

TRANSFORMERS TIMELINES PRESENTS:  
**LIVELY PURSUIT**  
A TALE FROM OF MASTERS AND MAYHEM



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## LIVELY PURSUIT

“Didn’t I mention that before?”

The room was black except for a few strands of light bravely penetrating the darkness in the far corner. Specks of dust – or was it rust? – danced among the brilliant photons. Reds, browns and even sparkling copper floated in swirling clouds. It was just enough light to reveal six shapes sitting in the gloomy dimness. They were upright, various sizes and bulk, and five had the familiar gracefully flowing metal lines that had once been all the rage throughout the Cybertronian social elite. The sixth form was heavier, broader, and alien by comparison. It moved between the others, its arms gesturing as its voice echoed across the dingy room.

“I’m pretty sure I mentioned it. I’ve never been accused of leaving, well, anything unsaid. Are you guys sure?”

There was barely a pause. It wasn’t enough time for any kind of response.

“Alright, alright. I’ll tell you now then. Hmm. Actually, let’s go back a bit. So I was making a trip over to Kenopsia, a typical run for me actually, and there was this pothole just at the bottom of the Lachesium bridge. You know that one, right? The bridge, not the pothole. It has the two interwoven arches that loop below it? And the statues of the ancient visionaries on either side? Of course you know it. Anyway, there beside the pothole was a light gray and teal vehicular form that I swore I had seen before. I couldn’t place it but I just knew I knew it from somewhere. So I pull over...”

The voice trailed off for a second as the robot shot a glance across the room.

“Don’t give me that look, Sonder. Of course I would have stopped even if she hadn’t looked familiar. Oh yeah. She was a she by the way. Not that it really matters to the story. Well it does because of who she is, but... Anyway, I pull off next to her and it was obvious what had happened – she had slammed into that pothole at full speed and bent her front axle. Sure, you’re sitting there thinking ‘why didn’t she just convert out of trans-form and walk to a transit tube?’ I thought the exact same thing. But two things stopped her from doing that: First, her bent axle jammed into the primary hydraulics, causing one of those to burst and lodge shrapnel between the gears of her transformation cog. Nasty bit of damage that. Second, well, she didn’t want anyone to see her robot mode. Because while her trans-form was a standard 65356-9292-346 transpo unit, her robot mode... well to say that it was unique isn’t doing her justice – she was Princess Adronitia after all!”

Expecting an impressed murmur from his audience, the robot hesitated. The room stayed silent.

“Princess Adronitia. Bit-spawn of Smelter Baron Anecdoche? Heiress to the seventh Kaon fortune? Exulancus, you’re glitz reporter for scrap’s sake... Oh, ‘scrud.’ I should say, ‘scrud.’ Forgive the language. I picked up some bad habits as of late, I guess. She won the Girder Lift Championships with a score of five-hundred fifty-three kilounits. You have to know – oh you do. Good! Well it was her. We sat there and chatted for, uh, I guess it was probably a mega cycle or two, and kept at it until a tow-bot was sent out. His name was Wrecker Hook or Tow-Line or something like that. It sure wasn’t Pipes; Pipes is a charmer next to this guy. I followed them to the repair shop so that I could make sure that her identity stayed a secret. Bang, clang, she’s all fixed in under twenty cycles and we’re back on the road to Kaon.”

There was a beat taken as the robot cleared the ventilizers in his throat.

“She’s actually not at all how the media bots portray her – er, no offense meant, Exulancus. But the whole platinum-plated party-bot routine isn’t the *real* her; that’s an act she puts on for the cameras so that she can slip away and keep a more low-key profile when the reporters are away. In fact, she was actually this side of Kenopsia to try to bring some of her father’s Ore-47 to the locals in need. Heh, ironically the locals probably would have used it to fill in that pothole by the bridge! Hahahaha!”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

No one else laughed.

“\*Ahem\* So, right. I’ve convinced her to stop in. Don’t I always have the best connections? I -”

A low hum in the distance caught the robot’s attention.

“Is that her?”

He shook his head as if to erase that question from his processors – it was absurd to have even uttered it. He listened as the hum became a roar. Metal shavings vibrated free from their perch around the door. He tried to pinpoint where in the city the sound was originating, but it wasn’t in the city. It was above it. It was the growl of a ship’s engines – a very low-flying ship’s engines.

A sleek silver craft then appeared and through a v-shaped cockpit, he could see a blueish robot at the helm.

“Oh! Scrap! They’re back!”

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“All I’m suggesting is that we talk with whoever sent the signal. There’s no harm in that, is there?” Despite his commander’s previous orders, Counterpunch had already calculated the FTL – *faster than light* – coordinates for Cybertron and input them into the ship’s console. It was an action of which Impactor was all too aware; the glowering Autobot’s stare could have burned holes into Counterpunch’s hand as it hovered over the engine controls.

“It’s over, hope is lost.” Impactor sneered. He then put his hand up as though to announce his correction, “*Revenge* is lost. Even with the convenience of this new communication from Cybertron... Giving us the chance to rebuild the team... After...”

Impactor’s lip curled, his teeth bit down to tear into his words and prevent them from leaving his mouth.

“Wreckage isn’t the weapon we wanted. Alpha Bravo was right about that at least; he’s simply another monster that we’d be letting loose on the universe. After he’d have defeated Thunder Mayhem, he would have just continued the slaughter in his own way. What his mind was made of... What’s left of those of us from Cybertron... We’re too tainted. Too corrupted. Why do you think I refused to join the combiner team in the first place? I know what I have in here,” Impactor gestured at his chest, “Is empty. And what I have in here,” He pointed to his head, “Is broken. It’d take a lot of sorting to straighten us all out.”

“But what about your fail safe?” The Predacon scientist squawked from inside the console that Toxitron had damaged during his tantrum. Impactor had forgotten that Fractyl was still on the bridge. The Predacon was referring to the thiotimoline that Impactor had planted inside of Toxitron as a way to start a chemical reaction that could detonate the Combiner if he proved uncontrollable.

“It doesn’t matter. You all know about it, so Wreckage would as well. As soon as he combined again, the first thing he’d do is rip it from his chest.” The Autobot dropped his head. “It’s over. We’re finished.”

Counterpunch’s hand, which had still been hovering above the gears and levers in front of him, began to shake. Its fingers curled themselves into a fist and slammed down onto the console. “This scrap-filled defeatism. Over what? Two dead robots? You’re the sludging leader of the Wreckers! Smelt it all molten and start acting like it!”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

How many bots have you lost before? Hrm? Should we make a roster? How many have you lost and you've never wavered?"

The Decepticon's eyes burned crimson red behind his visor as he continued, "You kept on. You had a plan. You took me – took us – and changed what we were. Rebuilt us. Restructured us. Had our bodies shaped to fit your dreams, your schemes. For all those you've lost, for all those you have, and for all those still sacrificing everything to follow you, how dare you give up. How dare you throw us all away like we are nothing."

The Wrecker commander strode over to blue and black robot who had just unleashed the scathing rant, and stared into his eyes. Impactor's scowl filled Counterpunch with unease, but the Decepticon knew that he couldn't show it. The Autobot leaned in, and without looking away, flicked his wrist to activate the engines. He gritted his teeth, his anger exuding from every seam in his plating, then turned and stormed away after grabbing a recording of the transmission.

Fractyl cocked his head back to Counterpunch after command deck doors slide shut behind Impactor. "Wow. That got him going again. Is... is that how you really feel?"

Counterpunch feigned adjusting the settings on the communication screens. "I might not know if I was ever actually an actor, but I still remember my training."

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Toxitron sat in the middle of the cargo hold, surrounded by the devastation he had made. Deep in a state of kuebiko, his shoulders slouched as he panted and his servos screamed for a cool down. He didn't hear Impactor enter the hold. In his exhaustion, he didn't even know that the Autobot was there until he spoke.

"The Pit. Did you leave anything standing?"

The edge to Impactor's tone along with his still clenched teeth told Toxitron that the purple robot was as boiling with rage as he himself had been just moments before. "Nope. Everything is toppled over, bent, dented or worse. I didn't leave anything for you to bash your frustration on."

The hulking green robot swept a hand gesture towards a particularly deranged pile of debris, "Although maybe you can find a couple of crates under there that could still be battered."

"Hrm. Maybe I should have installed a combat simulator..." Impactor's musing wasn't in reply to Toxitron; he hadn't been listening to the Decepticon and had barely even heard his voice.

"I still would have done this," Toxitron's face contorted into one of his unsettling smiles. "There's something much more tactically satisfying crushing actual things than wrestling with holograms and lightformers."

"We're headed back to Cybertron."

Toxitron didn't offer any kind of reaction.

Impactor cleared his throat. "We picked up a signal from someone still on the surface. It was an automated message, but it had last Solar Cycle's quantum code embedded in it. And called us out by name."

At hearing of a survivor, Toxitron's eyes narrowed. The hole above his faceplate - that seemed like a mouth gone wrong – curled upwards showing his amusement. "Thunder Mayhem left *two* Cybertronians alive on the planet. Ha. Hahaha!!"

## LIVELY PURSUIT

The purple and yellow Autobot raised an eyebrow.

“It’s something I wouldn’t have done.” Toxitron’s knotty smirk remained.

A sour look returned to Impactor’s face, “Counterpunch has insisted that we talk with the sender of the signal and find out her or his situation.”

“So it would be us four... plus one more?” Toxitron’s curled smile had disappeared, replaced by an unreadable expressionless face.

“No.” Impactor knew he should choose his words carefully. “For now if there is a survivor, we should at least band together and try to make something of the future of our species.”

That wasn’t the right thing to say. Not to a robot whose only current goal in life is to seek vengeance against a group of homicidal maniacs. Toxitron stood and loomed over Impactor. “I don’t care about the future of anything. I was told I could show the Mayhem Attack Squad the price of perfection. I was told I could get revenge against my history as an experiment. Do you really want to stand in the way of that?”

Impactor didn’t flinch. “We should reach Cybertron in under a mega cycle. When we meet up with whoever wants our attention, we’ll discuss it. You should get ready for landing.”

Toxitron’s thunderous footsteps echoed as he stomped from the cargo hold and back into the ship’s hallways. “Oh I’ll be ready,” He yelled back at Impactor, “Will you be?”

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The ship’s engines shifted from a rumbling whir to a deep growl as flames leapt from the landing thrusters. Powdered iron and pebbles of steel billowed below the vessel as the thrusters burned and singed the metal plates of the landing pad.

The blue and silver robot watched from behind a fallen slab of chromium as the dust began to settle back down to the ground and a profound *thunk* signaled that the ship had finally touched down. “It’s them. I told you. Head back and join up with the others. I’ll...”

