

# The New World

A Transformers Classicverse story  
By Greg Sepelak and S. Trent Troop

15 years ago...

*Cybertron was once a world of wonder, a shimmering jewel of the cosmos, the home of a proud race. It shall be again.*

*You... the Mini-Cons... you are a part of me, yet also born of the planet itself. You each contain a fragment of my power, the ability to re-shape Cybertron, channel the energies that can restore it... but without your guidance, will tear it apart. Horrors dwell beneath the surface that have been unleashed in the planet's upheaval, but your inner light can destroy this darkness.*

*Our people are in need of my aid elsewhere. They believe Cybertron to be a lost cause, unable to stop its decay, and have journeyed among the stars. I must go to them and bring them safely home, as they suffer now. In my absence, Cybertron shall be reborn, and you are the instruments of its rebirth.*

*Modus Prime, the first of your number, shall guide you.*

*Take care, children of Primus, children of my own spark. You hold the fate of Cybertron in your hands. 'Til all are one.*

-- The words of the Last Autobot to the Mini-Cons

## Chapter 1

Broadside looked up. Five glowing optics stared back down at him in the dim light. Knee-deep in fetid waters, he was well beneath the surface of Cybertron. The planet had built on top of itself over its long history, layer after layer, many lost and forgotten millions of years ago. Horrible things lived in the deeper levels. Horrible things like the three mutated, malformed machines that grinned smugly down at him.

One of them was an animalistic construct with four arms, two of which ended in wicked barbs. It smiled with a muzzle full of needle teeth. "Looks like some little critter is way too far from home, hm, Sawtooth?"

"Lookff like a taffy ffnack, Meathook" the one called Sawtooth rumbled, the grinders that made up his lower jaw spinning slowly, spraying lubricants with each word. He was the largest of the three mutant Cybertronians. His bulky torso rested atop a pair of oversized tank-treads causing him to loom over the diminutive robot. The mutant made a series of horrible slurping noises.

"Ain' cha gonna run?" the third mutant sneered. It





was smaller than the others and more humanoid in form, but still considerably larger than the Mini-Con. Half of its face was a mass of wires and where its left optic should have been there was a telescoping rifle-barrel. “Ain’t no sport if ya ain’t gonna run.”

“Little runt thinks he’s brave, Guttersnipe,” Meathook laughed. “Thinks we’re all bark and no bite?”

“Trufft uff, ffnack... we bite.”

The small robot didn’t flinch. He simply looked up into the large machine’s maw. Without a word, his face folded down, bringing a long cannon barrel forward in its place.

“Aww, ain’t that conffiderate, I’m gonna need a tooff-pick...”

The noise was like a thunderclap as Broadside launched a shell with pinpoint accuracy into the beast’s mouth. The mutant staggered backwards with the shock of the shot. Sawtooth let loose an

enraged howl and lunged only to be cut short when the shell detonated.

Sawtooth’s body, liberated of its head and carried by momentum, toppled forwards, upending and landing what would have been face-first into the brackish waters.

Guttersnipe spun to target the miniscule robot. His companion had let hunger and rage make him sloppy, but Guttersnipe had no intention of making the same mistake. The mutant locked his optics on his diminutive prey but something barreled into chest, slamming him into the ground. He screamed as claws and teeth scrabbled across his metallic skin and a set of powerful jaws clamped around the blaster-barrel of his left eye. A canine growl filled the tunnel.

Meathook roared and took a swipe at the first small robot. The agile little mech quickly slipped backwards out of the larger mutant's reach.

Meathook's second lunge became a stagger as his left leg erupted in white-hot pain. A small orange feline unit bounced into view only to leap at him again. The mechanical beast took another swipe at the mutant's wounded leg. Meathook felt the gearing of his knee shred apart.

The mutant swung the bladed stumps that served as his hands wildly. Each swipe missed the cat but kept the razor-clawed beast far enough away as to avoid more damage. Despite his ruined leg he advanced in an attempt to corner the animal.

A rush of wind was the last thing he felt as a pair of steel talons tore his head from his body.

Snarl shifted from his feline form to



humanoid robot mode as the mutant fell dead. “Slaggit, Dreadwing, you never let me have any fun!”

The robotic hawk perched on an outcropping and simply stared at the tiger with an unreadable face.

“Don’t gimme that look,” Snarl hissed. “You’re creepin’ me out, ya freak. Hey, Overbite, you got anything left of your chew-toy?”

Overbite looked up from Guttersnipe’s remains, random oil-soaked internal components dangling from his jaws. His tail wagged back and forth happily. His head lunged down and bit, and the wolf transformed. The air was filled with the sound of rending metal as the wolf-head became his robot-mode arms, prying the face off of the mutant in the process. Overbite held it aloft like a great prize, then stuck it over his own faceplate-visor.

“Hey, look everyone! I’m a mutant! Booga-booga-booga!”

Snarl howled with laughter. Dreadwing simply turned to stare off into a dark side-tunnel.

“No sense a’ fun,” Snarl muttered. The cat-tail on his left shoulder twitched as he snuck around over-melodramatically, head turning left and right, scanning the side-tunnels. “Oh muuuuu-taaaaaants, come out and plaaaaay-ee-aaaaaay!”

Snarl’s jest ended suddenly. The clank of metal feet and shallow splashing drew the assembled Mini-Cons’ attention. Weapons raised, they stared into the darkness, but relaxed when a tone sounded, accompanied by a series of precise light flashes.

“Is just us, comrades!”

The Dinobots strode into the dim light in their beast modes.

Hacksaw, the team leader, smirked as he spoke. “Why long faces? So sad that playtime is over?” He walked forward in his stegosaurus mode and raised his disproportionately small head to face Snarl. “Do not fret, kitty-cat, there will be plenty of time for more play later.” Hacksaw’s voice was even and confident. Even though no threat was intended, Snarl backed down with a hint of wounded pride.

The other two Dinobots, Knockdown, the triceratops, and Terrorsaur, the tyrannosaurus, followed their leader.

“Ran into a big nsssst.” Terrorsaur hissed as he stalked the outer edge of the junction. “Put the bite on three mutantsss. Nassy piecesss they were. And you?”

Broadside nodded to Hacksaw, one professional to another. “We located and neutralized three mu-” Dreadwing suddenly blurred into the darkness, moving faster than anything without jet propulsion theoretically should, and a very loud and very brief scream pierced the dank air.

“-four mutants.”

“Impressive!” Hacksaw transformed into his humanoid form and threw his arms open wide with enthusiasm. “I owe you drink then, yes?”

Broadside shrugged impassively. “Merely doing our duty. Efficiently and cleanly.”

