duty. They had a few Scrounges patrolling the perimeter, with Big Daddy and himself watching the main gate. Rodimus Prime had insisted on repairing the ones that had been damaged in the battle, reminding the complaining Goldbug once again about the nuke. Side Burn agreed with Rodimus that the humans were not to be underestimated, even with the GODS under Autobot control... he just didn’t think it should be him standing outside watching the vast expanse of nothing surrounding the facility.

“Scrounge 9-27 reporting. Incoming human vehicle. Engage?”

“Is it a military vehicle?”

“Negative. Appears to be civilian unit. Heading for your position.”

Side Burn cocked his head. “Do not engage. I’ll take care of it. If it tries to turn and run, live-capture and escort here.”

“Interesting initiative you’re showing there. Nice to see the young Autobots taking a keen interest in their duties.”

Side Burn turned, casting an annoyed look at Big Daddy as the roadster idled towards him.

“I want to... learn about the humans. Rodimus is correct: if we’re going to be on this planet long-term, we need to know all we can about them. This is... important.”

Big Daddy gave the younger Autobot a long, calculated look. “Mm-hmm. Well, here’s a learning opportunity coming up now. Don’t mind me.”

A few minutes later the van rolled into the complex, with a wheel-mode Scrounge a respectful distance behind it. Both robots strolled forward to speed things up; obviously the drivers weren’t particularly anxious to enter the base.

One of the windows slid down, and a carrot-topped youth reluctantly poked his head out. “Uh... wow... what’s going on? We’re here to make our catering delivery and... where’s the Sarge? He usually greets... us...”

“I’m your Sergeant now,” Side Burn rumbled. “What’s ‘catering’?”

“We bring food into the base for the soldiers,” the other boy replied.

“Oh, human-fuel.”

“It’s a weekly delivery, mister robot.” Rick didn’t have to act too hard to appear worried. “If we don’t make the delivery on-time, they dock our pay... we don’t want any trouble, we just want to drop off the food and get out of here, please!”

Side Burn nudged the van with his rifle, eyeing the mural on it side. “So what does ‘Cold Slither’ mean?”

“Cold Slither Brand Frozen Treats!” Will chirped up. “We humans love our desserts. One after a nice meal and we’re smiling all day! Mm-mm good!”

“*Laying it on a bit thick, aren’t you?*” Rick hissed out of the side of his mouth.

“*I’m panicking just a little here, what with the giant killer robots,*” he hissed back, eyes never leaving Side Burn’s rifle.

“A happy workforce is a productive workforce,” Big Daddy nodded. “Little bit of additive makes the cylinders ignite, they say.”

“*Who says?*”

“Alright, boys, go on in.”

Side Burn bolted upright as Big Daddy waved them on. “But, but... I insist we detain these two and-” He stopped cold as Big Daddy waved an admonishing finger at him, though mostly because the finger was attached to the hand holding his concussion rifle.

“Best listen to your elders, boy,” the larger Autobot replied in his same level, jovial tone. He nodded to the humans, and the white van drove on. “You’re not being yourself lately. You don’t normally complain about your duties. Something bothering you? Needing a little ember-to-ember talk?”

Side Burn morosely kicked a rock across the compound. “I’m not complaining about my assignment. I just think that we could be doing... more for the cause. I could be more helpful inside, keeping an optic on the humans.”

“Now, boy, you don’t have to be up close and personal to be a part of the plan. Proper Autobot makes the best of what he’s got so next time around he can grab for more.”

“Yeah yeah blah blah yackity schmackity,” Side Burn grumbled, looking ruefully at the hangar door the humans had passed through.



Sephie peered out from under the blanket in Soundwave’s back end. “We all clear?”

“Looks like they fell for it,” Rick nodded. They’d made it into a high-ceilinged garage. Several smashed military vehicles had been piled up in a corner, near a large hole in one wall, large enough to allow the average Cybertronian to pass through in robot mode. “However, I think we got some more Autobot company... unless the military really is using remote-control jeeps.”

Will groaned as an unmanned dull-green open-topped jeep with a large cannon on its back end rolled through the hole.

