

**Transformers Timelines Presents:**

# **Flames of Yesterday**

## **A Transformers: Wings Universe Story**

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Light glistened off their chassis, protruding from curves and hard lines alike. They stood straight, unmoving statues emotionlessly looking out over the planet they were to protect. For those faint of spark, it would seem as though the gods themselves had returned to Cybertron. Dion, however, found the entire thing far too melodramatic for his tastes.

“CombatiCONS? As in DeceptiCONS? Not exactly an inspiring name...” The orange and blue robot pointed his thumb at five Special Forces robots standing in front of him like an impenetrable wall. The tallest turned his head towards the former dock worker whom he towered over. His mask and visor managed to hide his expression entirely, but Metalhawk interpreted it somewhere between amusement and condescension. Sentinel Major edged his way between the two groups of Elite Guard soldiers, with a hand on his chest as though he was already complimenting himself.

“No, no, no. Combaticons. As in ‘COMBATing the DeceptiCONS.’ I thought the name was fitting.” Sentinel Major wore his smirk well. Then again, that’s how he always wore it. As his optics caught the incredulous looks on the faces of the Elite Guard all around him, though, it faded some, dulling to a thin smile. “What? I’m a military ‘bot, not some Landshakespearian...And Magnum liked it too.” Magnum’s facial features remained stoic. It wasn’t exactly discernible if Sentinel was telling the truth, or full of his typical hot exhaust. But if the big ‘bot was part and parcel to the naming process...Metalhawk hoped that Dion would decide to just let the matter drop entirely. Fortunately, the young ‘bot was apparently smarter than he looked.

“\*Ahem\* Regardless of the squad name, I’m Onslaught. Graduated top of my class at Omnihelix Academy. As for the rest of my troops, this is Brawl, who is in charge of Ground Assault. Next to him is Blast Off, our Space Warrior. Vortex is our lead interrogator, and Swindle, let’s call him our Munitions Expert.”

The robot identified as Swindle stepped forward to study the blasters strapped to Dion’s back. “Hmm. These are the new Nitronium launchers that use the Reverse-Higgs mechanism, am I right? How do they work in the field? I heard that quasar jams were a thing of the past, but I have this supplier in the Gamma Sector just itching to unload his stock, so I’ve been cautious...”

“Swindle.” The Combaticon leader’s vocalizations remained calm, cool. “Let the robot be. We’ll have plenty of time for discussing the Elite Guard weaponry later. Right now, I’m sure that Metalhawk and his crew are far more interested in their...OUR next mission. Magnum, sir?”

“Onslaught is correct. The next mission awaits. I called your team back to base for a specific reason, Metalhawk. Given your recent experiences, I believe you to be the perfect candidate to, er, ‘educate’ the Combaticons on Elite Guard operations. Both teams will be sent on a dry run, so to speak. Although I must say it is not our typical affair.” Magnum bowed his head and sighed.

“You see, the civilian council continues to pry into the Guard and its duties. You would think that its sterling record would be enough to convince them about its abilities, but certain members are of the mindset that the Guardsmen are loose-proces-sored grease-jockeys looking for a fight. Which is why your next priority will be a little less aggressive.” Magnum caught the questioning looks of the Combaticons and added, “Make no mistake, we’ll have the bad guys on the run, and not stop until that job gets done. However, let’s keep the protie gloves on until we can sway the council to the right way of thinking. Comm Officer Big Bang is waiting inside with the full low-down on where you’re heading. And so is our special ‘guest.’” Magnum turned towards the headquarters’ doors and disappeared into the winding hallways inside. Sentinel Major followed the military-minded councilman, only stopping to give one last glance at the two Elite Guard squads still trying to wrap their judgments around each other. Soon, though, his shadow also blended into the maze of the Elite Guard headquarters’ interior.

With the Elite Guard commanders having vanished, Swindle leaned over to Dion. “If you want some real firepower, kid, I’d suggest an Ajax P-9000 Grade-B Jump Launch Accelerator. I nicknamed mine ‘Thunderblast,’ after an old flame. The baddies won’t know what hit them... although, of course, the gun’s rebound tends to knock its wielder off his feet. Just like Thunderblast...”

“Swindle! I said, can it!” Onslaught called back to his munitions expert as he marched toward the doorway.





Big Bang was big. Incredibly big. Just plain massive. And yet he was standing in an average-sized room. The impossible physics boggled Dion's processors to no end, and he could see by the look on Ironfist's face that he wasn't the only one trying to figure it out. Then again, Ironfist always looked confused whenever explosives weren't the subject at hand.

Next to the gargantuan Autobot stood his smaller, unimposing, and entirely civilian in his posture opposite. There was no straight-backed stance of attention, just an old 'bot waiting for his chance to speak. His face had been augmented with a mustache and the slightest hint of a beard. Obviously he was amongst those in the citizenry that felt mimicking organic characteristics added an air of sophistication. Metalhawk didn't like it. He always thought that such superfluous fascination with one's own vanity was just...creepy.

"TAKE YOUR SEATS, GUARDSMEN." Big Bang's voice was as large as his form; those now in attendance lowered the sensitivity of their audio receptors. Metalhawk thanked the gods for that capability, as he now knew why even the Council considered the giant Autobot the best audio transmitter in the whole of Iacon. "YOU ARE ALL HERE TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR NEXT MISSION. IT'S PROBABLY NOT QUITE WHAT YOU WERE EXPECTING WHEN YOU SIGNED UP. HOWEVER, IT *IS* A DIRTY JOB, AND I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU'VE ALL GROWN TO LOVE THOSE."

Big Bang pressed a small controller in his right hand. Or it looked small in his hand. It was actually about the size of Metalhawk's head...a comparison that caused the gold and blue robot to shudder. A screen lowered from the ceiling and hovered at the front of the room. On it, a map became visible, mostly. Big Bang could still be seen behind the semi-transparent terrain as he pointed towards a small red dot in the middle. "THIS IS MEDIAN. YOUR OBJECTIVE. WE HAVE A TEAM OF AUTOBOTS AT THAT LOCATION, AND THEY NEED OUR HELP."

"Defensively, sir?" Onslaught studied the map closely, memorizing its entirety and no doubt already postulating his strategies.

"NOT EXACTLY." Big Bang gave the smaller robot standing next to him a quick glance. "THESE AUTOBOTS ARE SCIENTISTS. HISTORIANS. THEY'RE SEARCHING OUR PAST, SO THAT WE CAN BE BETTER PREPARED FOR OUR FUTURE."

Those last words weren't Big Bang's. Everyone in the audience could tell; the look on his face betrayed just how bitter the words tasted in his mouth. "OUR 'GUEST' WILL FILL YOU IN ON THE DETAILS OF THEIR OPERATION. ALPHA TRION?"

"Thank you, Big Bang." Alpha Trion's voice was somewhat weak compared to Big Bang's. It wasn't as though he was straining to talk, but instead he let the words carry their own weight and their own significance. Metalhawk returned his audio receptors back to normal levels. "Our group of scientists have found something they believe will change the face of this war, skirmish, rebellion. However the top brass are spinning it these days." Big Bang rolled his optics.

"It's a true mirror into our past. Our beginnings. We all believe that the One...or Ones...created us equal. That we are all made out of the same stuff. However, this find, it would indicate that something—or someone—altered that."

Metalhawk leaned forward, listening close. The Combaticons, however, had lost interest. Brawl in particular, as he instead turned his attention to the stylus and info-board on the table in front of him. He was furiously scratching at the board, making crude etchings that resembled blasters and bombs. Alpha Trion paid none of this any mind, however, and continued

with his speech. “What they believe they’ve found is an ancient factory. A factory that spawned our very ancestors. Perhaps most fascinating, the factory is divided into two sections. The purpose of these sections has not yet been identified, but given the vast differences in the output designs, it may just shed light into the dichotomy facing us today.”

“AT THIS POINT, I’D LIKE TO POINT OUT THAT THIS IS MAINLY SPECULATION. ESPECIALLY ON ALPHA TRION’S PART.” Alpha Trion looked away. Something in his face made it look as though he knew, without a doubt, that what he was saying was true. Or perhaps it was just the mustache playing tricks with Metalhawk’s facial recognition programs. “WHAT THIS TEAM HAS FOUND IS A BUILDING. AN OLD ONE, AS MOST OF THE INTERIOR IS RUST AND DECAY. YES, THERE ARE TWO DIFFERING SECTORS HELD WITHIN, BUT MANY BELIEVE THEM NOT TO HOLD THE SAME MEANING AS ALPHA TRION DOES.”

“Yes, thank you for the clarification, Big Bang.” Alpha Trion offered a weak smile towards the larger robot, to which Big Bang responded with his own viciously predatory smirk. “Anyway, the team requires aid in the excavation. Due to the collapse of the infrastructure, there is much that needs to be removed from the site. Additional helping servos are necessary.”

“Surely an independent civilian contractor could be contacted?” Over-Run interrupted. While he had shown a...tolerance to his superiors and fellow soldiers, he shared no such tolerance for those he considered his inferiors. And historians? During a war? He could not abide them.

“\*Ahem\* Yes. However, this task also calls for demolition. Er, explosives.” With this, Ironfist’s and Brawl’s heads immediately snapped up, and their attention re-focused on the purple robot standing before them. “I had assumed that those of us with the most experience in the matter would be best suited for the job at hand...”

“Oh yeeah, I think we kin do that, mate.” Ironfist clenched his hands into fists and waved them in front of his face. Metalhawk stood to draw the attention from his overeager explosives expert. “What Ironfist means to say, Trion, is that we’d gladly help your team of scientists. After all, the Elite Guard is not just a military force, but a Cybertronian force as well. If this is as important a find as you seem to think, then it clearly warrants further exploration. And if, by the creators’ wills, we somehow find out the source of these rebellions, so much the better.”

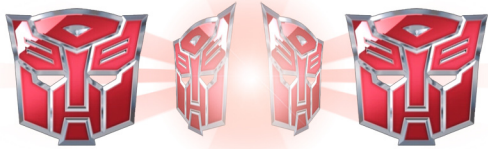
“Yes, we’d all like to help.” Onslaught nodded to his counterpart. “What can you tell us about the team itself?”

The map phased into a list of names and biographies. “The team of historians is led by Glyph, a particularly focused archaeometrist. Under Glyph’s tutelage are Lancer and Greenlight. These two are keen, young upstarts. Ambitious perhaps to the point of carelessness, but well-meaning. Conversely, the head of security, Strika, is far more deliberate; acting only after analyzing the situation. Much to your liking, Onslaught, I’m sure. The head of the entire operation is Flipsides, unfortunately I do not have much information on her. I apologize.” Alpha Trion bowed his head and held out an open hand as a symbol of his regrets.

“HMPH.” It was abrupt, loud and unquestionably meant to be insulting. What was questionable was whether or not Big Bang had intended it to be audible, or if that was simply quiet for him. Regardless, it drew all of the optics in the room onto him.

Metalhawk spoke up to break the awkwardness. “Well, thanks for what you can tell us, Alpha Trion. I’m sure it will be invaluable to our mission.”

Alpha Trion bowed his head, “And I should tell you, Metalhawk, this particular group of scientists may be a little different from the robots you’re used to dealing with...”



“They’re all girls!” Over-Run exclaimed as the Elite Guardsmen neared the gates of Median.

It was a long, straight road made of what was once highly-reflective metal. Stunningly manufactured with all of the care in the world... now oxidation’s palette of browns and oranges permeated its fractured surface. Only the occasional sparkle, a momentary glimmer of light, proved its former glory. The road complained of its present state as it crunched and whined beneath the Autobots’ wheels.

Standing amongst the walls of the city, looking down at the approaching vehicles, were the three Autobots that had caught Over-Run’s optics. Their feminine silhouettes were unmistakable...except maybe for the one in the middle. Her bulk matched just about any of the Guardsmen making their way from *Hawk’s Claw* and into the city.

“They prefer ‘female Autobots’.” Dion spoke from experience, and paused for a moment as he remembered a friend. “You probably shouldn’t call them ‘girls’ to their face.”

“Right. ‘Female Autobots’.” Over-Run never understood the need for robots that echoed organic female body types. They always confused him whenever they were around. “Robot genders” was nothing short of an oxymoron for the red and yellow Autobot. Something fit for science-fiction holonovels, not real life.

The largest female Autobot rushed to close the city’s gate after the Elite Guard had entered its limits. Metalhawk transformed and held out his hand. The robot instead turned her back towards him and glanced at a monitor. “Were you followed?”

“Followed? No. Wait. I thought we were just here for the heavy lifting?” Metalhawk pulled his hand back and held it at his side.

“‘Heavy lifting?’ Please.” The pink and white Autobot with the impressively broad shoulders walked over to the Elite Guard captain and looked down at him. “*I* handle heavy lifting.”

“And so you do.” Onslaught converted to robot mode and walked over to Metalhawk and his new acquaintance.

“I’m Onslaught. And you must be Strika, am I right?” Strika took Onslaught’s hand and delivered one of the most crushing handshakes the Combaticon leader had ever experienced.

“*Security Chief* Strika.”

“Quite right.” Onslaught held his hand gingerly, wincing as he retreated back to the waiting Combaticons.

“I will tell Flipsides that you are here. She will explain everything.” The pink female Autobot turned and walked away from the Guardsmen. Metalhawk and Onslaught exchanged wary looks.

“You’re quite the ladies’ ‘bot, aren’t you?” Metalhawk joked.

“I didn’t see you getting anywhere either.” Onslaught sat down on a broken colonnade and shook his hand one last time. “So I guess we just wait here.”

