

Transformers Timelines Presents:

Blitzwing Bop

A Transformers: Shattered Glass Story



by S. Trent Troop & Greg Sepelak
Illustrations by

Copyright 2009, The Transformers Collector's Club

“-the scene earlier today when the robotic vigilante known as Starscream and his compatriots thwarted the super-criminal Arachnolord in what many are calling -”

“-rescued thirty-nine Blackrock Oil workers from an Autobot raid when-”

“-gressman Shore of Wyoming assures the citizenry that the recent robot attacks are not connected to the sub-terrestrial invasion of the late 1980s-”

“-con Crasher, who was given honorary citizenship in the Ottoman Confederacy after saving President Fakkadi from-”

“-cently knighted Sir Soundwave made a brief appearance at a joint Misfits/Cold Slither concert in Dublin in support of-”

“-entified space shuttle discovered crashed in Antarcti-”

Just beyond a ring of shattered iron and stone orbiting a yellow star, a twinkling chunk of metal drifted through space. As the vessel sailed through the void, it passed through a shell of ever-expanding radio signals that came from a small blue world. The world was of little importance to the drifting craft, and save for a single scrap of information, the signals were equally irrelevant.

That single scrap of information was sufficient to draw the vessel through the asteroid belt and towards the otherwise fairly unremarkable planet.

“So tell me about Cybertron.”

Will’s half-hearted question came as he lifted his screwdriver. Getting used to riding around inside another living being had been difficult for the Decepticons’ other human allies, but Will had proven more adaptable. So adaptable, in fact, he had taken up minor repairs and maintenance of the alien robots as a hobby. Without the sense of awe that most humans felt in the presence of living, talking machines, Will was free to get his hands dirty.

Some things impressed Will: his friend Rick’s eternal optimism, Professor Arkeville’s comically oversized eyebrows, the Misfits’ seventh album, and so forth. For some reason, modifying the sound system of a red tank that was also a fighter jet and an intelligent humanoid robot from another world wasn’t one of those things.

“Why?” The tank’s voice came from the control panel that currently supported Will’s toolkit and oversized jug of soda.

“I’ve never been there, Blitzwing. Thought it’d be interesting.”

A sound very much like a sigh escaped the tank. “Okay. Imagine a junk yard. Now make it the size of a planet, and set big patches of it on fire. I suppose that’s interesting in a horrible sort of way, but there’s nothing appealing about it.”

“There’s got to be some good spots.” Will wiped his brow. Despite the small bunker’s cooling system, its garage managed to trap heat amazingly well. “And anyway, it’s got to be more interesting than this place.”

“What? This place is amazing! I could stay here forever. So many places to just go out and escape everything, and be alone with yourself. I just wish I didn’t have these blasted battle-forms. Yeah, tank treads make traction easier, but the damage I must be doing to the desert ecosystem...”

“Grass is always greener, I guess.”

“Wait... the grass gets greener?” Blitzwing lurched forward, having forgotten for a brief moment that driving out of the makeshift Decepticon hangar would put him in the desert. “This I gotta see!”

“Whoah, hold still, I’m almost done!” Will bound a few clumps of wire together and closed the access panel.

“You sure you know what you’re doing?”

“Not really. Your systems do all the real work. Plug-n-play, right?”



“I don’t know what that means.”

“It means welcome to Earth’s real point of interest...” Will tapped a button on the small white box installed in Blitzwing’s dash.

After a few moments, a brief crackle of sound issued from the Decepticon’s right speaker array. The crackle grew into a whine and twisted into a throbbing pulse that spread to come from both sides. Slowly the din coalesced into a recognizable form.

“And what is this called, Will?”

“The Pale Lines.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Music, Blitzwing. Music.”

The two listened in silence for a moment as the tones echoed out from the hangar and into the open air beyond.

“Never heard of them.”

“They’re pretty obscure.”

“And you’re certain that this U-Cube device won’t harm my internal systems.”

“That’s ‘O-Pod’, and yes... I installed one in Soundwave last week, it gives you access to eight gigabytes of Earth’s finest music, as determined by me, of course... including the Misfits’ third album. The *illegal* one.”

“Eight gigabytes?” Blitzwing chuckled. “I have errant thoughts that big.”

“Our consumer electronics are just efficient, is all.”

“Not that I don’t appreciate it, but what good is music, really? Entertainment is great and all, but I prefer a good data file, or even one of your books... provided the print is big enough to make out.”

“Music isn’t just entertainment. Music is... you know, deep? It’s important... music can change the world.”

“If you say so.”

“You know what else is important?”

Blitzwing paused. “Galaxy-wide peace?”

“...Uh, yeah, okay, that. But right here, right now, what is important is cruising in a flying tank-jet. Let’s hit the road, listen to some tunes, and I’ll explain the rest as we go.”



Goldbug looked the structure over eagerly. Three indigo-colored curved metal pylons rose forty feet into the air, connected by twenty-foot walls. The surface nearest to him contained the retractable doorway for the mechanism. Beyond it was sufficient space for twenty normally-proportioned Cybertronians.

“Excellent, fantastic, stupendous!” Goldbug shouted. “Have you set the exit coordinates?”

Wheeljack leapt to his feet and stared accusingly at Goldbug. “Have I set the exit coordinates? Have I? Of *course* I have! I have set them with a grace and genius that exceeds anything you or the other fools at the Academy could even comprehend!”

Goldbug paused a moment to let the rising anger pass. “Then where does it let out?”

“A few clicks outside that fetid pit that Optimus threw me into. Far outside the sight of either faction. Orrrrrrr...” Wheeljack performed some rapid calculations in his head. “The Plait Expanse will deflect the transwarp beam and hurl the subject to the Antares system, plus or minus a parsec.”

“Then I know who’s taking the first trip!” Goldbug turned. “Side Burn... it is time to answer the call of science!”

The black-shelled Autobot looked up from the access panel he was tinkering with. “Many apologies, but as I am the co-creator of this mechanical marvel, perhaps it would be better if we sent someone who won’t be needed to fix it in the event of a mechanical problem.” Side Burn’s smooth tone showed no signs of stress or concern, but a malicious gleam crossed his optics as he continued. “It would be far more logical for us to send a Scrounge.”

Goldbug let the annoyance pass for a moment. “Oh, very well. But it will take hours for us to get a Scrounge out here.” Goldbug paced as he spoke. “Plus... it would break the erm... project silence that Rodimus Prime personally entrusted me with...”

Side Burn’s smile was sickeningly sincere. “Of course, Goldbug.”

“That’s ‘Sir.’”

“Of course, sir.”



“-and that’s when Cold Slither really came into their own... I mean, yeah, the all-covers album was kind of lame, but *Thunder Hammer* was a masterpiece. Some people think its rap-metal, but it’s really more spoken word beat poetry put to-”

“Whoah... Not that I’m not un-disinterested, but I’ve got a major Autobot tech reading about twenty miles off.”

“I thought they’d started cloaking their energy signals.”

“Yeah, they did... but this isn’t a Transformer... it’s a machine. Probably a super-weapon.”

“Oh.” Will sat quiet for a moment, watching the forward viewscreen. “Are we driving towards it?”

“Yes.”

“Oh.” He paused again. “Can I ask *why*? I’m small, fragile and a minor. We need to call in the big guns.”

“Good point.” Blitzwing paused as his communications system came online. “Soundwave... I need backup. Looks like we’ve got a major tech project on the part of the Autobots.”

“Hear ya loud... but sorry dude, most of the mechs are in the Arctic diggin’ out the A-train. I beamed ‘em a priority, but even the Screamer’s gonna take over an hour to get there!”

“What, so I have to stop them by myself?”

“Heatwave’s close and burnin’ rubber now, be ready to rock it in five! I’m hittin’ the road as we speak!”



The Autobot build site was secluded and recessed into a small canyon, making it impossible to see at a distance from the ground. This, however, left the Autobots unable to see land approaches clearly, a fact Blitzwing was already taking advantage of.

By the time Heatwave had gotten the message, Blitzwing and Will were already taking up an

observation position behind a gravel-strewn hillock. This hiding spot overlooked the natural valley that the Autobots had chosen as the staging ground for their construction project. Blitzwing carefully parked behind the stone structure so his left-front light array, and thus his left-front sensor package, had a view of the area below. So long as the Autobots weren't looking directly at him, he would be unnoticed.

Fifteen minutes later, Blitzwing spied Heatwave's head peeking out from behind some scrub across the depression. Caution had kept Heatwave out of sight and sound. Behind a natural blind of shrub-brush and stones, Heatwave gazed down on the unsuspecting Autobots. As soon as he was secure in his hiding place, Heatwave's hushed voice echoed through Blitzwing's console. "You getting a good look at this, Blitz?"

"Yeah, not sure what it is, really."

"Hey, Blitzwing?"

Heatwave paused. "Will? What are you doing over... nevermind... I think I recognize it. If I'm right... it's a stellar spanner. It warps space-time to allow for long-range teleportation. Like, across the galaxy. Transwarp without the starship."

"So... that's bad." Blitzwing muttered.

"Oh, yeah."

"Blitzwing? Heatwave? You guys are talking over radio when there's Autobots like, right there... I'd think that's worse, right?"

"No, it's safe," Blitzwing replied. "Encoded faction frequency... the communication codes are secret and the encryption works off the ember's natural harmonics. They can't hear us."

"I'm only concerned about the spanner if it works... which I doubt." Heatwave chuckled darkly to himself. "Only one to ever get made was made by the Old One, and no one's even sure if *his* worked. Word is Prime knocked him off before he could finish it. I really doubt Wheeljack has the wherewithal to make this thing functional."

"I don't feel comfortable betting on that." Blitzwing replied. "The Autobots always seem inexplicably competent when it can make things turn out badly for us."

"Well, there's one way to find out."

"Hm?"

"I'm going down there to find out."

"What... *how*?"

"I'm going to ask it."

"What?! No, Heatwave, wait for reinfo-hey!"

Despite Blitzwing's protests, Heatwave was already moving forward, driven by the temptation to speak with a new and revolutionary piece of machinery. Much to Blitzwing's surprise, Heatwave managed to descend the rocky slope and creep halfway to the stellar spanner itself completely unnoticed, as Goldbug was berating his two compatriots for a minor aesthetic error. Over the shouting, Heatwave's footfalls went unheard...

...until his foot came down on a thin sandstone boulder. Worn flat and thin by years of wind and grit, the rock snapped under Heatwave's weight. The remaining chunks rolled out from under his foot, sending him toppling to the ground. Half-stunned by the turn of events, Heatwave froze up and grimaced as the stone walls of the valley and the metal walls of the stellar spanner conspired to echo the sound loudly in all directions.

Rapid footfalls told him all he needed to know. Heatwave struggled once again to get upright, managing to find his feet just as three dark forms rounded the corner.

"A Decepticon!" Wheeljack pointed directly at Heatwave, as though the discovery were purely his own.

"No, a volunteer!" Goldbug shouted. "*Get him!*"

Before the charging Side Burn and Wheeljack could reach Heatwave, he leapt to his feet and transformed in a single, smooth motion. Seconds before his tires touched the ground, he launched a volley of missiles toward the nearest Autobot. Side Burn had only managed to squeeze off three shots before the missiles struck his midsection. The Autobot flew backwards into one of the stellar spanner's control pylons. The pylon

held, but Side Burn bent nearly in half and tumbled to the ground.