“I hate chaperones,” Soundwave muttered. “That Auto-bummer’s gonna stick with us like mud on a flap, which is gonna go bad once he sees we don’t got the goodies. I’m sending the signal for the others to attack, otherwise this is gonna be one majorly bogus gig.”

“Let’s hope they’re quick,” Will whimpered as the jeep expanded into a lurking robot form. The cannon stayed slung over its right shoulder, but the Autobot’s stance, grim face and the way his hands clenched rhythmically gave Will the impression that the cannon didn’t see much use.

The dull thud of an explosion shook the Autobot’s attention from the van, however. Klaxons blared throughout the base, stopping the mechanoid’s advance.

“*It’s the Decepticons!*” Side Burn’s voice cut in over Soundwave’s speakers.

“Hacked their comm,” Soundwave chuckled quietly.

“*All units, this is Rodimus Prime! Defend the perimeter! Shoot to terminate!*”

The green Autobot paused, cast a glare at the van, and ran for the hole in the wall.

“Right, dudes, move out!” Soundwave’s doors opened the instant the Autobot disappeared, his passengers spilling out quickly.

“What about you?” Rick called, pausing as he approached a far door.

Soundwave answered by spinning his tires and turning to drive away.

“I’m gonna cause a little commotion of my own in here. Party on.”



Heatwave beelined for the edge of the base closest to the roof-mounted satellite dish, weathering the plasma pulses from the Scrounges. His missile rack swung wide, releasing a flurry of incendiary rockets in a wide spread.

The rockets caught one of the Scrounges just above its wheel-base. The explosion sent the drone tumbling end over end sideways, pieces breaking off it with every high-speed bounce, but the other Scrounges continued their pursuit undaunted, swerving around their stricken comrade.

Heatwave yelped as a plasma pulse whizzed over his cab. It was a near-miss thanks to the erratic bouncing the uneven soil imparted to the Scrounges in their war-wheel forms. Having shocks gave Heatwave the advantage when it came to his aim, his stronger armor allowing him to weather their attacks better to boot, but the Scrounges would dog him until they simply wore him down.

To make things worse, Soundwave had just broken through a wall of the base and was driving towards him on a head-on-collision course.

Heatwave turned his attention from his rear sensor array too late to stop or slow down. “Soundwave, get out of the—

“Ride the wind, dudebot!” The white van put on a burst of speed before returning to his natural robotic form. The momentum of the charge combined with that of his transformation hurled him up and over Heatwave in a long flip. Soundwave cleared Heatwave’s rumbling form and landed between the fleeing missile tank and the approaching Scrounges. “I got this!”

The Scrounges turned their attention to Soundwave, training their weapons and bearing down on his stationary form at high speed.

“You dudes may be numerous, but there’s one thing you don’t know.” Soundwave reached out with his sensors, catching a signal that identified itself as 95.5 KROC. He triggered the mental commands to reroute and amplify the signal, causing speaker panels to open across his body. “I have no mouth...”

The lead Scrounge swerved to one side, his main gun array powering up for another volley.

“Yet I must *rock*.”

The Scrounges desperately attempted to disengage their audio sensors as the “Non-Stop Classic Rock Block” scrambled their equilibrium at a hundred and eighty decibels and sent them careening into each other in a chaotic tangle of wheel-wells and half-transformed limbs.



The humans shouldn't have been able to hit me that hard, Wheeljack thought to himself as he lurked through the halls. His right arm was still giving him twinges from the shelling he took. The shell that hit him in the face had left his processor ringing, too.

Which was why he wasn't sure of what he was seeing. No Decepticon would be so brazen as to just be sitting in the middle of the hallway, waving.

"Hai! I'm Ravage!"

Wheeljack rubbed his optics and looked again. Yes, there was a small Decepticon feline just sitting in the middle of the hall.

"Ravage, hide!" a human voice hissed. A female poked her head around a corner, motioning frantically.

"Totally no problem, Sephie. It's only crazy old Wheeljack!"

