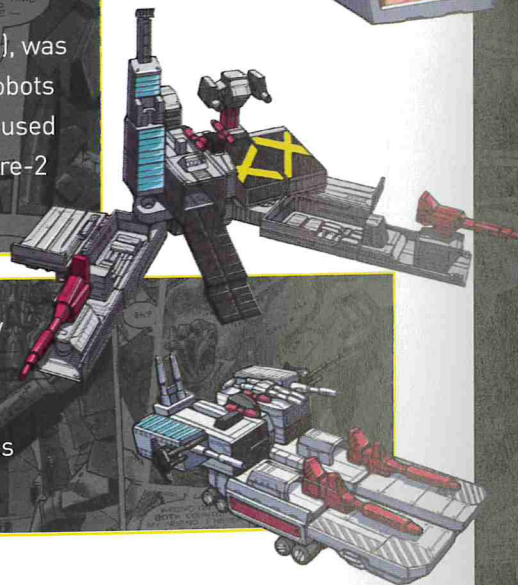
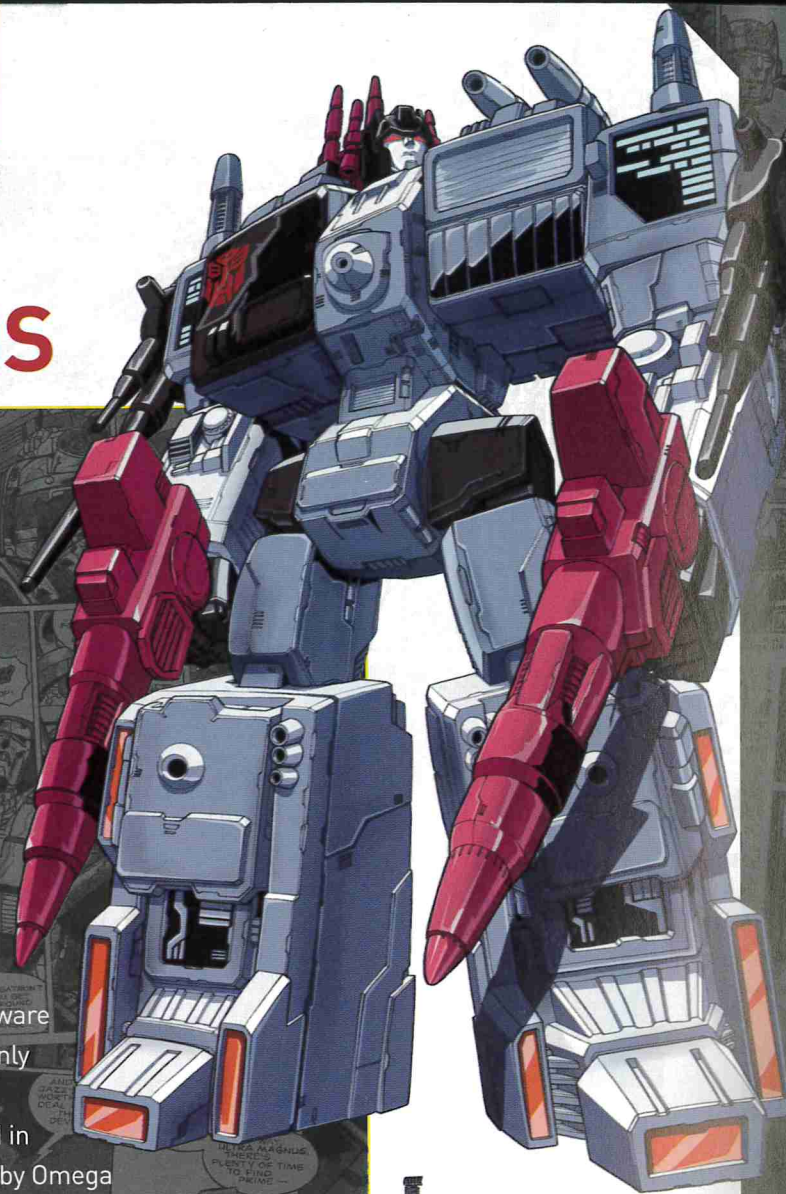


MEET...

