

# THE CYBERTRONIAN TIMES



Issue 9, August 2008  
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## IN THIS ISSUE:

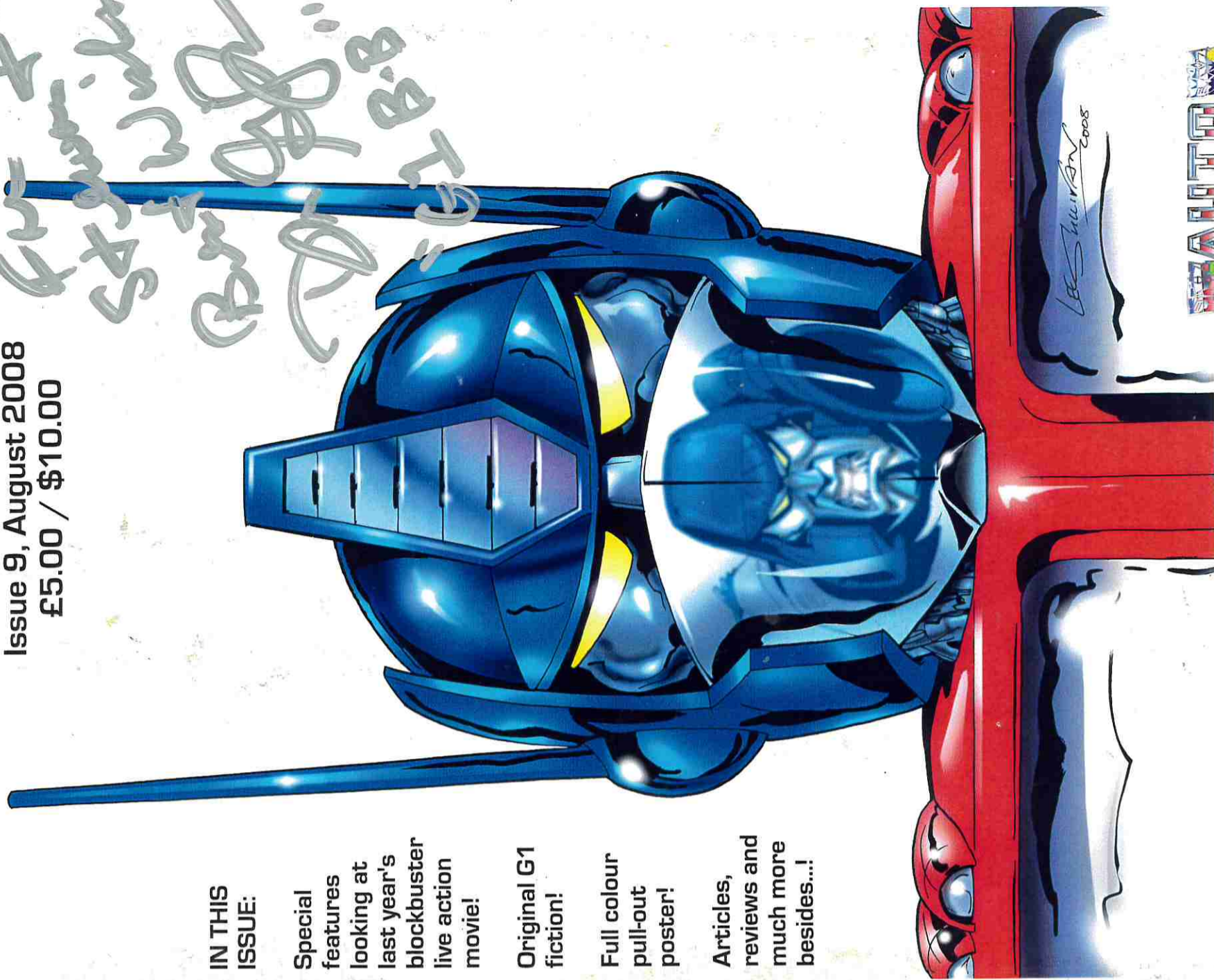
Special features looking at last year's blockbuster live action movie!

Original G1 fiction!

Full colour pull-out poster!

Articles, reviews and much more besides...!

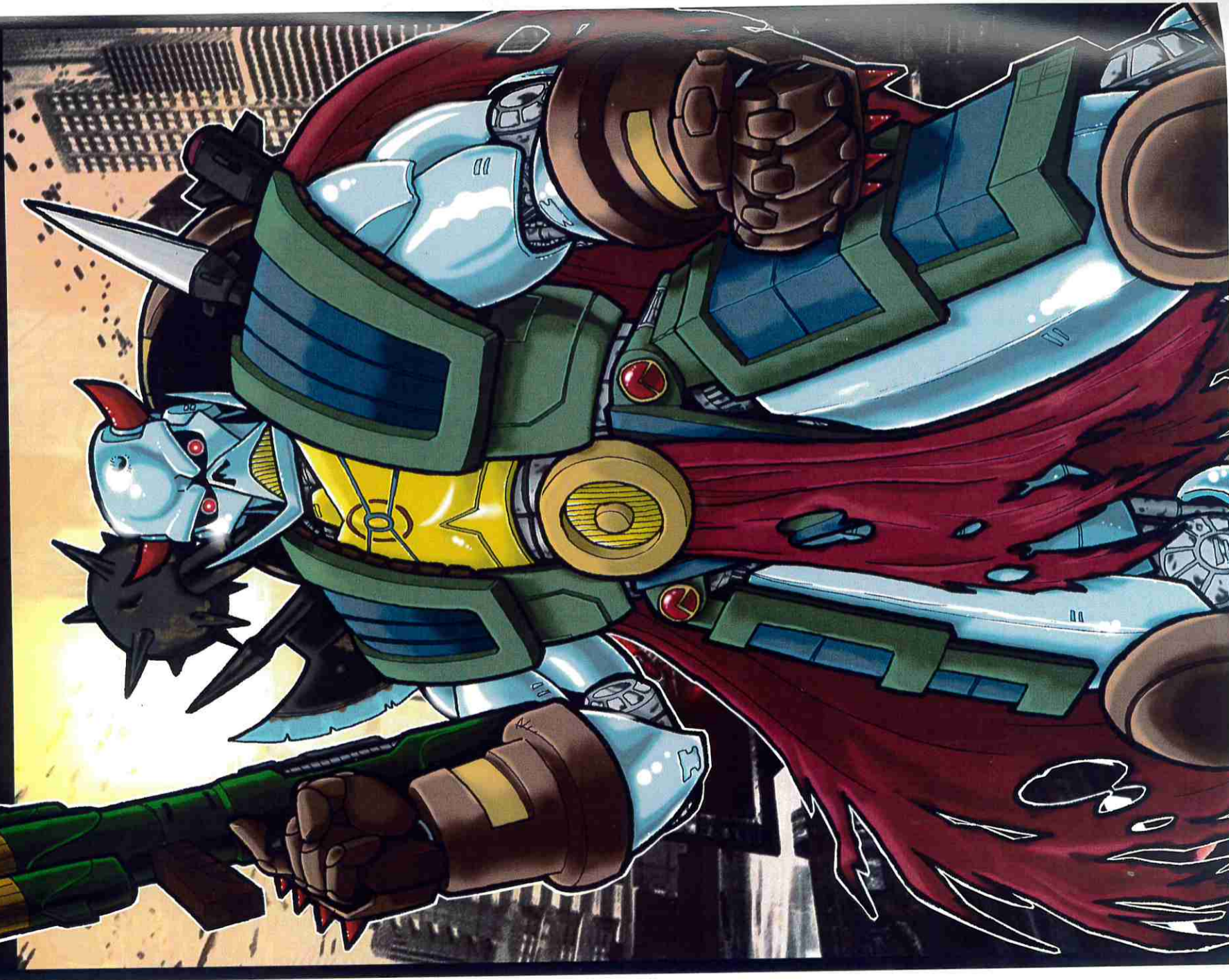
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## THE CYBERTRONIAN TIMES

## AWFUL ASSEMBLY AUGUST 2008

# DEATH'S HEAD



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# AUTO ASSEMBLY 2008



## Introduction

It's hard to believe that it's been two years since the last Auto Assembly event. A lot has happened since then both personally and in the world of Transformers...

Sven and I really needed to have a year off last year. We've been running Auto Assembly since 2000 almost non-stop with just a break in 2002 and for Infinite Frontiers as an organisation we haven't really stopped running one event or another or being involved in some form of major project since 1989 so we really needed some personal time to recharge our batteries and reflect on what changes a future Auto Assembly would need to give YOU, the fans, the type of event you deserve.

We know that Auto Assembly: Target 2006 wasn't perfect - far from it - but we hope that we have fixed all of the faults, have some new ideas that we think you'll love and we have a great guest line-up and programme of events throughout the day!

It's sad that we had to miss out running a convention last year as it was a pretty eventful time for Transformers. Not only did we have the live action movie which turned out to be one of the blockbuster movies of the year (which we've got coverage of in this issue) but also saw the return of a major UK Transformers comic through Titan which is currently hitting very impressive sales figures.

We've had an astonishing range of merchandise following on from the movie, a new line of toys and a new show with Transformers Animated reaching out to a younger generation of fans and all of this is hopefully bringing in much needed new blood into Transformers fandom. After all, none of us are getting any younger!

Pulling Auto Assembly together this year has been pretty tough. The hiatus has left us a little rusty and our jobs and personal lives have left us with little spare time to be able to devote to the convention so it really has been a case of grabbing every spare second and squeezing the most out of it to get everything done on time and I have to be honest and say

that if it wasn't for the support of our families we wouldn't be able to bring this convention to you every year. I know Sven gets all of his family involved each year on the day itself helping all over the convention and in the build-up behind the scenes packing goodie bags and with numerous other jobs. This year I certainly wouldn't have been able to have coped without the help and support of my fiancée Trish and my future step-daughter Hannah who have both stuffed more confirmation packs than I could possibly imagined!

It goes without saying that no convention of this scale could run smoothly without our team of volunteers who help out on the day itself - you all deserve a round of applause and we couldn't run the convention without you. We can't thank you all enough for your help every year.

We'd like to thank all of the following companies and organisations for their help and support and generous donations this year which has helped make Auto Assembly 2008 possible: Activision, Liberation Entertainment, Nostalgia & Comics, Red Mill Snack Foods, Sandwell MBC, The Entertainer, and Titan Magazines.

Finally, the most important people - YOU the attendees, who give us your support every year attending the convention! If it wasn't for you and your kind words of encouragement, we wouldn't keep coming back year after year doing this so thank you, each and everyone one of you and as long as you want it, we'll be back next year!

Simon Plumbe  
Auto Assembly

## Auto Assembly 2008 Guest Profiles

For this year's convention, we have what is probably our biggest and best guest line-up to-date with guests once again covering all aspects of the Transformers universe including comic and TV guests! Well, it's time to introduce them to you....

### DAN GILVEZAN

Dan Gilvezan began his career in animation as Spider-Man/Peter Parker on NBC's "Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends." After this auspicious beginning he went on to perform as a series regular on many action/adventure cartoon shows of the 1980's. In addition to voicing Bumblebee, everyone's favorite yellow Volkswagen, Dan provided the voice for Goldbug, Hot Spot, Outback, Rollbar, Scamper and Skids on the original "Transformers" animated series.



He was also the voice of jet pilot Slipstream on "GI Joe," love interest Sean Harrison on

"Jem and the Holograms," prince Dargon on "Sectaurs," Questar on "Dino-Riders," Commander Dirk Courage on "Spiral Zone" and Victor Vector on "Ring Raiders." On the lighter side he played Cooler, the mongrel leader of the "Pound Puppies," as well as the ever put upon Henry Mitchell in CBS's "New Adventures of Dennis the Menace." Work on other animated series include: "Rugrats," "A Pup Named Scooby-Doo," "Talespin," "The Real Ghostbusters," "Family Dog," "Fantastic Four," "The Tick," "Grim and Evil" and others.

No stranger to on-camera television, Dan has appeared as a guest-star on "NYPD Blue," "Boston Legal," "Bones," "The Bernie Mac Show," "Third Rock From the Sun," "Diagnosis Murder," "Love and Curses," "Sabrina, the Teenaged Witch," and many others.

This fall he can be heard as the evil Boogersnatch on "Underfist," a ninety minute animated special produced by Cartoon Network featuring recurring characters from "The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy."

Dan's complete list of credits can be found on his website: [www.dangilvezan.com](http://www.dangilvezan.com) or on [imdb.com](http://imdb.com).

He currently lives in Beverly Hills, California with his wife, Joselle.

### SIMON FURMAN

Simon Furman is a writer for comic books and TV animation, his name inextricably linked to *Transformers*, the 80s toy phenomenon. He has written literally hundreds of stories about the war-torn 'robots in disguise', for Marvel Comics (US and UK), Dreamwave IDW Publishing and most recently Titan Magazines for the latest UK *Transformers* comic. His other comic book credits include *Dragon's Claws*, *Death's Head*, *Alpha Flight*, *Turok*, *She-Hulk*, *Robocop* and *What If?*



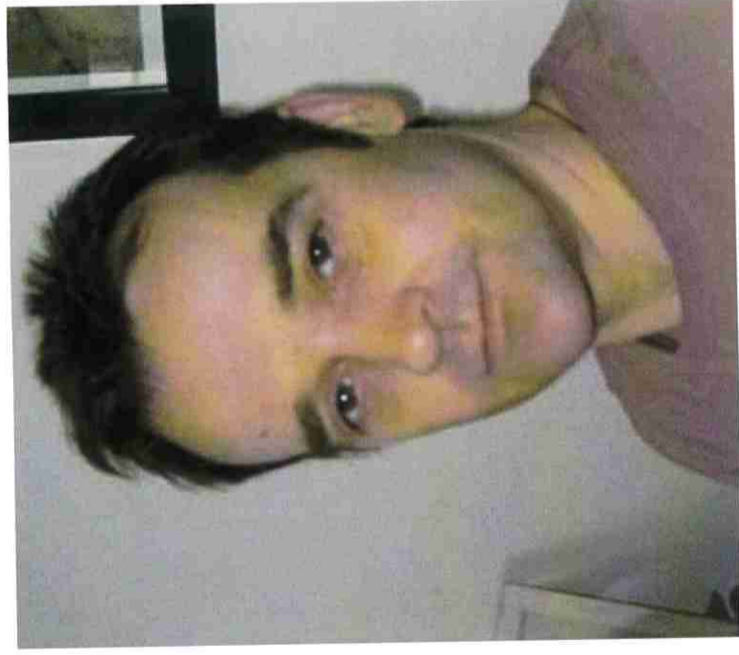
In the TV animation field, Furman has written for shows such as *Beast Wars*, *Roswell Conspiracies*, *Dan Dare*, *X-Men: Evolution*, *Alien Races* and *A. T. O. M.*

Editorially, Furman oversees Titan Books' range of *Transformers* titles and their 'Comics Creators' series (which includes *Comics Creators on X-Men* and *Writers on Comics Scriptwriting 2*). Furman's other recent writing work includes *Ronan* and *Death's Head 3.0* (both for Marvel), *Power Rangers SPD*, *A. T. O. M* (the comic) and *Wallace & Gromit*.

He is also the author of *Transformers: The Ultimate Guide*, a lavish twentieth anniversary hardcover, and a *Dr. Who* audio adventure ('The Axis of Insanity'). Online creation *The Engine: Industrial Strength* can be viewed at [www.wildfur.net](http://www.wildfur.net) or [www.whorunstheengine.net](http://www.whorunstheengine.net)

#### **GEOFF SENIOR (by Geoff Senior!)**

Since leaving the world of comic books around 14 years ago, I've been working as a storyboard artist in the world of advertising. The work is interesting as one day I may be working on a beer promotion and the next day a car or anything in between. I have enjoyed it as I've had to learn how to draw 'real' people and be aware of modern fashions and hairstyles etc. And as far as cars are concerned my cars no longer look like boxés with wheels!