The robot turned around but there was no one behind him.

“Oh. Right.”

The straining creak of well-used hinges on a heavy metal door drew the robot’s attention back to the ship. Brilliant white light spilled from the yawning opening, casting the four humanoid shapes in silhouette. As the lead of the silhouettes descended the ramp, however, Impactor’s visage quickly took form. “Well, bots, we’re home. Again.”

The blue robot sighed. He knew Impactor and wasn’t greatly looking forward to this introduction. He stepped out from behind the metal slab. “The Wreckers. I take it you got my message.”

“Bluestreak,” The purple and yellow robot nodded, “The message didn’t seem long enough to be from you.”

Fractyl’s eyes darted from Impactor to Autobot just referred to as Bluestreak, and then back. “So you two have met before then?”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

“Not really.” Bluestreak’s mouth was open, but Impactor had beaten him to the answer. Realizing this, the Wrecker smiled. “But Bluestreak has worked with the Wreckers before.”

“‘Worked with,’ not ‘for.’ If I can add the emphasis.” Bluestreak’s eyes narrowed at Impactor.

Impactor scoffed. “Since when do you need permission to add anything to a conversation?”

“You’re right. I usually don’t.” Bluestreak’s face somehow found a way to combine a sneer and a smirk. “But you seemed happy being the one to make all the grumpy, frumpy introductions, so I was going to let you roll with it.”

“Hm.” Impactor’s face tightened. “Bluestreak was Optimus Prime’s gunner. One of the most elite in the Autobot military. Angry sonnuvaglitch too after what the Decepticons did to Praxus. He had this whole vendetta thing going and everything. I probably should have asked him to join the Wreckers back then.”

Bluestreak dropped his chin to his chest. “I’m pretty sure we would all be in the same places now, even if you had asked. I know how your Wreckers operate. Or should that be past tense? I don’t see any familiar faces with you. Did you outlive your squad again? I wonder why you’re so good at sacrificing them but always manage to squirm away yourself.”

Impactor lunged forward, his face inches from Bluestreak’s. The slightly smaller robot didn’t flinch. “Keep talking, Bluestreak. That mouth of yours will get you deactivated someday. And I want to be there to see it.”

“Hahaha!” Laughter like the rustling of rusted chains echoed in the starry Cybertronian night. Toxitron’s voice was full of a deplorable joy. “If I had a tongue, I would try to lick this moment. The angst, the anger... It would be succulent.”

Bluestreak swept an arm towards Toxitron and the other members of Impactor’s team. “You always could find the cream of the vile and wretched crop, couldn’t you? Decepticons and even a Predacon this time too. That’s new, but also not all that surprising. As long as it gets you what you want, you’ll get anyone to align with you. Even the enemy. Or don’t you remember the Dark Star mission?”

“I remember it.” Impactor’s face was solemn.

Fractyl chirped, “I’m confused. I thought you two didn’t ‘really’ know one another? You seem to know an awful lot about each other.”

“Everyone knows about the great and barbaric Impactor,” Bluestreak huffed. “How he was responsible for the most decisive victories in the Great Wars by dispatching the entire opposing side of the battlefield. Sometimes after they had already surrendered.”

“I knew I liked him for some reason.” The large green and purple robot leaned over Impactor, the lurching motion seemed menacing. Although everything Toxitron did seemed menacing. “I’ll need to hear more about your former glories. I didn’t get a chance to hear much of anything during the war. No one wanted to tell me anything, they just wanted to scream.”

“I’m sure Bluestreak would be eager to tell you all about it.”

Counterpunch waved his hands to try to push his way into the conversation. “Alright. I don’t understand. Why did you ask us here if all you’re going to do is bicker with Impactor? If you dislike us as much as you seem to wouldn’t you—”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

“Why do you think I didn’t come out to meet you the first time you were here? When you found him?” Bluestreak gestured towards Toxitron with the tip of his thumb. “I didn’t want anything to do with you. I hid. I watched you come and I watched you go. I thought I could get on without you. Even if you were the only other survivors, I’d rather be alone than be cooped up in a space ship with the likes of murderers and brutes. I—”

“So what changed?” At Counterpunch’s question, Impactor raised an eyebrow and tilted his head. Obviously he wanted to know the answer too.

“I... Come with me, I want to show you something.” The blue robot waved his hand over his shoulder, beckoning the others to follow. “The terrain is a little tricky for vehicle modes – even for our flyer friend there – so best to stay in robot mode. Toxitron, why don’t you walk with me and we can share stories about Impactor.”

Toxitron laughed, once again the sound of shards of metal grinding together chilled everyone to the core. “I wouldn’t miss it... Chatterbox.”

“I mentioned the Dark Star operation, right?” Bluestreak didn’t give Toxitron the opportunity to answer. “Oh. I guess I did. Okay. Here’s how that went. Optimus Prime sent a squad consisting of myself, Hound, Mirage, Hoist, Brawn, and Gears to track down Starscream – he’s the Decepticon Aerospace Commander, well, the former Commander even at the time – who is off in space looking for something called the Underbase. That’s our mission. That’s Dark Star. Impactor and his Wreckers are on an adjacent mission, they called it ‘Operation Cybaxx’, in which they’ve been tasked with finding some High Circuitmaster whose name I’ve forgotten. Something-Tax. Started with a ‘B’. Anyway, doesn’t matter. The Wreckers used the already-mentioned codename ‘Cybaxx’ for this ‘asset’ so we’ll just go with that. ‘Cybaxx’ made it his duty to accumulate the entire knowledge of Cybertron into a single database; he wanted to protect and preserve Cybertronian knowledge from the destruction surging across the whole planet. Turns out ‘Cybaxx’ had died millions of stellar cycles ago and Optimus saw the whole thing. He watched Megatron rip ‘Cybaxx’ open as the Decepticon tyrant tried to get his hands on the database – Oh! ‘Cybaxx’ had named the database the ‘Underbase’, by the way. While Megatron was distracted with cleaning bits of ‘Cybaxx’ from his servos, Optimus managed to launch the Underbase away from Cybertron and out of Megatron’s clutches. So all that said, if Impactor would have just asked Optimus, he would have known all this and his mission would have been over. Instead what does he do though? He contacts Starscream and makes a deal to work alongside him to track down the Underbase, thinking that ‘Cybaxx’ might still be inside...”

Impactor had stopped listening. He had heard the mission as told by Autobots like Bluestreak far too many times before in briefings, bar rooms, and even once in a broadcast played on repeat on a dead moon. It seemed that whenever anyone involved in Dark Star found out where Impactor would be, the story would somehow find its way there too. Parts of the story were accurate, but very few. Most of it was exaggeration and wild accusation. Impactor whispered to himself, “Every scrap-filled time.”

“Impactor?” It was Counterpunch. The Decepticon spy clearly didn’t have any appreciation for Bluestreak’s epic either. “Do you trust this guy? Something still seems... off about him.”

“He has his quirks, doesn’t he?” Impactor considered the blue and silver robot now acting as trail guide. “But remember that he was on Optimus’ team. There has to be something more to him that earned him that spot. And that trust. Besides, aren’t you the one that wanted to come and talk to him?”

“Yeah. But that was when I was hoping it was someone like Sideswipe, Thundercracker, or Sunstorm, or somebody. I certainly wasn’t expecting this guy.” Counterpunch’s lower lip drooped in a pout.

## LIVELY PURSUIT

“So you wanted a warrior?”

“I wouldn’t mind one, no. Someone a little more ‘guts and glory’ than, well...” Counterpunch waved a dismissive hand at Bluestreak.

The corner of Impactor’s mouth slid upward into a smile.

“...then my team, the six of us, come under fire as Starscream unleashes his full force. Only the three of us survived.” Bluestreak’s story was coming to an end. “The other three had their circuits melted from the inside out as the energy poured through them. Not even Grimlock’s Nucleon could fix them.”

“And?” Toxitron raised an optic.

Bluestreak’s lips twisted in confusion, “What do you mean? What happened to Starscream? The power that he craved eventually tore him apart.”

“No.” Toxitron scowled. “‘Their circuits melted from the inside out’ and... details! What did it look like? What sound did it make? What were the smells it left in the air?”

Bluestreak’s eyes narrowed at Toxitron but he didn’t reply. Instead he turned to Impactor, “Just up here.”

The door was battered and barely on its one remaining hinge. Large portions of it were folded over or simply missing. The entire thing could have easily simply been pulled from its mooring and disposed as the scrap metal that it had become. If any salvager would even want it.

Inside the bar, the brilliant silver walls - that had once been scrubbed sparkling clean every night by some fastidious busser trying to impress the owner - had been scorched black long ago. Now the black was turned red as oxidation spotted their surface. Rust mites gnawed away at crumbling metal patina, unaware of Bluestreak’s voice reverberating through the ruins.

“Hey guys! I told you they were here! Exulancus is your camera rolling for the grand homecoming? Good. Noumenon, Aporia, can you two stop locking lips and pay attention for once. Where’s Adronitia? Did she leave with Consumma Compersia and their other conjun - No, they’re all still here! I hope you all stick around for introductions...”

The Wreckers each turned to one another as Bluestreak continued to rattle off a list of names and strutted around the destroyed, dilapidated, and immensely former engex bar. Their expressions drifted between confusion and concern and back again. All except for Toxitron, that is. He looked on with a hint of understanding in his eyes.

It was Counterpunch who spoke up first. “Uh. They’re a bunch of junk.”

Bluestreak’s glare snapped towards the Wrecker and then swiveled back to the “friends” for whom he was giving introductions. He could clearly see them for what they were: piles of pots, pans, stools, and other detritus stacked, slammed, and occasionally welded together into vaguely Cybertronian shapes and forms. “You’re right. They’re a bit ‘abecedarian’ as Master Aware would have termed it. But I needed someone to talk to. I mean... I’m me. And while I do know where each and every one of them,” Bluestreak’s open hand motioned towards the scrap piles, “are actually buried in this graveyard of a city, I thought better of digging them out and hauling them back here. Talking to a bunch of corpses... Then I’d *know* I had gone crazy.”

“I’ve talked to corpses.” Toxitron tilted his head up slightly. “Well, taunted them more often. But talking with a

## LIVELY PURSUIT

corpse does give you good insight; mostly into your own mortality... If you have any.”

“Have we ever asked how many of those corpses you made yourself, Toxitron?” Fractyl harshly yawped.

“I dismantled nine-hundred forty-six Autobots with my bare hands. Several times that in collateral.” The mouth-hole on Toxitron’s face curled boastfully. He then glared at Bluestreak. “How about you, Chatterbox? Impactor said you were worthy of being a Wrecker. That usually comes with a casualty list of its own. Hm? Come. Chat with us. You’ve told us stories of which of your friends’ lives were ended because of Impactor. Now how many deaths are you responsible for?”

