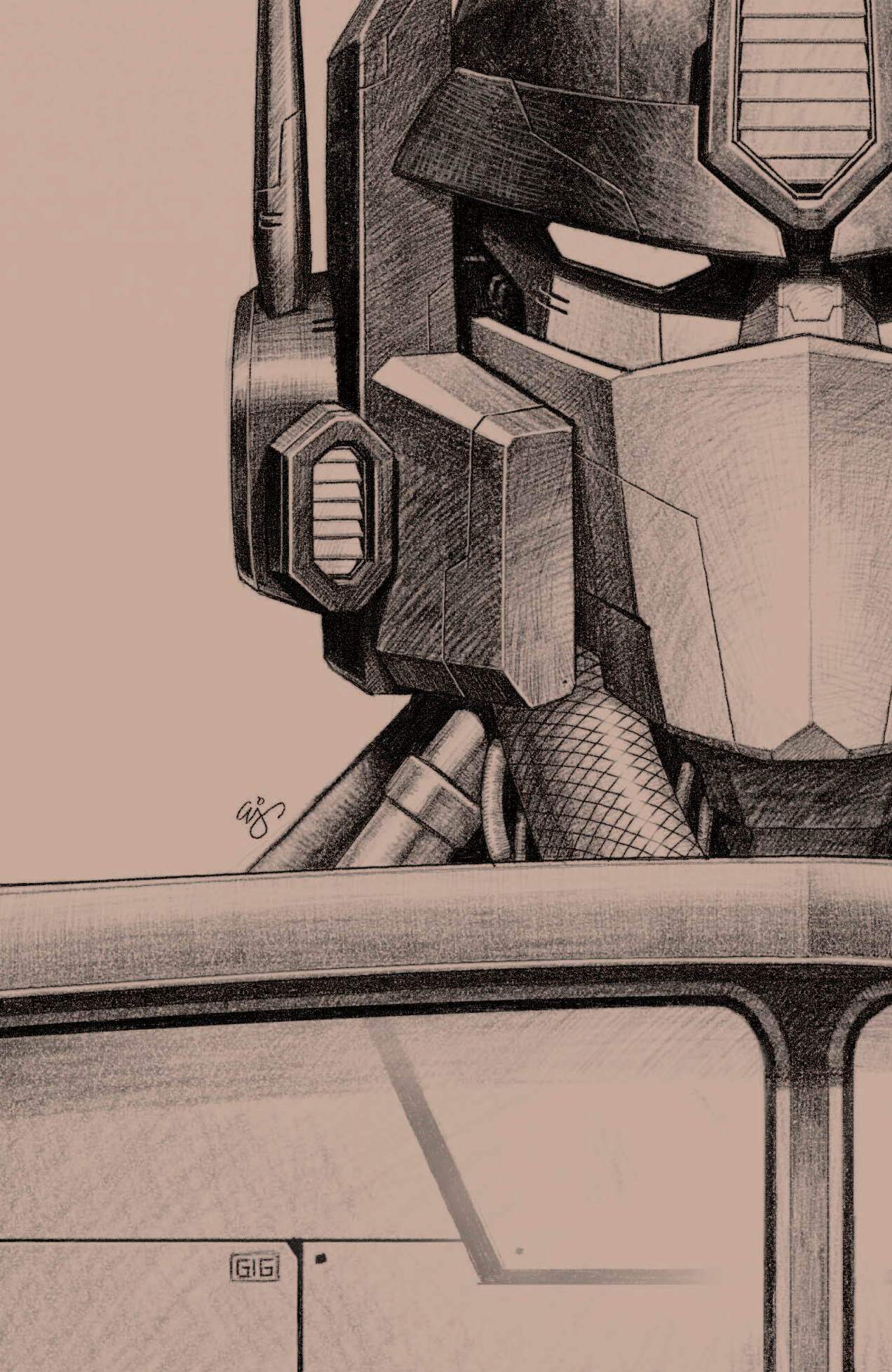
THE TRANSFORMERS

THE IDW COLLECTION

VOLUME TWO


GIG

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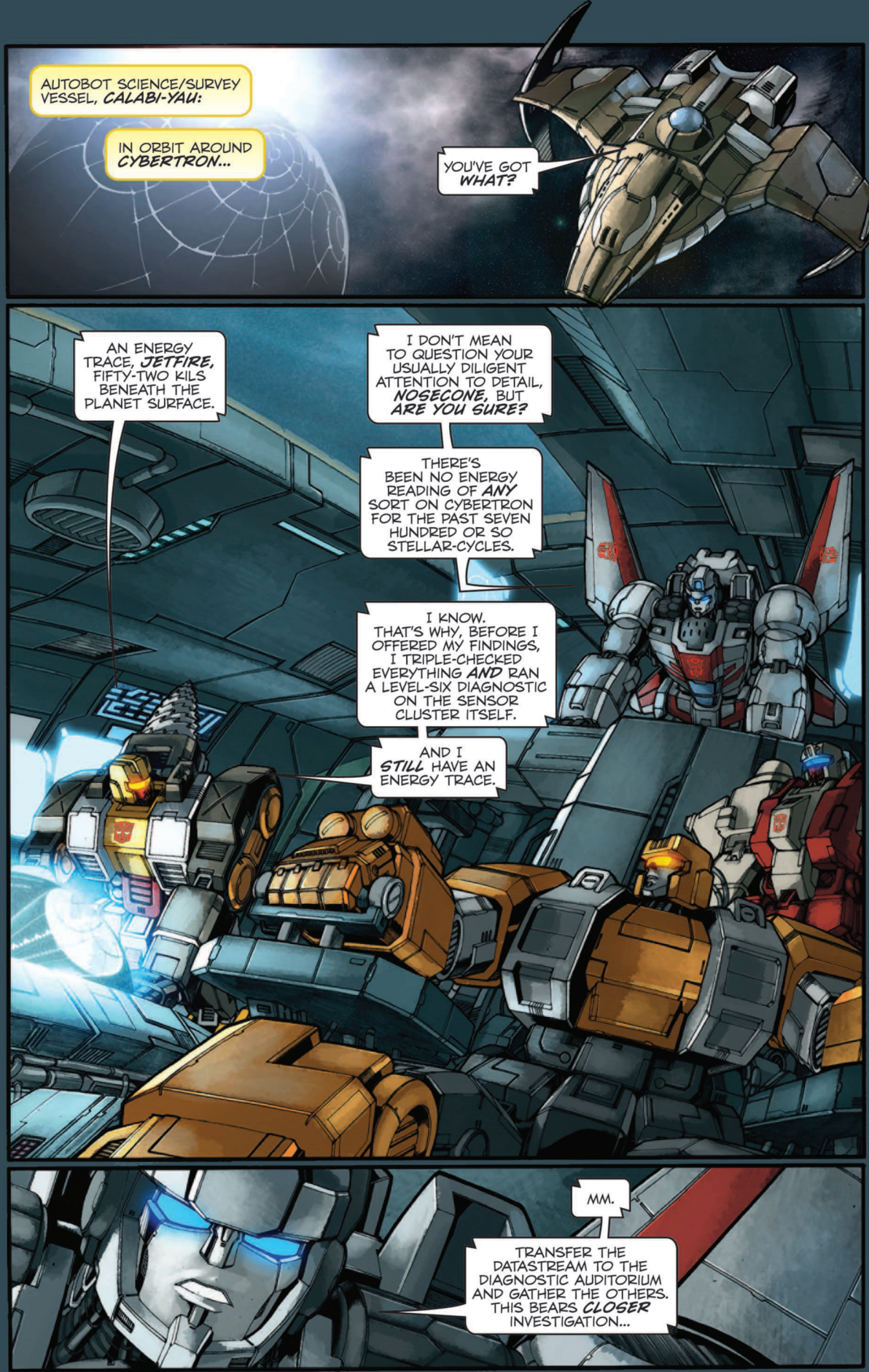
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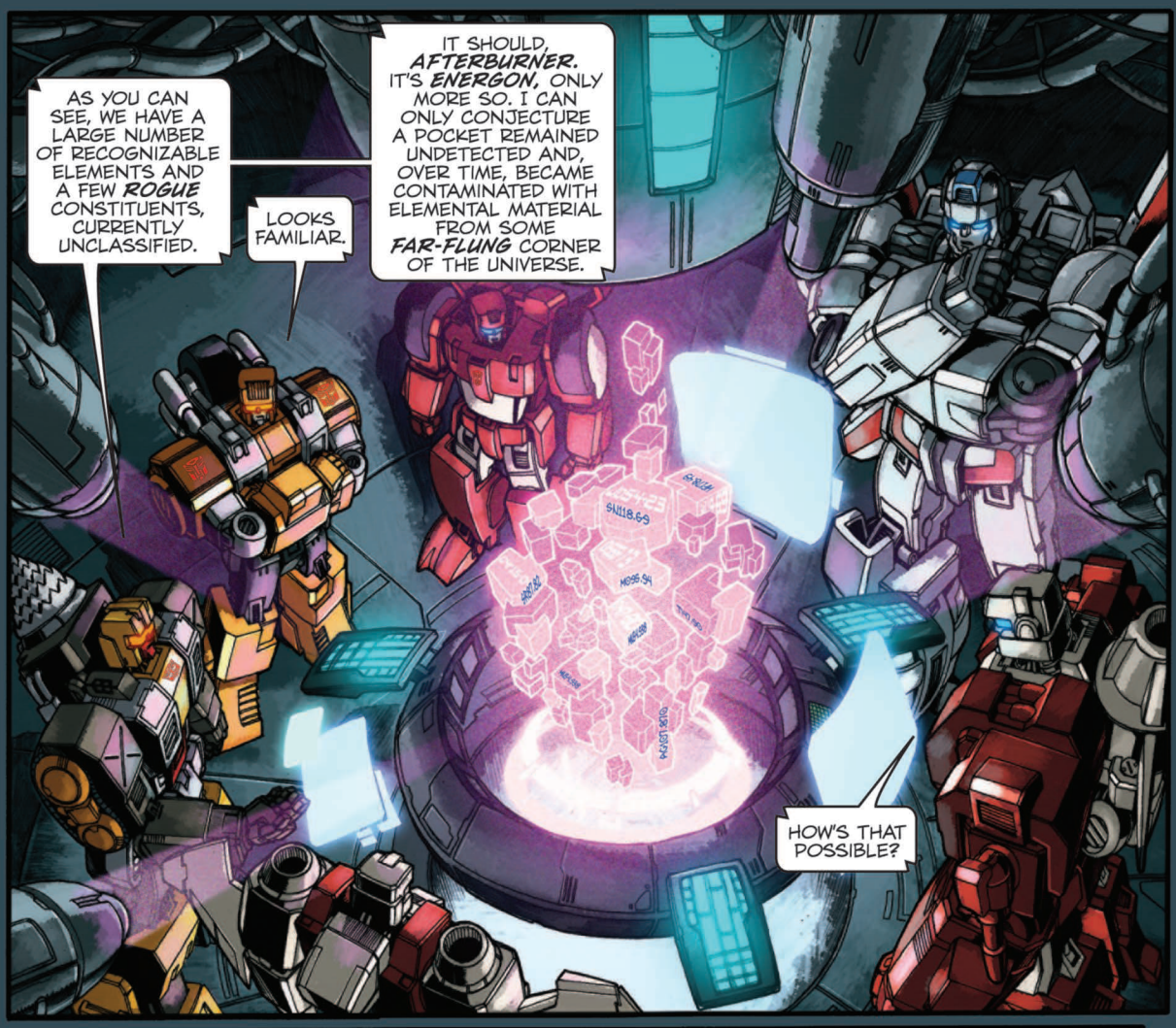
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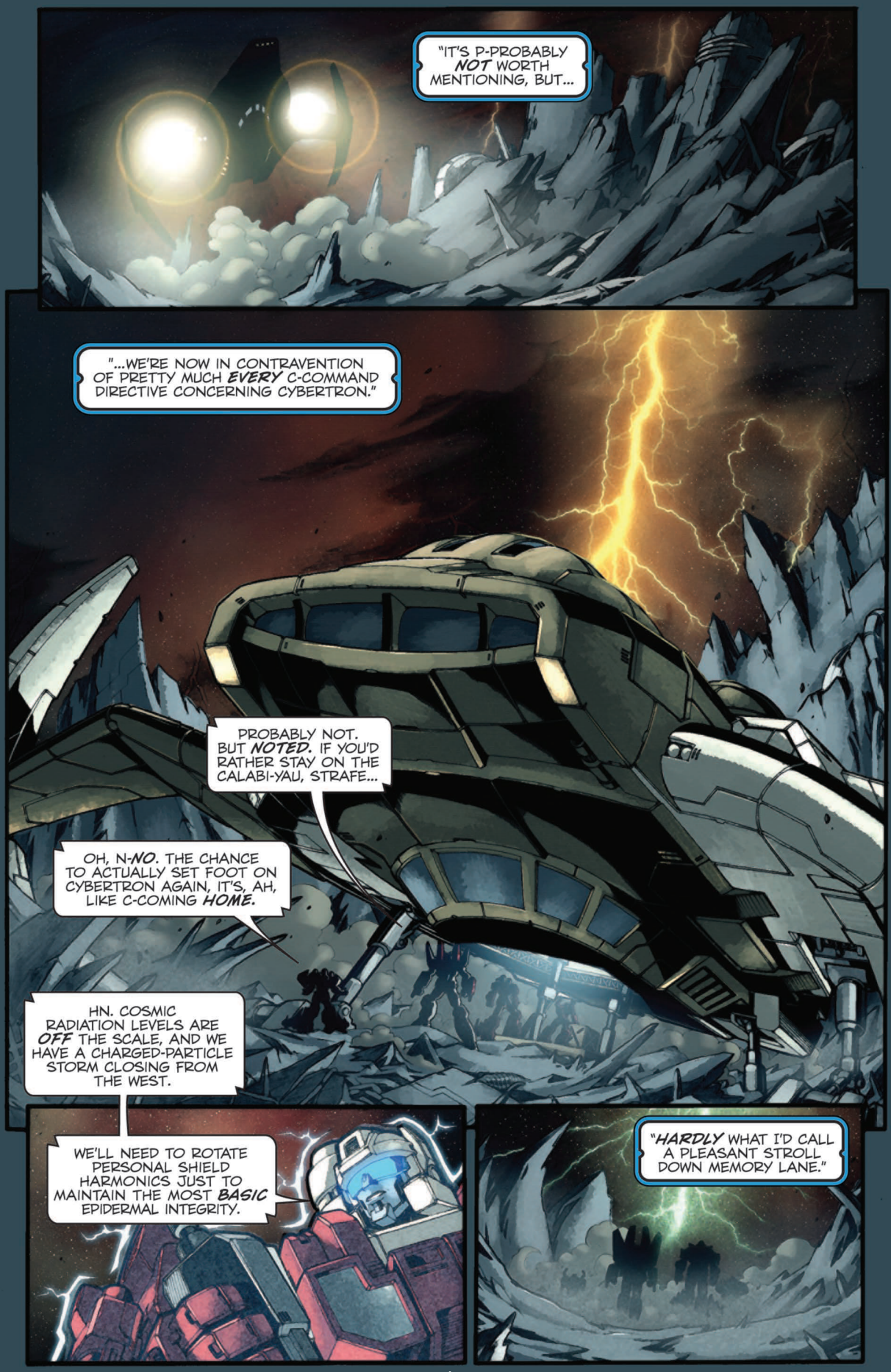

CHAPTER 1
EVEN NOW, THE MEMORY IS SEARED ONTO MY SUBCONSCIOUS...
IT EMERGES, SWATHED IN FLAME AND DRIPPING WHITE PHOSPHORUS, IN THOSE RARE, REFLECTIVE MOMENTS, WHEN MY MENTAL DEFENSES ARE DOWN...
TIME AND AGAIN I AM DRAGGED BACK TO THE VERY HEART OF THE RAGING, HOWLING STORM THAT WE BROUGHT DOWN ON OURSELVES, AND THOUGH THE FRONT HAS LONG PASSED...
...ITS CALAMITOUS ECHOES LINGER STILL.

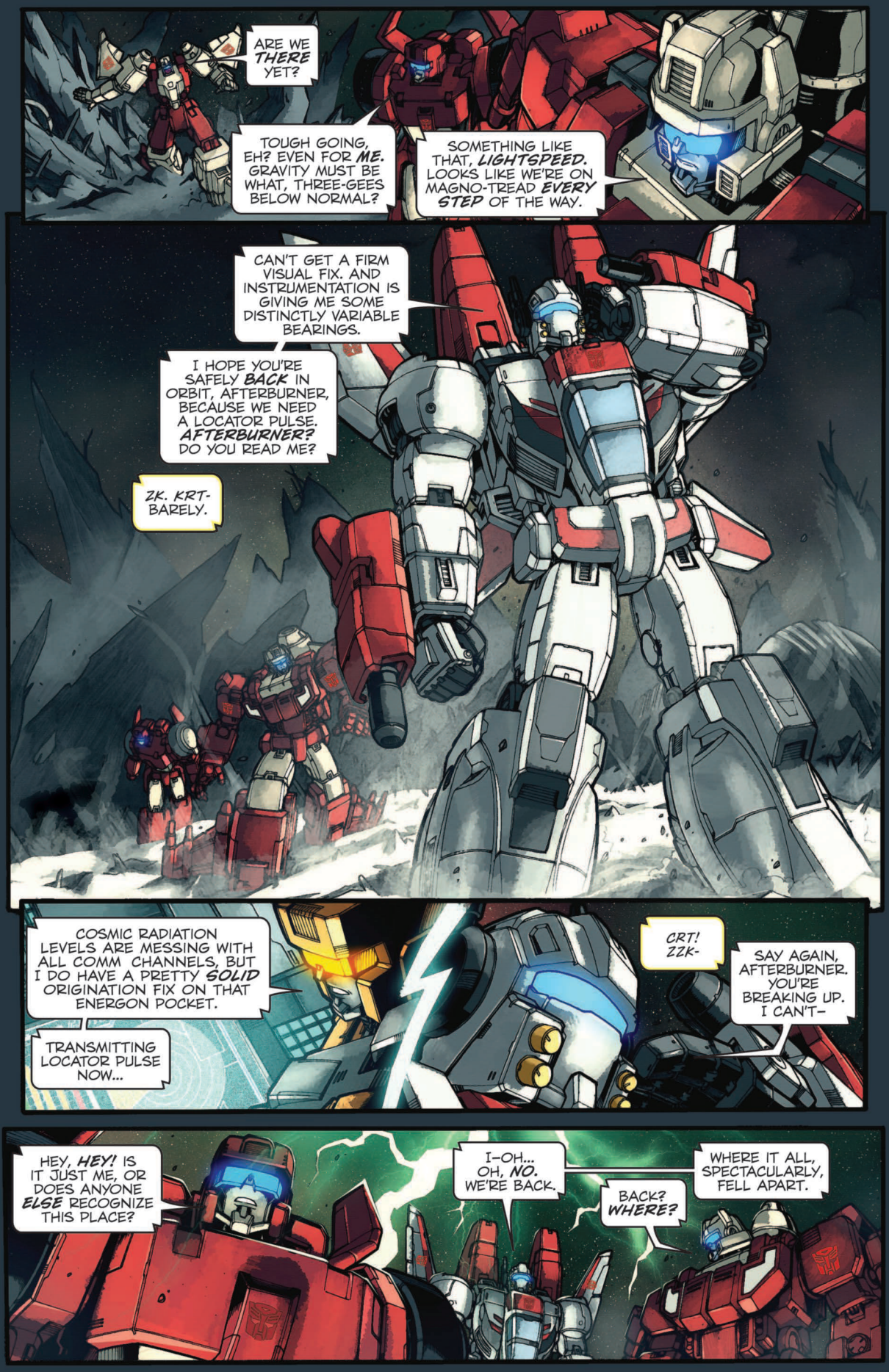

AUTOBOT SCIENCE/SURVEY VESSEL, CALABI-YAU:
IN ORBIT AROUND CYBERTRON...
YOU'VE GOT WHAT?
AN ENERGY TRACE, JETFIRE, FIFTY-TWO KILS BENEATH THE PLANET SURFACE.
I DON'T MEAN TO QUESTION YOUR USUALLY DILIGENT ATTENTION TO DETAIL, NOSECONE, BUT ARE YOU SURE?
THERE'S BEEN NO ENERGY READING OF ANY SORT ON CYBERTRON FOR THE PAST SEVEN HUNDRED OR SO STELLAR-CYCLES.
I KNOW. THAT'S WHY, BEFORE I OFFERED MY FINDINGS, I TRIPLE-CHECKED EVERYTHING AND RAN A LEVEL-SIX DIAGNOSTIC ON THE SENSOR CLUSTER ITSELF.
AND I STILL HAVE AN ENERGY TRACE.
MM.
TRANSFER THE DATASTREAM TO THE DIAGNOSTIC AUDITORIUM AND GATHER THE OTHERS. THIS BEARS CLOSER INVESTIGATION...

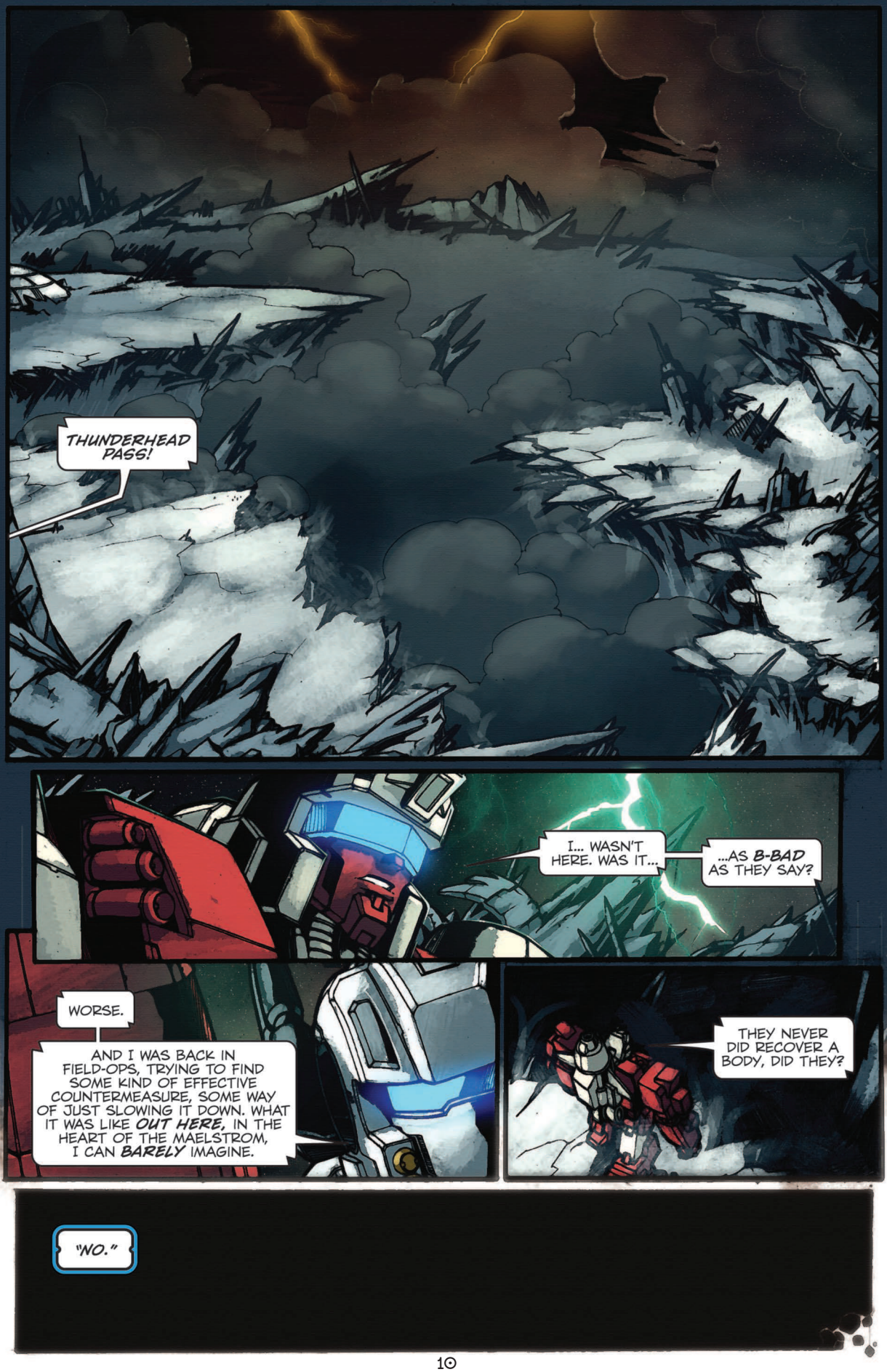

AS YOU CAN SEE, WE HAVE A LARGE NUMBER OF RECOGNIZABLE ELEMENTS AND A FEW ROGUE CONSTITUENTS, CURRENTLY UNCLASSIFIED.
LOOKS FAMILIAR.
IT SHOULD, AFTERBURNER. IT'S ENERGON, ONLY MORE SO. I CAN ONLY CONJECTURE A POCKET REMAINED UNDETECTED AND, OVER TIME, BECAME CONTAMINATED WITH ELEMENTAL MATERIAL FROM SOME FAR-FLUNG CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE.
HOW'S THAT POSSIBLE?

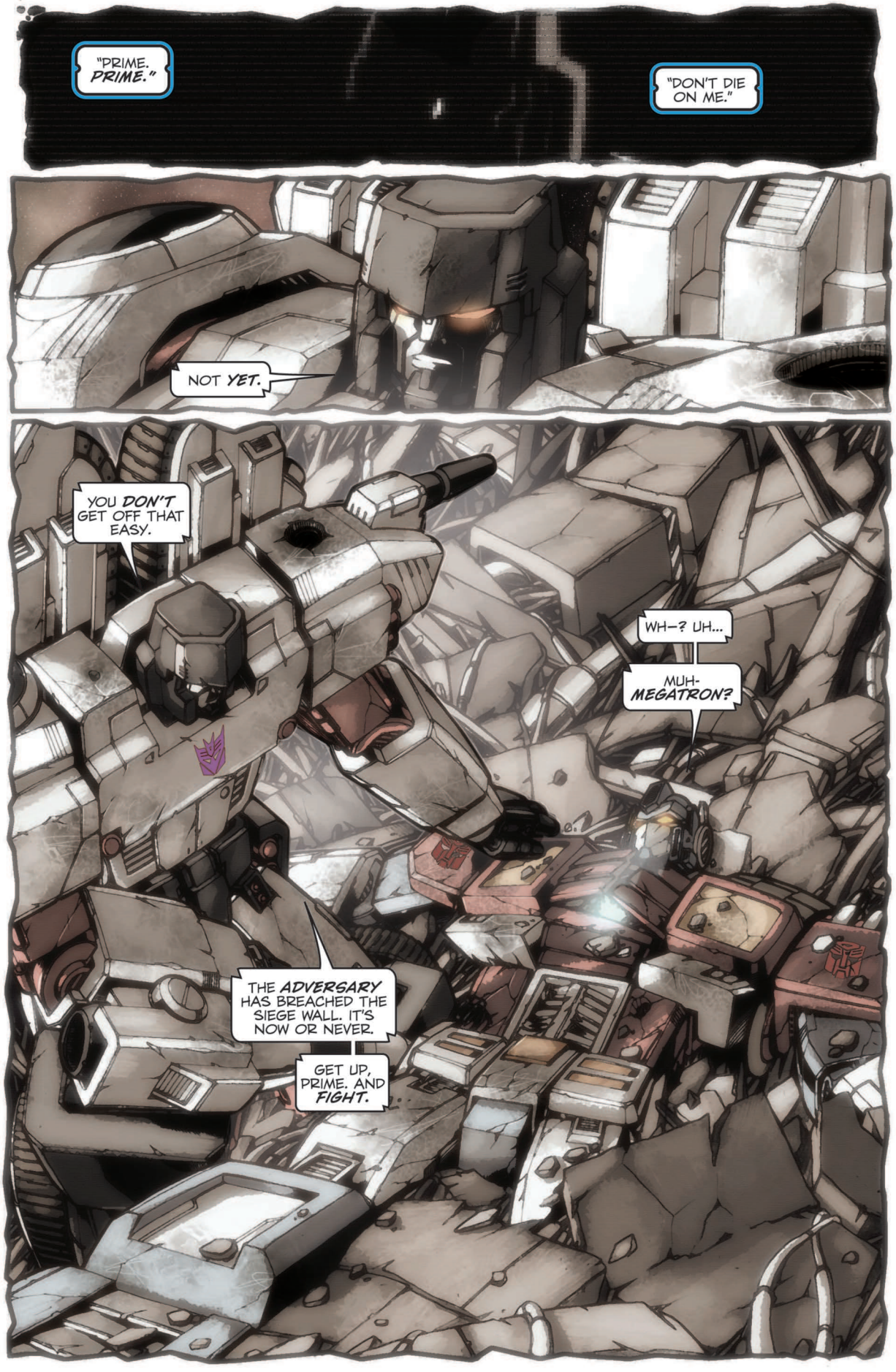

WITH THE DEGRADATION OF CYBERTRON'S ATMOSPHERE, THE INCIDENCE OF DIRECT IMPACTS FROM COMETS AND OTHER SPACE DEBRIS HAS INTENSIFIED.
IT'S POSSIBLE THIS HYBRID IS THE REACTION.


AND IF SO, IT SUPPORTS MY THEORY THAT CYBERTRON IS GRADUALLY–ALBEIT ON A COSMIC TIMESCALE–HEALING ITSELF, UNDOING WHAT WAS DONE.
S-SO... WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?
I THINK, STRAFE...
...WE SHOULD GO TAKE A LOOK!