Side Burn's fate had given the other two Autobots their opening. Wheeljack and Goldbug leapt in unison, each one landing at Heatwave's sides. Now able to block the movement of Heatwave's turret, they were free to grapple with him without fear of missile attack.

"Apply pressure at the plate seams, we'll force the spy to transform!" Wheeljack shouted as his fingers dug into the missile launcher and began to pry it into a pair of legs.

"A decent idea... You're a veritable stopped chronometer, Wheeljack."

"Heatwave..." Blitzwing whispered to himself. Still unnoticed, he watched as the Autobots forced Heatwave back into robot mode. "Well, no time to wait for reinforcements now. Sorry lil' buddy, you're gonna have to bail out."

"What? Why?"

"Because it's going to get violent and I don't want you getting killed."

"Wouldn't I be safer inside a heavily armored tank?"

"Yeah, but I don't know if that cockpit still exists when I'm in robot mode."

"Okay, I'll wait over by these rocks."



Wheeljack moved quickly to bind the Decepticon's hands behind his back. The optical cabling he used had not been designed for the purpose, but its tensile strength was enough to keep Heatwave's hands, and subsequently his form, locked. For his part, Heatwave refused to cooperate. By the time Goldbug and Wheeljack forced him into the spanner, each of them had been dented by Heatwave's flailing legs. Just as the Autobots pushed the struggling Decepticon to the center of the spanner, Heatwave managed to flip up and make one final kick.

His boot smashed into Wheeljack's face with sufficient force to hurl the Autobot scientist to the ground.

Goldbug didn't bother looking up as he set about binding Heatwave's legs to prevent any further retaliation. "Be more careful."

Seething with rage and dazed by the blow, Wheeljack walked out of the spanner ring without responding. *This entire affair is too humiliating, too pointless, for me to allow it to demean me any further*, he thought bitterly to himself. *I am a superior intellect, a grandiose inventor, a master scientist...*

And, distracted as he was, he walked right into Blitzwing's fist.

The impact was followed by a Jet-Judo throw that sent Wheeljack sprawling into the dirt beyond the spanner's ring. Blitzwing drew his sword, intending to finish Wheeljack off. The scientist tried feebly to rise and then crumpled into an unmoving heap. The distinctive sound of unnecessary systems falling offline to preserve vital functions came to Blitzwing's audio sensors. Satisfied that Wheeljack posed no further threat, the Decepticon warrior's conscience and sense of practicality both urged him to mercy.

"Spanner activation in thirty seconds," a hollow, female voice rang out from the spanner. "Please achieve minimum safe distance."

Goldbug stood next to the control panel, a contented chuckle rising from his audio processor as the access gate snapped shut. "Big show, but it's pointless, moot, meaningless!"

"I disagree!" Blitzwing lunged forward, sword drawn. As Goldbug raised his blaster, Blitzwing could only think that this was the sort of situation where other Decepticons engaged in banter with the enemy. His last statement seemed, in context, inappropriate and even a little disappointing. This thought stayed with him as he

hurtled forward and even survived the sensation of heat and impact wrenching at his hand as Goldbug blasted the sword from his grasp, leaving the blade a worthless hunk of scrap.

When his forward momentum finally brought him face to face with his foe, Blitzwing resolved to correct his previous error. “Nice try, Gold**thug**.” Blitzwing smashed his forehead into the Autobot’s cranium, knocking him to the ground. Satisfied with this victory over his now unconscious foe and his use of language, he turned to the spanner, which now rippled and surged with life.

“Oh... that’s not good,” he muttered to himself. “Heatwave, can you hear me?”

“Blitzwing! Got out of the bonds, but I can’t talk the spanner into shutting off! You’ve gotta turn it off from there!”

“Hang in there!” Blitzwing pulled an access cable from his forehead crest and plugged it into the spanner’s controls. A second later his consciousness reached out to the system, forcing the material world away in favor of a stream of unfiltered data. Despite his relative inexperience he began plucking command codes from the data flow.

‘Schematics... we might need those... and... aha... the Autobot communications encryption key...’ Blitzwing smiled to himself as he seized every bit of information available. While minutes had passed within the virtual environment, outside only seconds had passed. As the rift above the spanner grew ever wider, Blitzwing began pushing the codes he had stolen through to signal a cancellation. A few more seconds and the system would shut down entirely.

Seconds were all that the only-seemingly incapacitated Wheeljack needed.

Blitzwing couldn’t see the electro-shell hit the control panel but he felt it. Lightning surged out of the data stream and enveloped his virtual self. He screamed as his unprotected circuits were overwhelmed by the power surge. A motor-spasm ripped him free from the system just as he felt something pop deep within his form. As he tumbled backward he saw the rift open high above the stellar spanner, and witnessed a red and blue shape tumble upward into the void.

Wheeljack rose to his feet as the rend in the sky sealed itself. If he had a mouth he would have been grinning. “Pathetic fool! You thought I was defeated, but it is you who have suffered defeat!” The lights on the side of his head flashed as he laughed maniacally at Blitzwing’s fallen form.

As he laughed, Wheeljack swore he heard a click, as though a distant system were coming online. His laughter stopped as a strange cacophony of rhythmic sounds accompanied by the wet, meaty voice of some unknown human warbled at him from every direction.

“-ither, heavy metal machine, restore the con-sti-tu-tion, that is our dream!”

“What... who’s there?” Wheeljack looked in all directions. “Where’s that coming from? Goldbug!”

“What... what is that noise?” Goldbug muttered as he came back online. “Vile, reprehensible, obnoxious!”

“It is some sort of Decepticon attack!” The two Autobots, futilely covering their external auditory sensors with their hands, turned to see Side Burn running toward them. “This is what the humans laughably consider music, the Decepticons must have weaponized it somehow.”

“It’s coming in on the emergency comm channel!” Goldbug hissed. “I can’t turn it- Wait... aren’t you dead?”

“No, it was only a glancing blow. I rebooted cleanly.”

“You were nearly blown in half!” Goldbug shouted.

“It must have seemed like it from your viewpoint. But as you can clearly see, I am fine.” Side Burn replied, brushing some dust off one arm. “At any rate, noise or not, we have the advantage!”

“Not for long!” Wheeljack pointed to the horizon, where a cloud of dust was slowly becoming visible. “The rest of the Decepticons are coming!”

“Tactical ideas, fearless leader?” Side Burn yelled.

Goldbug growled as he clutched his head. He prided himself on tactical thought, but the only thing that



came to his processor was the hideously repetitive cacophony that he could neither banish nor suppress. Denied more elegant stratagems, he decided to fall back on instinct. “Escape... withdraw, retreat!”

“What about the spanner?”

Goldbug howled, bringing his cannon to bear. Even over the cacophony currently dominating their audio receptors, the roar of artillery filled their senses. The spanner’s control panel took the brunt of the assault, but several blasts from the cannon and the stingers hidden within Goldbug’s forearm armor plating soon made short work of two of the pylons, sending them crashing to the ground.

“We will recapture the structure and repair it later, now that we know it works!” Goldbug snapped as he finished his assault, quickly shifting into his vehicle mode. “We cannot, however, do that as prisoners or corpses. Autobots, roll out!”



Blitzwing leapt back to functionality with a jolt. Without thinking, he threw one hand upward to the sky and shouted. “*Heatwave!*”

“Whoah there, triple-dude, you gotta lay still.” Soundwave’s arm halted Blitzwing’s attempted escape from the medical bay.

“How did... where...”

“We’re back at the bunker, Blitz. The Autobums bolted an’ left a whole lotta slag in their wake.”

“We have to...”

“Dude, slow down. You took a serious bangin’. You’ve got internal circuits fused all through your torso” Soundwave paused. “Where’s Heatwave? We’ll take care of it.”

Blitzwing groaned and shook his head.

“The ‘bots... they set up some kind of teleporter machine, said they were sending him to Cybertron as a test... but if it failed, he’s somewhere in deep space.”



Cliffjumper paced, looking Blitzwing over. “The real question is, why didn’t the Autobots capture Blitzwing when they had a chance? Or scrap him?”

Blitzwing cradled his head in his hands. “Can that question wait until you fix this... thing... in me? The music is really loud and I’m already getting tired of it.”

Will blinked. “Tired?”

“It’s not stopping, Will. I can change folders, and I think I can tap into the web to mix it up, but really, I’d like to be alone in my head again.”

“Whoah... I think I know what caused them to bug out,” Soundwave said, turning from the diagnostic display. “It’s on an encoded frequency, but Blitz here is jammin’ on a communications channel.”

“I... I think I might have downloaded the Autobot emergency comm protocols while I was trying to hack the stellar spanner. It was kind of a jumble of data, I was just grabbing whatever I could get.”

Soundwave gave Blitzwing a huge double thumbs-up. “Dude, the O-Pod... you’re jamming the Autobots with righteous tunes! *Excellent!*”

“How is that even possible?” Professor Arkeville paused. “An O-Pod shouldn’t even work with your systems.”

“Basic Cybertronian medical science,” Starscream replied as he continued Blitzwing’s examination. “Introduce non-living plastics or metals into the body, the surrounding systems break them down, rebuild them into Cybertronian technomatter, and integrate them into the larger mechanism. We break a rotator or slip a gear, we can replace it, and after a short while it becomes living circuitry like the rest of us.”

“Now that is seriously cool,” Sephie smiled.

Arkeville nodded. “Like human flesh converting sterile coral into living bone.”

“Now that is seriously creepy,” Cliffjumper shuddered.

Rick gave Will a look. “So the O-Pod is what? His spleen now?”

Starscream shook his head. “No, it’s just an O-Pod, but it’s plugged into his nervous system.”

“So it’s not essential. You can fix me. Take it out.”

“But if this is broadcasting on the Autobot comm channel...” Starscream smiled.

“And their comm-channel is like, hardware locked...” Soundwave mused, tapping his faceplate in contemplation.

“Guys, can we fix me now?”

“Any Autobot that’s near Blitzwing will be rendered helpless.”

“Guys?”



“You built a stellar spanner... without lettin’ me know?”

Goldbug backed against Teletraan-X’s main console, then quickly jumped away at the warning beep. “It was... uhmm... a surprise, Rodimus.”

“It was a surprise, Rodimus *what?*”

“Rodimus PRIME! PRIME!” Goldbug spun for escape, but Rodimus stepped in his path. The Seeker backed against the wall as his leader advanced. “A gift... I was going to use it to get us reinforcements from Cybertron, to get an edge on the Decepticons!”

“Oh, that was a brilliant plan, ‘Bug. Def.”

Goldbug relaxed slightly as Rodimus’s posture changed.

“...Except that would put Optimus *right on top of us, you moron!*” Rodimus’s buzzsaw-hand whirred to life as he swung, coming within a wire’s breadth of cutting Golbug’s faceplate open. “He gots just as much reason to scrap you as me, so either you wuz thinkin’ you’d make a deal with the old boss... or you wasn’t thinkin’ at all!”

“I wasn’t thinking! *I wasn’t thinking!*”

“Elita One, the AR Chamber up and runnin’ yet?”

The white and black female slid up behind Rodimus. “It vas yesterday, but it seems to have developed a sudden glitch, my liege.”

“Oh, we can’t have nice things.” Rodimus fixed Goldbug with a dark stare. “You’s always thinkin’, aren’t you, Goldbug?”

“Um... no? Yes? Maybe?”

