

—IT IS TIME FOR CYBERTRON'S GOLDEN AGE TO BEGIN AGAIN, FOR ALL UNIVERSES TO BE ONE...

...AND TO BE MINE!

SPACE AND TIME SHALL BOW BEFORE US, LORD NOVA PRIME!

YES.
SALVATRON AND I SHALL SERVE YOU, NOW AND FOREVER...

...MY MASTER.

LIKE EVERYONE, I HAVE FEARS.

BUT MY FAITH KEEPS THEM IN CHECK.

MY FAITH THAT THE FAILURES OF YESTERDAY DO NOT DEFINE TOMORROW...

...THAT THE FUTURE IS FORGED NOT BY OUR PREDECESSORS, BUT BY US.

I HAVE FAITH...

...THAT THE SUN WILL ALWAYS RISE ON A NEW DAY.

DARK DAWN

DARK CYBERTRON CHAPTER 1

CONTINUED IN TRANSFORMERS: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE #23!

Welcome to the deluxe edition of TRANSFORMERS: DARK CYBERTRON #1!

I hope you enjoyed the first issue, and I hope you want to see some of the behind-the-scenes magic... because that's what you're about to do.

Back in September 2012, James Roberts, Phil Jimenez, and I gathered in a secret meeting at Hasbro's headquarters in Rhode Island, meeting with Michael Kelly (Director, Global Publishing at Hasbro) and the Transformers brand team. Transformers fans know James from his outstanding writing on TRANSFORMERS: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE and maybe know me from my writing on TRANSFORMERS: ROBOTS IN DISGUISE (and my editing of other Transformers comics). Comics fans know Phil from drawing and writing a crazy-diverse set of comics including the upcoming *Savage Wolverine*, *Infinite Crisis*, *Invisibles*, *X-Men*, and *Wonder Woman*.

Together, we started hashing out the ideas that would become DARK CYBERTRON—throwing concepts back and forth, bringing together notions from throughout Transformers lore, from the deepest depths of the comics IDW has been publishing, and from our own fevered imaginations.

Nothing was off the table—there were a lot of moments of, “well, we couldn't do *that*, could we?” But as the ideas grew and changed... well, you'll just have to wait and see.

Our goal was to create a comic that would excite all the existing Transformers comics fans, that would bring comics fans into the world of Transformers, and that would bring Transformers fans into the world of comics. This comic was going to be available at comic book stores and digital platforms, like all of our comics—but it was also going to be packaged with select Hasbro TRANSFORMERS GENERATIONS toys in 2014.

We tried to pay off a lot of long-standing story lines from the ongoing Transformers series—and earlier comics—but still make it accessible and provide a road map of who's who. There are a lot of players in this universe, so hopefully it worked out.

In most comics today, the writers deliver a “full script”—a script that breaks the story down into individual panels, describes who's in the panel and what action is taking place, and shows all the dialogue that will be lettered. You'll see this method in the first three pages following—but the rest of the comic was written “plot first.”

“Plot first” writing means that the writers deliver just the description of action, not broken into panels and without the full dialogue. The artist bears the brunt of the storytelling duties—figuring out how many panels are needed, as well as the design of the pages. Once the pages are drawn, the writers come back and write the dialogue.

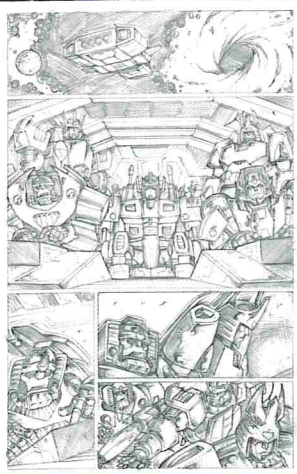
James and I hashed out a detailed outline of the entire 12-issue epic, then a more detailed plot for issue 1. Phil took that plot and—under the watchful eye of editor extraordinaire Carlos Guzman—nailed every layout, and sent them over to artist Andrew Griffith. Andrew's the regular artist of ROBOTS IN DISGUISE—and he drew the pages full-sized, adding significant embellishments and his own unbelievable dynamics. Then, those pages went over to colorist Josh Perez, who somehow made them even better.

It's been a long, fun road to get here—and I hope you enjoy the ride for the next few months... and this exclusive look at the making of DARK CYBERTRON #1!

John Barber

Inks of Casey W. Collier's subscription-only variant cover





1/ Deep space, millions of years ago, near the star GORLAM. A planet, GORLAM PRIME, orbits the star. The starship ARK-1 approaches a SPACE ANOMALY in the Benzuli Expanse, a region of deep space. [We've seen fragments of this sequence here and there, but never the whole thing. There should be some reference of the anomaly].

CAPTION: Millions of years ago. Deep space...

NOVA PRIME (INSIDE): What is that?

2/ Inside, we see the main crew. [There are dozens of crew members, but there are some key players on the bridge.] NOVA PRIME commands the ship, with GALVATRON and CYCLONUS at his side. JHIAXUS responds to Nova's question—in terms of command structure, Jhiaxus, the scientist, is second only to Nova. Jhiaxus is scheming, untrusting; Nova is powerful; a commanding, fascistic, presence. Galvatron is the chief warrior, brutal and barbarous—Conan as a Transformer; Cyclonus a more thoughtful, philosophic warrior, who acts as Galvatron's bodyguard. All these guys are important to the rest of the series. TAILPIPE, who we've never seen but has been established as being there, sits at the controls. Also around, as needed, are SCOURGE, GRINDCORE and STRAXUS [all seen in previous comics].

JHIAXUS: It is... an anomaly of some manner, Nova Prime.

NOVA PRIME: I can tell that by looking, Jhiaxus.

NOVA PRIME: I require your keen scientific mind to provide a more elaborate explanation.

NOVA PRIME: Does your anomaly present a danger to our mission?

3/ Jhiaxus looks at a monitor, displaying the anomaly.

JHIAXUS: My apologies, Lord Nova. This... this is like nothing I've seen.

JHIAXUS: The energy radiating from it... is utterly unique.

4/ Cyclonus pushes up next to Jhiaxus, examining the readings.

CYCLONUS: Let me see.

JHIAXUS: Cyclonus, you overstep your bounds—

5/ Galvatron taps his fusion cannon against Jhiaxus' chest, sternly, like you might stick out an arm to stop someone from doing something wrong. Cyclonus doesn't react, he looks at the readings.

SFX: KLANK

JHIAXUS: —erp.

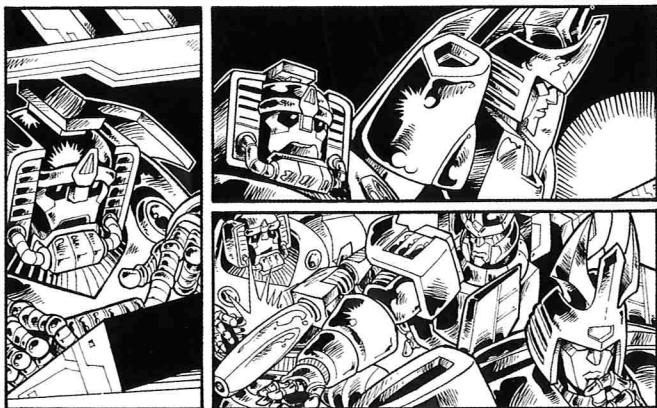
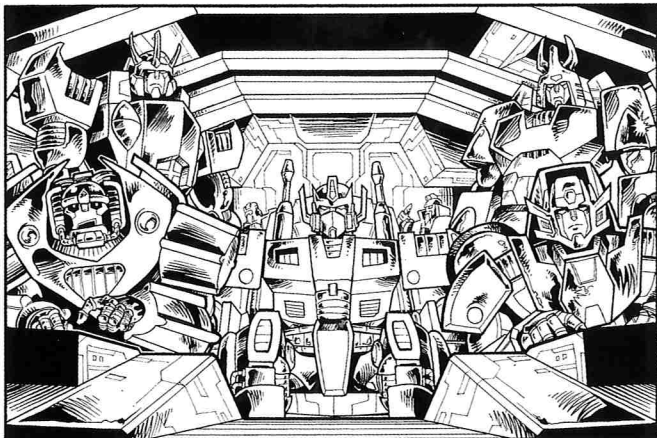
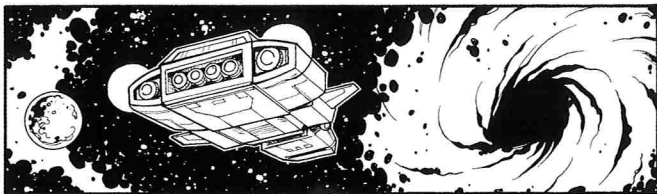
CYCLONUS: Hm...

John Barber:

The first three pages were written full-script, with art by Brendan Cahill. We wanted to give these a little bit of a retro look—but we'd already done a full-on make-it-look-like-a-comic-from-1984 in the *Robots In Disguise Annual* last year. Sort of ironically, Brendan drew the present-day sequence there.

Brendan Cahill:

My pages are set millions of years in the past, so it made sense to approach them with a different, older-feeling style. The approach I used is a little bit retro, so you see brush-style linework, some more exaggerated or dynamic poses, and of course, Kirby Dots in the space panels!



1/ Galvatron glares, sternly, at Jhiaxus. These two don't get along. Galvatron's glare is enough to stop Jhiaxus cold.

CYCLONUS (OP): ...this reminds me of something. A radiation so... cold. So... unnatural.

CYCLONUS (OP): It reminds me...

2/ Cyclonus looks up, remembering what he was thinking of.

CYCLONUS: ...of course. An ancient legend, of our creator, Primus, and his giant Titans.

CYCLONUS: There was a place, spoken of only in hushed tones. A plane of existence built upon decay—

CYCLONUS: —a dead universe. We must tread lightly, over the paths the ancients feared.

3/Jhiaxus turns to Nova.

JHIAXUS: Superstitious nonsense, my lord.

JHIAXUS: The era of myth and legend is long over. Ours is an era of science.

JHIAXUS: There is a rational explanation for this phenomenon.

4/ Cyclonus points to the readings.

CYCLONUS: Look at these readings, then! Use your science. This is a portal to another universe.

CYCLONUS: Alpha Trion blessed our ship that we may spread the Cybertronian way—freedom—across the galaxy. Not that we may risk everything on a whim.

5/ Nova rises.

NOVA PRIME: Our mission, Cyclonus, is to impose the will of Cybertron across all of creation.

NOVA PRIME: We shall be thankful fate has delivered upon us another universe in need of conquering.

6/ Galvatron pushes past Tailpipe and presses some helm controls.

NOVA PRIME (OP): Set course for the anomaly, Galvatron.

GALVATRON: At once, Prime.

