

# CREATING THE IDW-VERSE

## IN CONVERSATION WITH JAMES ROBERTS



The Definitive Collection's Simon Furman sat down with James Roberts, fan-favourite writer of *Transformers: More Than Meets The Eye* and now *Transformers: Lost Light* to talk 'Chaos'.



Photo by Nick Hardy

**SF) How did you get your pro break at IDW?**

**JR)** I was friends with IDW artist Nick Roche — we were both part of the British and Irish TRANSFORMERS fandom that took shape after the UK comic folded in the early 90s. Thanks to Nick, IDW invited me to pitch ideas for a *Spotlight* one-shot. I submitted quite detailed outlines for Octane, Prowl and Chromedome, but had little in the way of feedback. A Dinobots one-shot was also being kicked around. Then, Nick graduated from drawing covers to drawing interiors to being asked to write and draw a mini-series called *Last Stand of the Wreckers*. When IDW proposed a co-writer to help share the workload, he suggested me.

**SF) How did you end up working alongside Mike Costa on the ongoing?**

**JR)** I was eager to do more work for IDW. At one stage I was going to be responsible for 'War Stories', a dozen or so five-page strips that would've been released digitally in the first instance. I'd have written the bulk and been responsible for the arc that tied them all together, and there would have been guest appearances from TF stalwarts like you, Simon. I think that was canned when IDW or Hasbro decided to use the digital format to promote the new *Prime* TV series.

Undeterred (and uninvited) I pitched a Megatron one-shot to then editor Andy Schmidt. I'd asked a question about Megatron's motivation in Mike Costa's ongoing — why he'd surrendered, what his end game was — and that made me realise that we'd never, in the IDW stories, truly explored what the Decepticons wanted. We knew how they'd been formed thanks to *Megatron: Origin*, but what were they going to do once the Autobots were defeated?

The one-shot became a two-parter, and then, at the last minute (in comic book scheduling terms), it was decided to fold the story — now called 'Chaos Theory' — into Mike's ongoing. IDW were worried that a one-shot would get lost and wanted to stick to mini-series and ongoing.

It was around about then that Andy Schmidt asked me to be part of what he called a



I REMEMBER IT WELL, THE DAY I DIED.

IT WAS THE DAY I LEFT CYBERTRON, THIS DAY, TODAY.

AND YES OF COURSE A VOICE INSIDE SAYS "STAY." IT'S THE SAME VOICE THAT SAYS THAT MEGATRON IS STILL OUT THERE, AND THAT IF HE RETURNS—WHEN HE RETURNS—HE'LL TAKE ONE LOOK AT ANY POSTWAR COALITION AND START TEARING IT APART.

BUT MEGATRON IS NOTHING WITHOUT FOLLOWERS, AND IF BUMBLEBEE AND METALHAWK AND THE OTHERS CAN DELIVER ON THEIR PROMISES, THE CYBERTRONIANS WILL REJECT HIM AS SURELY AS THEY HAVE REJECTED ME.

MY FELLOW AUTOBOTS THINK THAT I HAVE MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE, WHEN IN FACT WHAT I HAVE DONE IS UNIQUELY SELFISH.

FREEDOM IS THE RIGHT OF ALL SENTIENT BEINGS—EVEN ME, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, I AM FREE. I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR NO ONE. I AM BEHOLDEN TO NO ONE.

MORE THAN THAT, I AM CHANGED.

I NO LONGER CARRY THE MATRIX.

I NO LONGER COMMAND AN ARMY.

"OPTIMUS PRIME" IS DEAD...

...AND ORION PAX IS REBORN.





Variant covers to *Transformers* #31 & *The Death of Optimus Prime*, featuring Revoltech Megatron and Generation 1 Optimus Prime toys. Photography by Rik Alvarez & Viktor Deak respectively.

Transformers Brain Trust, along with Mike, Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning. I think I was there mainly to be Continuity Guy. At this point we knew that 'Chaos' would trigger the launch of two new ongoing: *More Than Meets The Eye*, an Earth-based series to be written by Mike, and *Robots In Disguise*, a space-based book by Dan and Andy. So it was in my capacity as a member of this Brain Trust that Mike and I — with input, initially, from Dan and Andy — mapped out the 'Chaos' storyline.