“You gots plenty o’ time for it now. Get yourself waterproofed, you’s on salvage duty with Seaspray... until I say otherwise.”

Goldbug moved as if to retort, but glanced back nervously at Teletraan-X’s console, then slinked out of the main bridge without a word.

Elita almost purred as she moved to Rodimus’s side. “Oh, that was a stunning display of leadership, if I may say so, my liege.”

“Don’t I know it,” Rodimus smirked, wrapping his left arm around her waist. “Now, I gots a special job for you... and another one for you, Blaster.”



“Don’t worry, humans! Sure, this revolving restaurant is on top of big drill that will be digging miles into your planet to get at crude oil we discovered below... but you is all really, really safe!”

Swoop spread his clawed arms wide, oblivious to the diners’ sudden dives under cover as he knocked over a massive potted plant.

“Because we need you alive as hostages! See? All okay! Friends?”

The restaurant lurched again as the tower’s drill broke through an underground tunnel and into another concrete layer. Swoop staggered a little, bumping his head on the ceiling.

“Oopsie. Need to make sure tower legs hold up. Check them.”

“I don’t see why you get to lead this operation. I could lead this operation just fine.”

Swoop rolled his optics at the wheedling voice behind him. The Dinobot tried to offer his hostages an apologetic smile, but his robot-mode face simply wasn’t designed for it.

“You weren’t even alive half an orbital ago,” the voice continued behind him. “I’ve been in the Autobots way longer. Just because they always passed me up on promotions doesn’t mean you have seniority. I’m totally qualified to-”

“Shut up, Star Saber.”

The small tan jet flinched, even though Swoop hadn’t moved a millimeter. “Yeah, okay, sure. Fine. I’m the only one you’re mean to. Story of my life. You’re worse than Huffer. He took my sta-”

Star Saber’s litany was interrupted by the blare of a klaxon. Swoop’s face lit up. “Oh, boy! New friends... Decepticons!”



Starscream soared through the air, Blitzwing and Slugslinger in flanking positions. Of the three, only Blitzwing had taken an Earth-styled jet mode, chosen before he’d even left Cybertron. The other two’s alien forms may have stuck out, but over the last few months, humanity had quickly gotten used to seeing the alien robots, and had begun hailing the Deceptions as heroes.

Even if this hadn’t been the case, Starscream wouldn’t have missed the opportunity to witness a new field test anyway.

“All right... we have approximately ninety human hostages in the restaurant on top of the drill. A very precarious situation, we can’t risk damaging the tower. Evac crews are on their way, but we need to clear the Autobots from the area first. Which is where you come in, Blitzwing. Hang back, and once we are assured we’ve drawn them all out, I’ll give the signal for you to move in and make use of your new ability.”

“Two spotted!” Slugslinger called out as they approached the drill-tower. “Looks like one of them is a Dinobot, inbound. The other’s on the roof.”

“I’ll take the Dinobot,” Starscream replied, unfolding into robot mode. Crystalline blades swung free from his bicep armor. “Remember, no wild shooting.”

“Perish the thought.”

Slugslinger burst forward, streaking past the robotic pterodactyl on a beeline to the tower. Transforming in midair, he landed gingerly, eyeing up the smaller robot, who was brandishing a large spear.

“Stand back!” Star Saber howled nervously. “I know how to use this!” He took a step forward, giving a warning swipe. The spear slipped free from his grip at the end of the swing, clattering to the roof several meters away. The Autobot groaned, not even wanting to look, and too scared to take his optics off his opponent.

Slugslinger merely shrugged. “Go ahead, pick up your spear. I’ll wait.”

Star Saber gave him a suspicious glare.

“Wouldn’t be fair otherwise, would it?”

The little Autobot lunged, grabbing the spear and staggering upright into an awkward attack position. A split second later, it was shot out of his hands.

“Tell you what,” Slugslinger smiled. “Best of three.”

Star Saber dove for his spear again, but this time leapt over the roof’s edge, shifting into jet mode. “Not fair!” he wailed. “Three against two!”

Slugslinger smiled to himself as he gave chase. “Starscream, come in. Looks like it’s just the Dinobot and this twerp. We’re in the clear.”

Starscream nodded as he blocked a claw-swipe from the winged beast. “All right, Blitzwing... hit it!”

The Triple Changer sighed. Starscream made it sound so dramatic. It was little more than a thought on his end, and nobody looking on would have been able to tell he’d done anything at all.

But the effects on the two Autobots were immediate and very noticeable. The ever-present noise in Blitzwing’s head connected with his broadcast circuitry and expanded invisibly outward. Swoop let out a screech of pain, spinning madly in midair to find the source of the sudden noise in his head. Star Saber’s flight path swerved madly.

The two Autobots collided in midair. Both transformed in a mess of limbs, slamming into one of the tower’s legs on the way down. After hitting the ground, Swoop untangled himself from his partner, groaning and clutching his head. “Bad noise! Can’t think!” He managed to get into the air, shifting back into his pterodactyl mode.

“No hard feelings, human friends!” the Dinobot screeched as he sped away. Star Saber, one wing bent almost ninety degrees, hoofed it after the Dinobot, complaining loudly.

“Amazing!” Starscream pumped his fist as he watched the two retreat. “We now have an incredibly effective yet non-lethal weapon against the Autobots! This will surely minimize collateral damage from battles, too.”

“Guys?”

“Don’t quite seem fair to me,” Slugslinger muttered. “They don’t even have a chance with this.”

“I do believe that’s rather the point.”

“Guys?”

Both jets turned to the sound of the voice.

Blitzwing groaned as the jets in his feet screamed at full burn, his back denting the steel wall of the ever-tilting tower.

“Not to pressure you or anything, but this building is really, really, *really* heavy!”



Sideswipe skidded around a corner, engine roaring. “We got another wave of drone-cars coming up from behind!”

Blitzwing’s turret spun slowly to track the gaining mob of human vehicles. “Please tell me there are no hostage humans within them!”

“No human heat signatures that I can detect.”

“I still don’t like this!”

A large metallic beetle in shades of black and red skimmed through the air, swooping in to a few feet above street level beside the tank. “Don’t stress yourself unduly,” it replied in a smooth, sonorous voice. “The owners will be compensated by their insurance companies... apparently ‘Act of Rampaging Otherworldly Life-Forms’ coverage is required by law.”

“Maybe, Bombshell, but-”

“*Less talky, more breaky!*”

Sideswipe spun a full 180 degrees almost instantly, gunning his motor and heading straight for the oncoming traffic. His driver’s-side door flipped up on the top-hinge, his robot-mode arm pulling out with cudgel in hand. Mere seconds before impact with the lead car, the former Autobot skidded sideways, missing the head-on collision by mere inches. His cudgel ripped through its windshield and roof.

Bombshell sighed. “I’d tell him that’s not going to help much, but well, you know how well he listens. I suggest we fly over to the source of the problem.”

Blitzwing shifted into jet mode, flipping over a few drone-cars as he lifted into the air. He followed Bombshell carefully as they spotted the target: a massive Roll-N-Wash car wash station.

“That it?”

“Indeed.”

“So... humans bring their cars there and the Autobots do something to them in the process of a wash?”

“Giving them access to a well-spread-out drone force anywhere. And what do you see in that parking lot?”

Blitzwing peered. “Green jeep and...” The other machine in the lot was a sleek white-and-black automobile with red accents, but it didn’t look like any Earth car he’d ever seen. “Autobots?”

“According to the profiles, Brawn and Elita One. Elita would be the one in charge of this operation, certainly. Well, shall we?”

Bombshell dove as the green jeep peeled out on an intercept course. Brawn changed quickly, spinning into a kick that lifted a human vehicle into the air, following with a punch that launched it skywards at the Insecticon. Bombshell swerved in midair as he dove, swooping past a hail of automobiles. He landed, ducking quickly to avoid another suddenly-flying car.

“Now, Brawn, I certainly applaud your restraint in the face of battle, most Autobots would become frothing savages.” Bombshell leaned back, carefully dodging a swing from Brawn’s shoulder-mounted crane-cannon that would otherwise have taken his head off. “But really, you should relax a bit more. Now, I’m going to administer a sedative program, there are no permanent side-effects...”

The puff of compressed air from Bombshell’s head-mounted cannon was followed a half-second later by the spark of the anesthesiologist disintegrating in the energy field of Brawn’s perfectly-placed nucleon shock gauntlet.

“Oh.”

Brawn's face remained impassive as he stepped forward in a modified Tekkaido stance, but paused before his forward lunge. The lights of his optics dimmed slightly as he shook his head. His face split into a grimace, and he managed to stop himself before grasping his head with both shock-gauntlet-clad hands.

Another second later, a second anesthesiologist sailed through the air, connecting with the Autobot's forehead.

"Excellent timing, Blitzwing," Bombshell smiled as Brawn slumped to the ground.

Bombshell turned to the noise of rending metal. Blitzwing's sonic assault had scrambled the drone-cars' control-signal, leaving Sideswipe in the middle of a swarm of barely-controlled machines, swinging his clubs with a zeal that frankly worried the Insecticon.

"Oh, dear. Well, I suppose it'll do him good to vent off some steam... Blitzwing, Brawn is down, I'm helping Sideswipe out of a jam."

"Lucky me," Blitzwing muttered as he leapt over a charging drone-car. He'd spotted Elita dashing into the Roll-N-Wash. With the other Decepticons occupied, he gave chase.

The interior of the wash station was cramped and dark, save some odd flashing lights that seemed to serve no purpose. Blitzwing had only taken a few steps in when the machinery sprang to life. Rotating polishers and buffers came from every angle as hidden nozzles drenched him with soap and water. After his initial yelp of surprise filled his mouth with cleanser he decided against screaming for help. The assault itself was harmless, but it kept him blind to his surroundings, and therefore vulnerable.

Unable to find a target, Blitzwing fell back on his instincts and assumed his tank mode; large, heavy and, most importantly, wide. Amid the shifting and rearranging of panels the car wash buckled, originally designed for automobiles no larger than a sports utility vehicle. The supports for the brush mechanisms cracked and bent under the pressure of his widening shape. Within moments the entire system was a twisted wreck. Polishers hung lifelessly to each side, shattered pipes belched soap, water and hot wax onto the floor. Blitzwing was vaguely aware of a mechanical arm tapping on his under-chassis in a vain attempt to install a control module in an engine that wasn't there.

Elita One practically spat as she peered out from behind a large cleaning chemical vat. "Oh, you think you are sooo clever!"

"Come again?"

"You knew I was there, lining up my shot, you had to ruin it, didn't you?"

Blitzwing vaguely remembered something about Elita One being an expert sniper. "Ok... sure. If it makes you happy, I did that."

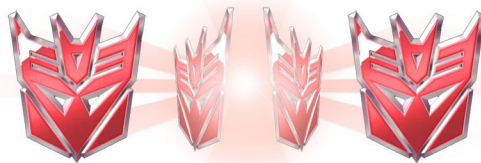
"Oh, vell, I try again, I suppose."

As soon as Elita One lifted her gun, Blitzwing reassumed his robot mode. Even as he shifted, he was raising his blaster, but the only thing to come from the barrel was a rather sad burst of foam.

"Uh-oh."

Elita One smiled viciously. "Oh dahling, don't worry, it happens to everyone sometime." She raised her twin-cannon, leveling it at Blitzwing's face.