Ironfist leaned around the corner, watching Strika make her way through the crumbling city streets. “Don’t worreey, mate, it looks like this might just be the sceneec part o’town. Eeverything else is just, weell, dust.”

“Terrific.” Brawl took out his rifle and began cleaning it. He made sure that each time he disassembled a component, it made as much noise as possible. *Clack. Click. Clack.* He wanted to emphasize his annoyance, and, as always, he let his guns do the talking.

Vortex watched his Combaticon ally as he pulled the action on the rifle. “So if we’re not here to help dig, why are we here? I mean, it’s not like we’re near anything else. Median is pretty much the middle of nowhere. And this particular nowhere is one sludge of a large place.”

“Maybe they’re just lonely and looking for a strapping young mech to hold them just right.” Swindle mocked, preening himself. “It’s got to be ages since they last saw a male Autobot. We’re all totally in.”

Dion frowned in disgust, but Onslaught spoke before the orange robot could respond. “Alpha Trion knew about this. He had to. That’s why he came to the Elite Guard for help and asked for Metalhawk’s crew personally. There’s something here that he needed us to protect. However, he must not want the higher-ups to find out what is *actually* here. At least, not yet.”

“Then what’s he hiding, mate?” Ironfist was now seated against an ancient wall of questionable strength. He rested his chin against his folded hands. “It’s gotta be weapons, eh? Really big ones.”

“Weapons?!” Swindle stopped straightening his armor, and pointed an index finger with a raised thumb at the tan and blue Autobot. His thumb fell like the hammer on an ancient laser rifle and he winked an optic. “Now that’s a mission I can get behind!”

“Even if they’re old?” Over-Run scoffed.

“Especially if they’re old! The old ones are the best.” Swindle narrowed his optics and raised his index finger to blow at the imaginary smoking muzzle. “Have you ever heard of a ‘Lightning Bug’?”

“No, I’m pretty sure you just made that up on the spot.”

Swindle dismissed Over-Run’s snide remark with a smile and continued. “It was created eons ago, but there are still ‘bots out there willing to pay top money for it. Collectors, enthusiasts...”

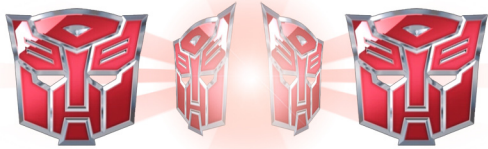
“Megalomaniacs.”

“ANYway,” Dion interjected, “Should we contact HQ about this? Whatever this is? Clearly they were misinformed about our mission. And I’m sure Sentinel and Magnum won’t be too happy about that.”

“Not yet. We don’t know for certain that something is indeed glitchy here. We need to find out what truly is happening here in Median.” Metalhawk’s index finger rested against his lips, as though he was deep in thought. His concentration was interrupted by Vortex.

“Besides. The radios aren’t working. I guess I was right about this being the middle of nowhere. No bars.” Vortex held out his radio; its screen indicated it was no longer picking up a signal.

“That happens from time to time,” a small white and maroon robot explained as she approached. Strika, the large brute that she was, obviously gave the smaller female Autobot her respect. No introduction was necessary, as there could be no mistake. But still... “I’m Flipsides, coordinator for the mission here. I believe there was a little misunderstanding as far as why you’re here and what your mission is. You’d better follow me. It’ll all be clear soon enough.”



The hall before them was remarkable, enormous, ornate and, in contradiction to Big Bang's briefing, almost unfathomably well-preserved. In the middle of the structure, kneeling next to a giant urn of some sort, was a blue robot lost in her work. Occasionally she'd take her optics off of the urn to jot down notes on a telepad, but then it'd capture her attention once again. She didn't hear the Elite Guard and her fellow female Autobots approaching.

"Glyph. Glyph!" Flipsides called futilely, as the blue robot's gaze remained locked on the urn. "GGLLYYYYPPH!!!"

"Well, I guess Alpha Trion wasn't lying when he said she was 'focused'." Onslaught chuckled softly. The Combaticon leader approached Glyph and placed his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Hm? OH!" A horrified look appeared on Glyph's face, if just for a moment. It faded to confusion when she saw Strika and Flipsides standing amongst the strangers.

"Looks like you're naught for two, there, Onslaught," Metalhawk elbowed Onslaught's side.

"I didn't mean to startle you..." Onslaught tried to comfort the blue robot still kneeling by the urn.

"No...no. I'm sorry. I didn't realize we had company." Glyph stood and wiped the rust and debris from her armor plating.

"\*Ahem\*" Flipsides mocked clearing her throat. If she had one. "These fine robots are from the Autobot Elite Guard. They're here to help us with our problem."

"Although we still don't know what that problem is." Metalhawk smiled politely.

"Of course." Flipsides nodded and motioned towards the urn in the center of the room. "What you are looking at is called 'The Heart of the Dragon'."

"Sounds omeenous." Ironfist stared wide-opticked at the urn.

"Sounds cryptic," added Onslaught. "The ancients always used such floral language to describe things. Mount Helix was the 'Nest of the Gods', if I remember correctly."

"Quite right, but the inscriptions go much further than merely giving this urn a name." Glyph pointed at various pictographs on the ancient metal object. "Here...and here. See?"

"Not really..." Ironfist scratched his forehead, trying to understand.

"Right, right, sorry. I'm used to dealing with Lancer and Greenlight." The blue Autobot pointed back to the first inscription.

"'Inside a monster slumbers. Its bulk shed and spirit captured.'" Glyph indicated the second inscription, "'Those that would dare re-awake the monster, let its fire and rage be their reward. For this is the dragon that brought the unrelenting inferno to the walls of Hyperius, leaving death and blackness.' I've cross-checked with all of the known ancient myths





and there's no mention of a dragon attacking Hyperious. I don't think this is fiction, but something someone wanted buried. Apparently quite literally."

"Fascinating story. It sends shivers down my servos, really. But I don't see anything in that description that provides enough accurate information for the, no offense, paranoia I've seen." Although he studied the urn carefully, Onslaught remained unimpressed. "Not to mention the lies..."

"Perhaps we should start at the beginning of the story, then." Flipsides motioned for the Guardsmen to follow her deeper into the dark, underground hall.



The Autobots emerged from the shadows and into a relatively well-lit room. Mechanical arms dangled from the ceiling and walls. Protruding from the floor were their counterparts, reaching toward the rafters in their bent, awkward way. It was as though they were frozen in the throes of agony, stretched out looking to defend themselves. Along the metal grating the Autobots now walked were corridors of computer screens, most of which were cracked and black. In the distance, though, Dion caught a glimpse of a green light flickering, struggling against the dark. *Could one of these ancient terminals really still be active?* he thought to himself.

"Yes, it's still functional." It was as though Flipsides had read his mind. Or, rather, had read all of the Guardsmen's minds, since they were all staring at the faint green light up ahead. "You see, this place, it's where our ancestors were actually built. Can you imagine it at peak operations? All those mechanical arms moving as one, building, building... THIS is where our race began. Or at least one of the places."

"Perhaps more interesting is that fifty clicks due east is another wing of this facility in many respects the same as this one. Only, there several of the robots that were produced are still on the line. We were able to examine what their intended purpose was, and determined them to be servants." Glyph wasn't talking to anyone specific, merely running down the data that they had collected so far. It was for her own good as much as it was for the Guardsmen's. "This wing, though, we didn't have any of the robots. So we had to delicately examine the terminal you see up ahead. What we found was...you. Military robots. Cybertronians built with the sole objective of fighting wars."

"Alpha Trion's deectology!" Ironfist exclaimed. He thought he finally understood.

"Dichotomy," Metalhawk corrected. "He had said that this core difference was the basis for rebellions we now face."

"Yes, think about it, Metalhawk." Flipsides stopped and grabbed the railing of the walkway as she looked down at the lifeless factory below her. "What were the two groups at the VERY beginning of these battles? Before the Elite Guard; before the Autobots adapted themselves to the conflict? There were the passive robots; the ones working in factories, in charge of politics, expanding our knowledge. And then there were more aggressive robots, the ones fighting in arenas, fighting in the streets, changing their own superstructures with tools and weapons to maim...and kill."

"So these rebels, you're saying that they have no choice. That they have to fight...even their own kind, because that's the way our ancestors were manufactured." Onslaught's optics narrowed behind his visor.

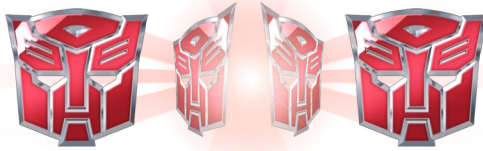
"That would certainly seem to be a possible conclusion based on the available facts." Glyph was now standing in front of the active computer screen. "However, I'd warn against making that jump in logic before further analysis is conducted."

"That's good, because I don't buy it." Onslaught approached Glyph and the computer screen. "To explain them by blaming how they were built is to let them off too easily. I have seen what they do. And they ENJOY it."

The archaeometrist didn't have any comment on Onslaught's last remark, and so continued with her lecture on what they had found. "What we do know for certain is what that 'dragon' in the urn is capable of. Although the blueprints and any images are not recoverable, the tech specs leave no uncertainty whatsoever; they were building their ultimate weapon."

"So that's what Alpha Trion was hiding." Onslaught stared at the astronomical figures on the terminal in front of him.

Metalhawk leaned around Onslaught's shoulder to peer at the computer screen. "Oh. My. Gods."



"Now you see why we needed you here. If the wrong 'bots were to find out about what we've found here..." Flipsides let her words dangle.

"KABLOOIE!" Illustrating his point, Ironfist mimicked an explosion with his hands. Metalhawk glanced back to silence him, but Ironfist was lost in animating his fake fallout.

"That screen back there seemed to describe this 'dragon' not as a weapon, but as...a Cybertronian. That's INSANE." Vortex threw his open hands out in front of himself to emphasize his point.

"Not to mention disappointing." Standing off in the corner, Swindle rested his chin against his fist, losing interest in the conversation.

"I agree with your assertion. About the dragon being a Cybertronian, not about it being insane or disappointing, since those are more subjective hypotheses." Glyph scanned the notes in her telepad. "I believe that the 'spirit' the urn refers to is either the dragon's spark of life, or his entire personality component with laser core. One could infer that the only way our ancestors could put an end to this dragon was by removing what made him, him. Without that, the body could be dealt with quite readily."

Metalhawk's metallic brow furrowed. "And what happened to the body? Couldn't someone simply use that as a weapon itself?"

"The energy contained within the urn is immense. Off the scales, up and away, just ridiculously high." Glyph's assistant Greenlight came forward to show a chart on her own telepad. Her name seemed appropriate, as most of her armor plating was coated by shades of green paint. The silver, pointed nodes on the sides of her head twitched. "I think that the energy given off by this particular personality component is the only way to control the body..."

"...which more than likely was repurposed ages ago. Hi, I'm Lancer." The orange and purple female Autobot with overlapping armor plates extending down from her torso offered her hand towards Metalhawk. "It's nice to meet members of the Elite Guard. You're SO cool. I mean, I've thought about putting in my application, but I always get too nervous--"

"\*Ahem\*" Glyph raised an optic at her assistant.

"Oh, right. Anyway, the dragon's body has probably been smelted or scrapped or used for spare parts. But since this energy in the urn is so specific, it could probably convert a conventional body and weapons into near-replicas of the original. That means the personality component is the important part of the formula, not the body." Lancer realized she was still shaking hands with Metalhawk, and quickly pulled her hand back and offered a nervous smile.

“And we need you to help guard, yes?” With her finger stretched towards the Guardsmen, Strika seemed almost to accuse them rather than identify them. “Normally I would not mind this task, but this dragon is nasty business. And Rage, he likes his symbolism.”

“Rage?” Metalhawk’s expression revealed just how little he knew of the Decepticon. “Rage is a small-time Decepticon leader over in Quarex. What does he have to do with this?”

The barrel-chested pink security chief handed Metalhawk a data pad. On it was a security camera feed showing two silhouettes creeping between the buildings of Median. “Twelve solar cycles ago, we had security breach. This was before we had uncovered the urn. Two Decepticon thugs had made it as far as the factory chambers before we found them. They were Hydradread and Drench from Rage’s gang, and they seemed to know all about the factory. We think they know of the urn as well. Not through us, but by their own means.”

“And you’re afraid that they’ll be back?” Onslaught squinted at the security feed, trying to make out the Decepticons’ faces.

Strika’s features became cold as the steel they were made from. “They WILL be back. This I know.”

“And more than likely with more support,” Flipsides added. “As Strika mentioned, Rage likes symbolism. It’s as though he believes he can amass his own power simply by making himself *look* powerful. So, yes, we fear that he will return, and undoubtedly in higher numbers.”

“I have already begun fortification of walls. Autoturrets are at 65%. These sludging rusted shells of building have not been cooperative, however.” Strika’s gaze drifted to the ground as she admitted, “I could use help.”

“Then, my dear, you’re looking at the right ‘bots for the job!” Swindle sounded like a used trillium-transport salesman. “We can fix up these fortifications in no time at all! And as for the turret guns, well, you’re so lucky as to be standing in the presence of the most esteemed munitions expert in all of Iacon. I’ll not only have your guns up to 100%, but I may just throw in an extra 15% just because I’m such a nice guy.” Swindle wrapped an arm around Flipsides’ shoulders, and the smaller white and maroon robot looked stunned. “And I’ll offer it AT COST, just for you.”

“And that cost is ‘zero’.” Onslaught grabbed his eager yellow cohort and pulled him off of his new mark. “Just show us what you have so far.”