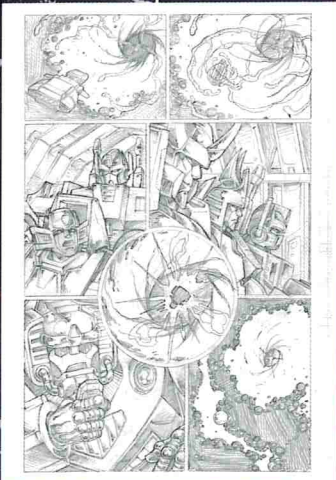
John Barber:

We didn't go full-tilt-retro, but we did bring in *Transformers: Regeneration One* colorist John-Paul Bove [who's capable of coloring in many styles, I should add!] and asked him to color it like that series—which is a continuation of the original 1984 series, but set in contemporary times. That seemed like the right fit.

James Roberts:

A scene featuring Cyclonus from *More Than Meets the Eye* and Jhiaxus from *Robots In Disguise* makes it feel like a proper crossover right from the off.





1/ Exterior--The Ark approaches the anomaly, and tendrils of glowing purple ultra-violet energy reach out from the anomaly, toward the Ark.

GALVATRON (inside): We approach--wait!

2/ The Ark's hull decays--metal peeling and turning black--as the tendrils of glowing purple ultra-violet energy drag the ship into the anomaly.

GALVATRON (inside): It--it has hold of us!

3/ Inside, Tailpipe panics. Nova keeps his calm--in fact, he orders the ship to stay the course. Galvatron looks determined.

TAILPIPE: We have to get away!

NOVA PRIME: Stay at your post, Tailpipe!

4/ Galvatron smiles at the thought of more worlds to conquer. Cyclonus is stoic.

NOVA PRIME (OP): --Nature merely follows my command--pulling us in, just as I ordered...

5/ The ark is drawn into the anomaly.

NOVA PRIME (inside): ...All is as it should be.

6/ But, back inside, Jhiaxus is concerned. He turns to a communication terminal, sending a transmission toward Cybertron, to his most trusted student--to Shockwave.

JHIAXUS: This is Jhiaxus, calling Cybertron--calling my most trusted student.

JHIAXUS: We, the crew of the Ark, are being drawn in to an anomaly in the Gorlam star system, at the edge of the Benzuli Expanse.

JHIAXUS: We may not return. Beware, my student. And I implore you--

7/ The ship vanishes, leaving only the anomaly.

JHIAXUS (inside): --please, please continue what I began, Shockwave!

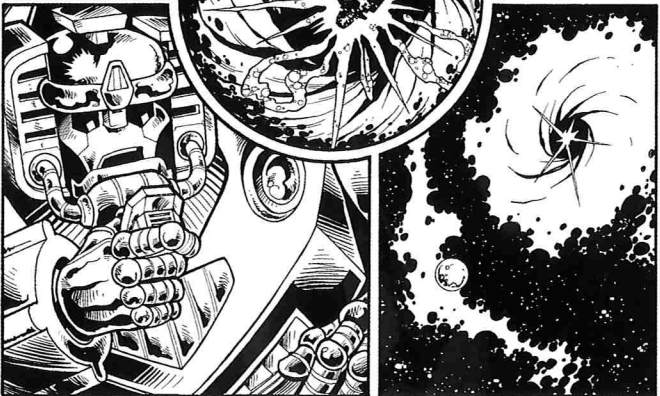
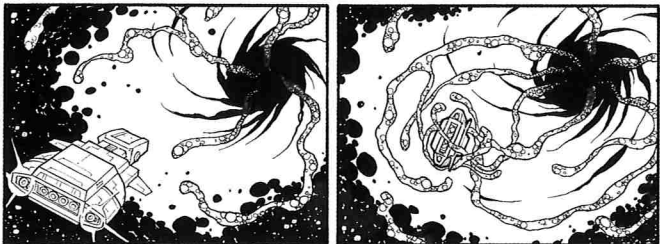
James Roberts:

John and I wanted a story that draw heavily on concepts that were unique to the Transformers comics, but without alienating new readers. The Dead Universe (introduced by writer Simon Furman back in 2006, not long after IDW started publishing TF comics) seemed a fitting place to start.

Brendan Cahill:

I looked at some of the old Transformers comics, as well as other Marvel stuff from the 1980s to get some ideas for the panel layouts. The circular panel on page 3 is pulled right from that era.

It's Tailpipe's first appearance, as he'd been mentioned by name in MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE but hadn't actually been seen yet. So I got to do a new Transformers design, which is always fun.



Cut to SHOCKWAVE, today--receiving a message from Jhiaxus. This is a different message, we realize in a moment. Shockwave is on CYBERTRON, inside the cavern in the CRYSTAL CITY that we first saw in ROBOTS IN DISGUISE #17. It's night, but we're indoors and can't tell that. There's a communication console that either appears here or in RID #21 first (it's a race as I type this).

DREADWING is there, making some final preparations to the Ore-14 [Resurrection Ore] --infused walls of the chamber. He's checking readings from the walls, using a datapad--something like that--some henchman busy-work.

Shockwave is cold and logical--no movement wasted, no extravagant flourishes--but he's basically a malevolent Mr. Spock. Like Spock, he'll deliver witticisms that may or may not have been intended to be humorous--"Was that a joke or just how he thinks" moments.

Dreadwing is relatively new to the continuity--a career Decepticon who modified his body to look like one of Megatron's old designs. He's following Shockwave because it seems like the right thing to do; he definitely does not understand the apocalyptic nature of Shockwave's plans.

Jhiaxus, on the screen (or as a hologram) of the communication console, explains that the Titan is on its way from Gorlam Prime.

Shockwave is cold, rude, and drops some subtle bon mots.



Phil Jimenez:

Big splash of Shockwave. Behind him is Dreadwing, on some sort of scaffolding, as he digs/mines/inspects the ore. In a hologram in front of Shockwave is Jhiaxus.

I absolutely love the even-more-severe worm's eye camera angle Andrew gives the team in the actual pencils. It gives Shockwave scale and menace; so much stronger than the original layout.

I imagined this as a two-page spread, with the bits of background on page 4 extending behind the panels of page 5.

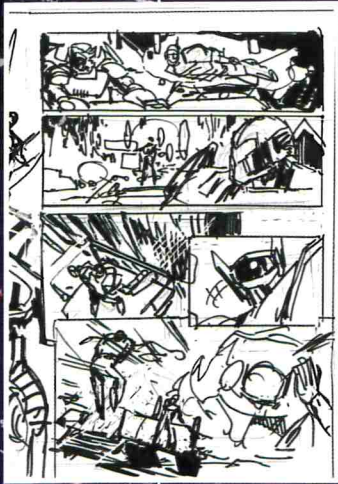
John Barber:

The two-page spread was cool, and I love two-page spreads, but after a little discussion with Carlos, we felt that the downside to how the spread would play on digital platforms wasn't worth it, and kept pages 4 and 5 separate.

Andrew Griffith:

The one change I made from the layout was to swap out the hologram of Jhiaxus with the back of the screen that Shockwave talks to him on to be consistent with how I drew Shockwave's communication console in RID issue 21.





Jhiaxus shows an image of WASPINATOR piloting the dead husk of the TITAN from RID #19.

Jhiaxus explains the Titan has been infused with the Death Ore, the link between our universe and the Dead Universe.

Shockwave acknowledges that when the Titan's space bridge teleports it here, the Death Ore will mix with his Resurrection Ore, the seeds of which Jhiaxus witnessed Shockwave planting so long ago, before Jhiaxus found the Dead Universe. Before this plan came into being.

Jhiaxus explains that he's following—traveling through space—as quickly as he can.

Shockwave closes communication.

The chamber begins to glow as the TITAN begins to materialize—it is massive, dwarfing Shockwave and Dreadwing; materializing into the walls of the chamber. Shockwave says something funny and ironic.

Materializing, the Titan absorbs the Resurrection Ore in the walls.

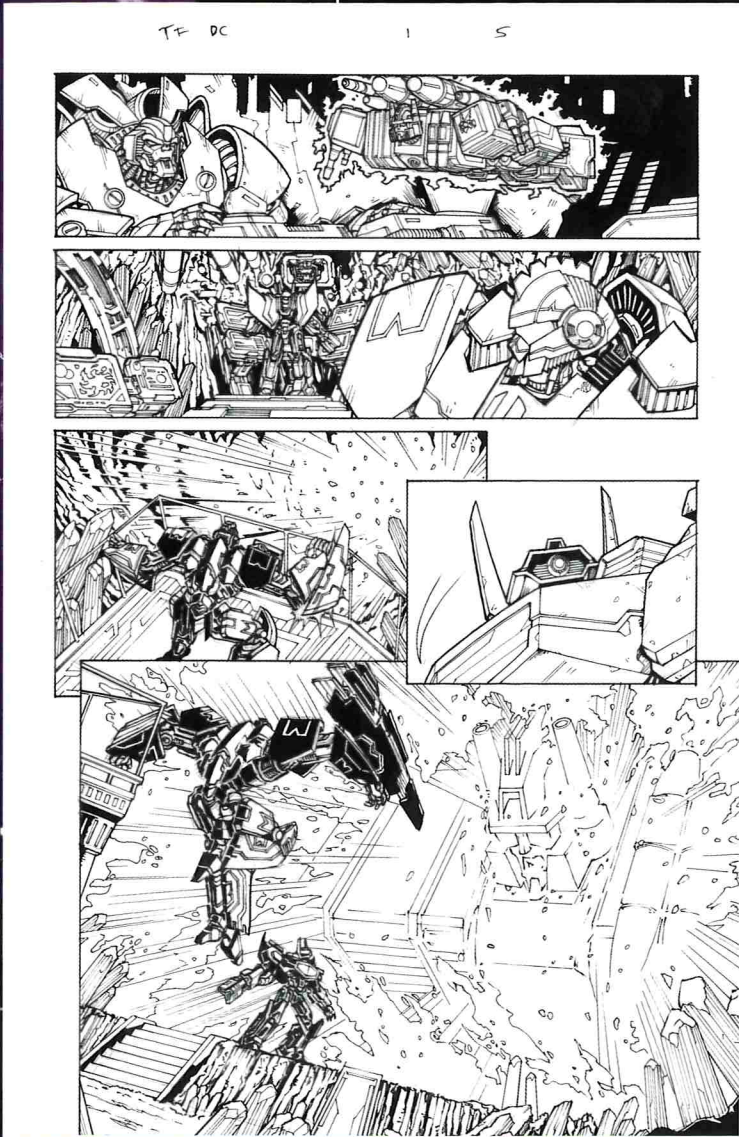
The Titan materializes and changes, distorting into its NECROTITAN design, but that won't be clear until the end of the issue.