I feel my work has improved leaps and bounds over the recent years because of the huge variety of subjects I've worked on. But I will always be grateful for the storytelling skills and experience I picked up from the drawing of *Transformers*, *Dragons Claws*, *Deaths Head* and *Judge Dredd* among others.

Recently, I've been busy starting up my own office/studio (*Smudge Pencil*) in central London. I have worked through other studios but decided to take the plunge and be my own boss.

I still draw the conventional way but now use Photoshop to colour in. I enjoy it and have put my inks and Magic Markers away for good I hope. Though like everyone else I haven't thrown them away, just in case.

On a social basis I regularly meet up with Robbie Morrison who lives up the road and Simon Furman who will be moving to an area nearby soon. I am thankful for the years on *Transformers* and the friends I made during that time. It is flattering to meet and shake the hand of a reader and to have been an important part of their childhood... Though they are very tall these days.

#### **SIMON WILLIAMS**

Simon Williams is not only a professional comic artist hailing from Wales, in the United Kingdom... but is also Wales ever lovin' idol of millions. Since breaking into the comics business in 2003, Simon has worked on various UK comic titles... including *Transformers Armada*, *Spectacular Spider-Man Adventures*, and the *Incredible Hulk Annual*. He has also recently produced artwork for Panini Comics' recent *Death's Head* collections, IDW's *Transformers: Beast Wars* sourcebooks and Titan's *Transformers UK* magazine.



He has also produced artwork for various other forms of *Transformers*-related media, such as DVDs, toys and collectable merchandise... including the official Optimus Prime and Megatron standees for *CardboardCutout.net*. He is currently working on Liberation Entertainment's new line of Marvel Comics DVDs.

Once he achieves his plan of world domination, he plans to tell all in his autobiography, *From Idle... To Idol...*

#### **ANDREW WILDMAN**

**Andrew Wildman** is a designer/illustrator of some 25 years industry experience. His work has featured in numerous advertisements and publications, but it is in the field of comic book art that he is best known. Early work

included strips in a host of Marvel UK titles, including

**The Real Ghostbusters**  
**Thundercats**  
**Galaxy Rangers**  
**Transformers**



Andrew graduated to the US *Transformers* comic (as of issue #69), handling the art chores throughout the rest of the book's run. Firmly ensconced at Marvel US, Andrew then worked on a number of their titles, including:

**G.I. Joe**  
**X-Men Adventures**  
**The Hulk**  
**Spider-Man**  
**Venom**  
**Fantastic Four Unplugged**  
**Spider-Man 2099**

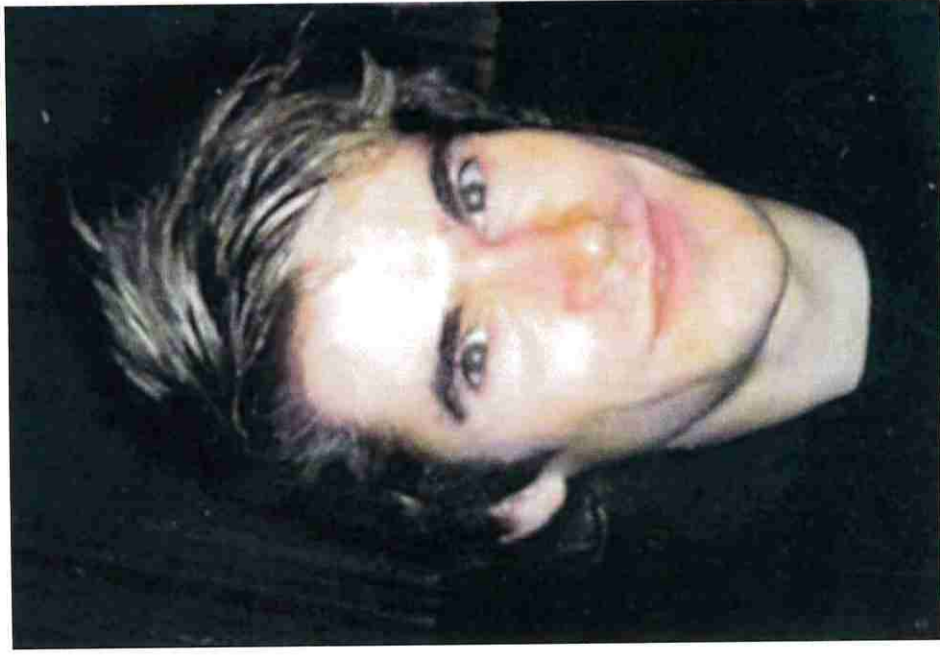
as well as a brief stint on *Nightman* for Malibu Comics. His other work includes character design and animated movie production for the video games industry, providing storyboards for **Wing Commander** and design/concept work on:

**The Mummy**  
**Gunlok**  
**Gunfighter**  
**Delta Force**

**Largo Winch**  
More recently, Andrew returned to comics with **Transformers: The War Within – The Dark Ages**, with long-time collaborator Simon Furman.

Andrew has recently designed characters for the animated TV show **Legend of the Dragon**, currently airing on Saturday morning BBC, animated movie **Ali Baba and The Forty Thieves** and **Kong: Return to The Jungle**. He is also currently producing all the art for the **Power Rangers** strip in the UK *Jetix* magazine and working on a new animated, pre-school children's television series with his wife Lesley and writer colleague Simon Jowett.  
For further information visit [www.wildman.uk.com](http://www.wildman.uk.com)

#### JASON CARDY



Jason is a professional colour-artist in the comics industry and has been involved in several Transformers-related projects. His work can be seen very regularly on the covers, and in the pages, of the current Transformers UK comic from Titan, colouring work by artists such as Guido Guidi. Enjoying

Frankenstein) for Classical Comics.



Originally trained as a traditional 2D Animator, Kat holds a keen interest in all things animated - perhaps this is why she finds the TFA style and characters so appealing! Outside of work she likes to help out with saving the world in any way she can. She enjoys supporting Andrew Wildman's Charity "Draw The World Together" at their shows, and hopes that one day she might make it in the industry as an Artist as well as colourist... Let's just hope they spell her name right!

#### STAZ JOHNSON (based on Wikipedia)

Staz made his professional debut working on role playing game magazines later moving on to working for Marvel UK where he worked on some of their more popular titles at the time - **Action Force** and **Transformers** during it's later issues. It was in this time that Staz had his first work appear Stateside in the Marvel's **GI Joe** title in 1989 - a reprint from Action Force.

He has subsequently worked on **2000AD** and his links with Marvel continued In 1994 when he started to work for Marvel US on titles such as Thor and Spiderman.

Following that, he then "switched sides" working for DC Comics on some of their major titles including **Detective Comics**, **Catwoman**, **Robin**, **Batman/Aliens II** and more.

He is continually working in the comics industry as his website highlights and recently returned to Transformers pencilling an issue for Titan Comics.

#### LEW STRINGER

Lew made his comic debut in 1983 and has been a fulltime freelance artist and writer since 1984. In that time he has worked for countless publishers including IPC, Marvel Comics, Egmont, Panini, and D.C. Thomson, covering the comics field from originated characters to licensed properties.

He has produced strips for numerous publications including Viz; Beano Summer Special; Buster; Oink!; Fun-Size Dandy; Fun-Size Beano; Sonic The Comic; White Dwarf; Ghostbusters; Transformers, and national newspapers DAILY STAR and SUNDAY SPORT. Lew has also written articles on the history of comics for publications such as 2000 AD, The Comics Journal, and the BBC website.

Many of his characters have enjoyed long and popular runs, including ten years for "Tom Thug" in Buster and four years for "Combat Colin" in Marvel's Transformers comic. He was also a regular writer on Sonic The Comic for seven years.

The past two decades have seen major changes to the UK comics market, but Lew has always adapted to maintain regular work in the industry. Having worked for publications for all age groups, his work has appeared in such diverse titles as CiTY Tellytots and Lego Adventures for the nursery market, to Viz and Sweet FA for the adult reader.

a large circulation, IDW will be reprinting these comics Stateside later in the year.

In other TF-related productions, he digitally inked and coloured the official Hasbro Gen1 Transformers standees, drawn by Simon Williams, with whom he also collaborated on artwork for the TF Metrodome DVDs. Jason also worked with Kat Nicholson on some IDW Beast Wars material and coloured Simon's artwork featured in the recent Death's Head collected trade paperbacks.

Away from Transformers, Jason contributes to the 'Eagle award'-winning UK Spectacular Spiderman comic and has a colouring partnership with Kat. They have worked on the Actionman ATOM comic and are currently colouring up modern graphic novels of classic literature, such as Frankenstein and various Shakespeare & Charles Dickens titles. Their first book, Henry V, recently won an 'IPPY' award in the US.

Having read the original UK Gen1 comic books as a child, Jason is proud to be contributing to the world of Transformers alongside the original creators and artists. Back then, his first TF experiences involved the G1 Optimus Prime and Bluestreak toys, both of which ended up in so many pieces the Allspark couldn't have put them back together.

#### KAT NICHOLSON

Back in 2006 Kat Nicholson coloured the Beast Wars Megaton postcard for Auto Assembly. Since then she's coloured a few Beast Wars illustrations for IDW and more recently a preview of an up and coming Transformers Animated Magazine in the Transformers UK comic. However to this date none of these TF publications have managed to credit her correctly... (Who is "Kat Robinson"?!) The TFA Magazine proper is due to be out in October and Kat is very much looking forward to working on it!

Other titles Kat's worked on include Bee Movie & DreamWorks Tales and, as part of a co-colouring partnership with Jason Cardy, also Action Man A.T.O.M, Spectacular Spiderman, and graphic novels (including

In recent years he has expanded his work overseas as well as the UK. Since 1997 he has written and drawn *The Suburban Satanists* for Egmont where it appears in the Swedish and Norwegian editions of *Herman Hedning* comic. 2005 saw the publication of *Brickman Begins* for the Los Angeles based publisher Active Images and since 2006 he has been creating a regular Brickman strip for the monthly *Elephantmen* comic published in the USA by Image Comics.

Some of Lew's current work includes:

- *Team Toxic* in **Toxic** fortnightly magazine
- *Mini Marvels* for **Spectacular Spider Man**
- *Brickman* in **Elephantmen** for Image Comics
- Artwork on a new series for **The Beano**
- Various strips occasionally for **VIZ** comic, including *Felix and His Amazing Underpants* and *Suicidal Syd*

#### LIAM SHALLOO



Liam started colouring in his final year of Uni, spending all his free time progressing. After graduating in 2006 with a Degree in Digital Animation and Digital Arts, he was offered his first professional work; Spotlight Hot Rod for IDW. Since then his worked on tie in children books for the *Transformers Movie*, and has worked on multiple books for Titan and IDW. Liam spends most of his time bouncing between London and Dallas and is currently working on the new *Transformers Animated*

mini series, and providing cover colours for the Best of the UK reprints, both for IDW... Narf!

#### A Masterpiece by Sven Harvey

Tomy Takara have finally announced the next release in what is becoming a huge draw to the brand both for fan and those looking in from the outside of the fandom, all around the world.

One look at Masterpiece Convoy, Megatron or the red and white Starscream and the general consensus appears to be "Wow".

So far Convoy (Optimus Prime) has been released twice in the Japanese Masterpiece line, MP-01 as the cab only and MP-04 (Convoy Complete) with his trailer, with a repaint as Ultra Magnus as the second release (cunningly labelled MP-02). I wont bore you with another review of that mould as I have already stated my reservations in a past CT.

Megatron was the 5th release (MP-05 - see the pattern?) which was quite a triumph thought the size of the figure results in a very oversized Walther P38 handgun.



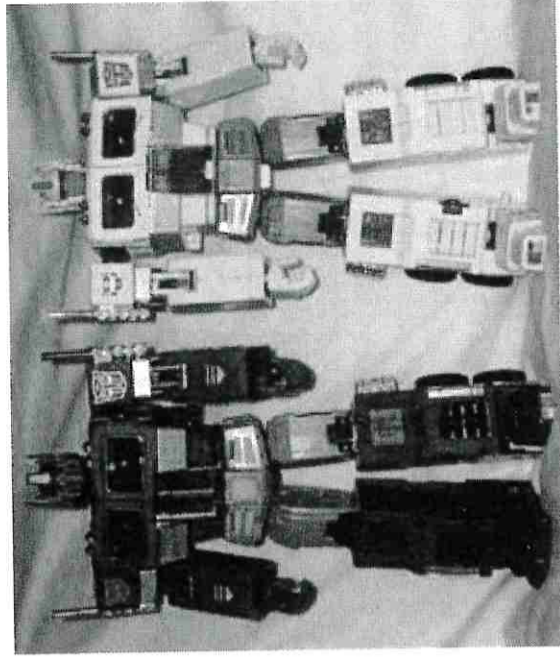
Around Megatron has been various releases of a mould based on the F-15 Eagle jet fighter, starting with what appeared to be a south pacific ocean camouflage version of the jet as Starscream as MP-03 (though from my research I cant find any images of the plane in such colouring.) There was some dismay

to the choice of colour scheme, but the model itself was absolutely brilliant with a huge amount of detail - though in robot mode some of the kibble hanging off the figure is a little distracting.

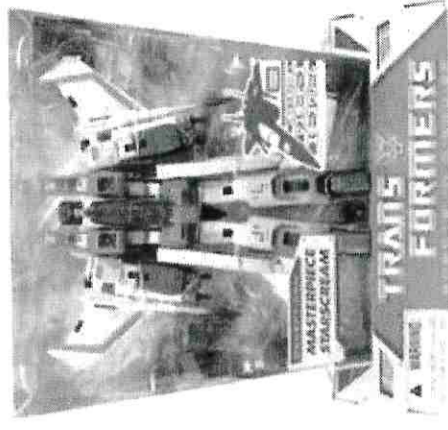
The mould was reissued in the appropriate black and purple livery for Skywarp, and the rear of the box also showed the Blue livery suggesting a release of Thundercracker later on, and indeed following on from MP-06 Skywarp, MP-07 Thundercracker will be released by the end of the year. Bit of a no brainer really.

Outside of Japan the Convoy mould got released with, unfortunately, cut down smoke stacks and a dodgy "battle damage" paint job (usual Hasbro woolly thinking) as a 20th Anniversary release for 2004. This was then repainted slightly for a UK release which was badged as a 20th Anniversary (1985-2005) which not only was wrong as Hasbro Industries GB Ltd released TransFormers originally here in 1984 but was released through Toys R US exclusively... in 2006.

Just as the UK version was making into Toys R Us stores up and down the country with its superior paint job with toned down battle damage an almost orange version with very dubious yellow head highlights was released in the USA as a 20th Anniversary of the 1986 Animated movie. The new version also came with a stand featuring the Autobot insignia and a sound chip, but the voice was not that of Peter Cullen (G1 Prime) or even Gary Chalk (Beast Wars Optimus Primal / Armada etc Optimus Prime), but of some Hasbro employee known within the fan community as "the Janitor"! The paint scheme on this version is really quite hideous as thought its red, well sort of, the main body looks quite orange especially next to the other versions. However the worst thing was the USA packaging though nicely sporting the classics TransFormers style also stated "20th Anniversary Movie DVD edition... and had no DVD in it. Unsurprisingly under European and UK consumer laws this wording was dropped from the version that made it out to retail here for Christmas last year!