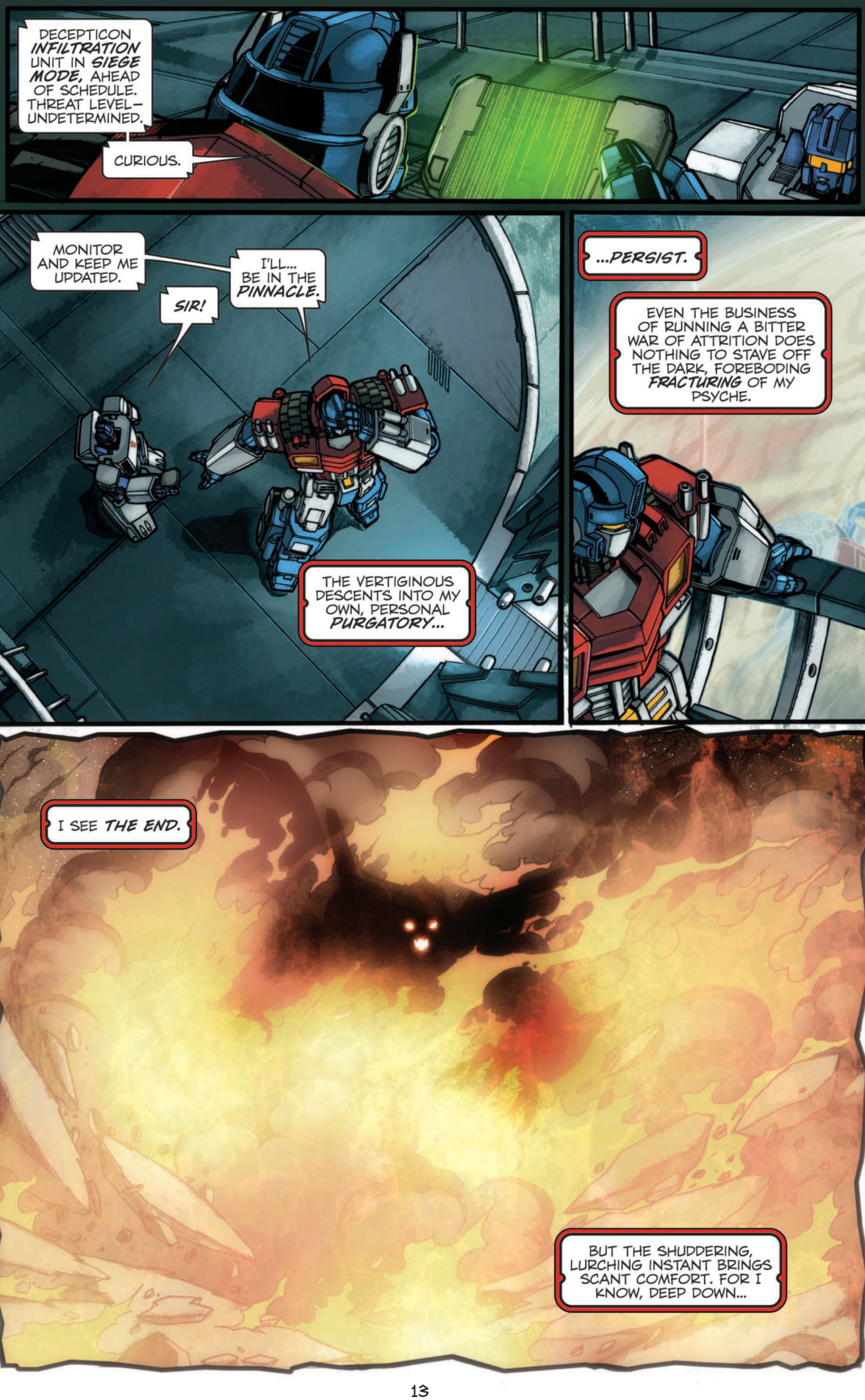

"IT'S P-PROBABLY NOT WORTH MENTIONING, BUT...
"...WE'RE NOW IN CONTRAVENTION OF PRETTY MUCH EVERY C-COMMAND DIRECTIVE CONCERNING CYBERTRON."
PROBABLY NOT. BUT NOTED. IF YOU'D RATHER STAY ON THE CALABI-YAU, STRAFE...
OH, N-NO. THE CHANCE TO ACTUALLY SET FOOT ON CYBERTRON AGAIN, IT'S, AH, LIKE C-COMING HOME.
HN. COSMIC RADIATION LEVELS ARE OFF THE SCALE, AND WE HAVE A CHARGED-PARTICLE STORM CLOSING FROM THE WEST.
WE'LL NEED TO ROTATE PERSONAL SHIELD HARMONICS JUST TO MAINTAIN THE MOST BASIC EPIDERMAL INTEGRITY.
"HARDLY WHAT I'D CALL A PLEASANT STROLL DOWN MEMORY LANE."

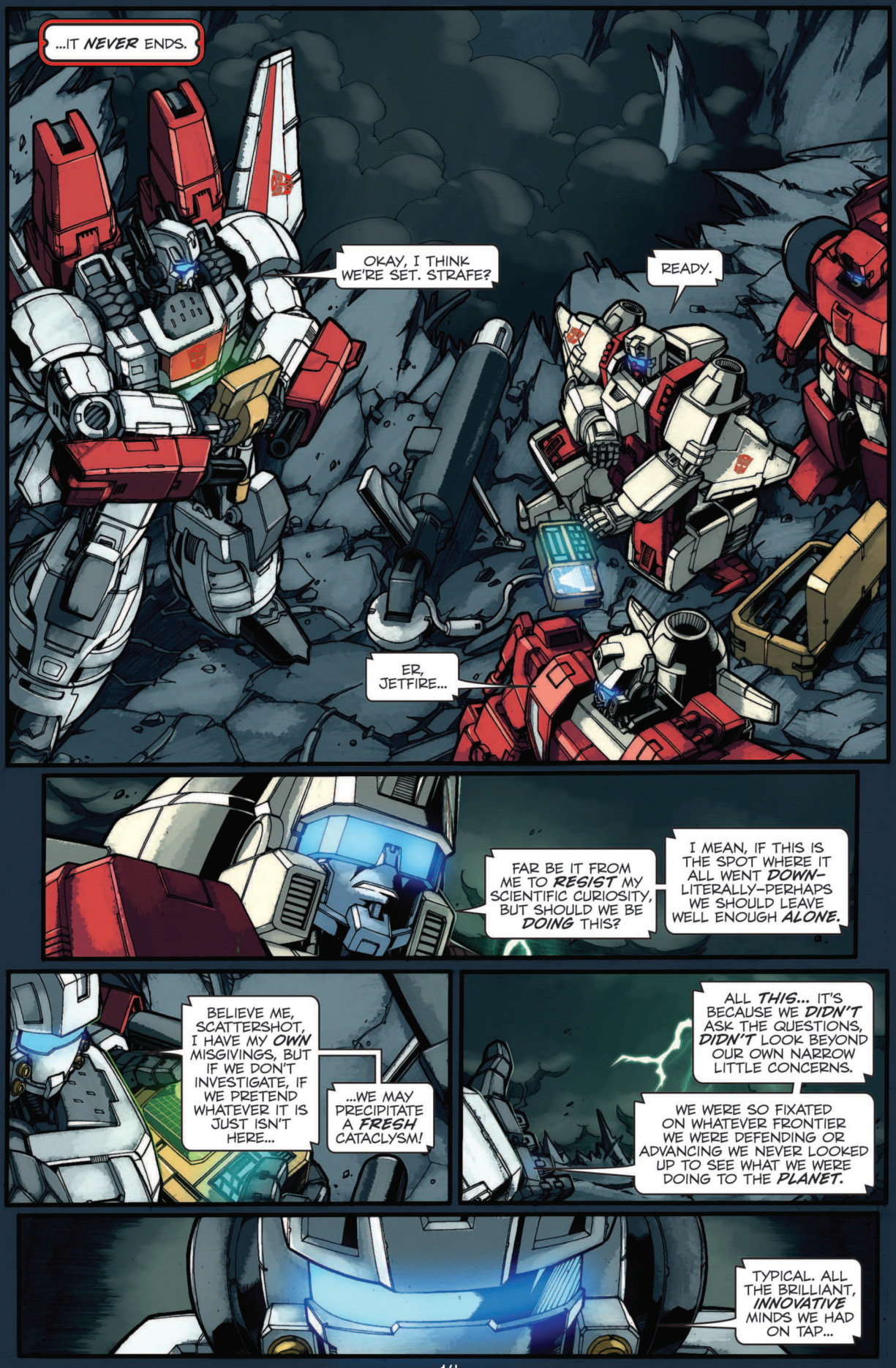

ARE WE THERE YET?
TOUGH GOING, EH? EVEN FOR ME. GRAVITY MUST BE WHAT, THREE-GEES BELOW NORMAL?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT, LIGHTSPEED. LOOKS LIKE WE'RE ON MAGNO-TREAD EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.
CAN'T GET A FIRM VISUAL FIX. AND INSTRUMENTATION IS GIVING ME SOME DISTINCTLY VARIABLE BEARINGS.
I HOPE YOU'RE SAFELY BACK IN ORBIT, AFTERBURNER, BECAUSE WE NEED A LOCATOR PULSE. AFTERBURNER? DO YOU READ ME?
ZK. KRT- BARELY.
COSMIC RADIATION LEVELS ARE MESSING WITH ALL COMM CHANNELS, BUT I DO HAVE A PRETTY SOLID ORIGINATION FIX ON THAT ENERGON POCKET.
TRANSMITTING LOCATOR PULSE NOW...
CRT! ZZK-
SAY AGAIN, AFTERBURNER. YOU'RE BREAKING UP. I CAN'T-
HEY, HEY! IS IT JUST ME, OR DOES ANYONE ELSE RECOGNIZE THIS PLACE?
I-OH... OH, NO. WE'RE BACK.
BACK? WHERE?
WHERE IT ALL, SPECTACULARLY, FELL APART.

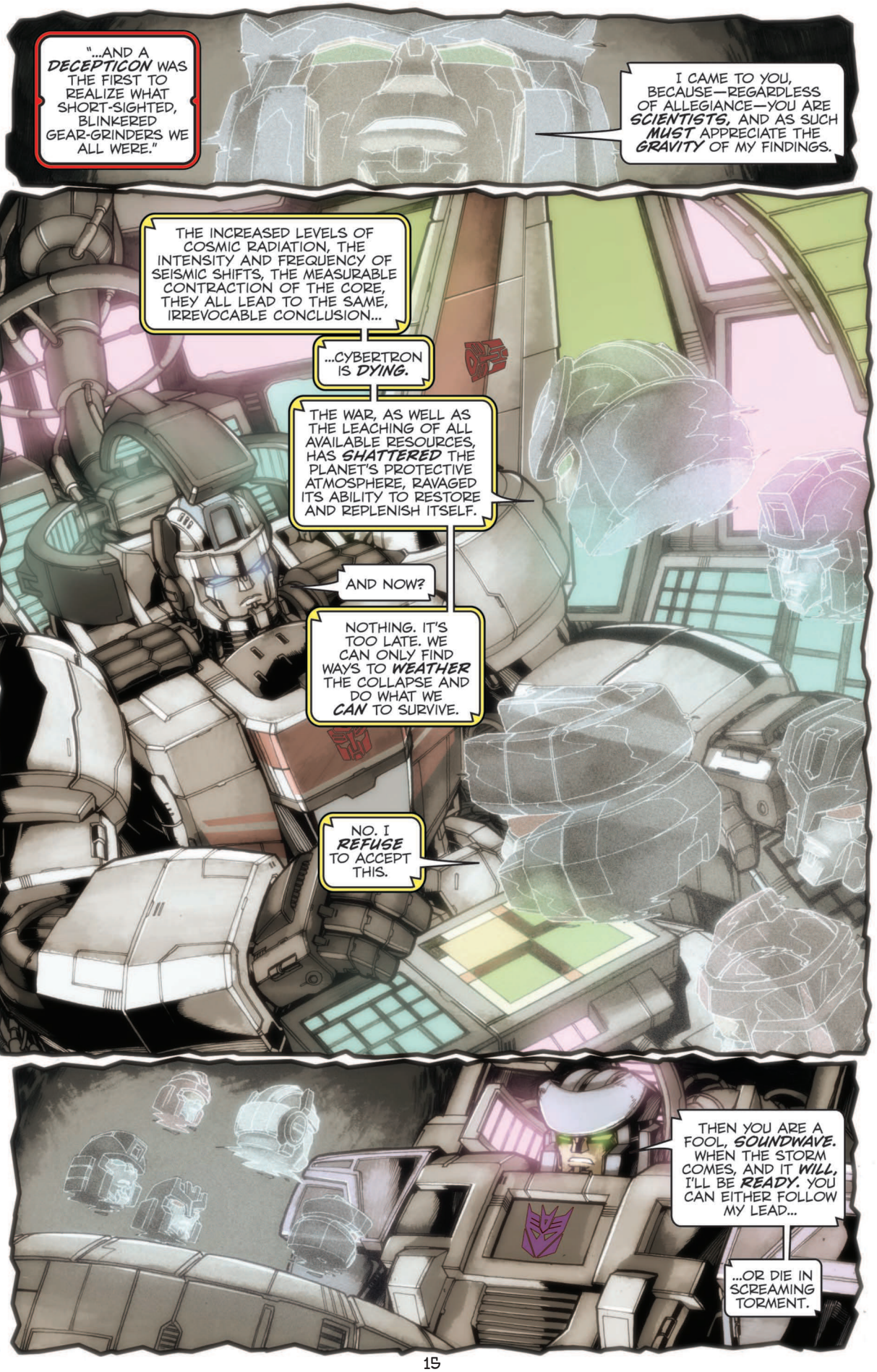

THUNDERHEAD PASS!
I... WASN'T HERE. WAS IT...
...AS B-BAD AS THEY SAY?
WORSE.
AND I WAS BACK IN FIELD-OPS, TRYING TO FIND SOME KIND OF EFFECTIVE COUNTERMEASURE, SOME WAY OF JUST SLOWING IT DOWN. WHAT IT WAS LIKE OUT HERE, IN THE HEART OF THE MAELSTROM, I CAN BARELY IMAGINE.
THEY NEVER DID RECOVER A BODY, DID THEY?
"NO."


"PRIME. PRIME."
"DON'T DIE ON ME."
NOT YET.
YOU DON'T GET OFF THAT EASY.
WH—? UH...
MUH-MEGATRON?
THE ADVERSARY HAS BREACHED THE SIEGE WALL. IT'S NOW OR NEVER.
GET UP, PRIME. AND FIGHT.

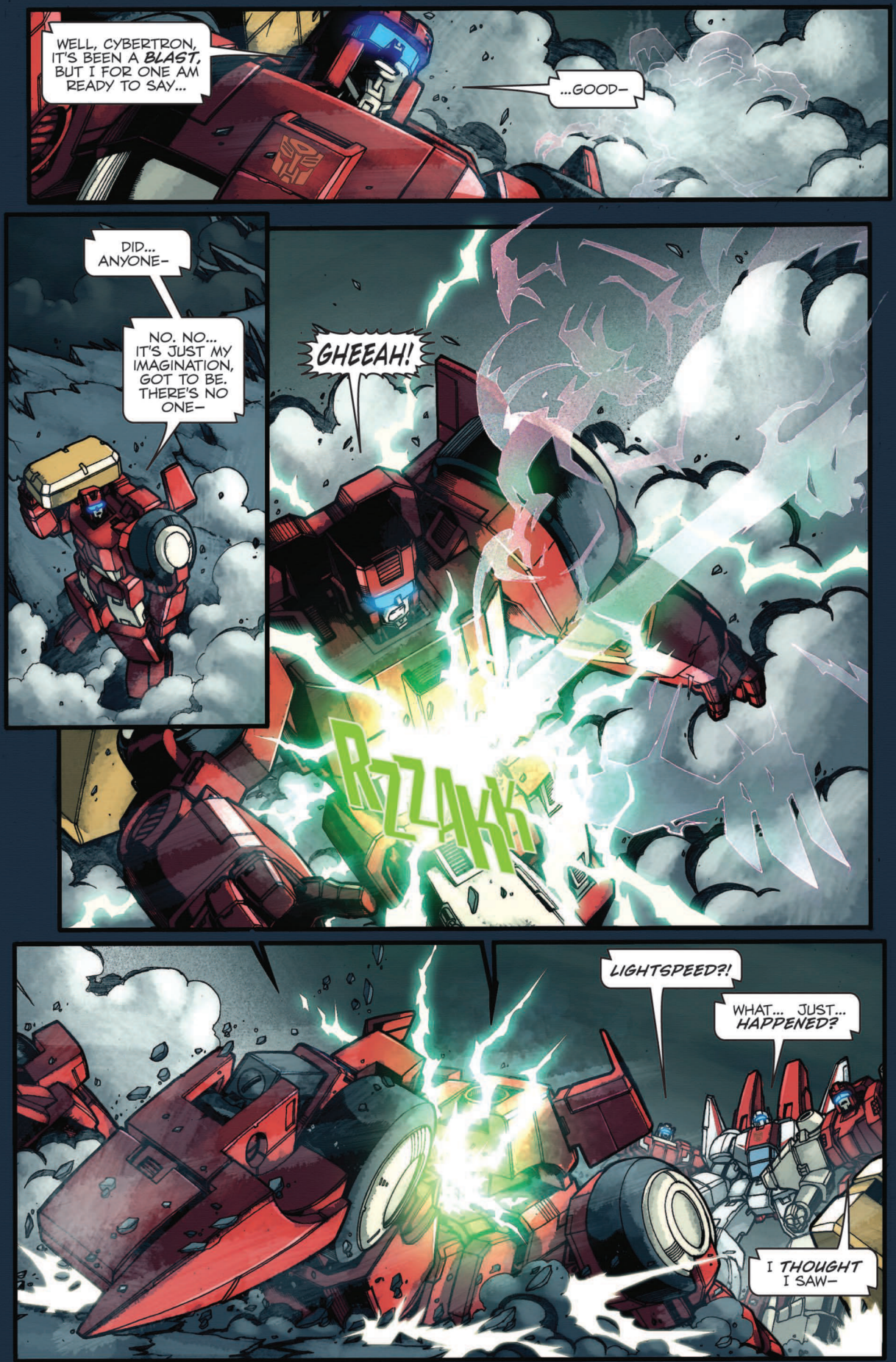

"THIS ISN'T OVER."
OPTIMUS PRIME?
SIR?
MM? OH, SEARCHLIGHT. EXCUSE ME.
WHAT IS IT?
PRIORITY PULSEWAVE TRANSMISSION FROM EARTH, YOUR DIRECT ATTENTION.
EARTH?
SMALL BODY IN THE SOL SYSTEM.
RIGHT. YES. PROWL'S DETACHMENT.

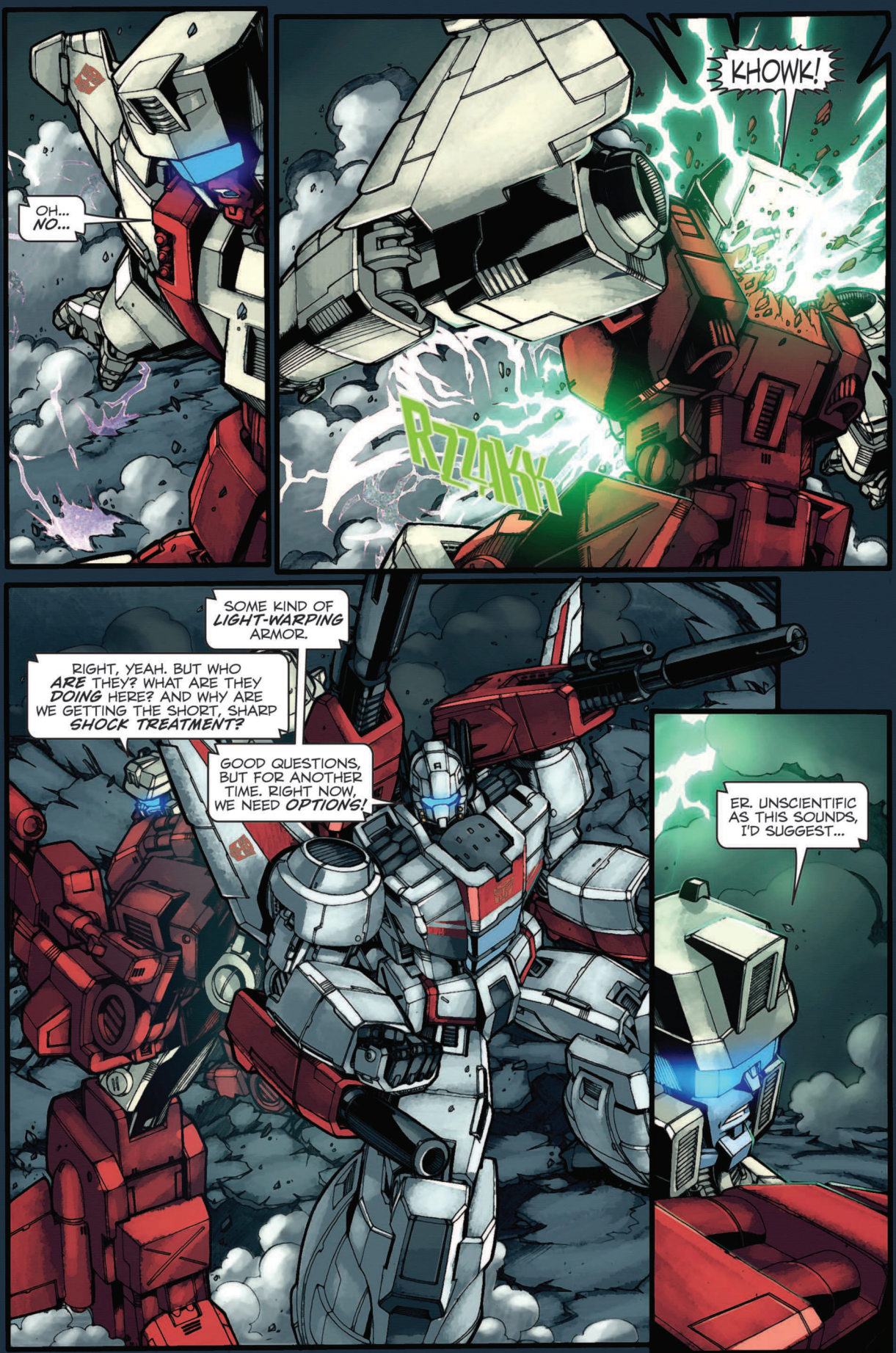

DECEPTICON *INFILTRATION* UNIT IN *SIEGE MODE*, AHEAD OF SCHEDULE. THREAT LEVEL– UNDETERMINED.
CURIOUS.
MONITOR AND KEEP ME UPDATED.
I'LL... BE IN THE *PINNACLE*.
SIR!
THE VERTIGINOUS DESCENTS INTO MY OWN, PERSONAL *PURGATORY*...
...*PERSIST*.
EVEN THE BUSINESS OF RUNNING A BITTER WAR OF ATTRITION DOES NOTHING TO STAVE OFF THE DARK, FOREBODING *FRACTURING* OF MY PSYCHE.
I SEE *THE END*.
BUT THE SHUDDERING, LURCHING INSTANT BRINGS SCANT COMFORT. FOR I KNOW, DEEP DOWN...

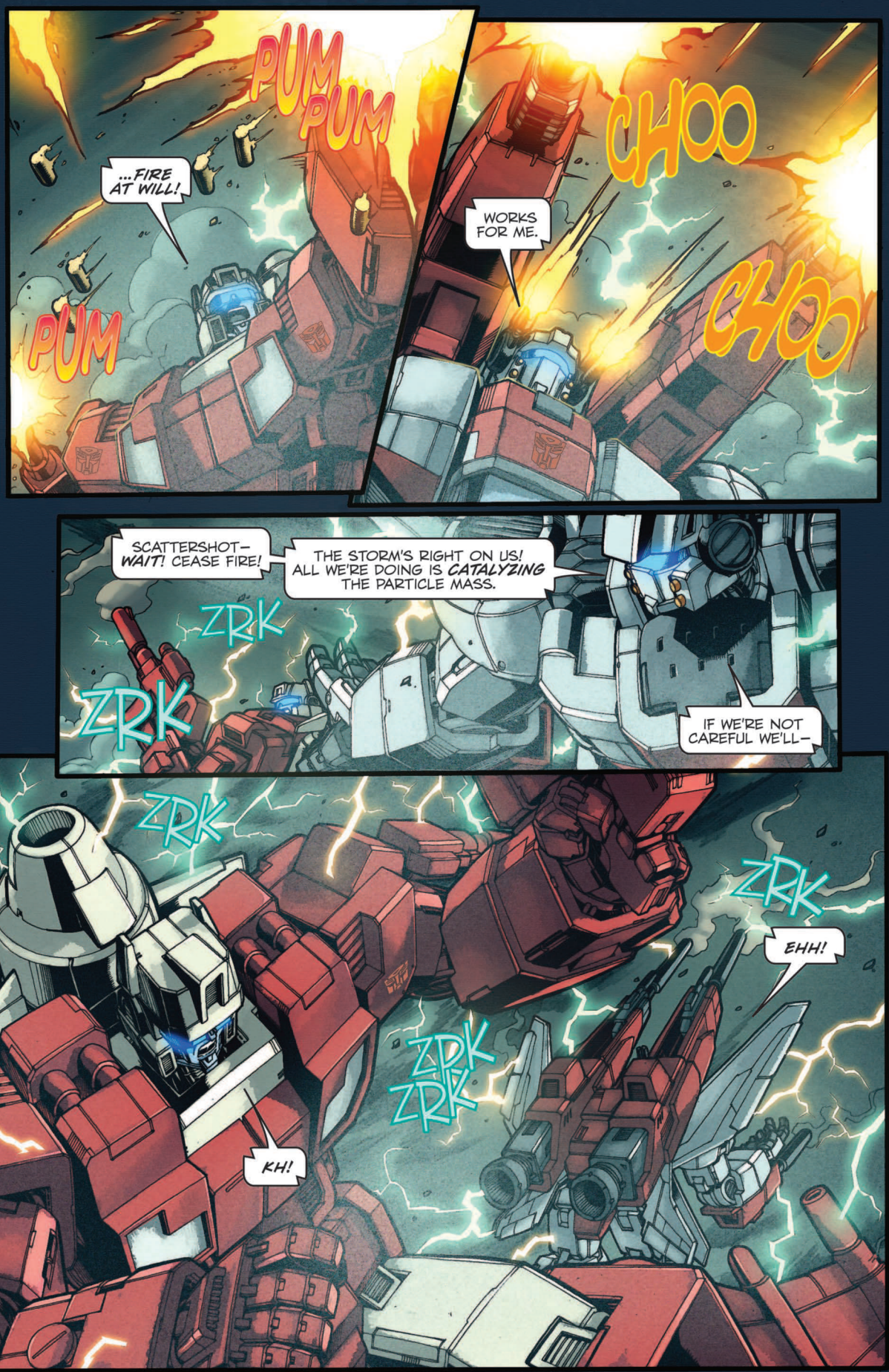

...IT NEVER ENDS.
OKAY, I THINK WE'RE SET. STRAFE?
READY.
ER, JETFIRE...
FAR BE IT FROM ME TO RESIST MY SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY, BUT SHOULD WE BE DOING THIS?
I MEAN, IF THIS IS THE SPOT WHERE IT ALL WENT DOWN– LITERALLY–PERHAPS WE SHOULD LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE.
BELIEVE ME, SCATTERSHOT, I HAVE MY OWN MISGIVINGS, BUT IF WE DON'T INVESTIGATE, IF WE PRETEND WHATEVER IT IS JUST ISN'T HERE...
...WE MAY PRECIPITATE A FRESH CATACLYSM!
ALL THIS... IT'S BECAUSE WE DIDN'T ASK THE QUESTIONS, DIDN'T LOOK BEYOND OUR OWN NARROW LITTLE CONCERNS.
WE WERE SO FIXATED ON WHATEVER FRONTIER WE WERE DEFENDING OR ADVANCING WE NEVER LOOKED UP TO SEE WHAT WE WERE DOING TO THE PLANET.
TYPICAL. ALL THE BRILLIANT, INNOVATIVE MINDS WE HAD ON TAP...

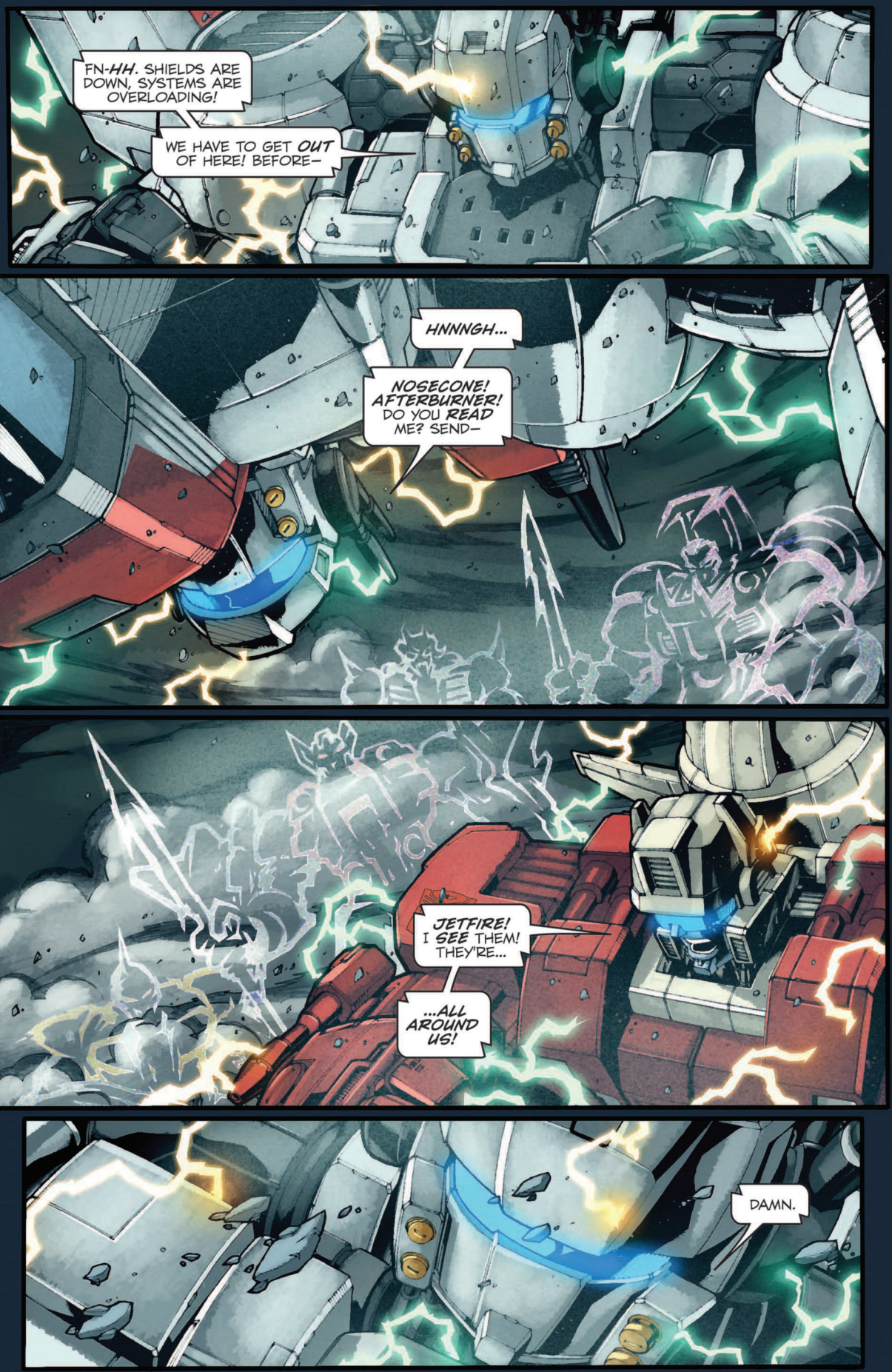

"...AND A DECEPTICON WAS THE FIRST TO REALIZE WHAT SHORT-SIGHTED, BLINKERED GEAR-GRINDERS WE ALL WERE."
I CAME TO YOU, BECAUSE—REGARDLESS OF ALLEGIANCE—YOU ARE SCIENTISTS, AND AS SUCH MUST APPRECIATE THE GRAVITY OF MY FINDINGS.
THE INCREASED LEVELS OF COSMIC RADIATION, THE INTENSITY AND FREQUENCY OF SEISMIC SHIFTS, THE MEASURABLE CONTRACTION OF THE CORE, THEY ALL LEAD TO THE SAME, IRREVOCABLE CONCLUSION...
...CYBERTRON IS DYING.
THE WAR, AS WELL AS THE LEACHING OF ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES, HAS SHATTERED THE PLANET'S PROTECTIVE ATMOSPHERE, RAVAGED ITS ABILITY TO RESTORE AND REPLENISH ITSELF.
AND NOW?
NOTHING. IT'S TOO LATE. WE CAN ONLY FIND WAYS TO WEATHER THE COLLAPSE AND DO WHAT WE CAN TO SURVIVE.
NO. I REFUSE TO ACCEPT THIS.
THEN YOU ARE A FOOL, SOUNDWAVE. WHEN THE STORM COMES, AND IT WILL, I'LL BE READY. YOU CAN EITHER FOLLOW MY LEAD...
...OR DIE IN SCREAMING TORMENT.