“Perhaps not so cleanly,” Hacksaw chuckled, watching Overbite, who was rummaging through his victim’s torso.

Broadside simply shook his head. The Predator Attack Team were utter psychopaths, exceptionally dangerous ones at that. He could only assume they had not been locked away because their murderous energies had been channeled into removing the threat of these mutants... but there were only so many of those left anymore. And those that remained were barely a threat...

Not like those “demons” from before. Broadside couldn’t stop the shudder that ran through him. Those things... he was glad they were wiped out early on. A lot of Mini-Cons had died at the claws and fangs of those abominations.

A series of growls shook him from his memories, as Overbite and Terrorsaur both got a little too



close to each other.

“Overbite! Down!” Broadside said angrily.

“Terrorsaur! Behave or I will thump you!” Hacksaw said before smacking Terrorsaur above the eyes with the back of his hand. “Twice.”

---

Knockdown looked up at the glowing indigo sign that cut through the star-dotted night. It read “Maccadams Old Oil House” in the Cybertronian language, though the first symbol in “Oil” flickered off and on irregularly. Every attempt to repair the sign failed, and a great many had tried. Some remarked that the sign refused to not have that flicker. Strongarm, one of the top tech-heads on the planet, claimed the sign was simply obeying some universal law of bars, but he was full of weird ideas like that.

Maccadams was special. As the story went, Maccadams had always been considered “neutral ground” throughout the millions of years of conflict, even in the worst times of the war that had driven the Cybertronian species to the brink of extinction. It was a place where anyone --Autobot, Decepticon or neutral-- could enjoy high-grade oil without fear of having a neutrino blaster shoved someplace unpleasant. The occasional over-energized skirmish was handled quickly, and usually non-lethally by the ever-present bouncers.

Of course, loss of one's arms was rarely fatal to a Cybertronian.

The Mini-Cons had gravitated to the bar. It was hailed as a place of peace, a testament to how their species could find joy and harmony even in the worst of times. Also, the place was in full working order --excluding the sign-- and was amazingly well stocked. That was why Knockdown liked Maccadams. Politics were for other mechanoids to worry about. Knockdown was a Dinobot, one of a new breed, and despite his small size compared to the Autobots that would one day return to their homeworld, he had an immense love of fuel and relaxation. Hard, honest work topped off with a cool oil drink at night, and he was happy.

The crowd was thin tonight. Knockdown sat down at a table in the back, placed alongside the much larger tables that awaited Autobot guests, and ordered a drink. Just across the room he spotted Broadside at a far table with a few others. Knockdown leaned back, ignoring the pained creak of his chair, and took a long sip off his oil.

When Knockdown's cup was half-empty a smaller robot in cherry-red armor made his way to Broadside, drink tray in hand, and whispered something to the tank. Knockdown watched, which drew his gaze to Broadside's companions... he dimly recognized one of them, a black shovel-armed mechanoid, as a member of the Urban Renewal Team. The other he thought was member of the Heavy Hauler Team, a bulky green Mini-Con. After a brief exchange with the serving robot the three stood up and made their way to one of the back meeting rooms.

“So serious,” Knockdown said to no one in particular. “No time for the simple things in life.”

The Dinobot kicked back, shut down his optics and relaxed, letting his audio receptors take over. For several minutes he let the audio wash over him. He enjoyed this, just sitting and listening to his people as they unwound. Catching bits and pieces of conversations...

...A group to his left was commenting on the final safety checks on a stretch of the Memnon Overpass...

...There was the plunk of a washer dropping into a cup of oil, followed by a cheer and the sound of someone downing a quart...

...Someone was leading a toast to a comrade who had spotted a mutant that'd been stalking them in



the lower levels and might had taken them by surprise otherwise...

...Someone was shouting angrily. It was muffled, but definitely the sound of trouble brewing.

Knockdown's optics snapped back on. He stood, releasing a long sigh as he did. It'd thankfully been a while since he had to do this, as he never really liked threatening people. But Maccadams was not a place for fighting, and the staff had always rather appreciated his patient method of dealing with troublemakers. Few messed with a Dinobot, even when over-energized. Those that did found themselves suspended by their ankles and having their head bounced against the floor a few times, which usually did the trick.

The disturbance had come from the back-room area... where Broadside had gone? He looked around, not seeing any of the staff nearby. He shrugged and headed in the direction he'd heard the shouting.

He was a few steps away from the door to Broadside's meeting room when the server came back out, carefully opening the door just enough to slip out, but Knockdown managed to get a quick look inside. Over the shoulder of the Heavy Hauler Mini-Con, he caught a glimpse of a lean yellow unit, flinching. He thought he heard Broadside's voice over the din as the door creaked open.

"... accident. We've come too far. This will be our opportunity to--"

The server, who had been carefully looking back into the room as he exited, turned and nearly jumped out of his shell when he saw Knockdown so close, dropping the tray and spilling empty cups across the floor.

"Sorry!" Knockdown said, kneeling to pick up the mess.

He could have sworn he'd heard the sound of a blade being unsheathed, but when he looked up quickly, the server had thrust his hands behind his back. "Sorry, you startled me..."

"Uh... yeah, sorry..." he said.

"Say, aren't you one of the Dinobots?"

Knockdown stood and handed him back the tray.

"Yeah?"

"The boss tells me you guys are a real life-saver, takin' care of the short-circuits we sometimes get in here. I ain't exactly built for that kinda thing... but maybe you could give me a few tips on handling 'em?"

"But... I heard arguing..."

There was the briefest of pauses before he waved a hand dismissively. "Just some overheated braggin' about how many mutants they bagged, gettin' mad when someone calls 'em on the slag. You know their type. You don't gotta worry about them, we'll cut them off soon anyway."

"Well, I guess..."

"C'mon, give a bot a tip or two and I'll treat you to a little Siebenaler Vintage we found in the back room."



---

Hacksaw set his jaw and paused as Knockdown's story sank in.

"Knockdown, you were right to tell me about this. Do not, however, concern yourself. This is politics; it is not for

one like you to worry about. Everything will be fine... I will have chat with Broadside, no problem.”

“If you say so, boss...”

“One more thing... let us keep this between us, yes? Just so others do not worry?”

“Okay, boss.” Knockdown said before walking slowly towards the door. There was a measure of concern, or possibly uncertainty, in his steps.

The Dinobot leader shut down his optics and thought quietly for several minutes after Knockdown had left his quarters.