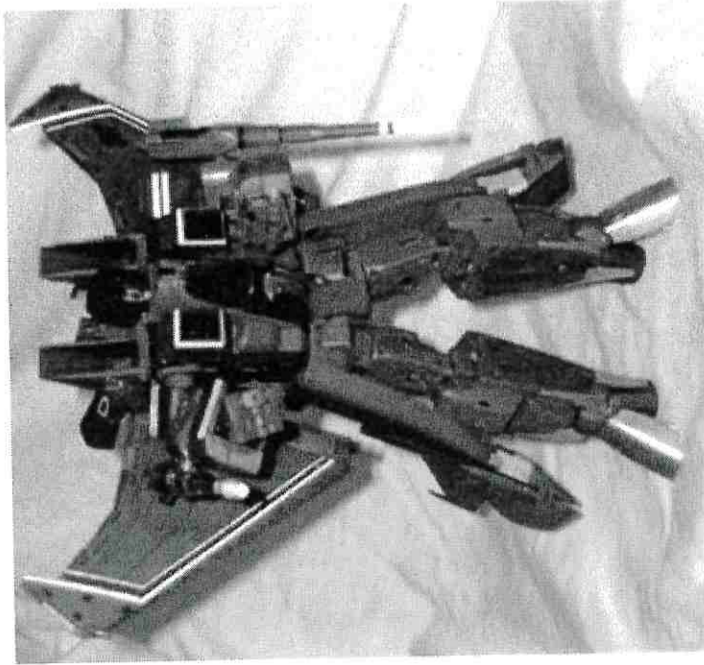
Towards 2007 Hasbro released the first in their Masterpiece line. Using packaging in the same style as the Classics range which had filled the gap between TransFormers: Cybertron and the toy line for the 2007 live action movie (and promptly sold like crazy as it was highly G1 influenced!), Starscream got released using the Takara Masterpiece mould but in a very G1 like colour scheme. However once again the design department at Hasbro had to ruin the look of the piece by adding battle damage... ughhh! A UK release of the Hasbro Masterpiece Starscream has not been confirmed or denied.



Fortunately Tomy Takara saw the potential of a G1 repaint and commissioned a "USA Edition" release of MP-03. Though using a bit of black to pick out panel lines and show some functional wear as would be on the real aircraft if it was white/light grey, the Japanese USA Edition featured a cleaner livery and as

usual for a Japanese release, a more expensive grade of materials.

The future of the Masterpiece line is uncertain but with the preparations underway worldwide for the 25th Anniversary of the franchise only an idiot would bet against further releases after Thundercracker, especially as earlier this year an advert appeared with the Transformers Masterpiece logo and what appeared to be the silhouette of Grimlocks G1 boxart, whilst at BotCon 2007 the suggestion of a Masterpiece Soundwave was broached by the Hasbro representatives.



Grimlock is, if you'll pardon the pun, a no brainer, especially considering that Takara is now merged with Tomy who have had a great deal of experience with mechanical dinosaurs (Zoids anyone). The only difficulty is the scale issue - so far the Masterpiece range has not had any kind of set scale, except possibly to try and ensure that the robot modes of the characters look about the right size compared with each other (ie Starscream/Skywarp/Thundercracker being significantly smaller than Prime and Megatron). But then Grimlock offers up an interesting dilemma... in the cartoon series he was significantly bigger than Prime and Megatron - making a Masterpiece toy ... well frankly HUGE! Of course in the comic they took the statement in Optimus Primes biography that he was the largest of all the Autobots literally. Grimlock

appeared in the comic to be as tall as Primes shoulder height (as Primes radio controlled hand crushed Grimlocks arm preventing him from detonating the Arks booby trapped Guardian robot.) I get a feeling they might go with that to have a 10-11 inch tall robot mode somehow!

Soundwave would undoubtedly be around that height too and would carry significantly less bulk - but would very likely come with at least one cassette, though he wouldn't be complete without Ravage, Rumble, Frenzy and Laserbeak at least!

Lets hope that 2009 brings at least a couple of new releases for the range!

### Transformers Artwork - An Affordable Luxury by Simon Plumbe

Most fans collect toys and while all of us collect Transformers across several ranges, not everyone has the luxury of being able to afford to own some of the rarer toys on the market. At best, many of us are able to own some of the convention exclusives that are limited to around 1,500 pieces worldwide although as these rise in price to around £100+ per toy even this can be out of the price range of many fans.

For regular Auto Assembly attendees, certainly the majority of us would never even be able to consider owning the incredibly rare "lucky draw" toys displayed by the guys from Transformers@TheMoon that have been seen over the last couple of years. These toys, often limited to between 5-20 worldwide, change hands for as much as £1,000 on eBay and are way beyond the reach of most fans.

However, there are ways that ALL of us can get hold of pretty much unique collectables and it's something I've been interested in for a few years now - original comic artwork...

If you stop and think for a moment, Transformers comics have been around now since the early 80s from an incredible number of publishers with work being done by

countless artists and if you tried to work out just how many pages of artwork have been produced, it's easy to see why it can be relatively easy for a lot of fans to be able to afford to own at least one piece!

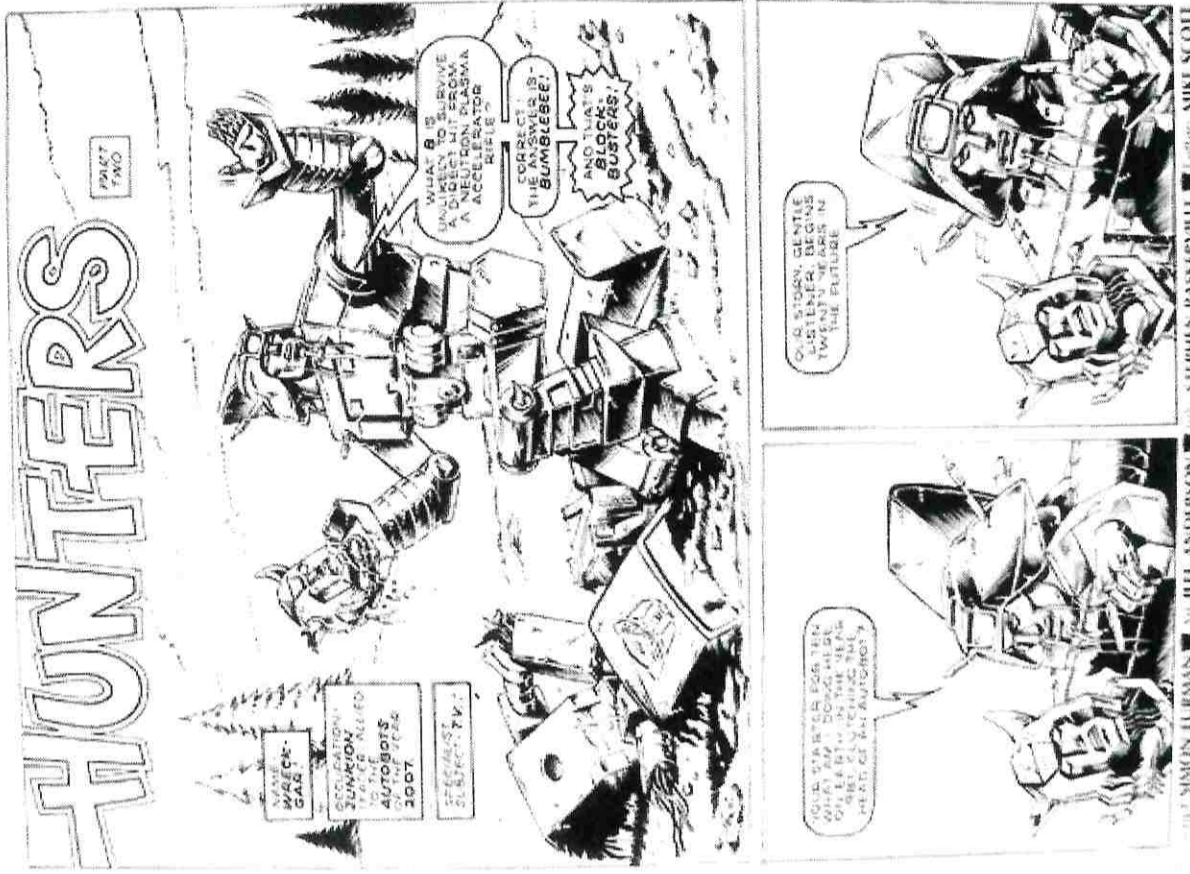
If you look at the Marvel UK comics to start off with, the series ran for over 320 issues. Just counting these comics alone, that would account for well over 3,000 pages of artwork from a considerable range of talent - Andrew Wildman, Geoff Senior, Lee Sullivan, Staz Johnson, Jeff Anderson, Dan Reed, to name but a few! Many of these can be bought for as little as £30-£50 each (although more significant pieces such as cover art and pages from key stories will fetch more).

With Transformers comics having been released by at least eight publishers since 1984 (Marvel US, Marvel UK, 3H, Devil's Due, Dreamwave, IDW, Panini, and Titan), there's no shortage of artwork available from an incredible range of artists.

Comic cover art does seem to be of greater interest and this is something that I see on sale far less frequently. Obviously, it depends on the artist and the key here is the story - no matter how good the artwork is, if the story itself is awful you're not going to get much of a demand for it but unlike the strip pages there's only one cover so it does make it somewhat more collectible...

Okay, so there's not ALWAYS one cover as regular Dreamwave and IDW fans are accustomed to. The less-common variant cover art should be of more interest to collectors and if you can ever find any, unused cover artwork should be priceless! The pride in my own collection is an unused cover variant to Issue 2 of Transformers Universe by Guido Guidi. It never got past the pencils stage and it cost me \$140. It's a stunning piece and worth every penny as you will probably have seen for yourself at any Auto Assembly art display.

As I said, some pages are more valuable to collectors than others. Significant stories from comics tend to fetch higher prices for individual pages, first pages of stories naturally fetch more, as do significant cover pages (anything from Target 2006 for



example). Apart from pages from the very early issues, probably the most valuable and of most interest are unpublished pieces (from cancelled issues such as Dreamwave comics) and unused variant cover artwork which will usually fetch three-figure sums!

In contrast, there are some works that have over inflated prices. The most notorious would be artwork from Dreamwave owner Pat Lee. Most of his artwork that does appear for sale is usually sold on his behalf by dealers and rarely sells for less than £200+ per page of standard artwork. While his work is good, it certainly can't warrant a price tag that high in comparison with other artists.

Another area of interest to some collectors is that of conventions related original artwork. Most conventions will commission artists to design posters, exclusive comic covers, covers for magazines or new artwork for additional elements to accompany the events and - in some cases - this artwork ends up on the market for sale. These can vary in terms of value as their appeal to collectors is mixed. Not all fans may be interested as it's not from mainstream Transformers work so it will have a stronger appeal to those who attended the event, but there will be some who will find it more desirable because of its limited public exposure.

In the case of Auto Assembly, we've had stunning artwork created by some of the best artists in the UK and we've had almost all of the original cover art for The Cybertronian Times and postcard artwork for sale in our charity auctions, created and in pretty much every case these have sold for around £100 each. Has the auction environment artificially increase the value of the artwork? Quite possibly...

Something that is a little harder to find is toy box art. Again, the appeal of this is limited more to those of you who like a specific toy and older artwork is going to be nigh-on-impossible to find as it would have all been created in-house by Hasbro or Takara but a lot of the more recent work from Armada onwards for example has commissioned contemporary artists who do have their artwork for sale and some of it does crop up for sale every now and then. The same can be said for convention exclusive toys that do have packaging although as is the case with a lot of convention related material, it's appeal can be somewhat limited. Generally I have found that toy and convention artwork, because of it's more limited nature, does fetch higher prices than typical comic pages.

The question that has to be asked is why do artists sell their work in the first place? Obviously, when an artist has been commissioned to illustrate a comic, they will be paid for usually 18-22 pages of artwork for a fixed fee which generally varies from one publisher to another. After the work sees print, the artwork gets returned to the artist.

Typically, artists who will have done hundreds of pages of work for publishers won't have space to store all of their work, but will still have copies of their work stored digitally. With a growing interest amongst fans eager to buy the originals, it's a great source of additional income for any artist without having to do any extra work and what better way to dispose of your old work than into the hands of someone who will appreciate it!

If you do take collecting artwork seriously, it can be almost as expensive as collecting toys, but just as fun... just don't try transforming any of your pages into a plane!

# THE TRANSFORMERS UNLIMITED

## "Size Matters" A G1 Comics Continuity Story by Clogs (Lola)

"It's...!" Ironhide yelled as he jumped into the narrow trench scoured out of the Cybertronian surface in some forgotten battle. "Big..!"

The assembled Autobot warriors gathered together, taking stock of their injuries. Beneath their feet, the whole area shook to a constant, ponderous rumble broken only by the brutal hiss of heavy lasers. Washes of brilliant light threw brief, disorientating shadows.

Above the steadily-rising noise, Sideswipe shouted: "Megatron sure knows that size matters!"

"I thought all of those things had been destroyed!" Tracks cried from where he sat hunched, nursing an ugly scar burnt deep into his chestplate.

Optimus Prime checked his depleted energy rifle, bitterly reflecting that overturning Trailbreaker's original plan might not turn out to have been one of his better command decisions. "We just need an appropriate strategy," he called out with deliberate calmness.

Prowl grimaced. Maintaining the radio silence, he had to move nearer to Optimus and lean close in order to be heard. "Of course, we should have bombarded it from a safe distance..."

"Not possible," Optimus reminded.

"We must disrupt those automated targeting batteries."

"And how do we do that?" Sunstreaker snarled. He was rubbing at one of the blisters in his paintwork, optics baleful.

"If Mirage was here..." Tracks began.

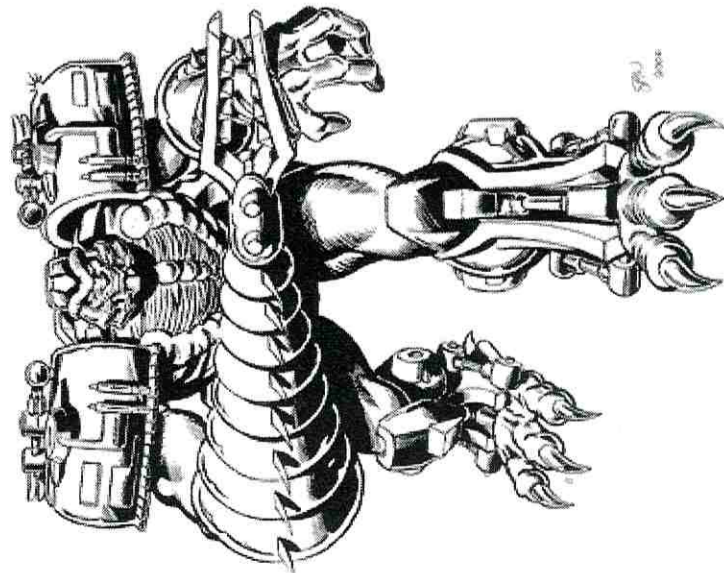
"But all we got is Bumblebee," Sideswipe sneered. He looked around in vain and added with unconcealed contempt, "He knows he can't size up with the big 'bots in a real fight; little coward's run away..."

"Or took a direct hit out there!" Ironhide growled.

"That thing will reach the Hub within five point one cycles!" Prowl shouted, finding it now necessary to increase his vocal level another notch. "Whether Red Alert succeeds or not!"

Optimus peered over the edge of the trench for a quick visual assessment. The broken, recumbent forms of Smokescreen's specialist team were strewn haphazardly across the landscape, many still ablaze, and over them fell the grim shadow of the automated assault platform. It was massive, its bulk crawling on two multi-link treads twice his height that mashed the planetary surface despite the glow of antigravity lifters beneath its belly. Its progress was inexorable.

He reviewed his databanks: The assault platform was a relic of older times, an early Decepticon development when energy and resources had been more freely available. There had been eight of these monstrosities,





each topped with a laser-studded turret. All eight had, however, been accounted for. Megatron must have unearthed their remains and combined them, for there were clear mismatches in the superstructure - and how like him to have thrown the devastating result at lacon as a mere distraction.

Sliding back down, knowing they had to buy time, he prepared himself to issue an order which might just prove suicidal. His troops were watching him; he nodded briefly. "Hit the turret! Load up and roll out!"

\*\*\*

Optimus spent his battered and weary forces in the hope of preventing even worse tragedy. He fought tirelessly, directing each new strike from the front with units going down into fiery oblivion around him, not even sure if his own Command Team yet survived. So now he stood, a lone bright figure, lifting his rifle for possibly the last time with the great autoguns swivelling to lock onto his position.

"Prime!"