"I'm not crazy!" the Autobot howled. "Everyone else is just blind to my genius! I'll show you I'm not crazy! I'll show *every last one of them* I'm not a foaming-mad megalomaniac with delusions of grandeur! As soon as I perfect my atomic supermutant alloygators, *you'll all see I wasn't crazy!!*"

Several long seconds of uncomfortable silence followed.

"Yes," Sephie said with deliberate slowness. "Clearly, you're not insane."

"Yes he is," Ravage added innocently.

"You will be destroyed!"

Human and robot panther broke into a dead run as Wheeljack flailed at the walls.



Frenzy peered quietly around the corner. Blocking their path was a large black-and-yellow Autobot.

"It's Goldbug. Don't worry, I can take him."

"But he's huge. And he has a gun. A huge gun." Will paused. "I don't know if I can stress the 'huge' thing enough here."

"Size isn't everything." Rick added.

"That's technically true, but size is still *something*, and right now, that *something* is an evil robot with a death ray between us and where we want to go." Will replied.

"... okay. You're right. So, what have we got to work with?"

"I have twin sonic pistols." Frenzy said, tapping the gun in his hand for emphasis.

"There's a fire kit a few feet back," Will shrugged. "There's probably an axe in there."

Frenzy nodded. "Okay, here's what we do..."

Goldbug was in the middle of formulating six different plots to bump off Rodimus when a shrill noise broke through his concentration.

"Hey, Goldthug! Yeah, I'm talkin' to you!"

"Your manufacturer outsources tech support!"

Goldbug turned, too confused by the words to actually get angry. The source of the annoyance was a small, stocky smear of organic matter and its slightly thinner counterpart.

"I don't know how you meatsacks escaped the barracks, but it is something you will very briefly regret!"

“Oh, sure, you’re a biiiig deal.” The slimmer human pulled a red canister from behind his back. He pointed the hose and nozzle from the top of the device at the looming Autobot warrior.

“What kind of weapon is that supposed to be? Bah! As if such a device could hurt me.”

“Let him have it, Will!”

A thick spray of misty white chemicals shot from the device’s nozzle, enveloping his head in globs of foam that clung to every available surface, including his optics.

The towering Autobot lurched backwards in shock, blinded by the spray. He could hear the two organics running away... and another set of footprints, this time metal, headed for him. The impact of a diminutive metal fist and the accompanying hypersonic blast identified his assailant. Goldbug tumbled backward into the wall and fell to a sitting position.

Snarling, he reached for his gun, yet felt nothing but the concrete floor of the hallway. He scraped and wiped at the clinging foam that even now was disrupting the function of his lens-wipers while triggering brief electrical shorts that stung his fragile optics. “Get back here and fight, Frenzy! I should have finished you... your brother... *whichever* one you are, when I had the chance!”

Through the thinning foam and static, Goldbug saw Frenzy running down the hall, holding the Autobot’s weapon aloft like a trophy. “Big talk! You mech enough to back it up with action?”

“You will lament that challenge, Frenzy!” Goldbug shifted to his vehicle form. The hallway gave him just a few inches of clearance on each side. “For a few seconds, at the least!”

For several minutes, the three led Goldbug throughout the facility, sticking to the narrower hallways. Goldbug was faster in the straight-aways, but he found himself forced to transform to robot mode every time he needed to turn down whatever hall his quarry took. He scrambled on all fours, letting loose with the stingers concealed within the door-panels on his arms, but each time the intruders managed to find a new passage to duck into.

“Heatwave says we’re close to the control room,” Frenzy panted, skidding around a corner.

“And the passages are getting bigger!” Will groaned.

The small robot skidded to a halt. “We have a few seconds before Goldbug catches up. You two better clear out.” Frenzy’s normally even tone was changing. His armor started to vibrate, sending a rattling noise carrying through the hall.

“We’re not gonna leave you!”



“I’m... about... to... get... *angry*.” The small robot turned his head, his visor almost glowing pure white. Rick could swear there was a heat-haze surrounding him now. Frenzy hissed through clenched metal toothplates. Goldbug’s gun began to emit creaking noises, being slowly bent in Frenzy’s grip. “You... won’t... like... me... when...”

“Right!” Will grabbed Rick by the arm and yanked, fear giving him the strength to pull the much larger boy behind him and around the corner.