“I can’t believe this. I have them fueling from my hands and the big guy just up and blows it all. Unbelievable.” Swindle was confident his muttering was out of audio receptor range for Onslaught, but the Combaticon leader still turned and gave the yellow robot a warning glance.



The stars overhead shone bright this far from the purple haze of smoke, fumes, and smog that covered most of the major cities of Cybertron. Even now Dion could see the full twelve faces of the Covenant staring down on him. Ariex, Capricorn, Geminator, Libras, Scorpius, Taurnotron, Virgol, Leonicus...all had their outlines traced in the stars. Although, to this Solar Cycle, Dion still thought that Leonicus looked more like a Krystar iron-bear than the pneuma-lion he was supposed to be. Still, though, he couldn’t help but have his processor shift back to his days as an alpha unit reading the magical adventures of those mystic Transformers hidden in the stars above. His favorite was the one with Leonicus and the ice demon. The warrior

lion sliced through the glacier-like armor of the demon with his razor-edged claws, only to have the resulting shards of ice turn into an army of ice demons. It wasn't until Scorpius arrived, inhaled, and breathed enough fire to melt the entirety of the chilly foes that the Covenant could claim victory.

"Fire breath is awesome." Dion's daydream had completely obscured his sense of reality, but with that comment it all came crashing back to him. Strika, Greenlight, Blast Off, and Brawl all stared at him as though his faceplate had turned into the oozing, unrelenting Goo of the planet with that same name.

It had been thirty-six megacycles since they had started the fortification of Median, but as far as Dion could discern they had made almost no headway at all. Everything around them was unusable as defensive plating or barriers, as the rust had already gnawed holes through it like some kind of oversized frizz-rat. Even thick plates of steel had been turned brittle as the thinnest foil. So instead of quality, they had opted for quantity, as they set upon moving various debris piles from the center of the city out to its defense walls. It was the type of labor that Dion had been accustomed to, but for the Combaticons...

"Ugh, this rust is positively ruining my paintjob. If only we had the Constructicons on our side, they could move this junk and leave us free for the more important tasks at hand." Blast Off was carrying the debris one small piece at a time, and his complaining was in no way speeding his endeavors.

"They made their choices, Blast Off. Their whole sludgin' race." A green treaded vehicle with a hastily modified plow blade welded to its front roared by Blast Off. Brawl circled around a debris pile, revved his engine and let loose a combat yell. "Yaaaah-hoooo!"

Slowly the pile inched forward until it collided with the detritus at the defense wall. Dion stood with a crooked smile welded onto his face; he had to be impressed. "You know, sometimes I regret giving up my truck mode just for that very reason."

"Hmph. Reformatting is for losers. You get one body and you stick with it. Despite whatever flaws it has. That's always been my creed-o." Brawl transformed into robot mode and began packing the debris down firmly.

"I thought your credo was always 'aim for the mouth, so you don't have to talk with them?'" Blast Off dropped his diminutive piece of steel next to the mound that Brawl had just moved.

"One 'bot, many creed-os. I'm a sofishtigated guy," Brawl said as he leapt from the top of his pile.

"Yes, of course, how could I forget?" Turning on his heels, Blast Off headed off for his next steel plate, but Strika's comment stopped him in his tracks.

"Do you two always get so amorous when you work? It's like a pair of squabbling life-mates." Strika kicked the auto-turret she and Greenlight were working on. *Clang!* The turret's computer flickered and hummed. "Either get to work, or get a room!"

Greenlight giggled, but Blast Off found no humor in the comment. He fumed, "My dear, I assure you that even if I wanted a life-mate, Brawl would be the LAST on my list. Even you would be before him!"

"Such insults!" Strika paused. "I think. But now that we've had our fun, get back to hauling parts. And move more than one at a time!"

"Yes'm, taskmaster, sir!" At a leisurely walk, Blast Off started heading towards the nearest debris heap. "Although I'd be much more efficient if I had an alt mode like Brawl's. Or even Dion's. A planetary orbiter? Useless."

“I think an orbiter mode would be kinda cool.” Dion had his arms buried elbow deep into a mound of rusted support beams. He jerked back, pulling free an armload of metal beams that rivaled his own height. Contrarily, Blast Off picked up a steel plate even smaller than the last one he had carried.

“Hmph.”



“What can you tell us about this Rage?” Onslaught was holding an autoturret in place as Lancer welded. The torch she held to the melting metal sparked and flared, causing her to lower a dark-tinted shield over her optics.

“I’m not really the one to talk to about that; it’s really more of Flipsides’ area.” The sparks began to die down as she finished her temporary tacks. “She knows everything about the Decepticons in this area.”

“Ah.” Onslaught released his grip slowly, testing the strength of the welds.

“What little I do know is what I’ve overheard. Rage is the leader of a group called the ‘Stormtroopers’. They’re not really full-scale rebels, but more of a group of ruffians using the rebellion as an excuse to make trouble. You see, Rage used to just be a crook. He was content with stealing things here and there. But he found out that with the Autobots distracted by the growing battles, he didn’t have to limit himself to trinkets... he could take towns, cities.” Lancer lifted her optic shield and looked Onslaught in the face. “That’s how he got his new headquarters. The Metrotitan was a fortress on the outskirts of the Glibax flats, but it was abandoned after it was overrun by the rebels. The thing is, though, they didn’t want it. So they just left it and moved on. In comes Rage and his two tinkerers and they give it this sort of mobile platform mode, and he’s now terrorizing a whole new bunch of people.”

Onslaught rubbed his chin. “A mobile city. What will they think of next?”

“Mind-boggling, isn’t it? Anyway, fortunately with this area being in the state it is, anything THAT big wouldn’t make it but a few hics before sinking in. So all we have to worry about is Roadgrabber.” Lancer returned to welding the autoturret, making more sturdy welds on top of her previous tacks.

Onslaught looked at her questioningly. “Roadgrabber?”

“Um-hm.”

“I think we need to get together and share a little more information between groups...”



“Who’s Roadgrabber?” Metalhawk had always thought that he knew most of the Decepticons in the various scattered rebellions, but this mission kept proving him wrong. Onslaught, though, was the mirror image of his fellow Autobot captain when it came to exuding confidence. If the Combaticon had a mouth, he’d be smiling. He took pride in studying the adversary, and it always felt good to be the one everyone turned to as an intelligence provider or gun hand.

“Roadgrabber is a Decepticon that specializes in highway demolition. That means that while his own modes are less than impressive, he wraps himself in an exo-vehicle mode that was BUILT to smash into things. Or, in the case of Median’s walls, THROUGH them.”

Metalhawk had been on the same scrap piles that they were all calling perimeter walls, so he knew just what kind of damage Onslaught was alluding to. Still, for the sake of his troops and the scientists, he put on a false sense of bravado. “Alright, they have Roadgrabber. That’s one ‘Con. We have nine Elite Guardsmen...and Strika. We can still do this.”

“Actually...” Flipsides spoke up wearily, “They have at least seven Decepticons. That we know about...”

“We may need to change plans.” Onslaught was going over the details of the city in his head. There was a clang above the conference as Ironfist jumped from the top of the wall. Despite the clamor he created, he landed easily.

“We may not ‘ave the time, mate...”



Smoke billowed into the starry night, flame erupted and steam snarled; Roadgrabber’s exo-vehicle was not unlike a creature of legend. Its pistons howled as he lurched forward. It was a crawl at first. Slow, unsteady, unnatural. As he continued on his way his pace quickened and smoothed. Soon his momentum would make him unstoppable.

Rage watched as his purple and black one-man front line steamed away. He knew that he was just cycles away from his prize. A prize that he desired with all of his spark. With the dragon AND the Metrotitan, the Decepticons would have to let him into their tight-knit council of warlords. Maybe he’d even meet that Megatron chap that everyone was talking about...

“Sir!” Rage’s second in command, Drench, stood at attention. Rage chuckled inwardly. It always amused him how Drench would do those sorts of things: standing at attention, calling him sir, salute... it was as though Drench thought he was in an actual military rather than a group of miscreants with hopes of grandeur. “Terror-Tread and Cement-Head radioed in. They’re in place.”

Rage folded his hands behind his back and straightened his posture to mimic that of Drench. “Good, Drench. You are performing your duties admirably. Perhaps when we are finally welcomed into the Decepticon army I will make you my lieutenant.”

“Thank you, sir!” Drench stayed put, looking to Rage for his next orders.

“Uhhhh, dismissed.” It was almost a question more than an order, but Drench still marched off to conduct his other tasks before the invasion. Rage shook his head at Drench’s devotion as he lifted a pair of binoculars to his optics.

It was always disorienting, using binoculars in addition to the natural magnification of a Transformer’s optics, but Rage wanted to see as far as he could. He wanted to see just what the girls in Median had to offer him. He chuckled to himself as he saw the hastily prepared autoturrets lining the top of the city’s walls. The extra scrap mound piled behind the walls impressed him, though. Not their form, for they were the crudest defense he had ever seen. Even for non-combatants. However, the sheer effort that it must have taken to move that much in such a short amount of time counted for something. The girls had been busy. Good.

He continued scanning Median's walls, looking for the female Autobots' faces. To see his enemy one last time before battle was only honorable. And it gave him a sick sort of joy. Greenlight and Lancer were working together tightening the power conductors on one of the autoturrets. In all of Rage's surveillance, those two always seemed like such a good team. Strika stood grimacing at a rather poorly constructed part of the wall. Her size made her silhouette unmistakable even from this distance. Just to the left of her security chief, Flipsides kicked up a cloud of red-orange rust as she paced back and forth. *She always was the worrier*, Rage quipped to himself. Mentally running down the list of personnel, Rage realized that he didn't see Glyph. Although that didn't surprise him. In all his time watching the girls, he rarely saw the little blue Autobot leave the archaeological sites. But he did notice someone else in her place. Rage zoomed in as far as he could on the red Autobot with the blades sticking out of his back. And he wasn't just an Autobot, he was...

"Drench! Hydradread! We've got to rush things a bit! It looks like the Elite Guard want to play too!" Rage called back to his troops still with him at their makeshift checkpoint. Spread out on a crate were bolts and nuts of various shapes, which Hydradread grabbed and tightened into the strange device in his hands. Meanwhile Aquablast closed the lid on his zero-friction accelerator oil mixture. It was the perfect blend to boost their speed.

Drench grabbed a second pair of binoculars and watched the Elite Guardsman alongside his boss. "How many are there?"

Rage's gaze followed the red Autobot as he paced the top of the scrap pile defenses. "I've only glanced the one. But you and I both know that where there's one, there's at least three more lurking in the shadows."

"Quite right." Drench had learned the hard way that Elite Guard squads worked in teams of four and five. He had been incredibly close to capturing that white and green Autobot with the familiar accent when his big green friend arrived. At least he got out in one piece. Or at least few enough pieces to carry back to base for Hydradread to reassemble.

Suddenly the space between Drench and Rage was occupied by a unique looking gun. Or a nozzle. Or a...Drench couldn't figure out what it reminded him of, but holding it with his optics beaming was Hydradread. "Splendid piece of craftsmanship, if I do say so myself."

"Innit." Rage hadn't taken his eyes off of the Elite Guardsman now standing stationary looking his way. "Just point and shoot, or is it another one of your daft inventions that you have to pump to prime it first?"

"Errrr." Hydradread looked away.

"Brilliant."



Dion watched as Over-Run stared out across the nothing to where Ironfist had spotted the Decepticons. The orange Autobot called up to his teammate, "See anything yet?"

"Yeah, Roadgrabber is on his way. I think he's seen Strika's weak spot." Over-Run was straining to get as much magnification out of his optics as he could. Now more than ever, he wished that he had been able to bring his heli-drone, but it still had systems shorted out by various insect fluids from its previous use. He had to settle for second best. "How's Swindle doing with my new toy? I swear if he sold me a lemo—"

“Bartered. I didn’t sell you anything. It was merely a trade between colleagues. No, not colleagues. Friends.” The black and red bipedal drone rocked back and forth as Swindle dug at its innards with a wrench. “You see, the trouble with these is that sometimes the previous owners stick something in the storage compartment that gets sucked up the ventilator. You just have to work it loo—” Swindle slammed into the drone as the object was suddenly and violently jarred free. He got back to his knees and looked at what had been stuck inside the drone. “Oh, hey! It’s a Tressian Kajig—”

“It’s MINE, that’s what it is.” Over-Run didn’t look away from the oncoming Roadgrabber. “We traded, remember? The drone and all its contents are mine.”

“Of course! I’ll just hold onto it for later...” Swindle’s pace quickened the further he ran away.

“I...don’t think you’re getting that back.” Dion rubbed the back of his head.

“Whatever, I didn’t even know what it was anyway.” The previously motionless Over-Run abruptly turned and pointed to Dion. “I think it’s time. Go tell the others to get ready!”



Roadgrabber had been studying the wall of junk throughout his entire approach. Some may call him dimwitted, but even he could see a weak spot in a wall. It was, after all, his job to knock them down and experience is always the better part of intelligence, or something. So when he saw the smaller, less dense mound of detritus in the middle of a collapsed section of wall, he steered directly towards it and revved his engine to maximum. The barren landscape flew by his windows, but Roadgrabber couldn’t care less about the scenery, particularly one so depressing. Instead he focused his complete attention on the scantily-built section of wall ahead of him.

“They’re gonna praise me for my awesome performance! Those bits n’ pieces ain’t gonna slow me down none. Not even one nanoklik!” Roadgrabber exclaimed at the top of his vocalizers, yet he was still drowned out by the roar of the engines. As the wall closed in on the front of the exo-vehicle, Roadgrabber braced for impact.