WASPINATOR has "piloted" the Titan here, and leaps out of the energy glow, landing by Dreadwing and Shockwave.

Dreadwing helps Waspinator to his feet—Dreadwing is scared; Waspinator is a little relieved to have made it to Cybertron in one piece.

Dreadwing says they should get out of there, get to the surface.

Shockwave's face is, as always, unreadable, as he watches the glow, like a sunrise occurring right in front of him.



James Roberts:

I'd never written in the "plot first" style before, and you know what, readers? It scared me. It gave me the sweats. But I needn't have worried: Phil—and Andrew after him—took our paragraphs and turned them into something special.

Phil Jimenez:

Dreadwing leaps down behind—I'm not sure this is accurate for the character, but I wanted to have him leap from the height above, in action.

Andrew Griffith:

Eagle-eyed readers will notice Dreadwing's arm cannon popping out in the third panel, in response to the sudden burst of energy in the cavern—he's ready for anything.

John Barber:

Pages six and seven were the first ones Phil did layouts for. It was really exciting to see what came in—what he added to the story.

Phil Jimenez:

I asked, "does Waspinator climb along different surfaces like a regular insect? Could he?"

Carlos Guzman:

Although it doesn't come up in this issue, it was a good idea having Waspinator climb around on different surfaces.

James Roberts:

An analogy for writing plot first: the Smiths wrote songs by post. Johnny Marr would record a demo and send it to Morrissey, who added the words. It was very separate.

This was the opposite: John and I wrote an outline, maybe flagging up a particular panel or line or close-up; Phil produced these sweeping layouts; Andrew added layer upon layer of detail; and John and I added the dialog so that it matched precisely what was on the page.





Cut to the city of Iacon, some couple hundred miles distant. The city has been burned and damaged by the battle between Autobots and Decepticons—the fight went down just a couple days ago. The borders of the city are guarded by Cybertronians—Autobots and Decepticons, but none wear symbols. See *RID #18*. JAZZ was one of the guards, last time we saw. But it doesn't really matter if he's there now. It's night, but the glow from the arrival of the Titan is casting a dawn-like light over the city.

Maybe we pull in slowly, establishing the city with some off-panel dialog—a one-sided conversation of RATTRAP trying to talk STARSCREAM into getting out of his chamber.

Possibly pull in past the being-rebuilt MACCADAM'S BAR with its owner, BLURR, tidying up the storefront in a super-fast multishot, like the Flash.

Finally close in on one of the buildings—Starscreams's new headquarters. We'll get ref if there's an existing building that works.

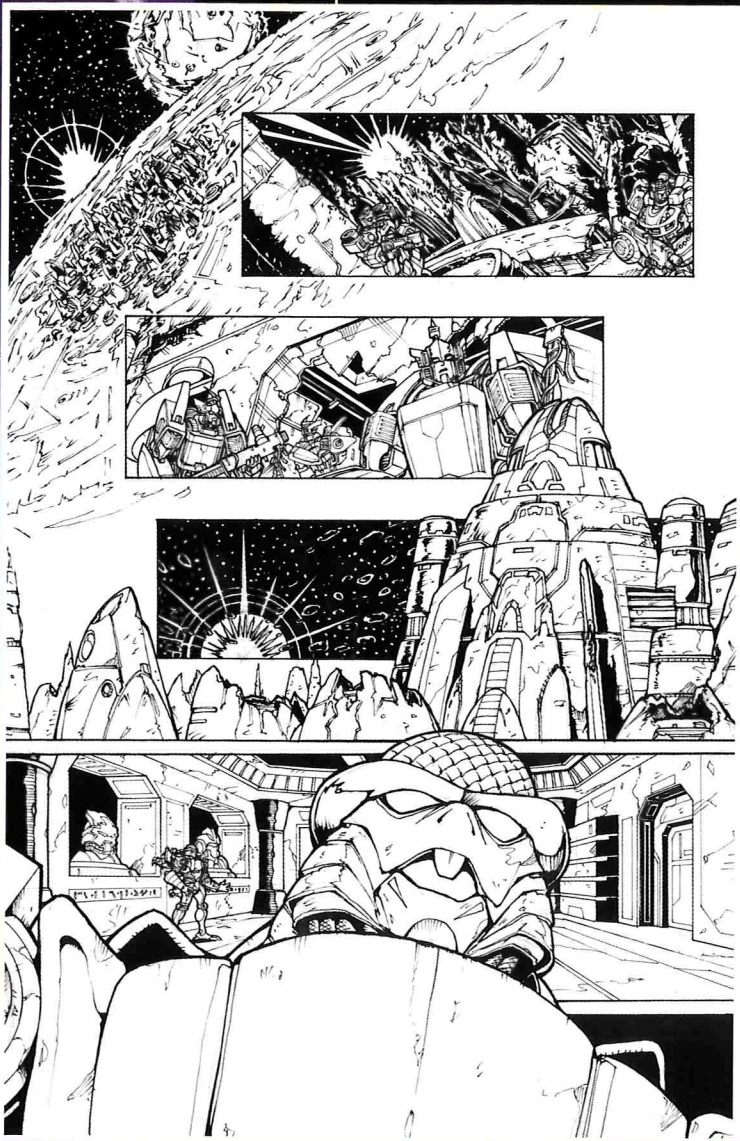
Inside one of the buildings, RATTRAP tells STARSCREAM that it's time for him to get up. Starscream is closed off in a chamber, away from the rest of the room. This is the interior of Starscream's opulent palace. Starscream has just seized control of the city—the only city remaining on Cybertron—and has, in the last day, requisitioned this building as his command center, and this room as his throne room.

Note: All the buildings of Iacon are built from the crashed war satellite called Kimia and from starships that have landed here over the past year or so. The battle has left many of the buildings burned and destroyed.

Starscream, inside his chamber, argues that he's been through a lot—seizing control, for one thing, but also getting this new body, better befitting his station in life.

Rattrap insists Starscream comes out there's something very important to see.

Rattrap is a schemer—he's figured out his best path to glory and/or survival is to attach himself to Starscream; to play Starscream's toady. Rattrap is an Autobot who's spent most of the war on a far-off planet, as part of the Maximal Brigade. Now that he's back, he's sort of grass—he smells funny to the other Cybertronians—has a weird animal alt-mode. And he's basically to Starscream what Starscream was to Megatron. A toady, but one who might try to grab power if ever an opportunity presented itself.



James Roberts:

This is one of my favorite of Phil's layouts, and an example of the degree to which layouts can influence the feel of a story. To me, this page says "epic;" it says "players being moved into position." Layout-wise, it's not something you'd see in a taut psychological thriller. It IS something you'd see in a 12-part universe-shattering space epic.

Phil Jimenez:

I lay everything out in two-page spreads; this allows me to see how pages will balance off of each other.

Andrew Griffith:

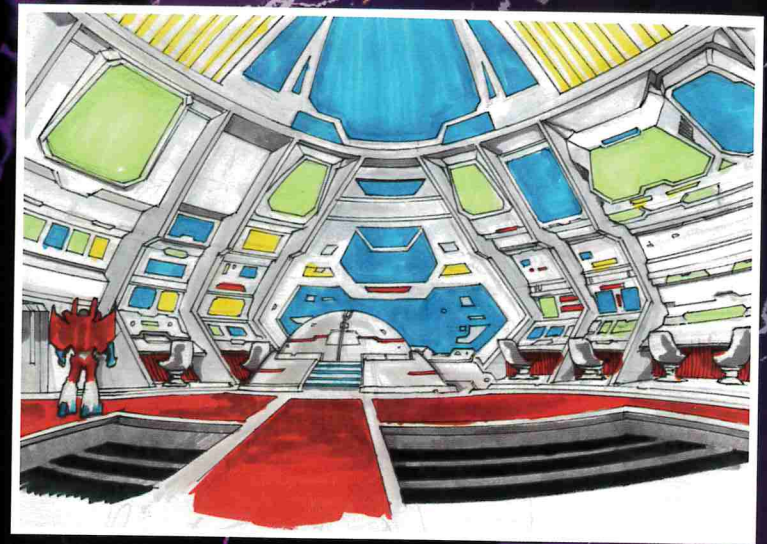
I stayed as close as possible to the layouts with the exception of matching designs I had already come up with.

Andrew Griffith:

Here's my idea for Starscream's communication center. I pictured it being the bridge of the ship he's using as a building, and tried to incorporate some Starscream-like colors and design elements that might appeal to him, even unconsciously, and draw him to using it.

Basically it's a circular room with a half-globe in the middle that I saw as being able to raise up and open into a command chair that could rotate depending on the orientation of the ship when it was in space. Figured it could also double as a throne room and throne if needed later.

And the colors are just ideas. Maybe a colorist could come up with something better.

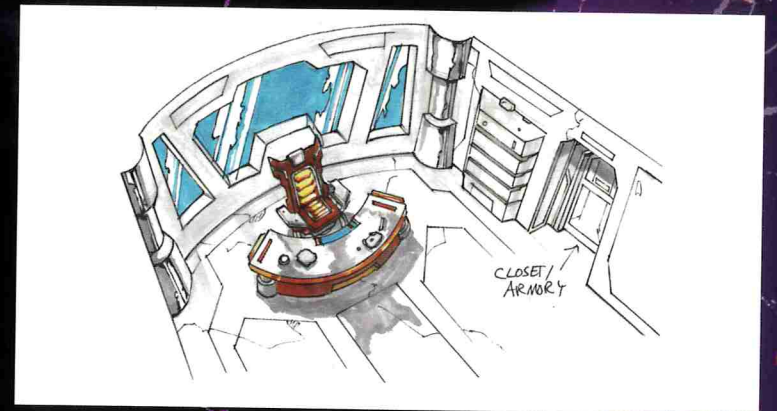


Andrew Griffith:

The interior of Starscream's quarters or office or whatever.