As the two boys scrambled, Goldbug’s voice carried through the air.

“Got you! Hah! Your silly little infiltration is undone, finished, *ov-*”

“HNRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!”

“*Yaaaaaaaiiiiiigh!!!*”



Rodimus nearly hit the GODS control panel with his buzzsaw in anger, shouting into his comm. “C’mon, what’s wrong with youse guys?! You outnumber ‘em!”

What good was it having an orbiting death-satellite when he couldn’t even use it against the Decepticons now that they’d shown up? They were moving too fast to properly target, and the other Autobots kept getting in the way. While Rodimus would normally chalk it up to “acceptable losses” and fire anyway, with their currently-limited resources, he couldn’t afford to lose any soldiers. Besides, any Autobot he scrapped would just be used as a rallying point for Goldbug to turn the others against him.

“*Zey haff destroyed all but two of ze Zcrounges! Ve haff no vord from Vheeljack!*”

Another thud shook his attention from the viewscreens, but this time the commotion was a lot closer.

It sounded like it was right outside the main door, in fact.

Rodimus shifted his view to the internal camera monitors. The one showing the hall just outside the control room had just gone black...

...And the room exploded with noise and debris as Goldbug’s battered form smashed through the wall, plowing into the Autobot leader.

“What th- Goldbug?! What’s goin’-”

“*Get him away from me!*”

Through the haze of dust, Rodimus could make out Frenzy’s shuddering, hunched form. As the diminutive robot stalked forward, foaming oil dripped from his clenched jaw, a high-pitched whine emanating from his joints.

Rodimus had just enough time to shove Goldbug off him before the berserker leapt.

Rick pulled out his phone as the two humans edged into the control room, staying as far from the pummeling as they could.

“Okay, Heatwave, we’re in... now what?”



“We talk it out.”

Soundwave’s distraction had given Heatwave the opportunity he needed, and the large Decepticon now knelt gingerly on the base roof, next to the main satellite transmitter. With the main controls on the other side of the base unmanned and the communications hub unguarded thanks to Frenzy and the kids, there was nothing to prevent Heatwave from accessing the system.

The humans had built a transmitter, a bit smaller than Heatwave's chest, to relay signals to the laser satellite. Heatwave laid a hand on the transmitter and concentrated. Triple-encrypted, self-sustaining, and isolated from any external communications systems, the device would be impossible to hack from the outside, thus the Autobot's need to take the base physically.

Surprisingly, it was a friendly system.