Hacksaw didn't like dismissing Knockdown's concerns like that. His comrade was undoubtedly simple, but he was not stupid, an important distinction many missed. Simple, Hacksaw felt, was worth trusting. If Knockdown said he heard it, he heard it, and if he said he wouldn't tell anyone else, he wouldn't. Liars, on the other hand, were always complicated. Telling things how they were not only lead to trouble. But it was possible Knockdown hadn't understood what he heard, or hadn't heard all of it. Unlike the young Dinobot, Broadside was anything but simple. As professional as he was in the field, once he was off-duty he liked to make stories, exaggerate, and be heard. If Knockdown misunderstood, or if he hadn't heard the whole conversation, then his honest report could very well still be false and could cause great harm. And he knew that Knockdown would wallow in misery if he did something to cause such strife, even if unintentionally and with only good intentions in his spark.

Someone would have to find the truth, and right now, Hacksaw was the only Mini-Con available for the job.

Broadside was supposed to be going back on duty soon. As one of the top security units, he had been chosen to accompany the Mini-Con leader Modus Prime on an investigation of a recently uncovered energon processing plant below Altihex.

Hacksaw tapped his jaw with his axe-hand. Perhaps... it would be better to not wait until he got back. And Modus Prime certainly wouldn't object to a little backup from the Dinobot leader.

He fervently hoped Prime wouldn't need it, though.

---

“Excellent work in sector Spellos, Broadside,” Modus Prime said as they marched through Cybertron's tunnels, motion-sensor emergency lights clicking on as they proceeded. “That route's going to make travel from Gygax to Ankmor Park much easier once it's been properly mechaformed.”

Broadside simply nodded, even though Modus Prime was behind him. He'd insisted on taking point, while the Heavy Hauler and Urban Renewal Teams formed a protective ring around the leader of the Mini-Cons.

The group stopped before a set of heavy iron doors, the lower entrance to Altihex's long-abandoned energon refinery. With the Mini-Con's powers, it was sure to be up and running again in short order. Modus strode forward and hit a few keys on a jury-rigged panel, and the doors creaked open.

“Modus, you should be careful. We cleared the area but there could still be stragglers,” Broadside said, stepping in front of Modus to enter the door first.

“You worry too much, Broadside. I am not some frail old mechanoid. I'm just as young and vital as you are. Besides, with you, two other Teams here, and the Clear Skies Team keeping recon overhead, I'm confident we can handle any threat thrown at us. The energon plant could be a great boom to the cause. I'll just give it a personal inspection.”

“I am simply concerned, that is all.”

“Well, I think the team you've assembled here is more than suitable to the task,” Modus replied casu-



ally. “Besides, I have to show everyone that I'm onboard for the things we all do, don't I?”

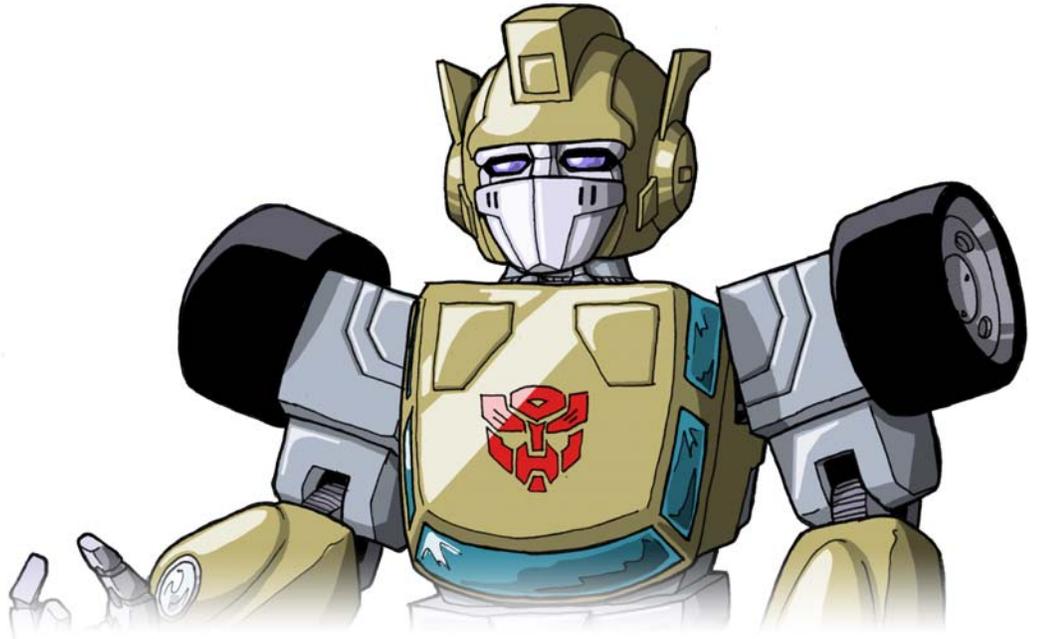
“As you wish,” Broadside noted as they entered.

Minutes passed as they walked through the refinery's lower levels, Modus and the others noting machinery needing replacing, power lines that could be quickly repaired. Occasionally Modus would lay his hands on some broken mechanism, channeling the planet's natural energies, and the device would heal, rust flaking away and conduits springing back to life.

“Don't exhaust yourself, sir,” Broadside cautioned, scanning the area. “Other Teams will be sent to do that work.”

“We each do our part,” Modus replied.

Several more minutes passed with relative quiet as the Mini-Cons assessed the plant's damages, until Sledge stopped and turned, looking down a darkened hallway. “Hey, Road Hazard... you see something moving over there?”



---

Hacksaw had to approach the processing plant from the surface, his quarters being on the opposite side of Altihex from the tunnels Modus and Broadside had taken. There was a rusted-out access door on this side that lead to its only above-ground level, mostly centuries-old unused administrative offices for several floors, the actual guts of the plant many levels below.

He was nearly to the open door when a series of explosions ripped through the building. The darkened passageway burst into blinding swaths of red and orange as a blast of air toppled the unsuspecting Dinobot, throwing him a full twenty meters back. Shattered glass and ash fell like rain, and the world went black.

Consciousness returned. Thunderwing of the Clear Skies Team swam into vision, trying to help him up. “What...”

“I dunno! The whole place just went BLAM!” Thunderwing shouted over the chaos. “Steel Wind and Nightscream are tryin' to find survivors, Steel's also droppin' fire-retardant bombs! Night Rescue Team's on their way!”

“Survivors! Are there any survivors?!” Hacksaw yelled, grabbing the Mini-Con by the shoulders.

“I don't know! It's been less than a click since it all went up!”

Hacksaw lunged forward, but Thunderwing grabbed his arm, feet throwing up sparks as the Dinobot dragged him along. “You can't go in there! Even your armor can't take that kind of heat!”