John Barber:

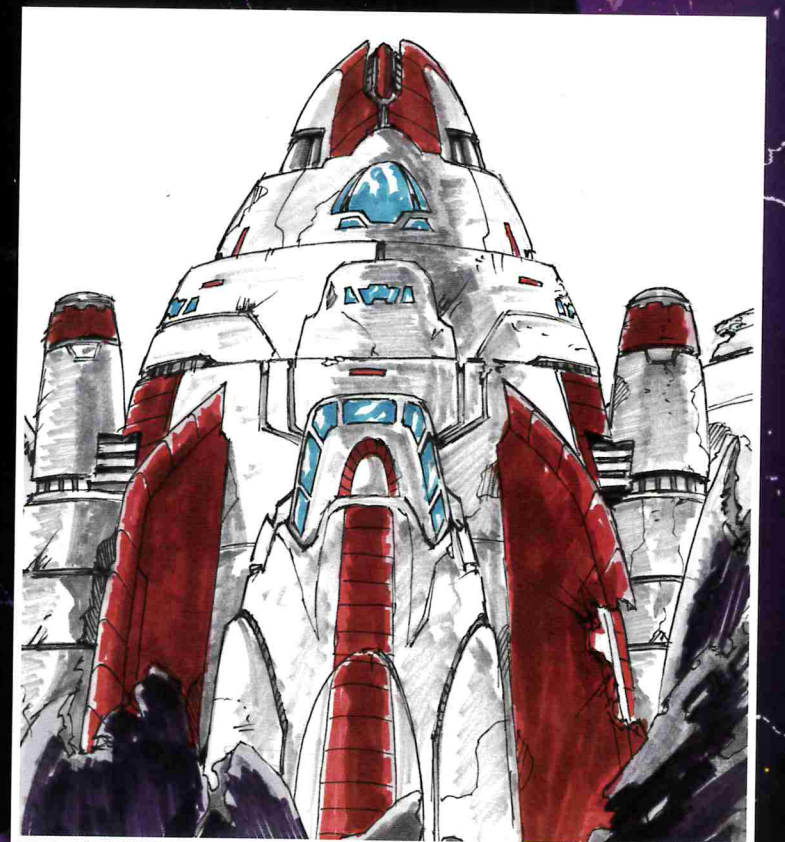
This is how Andrew and I have worked for like three years. Me: "Uh... we need a bedroom or office or something." And he has to somehow deal with that. And—obviously—he somehow creates something effective and cool that tells a story in the details.



Andrew Griffith:

And here's my design for the exterior. Sort of a somewhat damaged ship/building set among more damaged structures around it. Again, the colors are mostly an idea. Not precious about it if a colorist has a better idea.

I made some minor changes to the page 7 layout only so far as to match the designs. Starscream's Headquarters was more squat and less of the tall spire that Phil had drawn.



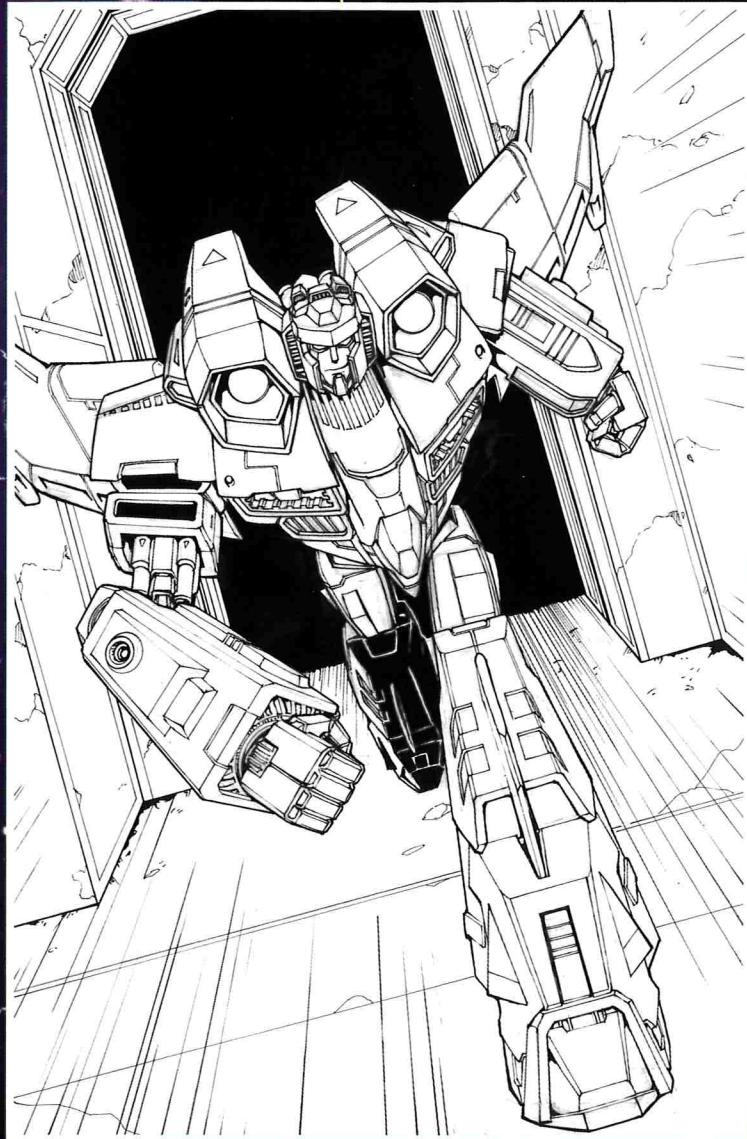


The chamber door opens, and ARMADA STARScream emerges. Starscream preens a little, trying out the body. [This issue will be packed in with that toy, so it's worth a little space to show off the new body. Also—it's the first new design that's appearing in this series].

Rattrap pulls Starscream to a window, to look out.

Starscream takes a moment to look at all the tiny little Cybertronians scurrying around, all under his control. They view him as divinely elected, after a now-vanished Titan declared him the chosen one.

Starscream pointedly drops this information to Rattrap, who's heard it a million times, and who points at the glowing orb on the horizon.



Phil Jimenez:

I moved some of the action from 8 over to 9, to give Starscream the splash.

As a Transformers novice playing 30 years of catch-up, I had a question: I needed to know how "malleable" the Transformers' bodies are—i.e., how "bendable" are their metal frames? I'd been going for a fairly rigid approach to their various "pieces," but reading Andrew's art I saw there might be a slightly organic feel to it.

Andrew Griffith:

I try not to bend their frames beyond what they'd be able to do (if that makes sense). I wasn't sure exactly what Phil was referring to by "organic," other than characters like Rat Trap that have a more organic feel.

Sometimes, like in this splash page of Starscream, I might curve straight lines a little to try and get a little bit of a fish-eye/perspective effect—but generally I don't get as "animated" with the characters as some others, like Nick Roche, do.

I've become a bit more relaxed with faces, though. I used to feel as though you should be able to see fairly rigid mechanisms that produce the expressions, but more and more I've been drawing the mouths in particular with a more flexible and "human-like" quality.

Fans seem to like human-levels of expression in the Transformers, and I rationalize it by saying certainly a race of technological beings as advanced as the Transformers would have some kind of tech that would allow their faces to move freely, whether it be some kind of metal mesh or something else.

Starscream says he's seen the sun rise, and while it's glorious that it's rising on the empire of Starscream The First, Starscream The First would rather sleep in, this morning.

Rattrap cuts him off. Sunrise isn't for another six hours.

This gets Starscream's attention.

He adjusts a dial and the window becomes a holographic computer display, overlaying data on everything they see outside.

Starscream looks at the energy readings. He's seen them before. They're very distinctive... He realizes this is the energy of the Dead Universe.

Starscream turns toward the door, and orders Rattrap to get contact with the Autobots.

Rattrap, puzzled, asks—you mean Bumblebee, who tried to remake the world in the image of the corrupt lineage of Primes, and who Starscream has exiled into the wilderness, along with the Decepticons (but he, er, says this less clumsily).

No, says Starscream, at the doorway. He calls Rattrap a fool. Not those Autobots—he needs an expert. Call the Autobots who left Cybertron—the ones in space!



Phil Jimenez:

This is my "Crisis" page! :)

Starscream and Rattrap are on the balcony, looking at the weird glow/sunrise over the city. Heavy shadow. Starscream complains...

Final shot—cut away to outer space, and Autobot space vehicle.

John Barber:

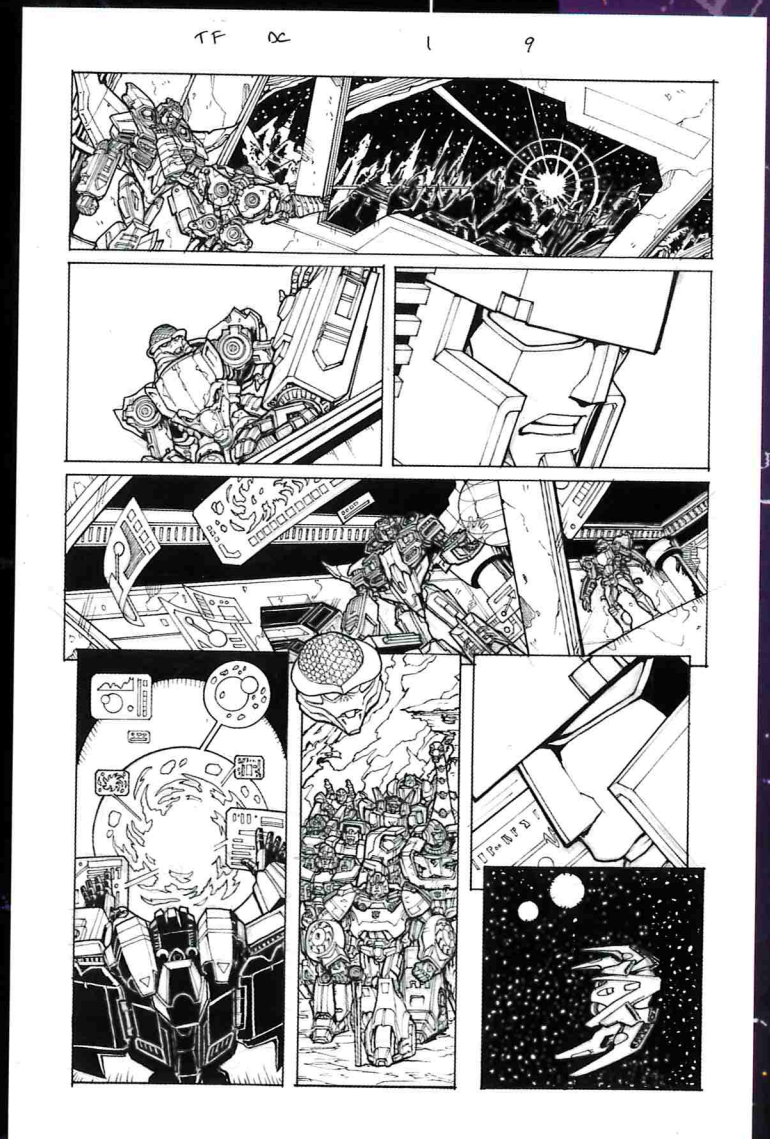
Phil Jimenez, artist of *Infinite Crisis*, lays out a "Crisis" page that James and I co-wrote. That's not a bad way to spend your day. Also, cool move putting Pax's ship onto this page.