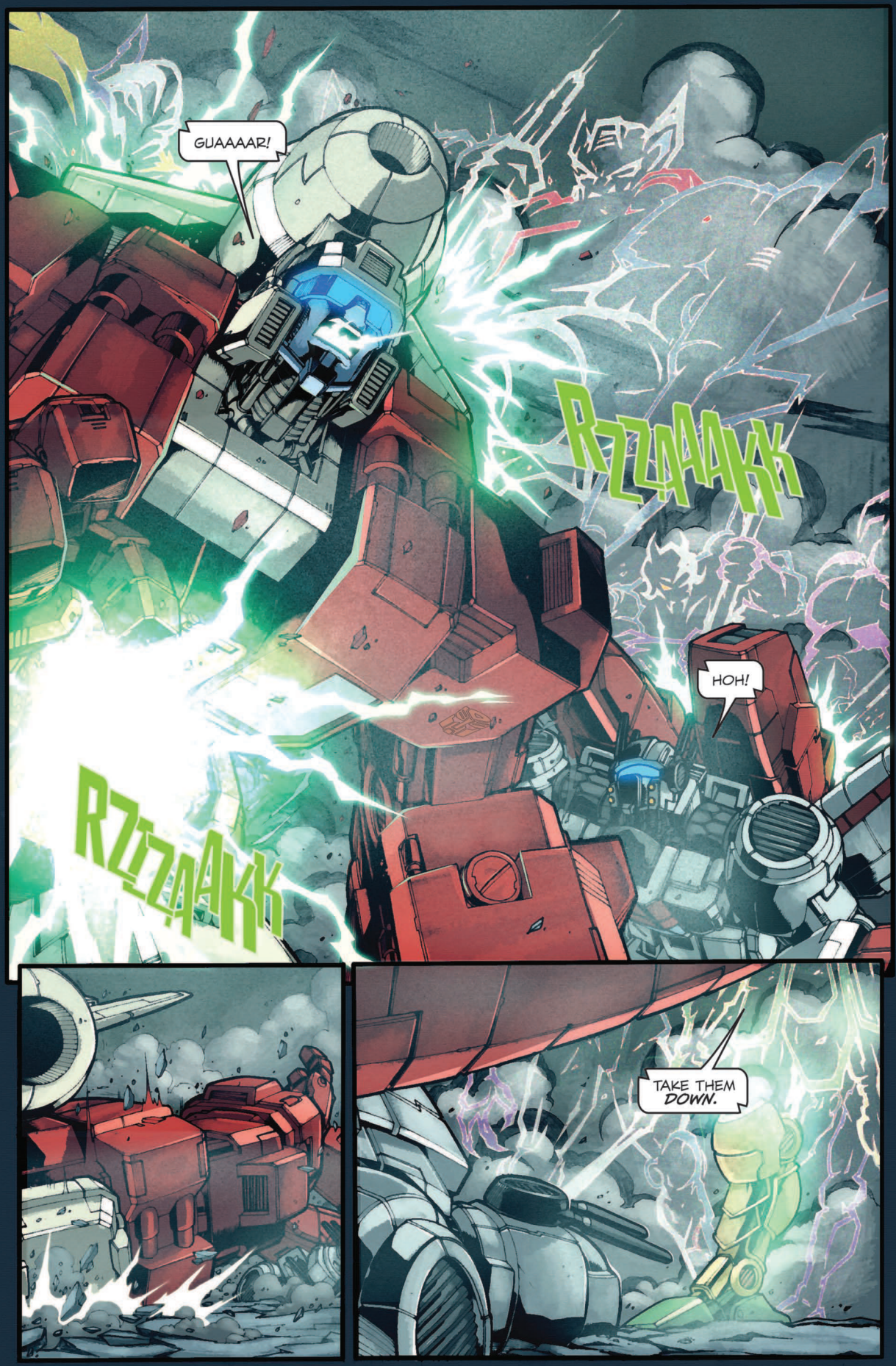

SO, IN ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION, SCATTERSHOT, YES. WE *SHOULD.* WHATEVER WE FIND, HOWEVER UNPALATABLE IT MIGHT BE, WE *CAN'T* JUST PRETEND IT'S NOT THERE. STRAFE...
...*LAUNCH* THE PROBE.
FLUSH
JETFIRE—THAT PARTICLE STORM WE TRACKED IS CLOSING IN, *FAST.* WE NEED TO BE *GONE* BEFORE IT REACHES US.
OUR PERSONAL SHIELDING CAN ONLY HANDLE SO MUCH.
AGREED. STRAFE, LIGHTSPEED—PACK UP ANY NON-ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT AND GET READY TO *MOVE OUT.*
WE'LL ANALYZE THE TELEMETRY FROM THE PROBE ONCE WE'RE BACK ABOARD THE *CALABI-YAU.*


WELL, CYBERTRON, IT'S BEEN A BLAST, BUT I FOR ONE AM READY TO SAY...
...GOOD–
DID... ANYONE–
NO. NO... IT'S JUST MY IMAGINATION, GOT TO BE. THERE'S NO ONE–
GHEEAH!
RZZAKK
LIGHTSPEED?!
WHAT... JUST... HAPPENED?
I THOUGHT I SAW–

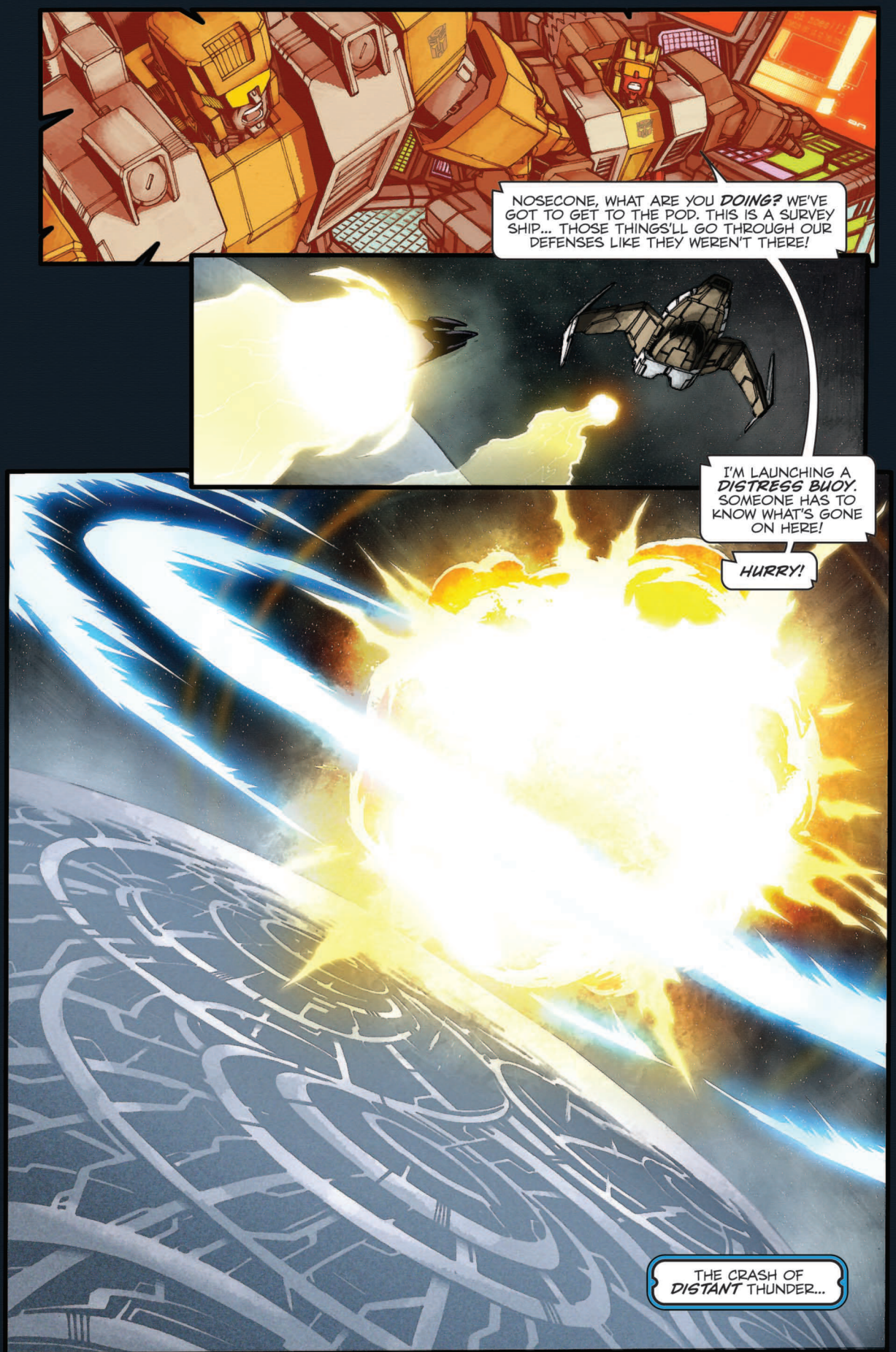

OH... NO...
KHOWK!
RZZAKK
SOME KIND OF LIGHT-WARPING ARMOR.
RIGHT, YEAH. BUT WHO ARE THEY? WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE? AND WHY ARE WE GETTING THE SHORT, SHARP SHOCK TREATMENT?
GOOD QUESTIONS, BUT FOR ANOTHER TIME. RIGHT NOW, WE NEED OPTIONS!
ER. UNSCIENTIFIC AS THIS SOUNDS, I'D SUGGEST...

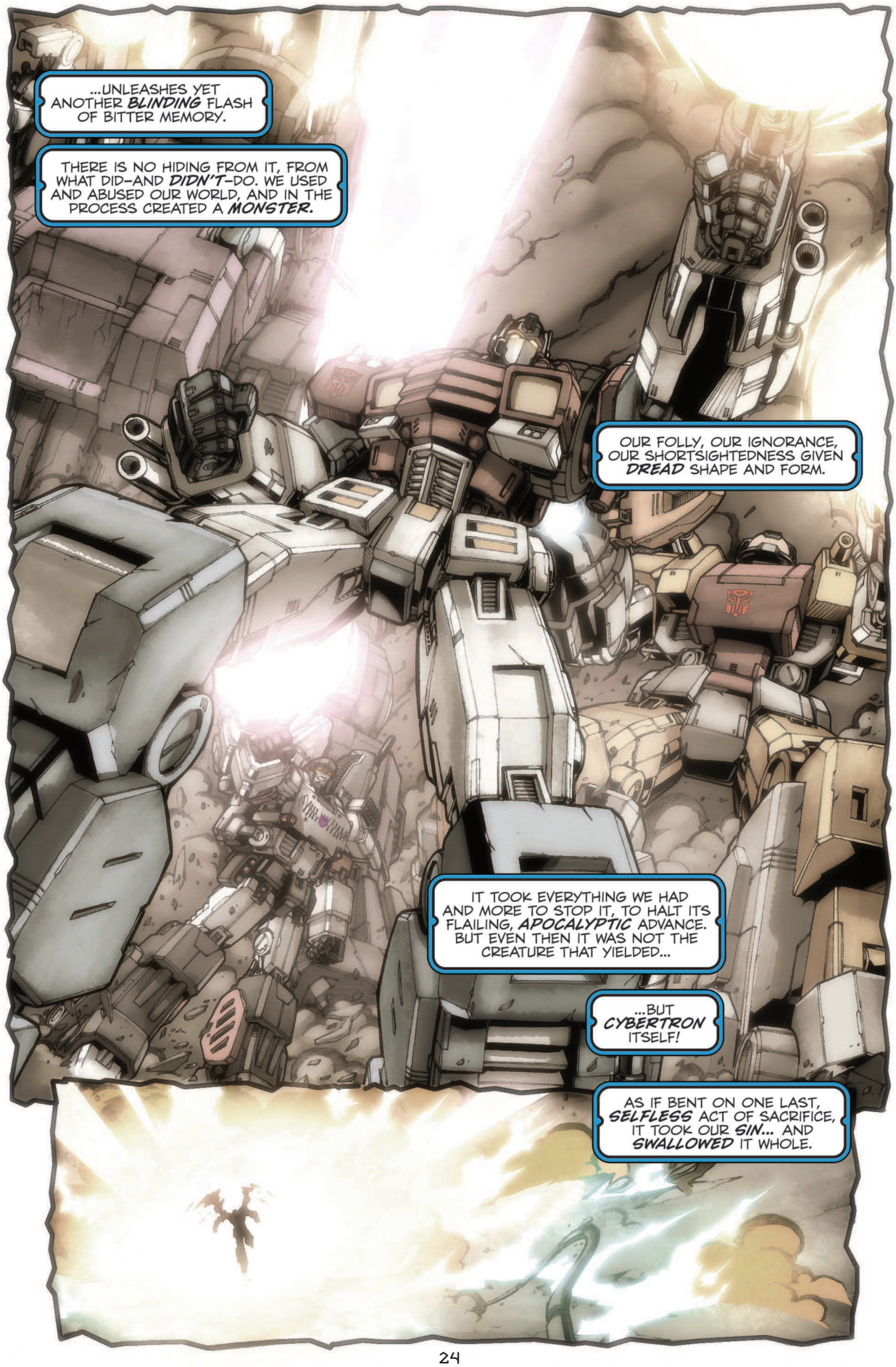

PUM PUM
...FIRE AT WILL!
PUM
CHOO
WORKS FOR ME.
CHOO
SCATTERSHOT— WAIT! CEASE FIRE!
THE STORM'S RIGHT ON US! ALL WE'RE DOING IS CATALYZING THE PARTICLE MASS.
ZRK
ZRK
IF WE'RE NOT CAREFUL WE'LL—
ZRK
ZRK
ZRK
EHH!
ZRK
ZRK
KH!

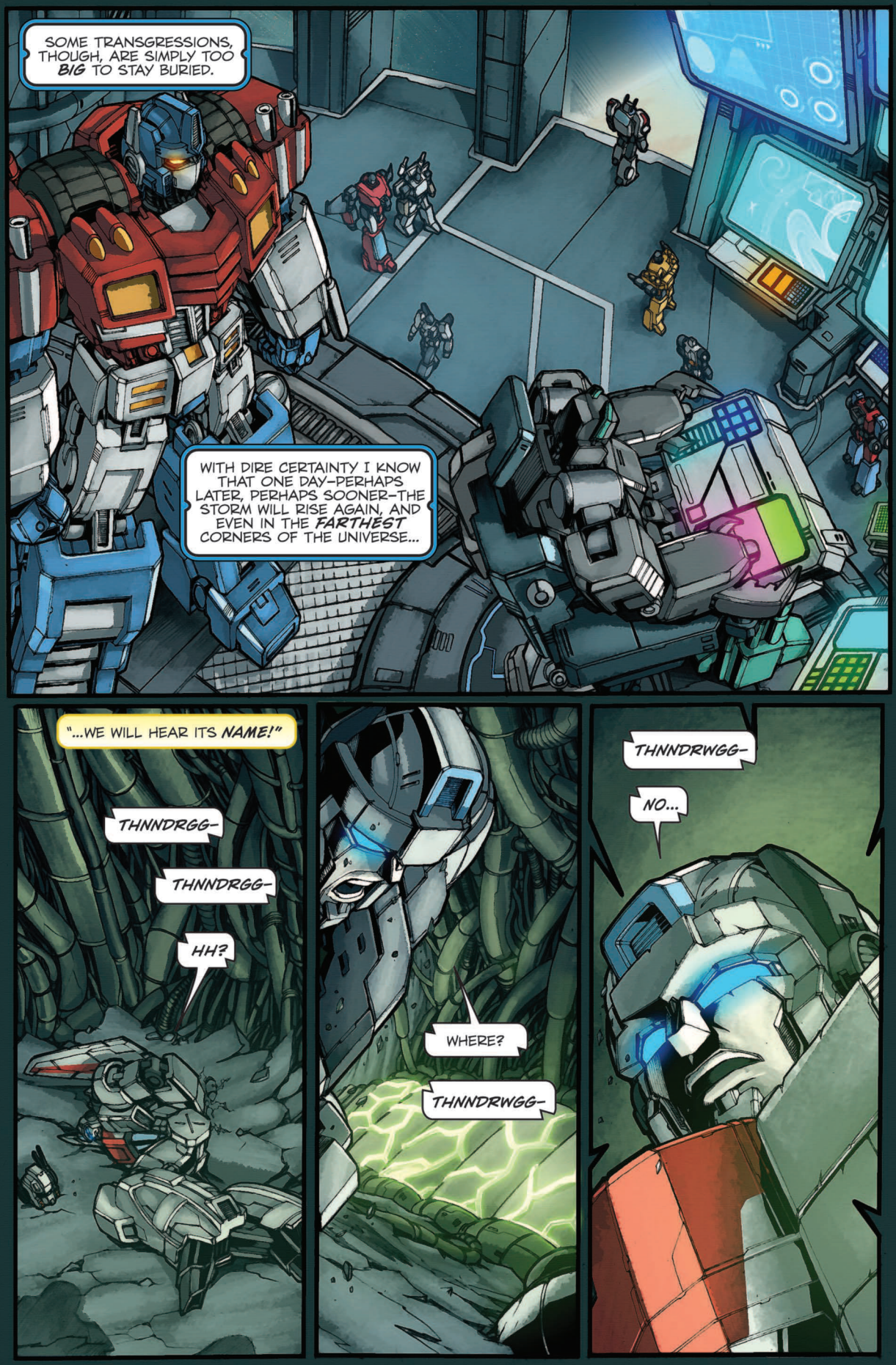

FN-HH. SHIELDS ARE DOWN, SYSTEMS ARE OVERLOADING!
WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE! BEFORE–
HNNNGH...
NOSECONE! AFTERBURNER! DO YOU READ ME? SEND–
JETFIRE! I SEE THEM! THEY'RE...
...ALL AROUND US!
DAMN.

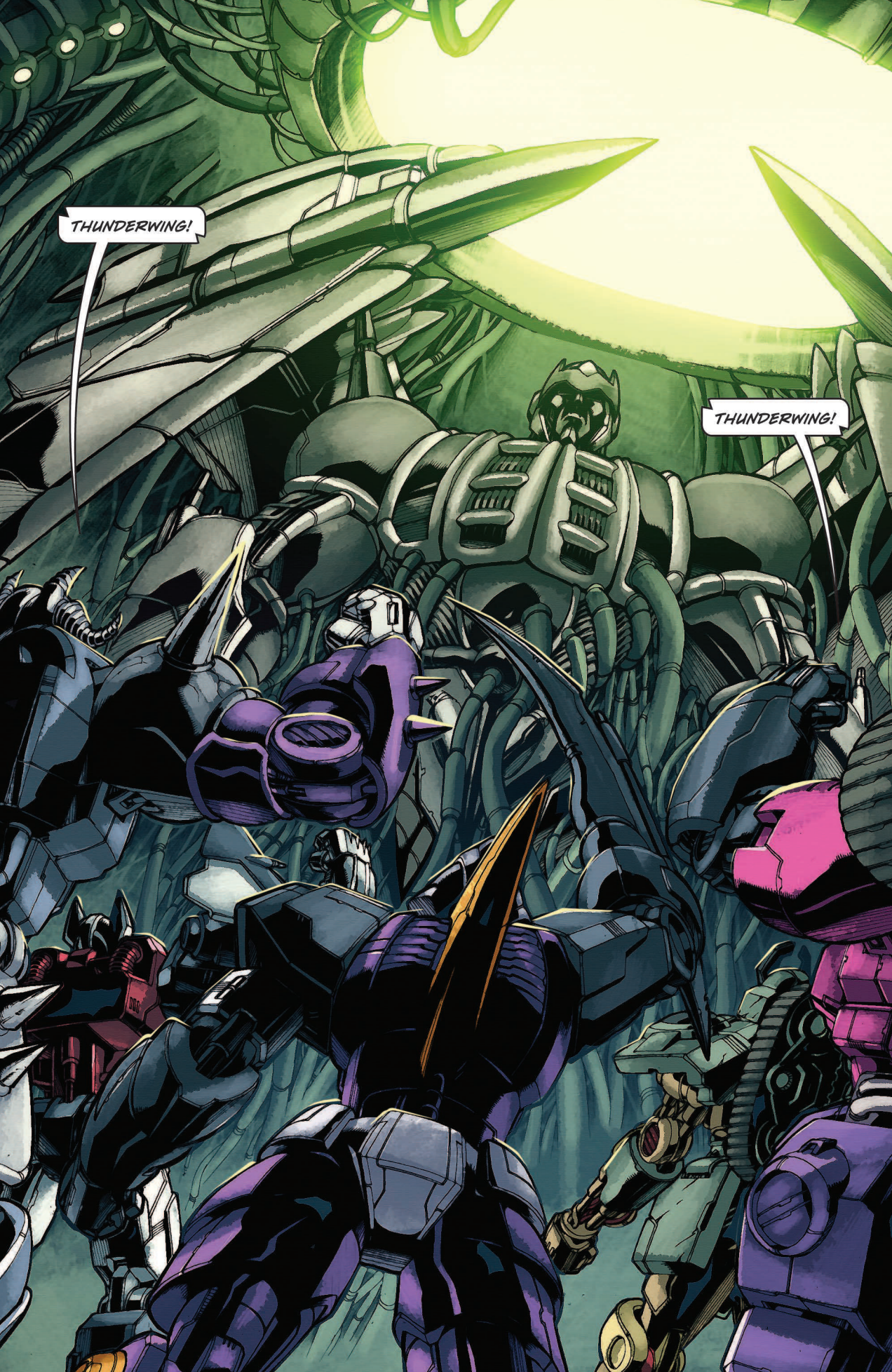

GUAAAAR!
RZZAAAKK
HOH!
RZZAAKK
TAKE THEM DOWN.

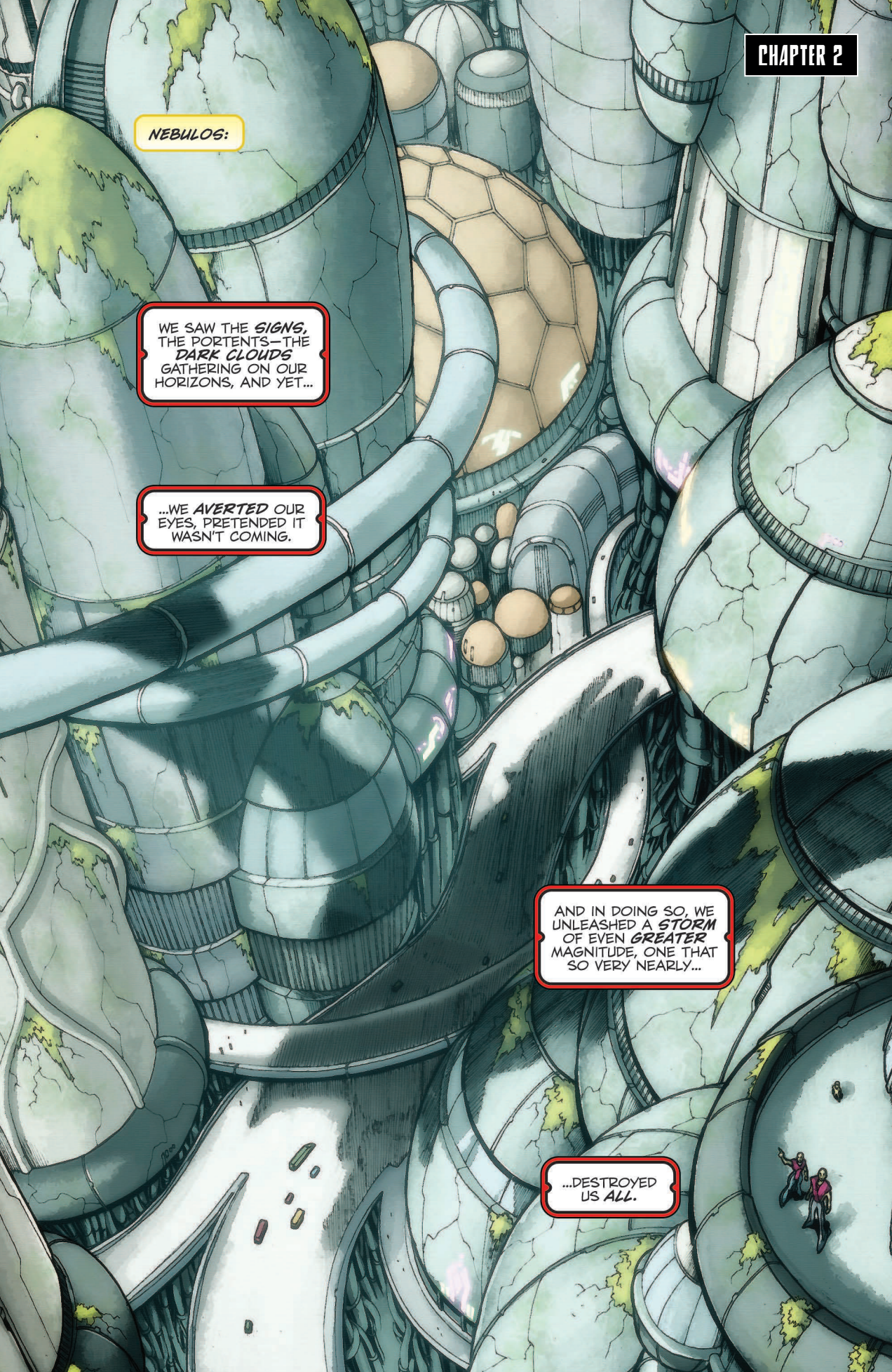

JETFIRE? JETFIRE?
NOTHING. DEAD AIR. IT'S PROBABLY JUST THE PARTICLE STORM, BUT–
OH... SLAG!
WHAT? OH... SLAG!
WHERE'D THEY COME FROM?
THE PLANET.
TIME TO IMPACT?
MOMENTS.

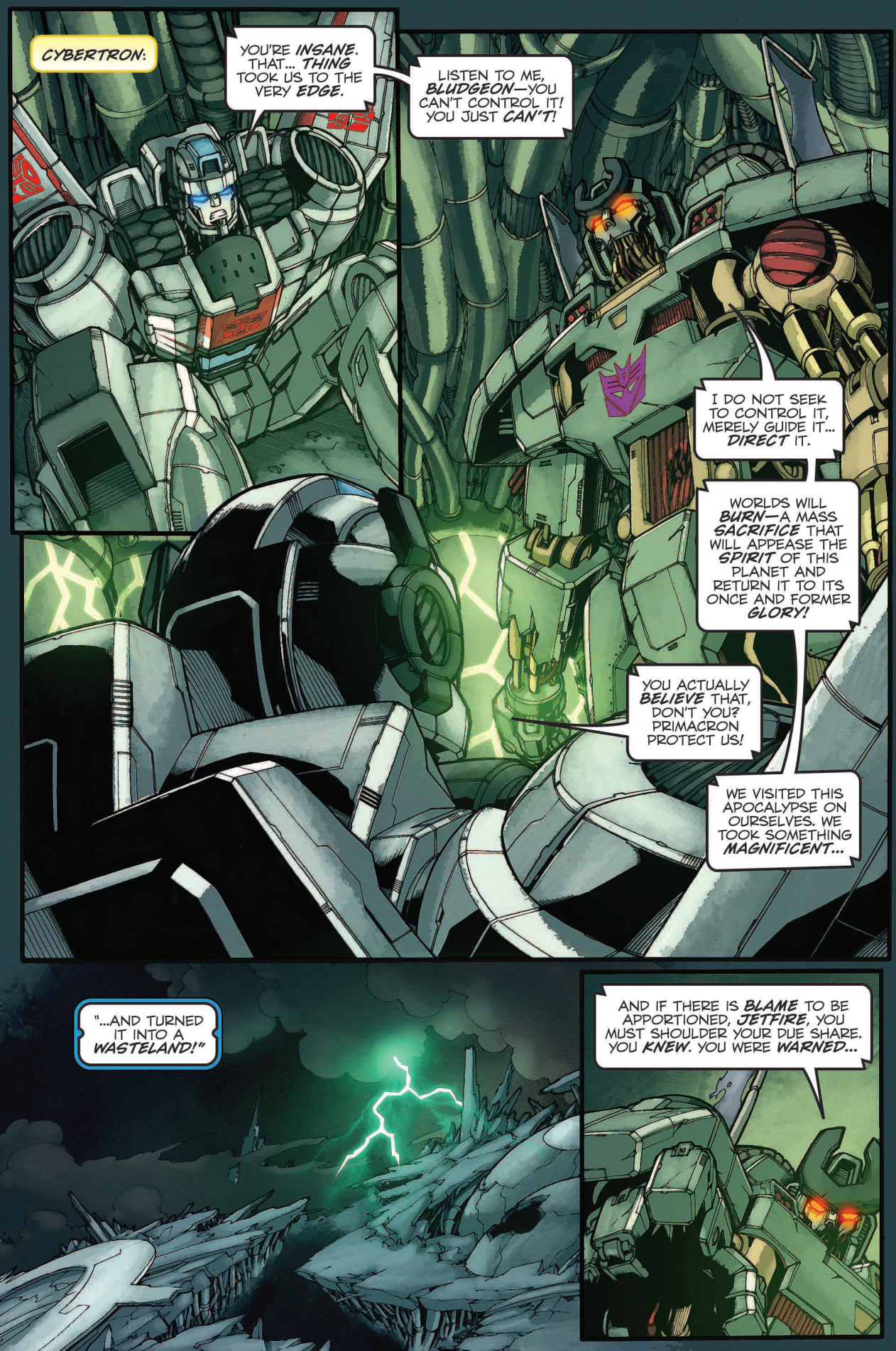

NOSECONE, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE POD. THIS IS A SURVEY SHIP... THOSE THINGS'LL GO THROUGH OUR DEFENSES LIKE THEY WEREN'T THERE!
I'M LAUNCHING A DISTRESS BUOY. SOMEONE HAS TO KNOW WHAT'S GONE ON HERE!
HURRY!
THE CRASH OF DISTANT THUNDER...