A shape appeared within the flames, a shape that slowly solidified into that of a stocky Mini-Con carrying a heap of junk in its arms. It took Hacksaw a few moments to realize that the oil-soaked junk in the

survivor's arms was the remains of another Mini-Con.

“Medic!” Broadside screamed hoarsely before he dropped to his knees, blackened and battered.  
“Medic, NOW!!”

---

The next few clicks were a blur. Hacksaw remembered the Night Rescue Team arriving to attempt to control the fire and stop it from spreading, and Firebot rushing without hesitation into the inferno. He remembered the crowd assembling and Thunderwing hollering for everyone to stay back. He remembered cradling Modus Prime's shattered torso in his arms until Remedy pulled the body away in a vain effort to save the fallen leader. He remembered the look of anguish and rage on Broadside's soot-stained face once he had regained control of his heavily damaged body. Everything else faded into a rush of emotions.

Hacksaw had faced death countless times. He had dealt it more than once. This time, however, death had come to him. It lingered over him. He felt a cold hand squeeze his spark as the sorrow took him. With effort, Hacksaw gained his composure. Sorrow was a luxury he did not have. Stoic resolve would help him keep chaos from spreading.

It would also keep his loss distant.

It was a short time after the world returned to horrible clarity that Firebot returned to the surface, carrying the chassis of another Mini-Con, followed by two more survivors. Wide Load and Sledge walked through the flames, damaged and blackened, dragging something huge behind them. “It was an ambush!” Sledge cried out as Firebot charged back in to retrieve the others. “Some crazed bulk attacked Modus! We returned fire, whole place just... boom!”

The assembled Mini-Cons gathered around their bundle. The corpse was huge; easily five times the size of any Mini-Con present, the size of a mutant. The form, though largely melted and charred, clearly bore a glaring red face on its sundered chest.

“Autobot,” Broadside growled. “It was an Autobot that ambushed us! A straggler. It killed Modus and the others! It killed Modus Prime!”

Strongarm, a solid-black machine from the Night Rescue Team, pushed his way to the front of the crowd, the emergency lights on his midsection still flashing. “It...can't be. It could be an accident,” he said, looking down at the chassis, head tilting. “It could have been shell-shocked from the battle with Unicron. Or... the planet is still unstable. The radiation, or any number of biomechanical parasites could have driven it mad... like the mutants.”

Broadside paused as the whole tone of his speech changed. “You... you're right. It could be contagious. Sledge, destroy the corpse!”

“On it,” Sledge said as he and Wide Load started to pull the bulk back into the darkness. “There's a direct chute to the level three smelter that should still be functional.”

Strongarm moved forward. “But I need to study it first, find out for sure-”

“No!” Broadside stepped directly in Strongarm's path and stood firm. “I won't allow any of us to be infected. I won't risk it.” Broadside shook his fist. “We have to stop more Autobots from coming. This madness-disease Strongarm discovered...”

“I... I haven't discovered anything yet! There are still tes-”

“It can't be allowed to spread to our... friends... in space. We must delay their return!”

“But we don't kn-”

“That's enough! With Modus gone I am-”



“Going to turn over leadership duties to next most senior Mini-Con?” Hacksaw’s voice carried over the din. His dinosaur form pushed through the crowd with ease, his gaze steel-hard and set on Broadside. “That is, of course, what you were going to say, yes?”

“... Yes... Hacksaw,” Broadside said slowly. “That’s exactly what I had in mind...”

“Good. Now, we will examine the body...”

All optics turned to Sledge and Wide Load as they came back from the darkness, alone.

“What?” Sledge asked to the questioning faces.

---

Hacksaw looked askance at Knockdown. The assembled Mini-Cons: the Clear Skies Team, the Dinobots and the Night Rescue Team, had all come to this meeting at Hacksaw's request. In deference to the seriousness of the situation, Divebomb, the Night Rescue leader, had turned off his rotor blade and was actually standing on the ground like a normal Mini-Con rather than hovering somewhat arrogantly over it as he preferred to.

“Modus Prime, Road Hazard, Yardarm, Flatbed, Steel-Belt... all dead. Broadside, Sledge and Wide Load, the only survivors are the three you saw in Maccadams just the night before. I do not like this,” he said, gesturing to Knockdown.

Hacksaw sat in the large chair of Modus Prime’s control room, eyeing the myriad reports coming in. He was uneasy with this, but knew that it was best for everyone that he had stepped up to assume command. Mini-Cons were beginning to panic. Several crews had halted their work out of fear of this “madness disease” from the lower levels. Others were now fearful that the Autobots were all killers like the one that supposedly attacked Modus Prime. Mutants weren’t too hard to handle since they almost always stuck to small groups and were generally pretty dumb to boot... but a whole army of Autobots?

What Cybertron needed right now was someone in control who would keep their head, and even bust a few if needed to calm things down.

“I should have done more. Should have asked more questions.” Knockdown said.

Terrorsaur looked up from his idle chewing of a duryllium bar, one of his favorite snacks. “Let me ssspeak to them and I’ll get sssome ansswersss.”

“Terrorsaur, you are stupid violent beast. If I let you ‘talk’ with them there will be nothing left to talk to afterwards. We do not need more corpses... we only need one, and it is currently molten slag!” Hacksaw rumbled, pounding the table in frustration.

He stopped and composed himself. Now was not the time to get angry. He had to keep calm.

“You confirmed how Modus Prime died?” Hacksaw asked, turning to Strongarm.

“Yeah, Remedy let me have a good long look at him to be sure... he didn’t mind me double-checking. This has really been a blow to him... to a lot of us.” He scuffed the floor with his toe. “Besides, he and his Team had others to tend to... let alone the who knows how many begging to be checked immediately for some ‘madness disease’. I tell you what, I’ve never seen him ready to punch anyone in the face before, but these panic-cases have certainly pushed his patience to the limit. He keeps telling them the only disease they’ve caught is stupidity, but they keep coming.”

“Modus?”

“Oh, yeah... It looks like the explosion is what actually killed Modus,” Strongarm sighed. “There’s certainly battle marks and other light wounds on what we could find of him, but the blast did the worst of it, and the rupture on his main spark chamber is consistent with an energon explosion.”



“The others?”

“Road Hazard was ripped in half by something, but what was left of him was too slagged to tell just what it was. The shock of it was too much for his spark. Steel-Belt was crushed under a collapsing storage tank. The others, the explosion took them too.”

“It's Broadside's fault!” Divebomb snapped. “If he hadn't opened fire the explosion wouldn't have taken out Modus. They could have reasoned with the Autobot! Or distracted it and gotten away from the volatile area, even if it was supposedly diseased.”

“Some trick that'd be. Reasoning with dead people is beyond even Broadside's talents.”

All optics turned to Strongarm.