Sideswipe swooped across the field, his rocket backpack stuttering on its last gasp of fuel, and brought Optimus down just as five lasers cut the air into white shreds. They crashed painfully, rolling to a halt.

Optimus landed on his back, staring up at the platform. It was too big. Too slugging big...

A concussive boom sent one set of giant treads flailing free and slashing into the tiers of autoguns above it. Explosions sprang from one battery to the next until the whole platform was crowned with a wave of destruction. The very top of the turret blew out, sending a plume of angry shrapnel high into the sky while the other treads, screeching on their bearings, dug deeper into the surface as the antigravs failed. Listing, the platform gave one last heave, a leviathan railing against heaven, and dropped back into sudden silence.

*Silence:* Optimus wondered why some lives seemed worth so much more than others.

ahead of one track. It would appear I've broken Megatron's toy..."

Sideswipe laughed. "I take it all back. Heh, who says size matters?"

## "A Mech's Best Friend"

By Kylie Austin

"Well, it's 4.23 in the afternoon, and for all you lucky people watching the clock and waiting to go home... it's a beautiful day!" The radio announced from the ambulance dashboard. "Temperature is perfect, just a light breeze from the south, and if you gotta be stuck in peak hour traffic, at least you gonna have blue skies! Does it get any better than this?! Next up we have a new single from an old favourite, and after that all the latest news, including the latest Deception attack on Sherman Dam..."

Ratchet abruptly shut the radio off, muttering something dark about over-enthusiastic DJ's.

"Jazz, you there?"

"Hey, Ratchet, m' man! What can I do you for? Heh, y' probably heard the haps from Sherman Dam, yeah?"

"I'm on the way back to the Ark now, what's the damage? And why wasn't I contacted?"

No need, Doc! The boys showed up n' the Cons split. Seems it was just the Seekers havin' a bit of fun. All's well, even your pal Sideswipe, Wheeljack can handle the dents n' scratches."

"Hmph, we'll see. I'll be about 20 minutes. Ratchet out."

The ambulance accelerated through the woods, the light flashing through the tall redwoods. At least the DJ was right, Ratchet thought to himself, it was a beautiful autumn day, not that it would help Sideswipe if he found himself at the Autobot medic's mercies. Again.

It was rare enough that he managed to get a day off, let alone have the med-bay empty so he could take it. And if that slagger Sideswipe had got himself half scrapped, by

Primus, Spike was going to get that MP3 player he'd wanted for so long.

After spending who-knows-how-many hours piecing together one or the other of the Lamborghinis, he was sure he could find at least one interesting way to reformat the young punks aft.

Ratchet amused himself thinking of technical possibilities, that didn't include jet packs, as he negotiated the winding road smoothly. Then, just at the edge of the trees, something moved in the road.

"Slag!" And again, "Slag,slag SLAG!"

He braked desperately, swerving to avoid what looked like a chewed up bit up of... something, and then everything seemed to happen all at once. His rear tyres lost grip and slid sideways, threatening to overtake the front, as the medic corrected for the slide he was confronted by the edge of the road looming threateningly. Then his tyres chose that exact moment to grip suddenly, and the ground and sky swapped places in his vision, accompanied by a grinding crash and a 'thumping' sensation that rattled his entire frame.

Ratchet transformed as he lay in the ditch at the side of the road, berating himself for the lack of concentration that allowed his speed to get that high.

"Well", he mused to himself, "might as well see what it was that landed me here."

He got to his feet hesitantly, waiting to see if anything was more seriously damaged than he first thought. Apart from a few creaks and groans he didn't like the sound of, he seemed to have escaped with little more than damaged armour.

However the amount of leaves and mud plastered to his frame did little to improve his appearance. But, that could wait, he had to see what animal it was in the road. First and foremost, he was a medic, dedicated to preserving life, all life.

Ratchet knelt slowly by the bedraggled little lump. It was hard to tell what it actually was beneath all the forest debris and mud that plastered it from head to tail. But clear to see, was the blood that seeped slowly from several gashes. He wondered if the poor thing was still even alive. As he was about to hesitantly feel for a heartbeat, a pair of the brightest blue eyes he had ever seen opened slowly and fixed on him, regarding him steadily, without fear.

"mew" the cat queried.  
"o, slag."

\* \* \*

The other Autobots gave the medic wide berth as he walked with long urgent strides towards the med-bay, casting curious glances towards his ditch-decorated paint job, dented and gouged armour, and... was that a cat??

Ratchet stalked into the med-bay quickly running a critical eye over every mech that was currently gathered there from the recent skirmish. Jazz apparently had been right, and his good friend 'Jack had almost completed all the minor repairs.

Although Sunstreaker as usual was griping about a buffed out scratch not being totally invisible.

Sideswipe glanced up, looked down, and rapidly looked back up again at the tiny bundle that Ratchet cradled carefully in his arm.

"Hey, bro, look, it's a cat!" He cried excitedly, nudging his yellow twin.

Sunstreaker irritably checked his buff, glaring at his brother for disturbing his perfectly glossed finish. "Yes, and looked what it dragged in" He replied nervously running his eyes up and down Ratchet's normally white exterior. "He's not coming anywhere near me! I'm already having enough trouble with this scratch right in the middle of my chest plate..."

"Right, everyone out, NOW!" Ratchet cut Sunstreaker off before he could get started. He glared about the room, daring anyone to say a word. Wisely they didn't, they simply sidestepped around him as they vacated. As someone once said, you do not want to annoy someone who knows exactly how to hit you to cause the most pain. But that didn't stop the whispers and giggles as soon as they got out of range.

Ratchet grabbed Wheeljack's arm with his free hand as he passed.

"Ah, 'Jack, I'm gonna need your help..." Ratchet said simply gesturing towards his parcel.

"Sure thing, Ratchet, what can I do?" the scientist replied, his faceplates flashing softly. Wheeljack was possibly the gruff mechs best friend, and one of the few mechs who understood that Ratchet yelling at his patients was simply his way of dealing with his concern for them as friends. The more he got attached to them, the worse he threatened them when he had to repair them. And no-one could ever doubt the gentleness of his hands, even if not his words.

Ratchet knew he could always count on Wheeljack to help, no matter how seemingly out of character his request was. Besides, 'Jack owed him a few favours too, for all the repairs after the scientist's 'experiments'.

Quickly the tiny animal was gently laid on one of the massive Autobot operating tables, and anaesthetised for surgery. Ratchet knew already that shock was a risk, having carried out a quick examination on the road, and inserted a drip into one of the cats veins. The blue colour of it's gums and eyelids worried him, he knew it meant massive blood loss. He had to work out where the blood was coming from underneath all the mud and leaves.

"'Jack, hand me a scalpel? And bring up everything we have on feline anatomy and trauma."

The two friends worked quickly together, anticipating each other's moves, an

efficiency born from much practice in life and death situations. The matted fur was removed on almost all of the emaciated, little body, displaying extensive cuts and deep lacerations, but most concerning was a mangled back leg. It was beyond broken, it was smashed and hanging by a flap of skin. This was where most of the blood had been lost from.

"Poor, kitty! It looks like it got hit by a car! What were you doing in the road, little one?"

"I don't know where it came from, 'Jack. It was just there. I'm gonna have to amputate this leg. Can you start suturing those other cuts? I want her out of anaesthesia as soon as possible."

Wheeljack looked at his friend curiously as he retrieved the suture kit they held on hand in case of human injuries. "Her?"

Ratchet simply nodded, he was already carefully cutting away the layers of mangled tissue. His attention totally devoted to the task at hand.

In short order, the cat had a few incision lines that would meet together neatly over where it's back leg would normally be. Ratchet halted, surveying his careful work, he grunted, satisfied that it was the best possible outcome. As he bent to resume his work, a hand touched his arm and he looked up to Wheeljack's amused eyes. Ratchet had forgotten that his friend was even there, he tended to get that wrapped up in his work.

"Why don't you go get cleaned up, you've done all the internal stitches. I can closeup."

Ratchet wryly looked down his own frame, and the trail he'd left through the normally immaculate med-bay "I suppose I could afford to do that."

Wheeljack chuckled lightly, and tilting his head removed a clump of needles from the chevron on Ratchet's forehead. "Yeah, well, I didn't want to say it at the time, but

Sunstreaker had a point. You two made quite a pair. "He said gesturing towards the sleeping cat. "Go, I can handle this from here, by the time you get back it'll be done, and I can have a go at getting you straightened out!"

Having shooed Ratchet away, Wheeljack gently finished suturing the amputation site neatly together. "I'll have to ring Spike and get him to bring some cat food up for you, little one. Poor skinny little thing, you been out on your own for a while, huh? Well, you're in good hands now. If I'm not mistaken ol' Doc Ratchet's quite taken with you, not that he'd admit it, stubborn old goat." He turned off the anaesthetic and bundled the groggily stirring cat into a warm blanket as he spoke, before putting it in a box where it could recover quietly.

He rung Spike and asked if he would mind delivering cat food, litter and a tray, assuring him he would explain when he got there. Spike was puzzled by the request but seeing how Wheeljack's faceplates were flashing in barely restrained good humour, knew that he would have to wait to find out, and assured him that he would be there shortly.

Wheeljack had just finished cleaning up the med-bay when he heard his friends footsteps.

"Better?" He asked, as he looked up he saw the medic properly. The barely restrained good humour could no longer be restrained, it was all he do to laugh quietly.

Wheeljack plopped down onto a table before he fell over and laughed until it hurt. Every time he looked at Ratchet standing there glaring at him, he started laughing again.

Eventually he got himself under control.

"You still look like the cat!" he said still giggling. Eyeing the gouges and ripped armour that adorned the white frame.

Ratchet crossed his arms over his chest and glared harder, his patented 'do-not-try-me' glare that ensured immediate obedience from all. It seemed that Wheeljack was immune, he just started giving out little hiccups of laughter again.

"I do not look like the cat!" Ratchet was doing his best to seem outraged, but seeing Jack trying to bite back further laughter, unconsciously his lips started twitching into a smile.

"How many times did you roll?" Accompanied by bursts of giggles.

"Twice. I think" A shrug dislodged a loose piece of shoulder armour that rang on the ground. They looked at each other, and this time they both burst out laughing, Ratchet sitting as Wheeljack moved over for him.

"Jack, I gotta stop taking time off, this R 'n' R thing is gonna kill me!" He said fingering a crack in his windscreen.

"Heheh, stay there and I'll get the welder, you can tell me about it."

\* \* \*

The cat recovered fairly quickly, over the next few days, and regained a fair amount of weight. No doubt helped by the constant stream of mechs finding some excuse to visit the med-bay, and just happening to have some treat that perhaps the cat might like? In turn, the cat regally accepted all said tidbits with a gracious purr.

Ratchet, being used to Autobots doing anything possible to stay out of the medical facility, was not quite sure what to make of the constant visitations. He supposed if he had any serious injuries to attend to, it would have been definitely irritating and possibly even resulted in him throwing something at an offending mech's head. However, it was currently quiet on the Decepticon front after the most recent Sherman Dam incident, and he found that having the Bots willingly front up for their routine check-ups was a refreshing change.

Bluestreak piped up again. "I hope you can keep the cat. I like her." Ratchet was waiting for the rest of Bluestreak's speech, when he realised the other mech was looking at him curiously, waiting for a reply. "The cat must belong to someone, Bluestreak. Spike has posted fliers up in the town, and sooner or later we're going to find her owners."

Bluestreak absently stroked the cat with his left hand, as it lay curled up next to his warmth, rumbling softly like a small engine.

"I know, I guess. But it must be kind of nice to have the company down here."

"What makes you think I need company?" Ratchet was puzzled by the change in Bluestreak's manner, despite the twitching doors and rambling, nervous conversation, he seemed almost calm. In fact the only time Ratchet could remember him being so subdued was when he was off-line, or in the middle of battle.

The gunner shrugged, "I don't know. Just... I don't like it here, and I wouldn't think many other bots would just pop in. I just thought it might be nice to have someone else around. And she seems to have got the hang of only having three legs. I bet sometimes she must like to play with things and climb around now. That must be fun to watch! But it's nice to have her just sit with you and pat her too, yeah? I mean like now, it's nice to have something else to think about in here apart from... well, it's just nice." Bluestreak trailed off with another shrug and looked away with a haunted expression in his eyes.

Ratchet kept working, trying not to show his interest in what the mech had nearly said.

"She does like to climb on the shelves. It's not really set up for cats down here, so I have to watch she doesn't get anywhere unsafe. She got into the air vents yesterday."

Had a heap of trouble getting her back out, I had to wait until she got hungry and came out for food. Nothing but trouble, if you

ask me." Ratchet hesitated, looking at the twitching young mech. Then plunged ahead, not quite sure if he was saying the right thing, "You know, I don't really have the time to play with her, so, maybe, you could. Until we find her owners, that is."

Bluestreak jumped and looked nervously, "What, me?"

"You see anyone else here? Yeah, you. Unless you don't want to."

"Ah, it's not that, it's just... well,"

Bluestreak looked away to his hand still slowly stroking the cats new, gray fur.

Ratchet groaned inwardly, he believed that he wasn't just responsible for the Autobots physical health, but their morale as well. And he felt that any chance he had of getting the amiable gunner to open up had just fled.

"Listen, don't worry about it."

"Ratchet... I...I don't mean I don't want to. You just, took me by surprise. Heh.

Yeah, I'll come play with her, and I'll make sure not to get in the way, or make too much noise. Does she have any toys? Of course not. I'll see if I can find some toys for her. Spike will know what cats like. I think they like to chase things, they're predators right? And I heard about something called catnip, you think that's food? When I heard about it, it didn't sound like food. But it's called nip. Why would something be called nip if it wasn't food? I'll have to ask Prowl that too. Wow, I'm going to have a lot of questions to ask Prowl tonight. I hope he doesn't get annoyed with me. Sometimes he gets a funny look on his face, and his left door twitches when I ask him a lot of questions. You know how he does that? It's kind of like the way you're looking me, only you don't have doors that twitch in robot..."

"Bluestreak, you're finished. Go."

"Yeah, ok. Bye bye, pussycat! I'll see you later, Ratchet. Don't worry, I'll find lots of things for her to play with, and I won't let her get into any more trouble. Maybe Sideswipe will let me use his computer to look on the internet? For stuff about cats, you know?"

Bluestreak happily hopped off the table and trotted to the door, oblivious to the frown

creasing Ratchet's forehead. He turned around in the door with a grin plastered all over his face, but Ratchet noticed it didn't hide the shadows in his eyes.

"Ah, thanks, Ratchet. For... you know. Everything"

"Get out of here, Blue!"  
Bluestreak grinned and waved, before trotting off up the hall towards the quarters that the two lamorghinis shared. Ratchet turned to the cat, still curled on the table, looking back at him through half-slitted eyes.

"That's just great! Do you see what you made me do?"

The cat blinked, and purred. "mew?"  
"Primus, you are nothing but trouble! What have I got myself in for."

\* \* \*

"Hey, Ratchet! Got another call for you, about the cat."

"Thanks, Ironhide. Patch it through down here, can you? I hope it's not another false alarm."

"Sure thing, doc."

Ratchet had gotten tired of the calls from distressed owners sure that the cat on the fliers was theirs, only to realise after a few minutes that some detail didn't match.

He'd even had a couple arrive to pick 'their' cat up, discovering on closer inspection that it was much larger than their own. Hopefully, this call would be the real deal.

"Uh, hello?" asked a middle-aged male voice on the phone line.

"Hello. This is Ratchet. I understand you're calling about the cat on the fliers?"

"Yeah. My name's Tom. I think I might be able to help you with your problem."

"If you could give me some information about your missing animal, I can tell you if the description fits?"

Tom chuckled wryly, "I don't think you understand, Ratchet. The problem is, I know your cat. I used to see her everyday, she belonged to my elderly neighbour."

"Great! If you can tell me the address, I'll drop the cat straight around."

"Ah, it's not that simple. You see, the lady in question is now deceased. She died

about three weeks ago, and I hadn't heard anything about her cat since. Until I saw the poster down the street."