THE TITANS

PROFILE: These city-sized Cybertronians were once living starships that – so legend has it – served the semi-mythical Knights of Cybertron in the planet's distant past. Following the end of one war, the Knights decamped to the stars aboard the Titans – ushering in a new era they dubbed Cyberutopia. The Titans settled on various worlds deemed fit for colonization, and largely went into a dormant state. The Titans themselves were often repurposed into actual cities and dwellings, the inhabitants unaware that they occupied a living being. Only two Titans remained on Cybertron. One, named Metrotitan, slumbered in secret under Crystal City, guarded by Omega Supreme, while the other, Metroplex (aka "The First Titan"), was woken by Orion Pax and briefly became a base for the Autobots before joining Alpha Trion on his quest. A dormant Titan roused on Gorlam Prime was contaminated by a combination of Ore-2 and Ore-14, turning it into the undead Necrotitan.

WEAPONS/ABILITIES: Immensely powerful, and virtually unstoppable, Titans possess internal spacebridges that allow them to teleport across vast distances instantaneously. Others are said to possess Super Sparks that allow them to straddle multiple planes of existence.



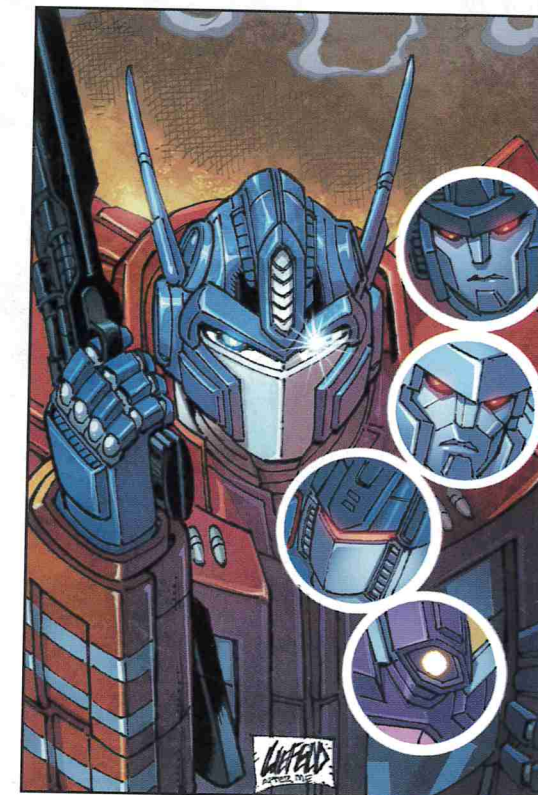
BEHIND THE SCENES

THE ART (AND WRITING) OF THE CROSSOVER

Crafting an 'event' storyline requires planning, plotting and patience – and in the case of *Dark Cybertron*, two creators at the very top of their game. With a little help along the way, John Barber and James Roberts produced a storyline worthy of TRANSFORMERS' 30th Anniversary year.

John Barber: I was the point person on the IDW side when the idea was launched, so Michael Kelly at Hasbro and I kind of nailed down the format and how it would work. Me, James Roberts, and superstar artist (and huge TRANSFORMERS fan) Phil Jimenez to all went to Hasbro HQ in Rhode Island and we sat in a room and started throwing ideas around with a bunch of people from Hasbro. Phil worked on the story with us, plus he did layouts for the beginning and end, and he did packaging art for Hasbro, which we used as alternate covers. There were a lot of Hasbro folks involved, but Michael Kelly (in charge of publishing and a big part of making the comics great), Mark Weber (who was instrumental in getting the in-packs to happen, and was a great friend of the comics) and Andy Schmidt (who was my predecessor as IDW editor and who hired James and me) were all key.

James Roberts: *Dark Cybertron* came about because Hasbro were looking for a way to celebrate 30 years of TRANSFORMERS. They planned to release sixteen new versions of classic G1 and Beast Wars toys and wanted to include an IDW comic with each release. So a 16-part epic was called for. They invited John and I, plus legendary artist Phil Jimenez to their headquarters in Rhode Island for a brainstorming session and *Dark Cybertron* – originally called 'Shockwaves' – was the result. Earlier iterations of the story involved the core cast of both MTMTE and RID travelling across parallel universes and encountering iconic characters from the last thirty years. We abandoned that idea not least because of the risk that it would have been impenetrable to all but the most committed and long-term TF fans.





The roots of Dark Cybertron can be found as far back as *Spotlight: Shockwave* and *Spotlight: Nightbeat*, but issues #6 and #10 of *Robots in Disguise* began to pave the way to Dark Cybertron proper.