The wall caved to the purple and black vehicle’s whims as it plowed through at full speed. Scrap metal flew in every direction in a clamor that was almost music to Roadgrabber’s audio receptors. Somewhere inside his exo-vehicle mode’s armor, a smile crossed his face. Although it didn’t last long...

Shortly after he cleared the debris, he realized his mistake. “Sludgin’ PIT!” The ground below him began to groan and whine under his weight. His only hope was to transform his vehicle shell so that he could escape what was soon to become a wheeled coffin. Unfortunately for the Decepticon, the added vibrations only served to make the situation much worse—Onslaught’s plan to correspond the weak point of the wall with the weak point of the flooring had worked perfectly. The Elite Guard just had to wait until...*Crack!* The load-bearing struts gave loose, sending the flooring and a trapped Roadgrabber into a small abyss.

When Roadgrabber’s optics rebooted, he could see Onslaught, Ironfist, Vortex, Brawl and Strika looking down at him. The Decepticon had been flung free from his exo-vehicle, but was now pinned under a rusted chunk of antiquated architecture.

“I’ll give the lady the honors.” Onslaught half-bowed to Strika, who replied in a grunt.



“Yah sludgin’ exhaust-heads think yahselves so smart! Jus’ wait ‘til I work myself free from this rubbish chute. I’ll show all yahs who the smart one is!” Roadgrabber’s struggling only made more rusted scraps of metal rain down on his head. When the new cascade of metal began to slow, Roadgrabber’s optics instantly refocused on Strika. Who was now standing behind the barrel of a sizable rifle. A rifle aimed directly down at Roadgrabber.

“This is farewell, slimebag Decepticon!” Strika pulled the trigger, and a beam of energy flowed from the barrel of the rifle. Although the blast missed the cowering Decepticon, he wasn’t Strika’s true target. The laser struck a metal beam just above Roadgrabber’s shoulder, causing another avalanche. Only this time it buried the Decepticon for good.

Strika handed Onslaught his rifle as the Combaticon leader opened the communicator on his forearm. “Onslaught to Metalhawk, we did it. The purple ’bot-eater is down for the count. I postulate that we can expect the swarm of gnats next.”



From his position on top of an adjacent junk pile, Metalhawk surveyed the action.

“Copy that, Onslaught. Get your crew out of there and set up for the next leg of the assault.” Metalhawk closed his commlink as he swiveled to face his troops. Blast Off, Dion, Over-Run, and Swindle eagerly awaited their orders. “Rage, Drench, Hydradread, and Aquablast will be here soon. Squad A has already begun falling back to provide our second front, should we need it. But let’s show them just how capable we are by stopping those Decepti-creeps dead in their tracks, shall we?”

“You got it, Boss Bot!” The Elite Guard turned to see Lancer approaching. “I assumed you could use the extra hands.”

“Lancer! You should be back with Glyph, Flipsides, and Greenlight. This could get very dangerous.” Metalhawk pointed towards the safe house that the Guard had prepped for the female scientists.

“And miss all the fun? Not going to happen. Besides, I’m a big girl.” Lancer thought for a moment. “Well, not as big as Strika, but I can handle myself.”

Metalhawk glanced back at Over-Run, who shrugged. “Alright. Swindle, please provide a firearm for Lancer here.”

“A chick-bot with a gun. That is all sorts of hot.” Swindle leered at Lancer as he passed along his Gyro-Gun. “Now give us a pose...”

Lancer raised an optic and turned her back on the yellow Combaticon. “Where do you want me, Metalhawk, Sir?”

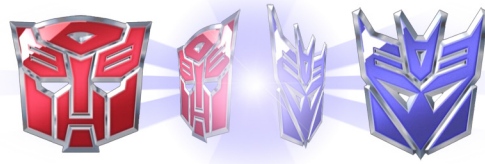
“Spoilsport. At least give me my gun back when you’re done with it.” Swindle crossed his arms across his chest and sulked. “And maybe a small usage fee...”

“The Decepticons will be here any minute. Lancer, now that you’re here, how do you feel about creating a diversion?” Metalhawk stared at the hole in the wall.

“Sounds like fun!” Lancer’s smile was so wide that it looked like it was about to bisect her face entirely.

“Tell me I was never THAT bad as a new recruit,” Dion leaned back to whisper to Over-Run.

“Nope. You were worse.”



The four Stormtroopers sped towards the hole their comrade had just made in the Autobots' defenses. Although it didn't quite seem right.

"Where's Roadgrabber? The big bloke should be wrecking the place, but I don't see plating nor hydraulics of him..." Aquablast kept his accelerator pinned to the floor, despite his concerns.

"What's it matter? He broke down the door for us, yes? That's all that really counts. He could go grab a pint for all I care." Rage overtook his troops as the special fuel mixture kicked in. Aquablast knew how to mix a good batch of petro, Rage had to give him that.

"What if by some chance it's a trap?" Hydradread's question was as annoying as his misdirected genius. The scientist had always gotten on Rage's servos, even though the thug leader could never quite figure out why. Was it his know-it-all-ism? His blasted inventions that managed to work only when they weren't needed? Or was it the way his pistons and processor hummed and buzzed when he was taking a stasis nap? Maybe it was a bit of a mix.

"Then we spring it. Now belt up, we're almost there!" Rage berated his subordinate scientist. "Everybody know their parts?"

"Yessir!" Drench called to his commander. "But...uh...sir? Does SHE change things?" Standing in the middle of the opening in the wall was Lancer, her gun aimed at the approaching Decepticons. Rage was surprised to see a historian handle a pistol with so much composure. Especially one that had four Decepticons bearing down on her. The manufactured image of Rage's face on the Stormtroopers' comm channel smirked beneath his faceplate.

"Her? Well, lads, she adds a bit of fun!" The black and maroon vehicle with the green windows darted forward, kicking up a cloud of rust that covered his fellow Stormtroopers. "If she manages to hit any of you dafties, you're paying for a round when we get blitzed back at Luggie's!"

Aquablast always appreciated a good sport. "Hear, hear!"



Lancer's anxiety escalated the closer the four Stormtroopers drew near. However, she knew her part of the plan and was determined to follow it through to the end. *Besides, this was so cool to be part of an Elite Guard operation!* she thought to herself. In her best action pose, Lancer shifted her sights from the black car, to the blue car, to the red car, to the green car and finally back to the black car. She didn't know which was which, but she had a hunch that Rage was the black car. Evil wannabe losers always paint themselves black.

Though she aimed her pistol, Lancer didn't fire. Despite her desire to pull the trigger and see the Decepticons scatter as she filled their armor with holes, she had to lure them in. And make sure that their attention was solely focused on her. Metalhawk, and the Elite Guard with him, were outside of the city's walls, hiding with what she assumed was enough fire-

power to dismantle an ARMY, let alone four braggarts looking for a cheap thrill. Even now she could see movement every once in a while as the Guardsmen made their final preparations. It looked like they could use more time, but this was it.

The Stormtroopers were close enough that Lancer could hear their crass comments to one another. Just a few more mecahnometers...and then Lancer twisted and ran, causing the Stormtroopers to burst with laughter.

“Such a pretty little poltroon. I think we’ve gone and scared her off for good!”

The Stormtroopers’ jovial moods were short-lived. As the Decepticons stopped to watch Lancer flee, the Elite Guard sprang into action. Suddenly the Stormtroopers were very much aware of the five Autobots surrounding them and training their guns at the Cons’ laser cores. The red dot of a targeting laser followed the curved lines of Rage’s vehicle mode and stopped in the middle of his hood.

“Rage, I demand your surrender!” Metalhawk called to the black vehicle.

“Really, now? You do?” Rage converted to robot mode and strode over to the Elite Guard commander. “I would like to comply, I really would. But, you see, the lads were just itching to get into some mayhem. So I’m afraid I’ll have to say...”

Rage pulled the trigger on his own gun and nothing happened. “That is, I’ll have to say...”

Again nothing happened. The Elite Guardsmen grinned at the Decepticon’s misfortune. Metalhawk kept his weapon aimed at Rage’s torso as he pulled out a pair of stasis cuffs and closed in on the Decepticon. He stopped in his tracks, however, when Hydradread came up behind his leader and made a flapping gesture with his left hand. “You got to pump it remember?”

Rage leaned back and glared at his scientist. “Thank you, Hydradread.”

“Troubles with your weaponry, Rage? I think Swindle here could help,” Metalhawk mocked.

“No, no. I’ve got it now.” Rage smiled behind his battle mask. “But thanks for the offer.”

This time when he pulled the trigger, a steady stream of chemicals spewed forward. The powerful blast of liquid hit Metalhawk and sent him flying backwards.

“Eeeegggh!” The Elite Guardsman landed and tumbled. However, other than getting knocked off his feet, he didn’t appear any worse for wear. “What the—? Hey, Rage, I don’t think your... Waitananoklik...”

Energy began to arc between the pools of liquid dripping down Metalhawk’s armor. Their intensity increased, building until Metalhawk was completely aglow with blue light.

“YYAAAAAAAAAAAAAGHHHHH!” The gold and blue Transformer collapsed to all fours as every servo in his frame seized and sputtered. When the energy finally dissipated, the Elite Guard commander was lying motionless on the rusted ground with smoke billowing from his plating.

“I’m sorry, Metalhawk, I didn’t catch that last part.” Rage kicked at Metalhawk’s body.

“You think that you can get away with that, Decepti-clown? You still have four Elite Guardsmen to deal with!” Dion pointed towards the Stormtroopers.

“Yeah, and now you’ve made us angry. I don’t think you’re going to like us when we’re angry.” Over-Run pulled the motorized blade shield from his back. His black and red drone waddled back and forth calculating target locks.

“Oh, please.” Rage took a step back and transformed back into a sleek, alien-looking black car. “In my experience, you Autobots just dive out of the way when we drive at you.”

“Wha-?” The Stormtroopers rushed Dion and Blast Off, who only barely managed to scatter out of the way in time. Once past the Autobots, they didn’t slow down and continued to speed through Median’s streets as though they were illegal city-racers.

Rage called back to the Elite Guardsmen, taunting them. “And now you’ll have to catch us all over again!”

“Sludgeit!” Dion cursed as he picked himself off of the ground. In futility, he tried to trace the Decepticons with his targeting visor.

Blast Off began wiping the rust off of his armor as he complained, “FANTASTIC plan you fellows came up with. I applaud your efforts to bring failure to this mission.”

“Can it, Blast Off! Onslaught, do you read?” Over-Run was talking into the commlink secreted inside his forearm. “You’ve got trouble heading your way. All four Stormtrooper buffoons broke through our line. And watch out; they have a chemical that can cause *almost* immediate stasis lock. Metalhawk was seemingly the test subject.”

“Next time, we shoot first, provoke second,” Blast Off intoned as he turned for the rusted city.



“And this isn’t OUR fault...” Dion’s voice trailed Over-Run’s as Onslaught closed his communicator.

“It looks like Metalhawk’s bunch didn’t quite get the job done. Let’s pick up their mess, hmm?” Onslaught crouched, allowing his armor panels to shift into his six-wheeled blue armored truck, and locked his turret on an empty street corridor.

“Oi! If they say it’s not their fahwlt, then it’s not their bloody fahwlt!” Ironfist protested.

Brawl ignored Ironfist. “So, let me guess: They tried to capture them?”

“Probably.” The Combaticon leader remained focused on the empty street ahead of him.

“Good. That means we’re not gonna try the same, right?” Brawl converted into a now plow-less treaded, armored vehicle, and rolled up next to his commander. Light reflected off of the muzzle of his cannon as he targeted the same street corner as Onslaught.

“We’ll see, Brawl. We do have to find out why Rage wants the Heart as badly as he does. He must have some plan other than to let the monster roam free.” This obviously wasn’t the answer Brawl was looking for.

“Hmf.” The green vehicle rolled back to where Ironfist, Vortex, and Strika were bunkered.

Onslaught didn’t have the time or patience to pay Brawl any mind. Especially since at that moment Onslaught’s internal radar began to ping. “Alright crew, they’ve just appeared on sensor scope. Everyone take their positions...and don’t be modest when it comes to shedding some ammunition!”

Vortex took cover behind a debris pile, while Ironfist balanced his “free-standing” missile launcher. *Engineers just like to buggah theengs up don't they?* he thought. The two vehicles stood motionless with their turrets trained on the street ahead.

“They should be rounding the corner...now!” Just as Onslaught shouted his warning, two Decepticon cars sped around a building. Brawl and the Combaticon leader let loose a volley that had the Stormtroopers scrambling for cover. Watching Hydradread and Drench dive from the torrent of laser fire, Onslaught realized, “There’s just two! They must have been using sensor ghosts to make it look like all of them!”

Ironfist’s sensors were also picking up four signals ahead, despite his optics telling him differently. “Then where are th’other two?”



Rage slid down the remnants of the wall he had just broken a hole through and stared at the urn in the center of the magnificently ornate room.

“Think about it, Aquablast.” Rage said to the Stormtrooper tinkerer. “This is where OUR ancestors worshiped and gathered. It’s almost a shame that their power was so entirely short-lived, and their leader defeated.” Rage paused, then added, “Still, though, I suppose if they were in power today, I couldn’t be the hero that restored us to our proper glory.”

“Yes, fascinating.” Aquablast wasn’t listening to his superior, but rather examining an engraving that featured a golden dragon being defeated by a green dragon. For a planet that had very little native animal life, their ancestors sure were obsessed by the winged beasts.

The black and maroon Decepticon laid his hand on the side of the urn, as though he couldn’t believe it was right there in front of him. “There you are...Aquablast, want to try cutting it open?” As much as Rage wanted the honors himself, he couldn’t risk any booby traps.