“I don’t talk about it,” Bluestreak said, his eyes shifting away.

“**Ha!** Weak Autobot. Chatterbox doesn’t have the stomach for war! I bet--”

“No. You don’t understand,” Bluestreak suddenly gazed levelly and as he slowly repeated himself. “I don’t talk about it. *Especially* not now.”

Several moments passed as the two locked eyes. Toxitron tilted his head and made a wet chuckle as he appeared to catch Bluestreak’s meaning.

“You’re okay, Chatterbox.”



## LIVELY PURSUIT

“And that’s just creepy coming from you.” Bluestreak’s comment was met with another rumbling chuckle.

Impactor had kept his silence since before entering the bar but he spoke now, “So this is Praxus? What’s left of it after the wars?”

“Yup. Bombed. Bombed again. And then bombed a third time just for the scrudging fun of it.” Bluestreak picked up one of the cracked and broken glasses still on the counter. “Three wars, three bombings, not really any rebuilding in between. Certainly nothing that resembled what beautifully luxurious place it once was.”

The blue robot emphasized “luxurious,” giving the word the importance only a high socialite could. *Of course that’s what he’d stress*, Impactor mused to himself.

“That can’t be right. None of my maps are identifying this as Praxus. Praxus should be five-hundred twenty-three mechanometers to the south southwest.” Fractyl placed two fingers against his helmet, causing geographical surveillance and imaging to scroll across his field of vision. Each one revealed the same thing: they should be in Protihex.

Bluestreak handed Fractyl the oil glass and pointed to the sign above the door. On both the text read “the sonic & surge. An Engex Bar and Taproom by QUIXEL. ‘It’s a Praxus thing.’” The inconsistent use of Cybertronix capitalization grated on Fractyl’s scientific and precise processors, but it let him know instantly that it was one of *those* places. High priced and shallow, yet always full of itself.

“That’s the real reason I wanted to bring you here. It wasn’t to show you my imaginary friends.” Bluestreak shuffled his way through mounds of rust and bits of shrapnel until he made his way to the rear door. He set his shoulder against the metal slab and with some effort forced the door open. Behind the bar was an alleyway, narrow, windowless, and just like the inside of the bar, full of blocks of architecture that had tumbled loose during one of the bombings. “Toxitron, Fractyl, Counterpunch, why don’t you go ahead. Take this alley five-point-seven-eight mechanometers and take a left. Another eight-point-two mechanometers and make a right. Then keep going until you find an opening. I want to talk with Impactor for a klik.”

Counterpunch looked to Impactor, who nodded. The spy reluctantly stepped out into the alleyway, followed by Toxitron, then Fractyl.

“Impactor, I – ” Bluestreak started after he was sure that the others were out of audio range.

The Wrecker commander cut him off. “I do remember them, Bluestreak. I remember them all. All the names. You like to pretend that I don’t and that I’m some kind of sociopathic sadist who might even enjoy destroying lives.”

“That’s not exactly – ”

“There was a time we had a recorder. Someone who took it upon himself to write down our missions, everyone involved, everyone lost. Wrecker or not.” Impactor ran his hand across the rusty counter top. “Fisitron’s chronicles were extensive; thorough enough that he thought I might be able to forget. Or at least not have to remember. He was a good bot, Fisitron. Thinking of others before himself. Always trying to see the good in them. When Fisitron died, he... I wore the data disc around my neck as a memento. All of us, our history, everything that I didn’t want to remember but knew couldn’t be forgotten, dangling from a twenty-gauge wire chain. Oh it was a constant irritation with the chain always getting pinched in servos and hydraulics and the disc getting tugged and grabbed by transformation gears. But that’s how I knew it was there.”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

Impactor placed his hand just below his neck. There was nothing there but bare armor plating. “I don’t know when I lost it, I first noticed on Pz-Zazz after I rebooted on a cold, filthy ferro-tile floor in the back of one of Fatale’s speakeasies. Disc, chain, everything was gone. It was as though a beacon ignited, and a bright sign lit in front of my optics. I suddenly knew what my mission was from that point on. Bluestreak, I thought I was supposed to die. With the data disc gone, I was the only place where the memories of the Wreckers still haunted this universe. My brain would be the only place where any of it was still alive. And if I were to go offline, the ghosts, the specters of our sins, and the horrors committed to try to end a war would all be gone. The galaxies – all of them – could sleep better at night. Especially if I took a few more nightmares with me when I went out. I was naïve and, fine, a little egotistical. I thought that *I* was the Wreckers. I thought it all revolved around me at the center and therefore I was the lynchpin. If I were removed, everything would fall away, forgotten.”

Impactor glanced over at Bluestreak, his mouth twisted into a confusion of emotions. “But then we got a message that called out the Wreckers by name. Can you imagine the timing of that? I had just lost the two team members who could have allowed me to complete my final mission and then there it was. A flicker of remembrance from across the cosmos taunting me and telling me that even if I succeeded in dying gloriously, there would be someone there to carry on the memories of the Wreckers. Someone spreading them like weeds.” Impactor laughed, “Especially with that someone being you.”

The purple Autobot paused and cleared his throat, “\*Ahem\* But I’m not the Wreckers. I’m not the only place where they live. They’re everywhere, entangled in everything. We’ve made our marks and those marks cannot be wiped away so easily. No, Bluestreak. I can’t go offline now – For the Pit’s sake, you just sludging spared my life. You big blue piece of scrap. Hah.”

Bluestreak joined in with Impactor’s chuckling, but then he caught himself. “Scrud, you’re real. You’re actually here. And you’re real...”

He cradled his head in his hands and slowly looked over his fingertips. “It was nothing before... but now I’m not sure if...”

The blue robot turned to steal a peek at the stoic pile of debris behind himself. “No. You’re right, Adronitia. Even after this, I can’t possibly actually know him.”

Impactor’s eyes darted from Bluestreak to the debris and back. He wasn’t sure what to make of this new conversation.

Bluestreak gestured to the door at the back of the bar, “Come on. Your Wreckers have probably found what I wanted to show you. I want to see the looks on their faces.”

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Counterpunch struggled as the metal girders pressed against his robotic frame. Toxitron’s size and Fractyl’s flight mode had been able to go over the collapsed section of wall, but the Decepticon spy had decided to burrow through it and had gotten wedged halfway. “Oh sure. Everyone keep going and no one think to stop and help me.”

Toxitron turned and held out a hand. Orange ooze seeped from every joint and fissure, sizzling the air and burning the ground where it dripped. “I’m sorry. Why don’t you take my hand and I’ll pull you free?”

The smaller Decepticon peered up at Toxitron’s mocking grin. He then returned to his effort against the girders. “On second thought, maybe I can do this...”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

The grin on Toxitron's face began to curl and sag as Counterpunch popped free and tumbled down the wall. He landed unceremoniously next to Fractyl, who was deep in study at the edge of the clearing. The Predacon was enthralled by a shard of metal that he rolled back and forth in his hands. As he moved it, the facets of the shard seemed to glow in the starlight. "Fascinating."

"It looks... new. Straight from the Forge. How did it get here?" Counterpunch watched Fractyl as the scientist stood and stared ahead. The Decepticon followed Fractyl's gaze out over a field of glistening metal. It looked as though every surface had been buffed and polished, it was all completely restored to some era before the Autobot/Decepticon war had ever been born. There were even patches of energon lattices that twirled and climbed together, stretching nearly a mechanometer above the ground at times.

"I...have no idea." Fractyl did all that he could from falling back to his knees. "It's... It's like something out of the pre-Kronoform era...It's not possible..."

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Boulders of iron and steel cascaded down the blockade-like wall behind Fractyl, Counterpunch, and Toxitron. The trio spun to see Bluestreak and Impactor approaching. "The Teklaans gave this view to me as a gift."

"The Teklaans," Fractyl repeated the name as though it should have meant something to him. It was familiar, but he couldn't yet place where he had heard it.

Bluestreak continued, pretending he hadn't heard Fractyl, "Or rather a promise, really. They say that they can reformat Cybertron. They can make the whole planet look just like this. All the destruction that we brought to our world simply wiped away, tectonic plates shifted, the ecosystem revitalized and the planet reenergized."

"Sounds too good to be true." Counterpunch interjected.

Bluestreak ignored him, "They say they can even bring back the population who have gone offline."

Fractyl's response was one word, "Scrap."

"It's not scrap; you can see what they've already done. They can do it! They can fix it all!" The blue Autobot exclaimed as he stared into the new wilderness in front of them.

"No, I mean –"

Fractyl was cut off by Impactor's booming voice. "What do they want in return? No one would be willing to expend that kind of energy without getting payment in some form."

"As advanced as their terraforming technology is, their programming as robots – Teklaans are robots, I'm sure you got that by now – is kinda primitive. They were coded by their creators to rejuvenate their home world and now they keep operating with that same coding whenever they come across a new barren world. No payment necessary."

"So... Do they have to execute this directive? What if we said 'no'?" Counterpunch pondered aloud as he stooped to examine a steel spire that pierced from below the planet's surface.

Bluestreak's nose wrinkled. "Why would we say 'no' to that? We could have Cybertron back."

"I don't think we wo-" Fractyl tried to speak up, but was interrupted by the sound of shifting metal. It was a

## LIVELY PURSUIT

footstep. It came from one of the piles of rubble behind them; an errant foot fall that knocked slabs of iron free from their perch.

“Oh,” Bluestreak spoke up, “There was one thing that they wanted...”

Five Teklaans slid from the shadows. Each stood a head taller than Toxitron and were just as wide as the sizable Decepticon. They carried laser weapons of a sort, all of which were fully charged and ready to fire as the crackling energy around the barrels seemed to indicate.

“...You.”

The starlight gleamed from the Teklaans’ blue-green armor plating and their small ovoid eyes burned an intense gold with palpitating orange orbs floating inside. Their faces were expressionless stacks of metal rings and their ribbed limbs carried a similar look. Curved, almost organically shaped torsos gave them an appearance of ancient grace. The Wreckers instinctively formed a defensive circle and reached for their weapons, but the Teklaans fired their own before the Wreckers could draw. Blue lightning burst from the Teklaan firearms and pierced the Wreckers’ metal bodies with ease. One by one Wreckers’ eyes faded black, but before he went offline, Impactor turned to give one last scowl at Bluestreak.

Acrid smoke seeped from the four motionless bodies, electronic snaps and crackles filled the air as energy occasionally discharged from the Wreckers’ exostructures. Bluestreak tried to mask his concern with a grimace.