**SF) 'Chaos Theory'/'Chaos' looks to be a concerted effort to tie off the long running Dead Universe saga. Was that always the intention?**

**JR)** The concept of the Dead Universe - introduced while you were assembling the building blocks of the IDW/TF Universe — had always been appealing to Mike and I (and indeed Dan and Andy — they'd revisited elements in their *Heart of Darkness* story). Obviously for 'Chaos' we needed a huge villain, and anthropomorphising the Dead Universe gave us a cosmic-scale threat. I think there's something inherently satisfying about launching an 'end of season' story off the back of pre-existing plots and subplots. I can't recall if the idea was to take the Dead Universe completely off the table; if anything, we probably thought it

had the potential to be a recurring threat in the style of Unicron from the UK *Transformers* comics.

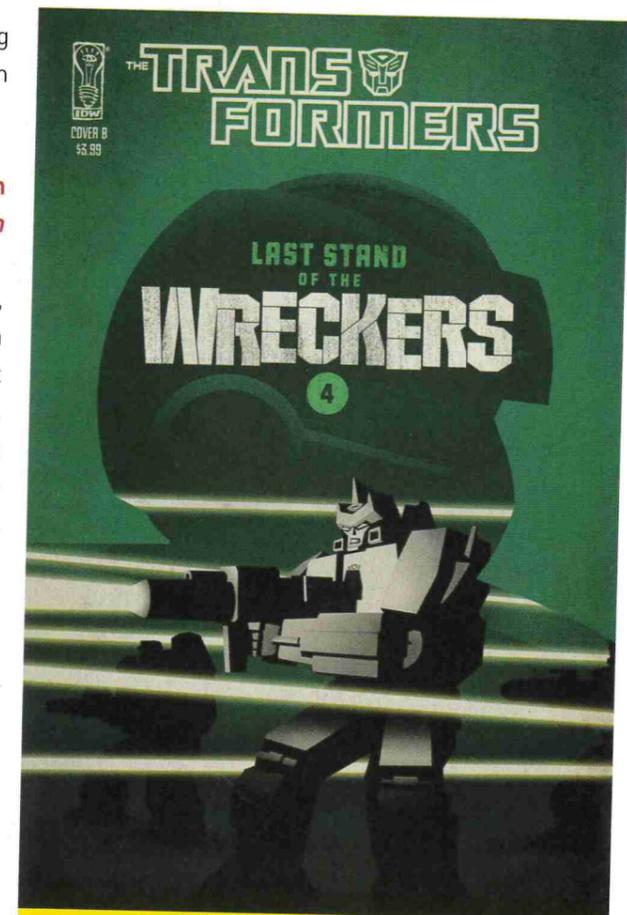
**SF) How did you go from 'Brain Trust' guy to writer on *More Than Meets The Eye*?**

**JR)** As 'Chaos' was being written, Dan and Andy decided to move on to other things, and Andy Schmidt offered me one of the ongoing. (Actually, that's what led to me scripting rather than simply co-plotting some of the later scenes in 'Chaos', specifically the ones featuring characters who I knew, by this point, would feature heavily in *More Than Meets The Eye*.) Then, a little later, Mike decided to move on as well, and John was offered his ongoing.

**SF) What was the thought process behind the *Death of Optimus Prime* one-shot?**

**JR)** *The Death of Optimus Prime* — which was called *Schism* until the X-Men series got there first — was written as a prologue to the two new ongoing, even though it picked up immediately after the events of 'Chaos'. It was IDW's 125th *Transformers* issue, too, and we wanted it to be one of those fabled jumping-on points for new readers. We carved up the issue between us, script-wise, with John handling the scenes that were most relevant to *Robots in Disguise* while I handled the *More Than Meets The Eye* ones. I think 'Death...' was one of the most exciting things I've worked on, because there was a sense of new beginnings.

Eighteen months earlier, Andy Schmidt had mapped out the future of the IDW/TF Universe and had written — as something of a placeholder — "a schism breaks the Autobots into two opposing groups". We got to the end of 'Chaos' and we still didn't know what would cause the split. It was only when John and I had the idea of Cybertron's civilian population returning home after four million years, and a planet repopulated overnight, that everything else fell into place.



Cover to *Last Stand of the Wreckers* #4, co-written by Nick Roche and James Roberts. Cover art by Trevor Hutchison.