“My pleasure, boss.” Aquablast’s visor-like optics glinted as he pulled out his chemical cannon, and set the nozzle to its finest setting. The powerful jet of liquid worked like a cutting blade, ripping straight through the metal composite that made up the urn’s walls. In just a few nanokliks, the urn was bisected and its contents exposed. Rage edged closer to look inside. A pink light shined bright from the dark ruins of the ancient container. The Stormtrooper commander stretched his fingers into the cavity of the urn and pulled out a glowing box. To the inexperienced it would have looked like an Energon cube, but to those who knew to look closer it was something else entirely, something much more powerful. The energy of the box jumped and spit at Rage, singeing his servos and metal casings. Rage didn’t care. He had it. He finally had it! The personality component of one of the very first Decepticon leaders lay in his bare hands, and soon would be incorporated into the ultimate weapon destined to bring final Decepticon victory over Cybertron. A victory led by Rage himself!

“Quickly, Aquablast, we can’t risk losing any of the transformative energy. A personality component without it is useless to us.” Rage pictured the hunk of dials and switches of a drained personality component and motioned Aquablast to speed things along. The Stormtrooper subordinate held out a metal box into which Rage lowered the glowing cube. The Decepticon breathed a sigh of relief. “Fab. Now we just have to get that back to the Metrotitan. Radio Hydradread and Drench. Tell them we’re on our way.”

“Yessir!”



“I still can’t get a signature lock on the other two Decepticons!” Vortex was frantically pawing at a keypad that had emerged from his left forearm.

“Alright then, Vortex. You and Ironfist go check on the urn. Brawl, Strika and I can keep these ‘Cons here pinned down.” Onslaught’s cannons fired an incalculable amount of laser fire at Hydradread. Thousands of charred holes appeared on the building just over the Decepticon’s head.

“You got it, Big O!” Vortex jumped into the air and let the blades on his back take him aloft as he converted into an attack helicopter. He banked left and headed towards the dig site located ten mecahnometers behind their position. On the ground, Ironfist transformed into his armored truck mode and followed after the airborne Vortex. “I love a good old Decepticon hunt!”

“Keep me apprised!” The head Combaticon called after them as he let loose another furious salvo of ferocious laser fire. Ironfist drove into the excavated urn-room as Vortex hovered above. The sight inside made Ironfist’s suspension drop.



The two pieces of the urn still laid where Rage had left them, scattered and empty. “Blimey. The blokes ‘ave done it, mate.”

“Copy that, Ironfist. I see where they broke in; they couldn’t have gotten far. I’ll survey the area. I’d suggest you get to the surface and do the same.” Vortex hovered directly over the new hole in the chamber’s walls, looking for traces of where the Stormtroopers could have gone.

“Onslaught, this is Ironfist,” The tan and blue Autobot yelled over his radio. “The urn’s been cut n’ looted. We’re lookin’ for the ray-dahs now.”

“Understood, Ironfist. We’ll keep an eye out here, and try to keep their friends pinned down.” Ironfist shut down his internal radio and began climbing back out of the chamber when he felt something wet hit him in the side.

Hidden in the shadows, Aquablast had taken aim and fired. The blast knocked Ironfist from his erstwhile hand-holds and back to the chamber floor. “Got ‘im, boss!”

“Lousy, blighters! I’ll tear your pistons from yer body n’ shove ‘em up–YEEARGGG!” Ironfist crumpled in a heap of blue light and sparks. He didn’t get up.

Inside the chamber fell silent, but overhead Vortex’s constant *whud, whud, whud* could be heard. Aquablast couldn’t help but feel trapped. “Cor! There’s another one above us, Rage! Please tell me you’ve a plan...”

“Of course I do, Aquablast. Just let me a moment to think of it.” A steady *tick, tick, tick* echoed throughout the excavation site as Rage tapped his index finger on his chin. Aquablast tried not to panic, but his commander was silent for far longer than the Stormtrooper had liked.

Just as Aquablast was ready for another panic attack, Rage blurted out, “Alright, got it.”



“What the sludge happened?” Lancer rushed back from the city towards Dion, Swindle, Blast Off, Over-Run, and the now-sitting Metalhawk. She hadn’t seen how the Stormtroopers had gotten away.

Metalhawk grabbed her wrist and stared directly into her optics. “L-Lancer! T-The...fuzzy...The fuzzy p-petro-rabbits taste like...yellow...”

Lancer furrowed her brow in concern and pointed down at the Elite Guard commander still holding her arm. “That... That’s not good, is it?”

Dion gently pried Lancer’s arm free from Metalhawk’s grasp. “They had some kind of chemical weapon that knocked him out cold. He’s having a little problem rebooting.”

“Which is just FANTASTIC, because we still have to stop those ‘Cons from getting back out of the city.” Swindle kicked at a bolt laying on the orange, gritty ground. As the piece of metal danced out undisturbed into the open space around the city, Swindle gained some inspiration. “We should have Flipsides activate the autoturrets now. As long as everyone is INSIDE the city, they can target anyone trying to get OUT.”

“Good thinking, Swindle.” Over-Run slapped Swindle across the back. “Lancer, can you go deliver the message personally? We have to keep comm traffic clear until we get word from Onslaught on what’s happening in there.”

A smile spread across Lancer’s face as she twisted and turned into something resembling a hover-chariot from one of the Covenants’ exploits. “*Historians*”, Dion chuckled to himself.

“You can count on me!” the orange and purple chariot exclaimed as it zoomed away.

“Grishy boushy makes vroom...” Metalhawk fell over as he tried to lean forward. The Elite Guardsmen just stared as he seemed to slip back into stasis lock.

“Nice,” Blast Off chortled.

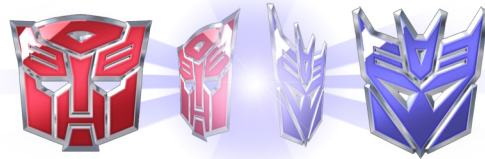


Vortex hovered over the ruins, trying to contact his Elite Guard cohort inside, “Ironfist! Ironfist! Come in! Onslaught, I’m not getting a response from Ironfist. I think the ‘Cons are still inside the dig site.” Vortex couldn’t see any movement whatsoever, and Ironfist wasn’t the quiet sort.

Onslaught’s reply came over Vortex’s radio, “Good. Keep an optic on that building, and make sure no one gets out. I’ll send Strika as backup.”

“Roger that.” Vortex rotated slowly, trying to split his focus between the various escape points in the rusted and cracked dome below. He was so busy watching the edges of the building that he didn’t bother monitoring the apex of the dome. He didn’t see the cracks expand and split the roof into chunks as twin streams of chemicals pierced through the metal and arced straight towards him. By the time he felt the drops on his windshield, it was too late.

“Wha-?! EEEAAUUUIIEE!” He spun out of control, pitching as his processor shut down. Finally he crashed, smashing through the side of a nearby structure. His blades ripped through the corroded metal, causing a spray of shredded steel until they collided with more solid struts. Finally, they came to an abrupt, metal-bending stop that ensured he would not be flying again any time soon.



“Two for two! Yee-hoo! I’m having a good solar cycle!” Aquablast pumped his fist in the air as Rage begun crawling out of the ruins.

“We should have it away. Who knows how many more of those ‘Bots are hanging around this kak bin?” The black and maroon Decepticon disappeared outside.

“Right-o, just celebratin’ a little is all...” Aquablast climbed up and out and stood next to his superior. “So, any thoughts on the way out?”

“Yeah, back that way. But there’s something I have to see to first.” Rage surveyed the broken city. Aquablast didn’t know what his boss was looking for, but knew that he had found it when he spotted a building with extra supports bracing its walls. “I have to give my ‘appreciation’.”

Rage transformed into vehicle mode and took off towards the messily rebuilt structure in the distance. Aquablast shrugged, converted into his vehicle mode and followed the black car in front of him.



Greenlight huddled in the center of the bunker, as Flipsides paced back and forth. Glyph stood as she reviewed the data in her telepad. She was seemingly oblivious to what was going on outside. Greenlight, however, shuddered each time she heard a new round fired in the distance.

“It doesn’t sound good out there...” Flipsides fretted.

“It’s a battle zone.” Glyph replied. “It’s not supposed to sound ‘good.’ I would wager that it would take a true psycho-path to find cries and screams appealing to their audio receptors.”

“How can you be so calm?” Greenlight tucked her knees against her chest. “Bots are *dying* out there!”



“Ah, but we can’t know that for sure, though. And besides, I’m not calm. I’ve merely accepted my position here. I can’t do anything outside; I have no skills that would be an advantage in a fire fight. So instead I do what I CAN do. I study my notes and try to find out more about the thing everyone is fighting for. If it comes to the worst, and Rage accomplishes his mission, perhaps I can find out how our ancestors defeated this ‘Dragon’ the first time.”

“You certainly SOUND calm.” Greenlight shut her optic protectors tight as an explosion roared nearby.

Glyph lowered her telepad and glanced at her assistant. “Greenlight, don’t worry. Everything is going to be fine.”

Greenlight opened one of her optic covers. “Are you sure?”

“Positiv—” Glyph’s reassurances were cut short as the bunker door flew open. In the doorway stood a black and maroon robot with an unmistakable Decepticon brand on his chest.

“Honey, I’m home!” Rage burst with laughter at his own joke. “You know, this shack is really knocking it on a bit. You didn’t really think you were *safe* here, did you?”

Glyph knelt beside Greenlight, who was sobbing gently. “What do you want?”

“Why, to thank you for this!” Rage held out the box that housed the personality component from the urn.

“The Heart...” Flipsides gasped.

Rage tilted his head sideways as though to nod, while keeping an optic on the Autobots. “I really don’t think I could have found it without you doing the leg work.”

“So you’ve got what you came for. You can leave now.” Glyph stood up and pointed towards the door.

Rage chuckled. “Not yet. I think you may still have some notes on this ‘Heart’ that might come in handy. I’d like you to give me those. Now.” The Decepticon held out his hand.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. They were all left at the dig site.” Glyph stepped around the sobbing Greenlight and stared defiantly into the Decepticon’s face.

Rage shook his finger back and forth, “Tsk, tsk. Lying to your friends just isn’t right. There was nothing there. Besides, I know your kind, Glyph, you probably couldn’t take three steps from your notes. They MUST be here.”

“They’re NOT. Now leave. Get out!” Glyph shoved Rage, who stumbled back outside the bunker and fell to the rust-covered ground. However, in his place stood another Decepticon. Aquablast still had his chemical cannon set at the finest grade as he pulled the trigger on his chemical blaster. A stream of hyper-pressurized liquid barely thicker than a pin prick spewed out of the nozzle. Just as before, it sliced into any metal before it without pause. Including Glyph’s chassis. The archaeometrist didn’t even have the chance to make a sound before the stream of liquid pierced straight through her body, severing her laser core. The blue Autobot’s optics had already grown dim as her body hit the ground. The impact caused her telepad to be jarred loose from her belt and skitter towards the door.

“GLYPH! NO!” Greenlight held her hand out as her optics enlarged and trembled. Flipsides fell to her knees. Her mouth was open behind her face mask, but no words came out.

Rage bent down and picked up the telepad from the ground. “Ah. Thank you again, Glyph.”

Greenlight crawled forward and cradled Glyph in her arms. The blue Autobot was already beginning to fade to gray. “You killed her! She was unarmed...”

“And so are you. My lucky day.” Aquablast pointed his cannon at Greenlight. The Autobot shut her optic covers tight, waiting for him to pull the trigger.

*Blam!*

Greenlight opened her optics to see Aquablast still standing in front of her. Only now he had a vacant hole where his face had been. The Stormtrooper’s lifeless body slammed into the ground hard, and Greenlight could see Lancer standing behind him.

“You little prit—” Rage started to lunge for Lancer when the novice historian pulled the trigger on Swindle’s pistol three more times. The shots weren’t aimed, but they still caused the Decepticon to transform and speed away.

Lancer stared at Glyph’s motionless body on the floor as she stepped into the bunker; it was as though she had suddenly lost a part of herself. She bowed her head and dropped her pistol.

“They shot her, Lancer. They *killed* her...” Greenlight still held Glyph in her arms.

“I know Greenlight...” Lancer suddenly remembered why she had come back to the bunker. “Flipsides. Flipsides!”

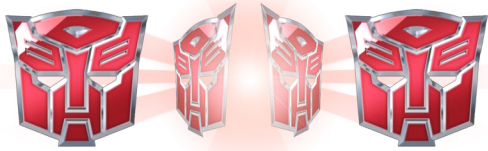
The white and maroon robot was still in shock. Lancer had to shake her to get her attention. “L-Lancer?”

“Yes. It’s me. I need you to activate the autoturrets.” Lancer was still holding the smaller Autobot by the shoulders.

“T-The autoturrets? R-right...” Flipsides struggled to take her optics off of Glyph’s body in Greenlight’s arms as she slid open the autoturret computer panel. “W-What are you going to do?”

Lancer looked at what used to be Glyph and tried to fight through her quivering lips, but the words “I’m going to make them PAY” never came out.





Strika rolled up next to Onslaught before converting back to robot mode. “I could not find them. The place was empty, no Vortex, no Decepticons, nothing. Just Ironfist babbling like defrag patient.”

“That’s certainly not a good sign.” Onslaught shifted into robot mode as well, and pulled out his rifle.

“Brawl...” The Combaticon leader sighed. “I *need* to find out where those other two Decepticons are. Go find them. Strika and I will take care of these two.”

Brawl pretended not to hear his commander at first, but then slowly slunk off without saying a word.