“Thou hath an accusation to make?” Nightscream said indignantly, idly petting the dragonhead that served as his right hand.

“This is a con, a trick, a lie.” Strongarm replied. “Explosion or no, I think Modus Prime was murdered.”

“No Mini-Con hath ever slain another!” Nightscream exclaimed, wings ruffling. “Hath you any proof of your charges?”

Strongarm paused, as if suddenly realizing the gravity of what he'd just said out loud, and realizing everyone was looking at him very carefully. “... Nnnnnnot exactly. But... that Autobot corpse. I took a snapshot-”

“When? With what?”

Strongarm smiled. “I been tinkering with my optics off and on, working in a few new optional filters and scanners.”

Divebomb nudged him. “Tell ‘em about how you blinded yourself for nearly two rotational cycles doing that and started going on about learning to see through smells.”

“That would have worked if you hadn't stopped me.”

Hacksaw threw his hands up. “You were saying about the Autobot?”

Strongarm huffed a little and pulled a few cables from his storage compartment, plugging them into the side of his head, then the other end to the room's main console. An image of the Autobot corpse came up on the screen.

“Sorry about the image quality, but given the experimental nature of-”

“Give me short version, yes?”

“Hard as it was to tell given what was left,” Strongarm started, deflating briefly before going back to his normal excitable delivery, “There are definite signs that it wasn't a single machine, but a conglomeration of parts. The right arm... the upper arm and lower arm don't match right. I managed to get a quick enough look to run a base spectrometer reading...” The image changed hues, and several readout windows popped up. “...There's a seam there, welded together. The upper arm shows signs of blunt force trauma taking the rest of it... but the lower arm screams ‘acid-burn’ to me. There are a few other questionable parts here and there... in fact, I can't be sure, but this piece here on the leg... looks like part of a Decepticon emblem to me.”

“So you think this corpse was corpse before the... accident?”

“The hole in the chest is certainly consistent with Broadside's mortars, but that don't mean much. If this was a patsy corpse he assembled, he could have shot it any time.”

“But Unicron destroyed many,” Hacksaw muttered, almost to himself. “A survivor would have tried to replace lost parts with what he could scavenge from the dead.”

“You really think that's the case here?” Firebot asked, leaning idly against a wall.



“No,” Hacksaw replied. “But makes sense anyway. It will be what is claimed, and we cannot prove it is not true.”

“Do we gotta?” Thunderwing snapped. “If Broadside’s spoutin’ waste oil, then I say maybe we give him a going-over until he stops talking out his reactor linkage!”

Hacksaw pointed a thick finger in Thunderwing’s face. “We do not fling accusations wildly! That is what leads to panic, which is already gripping our people! If we start beating up others on suspicion, then Mini-Cons will fear more, they will fear us!”

“If I’d been able to have a little more time to examine the body before they slagged it,” Strongarm said, trying to defuse the situation, “I probably could have even told you when that Autobot... well, most of it at least... had actually died.”

Hacksaw sank back into the chair. “Strongarm. First things first, you will keep your volume on mute about this theory to anyone not now in this room, yes? You have a problem with saying things without running through your brain filter first. And even if you are correct... and I think you are... this is something that could tear all that we have built apart if we are not careful. Got it?”

“Yessir,” Strongarm replied quickly.

“This goes for all of you. Not one word of this leaves this room, yes?”

The gathered Mini-Cons gave their agreements, some more reluctantly and sullenly than others.

“Now. We have a guess at what was actually done... only question that remains is ‘why would it be done?’”

“Oh, man! Heavyyy!”

All optics turned to Steel Wind, who was tilting his head at an odd angle, one hand pressed against his temple in discomfort.

“Hast thou taken a leave of thine senses?” Nightscream snapped.

“Whoah, there’s some kinda scene goin’ down at the trans-hyperwave caster tower outside Proximax.”

“What do you mean, ‘scene’?” Hacksaw rumbled. “How do you know?”

“I like floatin’ by there at night on the way back to the pad... the ‘come on home’ beacon signal it sends out to our big-bot brothers cruisin’ the stars really gives off a nice mellow, you know? I try to keep tuned into it whenever I can... but... I can’t get the tune in properly. There’s this real harsh buzz in there, breakin’ the groove.” He looked up, his normally complacent, almost-vacant expression growing serious. “I think some negative-vibe merchant’s jammin’ on the waves.”

Divebomb folded his arms. “Something smells. Besides Terror’s breath.”

“Want me an’ the dudes to scope it? I know Thunderwing’s been itchin’ to do somethin’ since the... the big bringdown.”

Hacksaw shook his head. “No. That ‘dude’ will destroy the tower and you know it.”

“I only blew up a building once!”

“Dude.”

“... Twice.”

“Dude.”

“Shut up,” Hacksaw snapped. “I will investigate. It might be just a glitch. Divebomb, your Team will stay here with Knockdown and Terrorsaur, keep watch, organize cleanup and projects as best you can. Must keep up appearance of knowing what the slag is going on, yes? Steel Wind, your Team come with me, but you will stay in holding pattern six clics away from tower until called for.”

“But boss,” Knockdown started.

“But nothing. My mind is made up.”



---

Like everything else on the planet, the trans-hyperwave caster tower had been built to accommodate beings considerably larger than the Mini-Cons, but the resourceful robots had adapted it for their use. A series of small gangplanks and rafters crisscrossed the tower interior, even through the walls to the outside in many places, with a few service elevators running making access to the upper levels quicker. It was ramshackle yet stable, a testament of clever engineering compromises and jury-rigged excellence. It stood out against the sky like the iron skeleton of a grandiose architectural marvel left forever unfinished. In its own way, the tower was a material metaphor for Cybertron's current state.

Hacksaw took the stairs. He wasn't feeling very confident about the elevators.

None of the Clear Skies Team had liked Hacksaw going in alone; even the snobbish Nightscream had offered to accompany him as backup inside. But Hacksaw had refused.

After thousands of individual steps the cold wind that whipped through the tower's framework bore voices.

"I can't believe we're wasting our talents on this."

"Shut up, Dirt Rocket. This is easy work for good pay."

Hacksaw heard the voices from around the corner. The tower should have been abandoned tonight and whoever was here had made no effort to lower their voices.

"Easy is boring. Pass me the data-con."

A few more slow, measured steps brought the voices out of the darkness and into Hacksaw's sight. Two Mini-Cons were tinkering with the broadcast relay. A disk-shaped data-con was haphazardly wired into the old-style Omniversal Serial Bus port used for message transfer.

"What do you think you are doing?"