Andrew Griffith:

It's funny how many differences I see looking at the final page right next to the layout. As I drew it, I was trying to be as accurate to the layout as I could be.

James Roberts:

By this point, with the introduction of Starscream and Rattrap, readers old and new will be getting a sense of how big the story is—and how big the TF Universe is. Lots of characters, lots of super-sized story beats, lots of action and a heap of proper payoffs—that's what Dark Cybertron is about.





Cut to space—we're back where we were on page 1, in the Gorlam system, near the Benzuli Expanse. But it's present day. The small starship *SKYROLLER* (last seen in RID #19) rockets away from the surface of the planet GORLAM PRIME, which is collapsing into itself, turning into an anomaly much like the one we saw earlier in the issue. From within the ship, a voice says "I'm not sure we're gonna make it, Prime" (driving home the connection to the earlier scene).

Inside, ORION PAX pilots—we saw the controls of this ship in *The Death of Optimus Prime*. "We're going to make it—and don't call me Prime. You know I gave up my role as Optimus Prime after the war ended—the lineage of Primes was always corrupt, anyway."

Elsewhere on the ship (we've never seen any of the rest of the interior of the ship), WHEELIE, HARDHEAD, and the reptilian alien GARNAK struggle with various controls and generally look worried. Hardhead says the planet is collapsing—the energy readings are consistent with a portal to the Dead Universe. I guess if you spend time poking around for the Dead Universe, the Dead Universe will come right out and poke you back.

Phil Jimenez:

The Skyroller rockets toward us as the planet implodes behind; not sure what this FX should look like so I just drew huge flares that explode thousands of miles into space behind the hopper...

Orion disagrees, as he calmly—steely—pilots the craft through the collapsing atmosphere. (There's no life on this world; all life was eradicated in a previous storyline). It wasn't a universe that did this—it was Jhiaxus.

The ship weaves through debris and collapsing planet/atmosphere as Orion starts to tell us how we got here.

Orion Pax is, despite what he calls himself, Optimus Prime. He's the ultimate hero; he's the idealized version of John Wayne. In action, he is confident and his choices are daring and usually the right choices. But, while in the heat of battle he acts without hesitation, when he's left to think, he tends to overthink. He gets inside his own head and undermines himself.

Hardhead is a career soldier who's been killed and brought back to life. He thrived in war, and thought there would be nothing he could do if the war ever ended. When the war did end, he took it upon himself to guard the mad scientist Jhiaxus. Jhiaxus escaped, but Hardhead teamed up with Orion Pax, and—despite the fate of the universe being at stake—Hardhead is basically enjoying himself. He's a warrior, and he's glad he's got a purpose—plus, he gets to hang out with Optimus Prime (he usually calls Pax "Prime") and basically live in an action movie.

Wheele is a goofy little guy who was stuck on a strange world by himself for millions of years, and then saw something so terrifying he's never been able to talk about it. Because of his friendship with this one rhyming alien he once met, he only speaks in rhyme. He tries to be fun and funny, but there's a profound and tragic darkness behind his eyes.

Garnak is a big lizard guy, who was some sort of a bodyguard/mercenary until he met Rodimus, and now he just hangs around these Autobots. He's good-natured and lacks self-confidence, but he really likes the people he's with. He's never fit in anywhere in his life, and despite being a big reptile in a world of metal guys, this is the closest he's ever come.

Phil Jimenez:

I wasn't sure I understood the action on these two pages, re: what's happening to the planet. So I did another version with Optimus Prime up top, in a big panel.

The second has the planet imploding behind the Skyroller, which could be really big to suggest it's approaching us, or much smaller, maybe a tiny object rocketing away from the huge imploding landmass.

But it wasn't clear what, exactly, is happening to the planet. I definitely preferred the first version, and started to think about one more...

John Barber:

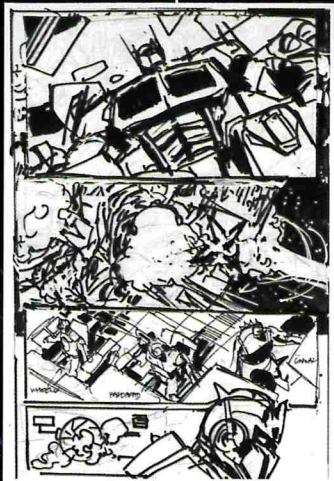
I explained (like I should have done in the script—this one is on me) that the idea was the planet was basically collapsing into a black hole. That kind of thing, anyway—collapsing into an entrance into the Dead Universe.

We had not actually established what this process looks like, but my idea was that Gorlam Prime was sort of disintegrating and all that's left at the end is a collapsing portal to another universe. It's collapsing into a movie-style black hole, not what a black hole actually is in real-life nature. It's sort of turning into a portal to the dead universe and swallowing itself up.

I agreed with Phil about version one. I liked that we were cutting from space (on last panel, page 9) to not-space (Orion Pax in panel one of page 10) then back to space.

Phil Jimenez:

I realized the planet is becoming the black hole. That changed things. I understood the movie black hole part, and I added that element and adjusted Orion.



Phil Jimenez:

I had one more thought about how to make this a two-page spread. Obviously, the spread is just the planet imploding and turning into a black hole. Big pyrotechnics shot, mostly—a "holy crap" moment. Orion's first appearance is smaller here, so that might not play well. But I was trying to give a sense of scale and scope to the event they're trying to escape.

I was curious which ones Andrew would use in the end!



Andrew Griffith:

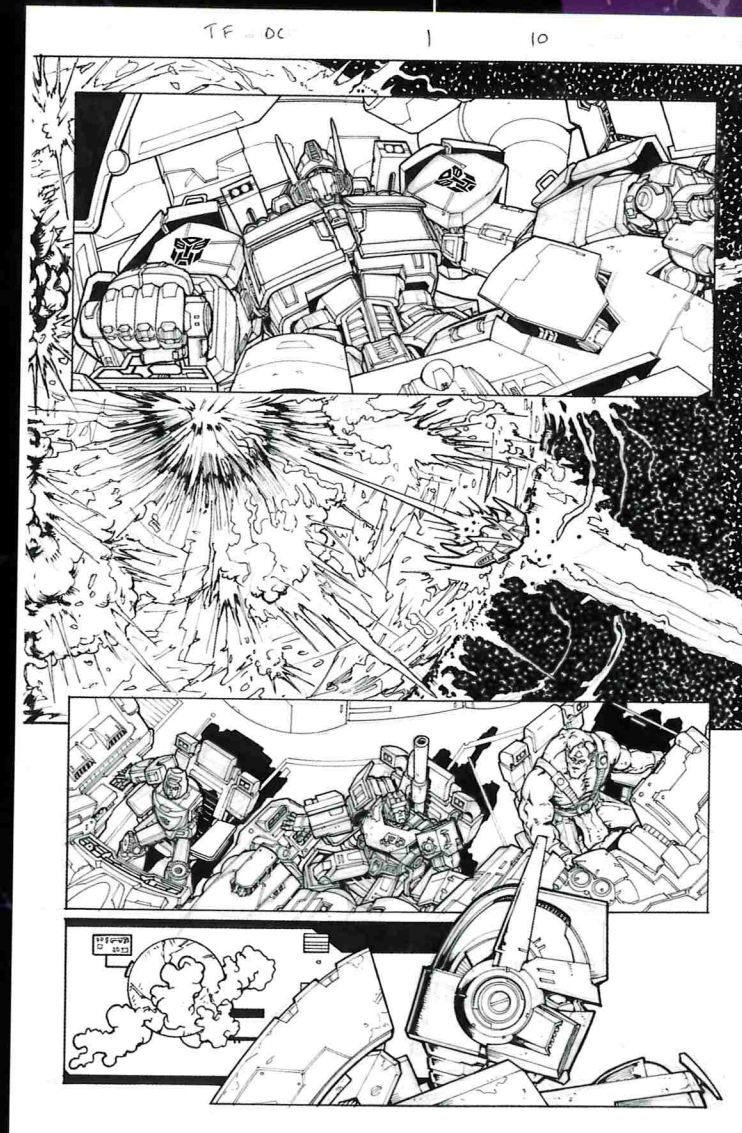
The ones Carlos told me to use. ;)

Long-time readers should be able to instantly recognize the page from *The Death of Optimus Prime* that this page is a visual allusion to.

James Roberts:

In very early drafts, John and I had Orion and co. encountering an injured Thunderclash (introduced in *More Than Meets The Eye* #22—a *Dark Cybertron* prelude issue), who had been calling for help. Another draft saw the Skyroller getting sucked towards the black hole at the end of the issue, with the Lost Light intervening in Part 2. The trick was bringing the various characters together whilst retaining or creating a sense of peril.

I love how the first panel echoes a panel from the end of *The Death of Optimus Prime*, which is the story that John and I last collaborated on, and the one that in so many ways led to where we are now. And while we're at it, the second panel is reminiscent of *Transformers: The Movie*, when the shuttle is trying in vain to escape Unicron. Have you not seen *Transformers: The Movie*? Oh, you should.





As Orion pilots the ship, we flash back to *RID #19* for a couple panels—Jhiaxus had tricked Orion into raising the Titan from the ground on this world—the junction between the Dead Universe and our universe. They'd discovered the Death Ore, planted like so many other ores across the galaxy, by Shockwave. But Jhiaxus had taken control of the dead Titan, using Waspinator to teleport the behemoth to Cybertron. Jhiaxus followed in his ship. In the wake, the planet began disintegrating. Now Orion and the others follow—but can they catch up?

Visually—I think “Titan towers overhead” and “Titan is gone and planet is collapsing” are the key flashback beats, and Orion Voice Over carries the rest, but whatever you think works.

Back in the present. “More importantly,” asks Hardhead—“can they escape the vortex into the Dead Universe?”

Orion replies “of course we can”...

...but the ship looks like it's in peril as tendrils of purple ultra-violet reach out.

BUT—there's a strange shimmering around the craft.

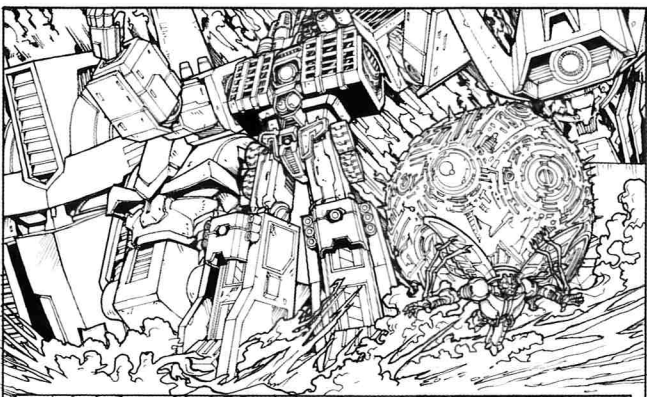
The *LOST LIGHT* appears out of nowhere, enveloping the *SKYROLLER* and deflecting the tendrils. The *Last Light* is considerably larger, and completely swallows up the smaller craft.