“A certain sense of haste would be appreciated!” Onslaught called to Brawl, who suddenly pushed his accelerator to maximum and sent a cloud of black smoke into the sky.

“Alright, Strika, they’re dug in pretty good up there. We’re going to need to charge them. You up for that?” Onslaught turned to look at Strika, whose optics were fixed on Drench as she fired incessantly.

“Finally,” the pink Autobot said flatly. “The red one is mine.”

Onslaught just nodded. “On the count of three. One. Two. Thr– What the– ?!”

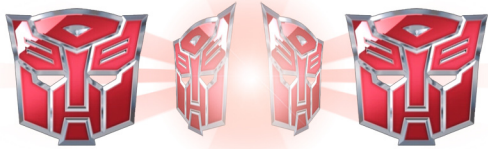
Both Decepticons jumped and shifted into vehicle mode, darting away. Onslaught’s optics became wide as he quickly realized how out of control the situation had become. His desire to blast the Decepticon in his target scope had blinded him from seeing what was truly happening on the battlefield. “Hurry! After them!”

Strika and Onslaught changed back to vehicle modes and raced after the Decepticons. Onslaught opened his internal communicator and warned the other Elite Guardsmen, “Over-Run, Dion, Metalhawk, they’re on the move! They’re heading for your location. Don’t let them escape!”

Onslaught kept his optics fixed on the Decepticons as they dove in and around the ruined buildings of Median. If the Combaticon couldn’t catch them himself, he would drive them straight into the waiting laser fire of the rest of the Guard. He diverted more power to his engine, hoping that it would be enough for him to keep up with the smaller and more agile Stormtroopers.

From the left, a third car zoomed in behind the red and blue cars. *Rage*, thought Onslaught. *He must have the Heart... And let's hope this means the fourth 'Con bought it.* Onslaught opened a comm channel, “Brawl, give up the search and get back to the breach in the wall. We have them.” They were getting close to the city limits, and where Roadgrabber had broken through the defenses. “Over-Run, prepare yourselves. They’ll be there shortly.”

“Copy that.” Over-Run’s voice crackled over the radio. *We have them now*, Onslaught boasted to himself. As the Stormtroopers and their pursuers approached the battered wall, however, Onslaught couldn’t help but notice there was no sign of the other Elite Guardsmen.



“Copy that.” Over-Run closed the panel on his wrist. “They’ll be here any moment. Get ready to fire.”

“*We’re* always ready to fire, aren’t we, Cement-Head?” A voice came from behind the Autobots.

“Agreed. I like shooting the squirmy little things.” Over-Run spun to see two hulking teal and black robots standing over them. “Almost as much as I like smooshing them.”

The behemoths took aim and fired, causing the Autobots to scatter. The twin lasers left a smoking crater in the ground as proof of the concept that getting hit by one would be a bad thing. Over-Run yelled to the Autobots, “Split up into two groups! Try to draw them away!”

Swindle and Blast Off ran left, while Over-Run and Dion took right. “Which ones do you want, brother?” Cement-Head asked of Terror-Tread.

“I’ll take the orange and red ones, they look like more fun.” Terror-Tread replied.

Cement-Head started after the Combaticons. “I agree, but I’ll let you have it. The brown and yellow ones look like sport as well.”

Soon after the thunderous footfalls of the twin goliaths had faded into the distance, the hum of three super-charged engine blocks filled the city streets.

“Blast it, Over-Run! Where are you?!” Onslaught muttered under his breath. Just then, the Combaticon saw the source of Over-Run’s distraction as he and Dion circled back to the damaged wall. Following them was a giant Decepticon that could have passed as a ten-story building.

From the other direction, Swindle and Blast Off came bounding with their own mobile monolith. “At least we’re all back together, eh, boss man?” Swindle’s whiny voice could barely be heard above the stomping feet and roaring engines.

“Yes, such a good thing that is,” Rage commented as he pushed his accelerator. “Terror-Tread, Cement-Head, now would be appropriate!”

The teal and black Decepticons nodded and shifted into cube-like vehicles rolling on monster tires. “I love this part!” Terror-Tread exclaimed.

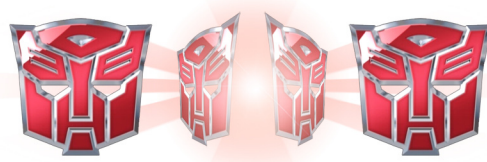
“Not as much as I do, brother!” Cement-Head shouted.

The teal cube-vehicles roared along the inner edges of the defense wall, closing in fast on the collected group of Decepticons and Autobots. Just as Rage and his Stormtroopers made it outside the city, Terror-Tread and Cement-Head slammed into one another with a deafening impact. While luckily the Autobots dove out of harm’s way just in time, they now had Terror-Tread and Cement-Head between themselves and Rage.

“Yeee-haw!” screamed Terror-Tread. “That was fun, Cement-Head.”

“You said it, Terror-Tread!” Cement-Head yelled as the two vehicles uncoupled from one another and turned to follow their commander outside of the city walls. “Although, it is regrettable that none of the Autobots got stuck between us.”

“That it is, brother,” Terror-Tread sulked.



With Swindle’s pistol drawn, Lancer jogged up to the Autobots milling around the city gates. “What’s going on? Did you stop them? Where are they?”

Onslaught lifted his head slowly. “They got away.”

““Got away”? You’re the Autobot Elite Guard! You DON’T let them get away!” Lancer pointed her finger at the Combaticon’s chest. “You don’t...”

“Whoah, hey, we’re going after them, don’t you worry.” A now fully-cognizant Metalhawk stepped between Lancer’s finger and a confused Onslaught. “We know where they’re going; Over-Run’s new toy...well, let’s just say it’s found a way to sneak into enemy territory.”

“He STEPPED on it!” Over-Run cried, “That big teal lummoX stomped it to bits!”

Metalhawk waved off the frantic Autobot. “The important part is that those bits lodged into the Decepticon and are still transmitting a location beacon. We can go after them just as soon as Ironfist gets what little wits he had back, and, well, we FIND Vortex.”

Lancer collapsed on the ground and tucked her knees to her chest. She buried her head into the crook of her arm.

“Um, we just said everything will be fine. What’s the problem?” Dion rubbed the back of his head.

“Yeah, I’M the one with the smashed up drone. What did you lose?” Over-Run puffed.

“Glyph.” Lancer buried her head deeper into her arms.

“Oh.” The red Autobot would have felt guilty if he wasn’t still hung up on his own personal loss.

Swindle, who had become bored just sitting around waiting, yelled down from the top of the city wall, “Hey! What’s the big deal! Don’t you guys like my ideas?”

“Swindle, what on Cybertron’s third moon are you talking about?” The Combaticon leader yelled back.

“The autoturrets, chief. I said we should turn them on to blast the Decepticons if they tried to leave, but look. Nothin’!” Swindle waved his hand in front of the guns for emphasis. “What gives?”

Lancer lifted her head and spoke softly, “But I told Flipsides to activate them. I saw her open the control panel.”

“Oh, but I did turn them on, Lancer.” The Elite Guard spun to see Flipsides sauntering towards them. Any concern she had for Glyph now seemed to have evaporated. “They must have malfunctioned, although I guess it doesn’t matter anymore, since our foes have made away with our goods.”

The white and maroon Autobot’s complete reversal in disposition shocked Lancer. “Flipsides—?”

“So I’d suggest that you all make haste and follow them. Your mission here has failed, but it could be recoverable. If you hurry.” Flipsides’ optics glowed with a suspiciously foreign strength for the small Autobot.

Metalhawk was taken aback slightly. “...Uh...Vortex. We still need to find...”

“Your helicopter friend?” Flipsides chuckled. “He’s not much of a flier, is he? Strika found him wedged into the side of a building. She’s cutting him loose and will be along with him shortly. Then I’d suggest you chase your quarry while Strika escorts Greenlight and Lancer back to Iacon.”

“What about you?” Dion asked.

“Oh, don’t you worry about little old me,” Flipsides’ smile slit across her face behind her mask. “I have a destiny somewhere else.”



“Wasn’t that weird? I think that was weird? Wasn’t she acting weird?” Lancer bounced back and forth as the Elite Guard sped down the road leaving Median. She had been giddy ever since Onslaught and Metalhawk agreed that she could join them. The military Autobots recognized the desire for vengeance that burned in her optics after her mentor was killed. They had seen it in other Elite Guardsmen talking about the Decepticons. It wasn’t a desire that they admired, but, having seen plenty of good Autobots rush off and do something foolish, they knew it would be best to keep Lancer where they could see her. So, for her sake, they obliged her inquiry to join the mission. Now, however, with her fangirl enthusiasm at a new-found high, they were beginning to regret their decision.

“Lancer! Shift it to neutral, already! I can’t hear myself process!” Onslaught snapped. Lancer immediately fell quiet and drifted to the back of the Elite Guard troop column.

“Oh don’t you worrie ’bout him, lass. He may bark, but he’s really just a big, cuddly Sehlat Fuzz-Bear.” Ironfist tried to console the depressed orange and purple chariot hovering beside him. Lancer giggled at the mental image that provoked. “‘Ere you are, lass!”

“Quiet down back there, you two!” Over-Run hovered over the Elite Guardsmen in helicopter mode. “My tracking signal is getting stronger...It’s headed back towards us!”

“Look, Cement-Head, they followed us!” a familiar teal cube on wheels exclaimed.

“Yes, Terror-Tread, how fortunate!” a second familiar teal cube added.

“I agree, brother. Now we get our second chance to smash them!” Terror-Tread taunted.

“Oh yes, brother; smash them, crush them, grind them...all of my favorite verbs!” Cement-Head could taste his victory.

“You certainly know how to cheer me up, Cement-Head.” Terror-Tread veered towards the Autobots at the end of the Elite Guard column, while Cement-Head remained focused on the leaders.

“Great, these two again,” Dion moaned. The orange and blue Autobot had already had his fill of giant Decepticons for one day.

Onslaught considered the options, then finally said, “Well, they like to run into things. Let’s give them the chance. Swindle. Grab Vortex’s nose cannon, I have a plan...”

The yellow and purple Combaticon transformed and pulled Vortex’s nose cannon loose. The incapacitated Combaticon tied to Brawl’s turret mumbled something about frozen jellyworms and then slipped back offline. “I’ve got it, chief.”

“Wait for my signal. All of you...” The Decepticon duo was close enough to block out most of the night sky, but the Elite Guard remained where they were. “Now! Hard left! Swindle, fire on Terror-Tread’s front bumper!”

Just as ordered, the Elite Guard pushed their accelerators and dove from the path of the oncoming Decepticons. Swindle hesitated a moment longer, aimed, and fired. It took only a fraction of a nanoklik, but it was perfectly executed so that when the two Decepticons collided, not a single Autobot was injured and the only thing trapped between Terror-Tread and Cement-Head was the single round from Vortex’s cannon—which the Combaticon interrogator nicknamed his “glue gun”. The impact, as well as the encapsulated adhesive, fused the Decepticons together. Terror-Tread and Cement-Head struggled, but they couldn’t break loose from each other.

“Wait, wait, wait, brother!” Terror-Tread howled. “You hit reverse while I do the same, we’ll pull ourselves apart.”

“No, brother! The Autobots escape! We must work together. You hit reverse while I drive forward, we can chase them.” Cement-Head replied.

“No, no. We pull ourselves apart, THEN chase, brother.” Terror-Tread argued.

“Ugh. That’s clearly useless!” Cement-Head countered.

The Guardsmen could hear this exchange echoing in the distance as they continued to speed away from the entangled Decepticon duo.



Sitting atop the next ridge they could certainly see it; how could anyone not? The Metrotitan stood on its eight massive wheels with the starlight above glinting off of its bright pink-red, blue, white and yellow armor plating. If the words “imposing”, “massive”, and “deadly” didn’t come to the Autobots’ processors first, then clearly “garish” would have been their description of the mobile base.

“There it is, as I had hoped,” Over-Run whispered. “This is the last position of Terror-Tread and Cement-Head before they made their way back to run us over.”

“Do you think that means they have long range sensors?” Metalhawk inquired of the red Autobot next to him. “Do they know we’re here?”

Almost as a response to Metalhawk’s question, a door opened on the Metrotitan.

“I would think that a ‘yes’. Although opening the front door is hardly the reaction I would have expected...” Over-Run’s quip was cut short by an oil-chilling howl emanating from the open doorway.

“SNRAA-MOOOOOOOOO-OOOOONNNKKK-OOOOONNNKKK.”

The doorway remained empty for a moment before they saw the creature responsible for making the terrifyingly outlandish noise. The appearance of the animal did little to appease their fear, for it looked just as strange as it sounded.

Two massive hooves stamped on the ramp descending from the Metrotitan. Above those hooves a massive head with curved horns swayed back and forth as it surveyed the intruders in front of it. As the creature lunged forward the rest of its twisted body could be seen. Trailing the two massive hooves were a pair of equally massive wheels, and the rear of the creature was supported by four more slightly smaller wheels. The back of the beast was seemingly composed of a dump bed, like that a Constructicon might sport. In the back of the dump bed were two roaring engines yearning to show off their power. As the creature reached the end of the ramp, three more emerged and followed the first down to the gritty metal ground below.

“*What the sludge are those things?!*” Dion shrieked. His optics opened wide; his face quivered with dread.

A speaker unfolded from the neck of the lead beast. It vibrated as Rage’s voice echoed through its cone. “Such a good question! I wouldn’t want you to meet your death without first being introduced to it, now would I? This fellow right here, I’ve named him Buffalo Dump. Let’s say he’s the alpha bull of my new creations—partly Cybertronian, partly mechanical. I call them the Minotorons. And I think you’ll find them as nasty in battle as they are nasty-looking!”