"Oh, I see." Ratchet didn't know what to do, what was he supposed to say? "I imagine this must be a difficult time, but perhaps the lady's family would like to keep her pet?"

"As far as I know, she didn't have any surviving relatives. No-one ever visited her, and she never spoke of having any children. To all appearances, it was just her and her cat. God knows if I could, I'd take that cat, bluest eyes I ever seen! But my son's allergic."

Ratchet sighed and scrubbed his face with his hand, "Thanks, Tom. I appreciate your call. Would you mind passing on my details to any family that you happen to come across? I just want the cat to go to a good home. We can't keep it, I'm sure you understand."

"I don't mind doing that at all." Tom laughed wryly, "I can imagine that keeping a cat is not your favourite idea. But no-one's been around to take care of her estate, and I believe she left everything to charity. Hey, you never know, someone in the neighbourhood might be looking for a cat. If something pops up I'll give you a call back. It's good to know she's ok for now though. You know, I spent half the day just trying to think of that cat's name? I'm not sure she even has one."

After Ratchet had ended the call, he sunk his head onto the bench hopelessly.

What was he supposed to do? He'd saved the vulnerable animal when otherwise she would certainly have died. According to many earthen traditions, her life was now his responsibility forever. For all of the mysterious 'Tom's' optimism, Ratchet was less hopeful about one of the neighbours taking the cat. Surely, if they were that concerned, they would have rung themselves.

**Continues after the poster...**

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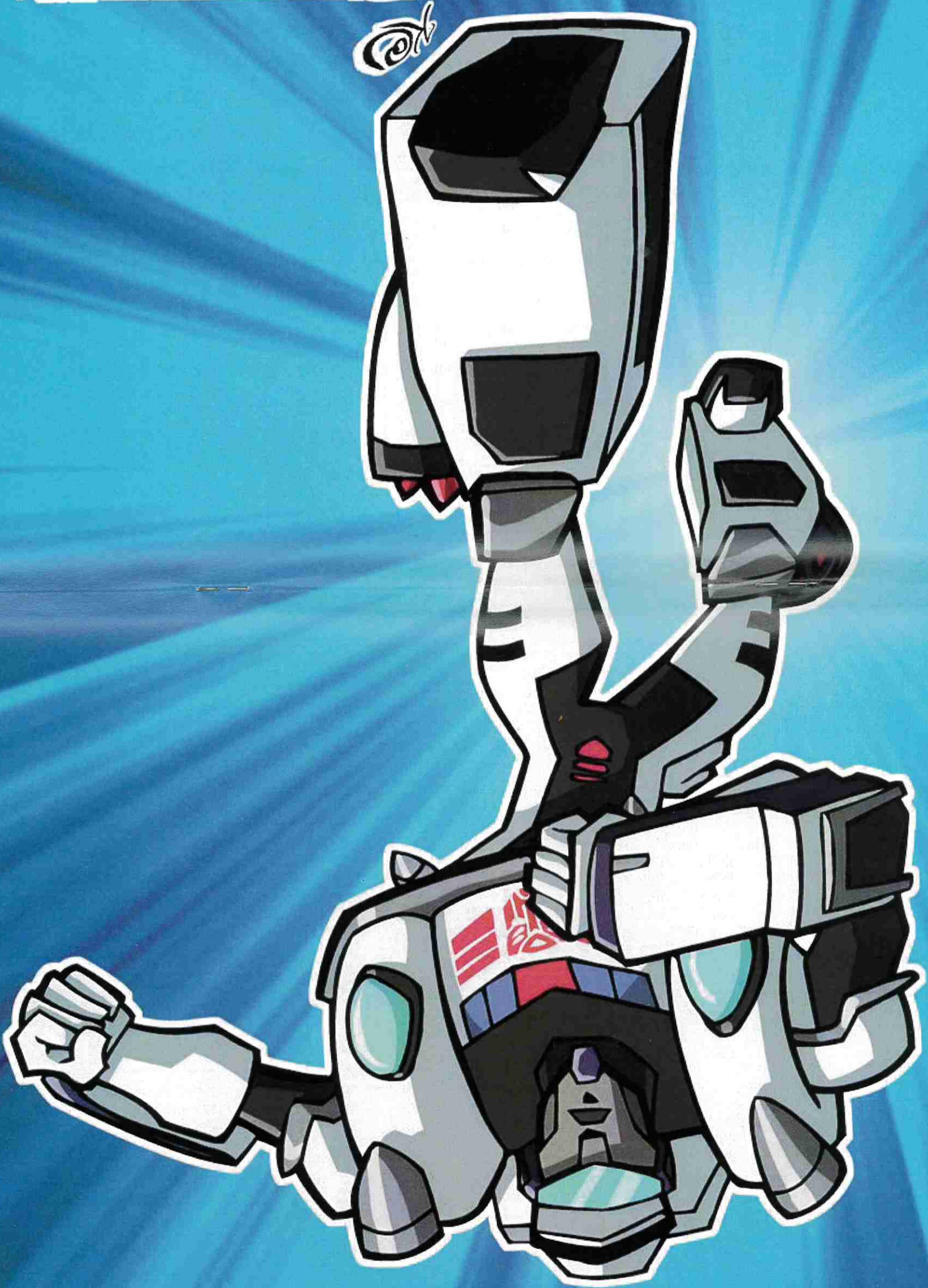
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artwork by Kat Nicholson - poster made exclusively for Auto Assembly 2008

# 2008 ALWAYS WINNING



"A Mech's Best Friend" (continued)

Ratchet had to admit, he'd become accustomed to the slight form arching along a benchtop and snaking around his wrist in a quiet moment. She was certainly a better patient than most, uncomplaining during her frequent dressing changes. And even Bluestreak's nervous visitations had become less noticeable. Apart from the odd sight of Blue' himself down on the ground teasingly rolling a ball just out of the cats reach, and laughing when a paw snaked out from under a bench to dab lightly at the toy.

He had one more card to play, and if that didn't work? He looked at the smoky grey wraith, limp now hardly noticeable, as she slinked towards him to settle on his lap. It was totally unfeasible to keep a cat in a fighting unit. Wasn't it?

\*\*\*

As Ratchet had expected, Tom never rang back that week, or the week after. He'd been busy with his own attempts to find a home for the ever more adventurous kitty. He'd tried every animal shelter in the nearby town, and then every one in an ever increasing radius, only to meet the same reponse. The current one was a perfect example.

Having asked for one of the vets to meet him outside, he'd waited for about an hour before finally having a tired young man in a white lab coat meet him outside. Ratchet explained the situation, while the vet carried out a roadside examination of the cat.

"Well, Ratchet is it?, if you ever get sick of repairing Autobots, we could use you here, that's for sure. This is nice work! Just, I'm not sure we can rehome this animal. You see, some people can overlook her only having three legs, but, I'm not sure how to say this..."

Ratchet interrupted gruffly, "How about the same way every other vet has said it. She's too old, we don't rehome 15 year old cats with three legs, we can pass on your details to anyone who comes in looking for this sort of animal, but if you were to leave her in our care we would have her put down. Is that about it, or have I forgotten part of it?"

G1 Transformers

R E Y V W B Z  
X W V D C K Z W O  
N G A L V A T R O N  
M S H W G J V F P X U A  
H K G T O K X U G T Y A W I K  
K V Q R S C N K I R O N H I D E W  
G E A F P E C O S M O S I L E S T E W  
S Q S E Y Q R H U N I U L M E P O A H  
B L Z T B T A S N E M Z M L D G R J  
E G A V A R P Y G B D Y W C Y E R C M C  
P G L G Z R E T A M Q S A U O T Y K V  
Z G E J I R S S A B P J S V E O M O B  
Z M A M X U S A R L W K D T E H Y U  
A E E P U S A R T E N W W B E O K  
X S K C A R I L B A Q D J O P  
A J V C I L B A Q D J O P  
J B Q G U E X M X F  
A R C E E B I P R  
K J R U T F O

- |               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| Arcee         | Prowl        |
| Bumblebee     | Ravage       |
| Cosmos        | Shockwave    |
| Galvatron     | Slag         |
| Grimlock      | Soundwave    |
| Hot Rod       | Starscream   |
| Ironhide      | Tracks       |
| Jazz          | Ultra Magnus |
| Laserbeak     | Wheelie      |
| Megatron      |              |
| Optimus Prime |              |

At the vets guilty blush, the medic immediately felt embarrassed for his outburst. "I'm sorry, but we have so many animals here all the time, there's nothing I can do. I wish it was different, but, I already have five dogs that I've taken home, and we can't help every single hard luck story that comes our way. I wish we could."

Ratchet looked at the pavement, "I guess I wouldn't want her locked in a cage for Primus knows how long, 'til she found a home, anyway. I'm sorry, it's just she's got so much better. I don't want all that work to be in vain, it just seems so pointless!"

"Hey, I know where you're coming from. To fix an animal up, and find a home, then the same animal comes back in, in the same condition or worse? Sometimes I could hit the people that undid my work! I think all docs, animal, human, or Autobot, would understand what you mean"

Ratchet carefully took the cat back off the vet, stroking it's ears with the tip of his finger, before grinning ruefully at the vet, "Have you ever tried actually hitting them? Trust me, it relieves a lot of stress. My medical teacher told me that, and it really works. That, and threatening your patients. If they're scared of you, it makes them less eager to need your attention."

The vet laughed at the mental image, "I'd love to! I'm not certain it's totally legal, though. Look, not to be rude, it was great meeting you, and I hope sometime I can catch up with you again, but I've got an appointment due any minute, you know how it is."

"Yeah, yeah, thanks. I better get back too. No telling what's waiting for me."

"Nice to meet you too, puss, pretty little thing."

Shortly after getting on the main road back to the Ark, Ratchet decided that there was nothing else he could do. He radioed back to the control centre.

"Prowl here." Came the brisk reply.

"Hey, Prowl. I'm on the way back now. Would Prime be available in about an hour and a half?"

"Optimus is in a meeting and can't be disturbed. I can leave a message for him to see you when he gets out."

"Ok then. I'll see you when I get back." Ratchet prepared to cut the comm-link, but

was stopped by Prowl's interruption.

"Did you happen to see Bluestreak before you left?"

"No. Has something happened to him? Is everything alright?"

"He's fine, nothing's wrong. Just, well, you'll see. Prowl out."

Ratchet puzzled over Prowl's question. He could have sworn he heard muffled laughter in the background, and it sounded like Prowl himself was smiling. All in all, very un-Prowl-like behaviour.

"Primus in a smelting pit! What's he gone and done now?! Well, I'll just have to wait and see. As if this day couldn't get any worse."

The cat turned around on his front seat a few times, before kneading it's paws into his seat cushion, and curling up, purring contentedly.

"Glad someone's happy."

As Ratchet walked into the Ark, his puzzlement grew. Every mech he passed started laughing, some made an effort to stifle it until he was at a safe distance away, some just outright howled. Ratchet was starting to wonder if all of them had been infected with a computer virus. He saw Sunstreaker up ahead smiling to himself, which was remarkable in itself, but at least he wasn't laughing.

"Sunstreaker, hey, what in the pit's name is going on?"

The tall, yellow warrior turned, and the smile broadened. "I was wondering when you'd get back."

"So?"

"So, what?"

"So, what in the pit's name is going on? Do you need your audio receivers returned?"

"I'm not sure I know what you mean. Can't a mech just be in a good mood? Really, Ratchet, paranoia does not become you."

Looking at that impassive, albeit grinning, face, Ratchet knew he would get nothing further and he should just give up now.

He continued on his way grumbling. Just before he turned the corner, Sunstreaker called, "Give my love to my brother!"

Ratchet walked faster, a sinking feeling in the pit of his fuel-tank. Whatever was going on involved Sideswipe, and that

to the ground and Sideswipe looked as though he was about to make a run for it. Ratchet set his arm firmly to the wall, blocking any potential escape routes.

Bluestreak was trying to pick up a staple gun with nerveless fingers, and only succeeded in repeatedly dropping it again. Sideswipe seemed to have resigned himself to his fate, but Ratchet wasn't taking his eyes off him for a second.

"Now," he growled, "are either of you planning to tell me just what, exactly, it is that you have found it necessary to fill MY med-bay with?"

"It's a scratching post." Bluestreak's words could hardly be heard over the rattling of his door wings. "I found out on the internet that cats like to scratch, and humans should get them scratching posts. And I wanted to get one for the cat, but Sideswipe saw someone throwing out carpet, and mesh and stuff, and thought we could build one better than we could buy, so we brought the stuff back here and built it, and I thought you'd like it, but now you're mad, and... and... I'm sorry."

Ratchet glared at Sideswipe. "So this is all your idea?"

"I thought it sounded like a good idea. For the cats welfare, you know." Sideswipe fixed Ratchet with his characteristic lop-sided grin.

"For the cats welfare."

Sideswipe shrugged. And grinned. Ratchet cursed him silently. Maybe he had been thinking of the cats well being, but he had also, sure as slag, been thinking of the infuriation caused to the medic.

"A scratching post."

"Yep. For the cats welfare. They need to scratch. And climbing will help her recovery. Unless you'd rather we pull it down and leave her climbing on the shelves, with your tools." The red Lamborghini was now leaning on the wall with arms crossed and a cocky tilt to his head. Still grinning that damned, annoying, smug grin.

Ratchet knew he was beaten. "Did it have to be so fragging big?"

"We had the materials, seemed a shame to waste them." Ratchet made a mental note to carry out Sideswipe's next CPU defragging with a pipe wrench.

Looking back to Bluestreak who was still miserably clutching the staple gun and staring at the floor with his doors drooping disconsolately, Ratchet sighed and dropped his arm off the wall. He was still angry, but he knew that it was unfair to blame the kind-hearted gunner for being led along by a trouble making hooligan. And besides, he could make sure that Sideswipe got his.

"Next time, for Primus sake, just ask me first. And clean up this smelting mess when you're done!" He fixed Sideswipe with a glare that left him in no doubt just what the real score was, before turning and walking to his office. Every now and then he could make out a hushed cry of "what the slag is that?!" from up the hall, accompanied by the sound of stifled laughter. He shut the door behind him with a clang, shutting out the sound of their guffaws.

Pouring himself a container of energon, he sat heavily in a chair and settled back plonking his feet up the desk with ankles crossed.

"Well, cat," he said as the little creature arched over to him and stepped daintily onto his stomach, rumbling noisily, "let's drink to your fragging huge, outrageously big and Lamborghini-inspired scratching post." Raising the container in salute and tossing back a decent portion in one mouthful as the cat 'made bread' and blinked at him through half slitted eyes.

"Now, we wait to hear what Optimus has to say about this." He chuckled softly, having another mouthful of his energon "I wonder what he'll make of the scratching post. Should be interesting to see."

Optimus' imposing figure cast a shadow over the two mechs cleaning up the debris of their construction sometime later. They both looked up as he surveyed their handiwork impassively, Prowl standing unobtrusively in the background with one door held higher than the other. Something only Bluestreak would recognise as amusement.

"Ah, hi, Optimus! Ah, Ratchet said we could build it, well, he didn't really say we could, but, he was here and he didn't throw us out, but, he was kinda mad. Well, he didn't tell us to stop, just to clean up when we finished," Bluestreak's doors went from

raised to drooping and raised again as he tried to explain the structure to the red and blue Autobot commander.

Sideswipe wisely just grinned, and stayed out of the picture.

"Where is Ratchet?" Optimus prime's deep, resonant voice echoed around the room.

"He went into his office," Sideswipe replied simply.

Bluestreak smiled happily at Prowl, as the commander and second walked over to the office door. Optimus tapped gently on the door and waited, as he received no acknowledgment he looked at Sideswipe again.

Sideswipe shrugged, "He went in there, and hasn't come out. We haven't heard anything from him."

Optimus knocked more firmly, "Ratchet? Prowl told me you wanted to speak to me." Again no reply.