Hacksaw glowered at the pair as they spun around in surprise. They couldn't have been the regular crew for the tower; he recognized the orange robot as Oil Slick, a grease monkey who had always struck him as a real slimy piece of work, and certainly nothing needed his mechanic skills here. The tower was one of the first projects completed, and ahead of schedule to boot. And while he didn't know the smaller yellow cycle-robot Oil Slick had identified as Dirt Rocket, his shifty, nervous stance all but screamed "we've been caught doing something very wrong, oh slag what do we do now?" Besides, he matched Knockdown's brief description as one of the other robots Broadside had met in Maccadams just before Modus Prime's death.

"Back off, Dinobot, we gots every right t' be here," Oil Slick snapped defiantly, having recovered his composure with remarkable speed.

"Yeah, so go screw," Dirt Rocket added, with considerably less confidence.

"What speak you of rights?" Hacksaw glared. "This is Mini-Con public works project. All personnel changes go through command."

"Yeah, well, we did," Oil Slick retorted, spitting a gob of waste-oil on the floor.

"I am command."

"Yeah, says you."

Hacksaw paused, optics narrowing. "You two are following orders. You have never been ambitious enough to do these things on your own. Who told you to make this change? Who is on that recording?"

Dirt Rocket flinched, optics turning briefly to Oil Slick in nervousness. His companion sighed and shook his head as Hacksaw took a step forward.

"Ya just had t' push, di'n't ya?" Oil Slick drawled, waving his claw-hand idly. "Grindor, let's put this



fossil in th' museum.”

“You think I fall for-” Hacksaw started, but was cut off with the roar of an engine, and the air was rushed out of him as Grindor barreled into him from behind. Slamming face-first to the floor, he felt oversized tires press down hard. The Mini-Con monster truck hit his hydraulics, leaping into the air, screaming “CRUSH!!!” in his booming voice before slamming down on the Dinobot’s back full force, enough to dent the floor underneath them.

Grindor leapt again, only this time Hacksaw was ready. He rolled onto his back and got his axe-arm up, slicing through one of Grindor’s tires and a chunk of the wheel drum. It wasn’t enough to stop the Mini-Con from landing on him again with teeth-rattling force, but the howl of pain told Hacksaw he had an advantage to press. He rolled further, upending the truck and sending it crashing onto its side.

Grindor transformed to robot mode and hobbled on his damaged left leg, the slashed tire that wrapped around his shin sliding free, and roared “SMASH!!!” as he charged. But Hacksaw merely swung his other arm full-force, fist crashing into Grindor’s oversized jaw and sending him reeling.

He didn’t have a chance to catch his breath and assess damages before his side erupted in excruciating pain. Oil Slick had taken the opportunity to lunge in and stab his side with the shiv that jutted from his right wrist-socket, twisting it into the wound.

Hacksaw coughed up oil and brought his arm down hard, elbow smashing into Oil Slick’s arm. The Mini-Con screamed as his arm bent in a direction it was never designed to, and Hacksaw rammed his elbow back, catching him in the face and sending him staggering backwards.

The Dinobot was hit from behind again as Dirt Rocket brought a lead pipe down on his head... but it didn’t have the effect he’d hoped for. Hacksaw’s thick skull neatly absorbed the impact, and a backhand sent the smaller robot flying.

But it had given the other two other Mini-Cons time. Oil Slick transformed to his low-riding car mode, headlamps retracting to reveal a pair of blasters. Hacksaw moved, but a shot clipped his ankle, sending him tumbling into Grindor’s arms.

The monstrous Mini-Con grabbed Hacksaw tight and began to squeeze. Hacksaw could feel armor buckling, and something inside him popped. Grindor looked into his face, red optics glowing as he laughed and applied more pressure. Oil Slick, back in robot mode, ran forward and stabbed Hacksaw again in the back.

“Stoopid good guy,” Grindor rumbled.

“You... forget... I... am... a... Dinobot!” Hacksaw hollered through the pain, and brought a knee up hard.

Grindor’s optics nearly popped from his sockets, and he immediately released his grip. Oil Slick stepped backwards in shock, unable to move out of the way fast enough as Hacksaw grabbed the stunned Grindor and hurled him into his teammate, sending them both smashing into the control console, crushing the jury-rigged data-con, which sparked and smoked.

Hacksaw gripped the wound on his side, coughing. “Dinobots never fight like good guys,” he grumbled at the prone intruders. He picked up the groaning Dirt Rocket by the arm, dangling him like a rag doll effortlessly a foot off the ground.

“Now, Clear Skies Team will come and take you into custody... and then we will have a nice long talk about who you are taking orders from, yes?”

“That won’t be necessary.”

Hacksaw turned. Just outside the control room door stood Broadside.

“They were trying to transmit a warning to the Autobots, telling them to stay away from Cybertron...”



that it was too unstable, that there was still grave danger.” He did not move as Hacksaw carelessly tossed Dirt Rocket to the side and walked towards him, and did not look away from the Dinobot’s face.

“On your authority.”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Did you ever stop and think about our little prayer, Hacksaw? ‘Til all are one. It sounds noble and glorious, doesn’t it? On face value, perhaps. But the Mini-Cons... we’re all fragments of the Last Autobot. What do you think is going to happen to us when he returns, when the Autobots come back to Cybertron? I don’t know about you, but I don’t intend to live a short life of toil and terror only to have my spark yanked and stuffed back into that ancient mechanoid for the rest of eternity while others enjoy the fruits of our labors.”

“Are you mad?! That is not what it means!” Hacksaw gasped. “We are children of Primus! The creator would not do such a thing!”

He saw Broadside stiffen. Bottled-up rage seemed to course through the tank’s systems, and his voice came out harsh, clipped.

“You know what we’ve done since we came online! We’ve hunted down and exterminated countless other ‘Children of Primus’! Demons, mutants, all of them created by this supposed ‘Light God’, forgotten, and then his avatar sent others... sent us to slaughter them, erase his failures! I’ve witnessed the deaths of dozens of Mini-Cons who were also sent on this mission of genocide... all for a people who left this world to die!”

“Left to die?” Hacksaw’s fist clenched as he stepped closer. “The Autobots left to save lives! They did not believe they would even have home to come back to! That is sacrifice, not abandonment!”

“It is still foolishness!” Broadside raged. “I didn’t ask for this! I didn’t want it to be this way!”

“It is the way things are! Only way things change is when we make it!”

“What do you think I’m doing, old man!” Broadside thrust forward his right hand and launched a volley of explosive shells into Hacksaw’s left leg. Hacksaw howled and crashed into the ground.

“Old?” Hacksaw coughed as his ventilation system choked on his own burning enamel. “We are the same age, stupid!”