“Now, now. Nothing to worry about, Bluestreak. My crew only used simple stun bolts on them. I can guarantee you that none of the Cybertronians will suffer any permanent damage from the charges, and you know me: my guarantees are irreproachable. I mean... I’m the one that makes them and I never make mistakes!” The voice came from a uniquely broad-shouldered Teklaan who approached now that the Wreckers had been neutralized. Its brilliantly beaming armor had flecks of metallic blue in its paint, further expressing its higher rank among the other robots. “Well there was that time I mistook a particularly luminescent Hermaglopillar as an expecting sporebloomer. I was buffing out dents for a firlonk. They have a lot of fists, as you know.”

“I trust you and your team, Cergo,” Bluestreak looked away. “It’s what comes...next.”

“What comes next, my bot, is science. Just that. Science.” Cergo placed a hand on Bluestreak’s shoulder. It was a gesture of compassion, but the weight of the other robot’s appendage gave it the same effect as a full-speed collision. Bluestreak stumbled if just for a step. “It will be under laboratory conditions and as surgically precise and sterile as a hermetically sealed ship can offer.”

“But they’ll still die...”

Cergo gauged its words and spoke carefully, “We Teklaans are not programmed to kill, therefore we cannot kill. But there is a high likelihood that their functions will cease as we disassemble them for our scans, yes. You had agreed that it’s worth the sacrifices of a few so that we can determine your anatomy and the nature of your – what did you call them? – sparks, so that we might rebuild your entire population. And from what you’ve said about these Wreckers, the universe will not miss them.”

“Yeah. It probably wouldn’t...” Bluestreak tried to shake the Wreckers from his thoughts. “So what can you tell me about the weather on this New Cybertron? Will it be like the planet in the old days or can we craft something a little... better? I was always fond of the warm nitrogen gusts from Vos, but they usually meant a frigid Kaonic halocarbon frost was on its way. If there was a way to have one without the other... Oh! And the tellurium

## LIVELY PURSUIT

thunderstorms that pounded the sulfur plateaus between the Nickel City and Hyperious. Those were gorgeous with their indigo and turquoise clouds and fuchsia lighting. And the manganese mountains south of Glibax flats with their sparkling selenium snow tops! Gotta keep those. The Terror Storms around Tarn could go though..."

Members of Cergo's crew hefted the unconscious Wreckers and dragged the robots off to the Teklaan ship as Bluestreak continued to pelt the alien science officer with trivia about Cybertron's hoary meteorological patterns.

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Things went from pitch black to brilliantly stark white. It took a moment or two for Counterpunch to realize that the sensitive registries behind his eyes were starting to overheat. "Ahhhhhhh!"

Impactor's words were monotone and dispassionate. "Adjust your shades to thirty-point-four-five percent. And shut up."

"Hrm. I needed a good scream." Toxitron sniffed. "Can I tear his blinders off and hear it again?"

"They apparently like it bright in here as part of their sterilization process. Photons are known to kill certain microbes and dissipate other contaminants." The laboratory environment was bringing out Fractyl's not-so inner scientist. He squinted as he tried to make out the screens on the far wall of the room. "Fascinating. They already seem to have scanned our exo – *Hnhng!*"

The Predacon had leaned too close to the energy barrier that lined his containment cell. Electricity arched from the field and surged through Fractyl's Cybertronian computer systems. Impactor used his right arm, which had its attachment removed, to shove his teammate free from the current. The motion was sluggish and strained as if something was holding Impactor back.

Fractyl cradled his head with one of his gold-colored hands and huffed, "I guess... I guess it's better to stay away from that... that shield."

Counterpunch tried to shift into vehicle mode, but his body only shuddered in response. Toxitron wheezed out a laugh. "Keep trying, Spybot. The barriers disable some of our internals; why do you think I'm not burning my way out of here? You know... with my ooze."

"I don't know. Maybe the sadist in you just likes cages." Counterpunch shot back, causing Toxitron to glower.

"Quiet, all of you." Impactor pointed his chin towards two Teklaans entering the laboratory. "We've got company."

Teklaan hands flew in rapid fury over a holographic keyboard. One of the scientists spoke, "Are these the preliminary scans?"

"Yes. I initiated them myself." The other robot replied without shifting its gaze from a monitor. "Is there a problem?"

"Possibly." The first robot's reply was distant, its mind outracing its words. "This is..."

The robot pointedly pressed a holographic button at the bottom of the keyboard and spoke an access code aloud. A translucent tablet emerged from the console below. "I have to take this to Cergo immediately. Plans will have to be changed."

## LIVELY PURSUIT

Impactor watched the Teklaan scientist hurry out of the room. “I wonder what that’s about...”

“It’s not good.” Fractyl’s eyes darted to Toxitron.

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“Cergo! Sir!” Cergo and Bluestreak spun as the scientist rushed onto the bridge of the Teklaan ship. The blue-green robot stopped in its tracks “I’m...not interrupting, am I?”

“Only Bluestreak. As usual.” Cergo chuckled. Bluestreak rolled his eyes. “What’s seems to be the rush?”

“Look at these scans.” The scientist thrust the small tablet into Cergo’s hand, then peered up at Bluestreak and cleared its throat.

Cergo briefly read the data on the translucent screen then shoved the tablet back into its subordinate’s hands. “Hm. Thank you.”

“Is something wrong?” Bluestreak arched his brow questioningly.

Cergo’s voice fluctuated as it attempted to mask its true deportment. “We’ll talk about it later. Now though, I want to assure you that Cybertron will be exactly as you picture it in your memories. I told you that we were built by organic beings as tools to terraform an organic planet, right? Well do you know how difficult it is to create carbon-based organic plants and animals? Actually, it’s not that hard at all! Especially not with the devices that I designed. Everything is built from the same base units – metal, rocks, organics, gases, everything. You just have to learn how those units are then stacked and once you do you can make your own stack. Then eureka! You have a living thing! Or a mountain or a river or whatever you wanted to build. It’s just all the atomic versions of ones and zeroes. Got it?”

“Sort of.” Bluestreak pondered what he had just heard. “It makes sense, I suppose. As long as you’ve had successful tests of this technology, which I assume you have. Knowing how rigid your programming is, it’s not as if you’d be *here* if you failed to fix your own home planet. You’d be there, still doing that until it was finished. Right? There’d be no //Execute>>Goto: 10 line if you were perpetually stuck in that loop, so your being here means you did it, it’s doable, and that Cybertron is just an inevitable rebirth waiting to happen.”

A rhythmic chuckle rumbled deep in Cergo’s frame. “You’re exactly right. I am as I am programmed. Faultless.”

“Okay then. I’ve looked over your blueprints for the planet and its resources and it all looks good. I’m good to go with it all. Are you good?”

Cergo studied Bluestreak. “Not exactly. You had said you could get us the four samples of typical Cybertronians for our scans. It seems you actually only provided us three standard divisions. And one heavily-modified anomaly. Perhaps we could use just the three – I am that amazing – but we’ve set our operations on four samples. It’s more or less locked in now, I’m afraid. But we can figure something out. I always can. We’ll just have to adjust or plans slightly.”

Bluestreak detected a radio transmission sent from Cergo to the nearest Teklaan, but it was too late. Before the Autobot could react, the blue-green robot had raised its laser blaster and fired. Electricity bolted through Bluestreak’s body and he fell backward. Before submitting to unconsciousness, his last thought was that he hoped they wouldn’t stick him in the same cell as Impactor.

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## LIVELY PURSUIT

“They’re going to disassemble us, scan us on the molecular scale and keep doing it until we’re nothing but a pile of disentangled particles. All while we’re still functioning!” The panicked look on Fractyl’s face matched his shrieking voice.

“That’ll be fun.” Toxitron’s mouth hole curved wide open.

“Oh they already know about you. I doubt they’d even try.” Fractyl waved his hand dismissively.

“I know.” The large green and purple Decepticon puffed out his chest. “I meant it’ll be fun watching them do it to you.”

Fractyl chittered Cybertronian profanities under his breath.

“Enough. Both of you.” Impactor thundered. “Fractyl, you seemed to have heard about these Teklaans before.”

The Predacon geochemist gave a glare at Toxitron then rubbed his chin. “I’ve been trying to place the name. It’s familiar but...”

Fractyl was interrupted by a blue-green robot dragging an offline Bluestreak into the laboratory. At an utterance of a command, the energy shield for an empty cell next to Toxitron lowered and the Teklaan tossed the Autobot inside.

“Hey!” Counterpunch called out. “Let us out of here!”

The Teklaan crew member stopped in front of Counterpunch’s cell and looked down at the Decepticon standing there. Its deep, mechanical voice stated flatly, “No.”

“Why don’t you let me out too? I’d like the chance to meet all of you.” Toxitron’s voice slithered from his gullet. “I like new playthings.”

The crew member scoffed and began to walk away.

“You’re so eager to see ours,” Toxitron bellowed, “Why don’t you let me see yours? I’m more than skilled at taking things apart myself.”

Bluestreak’s eyes fluttered as his consciousness slowly faded back to him. “You’re all completely lousy at starting conversations.”

“Hrm.” Toxitron derisive tone was ever-present, “I guess I don’t have as much experience as you, Chatterbox.”

Bluestreak groaned. “If you’re trying to get him to talk enough to record a clip for a voice scanner, you can give up. That’s not how security works on the ship.”

“But – ” Counterpunch was cut off.

“They speak the codes, sure, but they also transmit them via wireless. The ship and the Teklaans are one big network, and the frequencies for the connections are constantly changing.” Bluestreak rubbed his head. “I also used to be a courier for Optimus. I kinda get a little of this communications thing.”

Impactor squinted at Counterpunch and nodded, then turned to Bluestreak. “I thought Blurr was Prime’s courier? Actually, wasn’t he ‘the talkative one’ too?”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

“No. *No.*” Bluestreak said forcefully. “Blurr was the fast-talking one, I was the talkative one. There’s a difference. One talks fast, the other talks a lo– You know what? You don’t want me to get started on Blurr.”

“You’re right. I don’t.” Impactor’s gruffness was almost palpable. “I need some quiet time to think of a plan to get us out of your mess.”

A moment passed. And then another. The Wreckers sat in complete silence. Bluestreak contemplated his own plans for escape. Each line of thought, however, ultimately proved futile. He didn’t know these Teklaans or how their technology actually worked in a technical sense. There were too many unknowns at the moment for an intelligent attack on them. And the energy fields limiting his mobility made brute strength impossible.

It came as a surprise to no one that he was the one to break the stillness first. “I just wanted to ask them their names.”

The Wreckers’ heads turned towards Bluestreak. Impactor took it upon himself to ask, “Who?”