The two were now becoming concerned. Prowl tried the door, finding it Unlocked they walked inside, and stopped as they saw the medic. Leaning back on the verge of toppling the chair, he was deep in recharge, with both feet still on the table and the cat curled on his stomach. The energon container in his left hand was precariously close to spilling and his other hand was next to the contented cat, as though he was stroking it as he fell asleep. Optimus crossed the room, his eyes betraying the smile underneath the mask, and removed the energon from it's precarious position in the medics hand.

"Mmmph?" The medic queried groggily. Raising his head from his chest stiffly he met his leaders amused eyes and his legs hit the ground with a thud as he realised he'd fallen asleep waiting. "Sorry, Prime. Guess I just shut my eyes for a second and, Ow, remind me not to do that again." He said rubbing his neck ruefully.

"I can't believe you let them live. You must be getting soft." Optimus said tilting his head towards the office door.

"Heh, that rotten slagger Sideswipe blackmailed me with patient welfare. Primus below, you ever seen anything like it?"

"Negative." Optimus shook his head, "Prowl told me you wanted to speak to me, Ratchet, what seems to be the problem?"

this."

Inside the office, Ratchet had sat back down dispiritedly. But still glaring at Prowl.

"Prowl, she causes no harm. And the mechs actually seem to like coming here now! You saw Bluestreak out there, Bluestreak has been here every single day for Primus' sake. Voluntarily." The medic's glare softened, became almost pleading, "You know he nearly talked, I mean actually talk, not just ramble. He nearly told me about what happened in his city. Are you willing to trade a precedent for your friend?"

Prowl stiffened and his doors shot up. "We are a fighting unit, Ratchet. We are not a rescue society. We cannot have animals running about everywhere!"

Oblivious to the escalating volume of their discussion and the two mechs who could hear all but the quietest of their discussion, the medic and the logistical Commander squared off.

"I'm not suggesting we have 'animals running about everywhere', it's one little cat!"

"You know how much Mirage misses his tracking drones back at lacon, he's got pictures of them all over his quarters. What if he wants to get a dog? And you of all people should remember Sideswipe's furbies?!"

"The furbies?!" Ratchet swore he would carry that image to his grave. The sight of his med-bay covered in thousands of furbies, all happily chattering Sideswipe-esque profanities had nearly made him short on the spot, "What have the glitching furbies got to do with it?"

"What if he took it into his head to get a parrot? Can you imagine the special brand of mayhem that would inspire? And Hound bringing every lost and hurt creature in here that has a sore paw. I'm talking about precedent, if it's allowed for one, it's allowed for all. Ratchet, it's Prime's decision, but as his adviser, I cannot agree."

As Prowl made his argument, his doors dropped and tilted back, his eyes searching Ratchet's. The medic understood suddenly. Prowl wanted to agree, wanted to have the little animal and the bit of laughter and warmth she brought with her, but couldn't think of a logical argument to back up that want. Time out from a bitter war could not outweigh the possible ensuing nightmare of unpredictability. Ratchet had to find

something that carried more weight than logic, and he realised that Prowl had already given him the clues he needed.

"Yes, we are a fighting unit. And what are we fighting for? We crash landed here, and here we stay. We could have gone home, but instead we stay, and fight. Why?" Ratchet fixed his intense gaze on Optimus' face.

"Because it would be wrong to leave this planet to the Decepticons. Even if they simply gathered enough energy to follow us back, it would be wrong." Optimus thought he knew where Ratchet was heading with his questions, and silently applauded.

"Not just the humans, Optimus, but the whole planet." At Optimus' nod the medic continued. "Because all life is precious, not just sentient life. And we, as Autobots, are bound to protect it. Tell me, Prime, where does it say that?"

Optimus Prime's eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled. "The Autobot Charter." "Ah, yes, the Charter, the one we all swear to uphold when we declare ourselves followers of the Autobot code. Namely, that we will hold all life sacred, and protect it's existence in all forms, at all costs. You think the Charter applies to cats on Earth, Prime? Ones that would get put down, unless they stay here, just until another place for them can be found?"

Prime chuckled and shook his head. "Affirmative. She stays, until another home is found."

"It might be a while. She is a three legged cat, an old, three legged cat."

"Until you find another home, no matter how long that takes. I can't go against the Charter now, can I?" Optimus eyes portrayed amusement as he found Ratchet's. And Ratchet knew that the cat's future was assured, she could stay as long as needed, as long as she lived.

Prowl spoke up, "Well, if this cat is going to stay here, she had better have another name, apart from 'the cat'. Any ideas?"

The other mechs looked at him and shook their heads.

"Never had the need to come up with names for someone else. You got any?" Ratchet asked the black and white, noting it was just like Prowl to have an argument, and



once it was over just get straight down to brass tacks like nothing had happened.

"A lot of dogs seem to be called Spot. I don't know why it wouldn't be a good name for a cat."

"Spot? Why Spot?" Optimus asked curiously.

"Been nothing but a spot of trouble from day one as far as I can figure, and doesn't seem about to change."

The other Autobots laughed at Prowl's rare attempt at humour, recognising his effort to accept the newest member of the unit.

"Spot it is." Ratchet clapped Prowl on the shoulder.

"I just want you know, however, that the first time a mech walks in saying 'but it followed me home' I am still going to hold you both personally responsible!"

Outside Bluestreak relaxed his hold on the cat, "Spot. I like that, but you're not any trouble, I don't know why Prowl said that."

Sideswipe nudged Bluestreak, still stifling laughter. He remembered the furbies, how could someone ever forget a masterpiece of hilarity like that? "C'mon, we better make ourselves scarce in case they come out. I think you can leave Spot now. Let her have a go on the scratching post."

The two left with more stealth than most would give them credit for. Shortly after Prowl and Optimus re-emerged to find a grey wraith exploring the huge branching structure covering the wall. Prowl walked over after a moments hesitation, to where two blue, blue eyes peered at him from one of the many tunnels.

Extending a finger, he reached towards the little face "Nothing personal, you know. No hard feelings?"

The eyes blinked a couple of times and Prowl was about to turn away when she stalked towards him and rubbed her lithe body back and forth against his finger, rumbling noisily.

"Hey, Optimus, how about that? She likes me."

Ratchet watched, leaning in the doorway to his office. "Yeah, fancy that." He said with a dry smile.

Prowl turned and smiled back before walking out with Optimus, leaving the medic and his cat in peace.

"It's just you and me again, Spot. So, what do you think of the monstrosity?"

The cat jumped up to the next level, at eye level with Ratchet, and peered at him intently. "mew" it queried.

"Good, huh? I'm glad, 'cos I think you're gonna be using it for awhile, unless I rip into one day after the lambos have done something stupid. You know, Prowl really does like you, it's just him being all logical. And the lambos? Much as I hate to admit, fragging glitches the pair of them, really aren't so bad either, once you get to know them. Just don't shed on Sunstreaker. In fact, best if you steer clear of him all together, and Wheeljack's lab too. Never find you again if you go in there, and you'd probably get blown up."

The cat was playing close attention, as though listening to every word. It's tail slowly flicked back and forth.

"And since when did I talk to cats anyway? Hey, let's be done with it, we're all a bunch of misfits really. Maybe that's why, after all the arguments and aggravation, we are such good friends." Ratchet regarded the cat, steadily regarding him, and reached out to rub the fur between it's eyes, "Welcome to the funny farm, Spot, hope you have a great stay."

## Epilogue

Sideswipe's normally cheerful face showed deep thought as he lay on the top bunk in the quarters he shared with his brother. Something he had overheard from Ratchet's office that afternoon had stayed in his mind, every time he tried to go into shut-down it resurfaced and would not let him be.

"Sunny? You awake?"

"Slag off. Sleeping" The low growl came from the bottom bunk.

"What do you think about getting a parrot?"

"I said... slag off! Accompanied by a thump on the underneath of Sideswipe's bunk, Sunstreaker kicking it.

Sideswipe grinned. "Yeah, Prowl said after considering the furbies, could anyone imagine what I could do if I got a parrot."

A much more reverberating thump this time, both feet. Sideswipe's grin grew wider.

"I really like macaws, they're so colourful. And they're real smart too apparently. There's a place out by the interstate that sells them."

Double thump and a feral growl, "Shut the slag up, you sonuvagitch! I mean it, I'll get up there and twist your pit-damned head clean off!"

"Yeah, and I'd teach it to say nice things about you, but swear at everyone else. Can you imagine Prowl's face when a parrot swears at him on the comm-link?"

Silence.

Sideswipe slowly rolled over, and looked down at his brother, "Sunny?"

Sunstreaker's feral smile spread slowly over his face as he looked up at his brother peering over the edge of the bunk. "I like the red and green macaws."

## Alternated Binaltech by Sven Harvey

Those who have had the misfortune to read my work previously published in CT and Model and Collectors Mart over the years will be very aware of my view on the Binaltech line.

Started in 2003 the Binaltech range of 1:24 scale die cast car models that turned into robots was very very warmly received.

However it was a compromised concept that was finally released. Takara originally wanted to do a 1:32 scale range allowing the range to also include alternate modes other than cars (a 1:32 scale version of Optimus Prime for instance would have been quite close to the Masterpeace Convoy in size)..

It is known that the 1:24 scale was that of a compromise, so was Hasbro wanting to go in the direction of 1:18 similar to the Happwell Road Bots line? If so Takaras wish to do die cast would have resulted in a highly prohibitive price point for the Japanese versions of the toys. Hasbro had little or no interest in using die cast parts (though in recent months with oil prices rising it has been suggested that this policy may be being revised!). The result of the discussions between the two r and D departments would become the die cast and painted Binaltech range in Japan and the plastic, uglier and

frankly less well balanced Alternator range in Hasbros markets.

Takara however would appear never to give up their preference for a 1:32 line using die cast parts...

Licenses were secured left right and centre, and whilst Porsche and VW in particular refused licenses (Jazz had been prototyped as Porsche Boxster aka the 986, and VW refused to get involved in, ironically, war toys, after design drawings for the new VW Beetle as Bumblebee and Cliffjumper had been produced). Confusion and mind changing delayed Tracks as a Corvette and almost resulted in him becoming a Viper.

Sunstreaker had his body nicked by a Stunticon, and Jazz ended up not only with a Wankel engine but a loss of his western name entirely and being plonked into insurance group 20 even with a 1.6 litre under his bonnet. The Mitsubishi Evo X concept was licensed and then promptly delayed in development at Mitsubishi to the point where it missed the time of the lines entirely. An agreement was also in place for a Binaltech and Alternator version of Nissans replacement of the Skyline GT-R... which also promptly got delayed almost ad infinitum.

## Whoops!

By the end of 2003 the first character was ready for release. Only thing was that it wasn't the one they wanted! Jazz/Meister was supposed to start the line off and Porsche soon stuffed that idea up. Six vehicle models had been chosen and licensed, originally intended to provide twelve Autobots. These were the Chevrolet C5 Corvette (and ended up being the Z06), Dodge Viper, Subaru Impreza, Jeep Wrangler and Fords Mustang GT. With the Porsche out of the picture, Tracks was up next... until Chevy got cold feet at the idea of their car appearing to fall apart as it transformed (quite what they expected it to do was a mystery to many). As a result the Dodge Viper license that had been hurriedly retro-negotiated for Robots In Disguise was revisited with Dodge and not only the new Viper SRT-10 was licensed but they managed to get Jeeps license for the

Wrangler as they were both part of the Chrysler group. The concept of Tracks becoming a Viper however was not only hideous wrong in idea but may have altered the minds in Chevys GM masters – and the groundwork had been laid down for the new movie too. Meanwhile the Ford Motor company was also approached and led not only to the new Mustang but thanks to Fords stake in Mazda led to the new RX-8 being licensed also.

Development of the figures was ultimately difficult verging on impossible with the car manufacturers, Mazda in particular being so hyped about the tie up that they broke the news with an animation at a car show before the toys was even remotely ready or even had a name! In the end it was the Subaru that got through development the quickest, so Streak (Bluestreak/Silverstreak) was ready to go... Only for the design departments at Takara and Hasbro to change their mind late in the day and go for the Subaru re-tool first instead. Suddenly the slightly more obscure character of Smokescreen got centre stage.

### Tease

One single photo from a Japanese toy show showing this perfect replica of the 2003 Subaru Impreza rally car turning into an Autobot set the fandom alight! Never have so many fans had such a emotional response to a picture. This truly was the 21<sup>st</sup> Century's G1!

Smokescreen sold very well as a Binaltech, being in two variations for the number 7 and 8 car variants in the World Rally Championship, but due to the way things are done differently between Japan and the West his arrival as an Alternator, on his own, was a near disaster. Assortments is how toys of this nature are sold in the west, and solid cases of this, at double the price of the best selling deluxe-sized lines resulted in a huge amount of shelf warming on both sides of the Atlantic. If only Hasbro had waited until 3 or 4 toys were ready and launched then...

### Dodge

The Dodge mould was ready next and holding onto Streak for the third release Sideswipe got centre stage for the mould that was meant to be Tracks... until Chevy changed their mind back. Prototypes of Sunstreaker then hit the net with a moulded if slightly misformed Autobot logo on his chest, looking so like Sunstreaker it was almost ridiculous. Out came Streak providing a much more interesting if plainer version of the Subaru and Hound turned up as the Jeep Wrangler... with a gun so tiny you would soon lose it down the back of the sofa. Then came the hardtop version of the Viper as Dead End, looking suspiciously like a black Sunstreaker much to the annoyance of everyone. Apparently the Stunticon had stolen Sunstreakers body. Yeah right. Apparently Hasbro wanted some Decepticons... not the best figure to do that with guys!

The Tracks finally arrived and turned up in yellow – rather a departure from his original Blue, but apparently this was the cars signature colour and the Alternator promptly turned up in ... Blue as the yellow plastic turned out to be too transparent. BT-06 then got released in Blue with a flame sticker for his bonnet!

### Mazda

The Mazda RX-8 still wasn't ready, nor was the Ford Mustang, so Smokescreen got rolled out again with updates to match the 2004 version of the World Rally Championship car including remoulds and the car competition numbers of 1 and 2 (and the excuse that Smokescreen could have 4 bodies as they were being controlled using a system similar to that of Pretender shells... That would be radio control then).

Finally The Mazda made it into the market as BT-08 Meister though the Alternator version was designed to use Jazz's Japanese name due to trademark issues, whilst "Autobot Jazz" was deemed too cumbersome (that soon changed!) However Mazda didn't actually do the car in White so the car signature colour of Red was also released and explained away in Binaltech as being

Jazz's semi-autonomous clone... named Zoom-zoom from the car companies adverts! The red colouring was destined never to make it into Alternators.

### Mustang

Windcharger was supposed to be Ford Mustang but the Dinobot leader muscled in and Grimlock made his debut as a car. It was slightly historically ironic that Windcharger, who was originally a Pontiac Firebird/Trans-Am was almost a Mustang as KITT (from Knight Rider) has promptly managed the transition from the former to the latter as Knight Rider went under a reboot, primarily in an effort to jump on the bandwagon that the live action Transformers movie had created.

From that point onwards Binaltech went a little more smoothly with one or two... interesting choices of character (Ravage as a Corvette? Laserwave/Shockwave as an RX-8?) right up until the near end. BT-16 was originally supposed to be Wildrider using the mould changes done for Decepticharge in the Alternator range, oh and Windchargers head mould that had been produced, from the Alternator release of what in Binaltech was Overdrive. That release got canned for reasons unknown and Skids got moved to BT-16 from BT-17. The former Wildrider then was supposed to arrive as Black Widow (Blackacrachnia) but that too got cancelled.