"Fortunately for you, it'll only happen once."



Elita smirked as she lined her shot up with Blitzwing's ember chamber. Her finger squeezed the trigger gently as she savored the last few moments before the shot.

Then the song changed.

The previous tune that had overridden her comm frequency had been an inoffensive, forgettable and utterly ignorable ballad. The music now assaulting her was a cheery pop tune that tore through thought with the ease of a skill saw ripping through paper. Elita One's look of ecstatic joy wilted away and was replaced by a look of horror.

"No! *No! No!*" She screamed. The shot was still lined up. She could pull the trigger easily but instead shouted. "Turn that off! You're ruining it for me!"

"What are you-"

Before she could explain further the wall between the two exploded, sending masonry and foam flying.

As the debris settled and the last of the wash machinery shut down, Blitzwing peeked cautiously over the carnage. The car that had been thrown into the building let out a final, pathetic car alarm wail, its airbag belatedly bursting forth. There was no sign of Elita.

Sideswipe and Bombshell peeked through the hole.

"Oh, good, you didn't hit him." Bombshell said.

"Me?" Sideswipe protested, "That's one of yours!"

"Guys, have you seen-" Blitzwing was interrupted by the sound of tires squealing. The three turned to the car wash entrance to see Elita speed away in vehicle mode, the recumbent Brawn draped over her back end. "Oh... nevermind."

"So, who wants to get some oil? I could go for some oil right now," Bombshell chuckled.

"Yeah, I could go for that." Sideswipe replied absentmindedly.

"Yes, a relaxing drink after work does wonders for camaraderie and..." Bombshell paused. "Wait. Is anyone else hearing that?"

Sideswipe cocked his head. "Hear what, 'Shell? You mean that horrible, horrible music?"

"Oh, good. I thought I was going crazy a moment there."

"Uh, Blitz? You can shut off the noise now."

The Triple Changer looked at the two Decepticons, baffled. "I thought I had. And why are *you* hearing it? Neither of you should be on the Autobot frequency."

"We're not!" Sideswipe barked, lifting a hand to the side of his head. "It's coming over the Decepticon frequency now!"



"Whoah... Screamer-Dude, you ok?"

"Honestly, no." Starscream looked up from his scans of Blitzwing's frame. "In fact, none of us are. Blitzwing's new powers are growing, in intensity and range. It appears to be locked in right now, he's broadcasting uncontrollably. Blitzwing's limited immunity is understandable, but concentrating is becoming more difficult and it's only going to get worse."

"Bogus." Soundwave replied. "So we gotta take it out, right?"

"Yes. Hopefully soon, while we can still focus enough to perform the surgery. Frankly, Soundwave, I'm impressed you've managed to weather this." Starscream looked ashamed as he spoke. "I'm sorry to say that I'd always assumed you lacked discipline."

"Discipline? It's no big. I'm already metal." Soundwave thumped his chest proudly. "These righteous

tunes aren't anything that isn't already playing in my head."

Starscream stared at Soundwave in horror. "Really?"

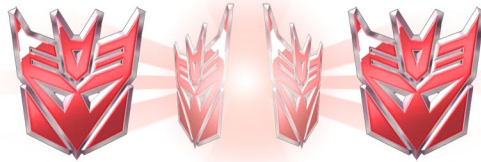
"I expect that it's more than that, Soundwave." Arkeville looked up from his work. "As a communications device, you're likely pre-built with the ability to prioritize incoming signals. Your friends aren't so lucky."

"Dude?"

"If my examination of Starscream's systems is accurate, unless we can stop the subspace transmission, Blitzwing's signal will eventually cause permanent memory damage... possibly even catastrophic data corruption."

"Whoah, that means-"

"If it's not stopped, this 'rock and roll' assault will rapidly become... *death metal*."



"Yo, Blitzer. Come on out, dude." Soundwave shouted down the corridors of the Decepticon base. "We gotta get you to surgery."

His calls unanswered, Soundwave patrolled the hallways of the hastily constructed complex. He found other Decepticons, most of them simply lying in their quarters trying to block out the musical assault that filled the base. Blitzwing was not in his quarters, nor in the fueling station or the computer rooms. The last place he could be was the repair bay, a massive cavern of rough-hewn rock and salvaged equipment from the now defunct Decepticon warship *Nemesis*.

The only thing in the repair bay, however, was Astrotrain, who was still in his colossal shuttle mode, resting in stasis lock. Numerous tubes and pumps gently melted the ice that penetrated his systems during his time in the Antarctic, draining away the corrosive liquid before it could do further harm to his systems. Astrotrain and Blitzwing had been close, and it made sense to Soundwave that he might be here.

There was no sign of Blitzwing there either, but a flashing datapad sat on top of the control console for Astrotrain's pumps. Soundwave picked it up and pulled up its contents: a single message marked "Urgent".



"And now, it's time for another ninety-minute ROCK BLOOOOOOOOCK!!!"

"Nein! Not anozer vun! Ze cacophony, ze atonality!"

Rodimus paced across the *Ark*'s former bridge. Even underwater the signal was unbearable. "Failure!" He smashed his fist into the command console. "Failure at an increased... uh... rate!"

"The signal is disrupting communications, and we can't shut it off because it's on the hardwired emergency signal band." Brawn muttered. "Just try and ignore it."

"Oh, really? How's that workin' for ya, Mister Stoic? Elita told me about the car wash."

Brawn uncharacteristically couldn't look Rodimus in the face. His wince, as a particularly loud power chord sawed its way across the Autobots' sensor net, told Rodimus all he needed to know.



“Ratchet... scrap dis noise. Can you shut off the receivers in our heads?”

The Autobots’ medic, one moment bent over a table groaning, suddenly shot upright with a disturbingly bright smile. “Oh, I thought you’d never ask! A few swipes of a micro-laser and we’ll get it shut right off. Just let me get the right tool.”

Ratchet dug through his equipment locker for a few minutes and, finding what he was after, turned back around.

“Ratchet, what’s that?”

“Oh, it’s a sonic jackhammer.”

“You said it’d take a micro-laser.”

“Oh, yeah... sorry Prime, I guess I just drifted,” Ratchet grinned. “This will still do the job, and nobody’s really all that attached to their personalities, right?”

“Fuggidaboutit.”

“About what?” Ratchet looked up as though hearing a distant noise. “Oooh, this one’s catchy... *‘and when the gun goes off it sparks and you’re ready for surgery... surgery’...*”

“Yes, yes, Ratchet... we can hear it already!” Despite the aural torture, subjecting himself to Ratchet was unthinkable. “I need ideas! Now! If I have to listen to this ‘Jim-Bob and Willy’ another slugging cycle, someone’s getting a phazon charge in the face!”

“Hyou are obviously stressed, Rodimus Prime.” Blaster circled around his leader.

Rodimus looked up at the communicator with an angry, suspicious glare. “You ain’t affected by this shriekin’?”

“Oh, nein,” Blaster purred. “I haff been rigorously on mein internal metronome for nearly five million stellar cycles now. Zis garboil is indeed un insult to mein refined tastes, ja, but it is hardly cripplingk. But for hyou? Tell me, *Rodimus*, can hyou really push a counter-attack against ze Decepticons in hyour current state?”

“You’ze gettin’ at something, Blaster?”

“It seems to me zat hyou are currently unfit for command,” Blaster smiled, pulling his electro-baton from storage. “Unt zerefore, I am-”

Blaster didn’t see Rodimus move. The Autobot leader was simply *there*, in his face, hand clamped around Blaster’s neck, buzzsaw pressed into his midsection, their faces only millimeters apart. Blaster’s baton

clattered to the floor.

“Right now,” Rodimus hissed, “I gots two idiot humans yammerin’ ‘bout venting exhaust stuck in my head. They will not shut up. An’ I can still bend your fenders in a knot an’ stick ‘em in your reactor linkage! So up your tube with an energon cube! Capiche?!”

“Ja, I capizzzh...” Blaster stammered. “I capizh mein Prime!” he added quickly as Rodimus gave him another shove.

“Anybody else think dey can take a piece of the Prime?” Rodimus looked around the room at the gathered Autobots. An attempted coup was a major point of interest, no matter how frequent, but today the entire group was distracted. Several shook their heads, others continued vainly trying to block out the noise with their hands.

Beachcomber alone stared directly at Blaster and Rodimus, or at least in their general direction, which was about as much focus as one could hope with him.

“Whatta you lookin’ at?” Rodimus snarled.

“Waitin’ to meet the new boss, same as the old boss.” Beachcomber muttered. “Don’t get fooled again.”

His point made and his attention drawn to Beachcomber, Rodimus’s grip slacked. Blaster slipped free and also turned to the slightly-swaying Autobot. “Hyou are not affected by ze sonic disruption?”

“I rose above the noise and confusion!” Beachcomber howled, staring intently at a spot about two inches to the left and behind Blaster’s primary audio receptor. “Though my mind can think I still am a madman... I hear the voices when I’m-”

“Of course he ain’t,” Rodimus snapped, cutting Beachcomber off. “His processor’s already so scrambled, what’s one more piece o’ crazy to him? ‘Scuse me one moment.”

Rodimus stepped over to a nearby wall, and with great care and ceremony, placed his one good hand flat against it. A split second later, the bridge echoed with the sound of Rodimus’s helmet banging against the wall repeatedly for several seconds.

“Right. Okay. Better. I can work with this. Teletraan-X! There any Decepticon activity at all out there?”

“One Decepticon energy signature detected.”

“Only one? Innarestin’. How’s this compare to when the audio disruptor started stayin’ on permanent?”

“Searching. Decepticon units globally withdrew to the Decepticon base within one megacycle of the sonic disturbance’s escalation.”

“Right. So either they’s out there with some kinda stealth tech they developed real real fast... or whatever they did to us is bitin’ them in the aft too. I’m bettin’ that single signature is the one ‘Con who’s doin’ this to us... he was at all our other operations.”

Beachcomber turned away from Rodimus, distracted by the noises in his head clashing with the voices from his comm. In one swift motion, Rodimus grabbed Beachcomber’s chin and forced the smaller Autobot’s focus back onto Rodimus’s face. “Pay attention, Beachcomber... I’m only going to say dis once.”

“Yeah, I can dig it...” Beachcomber muttered. “Keep it copasetic.”

“Good, good... Blaster, Beachcomber... I gots jobs for both of youse.”



“Dudes, he’s gone!”

Starscream, Cliffjumper and the Decepticons’ human allies were pouring over scanner information when Soundwave had rushed into the room. Now all eyes and optics were on him.

“What? Gone? Have you checked-”

“Everywhere, Starchild, he ain’t here. He left a note, said he was going to hide out so his signal wouldn’t hurt us.” Soundwave waved the datapad in the air for emphasis. “Dude turns into a jet, he could be anywhere in the world now.”

“But the signal is still coming through, loud and not-very clear,” Arkeville replied. “Maybe he hasn’t gone that far.”

“He has no idea how powerful the signal is now. He could be anyplace.”

“Then our only consolation at this point is that the signal appears to still be broadcasting on the Autobot channel as well.”

Starscream shook his head. “I feel awful. I was so wrapped up in the idea that we had a non-lethal way of stopping the Autobots that I was neglecting the well-being of one of my soldiers. That’s inexcusable... I can only hope Blizwing can find it in his ember to forgive me.”

Arkeville placed his hand on Starscream’s ankle. “I understand, but right now, I hope more that *we* can find *him*.”