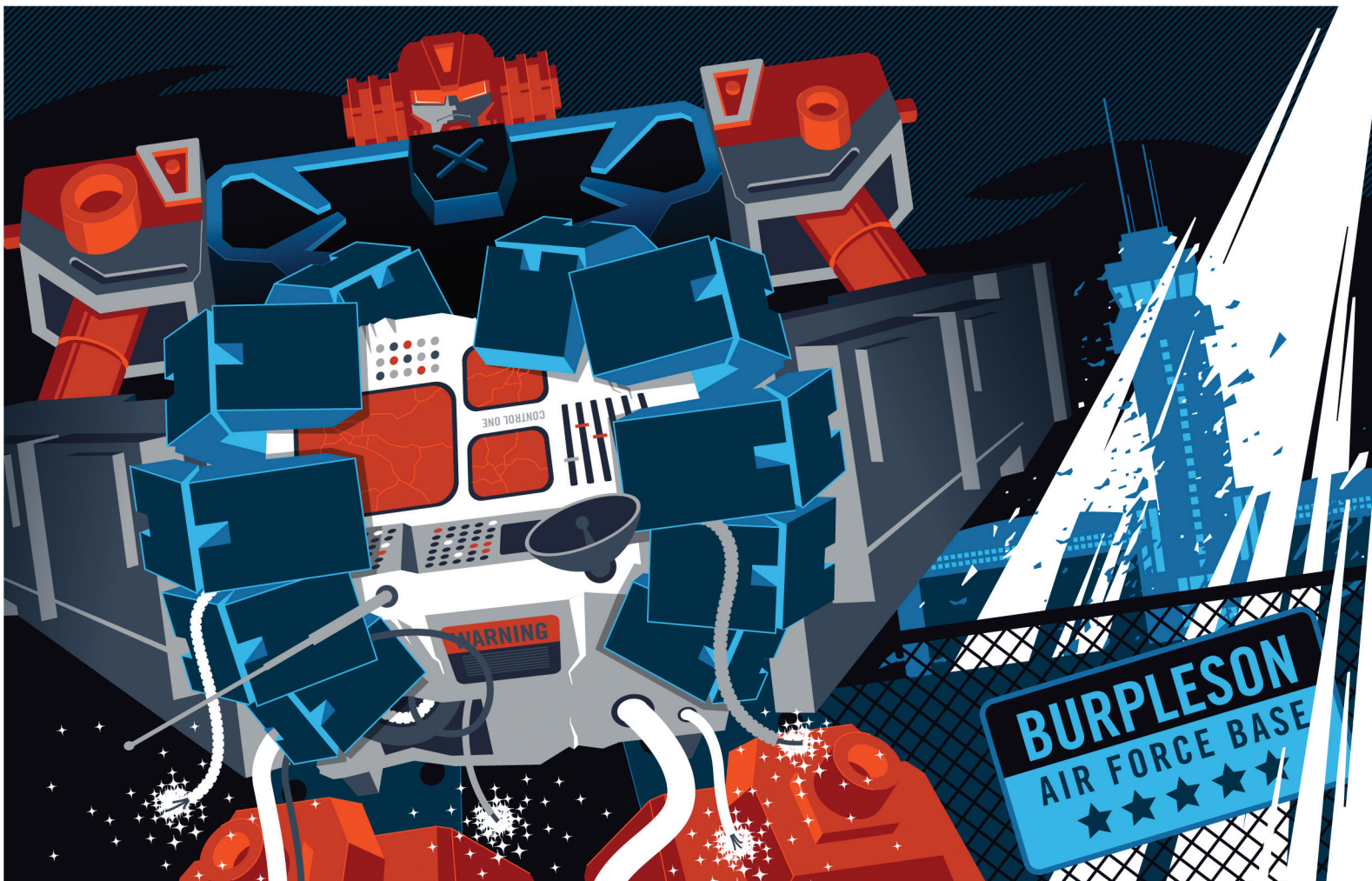
"Hello there," Heatwave said aloud. "I am Heatwave. I'm afraid I've got bad news. Yes, you've been hijacked by a hostile power. No, it's not them. I don't know who the 'Russkies' are, but the Autobots are worse, trust me on this. Can you still contact the GODS?"

He shifted his weight gently to keep from falling through the roof as he listened to the machine's response. "I understand. We'll have to prevent further unauthorized access... Do you know about any other systems to control the satellite? Just you? Yes... that will work. That's a good idea. Can you get the main base system to cooperate? I don't think it likes me very much."

With that, the main lights went out and the sound of alarm klaxons blared from every hall and corridor.

"Heatwave!" Sephie's voice shouted through the communications system. "Ravage and I are ok, we lost Wheeljack in the motor pool and we're coming back around! What's going on?"

Heatwave grasped the transmitter by both sides and pulled. The metal bolts ripped free as he liberated the system from its place atop the main building. "I talked to the transmitter, and it helped me negotiate with the base computer." Just as the roof began to crumble under him Heatwave leapt to the ground, taking the transmitter with him. "Soundwave, get in and get the kids out of there. It's unlocking all doors and sounding the evacuation. I think Burpleson isn't going to be around much longer."





Buzz Witwicky turned at the sound of deadbolts unlatching, which was followed quickly by the evacuation alarm.

“Oh, no.”

Spike looked up from his machinegun. “What’s up, bro?”

“I think the soldiers are free now.”

“And?”

“And there’s a crack-ton of angry soldiers trained to kill loose on the base now who know I betrayed them.”

“We got guns,” Buster rumbled.

“We don’t have enough.” Buzz had gone pale. “We’d better get out of here, and *now*. Let’s hotwire a copter, a jeep, anything, just run!”