### End of the line?

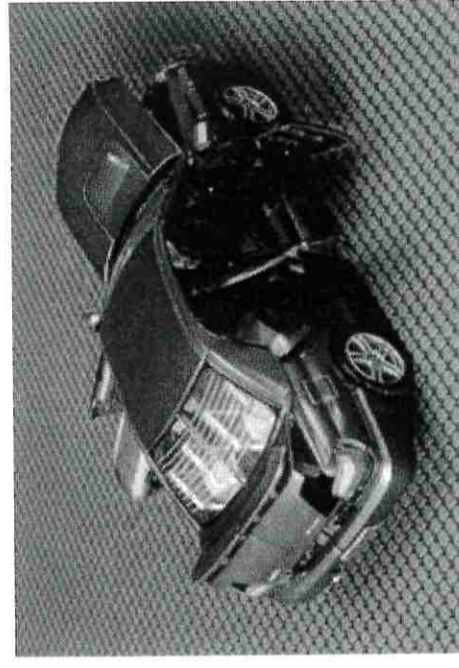
As the last couple of normal Binaltech releases were released, Binaltech asterisk turned up, releasing a police version of the Impreza WRX as Red Alet annoying everyone who saw what was wrong with Prowls Honda form, and Sunstreaker finally made an appearance. Binaltech Asterisk was also supposed to include Convoy in the form of a Dodge Ram SRT just as Optimus Prime was in alternators, but this got canned, leaving a repaint of Skids as Broadcast (Blaster) as the final mass market Binaltech asterisk release.

All plastic versions of the Dodge RAM as Ginrai (Convoys Masterforce look-a-like), Ford GT as Rodimus and an altered version

of the RX-8 as a human controlled EDC robot called Autorooper (Auto Trooper)? Looks a hell of a lot like Streetwise to me anyway) were released in the deeply disturbing TransFormers Kiss range.

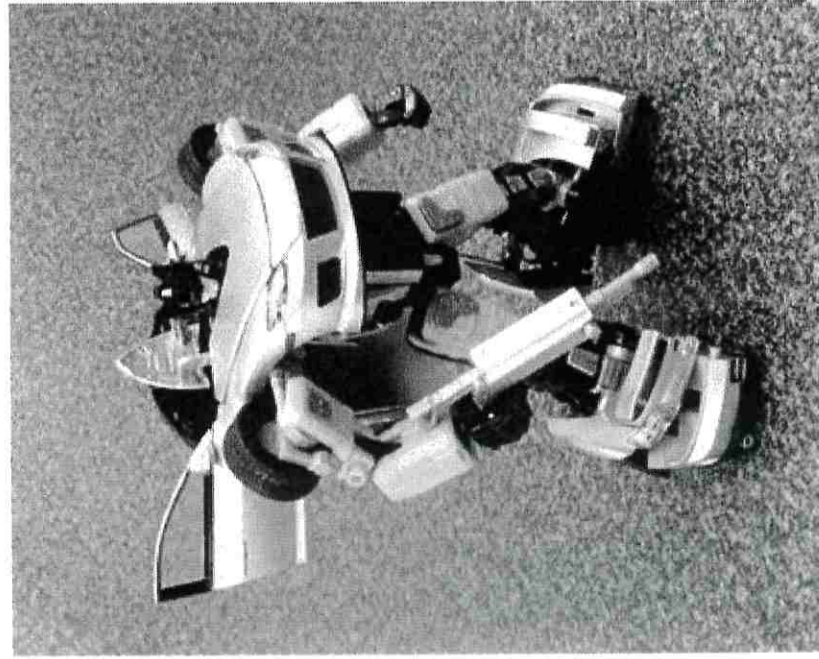
Binaltech didn't finish there completely though as the 2007 Wonder Festival got a special limited edition BT-17 in the form of Black Convoy - the Dodge RAM complete with die cast parts, making it unique thus far, which also got an extremely limited release through eHobby. Following this was a clear plastic version of the Ford GT as the Electro-disrupted (invisible to you and me) Rijie (Mirage). Those last two were annoyingly limited and hideous expensive in the end for western collectors (that translates roughly as "I didn't manage to get them, Damn it."). That however appeared to be the end... at least until earlier this year.

However what is not generally known is that Hasbro UK and MG Rover were at one point in very early and brief negotiations before the collapse of the Midlands car firm. The MG SV-R was initially being targeted for a Decepticon release... with a Binaltech die-cast version repaint for Auto Assembly! However Hasbro as usual soon got cold feet (as they always seem to have done with anything to do with fans, and whenever we try to get them on board for an exclusive toy) and MG Rovers days were seriously numbered scuppering it completely. Shame really as the whole range would have been up for grabs and initially Hasbro UK seemed quite keen to have more British originated Alternators. At least we got the Jaguar XK in the end before Tata bought Jaguar, Land Rover and the Rover marque from Ford.



### Rebirth or last hurrah?

Tomy Takara surprised everyone earlier this year by announcing the release of four new Binaltech toys, confirmed to all include die cast parts. The first two, BT-19 Bluestreak and BT-20 Argent Meister are a re-colour of the Streak WRX in blue rather than silver whilst the new Meister (Jazz) is in silver to match his appearance in the recent live action film but using the Laserwave version of the Mazda RX-8 mould with the Meister head and a hand instead of a gun on the right arm. Available at the time of writing these guys have yet to grace my doorstep unfortunately and have been pretty much written off as cynical repaints by the new combined Tomy Takara.



BT-21 is slated to be that Wildrider/Balck Widow release of the Honda S2000, finally, but in a silver pink and white colour scheme which allegedly makes it Arcee. Just with Windchargers head obviously.

BT-22 Convoy was also supposed to come out as the Dodge Ram SRT-10 in red with die cast at the same time as Arcee (by the time you are reading this) but has now been indefinitely delayed, and frankly that sounds like a cancellation entirely following the

sudden revelation of where that Nissan GT-R license is ending up. Looks to me like Arcee is bringing the 1:24 scale range to an end.



### Alternity

Finally Takara are getting their way, now they have the weight of Tomy with them. Whether this will ever see the light of day via Hasbro is a mystery, though it's Japanese price point suggests this is highly unlikely. Alternity Convoy is a 1:32 replica of the new Nissan GT-R using a combination of plastic and die cast parts, featuring the auto-morph technology seen in the live action movie toy range (and frankly descended directly from the auto-transform technology originally seen in the almost released in G2 Machine Wars toys and basic early Beast Wars toys.

The one leaked photo from a Japanese toy show, which we cant use here unfortunately, shows a very detailed toy that's ever so slightly larger than a Deluxe sized toy you will have seen scooting around at the £10 price point. Unfortunately it seems the price point will be the same as the Binaltechs at the 1:24 scale, though with the way oil and therefore plastic prices, and it seems metal prices have been going recently, this is hardly a shock.

However if all the detail shown in the hard copy prototype, the image of which has done the rounds thanks to Fan-2-fan, makes it to the final product I think it is fair to say that it will be stunning, and worthy of a purchase. Shame its not another character though as a supercar is probably not the best choice for the character we know as Optimus Prime. But then the fire engine form from Car

Robots/Robots In Disguise wasn't the greatest choice, but it didn't stop the figure being stunningly brilliant.

The future is now the question - is Alternity Convoy a one off? Is it the start of a range of 1:32? Does that mean that we may finally see the Mitsubishi Evo X? Perhaps some of the other licensed cars will make the move to 1:32. Perhaps its time we saw a Citroen C4 to go with the advert? Hell after the popularity of the Movie Audi are apparently involved in Revenge of the Fallen, perhaps Porsche and VW might wake up and smell the licensing fees? It nicely sets up bigger vehicles too, so perhaps Inferno, Grapple, and a proper Prime and jets might be in order? Actually maybe not the jets - an F-15 would be well over half a metre long in 1:32!

### The Binaltech releases

- BT-01 Smokescreen (number 7) - Subaru Impreza WRC 2003
- BT-01 Smokescreen (number 8) - Subaru Impreza WRC 2003
- BT-02 Lambor (Sideswipe) - Dodge Viper SRT-10 softtop
- BT-03 Streak (Silverstreak) - Subaru Impreza WRX
- BT-04 Hound - Jeep Wrangler
- BT-05 Dead End - Dodge Viper Competition Coupe
- BT-06 Tracks (Yellow) - Chevrolet Z06 Corvette
- BT-06 Tracks (Blue with flame sticker) - Chevrolet Z06 Corvette
- BT-07 Smokescreen GT (number 1) - Subaru Impreza WRC 2004
- BT-07 Smokescreen GT (number 2) - Subaru Impreza WRC 2004
- BT-08 Meister (white) - Mazda RX-8
- BT-08 Meister (red) aka Zoom-zoom - Mazda RX-8
- BT-09 Swindle - Jeep Wrangler
- BT-10 Grimlock - Ford Mustang GT
- BT-11 Ravage (Beast Wars) - Chevrolet Z06 Corvette Convertible
- BT-12 Overdrive - Honda S2000 softtop
- BT-13 Lazerwave (Shockblast/Shockwave) - Mazda RX-8 Mazdaspeed V2

### Binaltech Asterisk

- BTA-1 Red Alert - Subaru Impreza WRX Police
- BTA-2 Sunstreaker - Dodge Viper SRT-10 Competition Coupe version.
- BTA-3 BroadCast (Blaster) - Toyota Bb

### Alternators not released in Binaltech

- Windcharger (Overdrive with slight mould changes including loss of gun barrel)
- Decepticharge - Mugen Honda S2000 (hardtop)
- Swerve - Chevrolet Z06 Corvette
- Rollbar - Jeep Wrangler
- Ricochet - Subaru Impreza WRX
- Mirage - Ford GT (blue)
- Camshaft - AcuraRSX (Honda Integra Type-R)
- Nemesis Prime - USA paint variation from Black Convoy.
- Rumble - Honda Civic Si
- Ravage - Jaguar XK

### Transformers: Movie Special

#### The Movie

#### Reviewed by Simon Plumble

Fans have been wondering for years whether or not a live action Transformers movie was possible or whether contemporary special effects were really capable of truly bringing

Optimus Prime, Megatron et al to life on the big screen.

Then came along animator Michael Smith who, in a short 22 second CGI video of a VW Beetle transforming within a live video scene perfectly blended, there was proof that it COULD be done...

Fast forward to 2007 and we had what was arguably the movie event of the year... Transformers!

I think I must be one of only a handful of "die-hard" fans who deliberately avoided all of the spoilers, rumours, news and information that was going around about the film. Apart from the trailers and seeing one or two stills before the film I managed to remain pretty much in the dark before I saw it which in a way I think was a blessing.

The plot has taken quite a few liberties with Transformers lore to make it more accessible to the general cinema going audience (which is understandable to a limited degree) and starts off with a scene setting shot of Cybertron with Peter Cullen's voice describing the civil war between the Autobots and the Decepticons and how it left Cybertron a ravaged, lifeless planet...

All that is left now that can help to rebuild the Cybertronian race is the Allspark Cube, a device that can create artificial life or create life from any mechanical device but it has been lost in space... until now. The Autobots and Decepticons have tracked it down to a small blue-green planet known as Earth and the race is on to recapture it.

Oh, where on earth do I start? To be frank, I was disappointed with this film. There were so many wasted opportunities to make this a stunning film that would have worked on so many levels but instead I felt that Michael Bay delivered a summer blockbuster that was designed to appeal primarily to the casual cinema-going audience which compromised too much on everything that a typical Transformers fan would want and on that basis at least, he managed to succeed as box office figures proved.

I don't deny that Bay hasn't done a great deal of good for the franchise and he has introduced a whole new generation of fans to Transformers who wouldn't have been otherwise, but from a fans point of view, were the compromises made in the film really worth it?

So onto what I actually thought... probably my biggest gripe about the movie - and this was something that ran throughout from start to finish - was that it was pretty much human centric and it felt that at times that the Autobots were almost an afterthought in the film. The film seemed to be more about a small group of alien robots attacking earth and the human's struggle to defeat them rather than the ongoing struggle between the Autobots and Decepticons which is what we've been used to for the last 24 years.

In fact, the credits seemed to highlight this further... the "main" actors were listed as you would expect, and then all of the minor actors were credit right down to the obligatory "man in hat" type roles and then all of the voice actors were listed at the foot of them. Now considering how much of a key character Optimus Prime is in a TRANSFORMERS film, shouldn't Peter Cullen have had a fairly high billing in the credits instead of being listed below 'hot dog boy'?

Even more frustratingly for me were the scenes that DID feature them. Apart from Bumblebee, astonishingly the remaining Autobots didn't appear until an hour into the film and then for part of it were used for little more than comic relief. At least they managed to have some character interaction and showed signs of personality so they fared better than the Decepticons...

While they did seem to have more screen time, they didn't really seem to display any unique personalities with the exception of Megatron and to be honest, he was the only one who had any real dialogue to speak of. Apart from Frenzy, the rest could have changed bodies and you wouldn't have been able to have noticed any real difference.

Finally, Prime's mouth... do I really need to say any more on that one?! The only Optimus



I have ever really been comfortable with having a mouth is Optimus PRIMAL and that was perfectly acceptable because it made sense with his Beast Mode but without his faceplate he just didn't look like Prime.

Visually the film DOES look remarkable and it has some of the most incredible special effects I have ever seen in ANY movie but this film needed them if it was going to be anywhere near convincing!

Performances from the cast again were all pretty good although I'm not too sure about some of the casting. Megatron didn't quite sound "right" and I still think it was a wasted opportunity not casting David Kaye in the role. For some reason, Peter Cullen - to me at least - didn't feel as if he was putting as much into the part as he did over 20 years ago.

From the human cast, I'm not too sure - Shia LaBeouf was superb and fitting the part brilliant despite some questionable moments in the script itself, but many of the others didn't really leave much of an impression on me one way or another.

I'll be honest, it IS an enjoyable couple of hours as an action flick but it just doesn't FEEL like a Transformers film. If you watch it as a sci-fi action movie then yes, you'll get a few hours of good entertainment out of it, but if you want something that's a true, character-driven Transformers film then you're better off going back to the 1986 animated film.

## A Second Opinion by Sven Harvey

I wasn't even remotely looking forward to it. Everyone who had seen pre-screenings told me I would love it... then thought about it, then told me actually probably I wouldn't. I loved Beast Wars, so I can't really be a G1 purist can I?

I saw the early designs - the press shots of Prime and various bits of information and frankly I freaked. What the hell were they playing at? I breathed a massive sigh of relief when the "Energon Cube" got renamed the "All Spark Cube" but still didn't understand why it wasn't called the Creation Matrix or why it wasn't in Primes chest...

In retrospect it is probably a good thing I was pre-warned of the designs and the re-assembly style transformations, as if I had gone into the cinema to watch it the first time without getting used to the idea I probably would have walked out at the point where all the Autobots met up. I had a hard time not doing so as it was.

In any case I went to see the movie at the cinema and tried to keep as open a mind as I could. I tried, I really did. The biggest problem I had though was my memory of the storytelling from the British G1 comic - which I truly loved, and I loved the G2 comic and the TransMasters UK continued G2 comics. However I never warmed to IDWs or even Dreamwaves "neo-G1" stories. The ideas

behind Binaltech and Alternators had put an idea into my head of what a new live action movie should look like too. The designs previewed on the net and official press shots had destroyed that dream. The choice of director also put pay to any dreams of this being an epic bit of storytelling, more a underdeveloped story surrounded by a ridiculous number of special effects action shots.

Sitting there in the AMC I let the jibe at Porsche go. I saw the irony of the 70' Camero Bumblebee attacking the yellow VW Beetle next to it. The lines such a "More than meets the eye" grated badly. The robot modes seemed a total mess with Megatron being nothing more than a pile of scrap with bizarrely my fave G1 character having the most sensible looking G1-like robot mode - Jazz. Unfortunately the car mode was a horrible mismatch for the character and though the voice and attitude was about right in a way, the fact that he was the smallest of the Autobots whilst allegedly being second in command, and never actually giving an order made no sense. Then Bumblebee evacuated lubricants on a human and I realised this wasn't a group of heroes, or certainly not the characters I knew. I almost threw my popcorn at the screen and walked out, but I thought I better stay as my kids were with me (though they also had expressed their dismay at such stupidity - and the boys were 6 and 10...)

To be fair it didn't get any worse as such but the characterisations varied wildly from the characters they were supposed to be...