Bluestreak shut his eyes tight and buried his chin in his chest. “My friends in Praxus. I – I’ve told so many stories about them – to myself and to everyone who would listen – that I’m not sure anymore. It’s all just a story. I’m not sure what actually happened and what I was saying just to hear my own voice. I know that some of it is definitely fiction that I made so that I wouldn’t have to face the truth, and I know that I’ve changed a name or more. But...scud... I can’t remember which are which. I would just talk so that I could avoid the war. Avoid the casualties. Avoid everything. As long as I was talking, I wasn’t thinking. And as long as I wasn’t thinking I wasn’t remembering. Not really anyway. And I’ve been talking for so long – not thinking for so long – that I... I just wanted to ask them their names.”

Bluestreak swallowed hard and continued, “It’s why I built those rough facsimiles in the bar. I thought maybe even just that would jar something loose. It clearly didn’t. And speaking with them, which I’ll admit became much more of a crutch than you might think rational, didn’t knock free any memories either.”

After the briefest of pauses, Bluestreak went on, “When the Teklaans arrived and said that they could start bringing Cybertronians back, it was just too perfect. They could rebuild my fallen friends and I would go to each one and ask ‘Are you Sonder? Are you Aporia? Are you Fabulcon?’ and then... I would know. I would finally know. They told me stories about their homeworld, showed me images of how they restored... everything. Even lifeforms. It was right there in front of me after all this time. I finally had all my answers dangling right in front of me. Praxus, Burthov, Altihex, Crystal City, Cyber City, Iacon, the Torus States, they could all be rebuilt just like the Teklaans did to Maarin. It would be beautiful; the past few millennia erase –”

“*Maarin!*” Fractyl yelled loud enough that not even Bluestreak could talk through the interruption. “Impactor, this is bad. Really, *really* bad!”

“Calm down, Fractyl.” Impactor’s tone was more commanding than compassionate. “What are you talking about?”

“Maarin. It’s not what these ‘Teklaans’ depicted it as. The original organic inhabitants destroyed the planet and so built the robots to terraform it back into someplace livable. The robots did it but... Only for a couple of generations. Then a virus built into the fabricated flora devastated everything and the planet was once again made into a wasteland. The robots took over the planet for themselves. Even changing its name. If these Teklaans are part of that same race of mechanoids...”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

“Then Cybertron, even if its environment and population are temporarily restored to how they were in the Golden Age, is facing an invasion.” Impactor glowered at nothing in particular.

Fractyl nodded. “We have to get out of here and stop them.”

Toxitron growled, “How?”

“Why?” The Wreckers turned to Bluestreak. His thin, angular face caught the light reflecting from the energy shield, making it look hollow and mournful. “The world is dead. A husk. Any second chance – even a short-lived one – is worth taking, isn’t it? Zots, even if we only give it two generations, that’s like, a few million stellar-cycles given our lifespans.”

“I’m *not* going to be the bot responsible for losing Cybertron to a bunch of aliens.” Impactor tilted his head to Counterpunch. “How’s it coming?”

“Tut, tut. I’ve almost got it. Just wait a klik.” Counterpunch held a single finger up to Impactor. “The signals are run on a predictable loop. Give me twelve cycles and it’ll be back around to one of the frequencies that I’ve already hacked.”

Bluestreak’s brow stretched into a questioning look and Impactor smiled in return. “He’s a spy. He kinda gets *a lot* about this communications thing.”

Bluestreak let out an icy sigh, causing Toxitron to laugh. Twelve cycles later the first of the energy shields dropped. The rest followed shortly after.

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Blue energy sizzled through the air. It was only mere cycles later, but the Teklaan security forces had already discovered their escape. Impactor pressed his back against a pristine, white bulkhead while Fractyl shrieked, “We need our weapons back!”

“You need a lot.” Toxitron sneered. The Decepticon then balled his fists and willed loose a new supply of pungent orange ooze from between his exostructural plates.

“Uhm, those stun bolts already proved that they were just as capable of taking you down as they are the rest of us.” Bluestreak had followed the Wreckers on their flight from the laboratory cells. He still was not convinced that they shouldn’t let the Teklaans finish reformatting the planet, but he also was not convinced that Impactor was wrong either.

“I’m deranged, not dumb.” Toxitron buried his hands deep into the metallic slabs that made up the bulkheads. As he ripped at the metal, the corrosive he exuded began to melt the slab free from its last remaining moorings. “This hallway was too meticulous anyway. Meticulous only hides what’s rotten underneath...”

The slab tore free and, holding it with his fingers burned through the middle, Toxitron hefted it as a massive shield. It decidedly blocked the energy stunners that the Teklaans continued to fire. The green Decepticon roared and charged. He slammed into the group of blue-green robots, sending a number of them careening further down the hallway. Those with the misfortune of having escaped Toxitron’s trounce, were soon gagging on their own liquefied face plates as orange ooze enveloped them.

Toxitron stood over the howling robots who were quickly losing their shapes. “... I prefer to let my rottenness show.”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

“Charming.” Counterpunch retorted.

Before Toxitron could snap back at the other Decepticon, Impactor gave his orders. “Counterpunch, Fractyl, Toxitron. Go find our weapons. As Fractyl pointed out, we’re a little on the desperate side without them. Bluestreak, you and I need to find one of the reconstruction labs.”

Counterpunch nodded, Fractyl gave a nervous salute, and Toxitron harrumphed. Bluestreak watched them disappear down a hallway perpendicular to the one in which he and Impactor stood. He then turned to the Wrecker. “I’m still not exactly with you. You know that, right?”

Impactor cupped his hand on Bluestreak’s shoulder and smiled. “Bluestreak. I don’t even know where I am.”

The smaller Autobot brushed Impactor’s hand aside and took a quick step backwards. “Scrud! What does *that* mean?”

Impactor laughed. “I’ve had a death wish, a desire to stay alive, a hunger for revenge, a craving for redemption... It all has my head spinning so much that I’m not sure what I’m doing anymore.”

Bluestreak hesitated, then turned so he didn’t have to look at Impactor as he spoke, “I only kept telling those stories about you and the Wreckers so that I could face myself. If you were out there committing the horrors you did, then what did the terrible things that I did matter? You’re out there torturing and maiming and I... Hrn. Your big pal – Toxitron, was it? – asked me how many casualties I’m responsible for. Eye-to-eye and face-to-face, I have a good estimate, but, Impactor... I was the ace gunner of the Ark. The scrudding Ark of all ships! I can’t even count how many I’ve killed on board Decepticon cruisers and attack craft. I could have more death on my hands than two or three Toxitrons.”

Bluestreak spun around and added, “But I could still even those margins by bringing life back to this planet.”

“No you can’t.” Impactor frowned. “Don’t you see? If you go through with this, you’ll just be adding to your ledger. Everyone you bring back would be doomed all over again; they’d be stuck on a countdown clock right up til the moment the virus activates and wipes it all clean for the Teklaans to colonize.”

Cergo’s voice echoed like it was omnipresent. Bluestreak and Impactor spun to see it and a squad of Teklaans approaching from the end of the hall. “Like I told Bluestreak before, we’re not programmed to kill. We can’t kill. It’s something I excel at, *not* killing. We give life. I give life. Generations of organisms happily existing when and where they wouldn’t have before we arrived.”

“What about this virus that destroyed all of your constructs on Maarin? If you’re oh so terribly flawless, that can’t have been a mistake. You don’t make those, Cergo.” Bluestreak narrowed his eyes.

“You’re right. But we still didn’t kill anyone.” Cergo gestured with open hands as it spoke. “We extended the lives of each planet. How can you be accused of killing when you’ve given entire worlds another lease?”

“The. Virus.” Bluestreak spat.

Cergo raised an index finger and closed its eyes. “Nature generates viruses all the time, Bluestreak. So we recreate them too – they’re part of any ecosystem. Would it be wrong for us to go to Desna and create packs of pseudo-ligers that would hunt a genus of iron-ungulates to extinction? Or to Eska and restore the single-toed helium half-lopers even though they’re the ones that consumed enough of the razor-grass that the plant disappeared from the meadows? No. They’re all indigenous species and all equally deserve to be added back into the circle

## LIVELY PURSUIT

of life. Even the Maarin had doomed their entire planet, yet we saved them. So, yes, we created a virus with the opportunity to strive just as well as any other organism we introduced. It just happened to take after its creator's exceptionalism; we do make all of our creations as perfect as we can. Perfect inhabitants. Perfect predators. Perfect prey, perfect viruses... Perfect planets. We don't have any control after that. How could we? After Maarin, well, we were left with an empty planet. And we took advantage of it. I can think of so many amazing things to build, so why not use the space suddenly given to us?"

"So what would happen to Cybertron? Are you working on a transformation virus? Corrodi Gravis? Reverse Evolution virus? Rust plague? What sleeper super bug do you have on your drafting table?"

Cergo wagged its finger. "Now, now, Bluestreak. Weren't you listening? I have all of those under development. What kind of ecoengineer would I be if I didn't? I certainly wouldn't be the best, like I am now."

The blue Autobot clenched his fists. "You smug sonnuvaglitch!"

"Bluestreak," Impactor said sternly while grabbing the smaller robot by the shoulders. "We're exposed here. Get in the lab. Now."

"But..."

"Now!" Just as Impactor yanked Bluestreak inside the brightly lit laboratory, the Teklaans opened fire with their stun bolts. Blue lightning crackled all around the two robots as they tumbled through the doorway. Impactor landed on top of Bluestreak and braced himself, ready to take any number of stun bolts aimed at the two of them. None were fired.

Instead a strobing red light blinked in the hallway. It was accompanied by blaring klaxons. Bluestreak placed his foot against Impactor's chest and pushed the purple robot off of him. "Well, I guess your friends came across something more concerning than a design lab. What are we doing here anyway?"

Impactor rolled to his side and peered out the doorway. Cergo was pointing towards the aft of the ship and barking orders at the Teklaan squads rushing past. "You could say that I have a proposition for you."

"Join the Wreckers?" Bluestreak rolled his eyes.

"Yeah..." Impactor shifted to meet Bluestreak's gaze. "Look, this plan to restore Cybertron was a good one. It had its flaws, but could you imagine if it was doable? It would be astounding..."

Impactor's voice shone with his own kindling enlightenment only now coming to him as he talked, "Although it would also be in vain. The cause of Cybertron's destruction is still out there, still tearing worlds apart. If we want to fix this universe, we're first going to have to stop the Mayhem Attack Squad. Everything else is just pointless until we do that."

Bluestreak sighed. He knew Impactor was right, but it was as though a blade had been jammed between his ribs as he spoke the words, "You're right. Of course."