To Broadside’s surprise, Hacksaw transformed to dinosaur mode and swung his tail into Broadside’s chest, sending him flying. Had Broadside been paying closer attention he might have noticed the very deliberate shift in Hacksaw’s weight that turned the Dinobot’s tail-spikes away from his opponent.

Broadside landed on his back at the beginning of one of the walkways over the tower’s hollow center. “Old is as old does!” he coughed as he struggled to his feet. “You’re running outdated software, just like Modus Prime, just like the bulks we’re supposed to kowtow to!”

As Broadside rose, Hacksaw transformed back into robot mode, staggering on his wounded knee but still moving into a fighting stance. “Kowtow? What has gotten into you?”

“What’s gotten into me? I’ll tell you! I found him. Scorponok! Leader of the Decepticons!”

“He is dead!”

“Immaterial! There was enough of him left! I scavenged his head, worked for nearly a decivorn trying to recover whatever fragments from his brain I could! Do you know what I found when I pried into his primary processor, pieced together the fragmented memories of two minds merged into one?!” he cried out, his speech growing ever more fervent. “Scorponok, colossal leader of the Decepticons, and Zarak, an organic being no bigger than us who chose to become one with him?”

“You are insane!” Hacksaw grabbed a chunk of railing, tearing it free and swinging. Broadside’s can-



non-hand lit up, ripping the bar to shreds in mid-swing. Hacksaw continued to lumber forward in an attempt to tackle him, but Broadside rolled onto his back, kicking both feet up into Hacksaw's midsection and flipping the Dinobot over, rattling the walkway with the impact.

"They wanted more for their people than to simply work and exist, to toil away for meager rewards!" Broadside continued as he picked himself back up, turning to face his attacker. "And together they were willing to take on the Chaos-Bringer himself to claim it!"

"Scorponok died nobly, defending Cybertron from Unicron alongside Autobots! He died as a hero, not as a vile conqueror!"

"It doesn't matter how he died! It matters how he lived!"

With a roar, Hacksaw shifted into his dinosaur mode again and charged, slamming into Broadside, the walkway shuddering and groaning beneath his weight. "So this is how you choose to live? To become a murderer! Betray your people! Become like the Decepticons!"

"*If that's what it takes!*" Broadside screamed, bringing both arms around, smashing the dino's head from the side and sending him off-balance. Hacksaw transformed and staggered backwards, and the air filled with the noise of the tortured scaffolding starting to give way. "I'm justified, Hacksaw! I can do this for the same reason the bulks or Primus can do what they do... because no one has the power to stop me!"

Metal supports snapped under the strain, and the walkway collapsed, sending fragments spiraling into the darkness below. Broadside leapt forward as Hacksaw began to fall, getting one arm around a railing and grabbing the Dinobot's outstretched axe-arm with other. Hacksaw hung over blackness as pieces of the walkway tumbled downward, his arm a red-hot line of pain as it was twisted by his own weight. He looked up to his enemy, his savior.

"Why do you save me?!"



“We don’t have to fight, Hacksaw! We don’t need the Autobots... we don’t need anyone else! They’ll only ruin everything, take it all from us! We can make our people strong!”

Hacksaw looked up, optics blazing.

“If you cannot take risks, if you cannot sacrifice... then you are not strong,” he said coldly. “And you will never be strong.”

Broadside recoiled as if Hacksaw had decked him. He looked down at the only Mini-Con he would ever have deemed to call “friend”.

“I... understand,” he said quietly.

He thought he had heard Hacksaw begin to say something else, but it was too late. He had already relaxed his grip.

The Dinobot stared up at Broadside as he plummeted into the darkness below. He did not scream as he fell... but the look on his face had already been irrevocably burned into Broadside’s memory.

Not fear of death. Not hatred or anger.

Pity.

It took several moments after Hacksaw vanished from sight for the crash of his impact to ring out.

It took several more for Broadside to pull himself away from the abyss, and slowly walk back to the control room, where the Dirt Digger Team were picking themselves up.

“Did the warning message get sent?” Broadside asked distantly.

Oil Slick’s head snapped up in anger, and he flung his arm out to indicate the shattered console and the remains of their data-con. “Lookit this place! No, the message ain’t been sent! That moron Dinobot got-”

The force of the blow sent Oil Slick crashing against the far wall. He yelped as Broadside bore down on him, optics blazing in anger. Broadside’s cannon hand spun, an inch from Oil Slick’s face... and quickly jerked up, spraying bullets into the wall, showering the cowering Mini-Con with sparks and metal filings for several seconds.

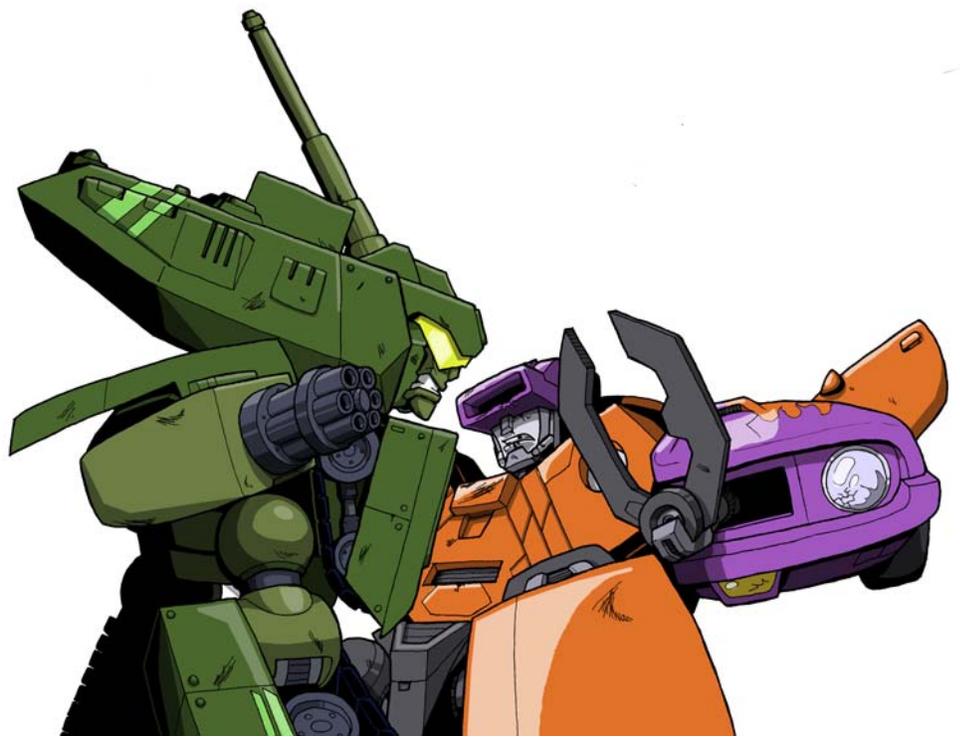
“We’re leaving,” Broadside growled, lowering his smoking gun-arm. “You three idiots get underground and stay hidden,” he hissed. “Somehow... somehow I’ve got to turn this... catastrophe to our advantage.” He turned, glaring at them.