John Barber: The 'Syndromica' issues were sort of separate. Way back before James and I first started, there had been an idea to have a concurrent Optimus Prime solo series, so James and I pitched what became *RID* and *MTMTE* without Optimus. But the plans for the solo book went away, and if Optimus weren't there readers would be expecting him to show up at any moment. So we had to concretely have Optimus somewhere else. Killing him was too much of a cliché, so James and I came up with having him go back to being Orion Pax, but we figured he wouldn't stop having adventures just because he changed his name. I thought I could work with Livio

Ramondelli and do some "meanwhile, off in space" stories centered around Optimus.

And I thought using the ores Shockwave had planted around the galaxy could lead to something interesting. The idea of Earth having Ultra Energon, a.k.a. Ore-13, suggested at least twelve other ores. And if Ultra Energon had one set of properties, maybe the other twelve had other equally unique properties. That let me set up a story where Shockwave and the ores would be the next big villain. The story would probably have taken us back to Earth, but that was as far as Andrew [Griffith] and I had talked about. I loved Shockwave, and once I knew what James was doing with his backstory, well, he was an even better character. So he was the next big thing in *RID*, until we moved him over to be the big bad in *Dark Cybertron*. So, the 'Syndromica' issues were absolutely setting up the next story, but that next story wasn't *Dark Cybertron* yet.

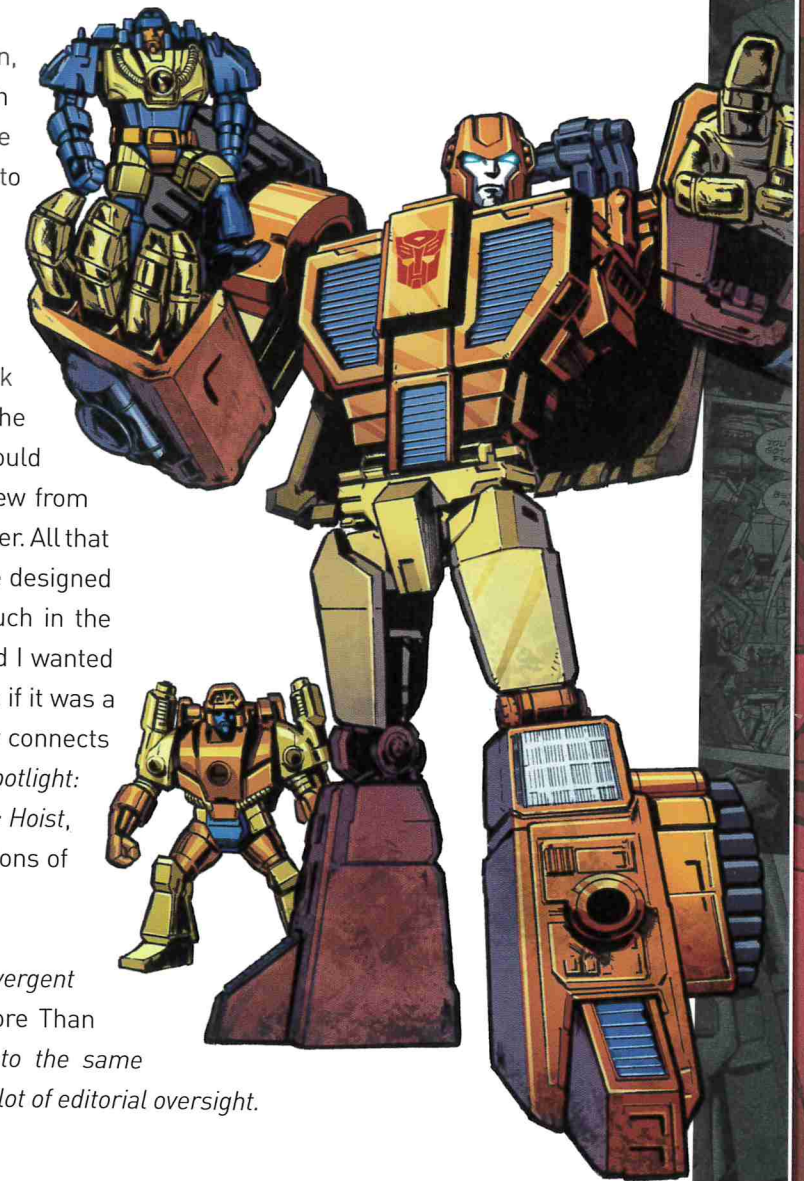
James Roberts: Funnily enough, both 'Syndromica' and the three-part 'Shadowplay' storyline in *MTMTE* issues #9-11 (a story which also lays the groundwork for *Dark Cybertron*) were slotted into *RID* and *MTMTE* at Hasbro's request, because they wanted more Optimus Prime in both books. John in particular is a master at picking up and tying off dangling continuity threads, and that more than anything was what he was doing with 'Syndromica' — and, ultimately, what we did with *Dark Cybertron*.