Buffalo Dump howled as though he felt insulted, “MOO-ONNKK!”

“Quite right, Buffalo Dump. Anyways, I’ll leave you all to become better acquainted. After all, I also have a dragon to wake!” As the speaker fell silent of Rage’s voice and receded back into the alpha Minotoron’s neck, a blaring whistle sounded from within the Metrotitan. The noise pierced the Minotoron’s audio receptors, infuriating them even further until they begun to charge everything in sight. Unfortunately for the Autobots, that included them.

“Alright, Combaticons!” Onslaught yelled, “Let’s show them just how friendly WE are!”

Brawl transformed, dumping the near unconscious Vortex off of his back. “It’s about sludgin’ time!” He withdrew a rifle from inside of the turret on his back. Swindle and Blast Off did likewise, and soon the Elite Guard line was bristling with gun barrels.

“Fire!” Onslaught’s command came not a moment too soon, as the Combaticons’ itchy trigger fingers were already squeezing down on the metal beneath them. A surge of laser fire erupted from the crowd of Autobots, aimed directly at the charging Minotorons.

The guns might as well have been hurling insults rather than laser fire for all the good they did. Each time a laser hit the thick metal skin of the Minotorons, it bounced off harmlessly. Their only effect was making the bull-trucks increasingly angry. And the angrier they got, the faster they moved.

“Cease fire!” Metalhawk shouted.





"Scatter!" Onslaught added, "Put as much distance between yourselves as you can. Give them more targets to chase, so that they can't just focus on one tight-knit group!"

The Autobots spread into a semi-circle around the mechanical buffalo-construction vehicle beasts. The Minotrons slowed their charge, confused at the Autobots' tactic.

"They're big, but they're dumb!" Metalhawk yelled to Onslaught.

"Isn't that always the case?" Onslaught joked. "Maybe we can use that to our advantage."

Swindle ducked out of the way as one of the creatures leapt towards him. "Ugh!"

"Waitananoklik! Swindle? Do you still have that doohickey you stole from Over-Run?" Dion shouted towards the yellow and purple Combaticon.

"Huh? Whoa..." Swindle dodged as the Minotoron hurled itself towards him again. "I'm kinda busy here, so I can't defend myself from your slander."

"Whatever. Do you still have it?" Dion yelled as he watched an approaching bull-thing out of the corner of his optic.

"The Tressian K—" Swindle started.

"Yeah, THAT." Dion interrupted as he jumped from the path of his own Minotoron. "It both identifies frequencies as well as amplifies them, right?"

"I'm impressed. You know your obscure alien equipment well. Oof!" Swindle barely managed to dodge the bull-creature. "What about it?"

"These Mino...Minotrons of Rage's. They're sensitive to sound. Yikes!" Dion stumbled from in front of the bull-truck. "Maybe we can confuse them with a loud noise."

"Or make them angrier!" Swindle hollered.

Metalhawk had been eavesdropping. "Do it, Swindle. It's worth a try!"

"Fine." Swindle pulled out the device and set its amplification to maximum. "You might want to tune down your audio receptors!" He pressed the button on the side of the device. "And pray to whichever god or gods you believe in."

*SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE-EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE-EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE-EEEEEEEEEEEE.*

The Minotrons froze in place, then shook their heads and stamped their hooves as they tried to get the noise to stop. Finally, when they could tolerate the blaring sounds no more, they turned and ran back towards the still-open doors on the Metrotitan.

"Good thinking, Dion," Metalhawk complimented the Guardsman.

"WHAT?" Dion shouted. Then remembered he had lowered his audio receptors' sensitivity. "Oh, sorry. What?"

Metalhawk chuckled. "Nothing, Dion."

"Now that we're rid of those ghoulish beasts, we have to figure out how to get inside that base and stop Rage." Onslaught stared at the Decepticon fortress in the distance.



“Um, guys...” Lancer spoke up. “I think four ways in are getting away right now.” She pointed towards the Minotoron stampede heading for the Metrotitan.

“You’re kidding, right?” Dion groaned.



“Iiiii tThHiInNkK mMyY rrRaAtCchHeEtT jJoiInNtsS aArRrreE lLOoOosSeENniInNgG!” Dion’s voice warbled as he bounced in the dump bed of the lead Minotoron.

“UuuGgghhH.” Blast Off held his stomach plating, mimicking organics he had seen do the same. “Iiiii tThHiInNkK Iiili’ mM gGoOiInNgG tTOo bBeE sSiIcCKk...”

“Iiiii sSHoOulLdD cChHaArRgGEe fFoORr TTHhIisS rRiIdDeE!” Unlike his fellow Autobots, Swindle was enjoying himself. “WweEee-HhEEe-hHEeeEe!”

Dion’s radio hummed, giving way to Metalhawk’s voice. “Remember, Dion, once you’re inside, we need you to find a way to the control room so that you can shut down their defenses, and open a door that preferably doesn’t lead to a bullpen.”

“SsuUrReE, yYoOUu wWaAnNTt tTOo mMisSSs aAllLl tThHiISs fFUunN...” Dion signed off as the Minotoron he was riding began up the ramp.

Inside the fortress, Dion and the two Combaticons found themselves trapped. As they surveyed the Minotoron’s stables, they couldn’t help but let that sinking feeling set in as they viewed the terrible conditions: only one of the four walls was something other than a featureless, solid surface. This fourth wall had windows overhung at an angle so that observers could check on the bull-creatures below. Only, the windows were at least fourteen or fifteen mecahnometers above the floor.

“Great, now what?” Blast Off complained.

Swindle pointed at the windows. “We’re gonna have to smash through those.”

“And how do you propose we get up there to do that?” Blast Off leaned back to stare at the windows overhead.

Dion rubbed his chin. “Hmm, don’t you have a flight mode, Blast Off?”

“I have an *orbiter* mode,” Blast Off explained. “Even if I tried, I couldn’t manage controlled flight in such a confined space. I’m more of a straight-up kind of robot.”

“Great.” Dion moved towards the wall with the windows. “I guess I’ll have to try it.”

Both Swindle and Blast Off stood gaping. “You?!”

“Yeah. Me. If I can use my vehicle mode boosters while in robot mode, maybe I’ll have enough lift to fly up there and smash those windows.”

“Really?” Swindle eyed the boosters on Dion’s back greedily. “You and me will have to talk about those when this is over...”

Dion glanced back at the Combaticon and half smiled. Then he pulled his duro-lifters from his back and secured them to his forearms. He squatted, ignited his boosters and jumped. As he applied more and more thrust, he slowly lifted into the air. Up and up further the orange and blue robot climbed through the air...

“I think this is going to work!” He was just about at the windows when he overtaxed the boosters, causing them to stall out. “Oh. Sludge.” The orange and blue Autobot came tumbling back to the ground with a loud *thud!*

“Um. Maybe we don’t have to talk about those boosters after all...” Swindle muttered as the Minotrons in the pen turned towards Dion and glared at him angrily. “And, uh, you may want to get up, Dion. I think you’ve spooked our chimerical bull friends.”

“Ugggghhhh.” Dion groaned as he rubbed his back end. “I almost had it.”

“Almost doesn’t cut it, Dion,” Blast Off guffawed. Dion stared at the Combaticon and scowled.

“Don’t you worry, Blast Off, I’m gonna do it.” Dion hefted himself to his feet, squatted again, and leapt into the air. This time he was more cautious while amping up his thrust. *Slow and steady*, he thought to himself.

Fortunately, on this attempt when he reached the windows, he stayed aloft. The orange Autobot’s reflection in the windows smiled back at him. Dion took aim, drew back a fist with the strength-enhancing duro-lifter attached, and plunged his forearm through the glass. Shards tinkered to the ground below, almost in ticker-tape parade fashion, as the Combaticons below celebrated.

“Alright,” Dion yelled down to them, “I’ll find something to lower down to you. Hang on tight.” Dion turned and disappeared through the window.

On the opposite side of the windows was a small control room of sorts. The computer banks ran by themselves, automating the Minotron’s feeding, exercise...and waste removal processes. “Ick.” Dion grimaced as he read the screen. The Autobot tore open one of the computer consoles, and yanked out handful after handful of wire. He hastily braided them together to make a quasi-rope. Heading back to the windows, he tossed an end through the opening and tied the other end to one of the computer stations.

“Climb on up!” An orange helmet popped from the window overhead as Dion looked down at Swindle and Blast Off.

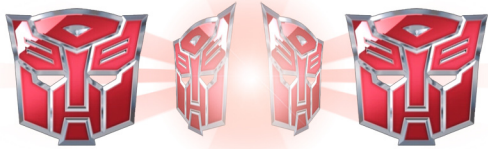
“Surely you can not be serious...” Blast Off grabbed Dion’s rope and examined the wires. “You don’t really expect this to hold our weight, do you?”

“Oh, ease up, Blast Off. Where’s your sense of adventure?” Swindle snatched the rope from his fellow Combaticon, tugged on it and began to climb.

Blast Off watched as Swindle slowly neared the shattered window above. “I’m sorry, I must have brought my need-to-live subroutine instead. Want to trade?”

“Pfft. You wish.” The yellow Combaticon clutched the window ledge and pulled himself into the control room. “There. Now it’s your turn.”

Blast Off gripped the wire rope. “Splendid.”



“I don’t know about the rest o’ you, but I’m feelin’ a leetle out in the open ‘ere, mates,” Ironfist spoke softly as he ogled the Metrotitan and, in particular, the Metrotitan’s cannons. The Autobot Elite Guard (and their female compatriot) were crouched behind a large oil pipe. Although it was not quite large enough to obscure seven Transformers, or even one Transformer the size of Onslaught.

Metalhawk patted the oil pipe in front of them with his left hand. “Don’t worry, Ironfist, Ol’ Greasy here won’t let us down. Isn’t that right, Greasy?”

The oil pipe gurgled in response.

“He’s got a point, Metalhawk,” Onslaught stated flatly.

Ironfist turned to face the Combaticon leader. “Who does? Greasey?”

Onslaught didn’t even acknowledge Ironfist’s question. “If Blast Off, Swindle and Dion don’t deactivate the defenses quickly, we’re going to have to make our move. It won’t be long until they get tired of us Peeping ROMs and take aim. And in case you couldn’t tell, those are some pretty sizable guns they can aim at us.”

“Give them a little more time, Onslaught.” Metalhawk wiped his hand, now covered in thin layer of dry oil sludge, on his leg armor. “I have faith in Dion.”

“As do I, but I also have faith in myself. We should be formulating a Plan B, just in case—” Onslaught was interrupted as Dion’s voice crackled over Metalhawk’s radio.

“Hey, big bots, we’ve got everything under control here now.” Dion paused. “It’s weird, there’s no one guarding... anything. This dragon of theirs must be a bigger distraction than we thought.”

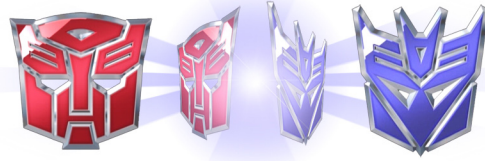
“That, or this is all a trap,” Onslaught added.

“Um, hm. I thought that as well,” Dion continued. “All the doors are unlocked. You can choose your favorite and come on in. We’ll put the fresh-baked Energon cookies on the windowsill to cool off for you. Over and out.”

Metalhawk’s radio grew silent as Onslaught spoke, “Hmm. He’s getting brash. Maybe having him and Swindle work so closely was a bad idea.”

“As long as it doesn’t affect his duties, I kinda like it.” Metalhawk examined the Metrotitan’s exterior. “There. Grid four-five-zero-two-three by three-two-zero-eight. Look good to you?”

“Looks perfect,” the Combaticon commander agreed.



“HYDRADREAD!” Rage bellowed, causing the Stormtrooper scientist to fumble his tools. “The Elite Guard have entered the base. I assume you have the weapon nearly complete?”

“Oh, yes, to be sure.” Hydradread picked his hydrospanner up from where it had bounced on the floor. “Just a few more nanokliks.”

“Perhaps you misheard me. They’re IN the base, you clod!” Rage slammed his fist against the surveillance computer’s console, demonstrating how he had earned his moniker. “We need him NOW!”

“Sir! Permission to speak freely.” Drench approached Rage and Hydradread and then saluted.

Rage rolled his optics. “Proceed.”

“I’m...not sure I understand your plan.” Drench glanced at Hydradread attempting to incorporate the personality component into the selected body. “This isn’t quite how you had described using the artifact.”

Rage chuckled. “Drench, m’boy, you see, this is only stage one. Think of it as a trial run. A controlled experiment. If he can destroy the Elite Guard, while still under my will, then we can move on to stage two. Should THAT succeed, then we place the personality component directly into the Metrotitan. Sometimes you have to look at all the small pieces before taking in the broad picture.”

Rage patted Drench’s shoulder as the lieutenant began to grasp the plan, even if he didn’t care for it. “Ah, I see. Thank you, sir.”

“No problem.” Rage smiled a faux-smile, then turned to Hydradread and yelled, “Isn’t he done yet?!”

The Stormtrooper scientist jumped. “Er, yes sir. The transformative energy has finished reformatting the body and he is starting to come online now...”

Rage smirked. “Good, get him out of the restraints. It’s time to show the Autobots the full power of the artifact they found for us.”



“We’re lost, aren’t we?” Vortex had finally rebooted, and now he was meandering through dark corridors with seemingly no determined direction.

“No, it’s not that...” Onslaught trailed off as he recognized that they had been down this particular hallway before. “Okay, maybe a little.”