Impactor pulled a small crystal out of one of the storage canisters on his shoulders. He plugged it into a port on the Teklaan computer console. "This universe... I guess it still needs the Wreckers. And now the Wreckers need you. These are blueprints created by one of our former members. Ironclad was an architectural and engineering genius. He created these plans and submitted them to the Technobots themselves, who took them with great enthusiasm. They at one time planned to elect him as their new rookie – just like the Protectobots did with Rook and... The Aerialbots did with Alpha Bravo."

## LIVELY PURSUIT

Bluestreak held back his questions as Impactor took a moment. He had heard rumors of the Combiner teams' expansions, but didn't know that they had gone far enough to actually accept candidates as potential replacements. It made a certain amount of sense to him though, given his own previous experience with the operation. Bluestreak had tried to stay expressionless during this lull but apparently failed to do so; Impactor raised his hand as a show that he was alright. Then the purple Autobot continued, "He had upgrades worked out for the entire team, with himself and a more energy-efficient Afterburner combining together to become an arm. That design was rejected, however the Technobots used the idea to create their own special arm instead – one that merged Strafe with a Minibot named Scrounge. And Scrounge with Cybaxx. Yup. We found him; he had uplinked his consciousness to the Underbase right as Megatron tore apart his body. That's why we needed to manipulate Starscream to get us close to the database. With Cybaxx recovered, the Technobots added his vast knowledge to Computron's own intelligence, hoping that intellect could defeat the Mayhem Attack Squad. Of course –"

"Uh-huh." Bluestreak was beginning to wonder if this was how the other Autobots felt when he was talking. "That sure is a lot of...history."

"The point of it is," Impactor emphasized his words with clicks as he scrolled through the information held on the crystal, "this has all of Ironclad's designs. It's where I got my new form from - I adopted the one he had designed for himself. I of course dropped his red faceplate, the crown, and swapped the mustard tan and gray for purple and yellow. There's also this..."

Impactor pulled up a three-dimensional wire frame of a robot mode. He jabbed at the hologram and it converted into a high-speed pursuit vehicle.

"This was Lightsteed's upgrade."

Bluestreak scrunched his nose. "I thought it was 'Lightspeed'?"

"Hmmm." Impactor leaned in and shrugged. "Schematics say 'Lightsteed'. Ironclad never was good with names though. Something he apparently had in common with you."

Bluestreak stuck his tongue out briefly, then tapped the hologram again and the vehicle stood on its rear end with a foot then attached at the bottom. "Ah. There's four of you. I get it. I got it. When you say 'join' you *really* mean join. Just like Ratchet, Hoist, Sideswipe and Inferno wanted me to do when Optimus went missing."

Impactor inferred from Bluestreak's tone that the other Autobot wasn't thrilled by the idea of becoming a Combiner. He had always wondered why Project: Firestormer was never completed. Of course, Impactor couldn't blame Bluestreak for not wanting to be part of such a thing; the Wrecker commander still had his own reservations. Visions of the uncontrollable Wreckage smashing his way through Mechannibal nests and joining web structures cascaded back to him. The Combiner was an animal. Would things be different next time? If he and Bluestreak were injected into the robot's consciousness, would two Autobots do anything to even out the maelstrom of anger and bru – Impactor smiled inwardly. He couldn't even finish the thought. Given his own past and what he knew about Bluestreak, Offroad and certainly Alpha Bravo were seiber-saints by comparison. Still though, the new group of Wreckers had come a long way and while they might not yet fully respect one another, they had begun to operate as a team. And take his orders like one.

It was a sudden realization when Bluestreak's voice penetrated Impactor's thoughts: Optimus' gunner had been talking the whole time. "I dunno. Just. I dunno. It's not like Superior, Defensor, Victorion, or Computron had any luck against Thunder Mayhem."

## LIVELY PURSUIT

“But you’ve seen that Toxitron is...different. And Fractyl has cobbled together a makeshift Matrix of sorts for him that should parallel what Thunder Mayhem has.”

Bluestreak threw his arms up in the air. “Zots! You gave the evil Optimus Prime guy his own scrudding Matrix??!!”

Impactor shrugged again.

“Well,” Bluestreak stared at projected leg slowly rotating above the Teklaan computer screen. “I’ll take the upgrade for the current fight. I don’t really have a choice there, do I? As far as anything else though, we’ll deal with that when we get to it.”

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“Are you sure this is the way to the hatch?”

Counterpunch let loose a volley from his twin mortar launcher, the explosives landed amidst a group of half a dozen Teklaans who were set reeling by the blast. “Fractyl, I was unconscious just like you were. I said that this was my best guess as to where the hatch was. We’re all just lucky I could find the armory.”

“I should just rip open every bulkhead until we’re outside!” Toxitron swung a dual-edge sword, bisecting a Teklaan crew member who had gotten too close.

“Uhm... I’m fine with that plan.” Fractyl turned to Counterpunch.

The Decepticon nodded. “Yeah. Why aren’t we doing that?”

Toxitron arched his back then meekly pointed at a random wall. Fractyl and Counterpunch nodded eagerly. The Decepticon then smiled with his twisted grotesque maw and tugged at the white bulkhead. His fingers dug themselves deep into the hardened steel panel. The metal buckled and bent until Toxitron was able to mangle enough of the wall to expose row after row of sensitive cables and crucial hydraulics. The Decepticon didn’t care, though, how important they were, his massive hands grabbed at them and rived each and every one of them loose until he could push his way through into the next corridor.

“We’re still in the ship.” Fractyl stated the obvious as he ducked through the opening Toxitron had made.

“It was one wall. Give me time!” Toxitron rolled his eyes. His fingers gouged tracks in the next bulkhead in front of them. Counterpunch aimed his black and red photon cannon at the hole they had just come through. A dazzling white beam erupted from its barrel and struck a Teklaan in the chest armor. The concentrated light bore through the metal and evaporated the vital systems held within. Fractyl screeched and fired his quark disruptor aimlessly down the new passageway in which they found themselves. Its pale lilac beams grazed the walls and cleanly missed the Teklaan security team rushing towards the trio of Wreckers.

“Toxitron, can you hurry it up a little? Our old friends met up with some of their old friends and they’re trying to put together a class reunion.” Counterpunch had his head turned towards his fellow Decepticon. He didn’t need to aim his rifles anymore; there were enough Teklaans that seemingly every photon charge or explosive found a target.

“Don’t forget that you’re the ones that these creatures want to dissect, spy.” Toxitron growled while he wrenched a chunk of metal free from the wall. “I could let them swarm you and get my amusement watching them dismantle you.”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

“Alright, alright. We won’t taunt you anymore.” Fractyl’s voice soared higher, “Just get us out of here!!”

Toxitron hoisted the revetment he had just cleaved from alongside the gangway, let out an *ummph*, and heaved the plate towards the advancing Teklaans. The massive wedge of metal slammed into the robots, crushing three and pinning two more against a wall. The Decepticon then gestured at the resulting gap. “When you’re ready.”

Counterpunch crouched and slid through the cleft leading into the next chamber. It was a colossal room with arched, vaulted ceilings and series of pipes and wires spiraling into a heterogeneous spaghetti of various sizes and colors. A cacophonous hum spewed out of a bank of drums, vats, and apparatus unfamiliar to either Decepticon. The Predacon was uncertain of their purpose as well, but the pulsating throb of the lights and the readout littering the digital screens told him that they had found the ship’s engine room. “Uh guys. If you thought we were drawing attention before, get ready to be the full-blown main act.”

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“Cergo is still out there. Along with three other Teklaans loaded to bear.” Impactor ducked back into laboratory where he and Bluestreak had taken refuge. “Loaded with stun rifles, of course, but still loaded.”

The Wrecker commander turned and caught a glimpse of Bluestreak. The Teklaan reformatting machinery in the lab was nearly finished rebuilding the other Autobot’s structure at the nano-scale. Laser grids were quickly being replaced with stunning blue and glistening silver armor plating; tempered, triple-enforced glass divulged that his alternate mode was capable of carrying a passenger should the rare need arise. The glow was almost angelic and Impactor couldn’t help but utter, “Impressive...”

“I made a few tweaks to those blueprints. You know, to keep some of the goodies that Medix and Ratchet had built into last body. Mirage too.” Bluestreak outstretched one of his arms and examined it carefully. “I mean, they do call me ‘Bluestreak’ for a reason.”

“I thought it was because of your mouth.” Impactor’s face twisted into a mock snarl.

Bluestreak smiled. The light in the room glimmered off of his blue armor until the shine appeared to become phosphorescent. So intense was the light that Impactor thought briefly about looking away... But then he came to realize that Bluestreak was no longer standing in front of him. An outlined afterimage of Bluestreak was there, smudged at the edges where brilliant indigo streamers trailed off and looped past Impactor. The beams of incandescent light flittered and flickered across the lab and out into the hallway. Realizing what he had just witnessed, Impactor rushed out into the corridor, chasing after his now nearly invisible acquaintance.

One of the Teklaans had already been knocked from his feet and a second was reeling backwards, confused by its sudden lack of balance. Cergo was wildly giving commands, but most went ignored as the alien robots attempted to sort out the chaos in which they had suddenly found themselves. Impactor charged at the last standing of Cergo’s guards and bowled into it with a well-placed shoulder thrust. The robot careened off of a nearby wall and fell to the flooring with a clang.

“I’ve got Cergo.” The voice came from out of nowhere, but the swirling blue shimmer that appeared behind the Teklaan officer began to take a more solid form. An arm reached out and wrapped itself around Cergo’s chest. When he became fully visible, Bluestreak squeezed the Teklaan tight in a hold that would have made even the most successful Intergalactic Cybertronic Wrestling Federation champion envious. The Autobot pulled Cergo’s head back and growled through gnarled lips, “You can call it off now. I don’t want your Cybertron.”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

“You know I can’t do that,” Cergo struggled and gagged. “Once our command prompts have been initiated... urk... They can’t be terminated until a successful conclusion is achieved.”

Impactor roughly grabbed Cergo’s chin. “Do you really want *us* to shut down the operation?”

“At this point,” Cergo gulped, “You can’t stop it either.”

“Then you clearly don’t get our team name.” Impactor smirked then nodded at Bluestreak. “So that’s the gift that Mirage gave you?”

“You should have seen when he and I would sneak out of base together.” Bluestreak reminisced. “It infuriated Cliffjumper every time. I think he was jealous.”

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“Is it just me or is the hum getting louder?” Fractyl cocked his head to listen to the engines.

Toxitron rested his hand on one of the generators; it vibrated fiercely. “It’s the droning hymnal dirge of the apocalypse.”

“They’re getting ready for take-off.” Counterpunch offered.