“But can we find him before you all go ‘pffft’, like, permanently?” Soundwave asked.

“Perhaps... but the question is, will you be able to get anything done?” Professor Arkeville pointed to a series of graphs on the main display console. Soundwave stared. Were his face more human his confused look would have been more apparent. As it stood, he appeared more thoughtful than anything. “The signal is crippling already, anyone in the field, except Soundwave, of course, would be a sitting duck.”

“So... the Autobots would be put out just as much!” Cliffjumper replied before a guitar solo derailed his train of thought. “Grrrn... I *hate* this universe! I’m not even a Decepticon and my comm frequency just happens to be the same as yours! What are the odds of that?”

“Astromic-” the professor began.

“Rhetorical question!”

Starscream raised a hand and waited for the room’s attention to return to him. “Given the situation, we’re left with an unpleasant temporary solution to our problem... emergency stasis lo-”

“I don’t like it.” Cliffjumper started his sentence before Starscream had finished his own.

“Wait...” Sephie interjected. “What is that? Sounds bad.”

“It’s nothing serious in and of itself, Sephie.” Starscream replied. “It’s basically a forced systems shutdown, allowing self-repair systems to work unimpeded. We’d be cut off from the emergency band until Soundwave can find Blitzwing and hopefully shut off the sonic interference in stasis lock.”

“There’s a ‘but’ coming up.”

“Err... yes. But the risk is... we’d all be vulnerable to attack if the Autobots have soldiers unaffected like Soundwave is. If they were to sabotage our intruder alert and self-defense systems...”

“Then we’re staying here!” Sephie leapt to her feet, pointing to the ceiling dramatically. “We’ll keep a watch on all the systems, right guys?”

“You can count on us, Starscream!” Rick beamed.

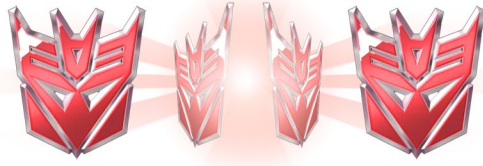
“This whole thing is kinda my fault, so it’s the least I can do,” Will nodded.

Arkeville folded his arms. “You’re too hard on yourself, Will.”

“Oh, no, no way, no how,” Cliffjumper snarled, waving his arms. “No offense, but we can’t leave our entire *defense* in the hands of four humans. *We* should be protecting *them*, not the other way around!”

“I find that speciesist.” Sephie piped in.

“I don’t like putting them in that position either, Cliffjumper,” Starscream replied. “But as acting commander of the Decepticons on Earth, I have to do what is best for the team as a whole. We have to lock down the base, go into stasis lock until Soundwave can correct the problem, and hope that the Autobots are getting it just as bad as we are.”



Thirty miles out of Tucson, a lumbering robotic form strode out of the desert. A mass of human vehicles sprawled out before him, parked on a slab of concrete along a stretch of lonesome highway. As the immense copper-and-steel colored robot came to a halt at the edge of the plaza, a dozen human voices gasped and murmured among themselves.

“Yes... *attenzhion* humans,” it boomed. “Mein name is Blaster, I am looking for the one hyou call... Big Steve Ludvig?”

“I’m Big Steve Ludwig!” a tiny voice shouted from amid the crowd. A portly man in a rather understated suit walked up to the giant robot. “Just like it says on the sign... Big Steve’s Honest Deals. What do you want?”

“I saw hyour live advertisement broadcast. I am ein vell-to-do friendly robot, und not ein alien *invader* with plans of *whurld dominzation*. I too am interested in ze... huge savingks on a new and or used automobile.”

“Ain’t you a bit big for a car? I mean, even a domestic is gonna be a stretch here.” Blaster looked down at the man in surprise. The other humans had either run to a safe distance or were already driving away at speed. “But hey, who am I to judge... what are in the market for?”

“Hyour big red tank of savingks.” Blaster pointed at the center of the lot. Surrounded by brand new sports-utility vehicles was an immense crimson tank. A banner reading “0% down” hung from its turret.

“Oh... that’s just a display piece. Came in this morning, right before my sale-a-thon broadcast... Nah, what you want is the 2009 Motresso Spo-”

“I’m pretty shure I vant ze tank.”

“Tank’s not for sale.” Big Steve turned and looked at the object of Blaster’s interest. “Blitzwing, you know this guy? You need your coffee break?”

“Steve! I told you not to mention my name!” The tank unfolded and reshaped itself into Blitzwing’s natural humanoid form.

“Hyou are unt hard robot to find, Blitzving! Vat mit your energy signature being all bouncy due to hyour signal interference.”

“I just want to be left alone!” Blitzwing shouted. “I’ll blast you to bits if I have to, Blaster, so back off!”

“Und if ze shrapnel goes everywhere und kills ze humans?” Blaster smirked. “No... hyou will come vit me. Hyou can’t fight me here.”

“No, but I can do something you can’t.”

“Und vat ist zat?”

Without speaking, the Decepticon leapt into the air and once more changed forms. The fighter jet that was Blitzwing engaged its engines and disappeared into the desert sky, leaving Blaster standing alone at the auto dealership.

“Oh, ja... flyingk.”

Blaster briefly considered smashing Big Steve into paste, but a quick glance downward revealed that the human had taken his opening and had fled the area.

Blaster sighed and began the long, slow jog back to the city.



Soundwave's axles ached.

He had spent all day rolling from combat museum to air show to flight school in an effort to locate Blitzwing. Each lead was less fruitful than the last, and with the exception of a news report about a near-clash between robots at a car dealership outside of Tucson, he had little to go on.

Until a news post on the humans' infoweb' alerted him to the fact that Monstroso, the Robot Horror from Beyond, was back at Wyatt's Roadsideaganza, in preparation for their grand-reopening. A new exhibit at a roadside tourist trap wouldn't have been worth a second glance in most cases.

Soundwave knew this bore investigation, however, since *he* was Monstroso. Or he *had* been for a few days after his eventful arrival on Earth.

The approach to the Roadsideaganza was a strange experience. Soundwave found the whole place a little unnerving. He could have stayed there as a comatose museum piece for years if Heatwave had not found him. The thought disturbed him and gave the whole park a menacing feel despite its bright and cheery displays. He found himself rolling slower and slower as he approached the main building. He assumed his robot mode, stepped over the "Closed for renovation" sign and walked gingerly towards the main office.

"Hello?" Soundwave shouted at the door before tapping it twice with the end of his finger. "Yo, I'm here to see Wyatt."

The door opened and a friendly-looking human in glasses and a sweater-vest walked out of the building. "I'm Wyatt. And..." The human looked up, and up some more. The color instantly drained from his face. "And you're Monstroso! Oh, no, you've come to kill me, haven't you?!"

"Dude, call me Soundwave, and no, no way! I'm one of the good guys! I just kinda crashed here on accident, honest mistake, no bad vibes!"

Wyatt half-hid behind the wooden door, for all the difference it would make if he were attacked. "You destroyed my dinosaurs and my woodchuck when you left!" Wyatt's brief moment of terror gave way to an immediate sense of annoyance. "They cost a fortune to replace!"

"Technically... that was the guy who was rescuing me." Soundwave raised his hands. "But I'm totally bummed that we wrecked your park. I promise I'll help fix it up, but right now I need help."

"What kind of help?" Wyatt looked up at the strange robot suspiciously.

"You got a new Monstroso... right?"

"Yeah."

"Does he look like this?" Soundwave held up a datapad and tapped a key, revealing a picture of Blitzwing's robot mode.

"Yeah, that's him, nice guy."

"Dude, you've talked to him? You know he's a Decepticon?"

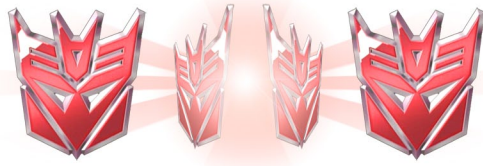
"Sure, we worked out a deal, he helps with the park, and I let him stay. Do you know him?"

"Yeah, he's a close compadre of mine. Could you-" Soundwave looked up as the rumble of jet engines and a sonic boom announced Blitzwing's departure from the roadside park. "Blitzwing! Come back! I..."

As the flare of Blitzwing's engines faded in the distance, Soundwave felt a human foot slam into his ankle.

"Dude! Most bogus! What was that for?!"

"My business!" Wyatt shouted, hopping on his non-stricken foot. "That's the second Monstroso you've cost me this year!"



Rick looked over from his monitor to see Sephie poring anxiously over the security monitors for the fifth time that hour.

“The alarm will sound if anything happens, you know.” He smiled and tried his best to appear reassuring.

“Better safe than sorry, Rick.”

“Yeah, but we’ve been through plenty already. If something happens, we’ll handle it, just like we always do.”

“Rick, ‘we’ normally means the *Decepticons* handle it while we watch from the sidelines. We can’t even pick up their weapons. If there’s an attack, what can we do?”

“Hey, I do way more than watch!” Rick was rarely loud or boisterous around Sephie, or most girls for that matter, but his pride was at stake. “I helped steal Goldbug’s gun that one time, and all three of us sabotaged that fuel shipment Rodimus stole from the Ottomans.”

Sephie shrugged. “True, but we were lucky. Let’s face it, in every conceivable way, they’re better than us. They’re bigger, stronger, smarter, they have powers we don’t.” Despite the pessimistic nature of her words, her tone was one of admiration mixed with something Rick didn’t quite recognize. He’d only heard it before once, when his younger sister was talking about some punk kid in his class named Brad White and about how ‘dreamy’ he was.

“We’re cooler,” Rick replied slowly, giving his friend an odd look. “Look at everything we accomplish without all that.”

“I think they’ve got some of us beat there too.”

A beep drew Sephie’s attention back to the console.

“What’s that? Is it an attack?”

“Hm? No, it’s an e-mail.”

Rick sidled over nonchalantly. It wasn’t normally in his nature to be nosy, but Sephie’s tone had simultaneously worried and annoyed him.

“So who’s Stormbringer99?”

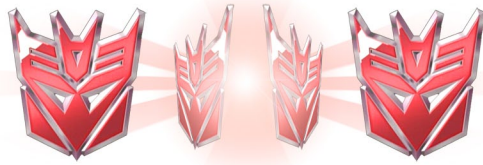
“No-one.”

“Is that your loser ex-boyfriend whats-his-“

“It’s private!” she snapped. “I need to read this... just, please sit there quietly and don’t say anything unless the base is under attack.”

A distant boom rumbled the walls. Alarms lights lit up as the main base lights shut down to conserve power.

“Sephie,” Rick replied, “I think the base is under attack.”



Blitzwing crouched low in the alley. The irony that his robot mode was currently his least conspicuous form was not lost on him. He crouched there, thinking of a new place to hide from friend and foe alike. His last two hiding spots had been too easily discovered. Human media was to blame, he supposed.

Perhaps I'll try one of the jungles, he thought. Or that Antarctic place where we found Astrotrain. Neither option seemed particularly pleasant or comforting. For the time being, however, he felt safely hidden, watching the occasional car drift by his hiding spot behind the fire escape and the dumpsters.

He had just come to the decision to split the difference between a jungle and a frozen wasteland by going to the wintry forests of what the humans called Canada when one of the more gaudy Earth machines, a yellow-and-black vehicle, rolled to a stop just outside the alley.