Inside, Hardhead and the others start to panic. What now?!

But Orion stays calm.

Orion pops the hatch and steps out of the ship, into the cargo hold of the *Last Light*.

Looking at someone off-panel, he says: “Everything was well in hand, but nevertheless... thank you for the assist, old friend.”



James Roberts:

Imparting background info is always tricky. You need to bring readers, old and new, up to speed, but you want to avoid Exposition Syndrome, where characters stand around telling each other things they already know. Having Pax narrate this issue gets around that; his interior monologue shows that he is indeed the type of person who plays things over again and again in his mind.

Phil Jimenez:

Optimus Prime's head frames the montage flashback as we see a laughing Jhiaxus; a full shot of the Titan rising from the dust, arms stretched out; Shockwave's eye; Cybertron; and Waspinator flying. I asked Andrew to please adjust visuals as needed...

John Barber:

Incidentally—I've been calling that ship the “*Skyroller*” for a while now, but nobody's ever said it out loud in the comics.

Andrew Griffith:

This page was a lot of fun for me, finally getting to draw the *Last Light* after so long. Especially as the casts are starting to come together.

Phil Jimenez:

In the big vertical panel, the *Last Light* appears above the tiny (?) *Skyroller*, protecting it from the debris and singularity-thing behind. Andrew could add even more debris, maybe even glancing off the ship hull, as he saw fit.

In the docking bay, the *Skyroller* is just touching down. Shadows of the soon-to-be introed Transformers creep in from bottom of panel. I had no idea how these characters scale next to each other; I don't know their scale relative to the other characters.

John Barber:

Relative scale of Transformers characters is one of the more difficult parts of drawing them. In most comics, everybody's person-sized.

James Roberts:

Some spaceship-on-spaceship action. Can't go wrong. Always fun (for me, at least) to see the *Last Light* alongside other ships, especially one as familiar as the *Skyroller*. It's pretty big, right? For those of you desperate to find out just how big the *Last Light* is, be here for Part 4.





Pull back and we see who Orion was addressing: RODIMUS. Rodimus stands with members of the *Last Light* crew—most importantly ULTRA MAGNUS, BRAINSTORM, CYCLONUS. Probably WHIRL, SWERVE, SKIDS, RATCHET, new character who's getting a toy called CROSSCUT.

Rodimus is brash and youthful and a little snide. He's seen some very bad things, but he keeps that buried under a veneer of arrogance and confidence. He's had a complicated relationship with Orion in the past, but Orion respects and believes in Rodimus without hesitation. He tends to move around a lot when he speaks – big gestures, big poses; a little OTT.

Ultra Magnus is stoic and reserved. He's comically a straight-man; over-the-top by the books, rigid in movement and action. He never smiles.

Brainstorm always has his briefcase chained to his wrist. The case contains... something. He's a mad scientist—erratic and brilliant.

Ratchet is a dour, gruff doctor with a big compassionate streak.

Cyclonus is an ancient warrior with a philosophical bent; he's somewhat brutal but trying to become better. Neither Autobot nor Decepticon, he is mistrusted by his crewmates because he once killed lots of Autobots (long story).

Whirl is arrogant and violent; just this side of psychotic. You know how these days the eyes on Spider-Man's mask change shape to give him expression? The same thing happens with Whirl's one eye, even though in reality it would forever be circular.

Swerve is a jokester—short, squat, talkative, hides his inner pain with a constant barrage of witticisms. NB: he has three fingers and a thumb on each hand.

Skids—a hyper-competent amnesiac, cynical but friendly.

Anyway—most of these guys don't get much screen time here.

Introductions are made.

Rodimus clearly doesn't believe Orion was going to escape. He says they saw the reading from Gorlam—they were on their way to find Thunderclash and get back to their mission to find the Knights of Cybertron. But they got a worrying call. And then, when they saw the readings they were getting from Gorlam... Rodimus thought they might be able to lend a hand.

James Roberts:

Why is Rodimus looking for Thunderclash? Wait and see. We can't tell you everything, you know.

Phil Jimenez:

Big shot of Orion descending from hatch/dock, surrounded by the cast on page; Rodimus in front. I did not include the new character because I didn't know what he looks like.

John Barber:

We decided the world was going to have to wait for Crosscut's first appearance. Until chapter 7, I believe.

Andrew Griffith:

Again, what a blast it was to finally get to draw the *Last Light* crew. Hopefully moving Swerve down lower in the bottom frame was as visually amusing to the reader as it was to me.



Garnak, Hardhead, and Wheelie exit the *Skyroller* through a hatch.

Wheelie is uncomfortable being around so many Cybertronians. Hardhead is a little uncomfortable, too.

But Garnak leaps up and bear-hugs Rodimus, overjoyed to see him.

Rodimus makes quick introductions to his command crew, and they get down to business. Swerve comes face to face with Wheelie, whose nursery-rhyme speech patterns practically beg to be ridiculed by someone like Swerve.

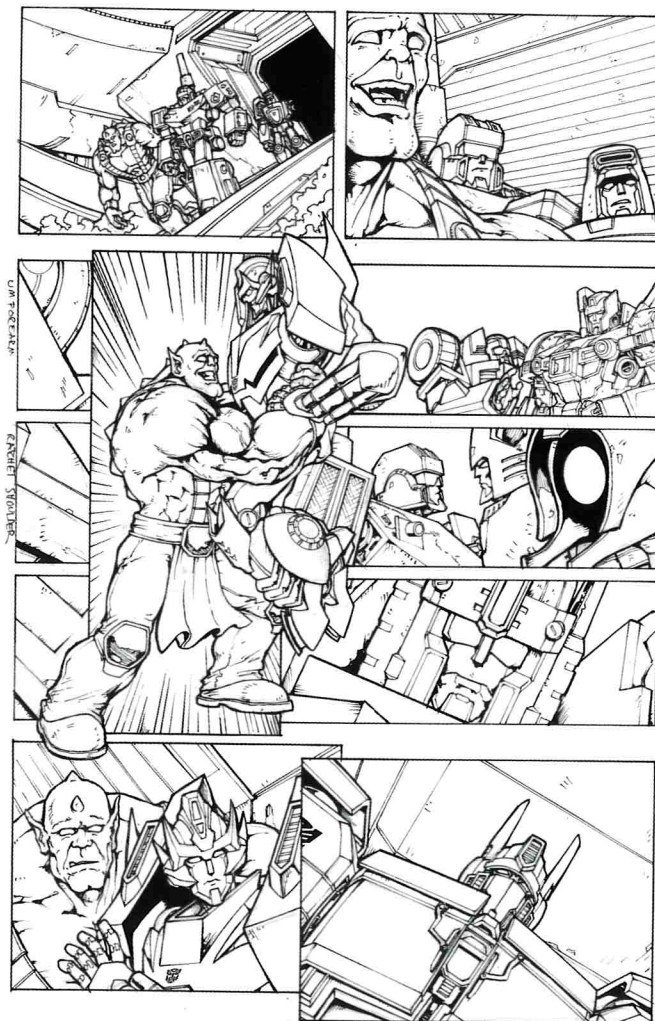
Cyclonus is clearly uncomfortable around Hardhead. They eyeball each other, size each other up, like two drunks outside a pub.

Orion tries to settle things.

Rodimus, Cyclonus, Magnus, and Orion walk through a hallway, toward the bridge.



TF DC 1 14



James Roberts:

For me, as writer of *More Than Meets the Eye*, probably the most exciting thing about Part 1 was when Phil, then Andrew, handed in pages featuring the crew of the *Last Light*. Obviously we wanted to feature as many regulars as possible, and for them to be acting up (i.e. being themselves). Rodimus & Co. are like the wayward children of the Transformers universe. They bring an element of chaos to proceedings.

Swerve was going to mimic Wheelie's speech patterns, but it seemed too cruel— even for him.

As well as mapping out the prevailing interrelationships between characters, we had to be mindful of old friendships too. Case in point, Rodimus, Garnak, and Wheelie.



They reach the bridge, Rodimus falling over himself to apologize to Orion for the lack of progress they've made in finding the Knights of Cybertron, and for losing the half of the Matrix that Orion entrusted to him.

PERCEPTOR interrupts to tell Rodimus that they've had a message. He activates a hologram of Starscream.

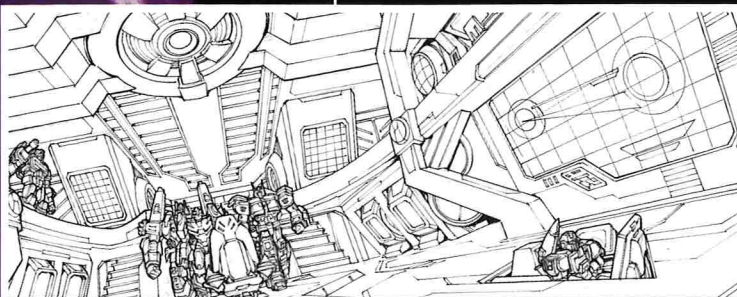
The hologram message that Starscream sent earlier in the issue. Something terrifying is happening on Cybertron—and it's sending out this energy signature.

We see Orion, Hardhead, Wheelie, watching. Rodimus watches them watching. Starscream needs an expert—Cyclonus.

Everybody turns to Cyclonus, who looks uncomfortable – he's tried to win their trust, and now Starscream of all people is singling him out.

Cyclonus, a little shifty, explains that he spent some long time in the Dead Universe, with Galvatron and Nova. If something is opening a portal to Cybertron, the whole planet could be in danger.

Relax, says Orion. It's much, much worse than that.



Andrew Griffith:

One thing having a layout artist separate from the penciler will produce is an angle like the first panel. That angle of the bridge of the *Last Light* had never been shown before, as far as I'm aware, so I spoke to [More Than Meets the Eye artist] Alex Milne and he took the time to draw up sketches showing what the ceiling of the *Last Light's* bridge would look like, as well as the upper level.

John Barber:

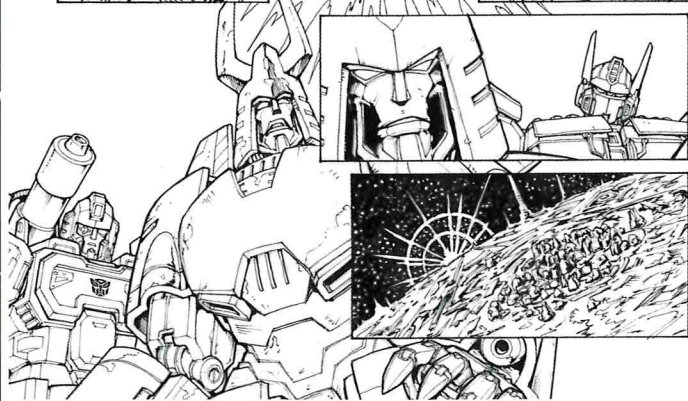
At some stage, the Starscream hologram became a live call. I can't remember why it was a recording at this point. Again, Phil makes a nice addition to the end here.