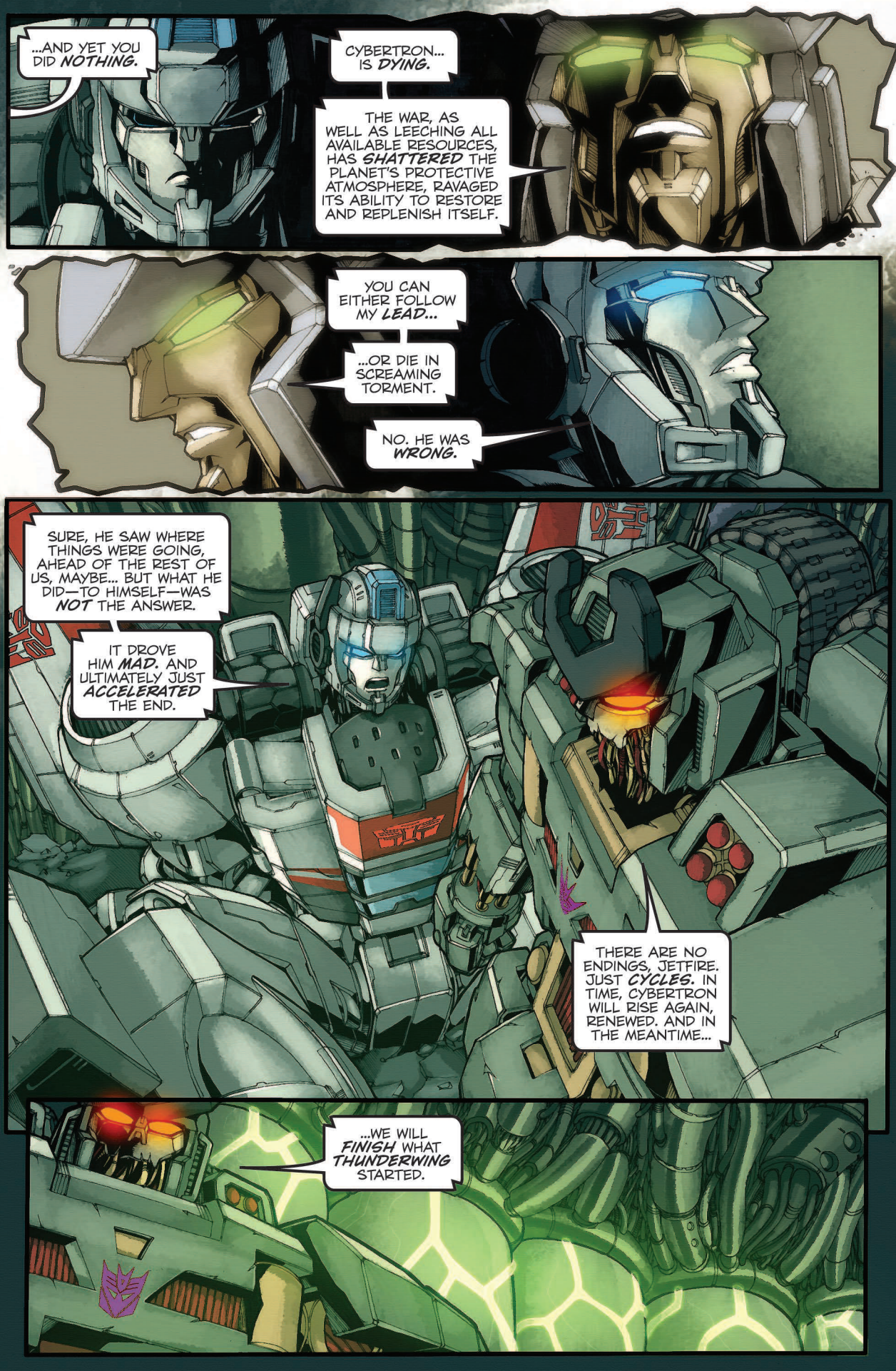

...UNLEASHES YET ANOTHER BLINDING FLASH OF BITTER MEMORY.
THERE IS NO HIDING FROM IT, FROM WHAT DID-AND DIDN'T-DO. WE USED AND ABUSED OUR WORLD, AND IN THE PROCESS CREATED A MONSTER.
OUR FOLLY, OUR IGNORANCE, OUR SHORTSIGHTEDNESS GIVEN DREAD SHAPE AND FORM.
IT TOOK EVERYTHING WE HAD AND MORE TO STOP IT, TO HALT ITS FLAILING, APOCALYPTIC ADVANCE. BUT EVEN THEN IT WAS NOT THE CREATURE THAT YIELDED...
...BUT CYBERTRON ITSELF!
AS IF BENT ON ONE LAST, SELFLESS ACT OF SACRIFICE, IT TOOK OUR SIN... AND SWALLOWED IT WHOLE.


SOME TRANSGRESSIONS, THOUGH, ARE SIMPLY TOO BIG TO STAY BURIED.
WITH DIRE CERTAINTY I KNOW THAT ONE DAY–PERHAPS LATER, PERHAPS SOONER–THE STORM WILL RISE AGAIN, AND EVEN IN THE FARTHEST CORNERS OF THE UNIVERSE...
"...WE WILL HEAR ITS NAME!"
THNNDRGG–
THNNDRGG–
HH?
WHERE?
THNNDRWGG–
THNNDRWGG–
NO...

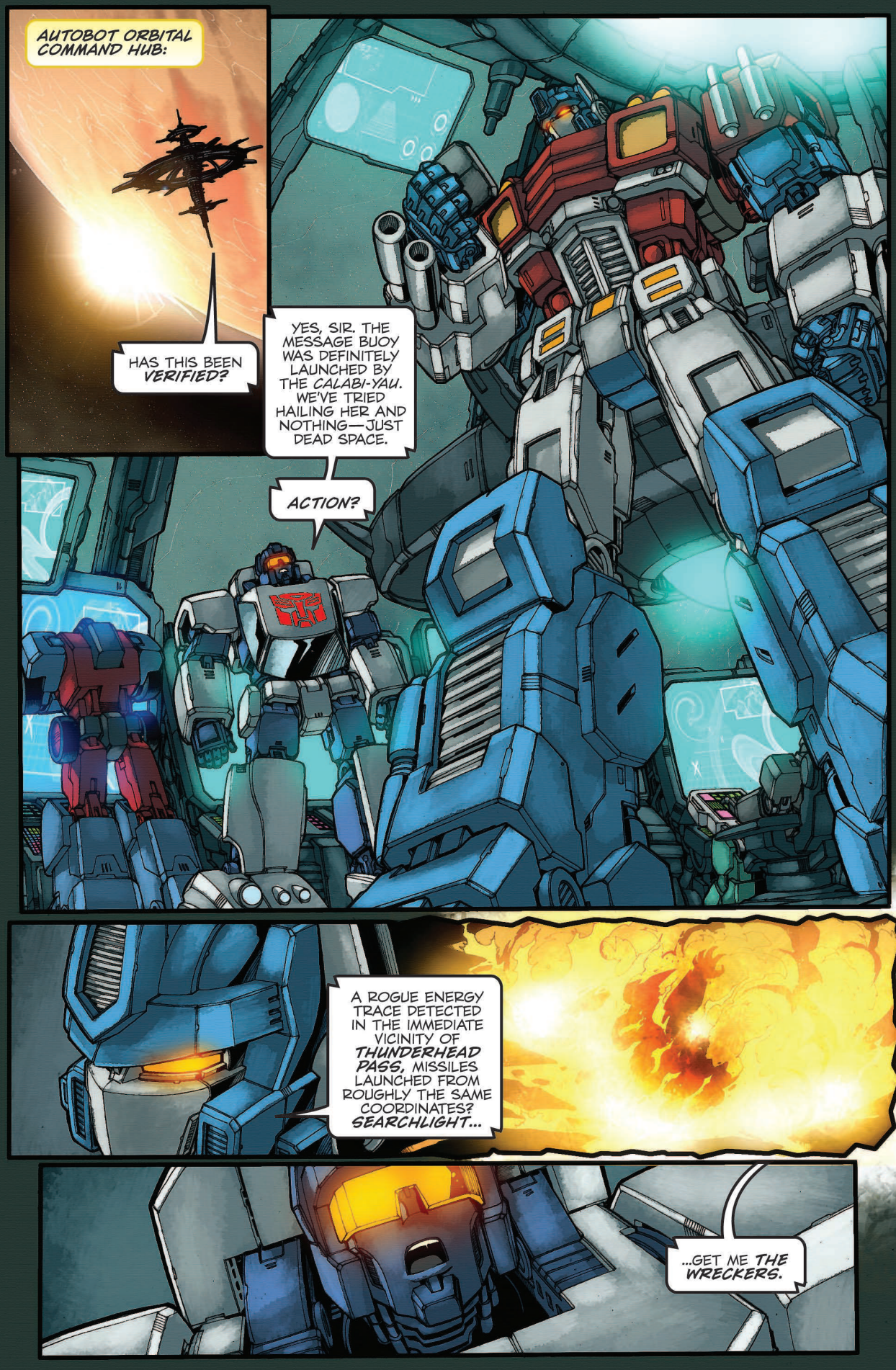

THUNDERWING!
THUNDERWING!


CHAPTER 2
NEBULOS:
WE SAW THE SIGNS, THE PORTENTS—THE DARK CLOUDS GATHERING ON OUR HORIZONS, AND YET...
...WE AVERTED OUR EYES, PRETENDED IT WASN'T COMING.
AND IN DOING SO, WE UNLEASHED A STORM OF EVEN GREATER MAGNITUDE, ONE THAT SO VERY NEARLY...
...DESTROYED US ALL.


CYBERTRON:
YOU'RE INSANE. THAT... THING TOOK US TO THE VERY EDGE.
LISTEN TO ME, BLUDGEON—YOU CAN'T CONTROL IT! YOU JUST CAN'T!
I DO NOT SEEK TO CONTROL IT, MERELY GUIDE IT... DIRECT IT.
WORLDS WILL BURN—A MASS SACRIFICE THAT WILL APPEASE THE SPIRIT OF THIS PLANET AND RETURN IT TO ITS ONCE AND FORMER GLORY!
YOU ACTUALLY BELIEVE THAT, DON'T YOU? PRIMACRON PROTECT US!
WE VISITED THIS APOCALYPSE ON OURSELVES. WE TOOK SOMETHING MAGNIFICENT...
"...AND TURNED IT INTO A WASTELAND!"
AND IF THERE IS BLAME TO BE APPORTIONED, JETFIRE, YOU MUST SHOULDER YOUR DUE SHARE. YOU KNEW. YOU WERE WARNED...

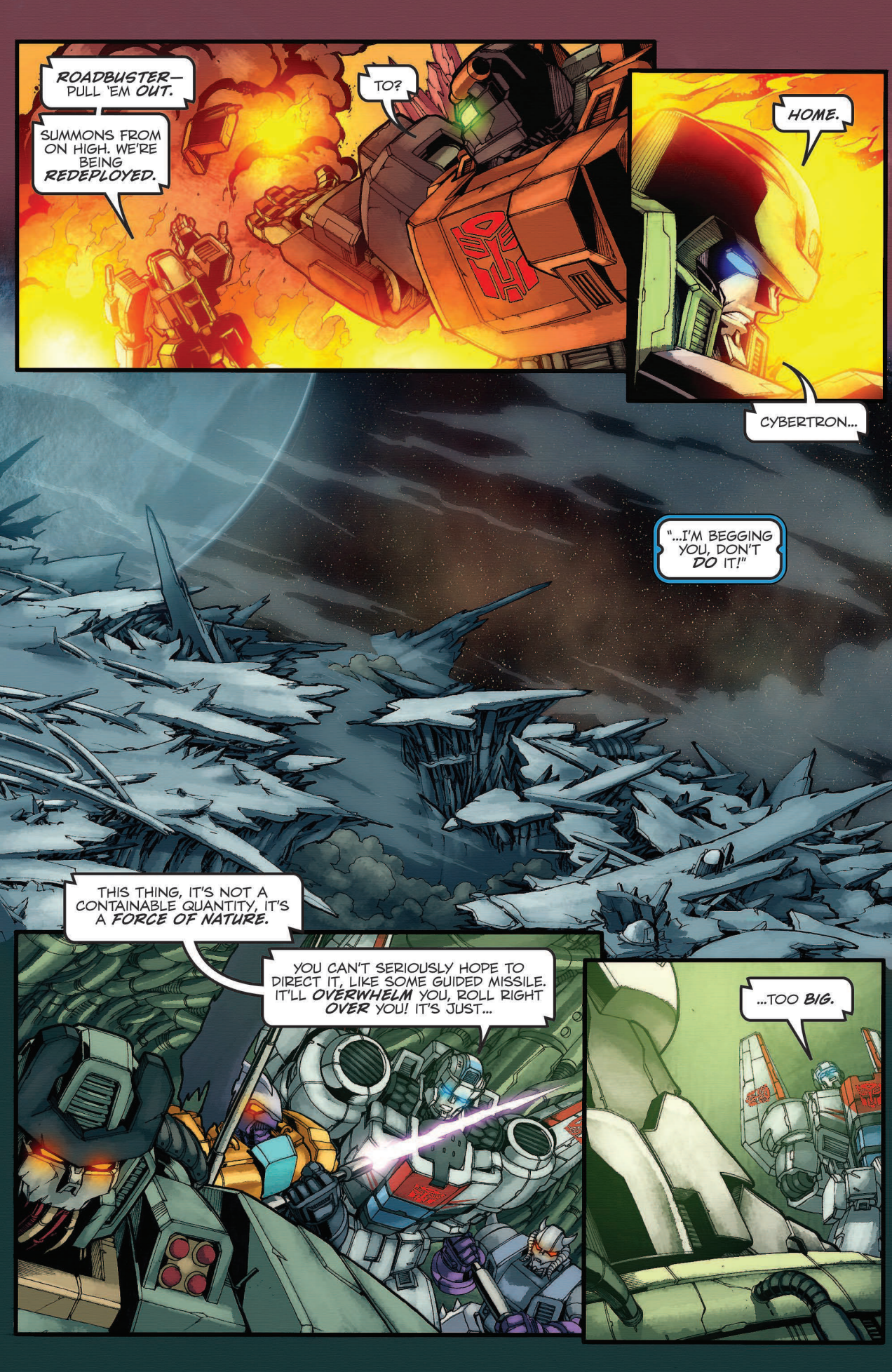

...AND YET YOU DID NOTHING.
CYBERTRON... IS DYING.
THE WAR, AS WELL AS LEECHING ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES, HAS SHATTERED THE PLANET'S PROTECTIVE ATMOSPHERE, RAVAGED ITS ABILITY TO RESTORE AND REPLENISH ITSELF.
YOU CAN EITHER FOLLOW MY LEAD...
...OR DIE IN SCREAMING TORMENT.
NO. HE WAS WRONG.
SURE, HE SAW WHERE THINGS WERE GOING, AHEAD OF THE REST OF US, MAYBE... BUT WHAT HE DID—TO HIMSELF—WAS NOT THE ANSWER.
IT DROVE HIM MAD. AND ULTIMATELY JUST ACCELERATED THE END.
THERE ARE NO ENDINGS, JETFIRE. JUST CYCLES. IN TIME, CYBERTRON WILL RISE AGAIN, RENEWED. AND IN THE MEANTIME...
...WE WILL FINISH WHAT THUNDERWING STARTED.

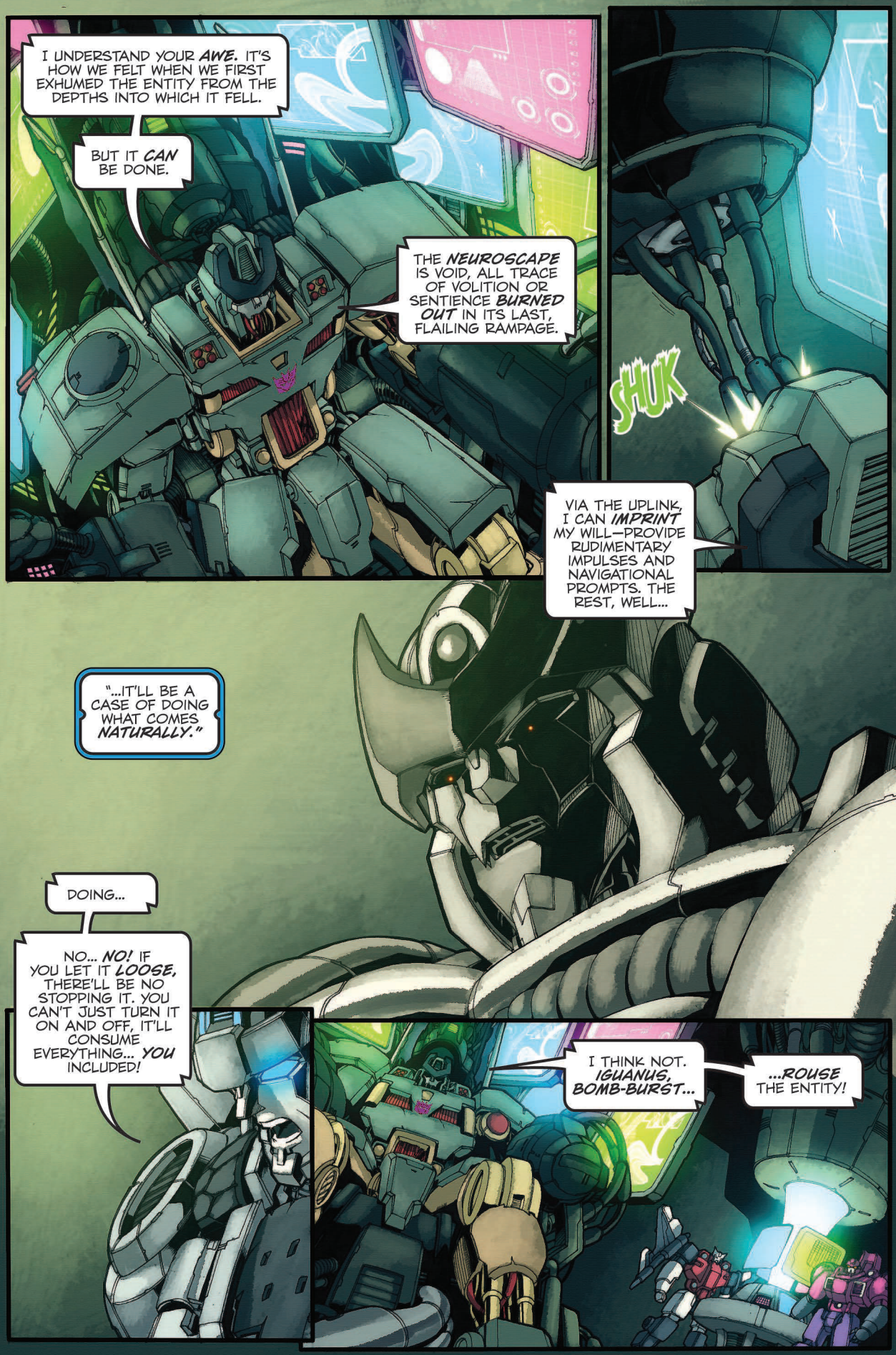

OH... NO.
YOU'RE TRYING TO REPLICATE HIS GRAFTING PROCESS, AREN'T YOU? I-I THOUGHT I RECOGNIZED THE TECHNOLOGY! BLUDGEON, YOU... CAN'T! YOU MUSTN'T—
I CAN. I HAVE. RIGHT NOW...
...YOUR COMPATRIOTS ARE PROVIDING THE NECESSARY RAW MATERIALS. AND SOON...
...WE WILL ALL BE SO MUCH MORE THAN WE ARE NOW!
WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THOSE WHO PERISHED ABOARD THE CALABI-YAU...
"...GOT OFF LIGHTLY!"

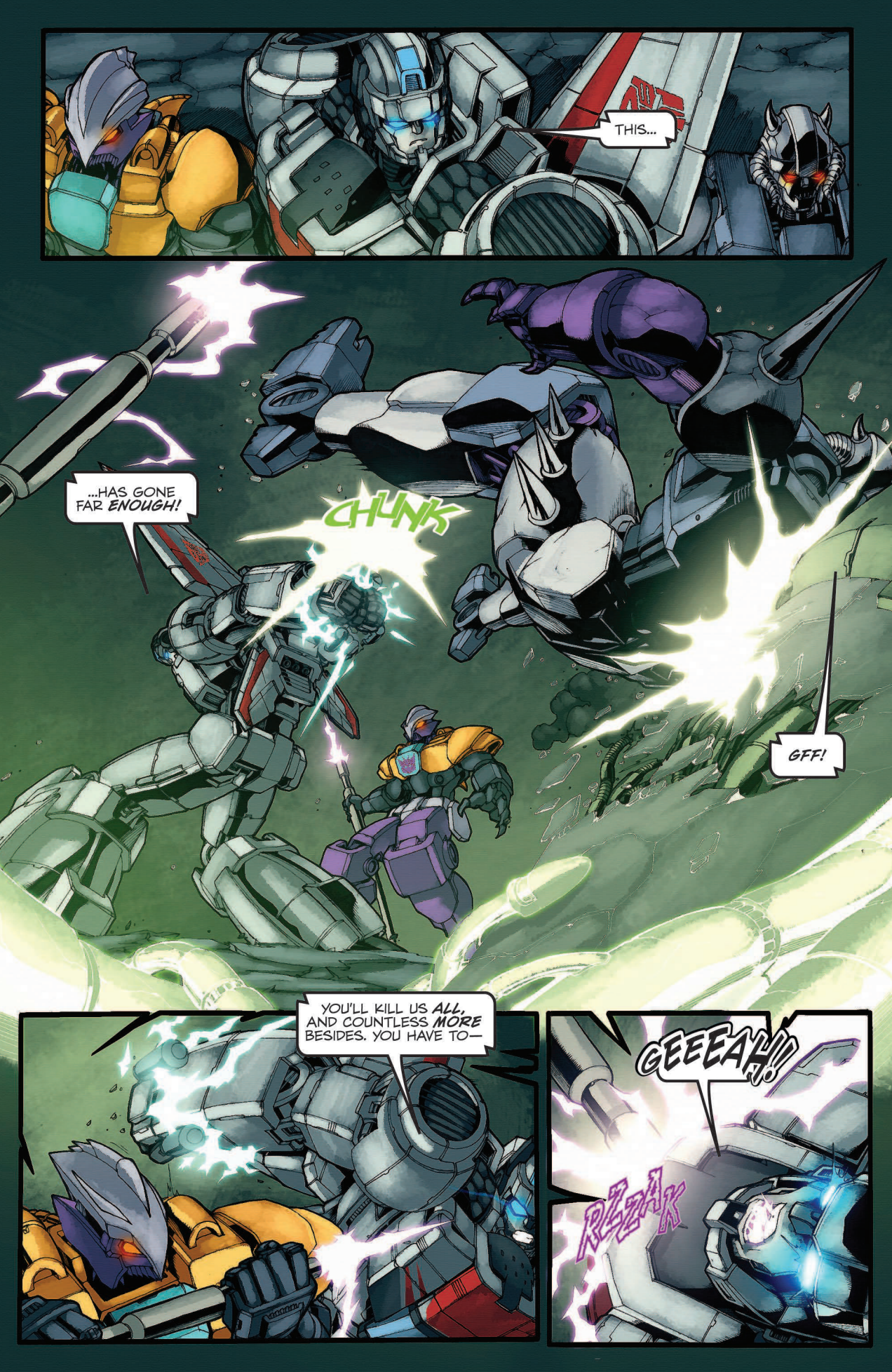

AUTOBOT ORBITAL COMMAND HUB:
HAS THIS BEEN VERIFIED?
YES, SIR. THE MESSAGE BUOY WAS DEFINITELY LAUNCHED BY THE CALABI-YAU. WE'VE TRIED HAILING HER AND NOTHING—JUST DEAD SPACE.
ACTION?
A ROGUE ENERGY TRACE DETECTED IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF THUNDERHEAD PASS, MISSILES LAUNCHED FROM ROUGHLY THE SAME COORDINATES? SEARCHLIGHT...
...GET ME THE WRECKERS.

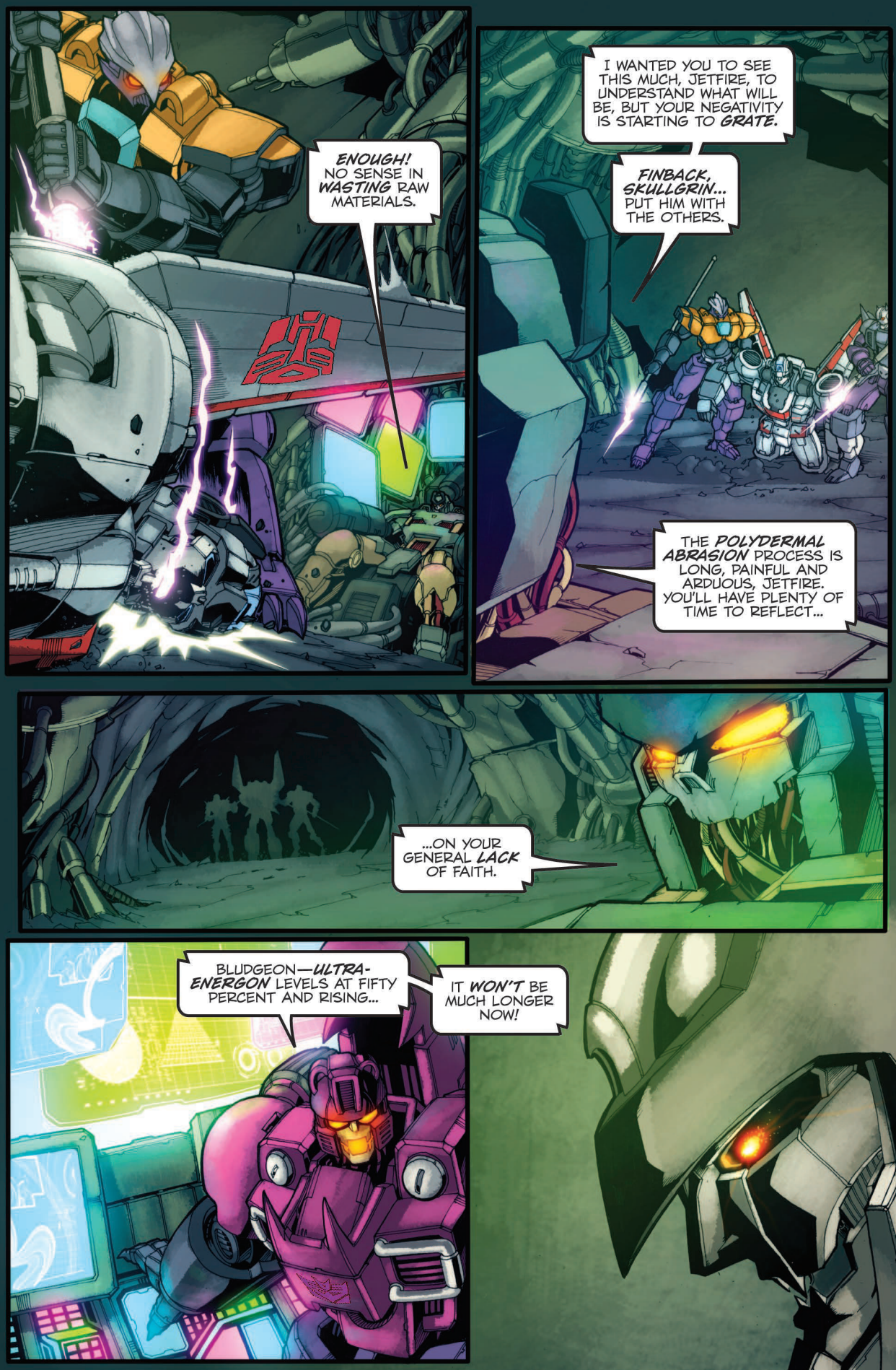

VARAS CENTRALUS, IN THE KOL SYSTEM:
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, IT'S A LOST CAUSE? OF COURSE IT'S A LOST CAUSE.
THAT'S WHY WE'RE HERE!
SAY AGAIN?
NO. I DON'T CARE IF IT'S PHASE SIXTY! WE DON'T CEDE THIS WORLD TO THE DECEPTICONS WITHOUT ONE HECK OF A KICK AND STRUGGLE. LISTEN, BLUESTREAK, GET YOUR SQUAD OUT HERE NOW...
THUWMM
THUWMM
"...OR YOU'LL MISS ALL THE FUN!"


SCOOP—HOW'S MY STORM TUNNEL COMING?
SLOWLY, SPRINGER, SLOWLY. THE LOCAL ROCK IS VERY DENSE. PRIMACRON KNOWS HOW THE DECEPTICONS GOT THEIR SIEGE MODE ARMATURE PLACED!
HONEST, VIRTUOUS EFFORT, SCOOP. TELL TWIN TWIST TO KEEP AT IT.
SPRINGER!
OPS-COMMAND! IT'S URGENT.
ISN'T IT ALWAYS?
HH. GIVE IT HERE.
YES?
NO.
DIRECT FROM PRIME, YOU SAY? WHAT ABOUT VARAS?
ONE BIG DISASTER AREA. BUT THAT'S NEVER STOPPED US IN THE PAST.
OKAY. BUT I HATE LEAVING A BATTLE HALF-FOUGHT.