A voice, muffled and faint, came from within the vehicle. “Ze money is on ze zeat, now scam.” Blitzwing caught a glimpse of the driver reaching back over his shoulder to open the passenger door. As soon as the door was open, a boombox fell out of the seat and toppled to the ground.

The taxi was already driving away when the boombox began to simultaneously grow and unfold, twisting and reconfiguring into a familiar robot form.

“Ah, zere hyou are!”

“Blaster! That’s not even... how did you... that doesn’t even make sense!”

“Fool! Ze earthmen are hyour undoink!” Blaster withdrew his rifle from its usual extra-dimensional storage space. “Ze mercenary cabbies care not who pays zem! Unt hyour location vas betrayed by ze internet itself!”

Blitzwing tried to shuffle backwards inconspicuously. “The internet?”

“Yatter feed! To kvote vun Pikapikaninja: ‘Oh-em-gee, zer is a robot in ze alley by my house, Ess-ahr-ess-ell-vhy!’” Blaster grinned. “Who needs drivingk ven hyou are ein *zupergenius*?”

Blitzwing looked around him. The alley had provided cover, but it was too narrow for him to transform into either of his alternate forms. He reached for his sword and gun only to remember their present condition. Devoid of other options, he raised his fists and looked as intimidating as possible.

Blaster paused and took a step back, a look of shock on his face. “Impozible!”

Blitzwing had mere seconds to enjoy a fleeting sense of self-satisfaction. A blur of white and blue flew from the roof behind him and landed between himself and the approaching Autobot.

“Dude, yatter? One of my buds lives and breathes it. You should’a known I was coming.”

“Soundvave!” Blaster snarled. “I vill crush hyou zo only ze head is le-”

Blaster’s threat trailed off into an indistinct howl of pain. Unwilling to wait for his enemy’s soliloquy, Soundwave landed a solid right cross in his counterpart’s midsection. Blaster gave Soundwave a punch to the face plate in return and the brawl began. In the narrow alleyway they were limited to hand-to-hand combat. After a series of painful but indecisive blows, Soundwave managed to dodge a lunge by his opponent. Seeing his opening, Soundwave caught the Autobot’s midsection with his shoulder and pushed the Autobot onto the street. The charge clipped one of the nearby buildings and sheered off a layer of brick that scattered across the ground as Blaster fell.

Blitzwing could only watch in stunned silence as the two communicators let violence do their talking. Now free of the alley’s confines, the battle changed substantially. Blaster withdrew his sonic baton and began

swinging it in wide arcs, vibrating the surrounding air into cacophonous explosions of discordant sound. Soundwave countered with every speaker in his frame, the clash of concussive energies creating a zone of harsh silence even as windows beyond the impact zone cracked.

The chaos had caused Blitzwing to forget his initial plans of escape. He contemplated coming to Soundwave's rescue, but a blast from his tank cannon would strike both machines at once. He resolved to leap into the melee and stop the battle before leaving, despite the risk that one side or the other might capture him.

Before he could put his plan into motion, however, the battle stopped unexpectedly dead.

Both Soundwave and Blaster caught glimpse of something in the sky at the same moment. A ball of flame streaked from the sky, growing ever larger as it descended towards the battlefield. The two combatants broke ranks and began running in opposite directions as the howl of the incoming object filled the air.

Amidst the terrified screams of nearby humans and the brilliance of the now fiery sky, Blitzwing swore he saw the meteorite turn, ever so slightly, to land in the middle of the street, away from buildings and other obstructions.

The impact shockwave smashed every window that Soundwave and Blaster had cracked, as well as all the ones that they hadn't, and hurled the fleeing Cybertronians to the ground. Soundwave fell down in front of Blitzwing, who had similarly been knocked onto his back. A plume of dust and smoke filled the air before trickling out to a thinner plume rising from the impact crater, which now was as wide as four lanes of traffic and a sizable median.

Through the smoke belching from the crater, an immense figure stood and slowly stalked out of the flames. The robot's face was stern, with sharp, angular features. Its design was clearly an aircraft, and its chest bore the well-worn red emblem of the Decepticons, though it had three diagonal lines, like wings, coming from



each side of the abreacted robot face.

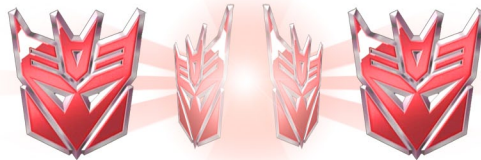
“Soundwave? Who is that?”

“I don’t know, Blitz-dude, but the badge says he’s a cop!”

The machine looked each of the three over dispassionately. “Gentlemechs. I am Special Agent Thunderwing. I’m here tracking a dangerous fugitive.”

“You’ve had it, Blaster!” If Soundwave could have smirked, he would have. “Alright Officer... do your duty!”

“Indeed. Unit designate Soundwave. By order of Decepticon law, you are under arrest. Scrapped or online, you’re coming with me.”



“Dude, what? ME?”

For once, Blaster was silent, looking from Thunderwing to Soundwave. The larger Decepticon had his optics fixed firmly on Soundwave, giving the Autobot the chance to surreptitiously step towards the stunned Blitzwing.

“Correct. It doesn’t matter how far you run or how much you change your form... I always get my mech.”

Soundwave shook his head. “I don’t know what’s going down, dude, but there’s an *Autobot* right there! Arrest *him!*”

“Faction-baiting isn’t going to help, rustbag.”

“Oh, zank logic hyou came by... mein friend here...” Blaster grabbed the stunned Blitzwing by the arm and subtly shoved his rifle into the unprepared Decepticon’s side. A focused sonic shock later and Blitzwing’s world went dark. With Thunderwing’s focus entirely on Soundwave, the attack went unnoticed. “Is ill unt zis ruffian came out of novhere!”

“You make sure he gets home safe, alright?” Thunderwing said. “And don’t let him fly in that shape, it’s a public hazard and I’d have to cite you both.”

“Yhah, yhah...” Blaster shouldered Blitzwing and dragged him off as quickly as possible.

“Dude, no you-”

Soundwave lunged, but the pavement ahead of him exploded.

“Don’t add resisting arrest to your record, Soundwave. You already have a lot to answer for. Which brings us to the charges. One count of piracy, airwave, and one count of indecency, airwave.”

“What?”

Thunderwing leveled a finger. “You hacked into a secure military comm channel and broadcasted material forbidden by the Cybertronian Broadcasting Code.” The Decepticon passed a small button on his forearm, and the sound of white noise burst into the air.

“This workin’? Wicked! Hey there mechs, this is Soundwave rockin’ the free world. Who all is out there from Kaon?... Hello? Anyone? ...aw, scrap, this ain’t right. Oh, dude. Dude. Power level’s too high. Blew right past the citizens’ band. Aw skroll. Right, let’s see if-“

For not the first time, Soundwave wished his faceplate was more expressive.

“Dude. That was from over four million solar cycles ago. I was just out of primary programming and mis-calibrated my transmitter.”

“There we are, one confession. I knew this would be an easy case. It usually is with protoform delinquents.”

The clank of Soundwave's palm hitting his face echoed through the street. "That's how I got my job! Dude... why now?"

"Wrong place, wrong time on your part. You aren't the only crook that fled Cybertron. I've been hunting a crime boss by the name of Beta across three sectors. If these humans hadn't been so fond of you, I might never have caught up with you on this mudball. Now," Thunderwing paused. "I suggest you revert to an atmospheric entry mode so I can tow you back home."

Soundwave peeked through parted fingers. "Home? Cybertron?"

Thunderwing pulled a pair of stasis cuffs from his storage compartment. "That's correct."

The communicator paused, thinking fast. "Now hold on. Hold on. Yeah. Uh... oh, dude! You can't drag me off 'til I check in with my boss-bot. That'd be going AWOL, and you'd be making me commit another crime... most heinous."

Thunderwing gave him a calculated stare. "That's correct..."

"Most unfortunately, Starscream is in emergency stasis lock, as is the rest of the Decepticon army save yours truly... and we can't bring them out until I clear the emergency airwaves once again. And I must retrieve my Blitz-bud for that."

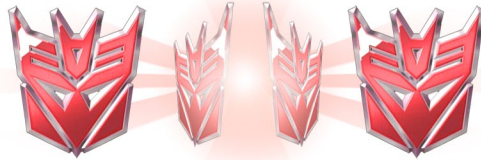
Thunderwing paused, filtering through every law in his internal datatrax for the proper response. "Yes... you are correct. According to Military Penal Code L-772b, emergency reactivation of a senior officer is grounds for temporary suspension of an arrest."

"Awesome!" Soundwave shouted. "So let us go kick Blaster's battery cover and get Blitzwing back."

"Sorry, not my jurisdiction. If the crime's not committed on Cybertron, it's a war offense and belongs to the MPs, not a peace officer."

"...Dude?"

"I'm just here to observe." After a long pause, he continued. "Don't even think of running, I'll be watching you the whole time."



"Professor, we've got a security breach near the loading entrance!" Sephie's voice crackled over the intercom. "Monitors went out afterward, but I got a look at the intruder, it's an Autobot... looks like a small car, maybe a dune buggy."

"Meet us in the science lab, we've got to fortify the defenses."

Will chased after the Professor as he made his way towards the main science lab. The base was maze-like and sprawling, with corridors large enough to accommodate most Decepticons comfortably. If he had not been present during the construction of the base from salvaged parts of the *Nemesis*, Will would have easily gotten lost while chasing his unusually spry and fleet-footed instructor.

"I've been... *ufff*... thinking, Professor," Will gasped as they turned a corner. "We should lure him up into the observatory... that's as far from the med-bay as possible."

"Good thought, but if he wrecks the observatory, it will draw the military here. The Decepticons might be public heroes, but we need to keep the location of this base a secret."

"So what's the plan?"

"We hope the defense guns stop him. If that doesn't work, we buy time and improvise."



The first defense cannon had given Beachcomber trouble. The blast clipped his shoulder and threatened to take his head with a second volley, but the Autobot had shut down any further assaults with his neutron rifle. The remaining cannons were easy enough for him to spot and shut down now that he saw the rhythm of their attacks.

The entryway he entered led him down a passage to a large room filled with scientific equipment scaled to both human and Cybertronian frames. In the distance he could hear voices; not the ordinary ones, or the loud musical shouts that had filled his head recently. These were small, whispering voices in the darkness.

“Cry the cable, cry the world, unknown terror’s here,” Beachcomber’s voice echoed through the chamber, a vicious sneer crossing his features.

“Hey, scrapheap!” a voice from the darkness shouted, “You’d better leave while you’ve got the chance.”

Beachcomber turned to face the voice. The speaker was a small human female with dark head adornments and pale skin. He lowered his rifle to a new firing position. “Girl in the corner, let the sound take you away.”

“Now, boys!” another voice shouted from Beachcomber’s left.

The Autobot swung to face the new voice when the equipment in the room bust to life. A brilliant, electric blue light filled the chamber as an energy cell between himself and the new voice started charging, without the benefit of its outer shielding. Beachcomber’s optics momentarily shut down to protect the light sensors, rendering him blind.

Behind him, he could hear two barrels crash, followed by the sound of thousands of metallic objects spilling onto the ground. By the time his sight returned he could see two of his assailants, the girl and an old, white-haired male that was half machine, running from the room through one of the side corridors.

