

**Bullets - Written by James Roberts, from Last Stand of the Wreckers.**

Pova, and the Wreckers were in a whole world of pain.

Positions had been taken, battle lines drawn; one way or another, this was the end of the road for the Autobot commandos and their arch-enemies, Squadron X.

When Impactor spoke to his battle-hardened brigade there was no mistaking the sense of finality in his voice. "It's over - finished," he said tersely. "Squadron X are evil, pure and simple, and it falls to us to put a stop to their reign of terror."

Springer pointed to the silhouette disfiguring the moon. "That's them," he said gravely. "They've fixed the Pale Fire." The Decepticons' fearsome spaceship hung in the air like some predatory bird, waiting for the right moment to strike.

"Face it, Impactor," said Rack n' Ruin in unison. "We're way out of our depth! Eight of us against a battlecruiser? Let's split while we still have the chance."

"That's where we differ," Impactor growled. "Because I'd rather fight and die than live with the knowledge that I ran."

The others yelled their agreement.

"Then it's decided," said Impactor solemnly. "And if this really is our last stand, there's something I have to say. The truth is, I---"

First Aid stopped reading as he sensed someone approaching him from behind. He tapped the keyboard and Fisitron's 113th datalog - The Wreckers: Showdown on Pova - was replaced by a picture of a fractured elbow joint. Okay, so he was still sitting at a computer terminal when he should have been walking the ward, administering energon boosters and propex swabs to the patients downstairs, but at least he was now looking at something vaguely medical instead of reading Fisitron's account of how Impactor and his hardbitten heroes had brought down Squadron X once and for all. He made sure he was frowning in concentration when Pharma strode past.

"So Fisitron's writing about the Wreckers' elbows now, is he?" said Delphi's Chief Medical Officer. "Come on, First Aid - get to it. You've got a Fader in Row 2 downstairs." He squeezed the air with his finger and thumb. "He's about this far from shutdown."

"I'm on it." For First Aid, life on Delphi - a military hospital on the planet Messatine, on the fringes of the Cybertronians' galactic battleground - was a series of fits and starts. He'd been stationed there for 10 years, on and off, and he still couldn't call it home. As he headed downstairs he thought about Pova, and about bullets and trenches and circuit dampeners. There was no denying it: he loved datalog 113. As a subscriber to Wreckers: Declassified, 113 had been beamed directly into his brain upon its release, enabling him to digest it instantaneously. But he often read it in the more conventional sense, the better to savour its contents.

And what thrilling contents! Broadside's desperate gamble with the psychic explosives; Rack n' Ruin finally coming clean to Impactor about the tragic nature of their prognosis; Roadbuster bringing down Pale Fire with a single shot. But the best bit was when Springer and Impactor were in the trench. As Fisitron says in his commentary, their mutual affection has never been more apparent, more poignant, than when Springer asks - no, demands - that Impactor shoot him so that they both have a chance of survival.

First Aid could boast his own connection with the Wreckers - or with Springer, anyway. Five years ago, the leader of the Wreckers had cornered him at a medical conference at Kimia, the space station that doubled as a weapons research facility.

"I need your help," Springer had said, grinning that grin of his. First Aid remembered his physique more than anything else. With a chest big enough to accommodate ten Matrixes and shoulders that would put Metroplex to shame, his entire upper body was a bold visual testament to the power of unchecked width.

First Aid's eyes had loitered on Springer's infamous midsection (there was no scar, no souvenir from Pova) before he'd replied. "What can I do for you? Straighten your olfactory unit? Upgrade your circuit dampeners? Maybe your center of balance is causing you problems. Are you a bit top heavy?"

"I'm not looking for that kind of help. I'm looking for helpers. Up-and-coming medics like you who have that little extra to give."