ROADBUSTER— PULL 'EM OUT.
SUMMONS FROM ON HIGH. WE'RE BEING REDEPLOYED.
TO?
HOME.
CYBERTRON...
"...I'M BEGGING YOU, DON'T DO IT!"
THIS THING, IT'S NOT A CONTAINABLE QUANTITY, IT'S A FORCE OF NATURE.
YOU CAN'T SERIOUSLY HOPE TO DIRECT IT, LIKE SOME GUIDED MISSILE. IT'LL OVERWHELM YOU, ROLL RIGHT OVER YOU! IT'S JUST...
...TOO BIG.

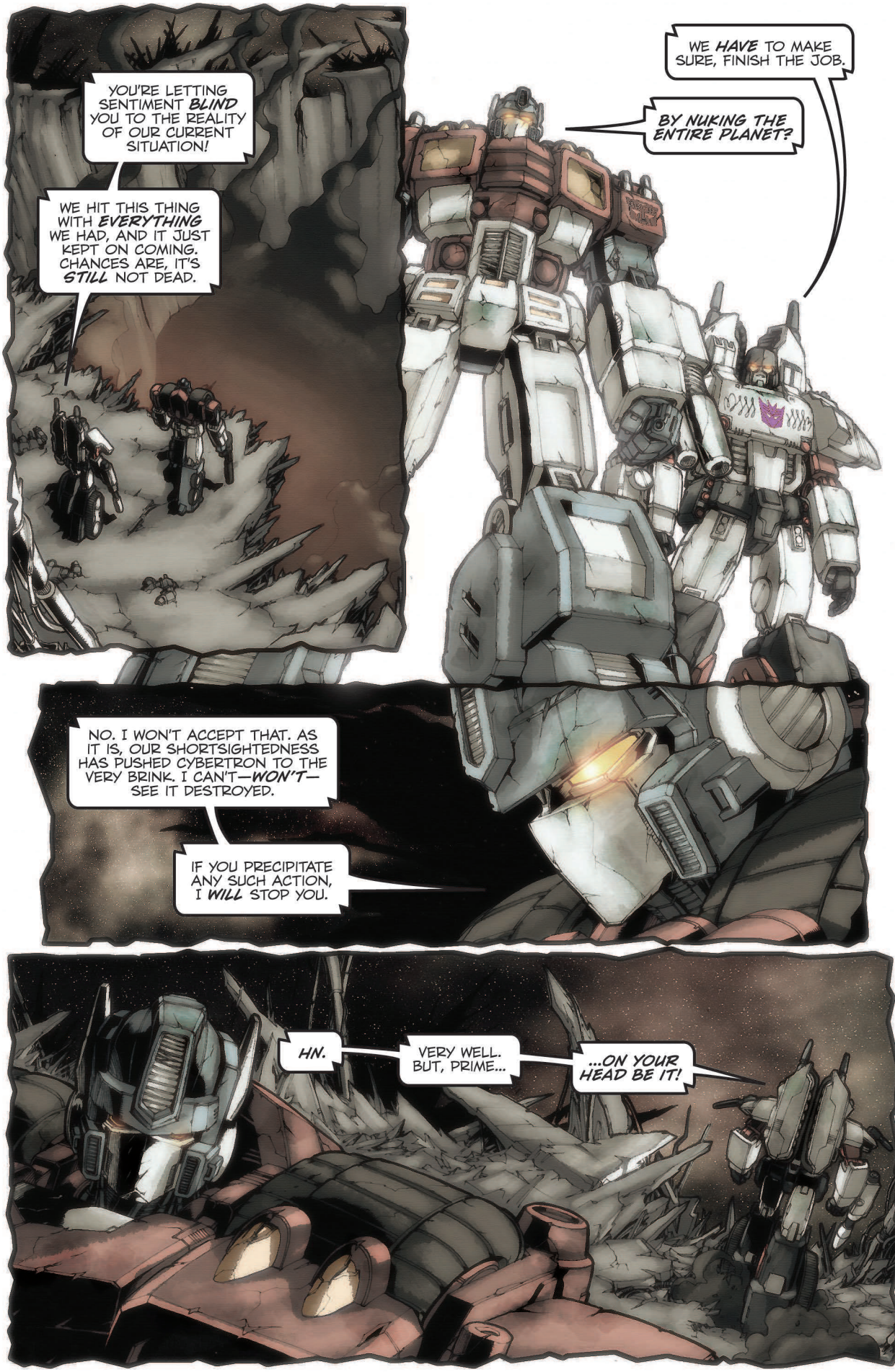

I UNDERSTAND YOUR AWE. IT'S HOW WE FELT WHEN WE FIRST EXHUMED THE ENTITY FROM THE DEPTHS INTO WHICH IT FELL.
BUT IT CAN BE DONE.
THE NEUROSCAPE IS VOID, ALL TRACE OF VOLITION OR SENTIENCE BURNED OUT IN ITS LAST, FLAILING RAMPAGE.
SHUK
VIA THE UPLINK, I CAN IMPRINT MY WILL—PROVIDE RUDIMENTARY IMPULSES AND NAVIGATIONAL PROMPTS. THE REST, WELL...
"...IT'LL BE A CASE OF DOING WHAT COMES NATURALLY."
DOING...
NO... NO! IF YOU LET IT LOOSE, THERE'LL BE NO STOPPING IT. YOU CAN'T JUST TURN IT ON AND OFF, IT'LL CONSUME EVERYTHING... YOU INCLUDED!
I THINK NOT. IGUANUS, BOMB-BURST...
...ROUSE THE ENTITY!

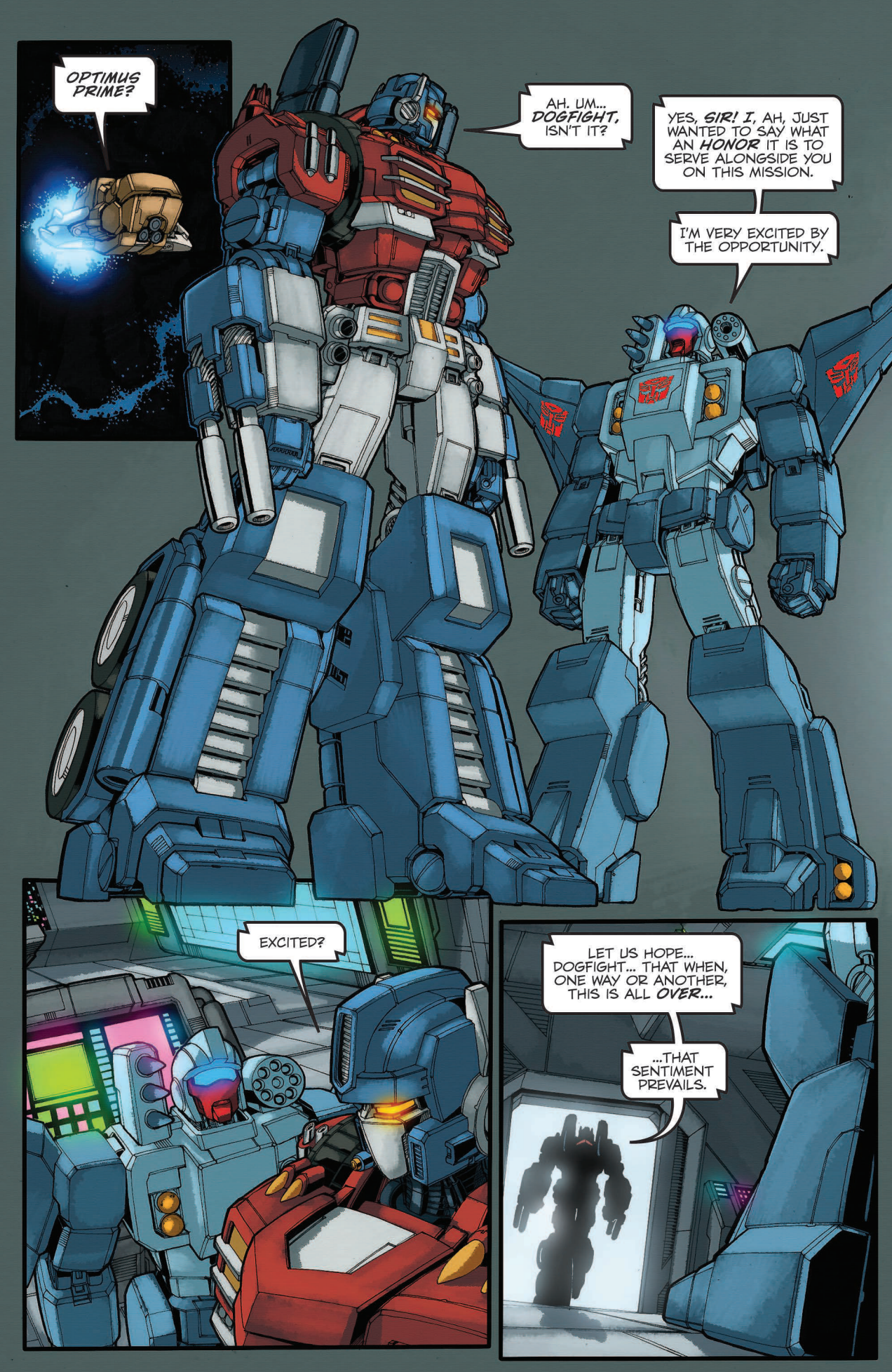

THIS...
...HAS GONE FAR ENOUGH!
CHUNK
GFF!
YOU'LL KILL US ALL, AND COUNTLESS MORE BESIDES. YOU HAVE TO—
GEEEAH!
RZZK

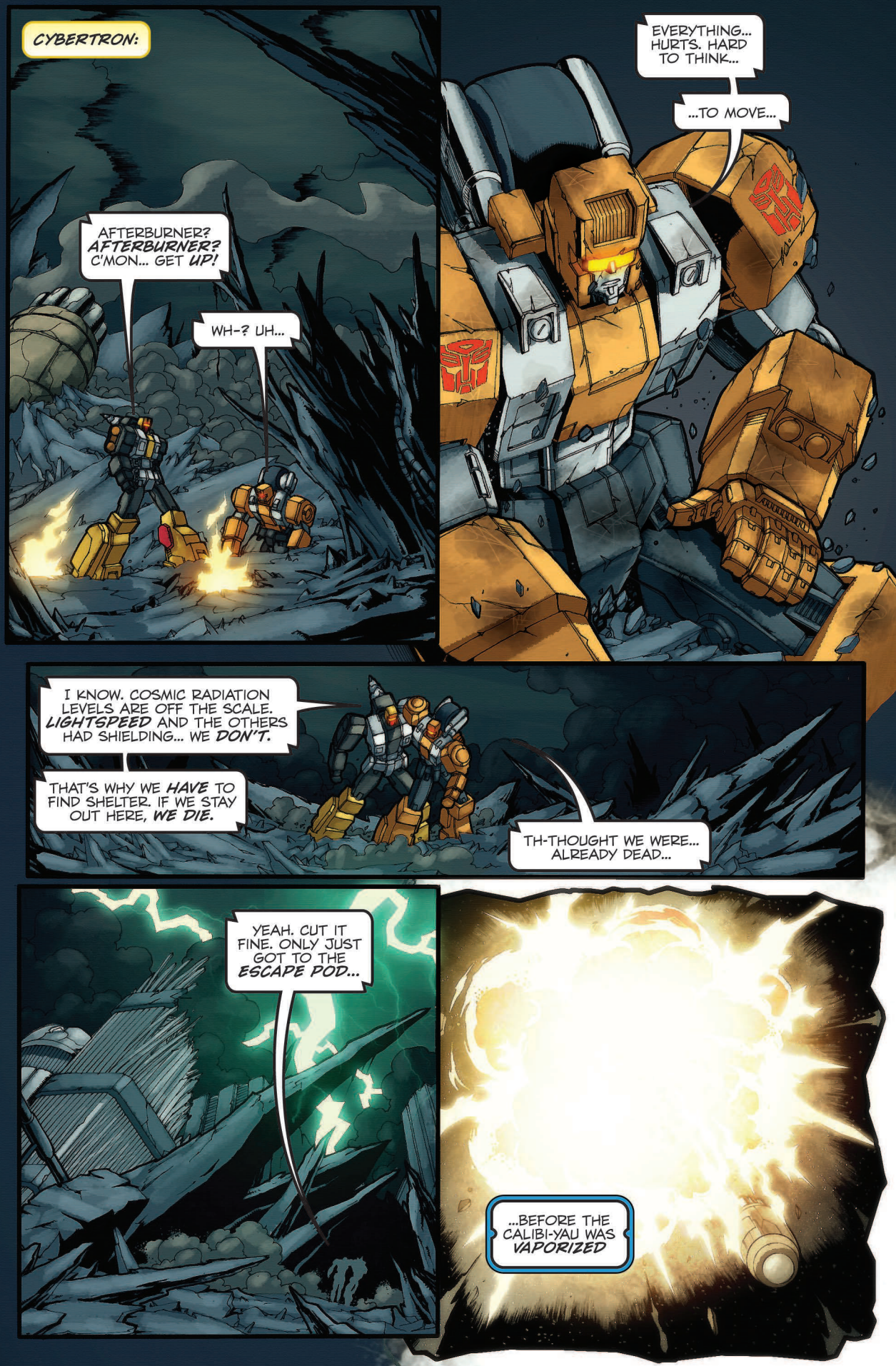

ENOUGH! NO SENSE IN WASTING RAW MATERIALS.
I WANTED YOU TO SEE THIS MUCH, JETFIRE, TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WILL BE, BUT YOUR NEGATIVITY IS STARTING TO GRATE.
FINBACK, SKULLGRIN... PUT HIM WITH THE OTHERS.
THE POLYDERMAL ABRASION PROCESS IS LONG, PAINFUL AND ARDUOUS, JETFIRE. YOU'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO REFLECT...
...ON YOUR GENERAL LACK OF FAITH.
BLUDGEON—ULTRA-ENERGON LEVELS AT FIFTY PERCENT AND RISING...
IT WON'T BE MUCH LONGER NOW!

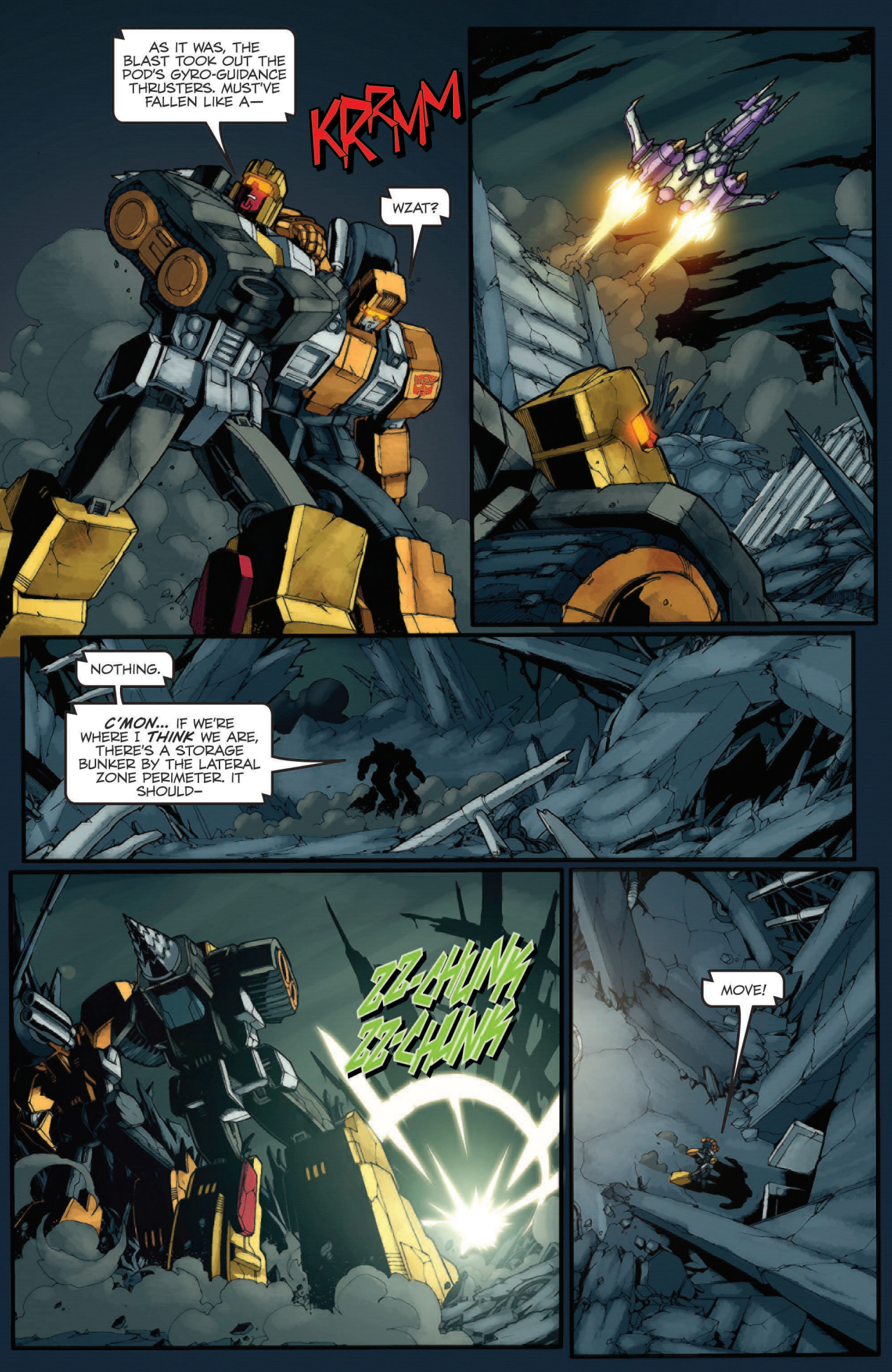

AUTOBOT BATTLECRUISER XANTIUM:
THUNDERWING. HNH.
NEVER DID WANT TO LIVE FOREVER.
THAT'S NOT CONFIRMED, SPRINGER. BUT, GIVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES, I'M TAKING NO CHANCES.
OUR E.T.A IS NINETEEN MEGACYCLES. YOU?
ABOUT THAT. WE'LL RENDEZVOUS ON LUNAR TWO'S DARKSIDE.
FINE. LOOK, PRIME... IF IT IS THUNDERWING, CONVENTIONAL WEAPONRY WON'T CUT IT, WE KNOW THAT FROM BITTER EXPERIENCE.
IF ALL ELSE FAILS...
...I SAY WE BURN WHAT'S LEFT OF CYBERTRON AND THAT MONSTROSITY ALONG WITH IT!


I'LL...
...TAKE THAT UNDER ADVISEMENT.
PRIME OUT.
"PRIME. LISTEN TO ME...
"...YOU HAVE TO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE.

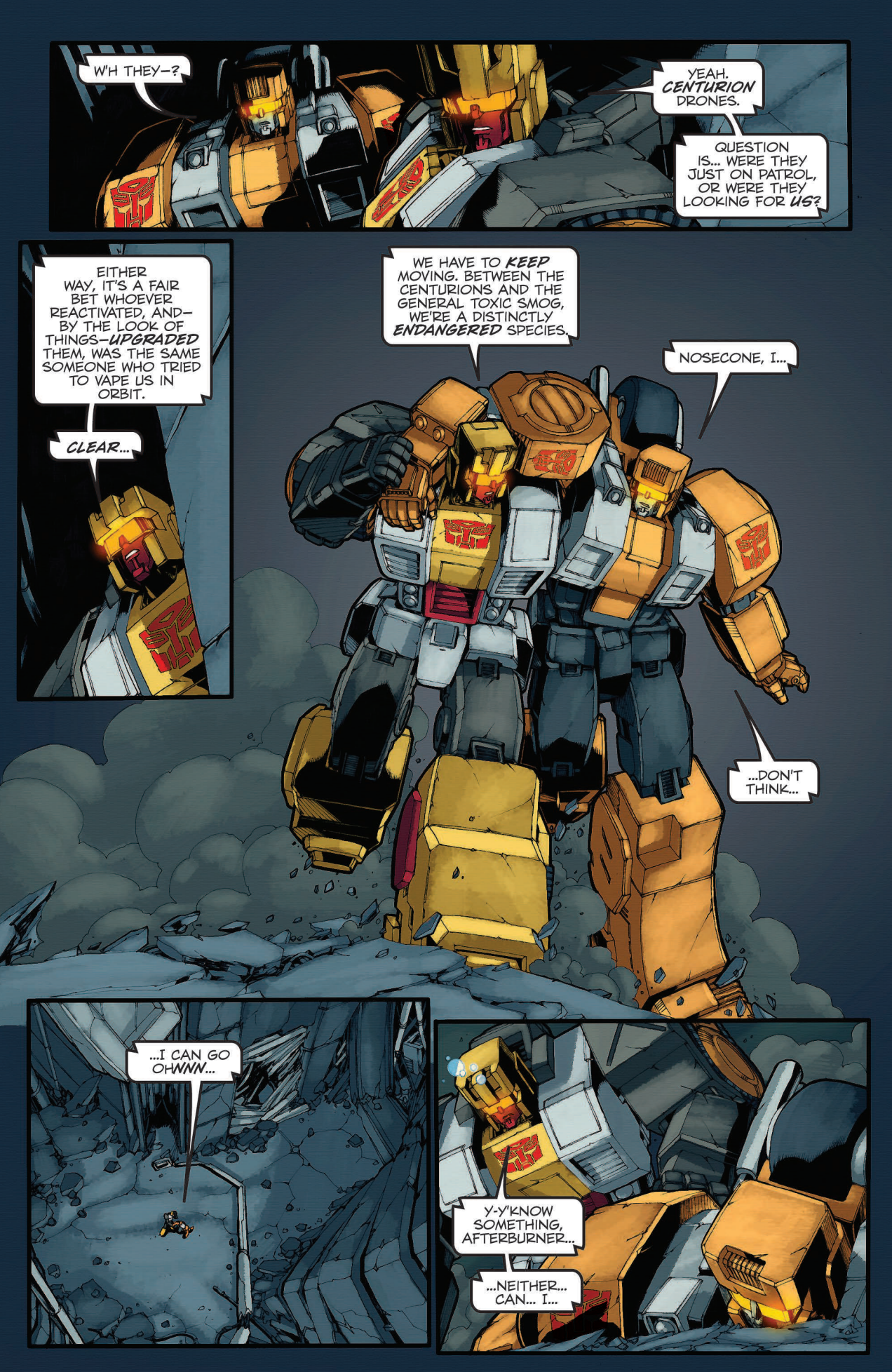

YOU'RE LETTING SENTIMENT BLIND YOU TO THE REALITY OF OUR CURRENT SITUATION!
WE HIT THIS THING WITH EVERYTHING WE HAD, AND IT JUST KEPT ON COMING. CHANCES ARE, IT'S STILL NOT DEAD.
WE HAVE TO MAKE SURE, FINISH THE JOB.
BY NUKING THE ENTIRE PLANET?
NO. I WON'T ACCEPT THAT. AS IT IS, OUR SHORTSIGHTEDNESS HAS PUSHED CYBERTRON TO THE VERY BRINK. I CAN'T—WON'T—SEE IT DESTROYED.
IF YOU PRECIPITATE ANY SUCH ACTION, I WILL STOP YOU.
HN.
VERY WELL. BUT, PRIME...
...ON YOUR HEAD BE IT!


OPTIMUS PRIME?
AH. UM... DOGFIGHT, ISN'T IT?
YES, SIR! I, AH, JUST WANTED TO SAY WHAT AN HONOR IT IS TO SERVE ALONGSIDE YOU ON THIS MISSION.
I'M VERY EXCITED BY THE OPPORTUNITY.
EXCITED?
LET US HOPE... DOGFIGHT... THAT WHEN, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THIS IS ALL OVER...
...THAT SENTIMENT PREVAILS.


CYBERTRON:
AFTERBURNER? AFTERBURNER? C'MON... GET UP!
WH-? UH...
EVERYTHING... HURTS. HARD TO THINK...
...TO MOVE...
I KNOW. COSMIC RADIATION LEVELS ARE OFF THE SCALE. LIGHTSPEED AND THE OTHERS HAD SHIELDING... WE DON'T.
THAT'S WHY WE HAVE TO FIND SHELTER. IF WE STAY OUT HERE, WE DIE.
TH-THOUGHT WE WERE... ALREADY DEAD...
YEAH. CUT IT FINE. ONLY JUST GOT TO THE ESCAPE POD...
...BEFORE THE CALIBI-YAU WAS VAPORIZED


AS IT WAS, THE BLAST TOOK OUT THE POD'S GYRO-GUIDANCE THRUSTERS. MUST'VE FALLEN LIKE A—
KRRMM
WZAT?
NOTHING.
C'MON... IF WE'RE WHERE I THINK WE ARE, THERE'S A STORAGE BUNKER BY THE LATERAL ZONE PERIMETER. IT SHOULD—
ZZ-CHUNK ZZ-CHUNK
MOVE!


WH—?
SHH!
ZZ-CHUNK
ZZ-CHUNK
ZZ-
-CHUNK
ZZ-CHUNK


W'H THEY–?
YEAH. CENTURION DRONES.
QUESTION IS... WERE THEY JUST ON PATROL, OR WERE THEY LOOKING FOR US?
EITHER WAY, IT'S A FAIR BET WHOEVER REACTIVATED, AND– BY THE LOOK OF THINGS–UPGRADED THEM, WAS THE SAME SOMEONE WHO TRIED TO VAPE US IN ORBIT.
CLEAR...
WE HAVE TO KEEP MOVING. BETWEEN THE CENTURIONS AND THE GENERAL TOXIC SMOG, WE'RE A DISTINCTLY ENDANGERED SPECIES.
NOSECONE, I...
...DON'T THINK...
...I CAN GO OHNNN...
Y-Y'KNOW SOMETHING, AFTERBURNER...
...NEITHER... CAN... I...


ZZ-CHUNK
ZZ-CHUNK
OHHH...
...FRAG!
NEBULOS:
"RUCKUS?"

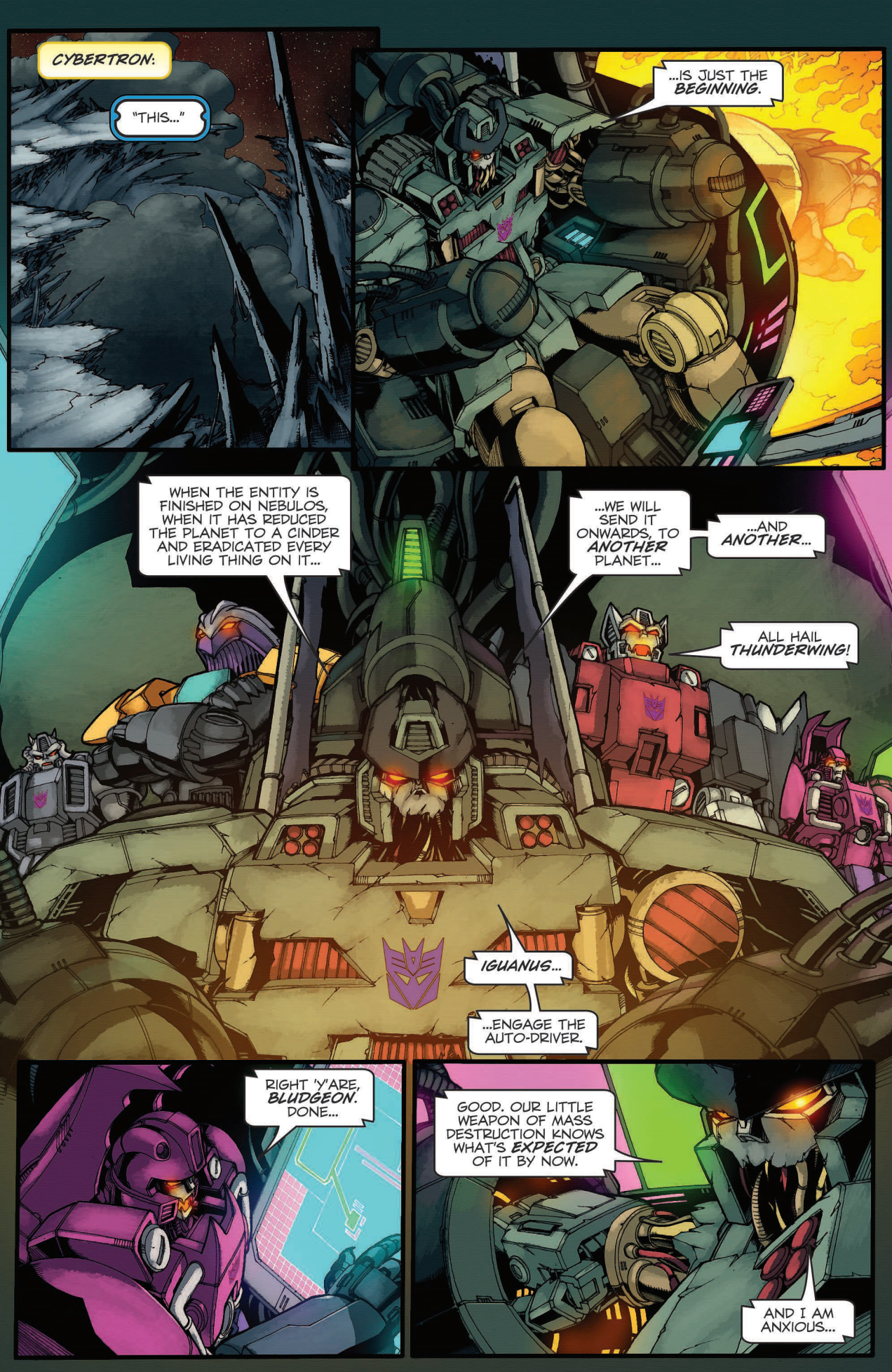

DECEPTICON INFILTRATION UNIT:
WHATEVER IT IS, DARKWING, IT'S CLOSING FAST.
NEBULAN?
NEGATIVE. TOO BIG, TOO SOPHISTICATED. IT EMERGED THROUGH A FOLDSPACE TRANSITION, SO IT MUST HAVE SOME KIND OF INTERSTELLAR DRIVE.
SHOULD HAVE VISUAL ANY MOMENT NOW...
WE SAW THE SIGNS, THE PORTENTS—THE DARK CLOUDS GATHERING ON OUR HORIZONS, AND YET WE AVERTED OUR EYES, PRETENDED IT WASN'T COMING.
AND IN DOING SO WE UNLEASHED A STORM OF EVEN GREATER MAGNITUDE, ONE THAT SO VERY NEARLY DESTROYED US ALL.
AND NOW, IT SEEMS...