The road to Dark Cybertron continued through a series of *Spotlight* issues, standalone stories that cumulatively amounted to a "Dark Prelude". Each was designed to form part of an in-pack Generations toy release, as were the core *Dark Cybertron* issues themselves.

John Barber: That was one of the hardest parts — we had to hit certain dates to get the books to Hasbro so they could print them and have them ready as in-pack comics when the toys were manufactured, which was well ahead of when we needed things for print — and Hasbro needed four issues at a time. So we had to figure out how we could split the issues and have different artists doing different sections — plus we had to actually find artists! Andrew Griffith and Alex Milne were the artists on *RID* and *MTMTE*, and they were still working on the pre-*Dark Cybertron* arcs at the time we needed the first *Dark Cybertron* comics.

James Roberts: In terms of production, the lead-in times with toys are much longer than with comics; and because the sixteen *Dark Cybertron* titles were going to be given away with the toys, John and I had to write all the issues, plus five of the *Spotlights* (the sixth, focusing on Megatron, was written by Nick Roche), well in advance. So even though I think we'd only reached issue #9 or #10 of the ongoing, we were writing stories that would be published about a year later. We knew from that point how it was all going to fit together. All that said, the six "Dark Prelude" issues were designed to be read as standalone stories — much in the tradition of the IDW *Spotlights*. John and I wanted there to be a link between all six — even if it was a subtle one — so each story in some way connects to another. For example, the events in *Spotlight: Orion Pax* affect the outcome of *Spotlight: Hoist*, even though the two stories are set millions of years apart.

For the first time, the two somewhat divergent tributaries of *Robots in Disguise* and *More Than Meets the Eye* were set to combine into the same teeming river of creativity. Which meant a lot of editorial oversight.



John Barber: James and I were going to co-write this, and I don't like editing my own stuff — I really feel more comfortable having somebody that'll take a look and push back on things that aren't working. So *RID* editor Carlos Guzman was the editor of the whole run of *Dark Cybertron*. I was still overseeing the TRANSFORMERS line, which I guess is sort of a conflict of interest, but Carlos was the one giving us editorial notes and maintaining the schedule. So we had to figure out how we could split the issues and have different artists doing different sections. Carlos figured out the scheduling — we got Andrew to do finishes over Phil's layouts on issue one, with Brendan Cahill doing the prologue. But we needed to be going on the next three issues simultaneously. And by the time Andrew finished the first one, he still had to do some of the issues leading into the event. It was difficult scheduling, but that was all Carlos once the machine started rolling.

He wrangled Atilio Rojo for the Cybertron stuff — he'd done some good work on *G.I. Joe* for Carlos and I and was able to handle the massive cast. Longtime TRANSFORMERS artist James Raiz came onboard to do most of the *Lost Light* sections. And we very deliberately



picked Livio Ramondelli to draw the Dead Universe pages so his digital-painted style would give those scenes a really different feel. And then we had some guests come in to help keep us on track, or who were really good but couldn't commit to a lot of pages, like Nick Roche (who's a TRANSFORMERS mainstay, of course) and Robert Gill who I really would have liked to see more of. I loved how he handled the characters, but he got hired to draw another series somewhere else.

James Roberts: Until *Dark Cybertron*, I had written all of the MTMTE issues and John all of the *RID* issues. We'd written all of *Dark Cybertron* together about a year ahead of publication, and intended for it to serve as a bridge between the first and second 'seasons' of our respective titles. So it was a case of IDW slotting a co-written story into the two ongoing. *Dark Cybertron* was the first time John and I had written in the so-called Marvel style, giving the artists scene-by-scene or page-by-page plot breakdowns and then adding the dialogue once the pages were drawn. I say that — as the neared the conclusion and the various threads started to come together, we had to revert to our usual full script approach.