For a terrifying moment First Aid had thought that Springer wanted him to be a Wrecker. The panic had made his vocal synthesizer misbehave, aborting every sentence after the first syllable. "But - but - I - I - why -"

"Relax. I'm not looking for new recruits. You think I'm gonna find another Roadbuster among all these Ratchets? No, this is about being the Wreckers' eyes and ears." Springer had passed him a thin rectangle of metal, one side of which was engraved with a single letter.

"What does the 'M' stand for?" First Aid had asked.

"You're holding it upside down... Listen, First Aid - that's your name, right? On the other side of that card is my personal hailing frequency. Give me a buzz sometime and we can talk some more."

Seemed like a long time ago now.

First Aid reached the ward and started moving from circuit slab to circuit slab, checking on his patients - all of whom had been powered down to minimum operating status so as to conserve energy: all non-essential functions, including those pertaining to movement and speech, were on hold pending recovery. The enforced silence spooked

him; sometimes, despite himself, he imagined that they were screaming. Their mouths may have been closed, their limbs frozen at the joint, and their optics glossy with disuse, but inside their heads they were screaming.

He found the Fader and started replacing frayed energon leads. Poor Roulette. Here was one robot who was unlikely to make it until morning. He touched his forearm, moved by a need to make physical contact (he'd have put his hand on Roulette's forehead if there'd been one, but north of the neck there was only a knuckle of scorched metal).

He went to fetch more leads, knowing that when he stepped into the corridor the lights would go out behind him - after all, what was the point of illumination when the patients' eyes were switched off?

The ward doors suddenly slammed open, knocking him over. He reached instinctively for his photon pistol, then relaxed: this was an emergency situation, not an attack. Four paramedics were pushing a mobile circuit slab into the ward and trying to stop a greying, groaning robot from falling off. He watched as they fixed up the Cryogenic Regeneration Chamber.

"Don't just stand there, First Aid!" yelled the chief paramedic, a skinny-limbed robot named Ambulon. "Pass me those energon swabs!"

First Aid looked down at the writhing robot. "Is that... is that Schema?"

"Yeah. Dogfight's recon team ran into the DID as they were returning from the Serp Mines."

The ward doors swung open a second time and Dogfight stormed in, followed by Dodger and Backstreet. He scanned the rows of patients suspiciously, as if he expected Decepticons to be hiding under the circuit slabs. "Where is he?"

"You're injured," said First Aid, pointing to the sparks escaping from Dogfight's shoulder. "Let me take a look."

"It's nothing. Forget it... Hey! What are you doing?"

"Ignore me," said First Aid, examining the wings on Dogfight's upper arms and running his fingers over two Autobot symbols. After a cursory look at the shoulder wound (just a minor graze) he moved on to Backstreet.

"Leave me be, doc!"

"Just ignore him," said Ambulon, who was busy placing Schema's body inside the CR Chamber. "He does that to everyone. It's a thing of yours, isn't it First Aid?"

"Yep. Whatever. Just making sure everyone's OK. Dammit, Backstreet, where's your - ah! There it is!" First Aid scrutinized the Autobot badge on Backstreet's hip.

Dodger knew it was his turn and didn't protest. "I took a few blasts," he shrugged, letting First Aid pore over his bodywork. "This one guy hit me right-"

"Here," First Aid pointed with trembling fingers to Dodger's midsection. "On your badge." He rubbed the symbol with his thumb. "Oh my. Oh yes."

Dodger looked at Ambulon for guidance. "Is this part of his thing too?"

"Nope. Never seen this before."

First Aid dragged Dodger toward a tray of surgical instruments then let go of the bewildered Autobot and jogged for the exit. "Don't go anywhere, Dodger! I need to operate on you! This is brilliant!"

He raced upstairs to his computer terminal and typed in a certain frequency code for the second time in his life. A face appeared on the screen and grinned.

"It's me," said First Aid. "And you're never gonna guess what I've got for you!"

\*\*\*

*This is a text transcription of the story included in the original trade paperback presented for accessibility purposes. Use the transcription however you like or need, as long as it's not for profit.*