“Great.” Blast Off had navigated these hallways before with Swindle and Dion, but now that they had rejoined with their companions, it was as though the walls themselves were moving, keeping them from finding their bearing. “I could have sworn there was a door there.”

“Me too,” Swindle agreed. “In fact, I’m sure of it.”

“What did you say before, Onslaught? Something about a trap?” Dion frowned as he realized now that Swindle was right. The walls and doors were changing, keeping them from finding a way to the main control center. “I think we’ve walked straight into it.”

“Indeed you have!” Rage’s voice blared over a speaker that had appeared from nowhere. “And while you’ve been wandering aimlessly, I have had the time to give the dragon back his heart!”

“Hn. Does he have speakers *everywhere*? That’s just... surreal,” Brawl puffed. He didn’t like show-offs, or ‘bots that liked the sound of their voice too much. Rage seemed to be both.

“Since you’ve been so persistent in your search, perhaps you would like to meet this dragon firsthand?” Rage laughed. “He’d certainly like to meet you!”

Replacing Rage’s taunts, a mechanical noise echoed in the dim lit corridor. *Wwrrrrtttt!* The wall in front of them began to lift into the ceiling. In the darkness residing behind the quickly receding armor plating, the dragon roared.

“My gods...” Metalhawk muttered.

A voice echoed in the dark, sound thriving where the light could not. It was a voice befitting of a dragon; deep, booming. “Gods? There are no gods here. Not any longer.” The voice paused as the sound of flapping wings could be heard from the blackness. “There is a reason the gods abandoned this world...Me. While their slaves distracted them, I attacked Mount



Helix. They fled like cowards, leaving but one thing behind. Frozen on the lips of their dead. My name...” The dragon stepped forward, his gray-green wings stretched wide, and his shadow loomed over the Elite Guard as they stared, too stunned to speak. The dragon finished his sentence by shouting his own name, “...BRIMSTONE!”

When her shock finally wore off, Lancer bent down on one knee so that she could look the dragon in his face. “Aww. He’s almost cute!”

“Uh, maybe ancient Cybertronians weren’t as big as we are now?” Vortex rubbed the back of his head. The Elite Guard chuckled.

Brimstone was taken aback. “...Cute? I may be a fraction of my original size, but have no doubt, I still have my power!”

The dragon reared back, then shot his head forward. He spat an orange ball of crackling energy against the wall behind the Autobots. The energy consumed the wall, decoupling molecules and atoms, leaving nothing but an invisible cloud of inert sub-atomic particles desperately trying to reform their previous substance.

“Sludge...I’ve never seen anything that could do that!” Swindle exclaimed. Brimstone arched back again, sending another energy ball flying past Dion.

“I’ve changed my mind; fire breath is totally NOT awesome!” Dion cried as the support beam next to him dematerialized.

“Although I would never dare suggest a retreat,” Blast Off said as he began inching away from the minuscule dragon launching mouthfuls of energy towards his fellow Guardsmen, “perhaps a strategic relocation to a position behind, FAR behind, our current one would be best?”

“I concur.” Onslaught turned to follow the brown and purple Combaticon. “A relocation would be preferable!”

“Sludge that! Just run!” Ironfist shouted as he pushed his way past both Onslaught and Blast Off.

The yellow and green knee-high dragon boasted, “Yes, run! I have missed the fear and anguish my name brings!”



“Look at them, Drench! The cowards!” Rage rubbed his hands together greedily as he stared at the computer monitors.

“Um, sir? What if we can’t control Brimstone? Even at micro-size he has the power to surprise. Do we really want to give him a larger, stronger body?” Drench glared at the diminutive dragon on the screen.

“Don’t worry, Drench, this has proven to be far beyond my expectations.” Rage placed his left hand on his hip as though to strike a celebratory pose. He waved his right hand dismissively at the long-deactivated green, gold, and teal Decepticon body propped against the command center’s wall. “I think we can skip stage two and go straight to stage three.”



“You mean, putting Brimstone’s personality component into the Metrotitan?” Drench didn’t like how that sounded. He didn’t like this mission from the start. Robbing and stealing was one thing, but Rage was beginning to take things too far. He was becoming obsessed with power, regardless of the consequences. “Won’t that be dangerous?”

“Cor, Drench! We’re going to have fail safes. How haphazard do you think I am?” Rage turned back to the monitors. “His is the only personality component powerful enough to control a body this big. I can’t wait to see the looks on the Decepticon warlords’ faces when I show up with a city-sized Decepticon obeying my every word!”

“Yes, that will be terrific.” Drench turned, then remembered to add, “Sir.”

Rage had not noticed his lieutenant’s slip in formality. Nor did he notice his lieutenant as he opened the command and control door and headed down the hallway toward the Autobots and their relentless pursuer.



“These walls keep shifting to cut us off!” Vortex complained. “How the sludge are we ever going to get away from that thing?”

Metalhawk considered his options. “Ironfist, do you have any explosives that could take down one of these walls?”

“Aye, mate. But the explooshin may just take a few o’ us with it,” Ironfist said as he tapped the wall to determine how thick it was.

“Then we’ll have to lure Brimstone and have him do the dirty work for us and...wait.” Onslaught saw something at the end of the corridor. “Is that a door?”

“Yeah! It sludgin’ is!” Dion exclaimed with joy.

Onslaught studied it with suspicion. “But where did it come from?”

“If the choice is between dragon or door, I choose door.” Swindle rushed towards the open exit. He didn’t care where it led, as long as it was away from the bad guy that spat what may as well to Swindle be mystical energy balls from his mouth.

“C’mon guys! Let’s go!” An orange energy glob flung past the Autobots and hit a support column, disintegrating it instantaneously. Brawl ran toward his Combaticon comrade. “I hate to admit it, but I have to agree with Swindle on this one.”

Dion brought his hand to his face. “Wow, if even Brawl doesn’t want to stand and fight, you know that running’s the better option!”

“Agreed.” Metalhawk shouted to his troops, “Elite Guard, follow the little yellow robot running for his life!”

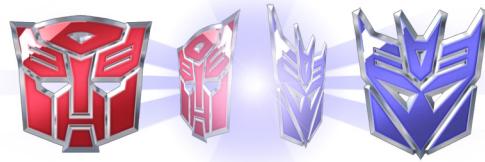
The Autobots poured through the doorway, and it shut behind them. “That was odd,” Vortex noted.

“Still, that’s not going to hold him off for long. We need a plan.” Onslaught snapped his fingers. “Ironfist, get your explosives ready.”

“How much, mate?” Ironfist began pulling various-sized charges from his hidden compartments.

Onslaught shrugged. “All of it?”

Ironfist’s optics widened with glee. “Yessir!”



“I can tear the bonds of matter completely asunder. Do you really think that you can hide behind a door?” Brimstone huffed and he puffed and blew the door down. Or rather, blew it to pieces. Tiny, sub-atomic pieces.

The Elite Guard stood their ground and fired at the green and yellow dragon. Brimstone waved a claw, creating a thin blue swath of light. The Autobots’ lasers hit the barrier and faded to nothingness. Brimstone laughed at the effort. “Is that the best you can do?”

“No. This is!” Onslaught turned the corner and fled down the hallway. The rest of the Guard followed.

The ancient Decepticon raised a serpentine brow ridge at the tactic. “Is that really so much better?” Brimstone’s snicker was cut short as he heard a sharp, electric *beep*. Then the world around him erupted in flame as a massive fireball engulfed the small dragon and rent the hallway around him.

Onslaught peered around a blackened corner of the hallway at the carnage sown by Ironfist’s demolition work. “That’s quite the punch you pack, Mr. Fist.”

“Thanks, mate.” Ironfist was enjoying the verbal pat on the back. Especially from someone like Onslaught. “I try—What the sludge?!”

The rubble pile shifted as Brimstone emerged. He was covered in black scorch marks, but looked to be otherwise intact.

“Blimey! That guy’s ‘arder to kill than a Turesian Tumble Snake!” Ironfist pulled a rifle from a compartment on his back and primed it to fire.

“Wait!” Another door appeared behind the Elite Guard and opened. Behind it, Drench stood with his liquid rifle in hand.

Brawl’s fury boiled as he saw the robot’s purple badge and charged at the Decepticon. “You little grime-bucket! I’ll tear you a new ventilator!”

Drench held his hands out, hoping to show that he meant no trouble. “Please! I don’t want this. Rage and Hydradread have gone too far. I want OUT!”

Down the hall, Brimstone roared, “I AM BRIMSTONE! NO ONE SHALL DEFEAT ME!”

“Well, we’d gladly take you with us.” Metalhawk pitched his thumb back towards the howling dragon. “But first we have to take care of that.”

“No, you really don’t,” Drench explained. “That tiny body can’t handle the transformative energy of Brimstone’s personality component. If he keeps generating that atom-smashing energy of his, he’s going to explode from the inside out.”

“So that’s it? The correct answer was ‘waiting’?” Swindle eyed Drench suspiciously.

“Well, yes and no. He could easily defeat you all before he went critical. But your explosion, it didn’t do him any favors.” Drench turned and walked to the next door. “So I suggest we leave. Now.”

“How do we know you’re tellin’ the truth, huh? This could be a lie, just so that we leave without pounding that tin-plated wing thing flat.” Brawl crossed his arms and refused to move.

“Fine. Lower your scanning shields and scan him at frequency point five-two-three-four-nine.” Drench opened the door and stepped through.

Onslaught leaned back around the corner. “I’m not sure I see...Oh!” It took a moment for the sensors to detect, but Onslaught eventually saw what Drench had seen. A small crack ran along Brimstone’s spine, from which energy radiated. As Onslaught watched, the energy began to expand, soon bathing the dragon in a white halo. “Yup, he’s right. Let’s get out of here.”

Brawl remained where he stood. “That’s it? Really?”

Onslaught pulled the stubborn Combaticon through the doorway. “Yes. Move. Now!”

Drench opened a third door, and the surface of Cybertron revealed itself. “Faster paces would be prudent!”

Just as the Elite Guard and their allies jumped to the ground beside the fortress, Brimstone exploded. The white flash of blinding energy devoured the Metrotitan and everything else within a fifty hic radius. Including the fleeing Autobots.



Magnum lifted his optics over the top of the report and directed a glare toward Metalhawk. “You really expect me to believe all this? Gods, dragons...and here it says that you all died!”

“Well, I may have taken a few liberties...” Metalhawk shifted in his chair and looked at Onslaught sitting next to him.

“Perhaps you should read my report, it’s probably more...accurate,” Onslaught offered, as he held a data pad out to the Autobot High Council representative in charge of Elite Guard oversight. Magnum took the pad and browsed through it.

“Hmm, Median, monsters and Metrotitan. It’s all there.” Magnum dropped the data pad on his desk. “Minus the artistic license, of course.” Magnum glowered at Metalhawk, who shrugged. “Well, at least it’s better than Ironfist’s single sentence, or Swindle’s report that read like romance holo-pulp. With him being the hero *and* love-interest, of course.”

“That’s Swindle, alright.” Onslaught gripped his chair, mentally scolding his Munitions Expert. “What about our two ‘recruits’?”

“Lancer is going back to meet up with Strika and Greenlight. They plan on a memorial service for Glyph. Drench, on the other hand, is now thinking of joining the Elite Guard himself. He is currently being retrofitted to meet Guard standards, and he’s choosing a new paint job so that he can forget about his past. He’s even forfeited his weaponry so that our scientists can reverse-engineer something similar. Which reminds me, I must admit you two do know how to go above and beyond the call of duty. Congratulations to you both on your successful mission, even if this Heart was lost...Which is something I may need to discuss further with Alpha Trion.” Magnum shook the Autobots’ hands.

“Thank you, sir!” Metalhawk and Onslaught replied in unison. Metalhawk wondered just how courteous Magnum’s discussion with the aged Autobot would be.

As the two stood up, Magnum’s office door opened, and Outback handed the Councilman another data pad. Magnum glanced it over. “Hold on, ‘bots,” he called to Metalhawk and Onslaught. “It looks like you have another assignment. What do you know about Praxium?”

## Epilogue

The room was brightly lit, causing the gold and various other ornamentations to sparkle and twinkle. It was almost like the light was giggling, joyfully bounding from one glimmering gold statue to the next. The blue and black robot admired the trophies before him, and his armor sparkled in contest with the gold amassed in front of him. He patted the arm of his throne with one hand while lifting a glass of oil to what organics could loosely call lips with the other. It had been another fine assault against the Autobot forces; they had recovered so many nice things. *It’s about time those aristocrats and ‘generals’ were repaid with the kindness they have shown we Decepticons*, he thought.

A white and teal female Decepticon entered carrying another sample of oil for her commander. “My Lord, this is straight from Traachon’s personal oil cellar.”

“Thank you, Lyzack. I do appreciate your loyalty...and promise that one day we will find your brother.” The robot nodded to the female Decepticon as he plucked the new glass of oil from her tray. “Please, tell me, how goes Rage’s attempted conquest of Cybertron?”

“There were reports of a massive explosion at his last known coordinates. It would seem that Rage’s foray into the past was more than he bargained for.” Lyzack took the empty oil glass and set it on her tray.

“Excellent news, indeed. He was becoming a nuisance, that one.” The blue robot drank from the second oil glass. “Mmm. Put this among the best.”

“Yes, my liege.” Lyzack bowed.

“Oh, and Lyzack, tell Falcon that I would like a full report on this Rage incident. Especially the gung-ho Autobots that answered his challenge. Our source told the most fascinating stories about them.” He swirled the oil in the glass and took another sip. “I would very much like to meet these Combaticons, as I believe she called them...”