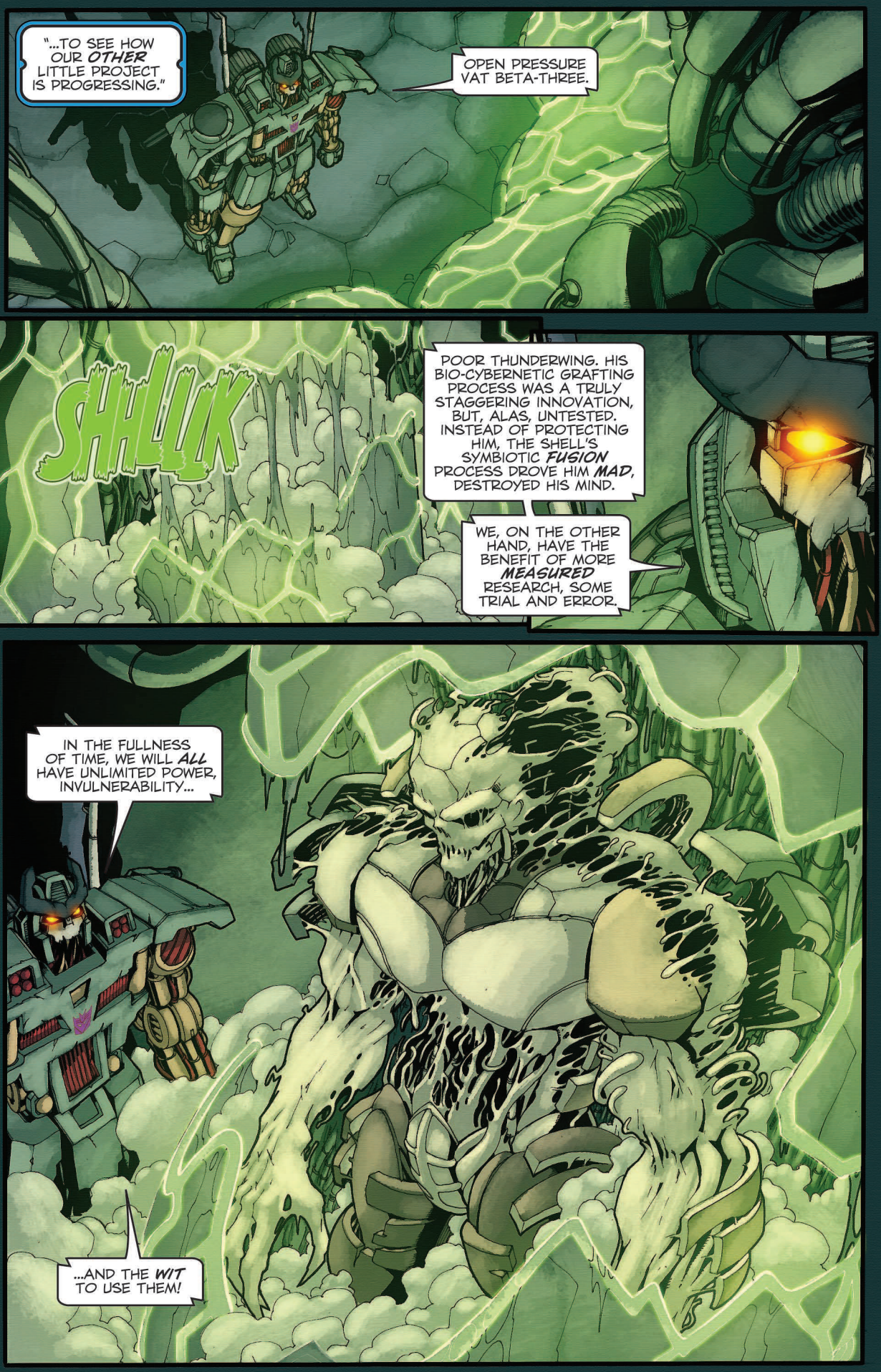

...OTHERS SHALL *REAP* THE WHIRLWIND.

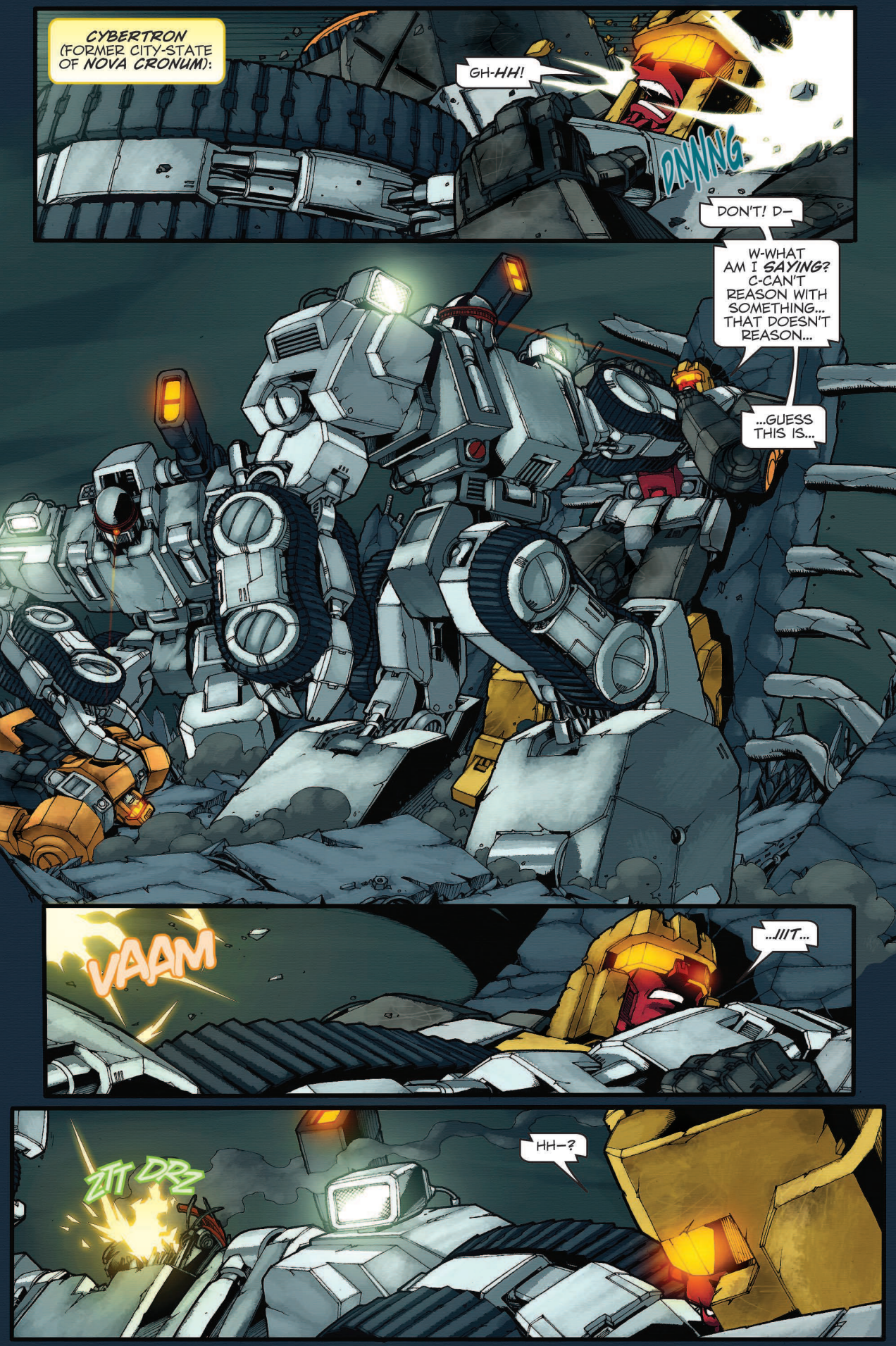

CHAPTER 3
NEBULOS:
IT IS A CLEANSING, PURIFYING FIRE, A TORRID TEMPEST, SWEEPING AWAY THE PETRIFIED REMEMBRANCE OF SINS PAST.
A SWORD, FORGED FROM PURE ANARCHY AND BEDLAM, TO SCRIBE BLOODY TRIBUTE TO ANGRY POWERS-THAT-BE.
JUDGMENT. NEMESIS. ARMAGEDDON.
APOCALYPSE.

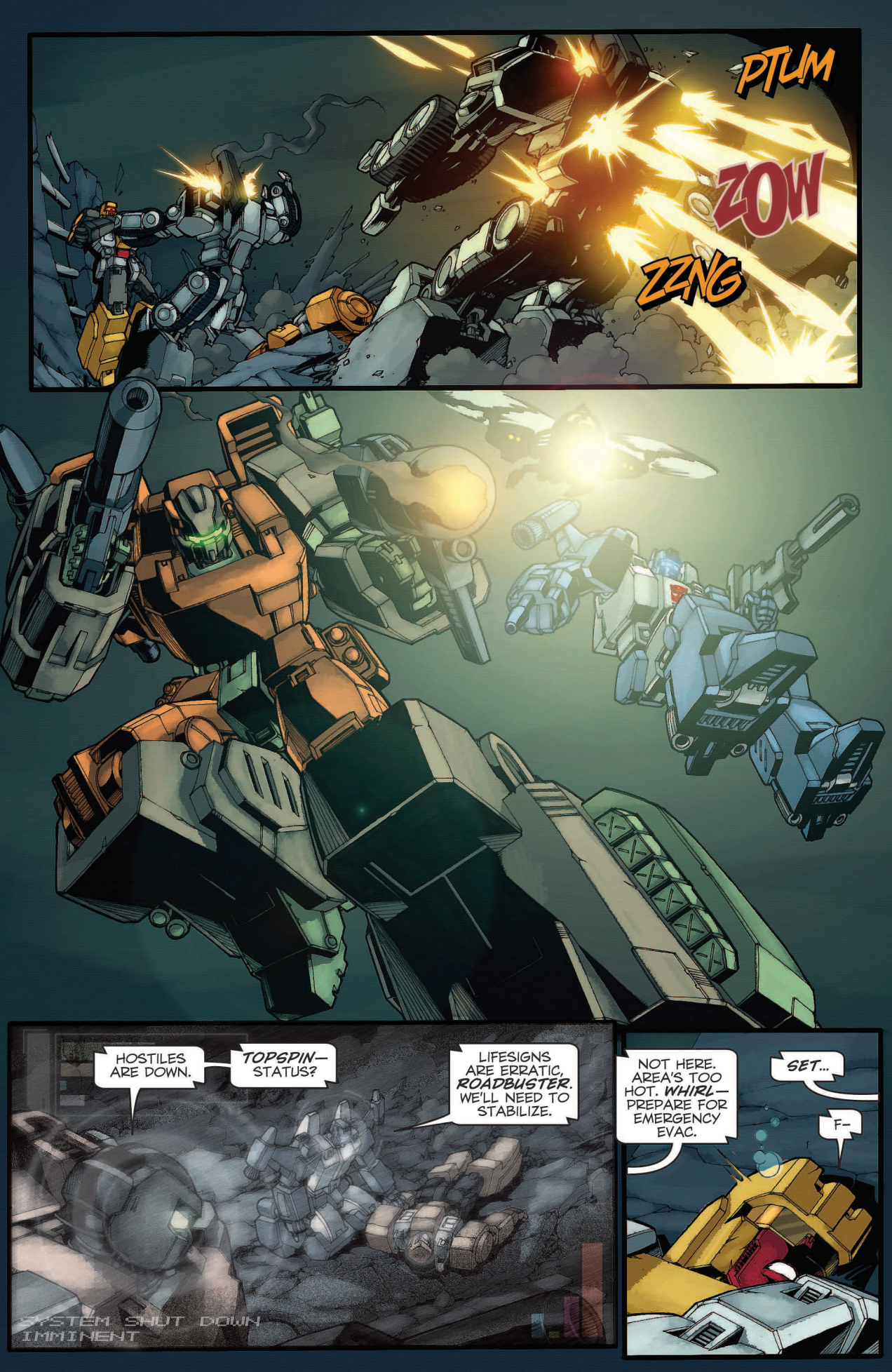

NOW.
KRUMMP


WORLDS WILL *BURN.* AND FROM THE ASHES OF FUNERAL PYRES LIT THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE GALAXY...
FAAASH
...A NEW CYBERTRON WILL *ARISE!*


CYBERTRON:
"THIS..."
...IS JUST THE BEGINNING.
WHEN THE ENTITY IS FINISHED ON NEBULOS, WHEN IT HAS REDUCED THE PLANET TO A CINDER AND ERADICATED EVERY LIVING THING ON IT...
...WE WILL SEND IT ONWARDS, TO ANOTHER PLANET...
...AND ANOTHER...
ALL HAIL THUNDERWING!
IGUANUS...
...ENGAGE THE AUTO-DRIVER.
RIGHT 'Y'ARE, BLUDGEON. DONE...
GOOD. OUR LITTLE WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION KNOWS WHAT'S EXPECTED OF IT BY NOW.
AND I AM ANXIOUS...

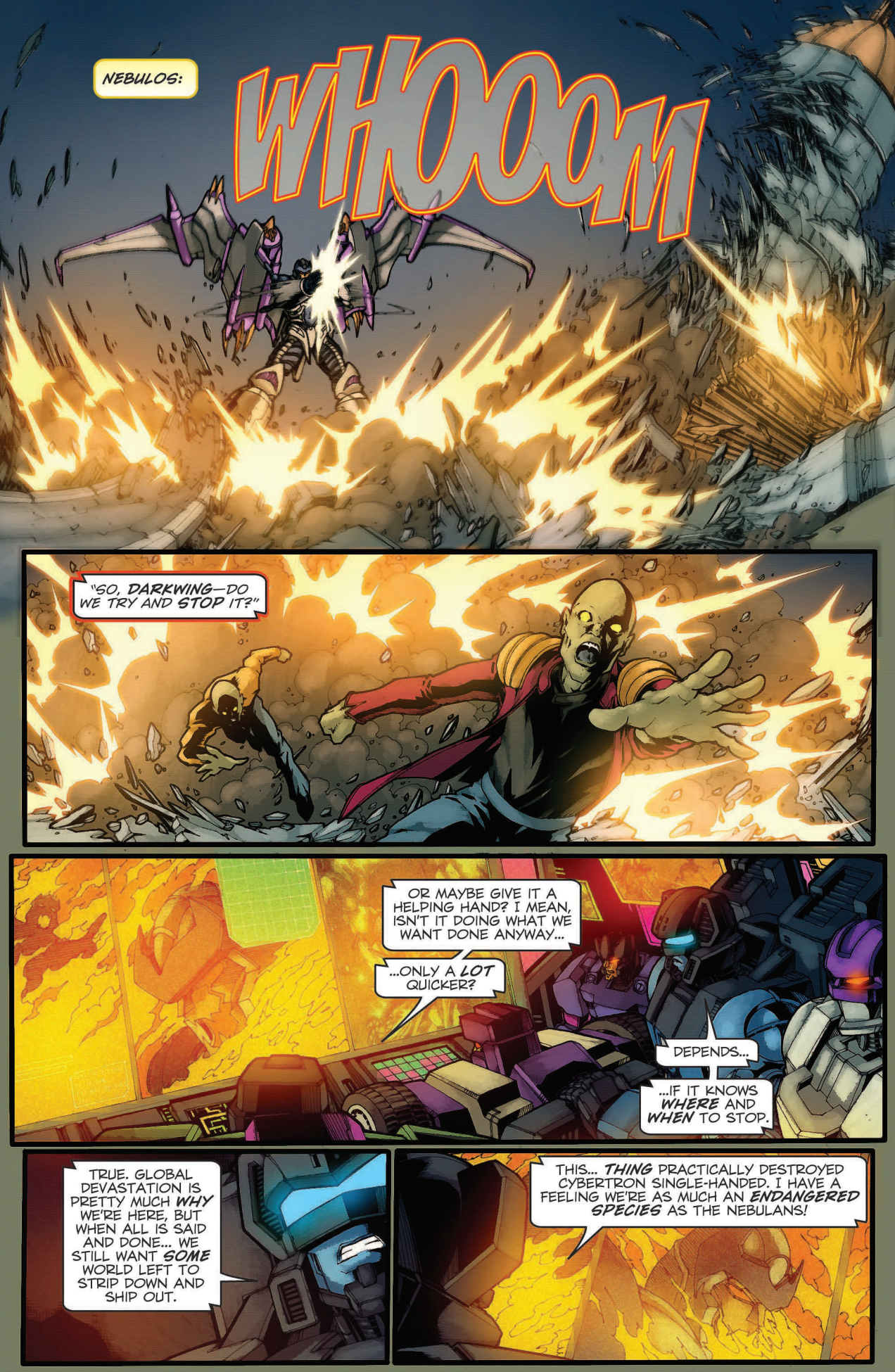

"...TO SEE HOW OUR OTHER LITTLE PROJECT IS PROGRESSING."
OPEN PRESSURE VAT BETA-THREE.
SHLLIK
POOR THUNDERWING. HIS BIO-CYBERNETIC GRAFTING PROCESS WAS A TRULY STAGGERING INNOVATION, BUT, ALAS, UNTESTED. INSTEAD OF PROTECTING HIM, THE SHELL'S SYMBIOTIC FUSION PROCESS DROVE HIM MAD, DESTROYED HIS MIND.
WE, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE THE BENEFIT OF MORE MEASURED RESEARCH, SOME TRIAL AND ERROR.
IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME, WE WILL ALL HAVE UNLIMITED POWER, INVULNERABILITY...
...AND THE WIT TO USE THEM!

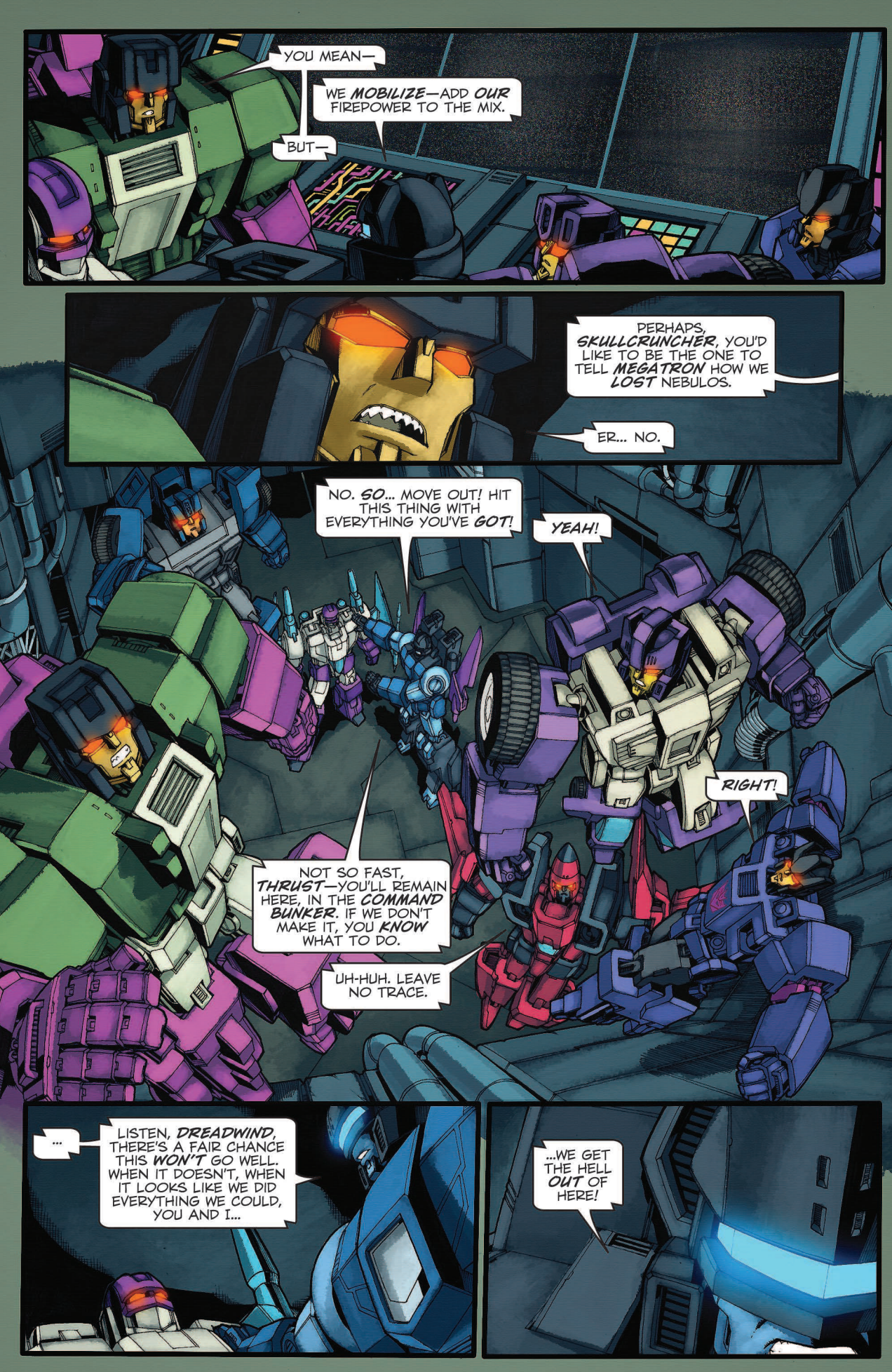

CYBERTRON (FORMER CITY-STATE OF NOVA CRONUM):
GH-HH!
DNNNG
DON'T! D—
W-WHAT AM I SAYING? C-CAN'T REASON WITH SOMETHING... THAT DOESN'T REASON...
...GUESS THIS IS...
VAAM
...///T...
ZIT DRZ
HH—?


PTUM
ZOW
ZZNG
HOSTILES ARE DOWN.
TOPSPIN— STATUS?
LIFESIGNS ARE ERRATIC, ROADBUSTER. WE'LL NEED TO STABILIZE.
SYSTEM SHUT DOWN IMMINENT
NOT HERE. AREA'S TOO HOT. WHIRL— PREPARE FOR EMERGENCY EVAC.
SET...
F-


NOSECONE?
NOSECONE!
WH-UH? TOP... SPIN? TH—
—THEN... OUR MESSAGE GOT THROUGH?
SYSTEMS RESTORED
EXTERNAL RADIATION CLOSELY DETECTED
BIG TIME!
MADE EVERYONE SIT UP AND PAY ATTENTION, I CAN TELL YOU!
SO-SO I SEE...
AFTERBURNER?


TOOK A BIGGER HIT OF COSMIC RADIATION THAN YOU DID—HE'LL BE OUT FOR A WHILE LONGER. LUCKY WE ARRIVED WHEN WE DID...
...WHOEVER REBOOTED THOSE OLD CENTURION DRONES WASN'T TAKING PRISONERS.
WHERE... ARE WE?
OLD BORDER FORTIFICATION EAST OF THUNDERHEAD PASS, SUB-LEVEL. WE'RE GOING IN!
JUST ANOTHER FEW CYCLES, PRIME.
WE'RE COMING IN AT AN OBLIQUE ANGLE, TO AVOID THEIR SENSOR FILAMENTS. TAKES LONGER, BUT WE'LL BE RIGHT ON TOP OF THEM BEFORE THEY KNOW IT!
UNDERSTOOD, SPRINGER. CARRY ON...
THEN YOU'VE FOUND THEM, JETFIRE AND THE OTHERS?
WE'VE GOT A LOCATIONAL FIX ON SOME KIND OF SUB-SURFACE COMPLEX. WHAT—OR WHO—WE'LL FIND DOWN THERE IS ANYONE'S GUESS.
I—I'M COMING WITH YOU. I—EHH...
UH-UH. LEAVE THIS...
...TO THE PROFESSIONALS.

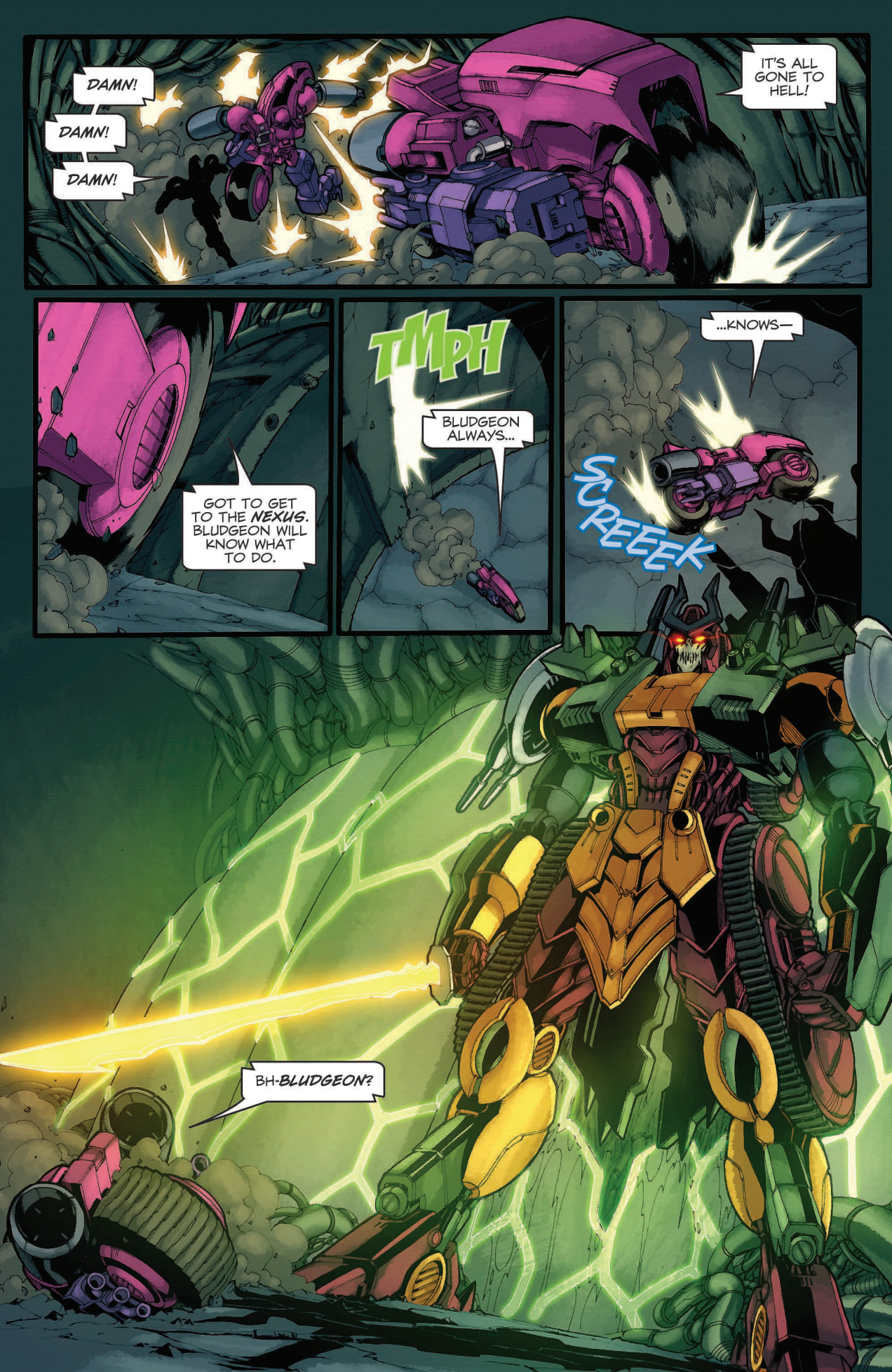

NEBULOS:
WHOOOM
"SO, DARKWING—DO WE TRY AND STOP IT?"
OR MAYBE GIVE IT A HELPING HAND? I MEAN, ISN'T IT DOING WHAT WE WANT DONE ANYWAY...
...ONLY A LOT QUICKER?
DEPENDS...
...IF IT KNOWS WHERE AND WHEN TO STOP.
TRUE. GLOBAL DEVASTATION IS PRETTY MUCH WHY WE'RE HERE, BUT WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE... WE STILL WANT SOME WORLD LEFT TO STRIP DOWN AND SHIP OUT.
THIS... THING PRACTICALLY DESTROYED CYBERTRON SINGLE-HANDED. I HAVE A FEELING WE'RE AS MUCH AN ENDANGERED SPECIES AS THE NEBULANS!