The Autobots acting like the keystone cops behind Sams (SPIKE? BUSTER?) house? I don't think so.

Jazz sitting unprotected in vehicle mode in the middle of street while the weapons expert and medic went into battle?

I don't think so. Jazz being unskillful enough to be caught by a lumbering oaf like Megatron? I don't think so.

Prime running past a crashing helicopter rather than catching it and saving the occupants? I don't think so.

And adding to that the filmmakers had even forgotten to change the subtitles letting Brawl be called Devastator - a huge continuity error with plans for the future in movies two and three!

I came out of the movie thinking it wasn't aimed at fans. If anything it and everything leading up to it had put me off the franchise for a while. I went home and watch the original 1986 movie to recover. Ironically I enjoyed that film more than I had in years.

That's the point though - this was aimed at non-fans and for them it is enjoyable. Fans of Transformers frankly have to basically switch off the part of their brain that knows about Transformers before you watch this film, as at best it goes in a different direction, and at worst is an insult to the original characterisations and storyline.

After that initial viewing however I learned to just see it separately. This isn't Transformers as I know it. It isn't Transformers as I would like it. It certainly isn't Transformers as I would write it or direct it myself.



## Transformers The Movie - What Has It Done For Us? by Simon Plumble

The Transformers franchise had been in something of a slump for a while. We've had a couple of lacklustre TV shows (Armada, Energon etc.) with mainstream toy ranges that have been a bit hit and miss. While we have had ranges aimed at the hardcore collector, these have been sporadic at best and have dried up since the merger of Takara and Tomy (the Takara collection, Worlds Smallest and so on).

Toy displays have been hidden away in small corners in stores given very little space compared with other ranges, the cartoons have been buried away in TV schedules so hardly anyone has seen them and it's little wonder that the profile of Transformers in the UK hasn't been as high as it should have been over the last few years and certainly nowhere near as it has been in the past.

That is until last year when the movie hit the big screen! Suddenly the franchise seemed to be given a completely new lease of life and toys and merchandise was being released at a rate the likes of which we hadn't seen since the 1980s. Not only were we getting an extensive range of toys once again, but a seemingly never ending supply of associated items with just the slightest connection with Transformers. For manufacturers, Transformers literally became a licence to print money.

What it is a normal Hollywood Summer Blockbuster - a popcorn movie, designed very clearly for a primarily American audience (I will let you work out what that means). If you go in expecting that and no real commonality with Transformers as you know it, it doesn't disappoint, well except for that damn scene with Bumblebee peeing on that Sector 7 guy anyway.

One major plus point that has to be awarded to it though as the fact that as a special effects movie, it frankly is unparalleled. The HD-DVD consortium went after an exclusive deal with Paramount and one of the Prime reasons was the fact that the movie makes one hell of a reference disc for high def. Septembers release of this film on Blu-Ray will only cement the point further.

On balance though you can look at this film in two ways - from the point of view of an established Transformers fan, especially one who knows G1 lore, it is a humungous let down. The characters and original storylines scream for far more attention, and the film just doesn't have a storyline that can bear examination, resulting in a very below par mark of around 3/10.

Show it to a non-fan (and preferably switch off their higher brain functions) and they'll have a blast as it is a massively enjoyable film (maybe even a 7/10), if you don't expect much from it. I just despair at the fact that that \*IS\* how you have to approach it.

The action figures were dominated by Optimus Prime and Bumblebee with countless variants on the two, in sizes ranging from minibot size to Voyager and beyond (in the case of Ultimate Bumblebee) although I still can't understand why the Robot Replica range of non-Transforming figures were released!

What was even more shocking was the sheer scope of the non-figure lines... stationary sets, Top Trumps, greetings cards, radios, clothes, childrens fancy dress costumes - anything imaginable and as soon as stores had stocks in they were flying off the shelf. The movie - and Transformers once again, had become the "in thing"!

Then we had Activision... they spent millions developing a series of games released on every current console format around today. - one for the PS3/PS2/XBox 360 and PC, one for the DS, and one for the PSP and that too turned out to be a massive seller, hitting the number one spot in the game sales charts and staying there for several weeks! Granted, having the involvement of Peter Cullen, Frank Welker, Shia LaBeouf, Mark Ryan and David Sobolov (Beast Wars) providing voices only added to it's appeal!



Titan launched their new comic amidst all of this and it is currently selling an impressive 45,000 copies a month - far better than the old Marvel UK comic achieved and all of this is helping to attract new fans to Transformers of all ages, many of whom hadn't been interested before the movie so even if G1

wasn't something they were interested in, maybe they may try the classic material over time...?

While we may not all agree with the quality of the movie or how true it is to our own personal vision of what Transformers is/should be, there's no denying the positive impact it has had in making Transformers mainstream again and making what many people have thought of for so long as being something for "geeks" as something that's actually pretty cool to enjoy. If nothing else, at least that's something to be thankful for.

### Return of the Classics by Sven Harvey

As you may well recall, in between Transformers: Cybertron and the release of the toy lines to go with the live action Transformers movie, Hasbro created a filler line they called Transformers: Classics. As with all Transformers product the line was developed in association with Takara, but the resulting line was too small for Tomy/Takara to release and they held off on releasing it in Japan. The classics range was designed to make sure there was Transformers product out there, but the sales pulled in by the line surprised Hasbro and many of the products in the line sold out in half the time they were supposed to in the USA, leaving the UK and Europe getting very little of the second wave of classics (indeed of all places Wilkinson Hardware Stores seemed to be the only major chain that got the Deluxe sized Mirage, Grimlock, Astrotrain, Ramjet and Cliffjumper toys!)

Botcon 2007 also had an exclusive range of Classics toys - including some Cybertron repaints and these were snapped up very quickly - and prices went through the roof as anyone with any love for G1 desperately wanted them.

Hasbro and Takara already had ideas about a second range of Classics, but the sales success of the very G1 inspired line made the development all the more urgent. The usual policies with new Transformers toy lines went into place as with the first classics range

- each mould would need to be repainted and slightly remoulded to create two characters, but done carefully to make sense, and though totally new moulds would be used for the deluxe and ultra size class whilst repaints from earlier lines would be used for the Voyager size class, and a late decision was taken to have legends toys (with three repaints of moulds from Cybertron that had already been repainted for the original Classics line.

Hasbro also took the decision to bring back the Transformers Universe title, and merge anything that wasn't part of the mainstream lines (ie Movie/Animated) into it. Hence the Deluxe Classics 2.0 are officially referred to as Transformers: Universe Classic Deluxe Assortment.

Takara started releasing their version of the original classics earlier this year (Transformers Henkei) with the express intention to release the new Classics 2.0 toys as part of it. Takara have already grabbed some attention with their versions of the classics toys by using a significant amount of vacuum metalisation (chroming) and their colour schemes are quite different to the USA versions, with Takaras versions often being much more faithful to the original colouration seen in the G1 cartoon series. Megatron is particularly a departure featuring a much more G1 Silver, red and black colour scheme compared with the rather neon western version.

The tendency to add chrome and hark back to G1 as much as possible has shown in images of the Japanese versions of Prowl and Sunstreaker (who along with Octane should be hitting the UK in the deluxe assortment any time now).



The second list shows the toys due for release that have been confirmed so far, with the Ultra class Onslaught, Powerglide and Silverbolt being the only non-Deluxe size part of the range being released in Japan (and those will be as "USA editions" but with much more G1 accurate paint jobs, ie USA Powerglide is grey primarily while the Japanese "USA Edition" is in G1 Powerglide burgundy!)



The good news is that at the moment it is believed that the entire Classics range in Universe packaging will be coming to the UK market in stark contrast to the original Universe line which only ever made it to the UK in spits and spats as grey (unofficial) imports to retailers such as Home Bargains (and of course your local neighbourhood TransFormers specialists!)

Lets just hope the entire G1 homage range makes it to our shores.

### Classics Range

#### Classics Legends (£2.99)

- Bumblebee (G1 repaint of Cybertron Hot Shot)
- Fireflight (G1 repaint of Cybertron Jetfire)
- Jetfire (G1 repaint of Cybertron Thundercracker)
- Leo Prime (repaint of Cybertron Leobreaker)

- Perceptor (G1 repaint of Cybertron Red Alert)
  - Whirl (G1 repaint of Cybertron Evac)
  - Menasor (G1 repaint of Cybertron Optimus Prime)
  - Trypicon (G1 repaint of Cybertron Scourge)
- Minicons (£6.99)**
- Clear Skies Team (Steel Wind, Thunderwing and Nightscream)
  - Dinobots (Knockdown, Terrorisaur, Swoop)
  - Night Rescue Team (Strongarm, Divebomb, Firebot)
  - Demolition Team (Wideload, Sledge, Broadside)
  - Dirt Digger Team (Oil Slick, Dirt Rocket, Grindor)
  - Predator Attack Team (Snarl, Overbite, Dreading)

### Classics Deluxe Class (£9.99)

#### Wave 1

- Starscream
- Bumblebee
- Rodimus

#### Wave 2 - very limited UK availability

- Cliffjumper (repaint of Bumblebee)
- Grimlock
- Mirage
- Astrotrain
- Ramjet (remould of Starscream)

### Specials

- Optimus Prime VS Megatron "The Ultimate Battle" (Prime is very G1 like in this double pack while Megatron is very G2. Shame the included DVD was all about the two characters in the "Unicron Trilogy") (£19.99)
- Soundwave W/ Ravage and Laserbeak (Toys R Us Exclusive in USA and UK, though it isn't really Soundwave, rather its Soundblaster complete with two cassette chest in blue!) (£24.99)

### Universe Classics (2.0) Range (announced at time of writing).

#### Legends (£2.99)

- Starscream (G1 Repaint of Cybertron Thundercracker)
- Red Alert (G1 Repaint of Cybertron Hot Shot)
- Onslaught (Repaint of Cybertron Red Alert)
- Autobot Jazz
- Autobot Hound
- G2 Megatron



#### Deluxe (£9.99)



- Sunstreaker
- Prowl
- Octane

- Sideswipe (remould/repaint of Sunstreaker)
- Silverstreak (remould/repaint of Prowl)
- Acid Storm (repaint of Classics Starscream)
- Galvatron
- Ironhide
- Ratchet (remould/repaint of Ironhide)



#### Voyager (£19.99)

- Blaster (repaint of Cybertron Soundwave)
- Heavy Load (repaint of Cybertron Quickmix)
- Blades (repaint of Cybertron Evac)
- Drop Shot (repaint of Cybertron Scattershot)
- Treadbolt (repaint of Classics Jetfire)
- Nemesis Prime (SDCC repaint of Classics Optimus Prime)

#### Ultra (£24.99)

- Onslaught
- Powerglide
- Silverbolt
- Stormcloud (Powerglide repaint)



## A Look At Swerve by Sven Harvey

Leaking out on auction sites, the release of the Transformers Universe Swerve figure has been utterly bizarre.

After their links with Hasbro as exploited in the live action Transformers last year, GM apparently approached Hasbro/Takara regarding their Chevrolet range that they are developing from the ashes of the Daewoo motor company they bought out a couple of years ago.



The old Kalos supermini was being replaced by the new Aveo, and for the initial launch in China Chevy/GM had ordered this deluxe sized figure based on the car from Hasbro and it came in red in a basic bad with Transformers Universe branded instructions.

The idea was to give the figure to people who either test drove or bought the car in the far east.

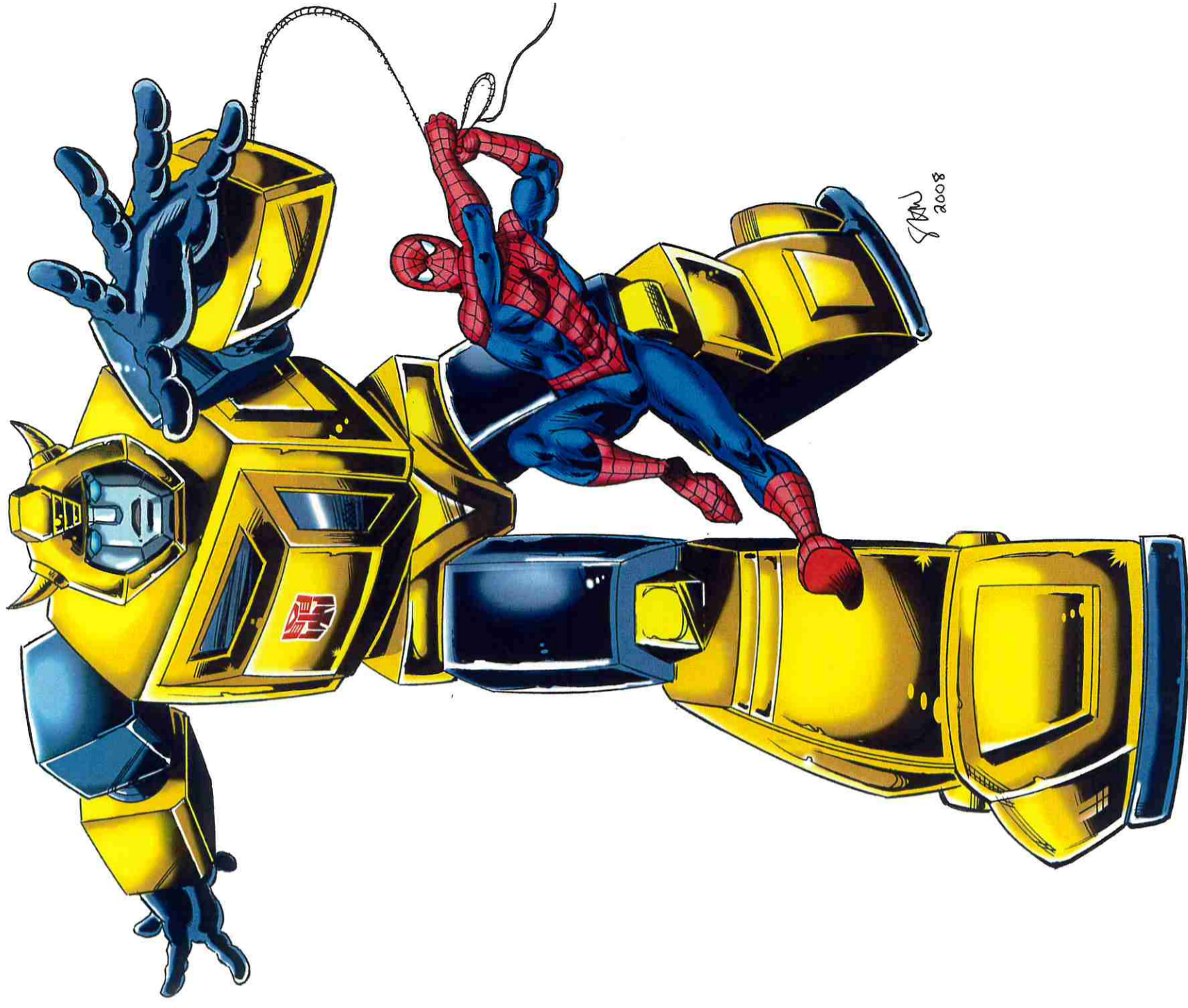
The toy ended up on auction sites and unsurprisingly the information on how these toys were obtained was distorted somewhat so it appeared that you had to buy a real Aveo to get the figure.

This of course pushed the price up for a while with the figure changing hands at around £50 a unit quite regularly.

Fortunately for European collector the European GM store got hold of a batch of the toys and put them on their site at around £7-8 each plus shipping, and I immediately grabbed a couple.

I was very pleasantly surprised by the figure as most people had assumed it was a remould of a previous figure, but it turned out to be a completely new mould. The transformation isn't too complicated and produces a damn fine looking robot mode with a great deal of articulation, especially for a figure at this size class. The vehicle mode is also very accurate, making this one of the best toys ever produced at the Deluxe size. That is a bit ironic though being as it has been licensed from a car that so far has received very much lower than average reviews!

I sincerely hope that this mould get a general release sometime so that everyone can enjoy it.





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