Beachcomber howled incoherently as he took a step forward, intending to give chase. His boot hit the ground a millisecond after he identified the metallic objects he had heard just seconds before.

The ball bearings slipped from under his feet, sending him into a flailing, panicked dance as he tried to keep traction. He managed to secure his footing for a split second, only to slip painfully onto his back when the jury-rigged power cell exploded. From his new vantage point on the ground, Beachcomber caught an upside-down glimpse of two human boys who were now smirking and laughing at him.

“Superior in every way? Hardly!” Rick laughed and gave his best friend a high five.

“I am resenting a position that is *past resentment!*”

“Rick?”

“Yes, Will?”

“Run.”



“Guten tank.” Blitzwing came online to see Blaster’s snarling face loom over him. “Hyou are a dream come true, Blitzving.”

“Whuh... what?”

“Hyou are a livingk veapon,” Blaster grinned. “Lethal to both sides, indiscriminate, merciless, unt perfect. I only vish I hadt designed hyou myself.”

“Wait... what? If that’s true, why aren’t you affected?”

“Oh, hyou know, zience unt thinkgs, it is very dull and complicated. But do hyou know vot zis is?” Blaster held up a metallic band with several wires and antennae jutting out.

“It’s a broadcast signal amplifier.”

“No, hyou simpleton, it is unt broadcast signal amplifier!”

“I just said th-”

“Vith zis device,” Blaster continued, oblivious, “Hyouur sonic assault, which hass taken days to go from merely obnoxious actually dangerous to your fellow Cybertronians, vill become a deadly sonic veapon! Unt by my calculations, vich are always correct, ze range vill be enough to cover ze planet!”

“What?! But... all of Earth?!”

“Who sed anysingk abut Earzh?” Blaster smiled, arms wide. “Ve are quite happy here! Oh no, hyou see, all zis time hyour friends vere foiling silly little plots, ve vere buildingk a new stellar spanner!”

Blaster spun around as the roof slid open, revealing a long shaft up through the mountain into the open air, lined with stellar spanner projector struts.

“Zat Goldbugk is un crafty devil who vas surely vorkingk to betray us all to Optimus... but mein fuehrer Rodimus Prime is not ze type to say no to an advantage such as zis, provided *he* is in control of it. Hyou vill be sent back to our homevorld Cybertron... unt sixty nano-kliks later, hyou vill cut loose vith a sonic blast across ze Autobot unt Decepticon frequencies zat vill fry every processor on ze planet! *Hahahahaha!* Von’t it be vunderbah? Every neuro-circuit on ze planet sizzlingk unt poppingk like Insecticons on a hot engine block!”

“Why?!”

“Hyou should be proud!” Blaster continued, lost in his monologue. “Hyou vill be ze Decepticon who kilt Optimus Prime! No-vun has ever come close... but *hyou* vill be ze one to accomplish zat mighty task, as vell as vipingk out *all* ze Autobots on Cybertron!” Blaster paused, shrugging nonchalantly at Blitzwing’s look of horror. “Of course, hyou vill also be responsible for ze destruction of every Decepticon on ze planet too, unt hyou vill not survive ze sonic bomb hyourself, but ah vell. Hyou can’t make a perfect symphony vizout breakingk some instruments... over ozzer’s heads.”

“Is it worth pointing out that you’re insane?”

“Unt vunce Optimus is out ohf ze equation, ve kin use zis stellar spanner to return to Cybertron... unt raid ze armories of both sides, returningk to Earzh vit enough firepower to vipe out your miserable Decepticon allies vunce unt for all!”

“That cop, he and Soundwave will stop you.”

“Hardly... his accent unt markings put him as a member of ze Elite Guard, a pre-war law enforcement group... unt ze fact zat hyou don’t affect him means he’s been off-vorld since before ze comm protocol upgrades. Long time, before zings really got hot. Before ze civilian government fell...”

“You can’t tell me he doesn’t know about the war!”

“He might, he might not, but his kind don’t often care. Face it, Blitzving... no vun vill help hyou.” Blaster tapped a few keys and the stellar spanner sprang to life. “Let’s get ze amplifier turned on... ve don’t vant hyou unprepared for hyour trip.”



An eerie metallic voice echoed through the main corridor.

“And I breathed in, and there was smoke in my lungs and *there was fire in my brain!*”

“I can help with that!”

Beachcomber looked down as two of the humans, the portly one and the skinny one, leapt out from around the corner and raised a pair of hoses attached to small red canisters. Will and Rick whipped up their fire extinguishers and fired in unison, releasing a spray of foam towards Beachcomber’s face. Taken by surprise, Beachcomber let loose a sharp yell and whipped away from them. When the blast subsided, Beachcomber turned his untouched optics toward the two interlopers as fire-retardant foam dripped down the back of his helmet.

“They looked backward and said goodbye. Are you satisfied? How long can you stand the heat?”

“I guess it was too much to hope that would work a second time.” Will muttered, taking a step backward.

“Plan B!” Rick grasped the extinguisher by the hose and swung it in a wide arc, hurling it like an Olympic hammer into Beachcomber’s face. Will followed suit and the two canisters clanged off Beachcomber’s jaw and visor, respectively. The impact was too weak to damage the Autobot. The shock of being viciously attacked by tiny creatures that ought to be running, however, startled Beachcomber more than the humans’ initial appearance. Flailing instinctively against whatever new attack the diminutive lifeforms might muster, Beachcomber fell backwards with a thunderous clang.

“When I get to the bottom... *I go back to the top of the slide!*” he screamed as he regained his footing. Following the sounds of human footfalls he wound himself through the complex’s maze-like tunnels. At long last, the sound of footfalls faded and he came to a stop in a large, darkened room.

As his helmet-mounted searchlight came on, Beachcomber was immediately given a clue to his attackers’ location. Just beyond a doorway on the far side of the room was a new passage, just narrow enough to allow a Cybertronian access. Just beyond the doorway, the toe of one of the humans’ shoes peeked from around the corner.

“Ain’t nowhere to go, Reaper’s saved your soul,” Beachcomber snarled. “Gonna getcha, getcha, getcha, getcha...”

His path once again clear, Beachcomber broke into a sprint. Driven by his need for revenge, he ran past the door, past the human’s shoe and straight into a solid wall.

He turned to see the portly human wearing one shoe with the other, slimmer human standing on his shoulders, at a control console across the room. Before he could move, the one on top had gotten hold of a lever and pulled it downward into the active position.

The doorway Beachcomber had just passed through slammed shut, leaving him only a tiny porthole to look through. The rumble and hiss of unknown machinery shook the chamber he had unwittingly run into, as a blue-white light snapped on above him.

A voice speaking in Cybertronian filled the chamber.

“Please stand by for full decontamination procedures. To minimize discomfort, please remain perfectly still during the chemical wash.”

The two humans turned to wave at Beachcomber just before he heard the hiss of high-powered sprayers rise up all around him.



“Unt now, my dear zuperveapon, ve vill see how hyou perform as ein murder machine.”

“Dial in a different tune, Blaster. You’re totally busted.”

Blaster turned to see his arch rival standing across from him. Soundwave pointed a single accusatory finger at Blaster and held the pose, motionless save for his lime green headband flapping in the wind.

“Nein, nein, NEIN!” Blaster howled. “Hyou wish to have ein rematch? I vill crush hyou, and hyou vill be too late to stop ze plan! Hyou and I both know ve are too evenly matched for hyou to overtake me before ze spanner activates!”

Soundwave paused. For all his posturing, Blaster was right. The spanner’s doorway had snapped shut and the bridge was powering on. Devoid of options, Soundwave glanced back at his companion.

Thunderwing was leaning nonchalantly against a wall, tapping away onto a datapad.

“Dude, little help?”

The officer didn’t even look away from his pad. “Just working on my file processing. Cataloging the specifics of the current case. Very important.”

“Dude, I can’t believe you won-”

Soundwave lunged at Blaster in mid-sentence. In mid-leap he powered on his sonic field and swung hard with his left fist. The feint had the desired effect. Having assumed the two Decepticons would argue, Blaster had dropped his guard. He was only able to raise his own sonic defenses a moment after the initial impact: plastisteel buckled and Cybertronian crystal cracked under the assault that sent Blaster sprawling to the ground.

Blaster ignored the pain from his injuries and mounted an immediate counterattack. His foot smashed into Soundwave’s chest, shattering his van mode’s rear window in the process. “How did a punk like hyou even find me?”

“I just followed Blitzwing’s signal. Oh, and little suggestion, buh-deeeee... hollowed out mountain in the Arizona Bay quarantine zone? Couldn’t be more obvious if you carved your faction symbol into it!”

They exchanged blows through their verbal sparring. While Soundwave held the edge in the latter form of combat, Blaster’s raw anger and frustration gave him an advantage in the former. Despite his strong initial assault, Soundwave’s focus was on freeing his friend. Blaster’s focus was on destroying his opponent. A series of rapid punches to Soundwave’s midsection, followed by a blast of weaponized Mozart from Blaster’s sonic baton, finally broke the stalemate and sent the Decepticon tumbling to the ground.

“Hyou don’t know ven hyou have lost.” Blaster focused another sonic charge into his baton and pondered where he would deliver the killing blow. “Hyou are naught but ein uncultured protoform und I? I am ein mastermind.”

Soundwave looked up, one brow raised. “Shyah. I know masterminds, dude, and you are no mastermind! You never did a thing without Prime’s orders.”

“Vat?”

“You heard me... I mean, maybe you kicked over a comm-terminal or downloaded some tunes, but nothing criminal.”

“Hyou haff no idea of ze depths of mein crimes! Hyou cannot conceive of mein exploits!” Blaster glowered. A decisive and lethal blow to Soundwave’s head was increasingly appealing.

“Let me guess, you threw lubricant at the high-council’s headquarters? Swiped coolant rods from work?”

“Hah!” Blaster’s rage faded, replaced by a feeling of triumph at being able to prove Soundwave wrong. “Hyou sink so small! I stole zirty kilotons of energon from ze protoform orphanages before ze var even started... unt I vas nevah caught!”

“That sounds like a confession to me.” Soundwave wished he could smirk.

“That it does.” Suddenly, Thunderwing was between the two. “Blaster, you are hereby under arrest for questioning in the Altihex Proform Rehabilitation Complex robberies.”

Blaster did not bother speaking. The realization that a glitch like Soundwave had tricked him tapped

new reservoirs of hate he wasn't even aware he had. Without warning, he fired a bolt of sonic energy. The blast exploded on Thunderwing's chest, pushing the larger robot back three meters.

Thunderwing kept his feet.

"Resisting arrest. We'll add that to the list of charges."

Soundwave rolled out of the way as Blaster began firing wildly at the Elite Guardsmech. As communications officers, Soundwave and Blaster were well matched. Thunderwing was a warrior and lawmech. It was only Blaster's desperation and speed that kept him out of the reach of Thunderwing's neutralizer cannon.

"Blitzwing, can you hear me?" Soundwave shouted over the battle's din.

"Yes!" came a faint reply from the other side of the spanner wall.

"I need to shut this down! Do you remember the codes?"

"Enter emergency override procedure L-73!"

Soundwave tapped the code out into the spanner's control panel as Blaster and Thunderwing continued their battle in the adjoining chamber. The spanner door slid open, revealing Blitzwing in the center of the spanner chamber. Energy still coursed through the structure, and the air had begun to warp and distort in strange ways. For brief moments the chamber appeared to violate the fundamentals of natural geometry. Familiar structures bent and twisted into unnatural angles and then warped back, filling Soundwave with vertigo.