Fractyl shook his head. “No, it’s not those engines. I think this is it. Rejuvenation.”

“Then let’s wreck and rule...” Counterpunch hesitated. “Unless that would trigger a doomsday-esque explosion?”

Fractyl pondered the question for a moment then shrugged. “How should I know? I’m a geochemist, not a terraformer.”

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“The reaction has started.” Cergo, now free from Bluestreak’s clutch, rubbed its neck. “You could break the containment if you want, but then the ship – and five hundred forlaps of the planet’s surface – would be engulfed by radiation.”

Impactor cocked his head to the side. “So we’ll have one little spot of paradise. Sounds like a fine trade off to put an end to your plans.”

“No.” Cergo coughed. “This wouldn’t be the final mix. It would restore nothing.”

Bluestreak held up both hands and shook his head, “So you’re threatening us with poisoning an already dead world.”

“Thanks for proving that I’m *still* the only genius in the room.” Cergo angled his head back to glare at Bluestreak. “The terraforming radiation is only stable within a coalescence of substances. Any one of those being released individually and their reaction with our universe would be catastrophic. A chain reaction of fusion so energetic that it literally rips molecules apart, causing an unstoppable void spreading like a crashing wave.”

“That doesn’t sound good, no.” Impactor’s grimace tested the corners of his face.

“So you see, your only choice now is who populates this world after it gets reformatted – Do you wish for a

## LIVELY PURSUIT

second crop of Cybertronians to rise up or do you five want to be the only inhabitants as you watch the planet die all over again?”

Impactor clenched his fist and through grinding teeth asked, “The machines are automated and you have no way to turn them off, right? No insight on how to shut them down?”

“Yes. Ugh... yes!” Cergo’s curled fingers trembled from his frustration. “That is precisely what I have been trying to explain to you. Must I stoop to even baser terms in order to have to understand? The machines are on. They cannot be turned off. They cannot be destroyed. What is wrong with you robots? I’m just trying to bring life to a dead world. Your dead world. I’m trying to help. What -?”

The Teklaan was cut short by a deafening *ruunch!* Impactor’s fist had collided with the robot’s face with such force that Cergo’s faceplate had now buckled inward - a concaved dent slightly larger than Impactor’s fist.

Bluestreak rolled his eyes and moaned, “Seriously... Seriously, Impactor?”

“It’s still alive. And being a simple robot, its friends should be able to fix it.” Impactor shrugged. “Now let’s go meet up with *our* friends.”

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Fractyl ploddingly typed away at a hovering holographic keyboard with one hand while he rubbed his chin with the other. Behind him, Counterpunch frantically fired his two rifles at approaching Teklaans. “If you want to hurry it up, I don’t think that you’ll hear any complaints.”

“Speak for yourself.” Toxitron swung his sword and tore through a squad of Teklaans.

Fractyl spoke slowly, without any haste. “I don’t think there’s any way to shut it down. There’s no overrides or anything like that. No power diversion subroutines. Not even a diagnostic that can be run to bog down the computers. But...”

“But you’re a geochemist, not a computer expert.” Counterpunch groaned as he launched two mortars at the engine room doorway. “Trade places.”

“But uhm...” Fractyl’s eyes darted to his quark disruptor. “Yeah, sure. Okay.”

The Predacon lifted the double-barreled firearm and launched a sparkling light violet beam of energy at the Teklaans. The first volley missed any targets, but a second shot crashed into a Teklaan’s abdomen, the beam scattered and sizzled across the blue-green metal plating and then disappeared within the robot. Violently, that entire section of the Teklaan burst outwards in a blindingly white explosion. Tiny specks of iron floated free and then evaporated into the air, leaving a gaping hole. The Teklaan’s eyes sputtered and went black as the robot fell backwards and hit the ground with a clamor.

After a few seconds, Counterpunch was able to form the words, “That’s...uh...That’s a good gun.”

“Now you know why I’ve never tried to develop good aim.” Fractyl said through gritted teeth.

Another blast from the quark disruptor hit a Teklaan, this time squarely in the shoulder. After the same bright white flash, the robot’s entire shoulder went missing and the Teklaan’s arm fell limply and freely to the floor.

## LIVELY PURSUIT

Counterpunch turned back to the computer terminal and began typing as fast as his fingers would carry. Every time he thought that he was getting somewhere, a red message would flash. It was the the same disappointing message every time. However, he kept trying undeterred. He spoke, more engaged with the console than in his conversation with Fractyl, “Well keep making statements like those and maybe you won’t have to keep firing. Hope they’ll see your point and hold bac...”

The red message blinked across the screen one more time. “Scrap! That was my last idea. It looks like you were right; there is no way to shut this thing down. Not electronically anyway. Anything in your chemistry background know another way to stop this?”

“Just give it a good smack and break the scruptacular thing!” Toxitron exclaimed as his sword cleaved through a Teklaan with a sickening “slorp”.

“Well... I wouldn’t do that.”

Toxitron let loose a rumbling growl at his suggestion being ignored, but Fractyl ignored the grumble as well. “But with the way that the radiation is acting like an energy flow, we could probably absorb most of it before it builds up for release.”

“Going back to Toxitron’s idea, what if we destroy the emitter before the build-up?” Counterpunch offered, and a demented smirk swept Toxitron’s face. It was short-lived, however.

“The entire hull of the ship is the emitter. So... not really.” Fractyl’s attention was turned to Counterpunch when he fired his rifle again. The weapon struck its targeted Teklaan: a head shot. It was perhaps fortunate that Fractyl didn’t see the damage he had just caused to the intended robot.

“Then we destroy the ship’s hull!” The hulking green and purple Decepticon howled from the other side of the engine room. Counterpunch didn’t know when Toxitron had dropped his sword, but it was now on the deck plating and he was mauling Teklaans with one of his fists. His other hand held a deactivated Teklaan, which Toxitron was using as a shield against the stun bolts crackling at him.

“Why don’t we,” Fractyl took a pause to fire at a Teklaan. The twin streams of energy burst the Teklaan’s leg into a cloud of disjointed particles, “put a pin on the destroying-the-ship idea and get back to the absorption one.”

Counterpunch picked up his photon cannon and yelled to Fractyl, “Get started on that then.”

“We could trap the radiation flow inside of a crystalline lattice. Just like we do with energy and energon. But where do we...?” Fractyl rubbed his chin, lost in thought.

Toxitron hurled the robot he was holding. It tumbled and flailed as it struck a group of four more Teklaans. “Right. Right. It’s all on me again isn’t it?”

“I don’t...” Fractyl started but then caught himself. “...Oh.”

Toxitron arched his back then tossed his shoulders forward. A massive compartment on his back swung open, spilling a green glow from deep inside of his body. The greenergon matrix that Impactor had implanted chimed and chittered as light refracted between the individual crystals. “Where do you want me to stand?”

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## LIVELY PURSUIT

“I have to admit,” Impactor grunted as his fist pummeled the side of a Teklaan’s faceplate, “I was half-expecting all of these robots to shut down after I took out their commander. Why do they actually have to be autonomous?”

“I thought you Wreckers liked fighting challenging opponents?” Bluestreak muttered as he converted into his vehicular form. He revved his engine and aimed himself at a cadre of Teklaans.

“We do,” Impactor let out a groan as he spun and bashed his elbow into one of the robots. “But we don’t really mind an easy victory now and again either.”

Bluestreak locked his brakes, squealed his tires, and came about for another collision course, but stopped when he saw something. A hole had been burned in the wall, one large enough for Cybertronians to escape through. “Impactor! I think we just caught their trail.”

“Finally.” Impactor’s gruff voice stretched out the last syllable.

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“The flow reaches the collector... here.” Fractyl pointed to a large cable with oscillating purple light coursing through it. The cable entered an innocuous-looking tower coated in a glossy white finish. “I’m going to loop it briefly and remove the coupling. Then we’ll plug the cable directly into the greenergon... Are you ready?”

“Wait! What about Impactor’s... you know?” Counterpunch objected.

Fractyl sounded like an Iacon Institute protoform instructor. “The thiotimeline is in a non-conductive casing. It will be protected.”

The Predacon looked up at Counterpunch, who had taken cover nearby and, with rifles in both hands, was pelting the Teklaan crew with laser fire. The Decepticon had obviously stopped listening.

Toxitron grunted and glared back at Fractyl.

“Okay then. Here we go.” The Predacon announced to no one in particular. The rhythmic hum of the generators became a pained whine as the radiation momentarily backed up. Fractyl twisted loose the connection port on the collector and pried the cable free. He then shoved it into the open panels on Toxitron’s back just as the temporary backwash gave out and the current resumed with ferocity.

Toxitron waited. He expected agony and torture but he felt nothing. The crystals were at first doing as predicted and soaking in all of the radiation. However, in an instant, that all completely changed. A spasm twitched through his body, followed by seething torment. His internal sensors burned and screamed. Smoke plumed from the opening in his back.

“Aaawwaaarrrrgghh!!!”

So loud was Toxitron’s wail that everyone – Cybertronian and Teklaan alike – froze in place.

“Aaaaeeeeerrrrgghhh!!!”

Counterpunch whirred around and called to Fractyl, “Get that thing out of him!!”

Toxitron swatted the Predacon scientist away, “NO!”

## LIVELY PURSUIT

Power singed at his every diode, but it was power. Such incredible power! It was the power to create worlds... or destroy them. He wanted it all, every last bit. But he was ready to give it all up if he could. He knew that if he were destined to be owner of such a force, it would be him – not Bludgeon – who formed the center of Thunder Mayhem. Besides, this hurt. A lot. Seams in his plating began to rupture and lustrous purple beams poured through. He struggled to point at the readouts on the computer terminal next to Fractyl. The Predacon's eyes followed Toxitron's lead and then Fractyl nodded.

Impactor and Bluestreak pushed their way through the dumbfounded Teklaan robots. Aware that he was still without a weapon, Impactor grabbed Toxitron's sword from the grated floor. The unsettling purple glow from Toxitron was quickly overcoming the calm white light from the overhead lamps.

Fractyl squawked, "It's too much for him! If he explodes, he'll take this whole quadrant with him!"

The Wrecker commander lifted the blade over his head and aimed for the cable in Toxitron's back, but the Decepticon grabbed Impactor's hand. Toxitron then merely scowled at the Autobot.

Fractyl put his hand on Impactor's shoulder and leaned in behind him, "Even if we did remove the cable now, the radiation is nearing final build-up. This entire room would be filled as it spewed out of the coupler."

"What..." Impactor let out a *hrumph* as he pulled himself free from Toxitron's grasp. He had doubts whether he should even finish his sentence. "...About Wreckage? If we add his mass to Toxitron, could that absorb it all?"