Phil Jimenez:

Close on a shot of Cybertron, with Orion voice over.

James Roberts:

The *Last Light* left Cybertron quite a while ago, in dramatic and explosive circumstances. The crew only managed to contact Cybertron at the end of *More Than Meets the Eye* issue #21, when they discover that Starscream has taken over. I like to think that Starscream is one of those people, when he gets your number, it's 2 a.m. phone calls all the way.



Back on Cybertron. It's night, technically, but the glow from the arriving Titan is as bright as a rising sun. We're outside of Iacon, in the weird, changing terrain of Cybertron.

Note on that: Cybertron was a dead world for a long time, but came back to life about a year ago. But it came alive to a primordial state—basically, it reset back to the Cybertronian equivalent of dinosaur-times. Strange, predatory metal foliage; atavistic wild animals, rivers of molten metal and energon; it's oddly patchwork, like the planet in Secret Wars, where one region might be barren and another might be covered in living solar cells or strange, unearthly landscapes. The more we can play up this, the better. Andrew Griffith nails this, sometimes we default to "barren plane of metal." The only thing to remember is that everything is metal, or metal-like (glass is okay). And lots and lots of bits that randomly light up.

Anyway—BUMBLEBEE leads IRONHIDE, ARCEE, PROWL, and the DINOBOTS (SLUG, SNARL, SLUDGE, and SWOOP) toward the light. The ground they're climbing up is basically a bubble on the surface of the planet—cataclysmic forces under the surface have created a bubble-mountain. I guess after talking about the terrain there for a paragraph—there isn't much room to do much that's too crazy—maybe some metal vines snapping at them as they determinedly drudge toward the light.

Bumblebee tried to build a new world; he was always the friendly, nice guy—but he was thrust into a position of power where he had to make moral compromises. And it didn't pay off; he failed and Starscream won. Bumblebee blames himself. He was damaged, and just got a new "Goldfire" body, with a faceplate, just a few minutes ago as we open the issue. Underneath, his face is crushed and distorted, from his fight with Megatron about 48 hours before this comic.

Ironhide is the gruff old man of the group; he's had a vision of the future where he outlives all his friends and sees a peaceful galaxy where the Cybertronians have spread everywhere—and he isn't sure if this is what victory or defeat looks like.

Prowl is cold and logical, but with a temper that runs hot. He was mind-controlled for several months, until a couple days ago. He's disappointed that most people believed he would do what mind-controlled-him did; but also real-him did some pretty shady things.

Arcee lives by a different set of rules than everybody else. She won't hesitate to kill and doesn't really have much of a conscience about it, but she believes in the Autobot cause; believes in peace and the united world Bumblebee was trying to forge. She carved an Autobot sigil into her arm last night; she sees herself as an Autobot.

The Dinobots are hard-fought warriors. Their normal leader, Grimlock, is lost out in space somewhere; SLUG (formerly SLAG) (triceratops) is in charge. He's brutal and doesn't take much guff from anyone. SNARL (stegosaurus) is silent, lets his actions do the talking. SLUDGE (brachiosaurus) is kind of dumb, but he's good in a fight. SWOOP (pterodactyl) is the most personable, but he's kinda a jerk and takes a lot of pleasure in other people's awkward situations.

Anyway—Bumblebee leads these guys toward the glow on the horizon.

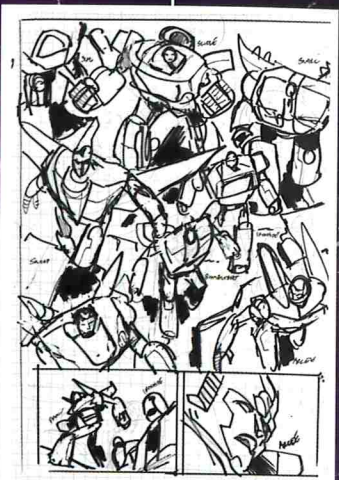
Arcee and the Dinobots are ready for a fight.

Ironhide's ready for anything; but Prowl thinks they need to hold back. He knows something bad's going to happen.

Arcee says she can sense Jhiaxus—who she has an unpleasant past with—at work, and she could see Shockwave at the base of the glow for an instant (at the end of *RID #18*).

Phil Jimenez:

The terrain is uneven, which allows some difference in scale and foreground/background push.





Bumblebee and the group get closer to the glow.

The Dinos switch to Dino mode, everybody looks aggressive. The Autobots have their guns and swords ready.

But there is no one there—just a powerful, sun-like glow.

Bumblebee yells at the glow—stand down. I don't know what you're doing, Shockwave—but this planet has been through too much!

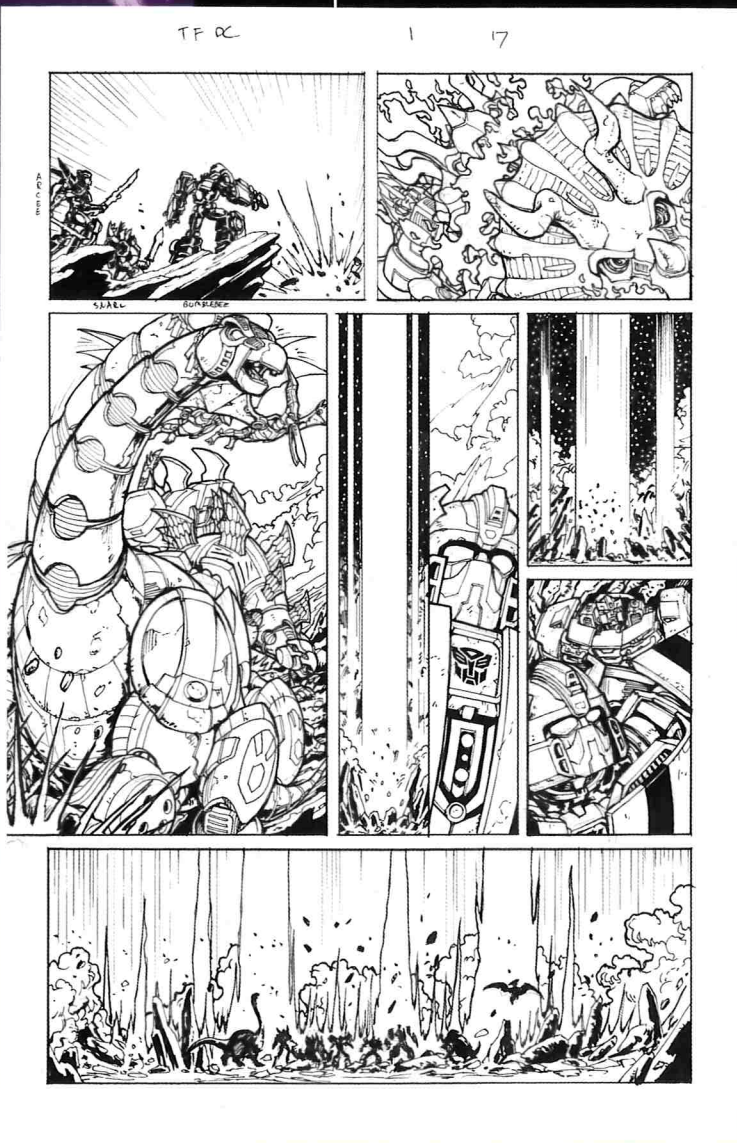
Suddenly, the glow disappears—swallowed into the ground of Cybertron.

Prowl puts a hand on Bee's shoulder. Prowl doesn't know what this is, but he knows there's nothing here to fight.

But the ground begins to crack—light spills out of the cracks.

From the cracked surface—NECROTITAN, the undead form of the Titan that teleported in, rises out of the ground; terrifying and deadly. This is the biggest, nastiest, most unusual Cybertronian ever seen, underlit by the glow below.

Bumblebee—maybe in an inset—says “well, at least I lived to see Prowl be wrong about something.”



Phil Jimenez:

Two thin panels—the glowing light, and then Bumblebee yelling. Then, suddenly, the light goes down. The nighttime sky returns.

John Barber:

This is a deceptively complex page to draw. Pro tip: sometimes you just write stuff and let Phil and Andrew figure it out.

James Roberts:

The last panel. That *Secret Wars* vibe. You're thinking it too, right?

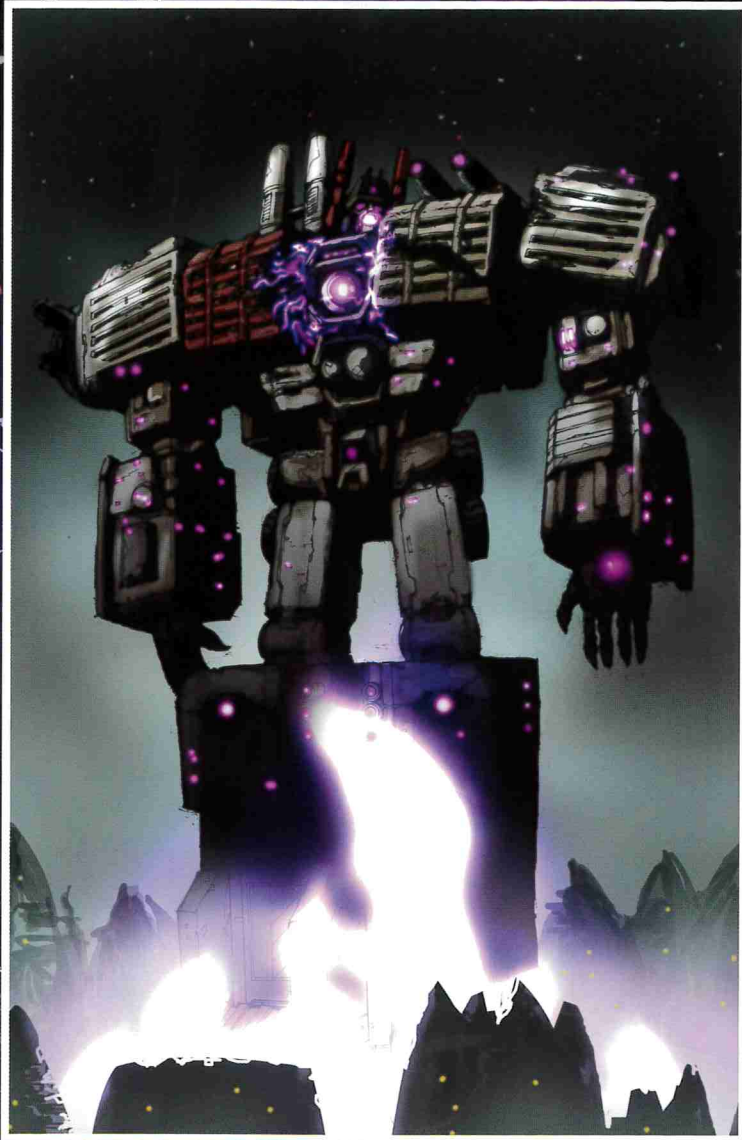


Phil Jimenez:

Necrotitan rises!