Soldiers poured from the installation, chasing the retreating Autobots. Soundwave roared at full speed across the sand, his passengers rattling around inside.

“We’d better clear out!” Heatwave howled, clutching the control system in his arms. “I think things are about to get very hot around here! The base computer says everyone’s evacuated...”

“What are you going to do?” Cliffjumper howled, taking a few potshots at the retreating Autobots.

Heatwave ran his fingers over the transmitter module. “Can you hear me up there?” His optics dimmed as he focused on the transmitter and the distant satellite it controlled. “We’re all clear.”

Human and machine alike looked up as a stroke of searing light fell from the sky. It was as though an entire thunderstorm were being spent in a single stroke of lightning that slowly cut its way through the airbase. Fuel tanks and munitions exploded, wood and plastic caught fire and brick and mortar burst from the intense heat. The beam began burning hotter and brighter, forcing the humans to turn away.

Amid the shower of ash and burning embers, Heatwave pressed his hands together. The transmitter buckled and then collapsed under the pressure. A look of sorrow crossed his face as he hurled the remains of the control panel into the bonfire that was once Burpleson Air Force Base.

The blast from the sky vanished as quickly as it had appeared. A deafening peal of thunder and a rush of wind followed as the vacuum created by the superheated blast collapsed.

“Sweet motherboard,” Crasher breathed.

The beep of the Decepticons’ comm system broke through the low rumble of the aftershocks. “Starscream to assault team... *what just happened?!?*”

“All the controls for the satellite are gone now.” Heatwave said to no one in particular. “It was a brave transmitter. It knew what had to be done... it’s all over.”

Cliffjumper reached up to try and put his hand on Heatwave’s shoulder after a few moments’ silence, but ended up simply patting the far larger mech on his back. “You did, too. Let’s go home, big guy.”

Meanwhile, somewhere, in high earth orbit, an advanced weapons satellite activated its adjustment thrusters. A shooting star fell from the sky over the midwestern United States as reentry burned it away.



“The primary GODS satellite is confirmed destroyed, President Colton.”

The President ran his thumb over the trigger mechanism, eyeing the Secretary of Defense critically. “Of course it is, Hauser. I paid a lot of money to ensure the self-destruct would function properly. How much longer until the others are fully operational?”

“Well, we have a problem there, Mister President,” the Vice-President chimed in. “Obviously, the announcement that we even had the GODS system caused skyrocketing international tension...”

“Clay... in all the years you’ve known me, where have the concerns of the international community typically lain in my priority list?”

“Somewhere between National Bran Awareness Day and your alimony payments, sir. But if word gets out we’re sending up others, we may be looking at a major preemptive strike from the Soviets or from the Brits. It might even get the Ottomans after us.”

“Fakkadi is a pacifist. They’ll impose trade sanctions but they won’t move on us. The Queen Mother won’t drop the bomb on land she wants to conquer... and that leaves the Soviets...”

“Who are probably building their own bargain basement satellites right now.”

“Right. Now... what of the alien robots?”

Secretary Hauser shifted slightly. “It looks like there are two groups. Both escaped the facility, and we haven’t been able to track them yet. What we’ve gotten out of the soldiers at the base is that both sides have allies among humanity. Here’s the file on the traitor, First Sergeant Witwicky... and what we have on his family. Lot of petty offenses for his brothers, the father has a list of indictments a mile long, mostly for auto theft, smuggling and racketeering, but nothing that’s actually stuck. We’re hoping that if we can find them, they’ll lead us to these ‘Autobots’ who took over the GODS.”

“And the other group?”

“Not sure of their intentions. There were some odd communications within the GODS system, but it looks like they were trying to stop the Autobots. We think they were also trying to destroy the satellite.”

“And their allies?”

“We’ve gotten a few pictures from internal security, and believe we’ve identified them. Frederick Ottman, William Hayes, and Josephine Beller. According to their files... they’re interns with Professor Arkeville. Should we pick them up?”

“No. Let’s just... keep an eye on them. All of them. Arkeville will be trouble to be sure, but I’ve had an eye on him a long time.” President Colton smiled grimly to himself. “But these robots... they’re a priority now.

“Especially the Autobots.”

END