“I have a feeling you three aren’t going to be very popular.”

Dirt Rocket squeaked. Oil Slick, still shell-shocked from his near-death experience, just staggered. Grindor was the only one to find his voice.

“Now you wait just one smeltin’ minute!” he roared, shocking Broadside by using more than a couple syllables before needing a break, his “lumbering brain-dead brute” act dropped. “We did everything you said to, how you said to! It’s not our fault you didn’t take care of all the loose ends! The Dirt Digger Team is not gonna to take the rap for your slag-storm, you got me?”

Broadside sighed. “I’m giving you a choice. You can be fugitives who have not been positively identi-



fied, are not very rigorously hunted at all and eventually forgotten, and can return once I've got everything in-hand and can clear you..."

He brought his cannon-hand up again, the barrels spinning madly.

"Or you can take the full brunt of the blame as easily-identifiable corpses."

---

"Mini-Cons of Cybertron. It is with a heavy spark that I inform you that our leader, Hacksaw, has been murdered by unidentified assailants."

Broadside looked out over the massed crowd in Iacon's Grand Oratory, giving them a moment to let the news sink in. Behind the podium where he stood, a massive screen magnified his image for those in the back, also showing what was being broadcast across Cybertron to the Mini-Cons in other cities.

"We have no solid leads at this time, but it is our belief that Mini-Cons who disregarded the quarantine guidelines for the lower levels may have become infected with the as-of-yet unidentified madness agent that caused the death of Modus Prime. To prevent further tragedies of this sort, I am hereby ordering all exploration of Autobot zones closed and a planet-wide quarantine order has been given regarding off-planet visitation."

There were generally positive murmurs and even some applause from the crowd, but a few raised voices in shock.

"I know some of you may find these measures unnerving. I am merely doing what must be done to protect you from those who would destroy our world, our way of life. It is possible that the Autobots, or even Decepticon agents....

There was a sharp snap and a brief flash of static. The broadcast resumed, but in place of Broadside's face there was a new image.

"...may attempt to run the planetary defense blockade. If this happens we must be prepared to drive them away, for their own safety, and for ours. But this news is not entirely dark. We will rebuild Cybertron, carefully, in stages, and we will purge this world of its madness so that a stronger future... a Mini-Con future can take place."

As Broadside spoke the image cast behind him showed a pair of Mini-Cons struggling atop the caster tower. The camera work was shaky, as if taken from a great distance. There was no sound to accompany the images but none was needed. The crowd watched in horror as Hacksaw fell... or as some thought tossed, from Broadside's grasp.

Broadside sensed the shift in the audience and turned to see the broadcast behind him. Stunned, he fell silent, which was all Nightscream needed. The Mini-Con dragon glided down onto the stage from the rafters and shouted to the crowd.

"Witness the villain unmasked, brothers!" Nightscream said, transforming into robot mode and holding his dragon-head-tipped arm high. "This foul knave hath murdered Hacksaw, and I wouldst wager his hands art stained with the fuel of Modus Prime as well!"

"Nightscream speaks the truth!" Strongarm said, leaping to the stage. His weapons were leveled at Broadside as he spoke. "The bulk from Altihex was a cobbled together nightmare, and he had it destroyed before it could be examined! There is no plague! I never ran the tests! He orchestrated the whole thing!"

The remainder of the Clear Skies and Night Rescue teams emerged from the shadows, Divebomb floating down from the ceiling in robot mode, hand-cannons pointed at Broadside.



“This is madness... treason!” Broadside snarled as Sledge and Wide Load clustered closer to him, taking defensive stances.

“Treason? Madness? Thou hath much knowledge of both of these subjects, villain, through your own expertise! Before this day no Mini-Con hadst slain another... and it is still thus. For as there is a spark in my chest thou art no Mini-Con. This murderer is a Decepticon in mine optics, brothers! What say you to this matter?” A murmur ripped through the crowd and in the distance a Mini-Con voice called for the death of all Decepticons. Another voice answered in the affirmative.

“No, Nightscream, he's a criminal, and needs to be arrested,” Divebomb said firmly. Nightscream's crusader's zeal had to be diffused before he inadvertently turned the assembled crowd into an angry mob. If torn apart, Broadside's reasons for his actions and the knowledge of his other secret activities would be lost forever. “That is the law, and that is what we are, enforcers of the law.”

“Such accusations and recriminations.” Broadside said coldly into the microphone. “You have no authority to arrest me but you are welcome to try... after I have had my say.”

Dead silence. Every optic was on Broadside now. Waiting.

Broadside smiled.

Hacksaw was right all along. Everything is so simple now. As it should have been from the beginning. What have all my lies truly accomplished?

He turned to the crowd, the cameras, optics blazing.

“This is our world! We built it up from the ashes! We are the rightful heirs to its bounty! The Autobots would take it from us! ‘Til all are one’ is the declaration of a death sentence for us! When they return, our purpose has ended! Others were willing to simply hand all this over, all our lives... but not I!”

He could see Mini-Cons bristling. The two remaining Dinobots were already elbowing their way through the crowd, but suddenly several Mini-Cons purposefully got in their way, and a fight broke out. Arguments were starting in other parts of the arena. He could see the Night Rescue Team tensing to attack in the edge of his field of vision.

It was all coming to a head here and now. No turning back.

“Who among you will join me, and will claim the new world we made for our people?”

Divebomb lunged at the podium, but Broadside brought his cannon-hand up, firing and shredding the Mini-Con's rotor blades, sending him crashing to the ground. Firebot fired his water cannons at him, but Wide Load stepped in the path, his massive shielded arms deflecting the high-pressure streams, though he was knocked several feet backwards from the force of the impact. Sledge swung his scoop-arm wide, throwing Nightscream off the dais and into the crowd.

Broadside spun and launched a shell from his main cannon, blasting a hole in the wall to the outside.

As he fought his way through guards to his new exit, he smiled to hear the sounds of more fights breaking out among the crowd... and Mini-Cons crying out “Our world! Our world!”

**END**

Be sure to check out Transformers Timelines Issue 2 featuring the all-new 22pp Classicverse comic story “Games of Deception.” Available at a Comic Shop near you or online at [www.transformersclub.com/shop](http://www.transformersclub.com/shop)