Andrew Griffith:

I remember working on this thinking “This must be one of the ‘biggest’ images in the history of IDW’s Transformers comics.”



Andrew Griffith:

Here's my interpretation of what Carlos said they were looking for—pointy fingers and all.

As well as the lineart, I did a concept of what he might look like with effects and everything. Carlos described him as sort of hanging, like someone hanging from a noose. I thought it might be kind of cool if he was almost suspended in otherworldly energy, without any weight being supported by his legs. So I was trying to picture how that might look.

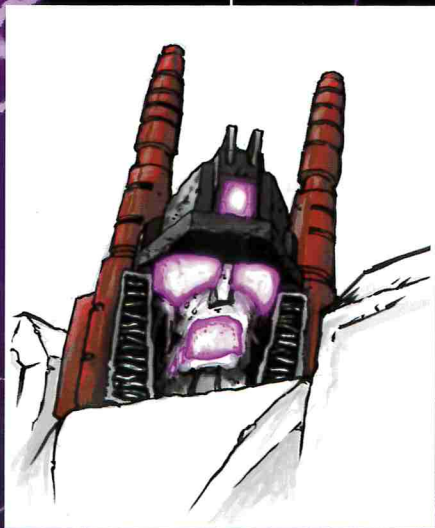
I drew his face as being melty but I guess it's hard to make it out without a closeup of his face.

John Barber:

I really love the posture, that is brilliant. I'd've never thought of anything like that.

Andrew Griffith:

Funny how that works. This is pretty much the image that grew in my head while Carlos was describing what you guys were thinking.



Andrew Griffith:

Here's a rough sketch of how I was picturing his face looking. Melty, but not too melty.

A big splash of events that we'll see over the course of the rest of this series—some sort of a montage, or series of panels. Maybe these use the hexagonal shape of Shockwave's head as a motif?

Narration tells us that the seer of these images has just had everything fall into place. He has seen the future—not mystically, not metaphorically, but the cold truth of logic has shown him that there is only one way events can play out.

Everything is tinted yellow, as though we were seeing it through Shockwave's yellow eye. The montage includes:

Galvatron fighting Megatron.

Starscream decaying.

KUP in chains.

The *Last Light* crashing into an ocean.

Rodimus trapped up to his waist between METROPLEX's "teeth," trying to pull himself free, looking terrified.

Optimus Prime fighting Optimus Prime.

ALPHA TRION missing his legs [they've been chopped off], dragging himself along a metal floor, reaching out for help.



James Roberts:

Sometimes, you let everything play out gradually, shrouding future events in darkness and giving no clue as to what's around the corner. Other times you think "sod it, let's give 'em a taste of what's coming up." This panel is the equivalent of a trailer for the new season of that show you really got into halfway through season one. And no, I'm not sure what I mean either.

Andrew Griffith:

Galvatron v. Megatron! Prime v. Prime! Kup! What else do you need?

John Barber:

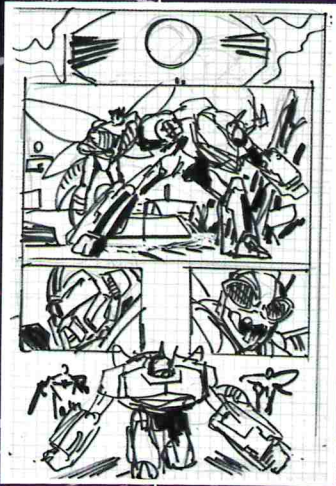
Spoiler alert: the Alpha Trion thing changed between plot and actual comic!

Josh Perez colored this one differently than noted here, but like every page Josh colors, it came out amazing.

Phil Jimenez:

5000 times better than the layout. You saved this piece, Andrew!





Cut to Shockwave's chamber, from page 4. Shockwave's narration concludes, as we see his one eye: There is only one vision of tomorrow.

Pull back and we see Shockwave steadies himself against a wall—he's just been overwhelmed by the vision he's seen.

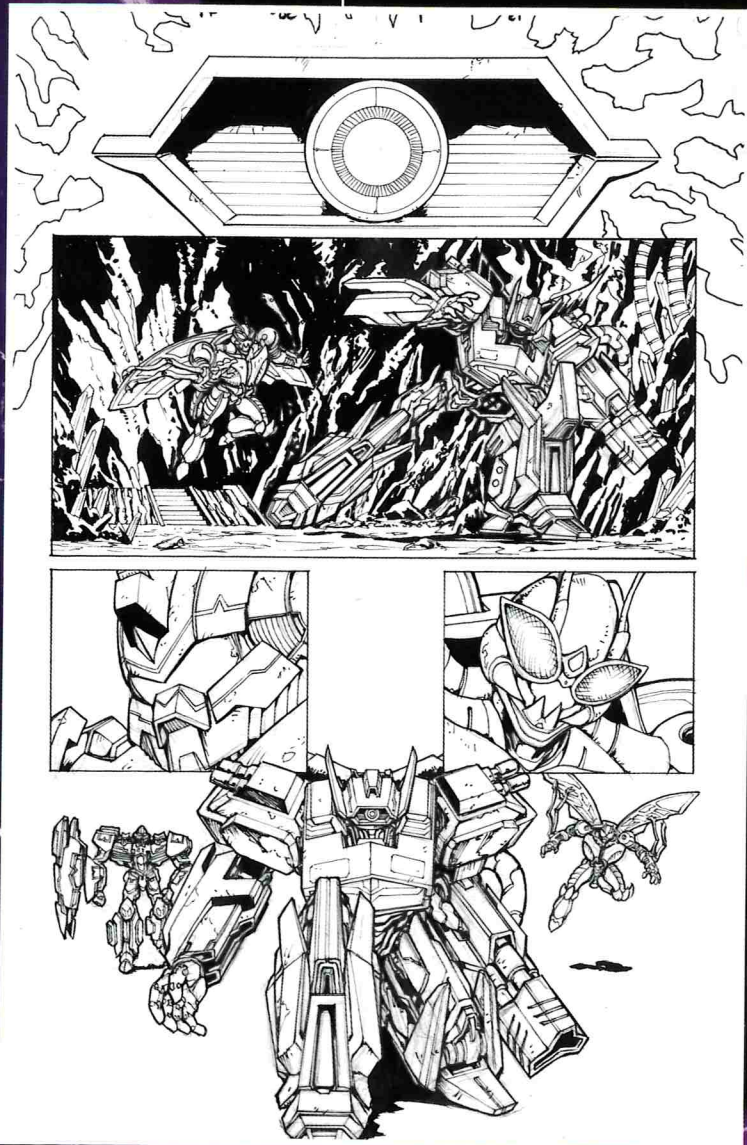
Waspinator helps Shockwave to his feet.

Shockwave excuses himself. He has been planning this for so long, the reality becoming clear was... much to process.

Dreadwing breaks in—they've made contact via the Titan.

Good, says Shockwave as he approaches the communication portal. It has been a long time, my lord. A voice from off panel: Far too long. Has the battle begun?

Shockwave kneels, bowing his head at the off-panel figure—like Darth Vader bowing to the Emperor in *Empire*. "My liege, there shall be no battle. The war is already over; all that remains is the final conquest—the conquest of all space and time..."

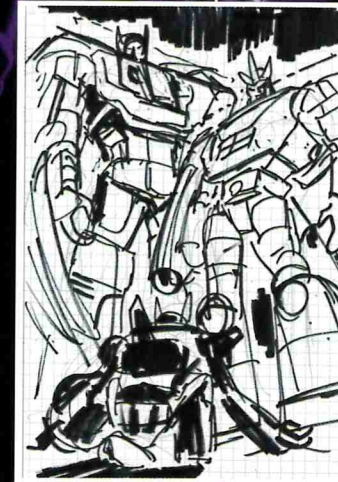


James Roberts:

Shockwave's beautifully ordered head encourages pages which are vaguely symmetrical.

Shockwave kneels before a hologram image of NOVA PRIME and GALVATRON. Shockwave concludes "...the final conquest of this universe by Nova Prime, and the reinstatement of the lineage of the Primes."

Nova Prime dramatically reinforces this—"we have been held by this Dead Universe for too long—it is time for all universes to be one... to be mine!"



Phil Jimenez:

I did two versions of the splash. I preferred the big figure one; it's a cheat—even though they're holograms this looks like they're actually there.

Andrew Griffith:

I actually liked Phil's other layout for this page more, but this was a case of where Transformers characters' anatomies can make certain poses hard to draw. Showing Shockwave kneeling from behind proved to be surprisingly challenging for some reason, and I went the easy way out by using the layout that only shows his "wings" and the back of his head.

Phil Jimenez:

Andrew, I hope it was fun and that I wasn't too much of an intrusion on your regular work-cycle, style. It was great fun and I hope you had fun. It looks phenomenal. Thank you!

Andrew Griffith:

And thank you, Phil! It was a blast. Working from your layouts taught me a lot and forced me to draw things in ways I might not have otherwise.

James Roberts:

Things come full circle as some of the crew of *Ark 1* return to wreak havoc on the world they left behind. By issue's end we've got Shockwave, Galvatron, Megatron, Nova Prime, Starscream, the Necrotitan, imploding planets, visions of the apocalypse, ringtones, and characters that speak in rhyme. Now everything's in place... bring on Part 2.



DARK CYBERTRON

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Phil Jimenez:

Don't know if you can "read" this—this thumbnail for the Transformers cover is very *Infinite Crisis*. Lots of symmetry and circles and what not—including the mysterious Necrotitan, exploding planet, Shockwave's eye, Dreadwing and Waspinator on either side; then Rodimus and Orion and Starscream and the Dinobots and Cybertron and Arcee...

I was thinking it might be too "classic," as it were?

Again, these are tiny thumbnails—but this is a more asymmetrical cover. Same elements, just shifted about differently.



Carlos Guzman:

Symmetrical all the way.

MAR. '14 FEB. '14 JAN. '14 DEC. '13 NOV. '13