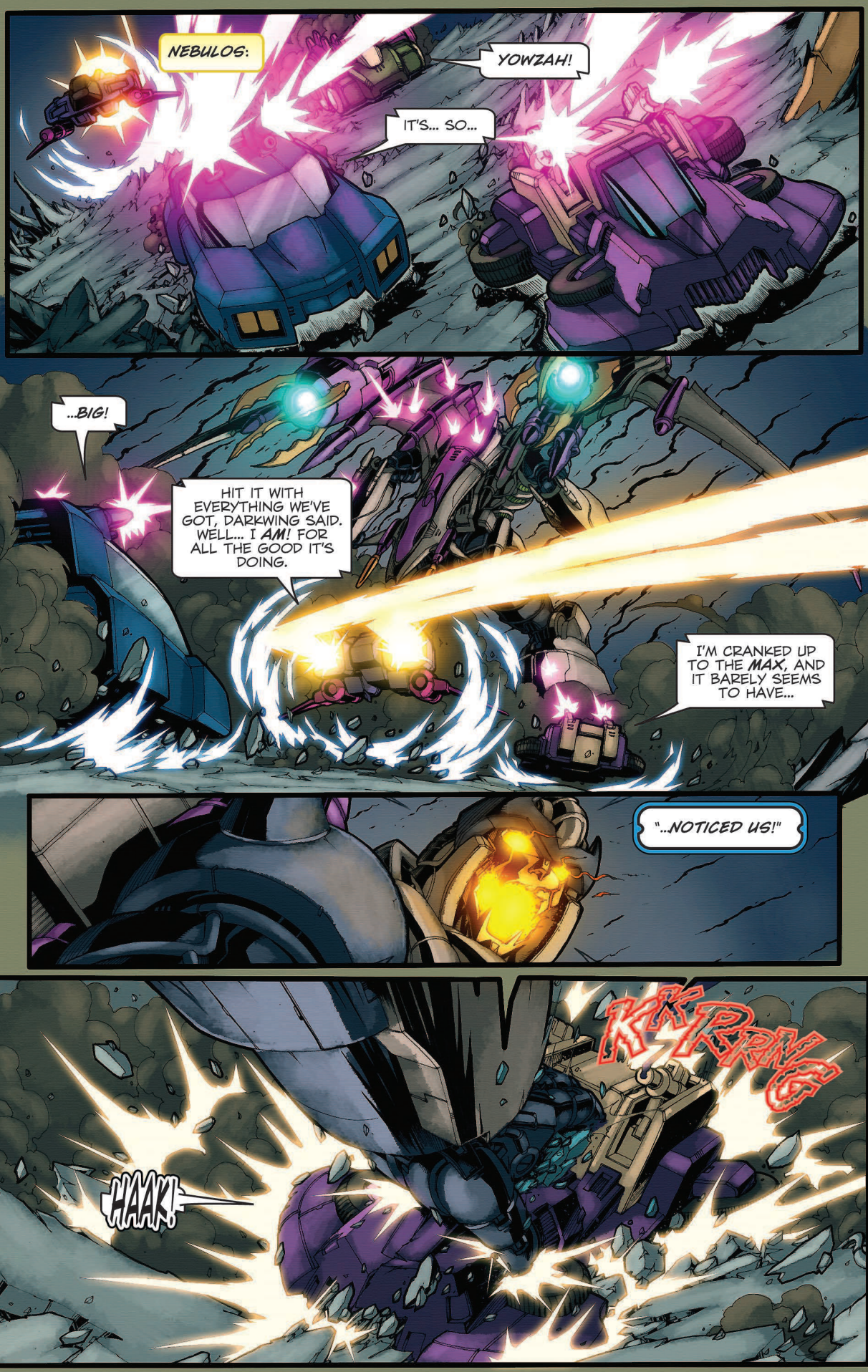

YOU MEAN—
WE MOBILIZE—ADD OUR FIREPOWER TO THE MIX.
BUT—
PERHAPS, SKULLCRUNCHER, YOU'D LIKE TO BE THE ONE TO TELL MEGATRON HOW WE LOST NEBULOS.
ER... NO.
NO. SO... MOVE OUT! HIT THIS THING WITH EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT!
YEAH!
RIGHT!
NOT SO FAST, THRUST—YOU'LL REMAIN HERE, IN THE COMMAND BUNKER. IF WE DON'T MAKE IT, YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.
UH-HUH. LEAVE NO TRACE.
...
LISTEN, DREADWIND, THERE'S A FAIR CHANCE THIS WON'T GO WELL. WHEN IT DOESN'T, WHEN IT LOOKS LIKE WE DID EVERYTHING WE COULD, YOU AND I...
...WE GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!

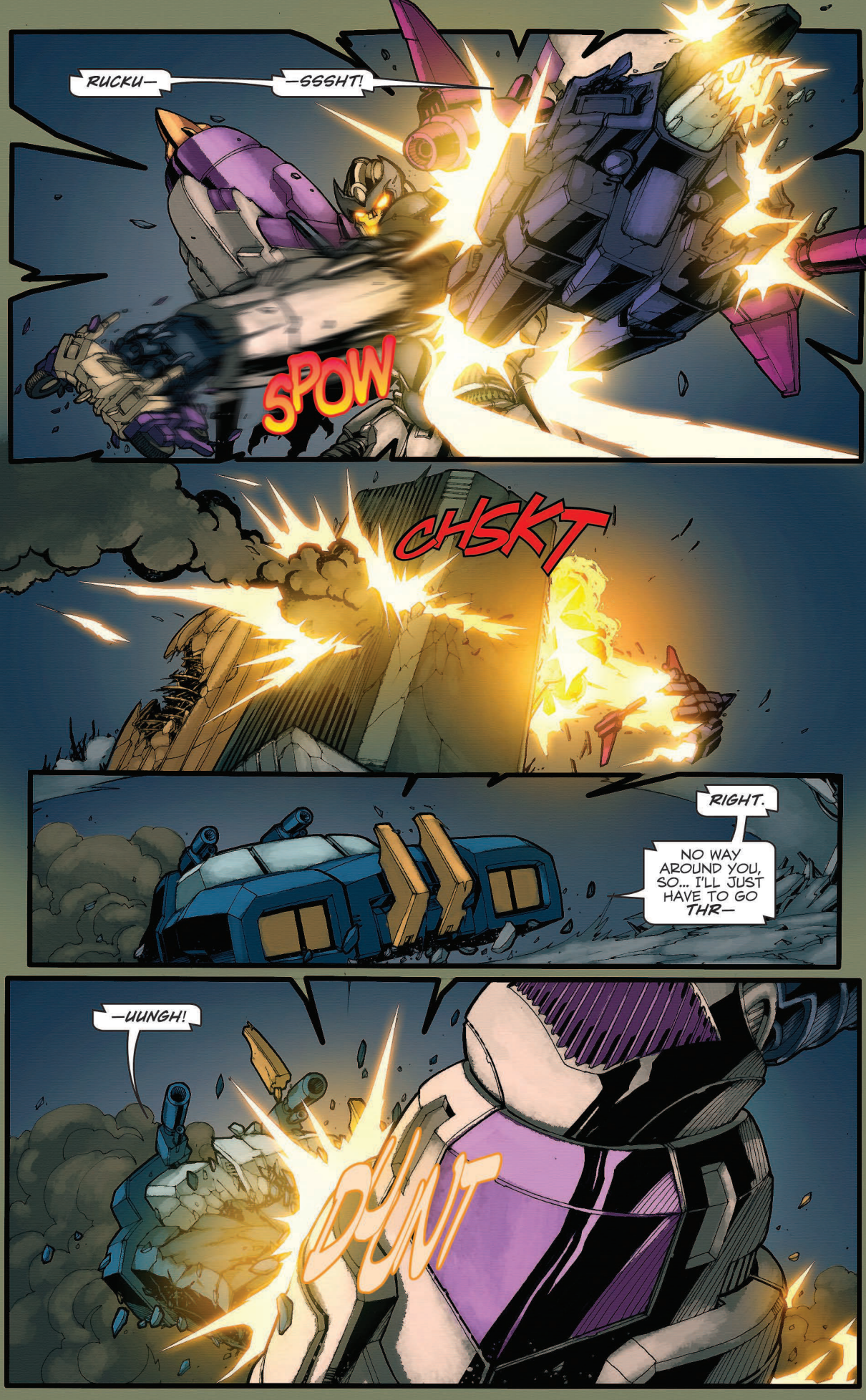

CYBERTRON:
SCOOP—WE'VE REACHED THE BUFFER ZONE. LET SPRINGER KNOW, HUH?
WILL DO.
SPRINGER—WE'RE ABOUT DONE TUNNELIN'. YOU'RE UP.
'BOUT TIME, TOO. WRECKERS—
—LET'S GO COUNT HEADS!
SUPPOSE THERE'S NO POINT IN ASKING YOU TO STAY UP HERE, OUT OF THE FIRING LINE.
NO.


ZRR-
THRK-
KRK
WH-?
NO!
TAKE 'EM OUT, WRECKERS, HARD AND FAST. SAVE THE I.D.'S...
...FOR THE BODY BAGS!

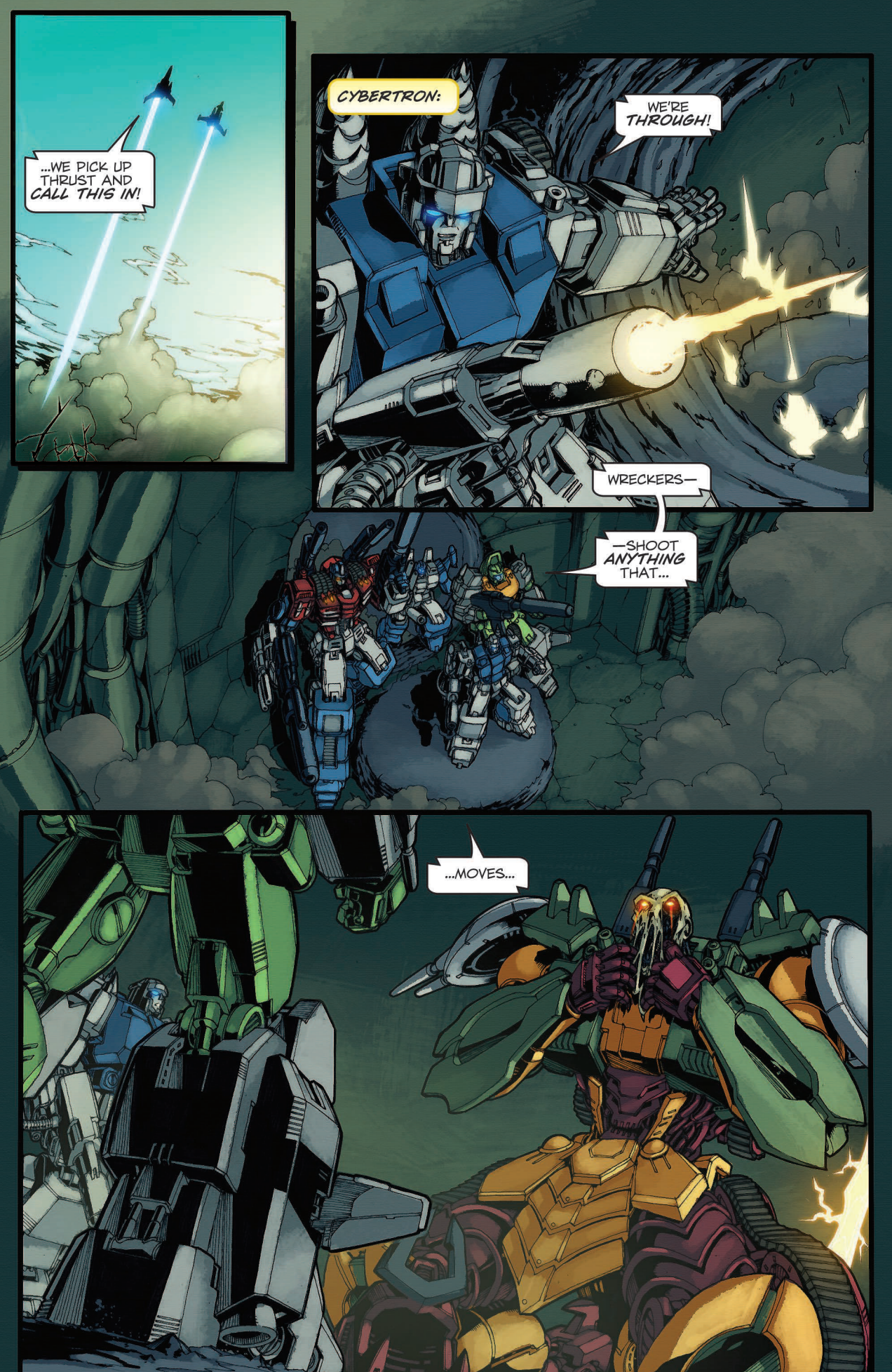

PUM
PUM
PUM
PUM
BOMB-BURST!
I SEE, I SEE!
BLUDGEON! WE'RE—
HGH!
BADOOOM
SKULLGRIN— MOVE! BEFORE—
VASHT


DAMN!
DAMN!
DAMN!
IT'S ALL GONE TO HELL!
GOT TO GET TO THE NEXUS. BLUDGEON WILL KNOW WHAT TO DO.
TMPH
BLUDGEON ALWAYS...
...KNOWS—
SCREEEK
BH-BLUDGEON?


NEBULOS:
YOWZAH!
IT'S... SO...
...BIG!
HIT IT WITH EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT, DARKWING SAID. WELL... I AM! FOR ALL THE GOOD IT'S DOING.
I'M CRANKED UP TO THE MAX, AND IT BARELY SEEMS TO HAVE...
"...NOTICED US!"
KKRRK
HAAK!

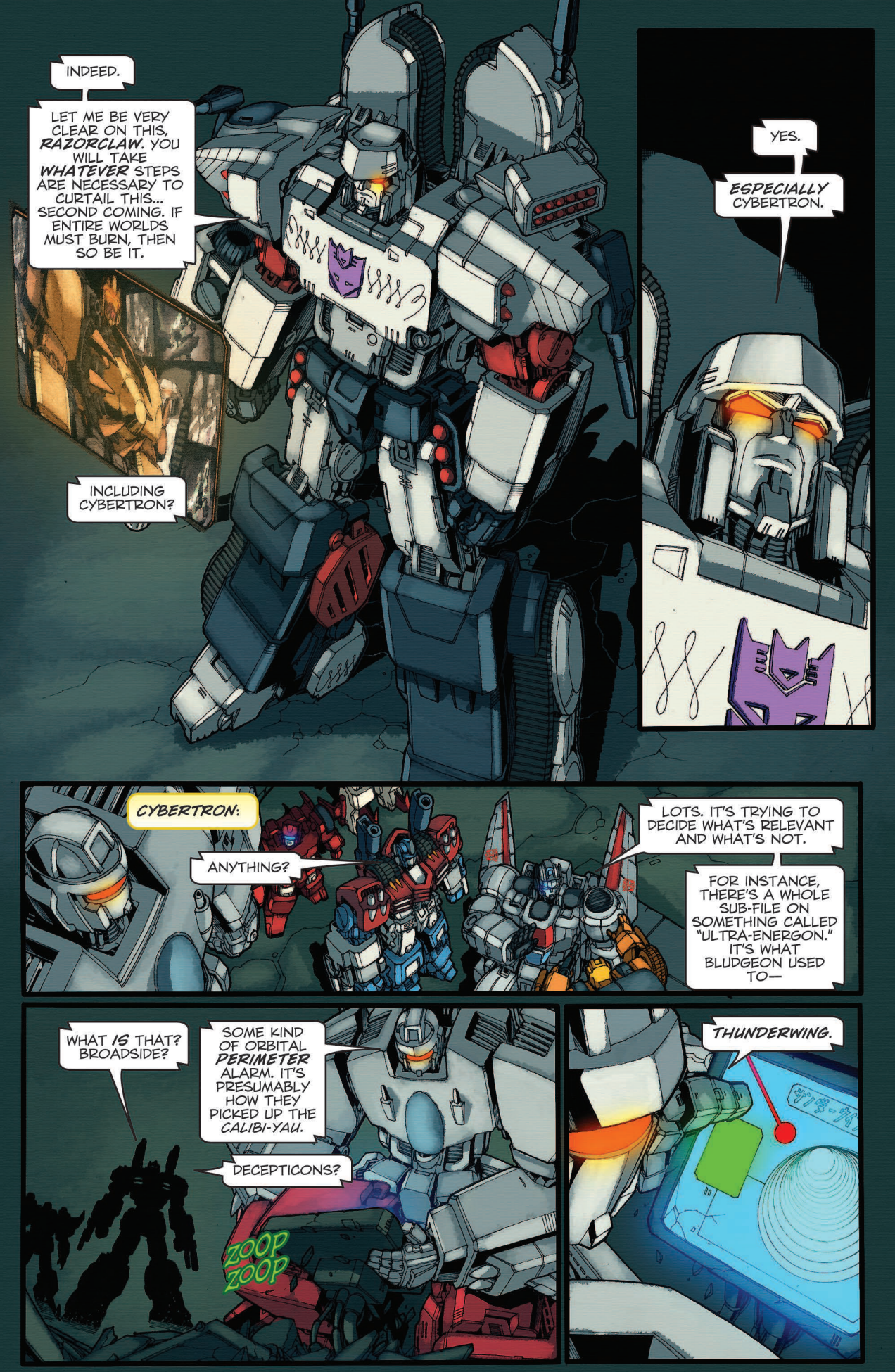

RUCKU—
—SSSHT!
SPOW
CHSKT
RIGHT.
NO WAY AROUND YOU, SO... I'LL JUST HAVE TO GO THR—
—UUNGH!
DUNT


RUCKUS, ROADGRABBER AND CRANKCASE... TOTALLED! AND THE BATTLE'S BARELY BEGUN.
AS I FEARED—IT'S AS POWERFUL, AS UNSTOPPABLE AS BEFORE. NOTHING FANCY, DREADWIND...
JUST HIT...
VAAP
VAAP
...AND RUN!
BADOOM
ZZZRRK
DARKWING— WHAT'S IT DOING?
SYSTEM FAILURE
IT'S IONIZING THE ATMOSPHERE. NAVIGATION'S DOWN, TACTICAL'S DOWN. THAT'S IT, DREADWIND...

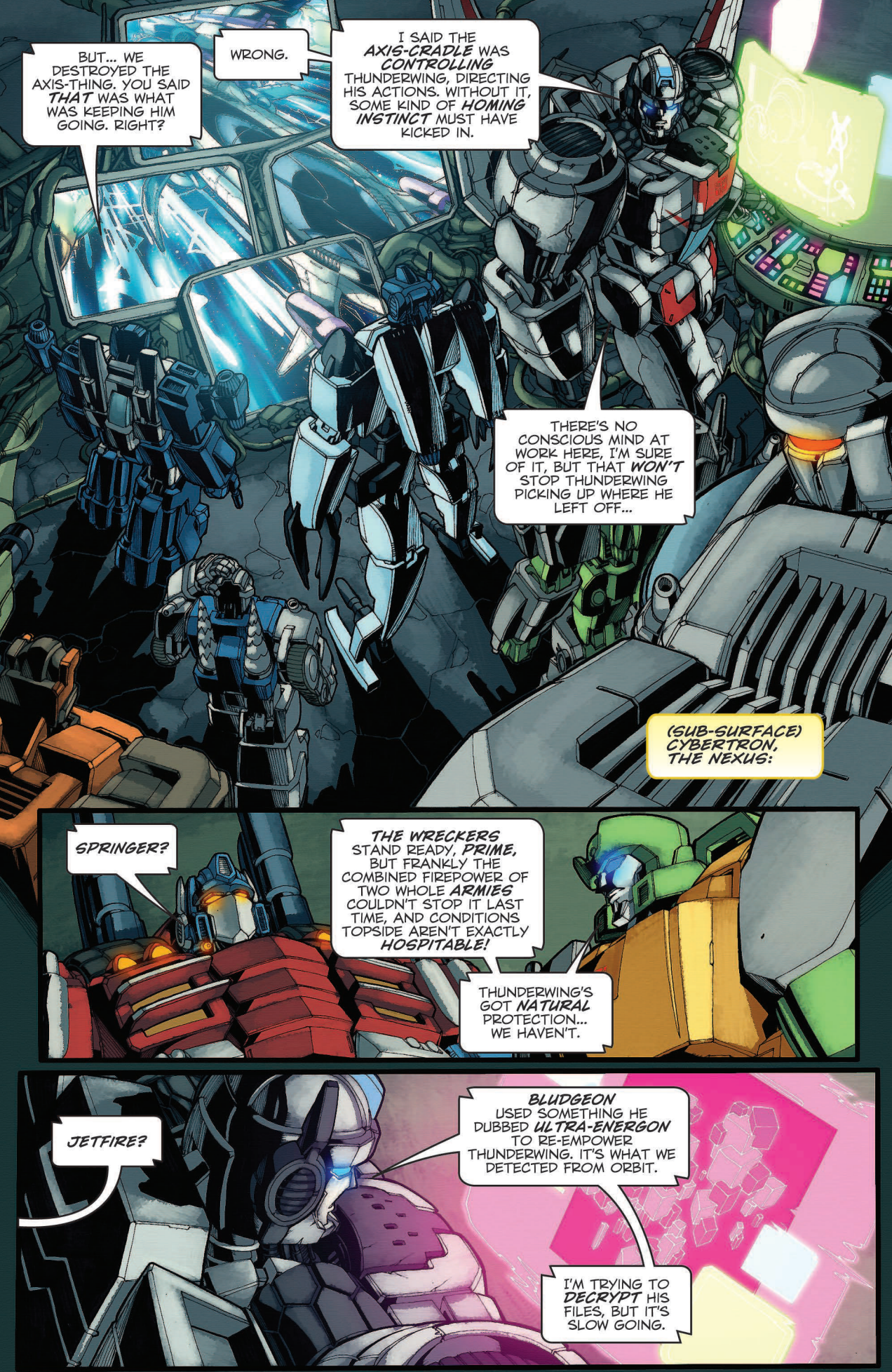

...WE PICK UP THRUST AND CALL THIS IN!
CYBERTRON:
WE'RE THROUGH!
WRECKERS—
—SHOOT ANYTHING THAT...
...MOVES...


WHAT THE FRAG—?
WAS...
...TOO SOON...
TOO—? POLYDERMAL GRAFTING. THUNDERWING'S OUTLAWED EXPERIMENTS...
Y-YES... KKH... THE EXO-SHELL HADN'T BEEN NEURO-ALIGNED. PSYCHIC BACKLASH, BLUDGEON'S MIND...
...COULDN'T...
LOCKED IN A PRISON OF HIS OWN MAKING. ONE CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL...
...HE GOT OFF LIGHTLY.
JETFIRE?
PRIME—SHUT IT DOWN! THE AXIS CRADLE... SHUT IT DOWN NOW!
AXIS CRADLE?


THAT...
OH. WELL...
...WHY DIDN'T YOU JUST SAY?
VUUM
THEY LET IT OUT. THOSE BLINKERED, DERANGED MANIACS, THEY LET IT...
UUH...
EASY, EASY. WILL THAT BE ENOUGH, JETFIRE, TO END THIS?
I... I HOPE SO, PRIME. BECAUSE IF IT DOESN'T STOP IT...
...I DON'T KNOW WHAT WILL!
EARTH:
THAT'S WHAT DARKWING SAID— THUNDERWING. NOW THAT IS A NAME I NEVER WANTED TO HEAR AGAIN!

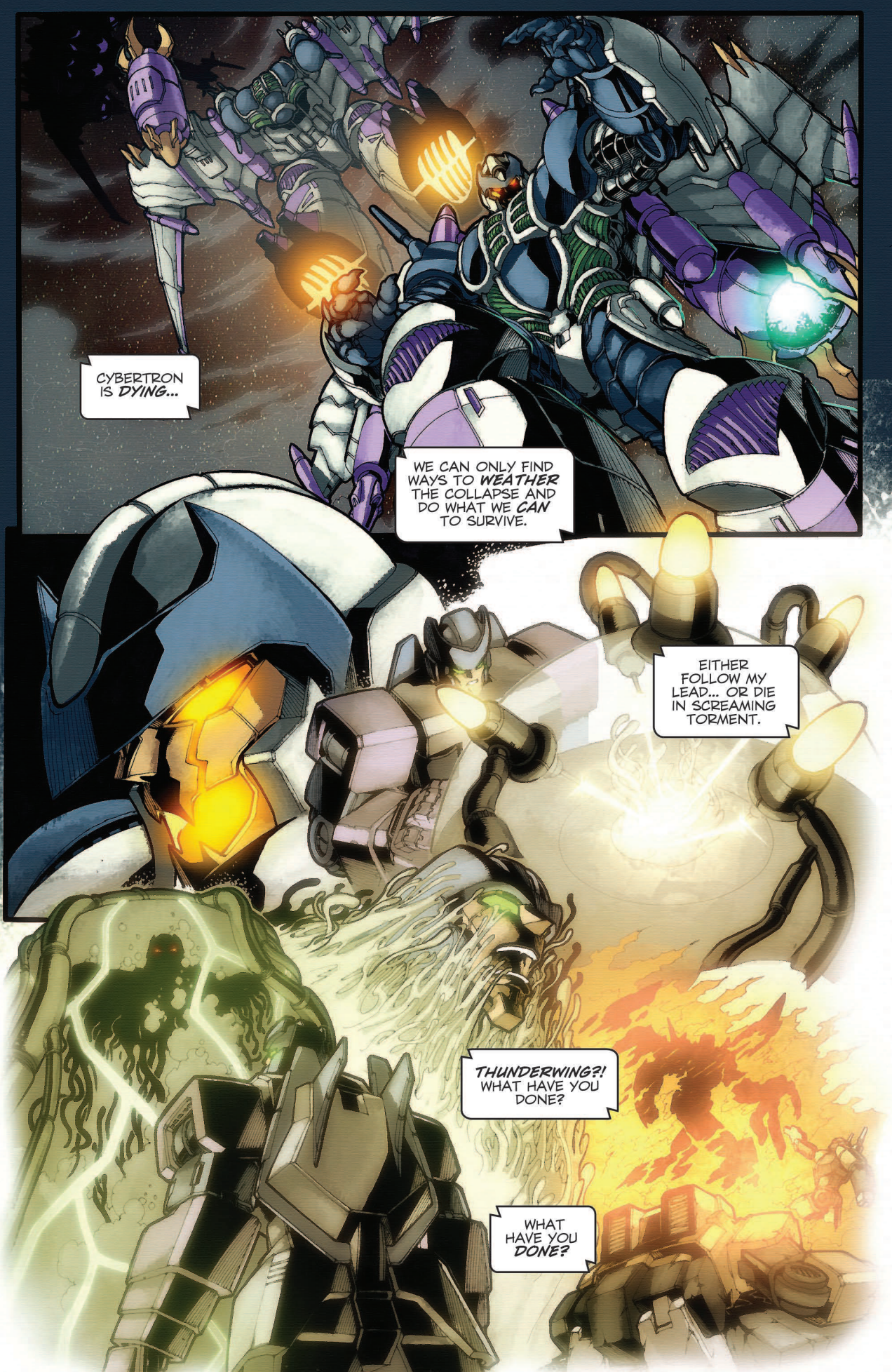

INDEED.
LET ME BE VERY CLEAR ON THIS, RAZORCLAW. YOU WILL TAKE WHATEVER STEPS ARE NECESSARY TO CURTAIL THIS... SECOND COMING. IF ENTIRE WORLDS MUST BURN, THEN SO BE IT.
INCLUDING CYBERTRON?
YES.
ESPECIALLY CYBERTRON.
CYBERTRON:
ANYTHING?
LOTS. IT'S TRYING TO DECIDE WHAT'S RELEVANT AND WHAT'S NOT.
FOR INSTANCE, THERE'S A WHOLE SUB-FILE ON SOMETHING CALLED "ULTRA-ENERGON." IT'S WHAT BLUDGEON USED TO—
WHAT IS THAT? BROADSIDE?
SOME KIND OF ORBITAL PERIMETER ALARM. IT'S PRESUMABLY HOW THEY PICKED UP THE CALIBI-YAU.
DECEPTICONS?
ZOOP ZOOP
THUNDERWING.


CHAPTER 4
THIS IS HOW IT ENDS.
IN THUNDER AND SPITTING LIGHTNING, IN A STORM-LASHED ONSLAUGHT—OUR PAST TRANSGRESSIONS AND BLINKERED INEQUITIES REVISITED IN PURGING FIRE AND ROARING FURY.
FATE-CRUSHING, INEXORABLE—CANNOT, WILL NOT...
...BE HELD AT BAY INDEFINITELY!
"IT'S THUNDERWING... HE'S COMING BACK!"


BUT... WE DESTROYED THE AXIS-THING. YOU SAID THAT WAS WHAT WAS KEEPING HIM GOING. RIGHT?
WRONG.
I SAID THE AXIS-CRADLE WAS CONTROLLING THUNDERWING, DIRECTING HIS ACTIONS. WITHOUT IT, SOME KIND OF HOMING INSTINCT MUST HAVE KICKED IN.
THERE'S NO CONSCIOUS MIND AT WORK HERE, I'M SURE OF IT, BUT THAT WON'T STOP THUNDERWING PICKING UP WHERE HE LEFT OFF...
(SUB-SURFACE) CYBERTRON, THE NEXUS:
SPRINGER?
THE WRECKERS STAND READY, PRIME, BUT FRANKLY THE COMBINED FIREPOWER OF TWO WHOLE ARMIES COULDN'T STOP IT LAST TIME, AND CONDITIONS TOPSIDE AREN'T EXACTLY HOSPITABLE!
THUNDERWING'S GOT NATURAL PROTECTION... WE HAVEN'T.
JETFIRE?
BLUDGEON USED SOMETHING HE DUBBED ULTRA-ENERGON TO RE-EMPOWER THUNDERWING. IT'S WHAT WE DETECTED FROM ORBIT.
I'M TRYING TO DECRYPT HIS FILES, BUT IT'S SLOW GOING.