A calm synthesized voice filled the room. "Emergency override accepted, security gate retracted."

"Dude, it's still on!"

"Can't shut it down now! We have less than a minute!"

Soundwave ran forward into the spanner. His first step was normal, but on his second space twisted slightly to the left, throwing him off course. He stumbled and re-corrected continually as he pushed his way through to Blitzwing's shackled form.

"Just one sec, dude! Screamer made this up for you..." Soundwave pulled a palm-sized device from his storage compartment, quickly slapping it onto the amplifier.

"What was that?"

"Dampener device! Should block the signal 'til we can remove that O-Pod! Now, let's get you outta here!" Unable to lift his comrade's sizable bulk, Soundwave assumed his vehicular form.

"Grab on!"

Blitzwing raised his shackled hands and latched on to Soundwave through his now-shattered rear window. As soon as Blitzwing secured his grip, Soundwave began pulling the captured Triple Changer out of the spanner ring. Amid squealing tires and the scrape of metal dragged against metal, Soundwave and Blitzwing crossed the barrier to collapse near the control panel.

As the two Decepticons worked their way free of the spanner, Blaster ran towards it. The presence of Soundwave and Blitzwing in the line of fire forced Thunderwing to stop shooting. The brief pause in the assault allowed Blaster to leap over the crumpled forms to land within the spanner ring.

"Zis was fun, but I must be goingk!" Blaster smirked. "Auf Wiedersehen! Or should I zay, *auf Wiederhören!*?"

"Transfer immanent, emergency gate closing," the synthesized voice announced.

As the stellar spanner sprang to life, Soundwave rushed forward, hoping to leap through the gateway after Blaster. His feet did not carry him quickly enough, and the last thing he saw before the gate snapped shut was Blaster's snide grin. Soundwave pounded on the door in frustration for a few seconds, before turning to face Thunderwing.

"Boost me over, I'll get 'im!"

"Don't!"

Blitzwing picked himself up, gingerly rubbing the modified amplifier around his head. "The gate is for our safety, not the passenger's. If you cross that threshold, you could be torn apart at least five dimensions!"

"Dude! He's about to bail to Cybertron!"

“No, he’s not!” Blitzwing leaned forward, folding into his tank form. His sole currently-functional weapon trained on the control panel and launched an explosive shell.

The spanner sputtered and ground to a halt as its controls erupted in flame and shrapnel. The crack in the sky collapsed with a thunderous boom.



Blaster slammed into the ground, leaving a plume of grayish dust to drift upward and slowly settle again.

The impact was utterly silent. Blaster was distinctly aware of the complete lack of sound, either from the surrounding area or on any of his communication channels. He stood slowly, surveying the pockmarked gray and black landscape with a combination of curiosity and irritation.

It was several moments before Blaster thought to look upward. Looming above him against the blackness of the sky was a large blue-green orb, mottled with white. Blaster tried to scream but his curses had no medium in which to travel. Trapped as he was on Earth’s Moon, he could only stare upward at the slowly spinning planet that loomed so close that he felt he could almost touch it.

If only he could fly.



Beachcomber had survived the decon bath, the optic calibration process, the hallway filled with zero-friction lubricant and three chemical explosions since breaching the outer defenses of the Decepticon base. He had been thrown about, smashed and lit on fire by four puddles of organic waste.

He was not happy.

Now, however, the enemy was out of tricks, and out of places to run.

That made him happy. Insanely happy.

At the end of the winding corridor was the medical ward, and his helpless victims-to-be. He was certain of it. He had seen the humans run down the corridor moments previous. He could read the signs labeling the room as such in both Cybertronian and in the humans’ language. He was coming close, thoughts of revenge and slaughter driving him forward step by cautious step.

His face, battered and smeared, split into a grin, revealing jagged, rust-flecked toothplates. “Je me lance vers la gloire...”

There was no way they would stop him. He was ready. He was armed. His head was even a little more clear, giving him purpose and focus. He raised his sniper rifle and turned the corner, his energon pump nearly bursting with anticipation.

Two dozen Decepticons stood at the other end of the corridor, their various weapons trained on the Autobot.

Beachcomber paused, apparently deciding he might have been crazy, but he wasn’t all that crazy. He took a few slow steps back, hands raised. “You win some, lose some, it’s all the same to me!” He turned and bolted, shifting into his dune buggy form and burning rubber, his voice echoing down the corridor as he

vanished. "I'm gonna go to the place that's the best!"



"There you go, Blitzwing, we've extracted the alien tech, and your weapons systems are fixed. You're good as new." Starscream held the offending device gingerly, as if it would explode.

"Oh, blessed silence, how I missed you!"

"Oh, c'mon, Blitz, it wasn't that bad," Will replied.

"It was rocky, but I'm willing to call this a win for our side," Starscream smiled. "We stopped several Autobot plots, gave Blaster a trouncing..."

"And your download from the Autobot's gizmo worked out," Cliffjumper added. "Soon we'll be able to build our own space bri-" Cliffjumper stopped himself in mid-phrase and continued in an annoyed tone. "Stellar spanner."

"Thanks, guys. I'm just glad everything's back to normal."

"Us, too," Sephie said. "And as a consolation, Soundwave and I are working on a music player that you can just carry around, you can rock out with no risk of fusing with your systems."

Blitzwing scratched the back of his head as he came up with exactly what to say "If it's all the same to you, Sephie... I think I'll just stick to talk radio for awhile."

The assembled Decepticons couldn't help but laugh, and it wasn't long before the humans, minus Sephie, joined in.

The laughter stopped suddenly as Thunderwing grabbed Soundwave by the arm.

"All right, young mech. Now its time for you to pay the price for your crimes."

"Dude, you can't just haul me off to Cybertron!" He spun towards Starscream as best he could with his arm caught in Thunderwing's unmoving grip. "Bossbot, help a dude out here!"

"I'm sorry, Soundwave, but I am bound by Cybertron law."

"*Bogus!*"

"The only way out of this is a guilty plea. Then we can simply administrate the punishment at any Cybertronian outpost, colony or municipality."

Soundwave spun back to Thunderwing, waving his free hand in the air. "Fine! I did it! You happy?"

"Sentient Mechanism Soundwave, I am authorized to deliver and enforce the full punishment for your infractions under Cybetronian law: Five hundred hours of community service."

There was a long pause. "Dude?"

"Well, we are an outpost," Starscream nodded. "Looks like you get to stay here, Soundwave. Congratulations."

"Whoah, dude? What the... C'mon! Five *hundred* hours? Don't saving Earth and Cybertron count for anything?"

Thunderwing paused. "Hmm. I suppose it does. Very well. Accounting for the time taken to defeat Blaster... you now have only four hundred and ninety-eight hours and twenty-nine minutes of community service left. I saw a particularly litter-covered highway on the way back to base."

"Dude, not coooooool!"

END

32





EPILOGUE

“Owwwww.”

Heatwave hurt. Everywhere. He felt like his entire being had been converted into energy, flung light-years away within mere seconds, then re-assembled... by unskilled labor without consulting the manual.

He was face-down, he knew that much, on solid flat metal. Audio receptors came back online, picking up little more than hollow wind and the occasional distant creak. After months on Earth, memories came flooding back.

Cybertron?

He lifted his head, letting visual input return. The distant sky was dusky and rose-colored with the haze of distant smoke and flame, tinted with odd electrical flashes. Dilapidated metal spires rose over the metallic horizon. The familiar whispers of millions of machines echoed on the wind as Heatwave rose to his feet.

“Cybertron,” he whispered. After a brief pause he tapped out a long-range distress signal on his wrist console. With nothing more to do than wait, he sat down on an abandoned storage crate and stared into the shimmering lights above him. The planet was still in the midst of the Plait Expanse, and the radiation caused the upper atmosphere to spark and shimmer like billions of droplets of fuel igniting one after the other.

Two Earth hours later, the roar of jet engines shook Heatwave from his contemplation. He looked up, expecting a fleet of airborne Decepticons. Instead, he came face-to-face with a tiny black-and-teal robot.

“Somebody call for a rescue?” the tiny robot bellowed. “Heatwave! You’re alive! That’s *sparkin’ awesome!*”

“Er, yes, thank you, Whisper.” Heatwave couldn’t help but smile at the Micromaster’s ironic moniker, despite the assault on his audio receptors. “Sideswipe is too, most everybody is accounted for... on both sides.”

Whisper’s head spun from side to side so fast Heatwave half-expected it to pop off. “So where are they? Huh? Huh? We didn’t see a ship come in.”

“Ah. Yeah. That’s the bad news. The ‘Bots have a functioning stellar spanner. That’s how I got here, accidentally.”

“What? Scrap in a bucket, Megatron is so gonna want to hear this!” Whisper leapt into the air and converted back into his miniature jet mode. “Let’s punch it!”

“Megatron’s going to want to hear this,” Heatwave repeated to himself. He took a few steps before he paused. The travel between the two planets, according to his internal chronometer, had been mere astro-kliks. But there was an odd sensation of timelessness creeping over him. Not exactly memories, more like... remembrances of sensations during the transfer.

The fear that had been there when the spanner first activated and began to draw him into transwarp... had been replaced. For the briefest of moments, there was a sensation of... joy? Serenity? Compassion? Love? Satisfaction? The light that had consumed his senses had taken a rainbow hue... and there was... a message?

“HEY!”

Heatwave shook himself as Whisper zipped back towards him. “You coming or not? Megatron’s thrilled you’re back, and really wants to know everything that went down since you guys left.”

“Oh, right... sorry. Just... recalibrating my systems.” He folded into his missile launcher mode, revved his engine and pulled up behind the Micromaster.

“Hey, Whisper?”

“Yeah?”

“What does ‘Keep on truckin’ mean?”

END

COLD SLITHER

Thunder Hammer

Babel Music, Inc. (ASCAR)/ZMI
Synergy Music Ltd.

Cold Slither

Blinken-Smythe / Wilken / McCullan

We're Cold Slither
Hope you're joining us soon
A band of vipers
playing our tune

Break the iron fist
with a reptile hiss
Freedom Now!

"Just wait and see"
Shouts the powers that be
I reply: "Don't Tread on Me!"

Fascism's a joke
Anarchy's for fools
Just give us a vote
And we'll choose who rules

We're Cold Slither
Heavy metal machine
Restore the Constitution
That is our dream!

When the venom stings
A new order brings
Freedom back!

Battle Song of Liberty

Yellen / Bigelow

It's the roar and rattle of Freedom's
battle
That's calling us over the sea,
Where a mighty foe has challenged us,
boys

It's up to you and to me;
So get Old Glory, we'll make 'em sorry
That they ever dreamed of this fight.
We're on our way with a Hip! Hooray!
Just to do what we know to be right.

So here's to Uncle Sammy faithful and
true;
Here's to our banner of red, white and
blue;
And here's to all good fellows on
and sea
Singing the Battle Song of L

Don't Open th

Blinken-Smythe /

For the sake of all that's
I beg you, friend, would
Just put that
For god's

"That stuff is sure to clean our clocks!
No I beg, NO! Don't open that box!"

I pray that this won't leave us dead,
You should have listened when I said:
Just put it down and secure the locks,
For our sake don't open that box!

The Star Spangled Banner (Radio

Key /

Of s