Fractyl shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine."

Impactor turned to Bluestreak, who nodded. The purple Autobot sighed. "Okay then. Wreckers, you know what to do."

Wireless brainwave patterns began to stretch out and intertwine. The five robots were soon intimately aware of each other's thoughts. Somewhere a disembodied voice issued a warning, "Keep in mind Toxitron's current mental state of anguish."

Another voice replied, "Yeah. That ought to be all kinds of fun."

A riotous chorus of distress soon followed. Five minds were at once trying to become same. Every thought, idea, and emotion shared. And every pain. As their selves began to blend, their physical bodies transformed. Counterpunch and Impactor took the shape of massive arms - Impactor's arm mode ending in a massive blade where a hand should be. Fractyl and Bluestreak became legs with giant violet feet affixed to their base. Toxitron's shoulders flipped from end to end, burying his own head, while a new, larger one swung up and locked into place. All five parts then merged into a single whole; Wreckage lived again.

At first he stood hunched and grunted between heavy breaths. His arms hung low at his sides and there was a wild look in his eyes. His entire appearance was bestial.

As he became aware of his surroundings, however, he found that something about himself was different this time. Instead of merely being filled with an instinctual need to cause destruction, his head was busier, louder. It was also more ordered, almost as if some part of him was giving instructions. Or commands. He stood upright, as straight as the ceiling in the engine room would allow, and then studied the new limbs on his right side. They felt different from his old limbs, yet they still felt a part of himself. He then looked down at the cable plugged into his chest, it was still pumping radioactive energy into his body, but the size of his new body was enough to contain it.

## LIVELY PURSUIT

There was also Impactor's fail safe. Wreckage was overcome with a need to tear it from his body, but the Teklaan cable was in the way. The explosive would have to wait. He felt obliged to absorb the radiation first.

The Teklaans behind him were regaining their senses, even if those senses were still screaming at the sight of the giant robot now standing in front of them. Squad leaders encouraged their followers to raise their stun weapons and fire at the massive Cybertronian. Although a few were still unable to do anything but stare, most lifted their rifles into firing position. Blue electricity buzzed and snapped at Wreckage, but failed to have the same effect that it had on the individual Wreckers. Wreckage shrugged them off as though they weren't more than Thulerian tzz-z-tzz-z flies.

"Your desires to meet your early fates aside, it would probably be for the best if you stopped firing while I have this thing in my chest." Wreckage's booming voice shook the flooring and he gestured with his one hand to the cable in his chest.

The blue-green Teklaans glanced at one another, attempting to decide a course of action. Their programming was driving them to restore the terraforming process, but their logic centers were advising a change of tactics.

Wreckage faced no such hesitation. His internal computers were telling him that his batteries were about to exceed safe charge levels; he needed to expend some of the energy that he was taking in or the results would be messy to say the least. He engaged his targeting systems and aimed his shoulder-mounted cannons. With a single thought, concussive blasts erupted from the cannons and lit up the engine room. Streams of yellow and amber blazed towards the Teklaans. Several of the robots flinched but the energy beams passed harmlessly overhead and through the hull of the ship. A second barrage was followed by a third and a fourth, and Wreckage yelled as he tried to release energy as fast as he was absorbing it. Soon starlight filtered down into the engine room, replacing the artificial rays from the now-ruined lamps. The purple glow from Wreckage too began to fade as the build-up from the terraforming machines wound down.

The Wrecker Combiner stood panting and victorious – at least in his endeavor to stop the reformatting of Cybertron. Without the threat of the radioactive energy, however, he had lost his protection from the Teklaans.

They could yet rebuild and try again after the machinery was given proper rest... But they still needed to rid themselves of the Wreckers. The Teklaans again took aim and fired their stun rifles. The blue lightning sizzled at Wreckage's armor plates, seeking a way inside to fry vulnerable systems within.

The massive robot tore the cable free from the greenergon orb in his chest. Even though his statement was made as a matter-of-the-fact, in his deep bellow it came across as nothing other than threatening. "You being as filled with determination as you are, I know you're not going to stop. With Cybertron still here and your equipment salvageable, you'll return regardless of setbacks. Your inability to fail is detestable. You should embrace your flaws, your faults."

Wreckage considered the stacks of generators in the middle of the engine room, but then turned instead to the ceiling. With a jab of his bladed arm, he punctured the ship's hull once again and let more starlight beam in. "To seek perfection is a folly and to think yourself perfect is a fool's dream. Perfection is a lie made to strip away the rights and merits of those who would be labeled 'different'. A way to turn them into subjects to be studied and replicated as if they were mere things."

## LIVELY PURSUIT

Wreckage clambered onto the exterior of the Teklaans' space cruiser, continuing his diatribe. "We – I am not a thing. I am a creature of Spark, mind and body – I know my failures and I move past them. Learn from them. I am the combination of them, not what someone else's programming makes me. It may make me a beast in your eyes, but in the beast is where real beauty rests!"

With that, Wreckage slammed the top of the ship with his fist. The ceiling buckled and caved, sending debris raining down at the Teklaans inside. The robots scattered and stumbled to get to any kind of shelter that would protect them. Wreckage then leapt from the vessel and circled around to the pilot's cabin. It housed a single seat, a peninsula of metal jutting from the body of the ship. With a swift blow from his blade he severed the cabin completely clean. Cut and maimed conduits coughed embers into the air.

The Combiner then straightened his posture and glared down at the damaged ship. He reached into his chest, searching for the device he knew was in there somewhere. When his fingers prodded the round metal casing, he instantly remembered it – Impactor's thoughts came floating to the forefront. He snatched the explosive, or rather the canister of thiotimoline along with several crystals of greenergon, and with a tug, yanked it all free. As he stood there, bomb in hand, he clearly meant to threaten this time. "You've seen now what I can do. If you value your lives, you will leave your ship, because in a cycle and a half it will be nothing but a smoldering ruin."

It was a difficult choice for the Teklaans – They were coded to complete their mission even at high costs, however, they weren't without their own self-preservation sub-routines. Ultimately the latter won out and a cycle later, they were exiting the craft. A half a cycle after that, the ship detonated as Wreckage placed the explosive in the ship's engines and directed the rest of his excess energy into it.

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## LIVELY PURSUIT

“Are we actually bringing them with us? Our ship isn’t exactly a starliner?” Fractyl said dispassionately as he and Counterpunch leaned over a railing of a former high rise building in Praxus. Below them, the Teklaans were marching into one of the cargo holds of the Wreckers’ own space ship. “Besides, wouldn’t it be fitting to leave them here on the planet they failed to reformat?”

“Impactor says that it’d be more of a message to return them to Maarin. Or Mekka. Or whatever it’s called now. It will let the whole planet know that Cybertron is off limits.” Counterpunch then raised his head and his brow lifted. “Speaking of failure though, did any of that stuff that we were saying as Wreckage make sense to you?”

“Not a bit.”

“It made sense to me.” Toxitron’s voice came from behind them. Counterpunch turned to look at him and then immediately back to the Teklaans on the ground.

With a smirk, Counterpunch retorted. “Yeah, I figured most of that came from you. You and Bluestreak together like that... Woe be unto any adversaries who’d be talked to death.”

Toxitron sneered, then slapped Counterpunch on the back.

“Hmrph...” Counterpunch bit his lip, trying not to yell out in pain.

“Hey!” Toxitron called down to two Teklaans carrying Cergo’s body. “Pick up the pace. I could sever my own leg and still walk faster than that! I’d do it too! I’m coming down and you better be on board when I get there!”

Fractyl paid little attention, his voice again sounded flighty as though his mind was far, far away. “Where is Bluestreak, anyway?”

Toxitron’s voice echoed as he disappeared into the half collapsed building. “Chatterbox? He’s off with the commander.”

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“I’ve never felt this good.” Bluestreak’s voice grabbed Impactor’s attention. The Wrecker commander had been trying to keep a count of the Teklaans now crowding the third cargo hold, but had already given up before Bluestreak interrupted. “I think I still have some of that alien energy trickling around in my hydraulics.”

“Really? I feel like scrap.” Impactor was reminded of far too many mornings where he woke up outside of some seedy oil bar on some run down backwater planet.

Bluestreak smiled. “I guess I should try to keep everything a little short, shouldn’t I?”

“I’d appreciate that.” There was the faintest smirk on Impactor’s face, but it was fleeting. “Bluestreak. When we were Wreckage, I saw them. Your friends. It was... I don’t know. A living memory. It was as though I was there. In the sonic & surge. I could almost reach out and touch them.”

“I know.” Bluestreak slouched. His head dropped and he let out a sigh. “I saw them too.”

“Could you... Did you ask them their names?” Impactor’s face betrayed no emotion, but somewhere buried deep in his voice was genuine concern.

## LIVELY PURSUIT

Bluestreak shook his head. “No. I couldn’t bring myself to speak to them. But seeing what they looked like was enough...”

The blue robot looked up at Impactor. His eyes were wide and glimmering. “...This time.”

“So...” Impactor raised a brow. “Does this mean that you’re going to join us? For Thunder Mayhem?”

“You’ve showed me that you can’t actually go back to the way things were. I can have my memories, but I can’t have them be real.” Bluestreak then gestured out at the barren world around them. “But I can make sure that this... This never happens anywhere else. If Thunder Mayhem is still out there, still wreaking destruction and reaping despair, then the Infernos of Kaon help him. Because the Wreckers are coming.”

Impactor smiled and clamped his hand on Bluestreak’s shoulder.

Bluestreak brushed it away.

“We’re not there just yet.”

Impactor watched the last of the Teklaans enter the cargo hold and pressed the controls for the outer hatch. “Yeah. I didn’t think it felt right.”

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## EPILOGUE

The shining blue orb loomed on the view screen. Its azure glow lit up the control room with a brilliant shimmer. It was an entirely different appearance from the rust orange world where they had just dropped the Teklaans.

Impactor gritted his teeth. “That’s where the readings are coming from? Does the planet have any sort of designation in our library?”

“No. I don’t think any Cybertronian has ever been here. Or at least been here and returned to log it.” Fractyl’s face was buried in his own computer terminal.

“Whatever this world is called,” Counterpunch spun in his chair. “I’m reading an indeterminate number of Cybertronian energy signatures down there. At least eight, maybe as many as fifteen.”

“What?!!” Bluestreak’s eyes almost bulged out of his face. “Even if five of those are the individual Mayhem Attack Squad members, who are the others?”

“Appetizers.” Toxitron shrugged when the other Wreckers turned to him. “Or dessert.”

“Take us down.” Impactor pointed at the view screen. “We’ll find out soon enough.”