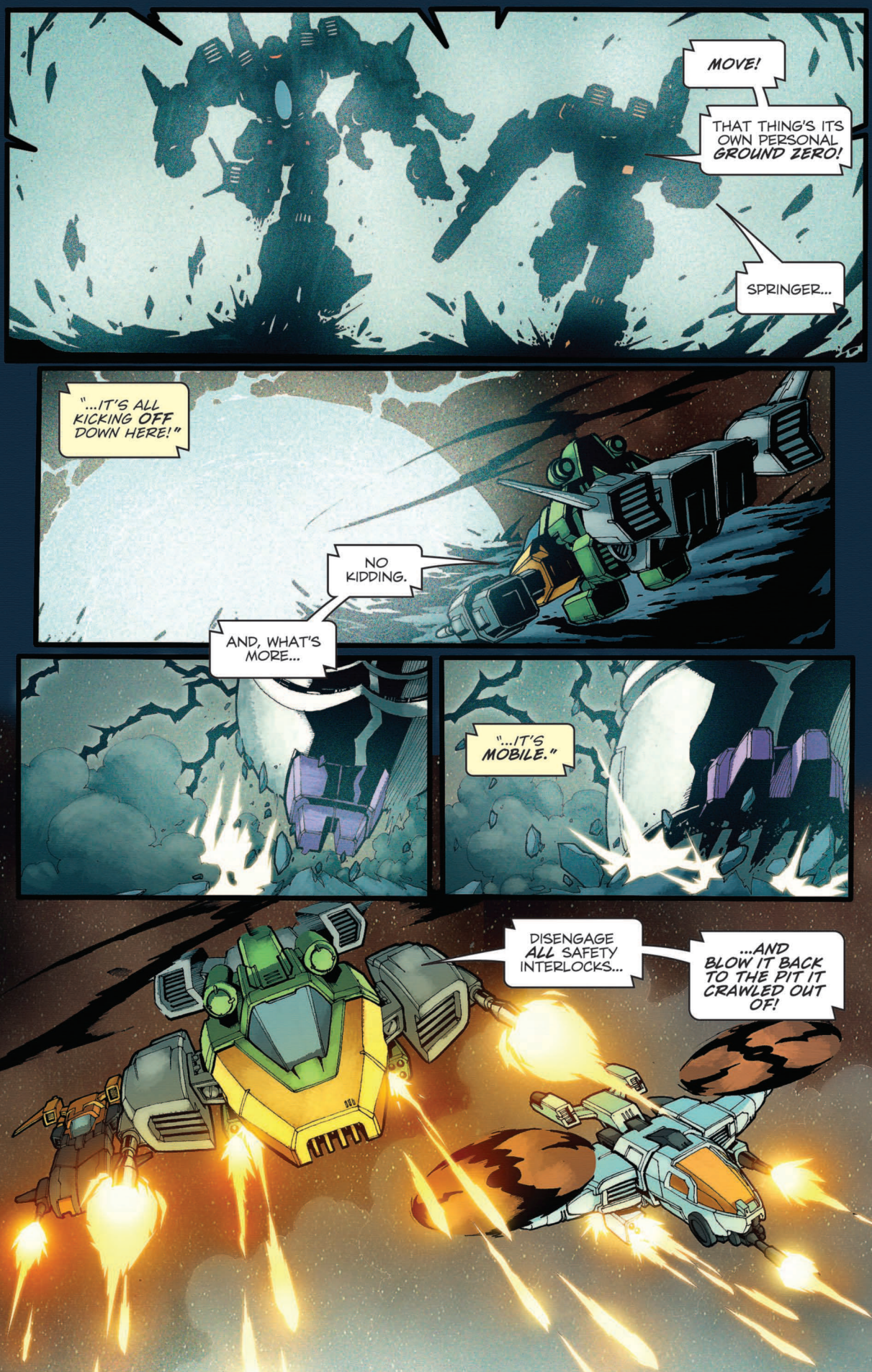

KEEP TRYING.
FIND ME SOMETHING—*ANYTHING*—WE CAN USE AGAINST IT.
WE DON'T QUITE KNOW *HOW* THUNDERWING WILL REACT OR WHAT EXACTLY HE'LL *DO* ONCE HE REACHES CYBERTRON... BUT HE HAS TO BE STOPPED, AT ANY COST.
ANY COST?
IF... ALL ELSE FAILS, YES.
WHOA. HANG ON. YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT *SACRIFICING* CYBERTRON ITSELF... AFTER ALL WE'VE *BEEN* THROUGH TO PRESERVE IT?
I PRAY, JETFIRE...
"...IT WILL *NOT* COME TO THAT."
RAMPAGE—LOCK STARBLITZ TORPEDOES ON TARGET AND PREPARE FOR *ORBITAL BARRAGE.*


DECEPTICON WARSHIP *THANATOS:*
TIMEFRAME, *RAZORCLAW?*
GIVE IT... ONE MEGA-CYCLE. CALL ME *SENTIMENTAL*, BUT REDUCING CYBERTRON TO A CINDER REMAINS A *LAST* RESORT.
I'M ALL FOR PAN-GALACTIC COLONIZATION, BUT, LET'S FACE IT, THERE'S *NO PLACE LIKE HOME.*
DONE.
ABORT *THRESHOLD* AT FIFTY-FIVE CYCLES.
FINE. BOTTOM LINE, THOUGH, IF IT COMES DOWN TO A CHOICE BETWEEN BLITZING CYBERTRON AND DISOBEYING A DIRECT ORDER FROM *MEGATRON*... THE PLANET IS *TOAST.*
AH...
...HERE HE COMES!

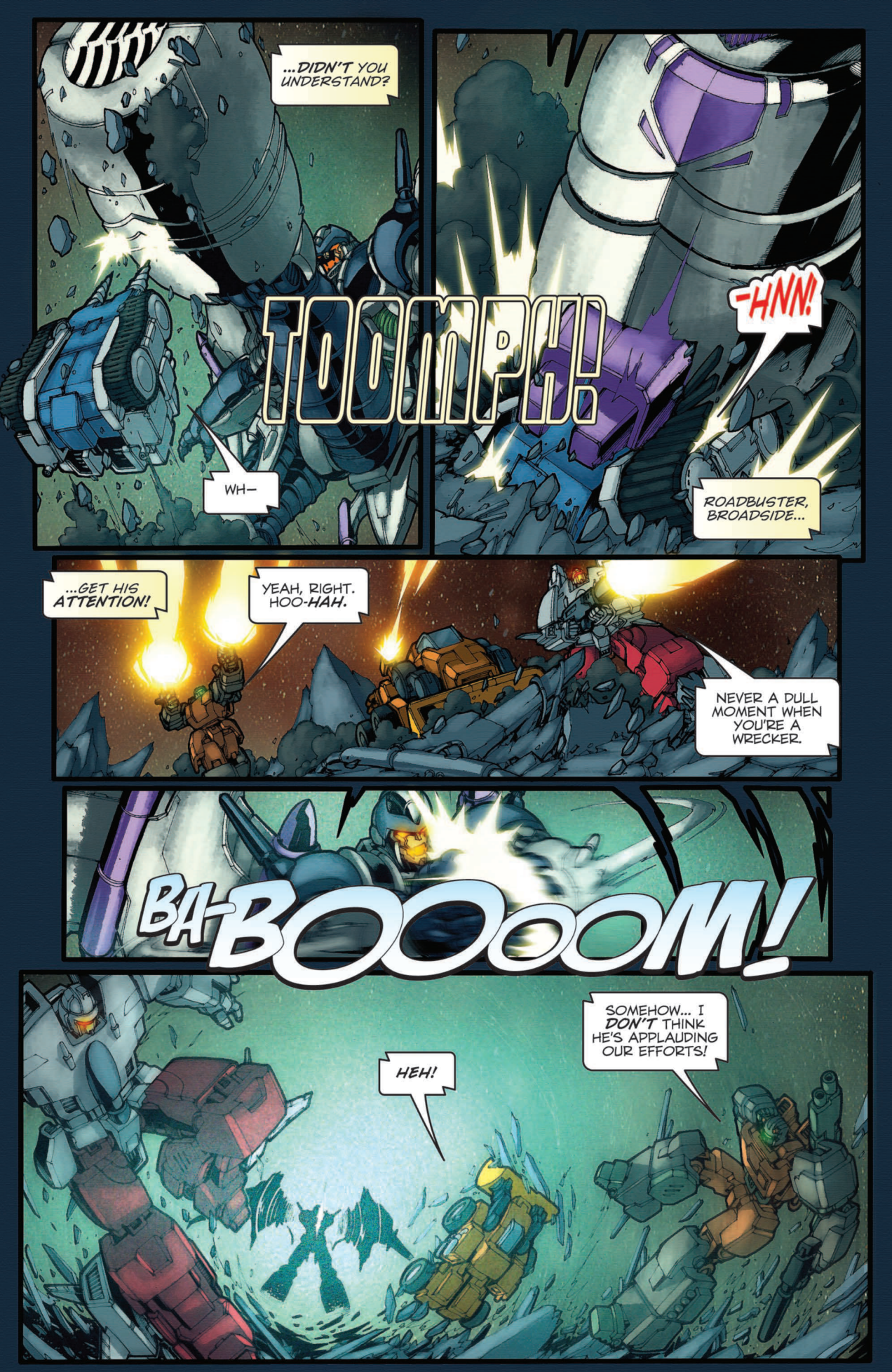

CYBERTRON IS *DYING*...
WE CAN ONLY FIND WAYS TO *WEATHER* THE COLLAPSE AND DO WHAT WE *CAN* TO SURVIVE.
EITHER FOLLOW MY LEAD... OR DIE IN SCREAMING TORMENT.
THUNDERWING?! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE?*


WHAT'S HE DOING?
NOTHING, SCOOP. JUST STOOD THERE.
HM. FIGURE IT'S WHAT YOU CALL THE CALM...
...BEFORE THE STORM.
...ENCASE OURSELVES IN SYMBIOTIC CARAPACES, THE BODILY TISSUE CULLED FROM LIVING SUBJECTS...
...THE NEUROSPHERE IS SPLICED TO THE NEO-CORTEX OF THE WEARER, AND...
ENOUGH!
OF ALL THE UNNATURAL...
...MISGUIDED...
...ILL-CONCEIVED...
YOUR REMIT IS DISCONTINUED...
DECOMMISSIONED...

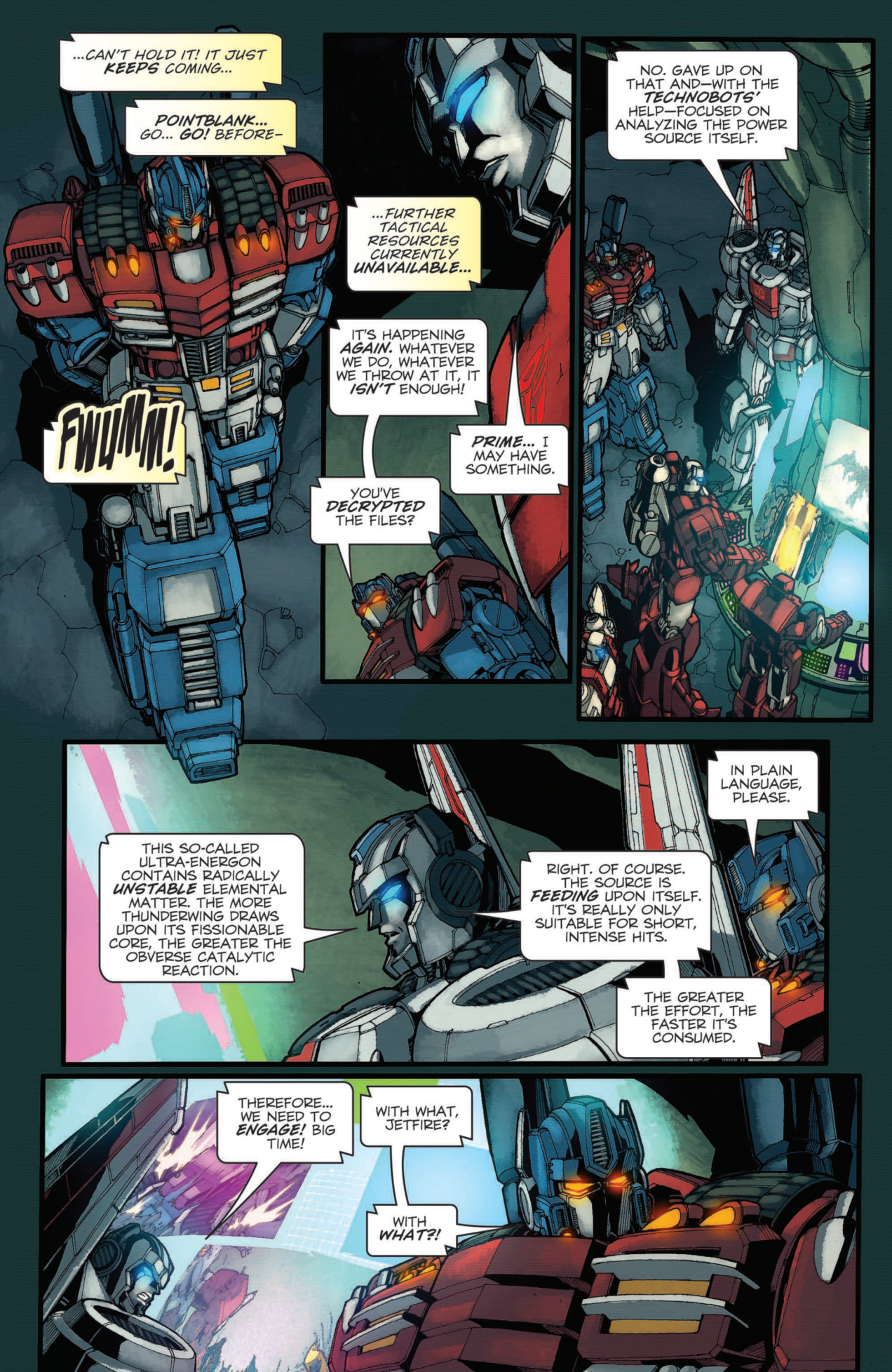

...DEFUNCT.
SKARAAAAAK!

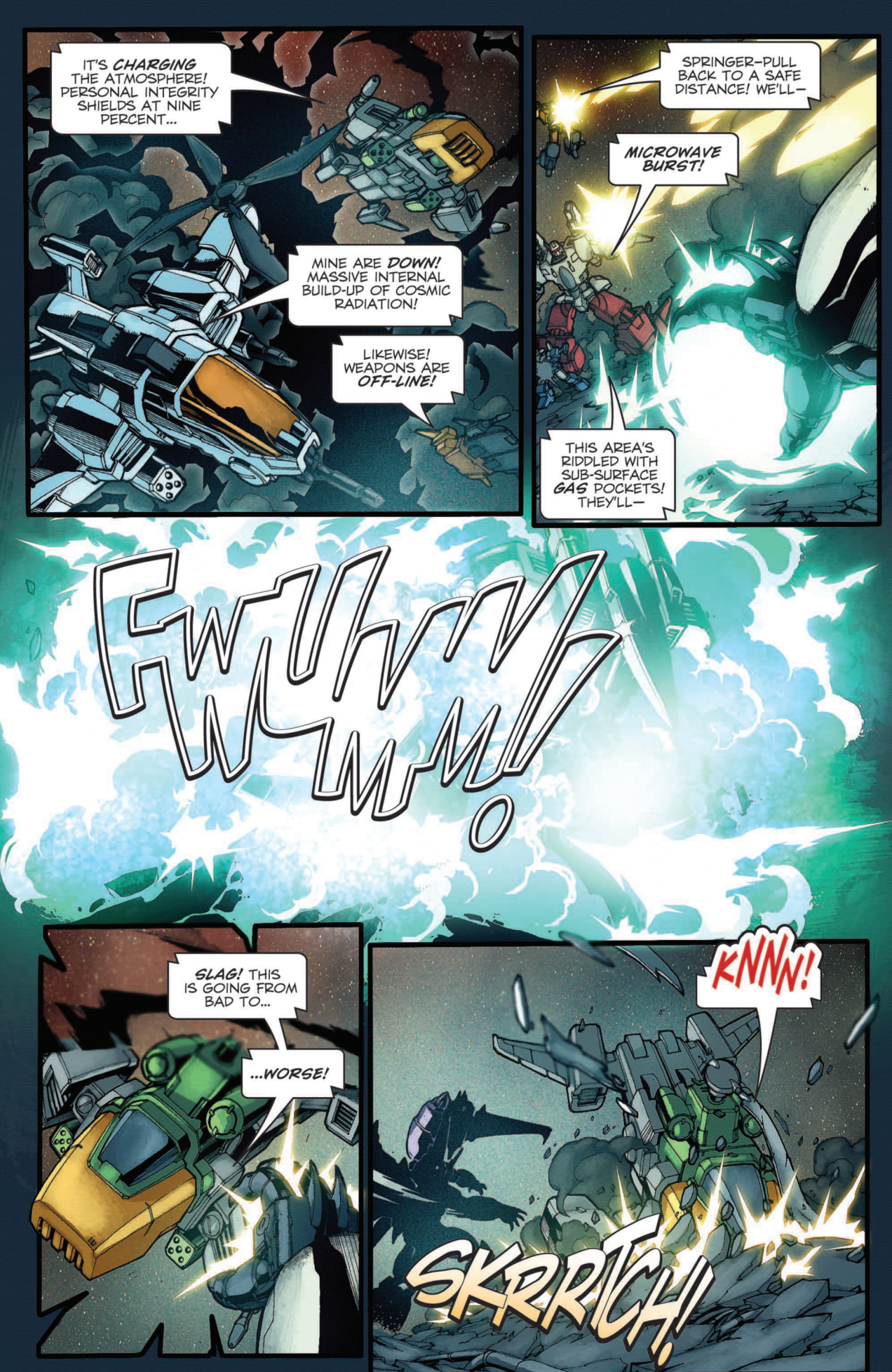

MOVE!
THAT THING'S ITS OWN PERSONAL GROUND ZERO!
SPRINGER...
"...IT'S ALL KICKING OFF DOWN HERE!"
NO KIDDING.
AND, WHAT'S MORE...
"...IT'S MOBILE."
DISENGAGE ALL SAFETY INTERLOCKS...
...AND BLOW IT BACK TO THE PIT IT CRAWLED OUT OF!

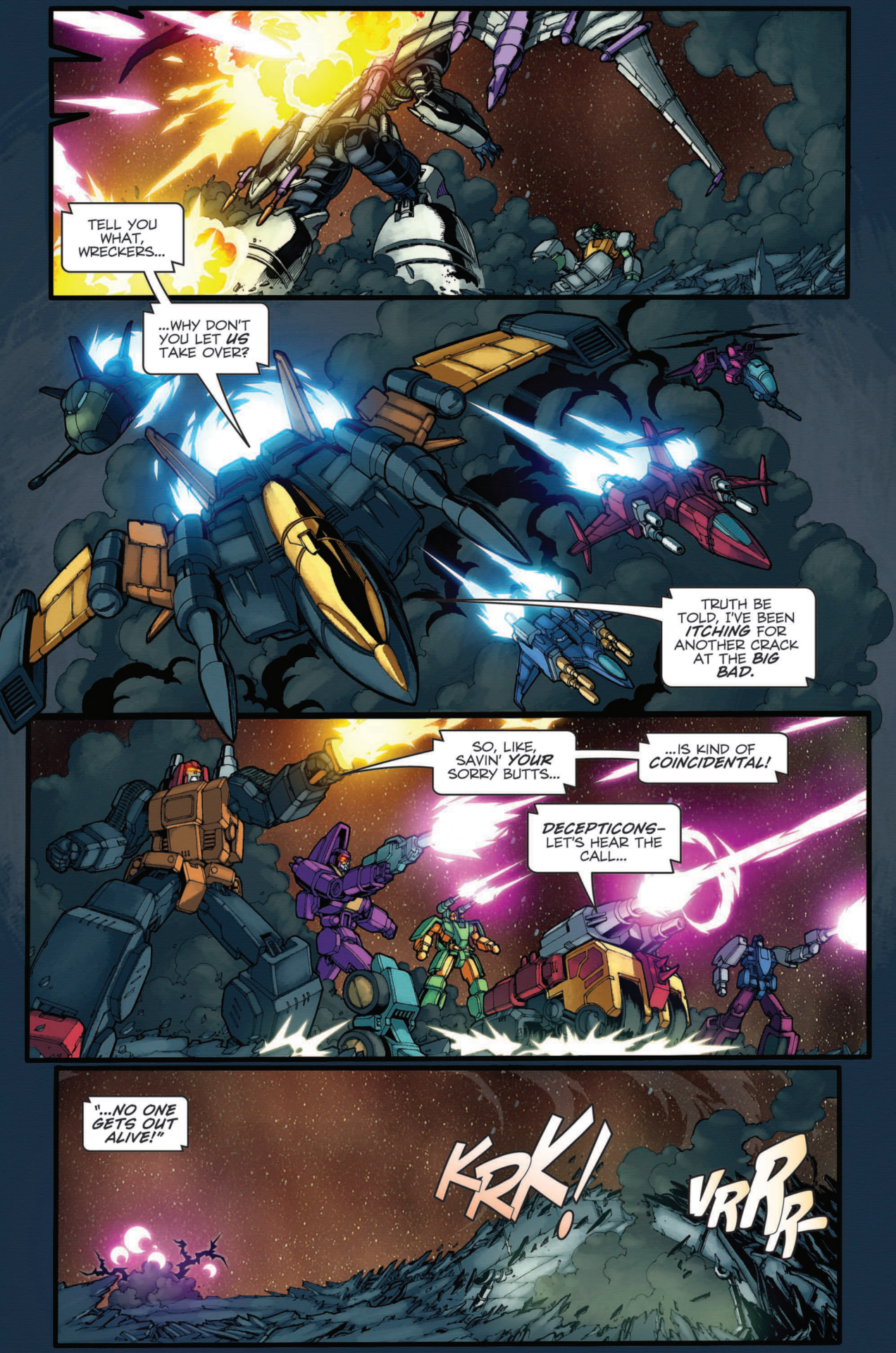

WHEN THEY ASK ME, "TOPSPIN, WHY'D YOU GO ONE-ON-ONE WITH THUNDERWING?" I'LL SAY...
...BECAUSE IT WAS THERE.
VRAK!
VOW!
DUMM!
ONE THING ABOUT YOU, TOPSPIN—YOU'LL NEVER GO QUIETLY. ME, I ALSO LIKE TO MAKE MY POINT...
...BUT A TOUCH MORE DIRECTLY!
ZZZRK!
TWIN TWIST, NO, DAMMIT! WHAT BIT OF HIT AND RUN...

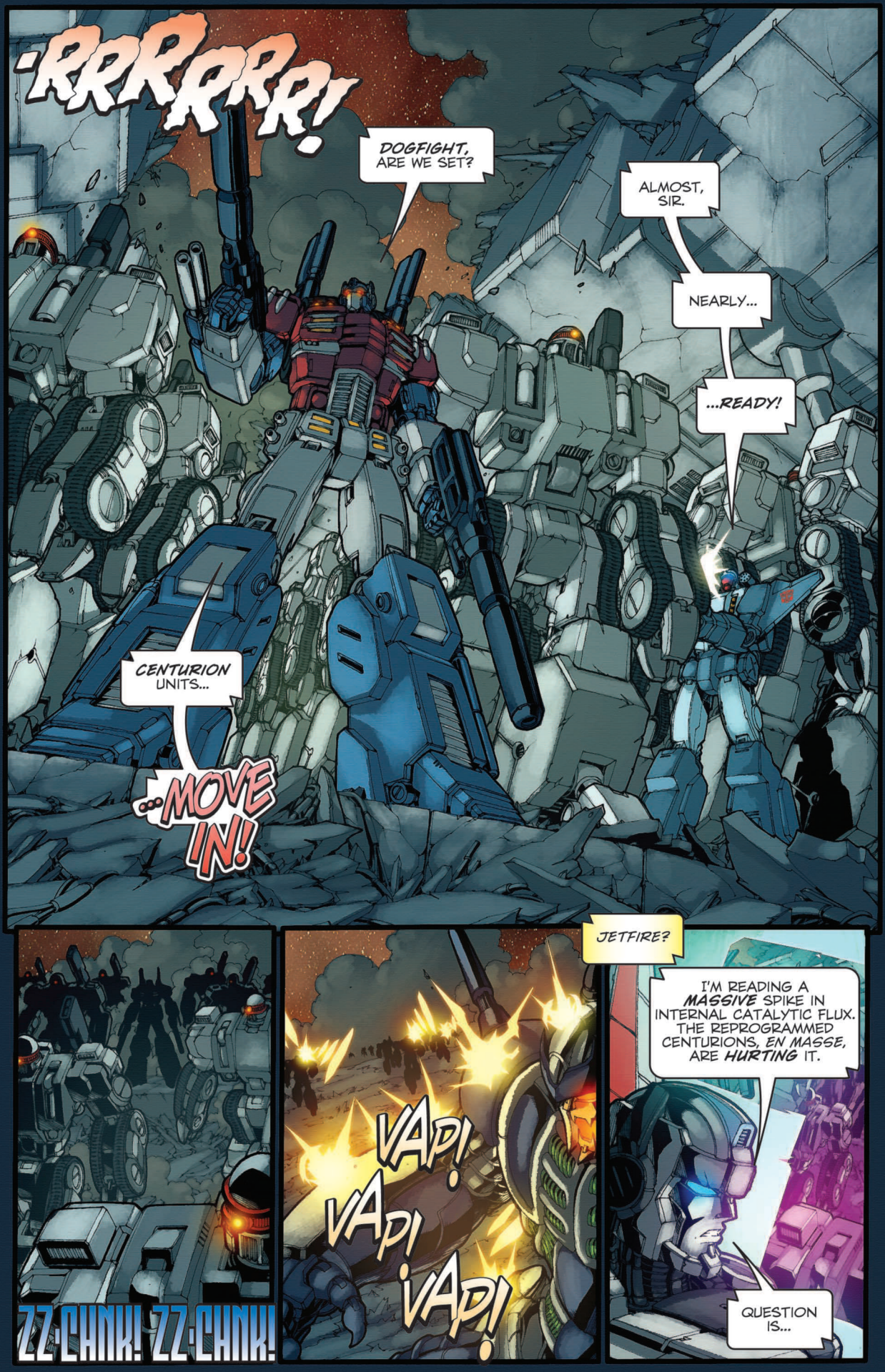

...DIDN'T YOU UNDERSTAND?
WH—
TOOMPH!
-HNN!
ROADBUSTER, BROADSIDE...
...GET HIS ATTENTION!
YEAH, RIGHT. HOO-HAH.
NEVER A DULL MOMENT WHEN YOU'RE A WRECKER.
BA-BOOOOM!
HEH!
SOMEHOW... I DON'T THINK HE'S APPLAUDING OUR EFFORTS!


DECEPTICON WARSHIP THANATOS:
THEY'RE GIVING IT THEIR ALL.
MM.
FOR ALL THE GOOD IT'S DOING THEM.
STILL... THEY ARE WARRIORS WORTHY OF OUR RESPECT AND, PERHAPS, OUR HELP.
TIME TO ORBITAL BARRAGE...
THIRTY-EIGHT CYCLES.
VERY WELL. DIVEBOMB—ORGANIZE TWO ASSAULT TEAMS. DO WHAT YOU CAN IN THE TIME AVAILABLE. BUT ONCE WE REACH THE MAIN FIRING SEQUENCE THRESHOLD...
...LEAVE THEM ALL TO BURN.


...CAN'T HOLD IT! IT JUST KEEPS COMING...
POINTBLANK... GO... GO! BEFORE-
FWUMM!
...FURTHER TACTICAL RESOURCES CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE...
IT'S HAPPENING AGAIN. WHATEVER WE DO, WHATEVER WE THROW AT IT, IT ISN'T ENOUGH!
PRIME... I MAY HAVE SOMETHING.
YOU'VE DECRYPTED THE FILES?
NO. GAVE UP ON THAT AND—WITH THE TECHNOBOTS' HELP—FOCUSED ON ANALYZING THE POWER SOURCE ITSELF.
IN PLAIN LANGUAGE, PLEASE.
THIS SO-CALLED ULTRA-ENERGON CONTAINS RADICALLY UNSTABLE ELEMENTAL MATTER. THE MORE THUNDERWING DRAWS UPON ITS FISSIONABLE CORE, THE GREATER THE OBVERSE CATALYTIC REACTION.
RIGHT. OF COURSE. THE SOURCE IS FEEDING UPON ITSELF. IT'S REALLY ONLY SUITABLE FOR SHORT, INTENSE HITS.
THE GREATER THE EFFORT, THE FASTER IT'S CONSUMED.
THEREFORE... WE NEED TO ENGAGE! BIG TIME!
WITH WHAT, JETFIRE?
WITH WHAT?!

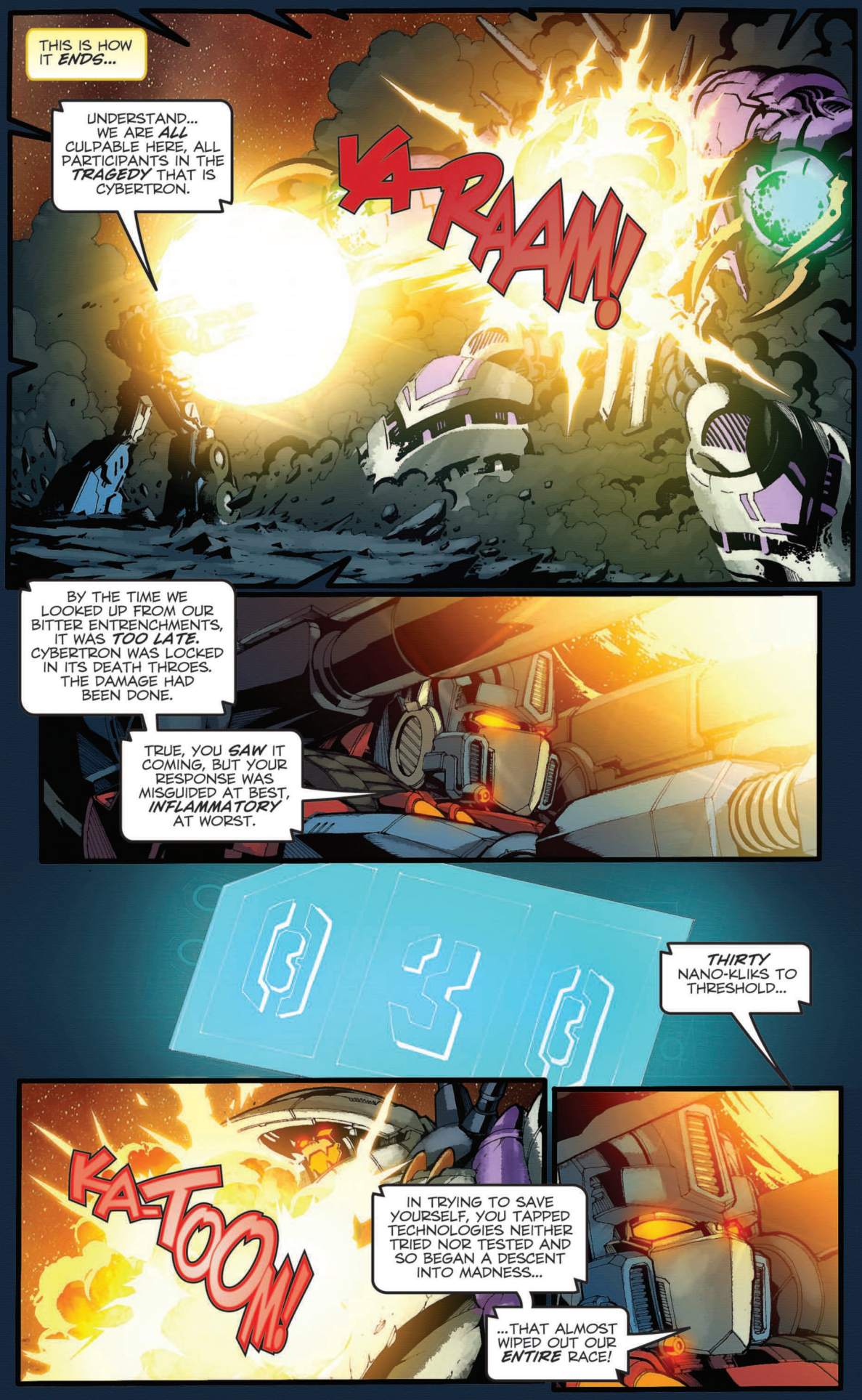

IT'S CHARGING THE ATMOSPHERE! PERSONAL INTEGRITY SHIELDS AT NINE PERCENT...
MINE ARE DOWN! MASSIVE INTERNAL BUILD-UP OF COSMIC RADIATION!
LIKEWISE! WEAPONS ARE OFF-LINE!
SPRINGER–PULL BACK TO A SAFE DISTANCE! WE'LL–
MICROWAVE BURST!
THIS AREA'S RIDDLED WITH SUB-SURFACE GAS POCKETS! THEY'LL–
FWUMP!
SLAG! THIS IS GOING FROM BAD TO...
...WORSE!
KNNN!
SKRRTCH!

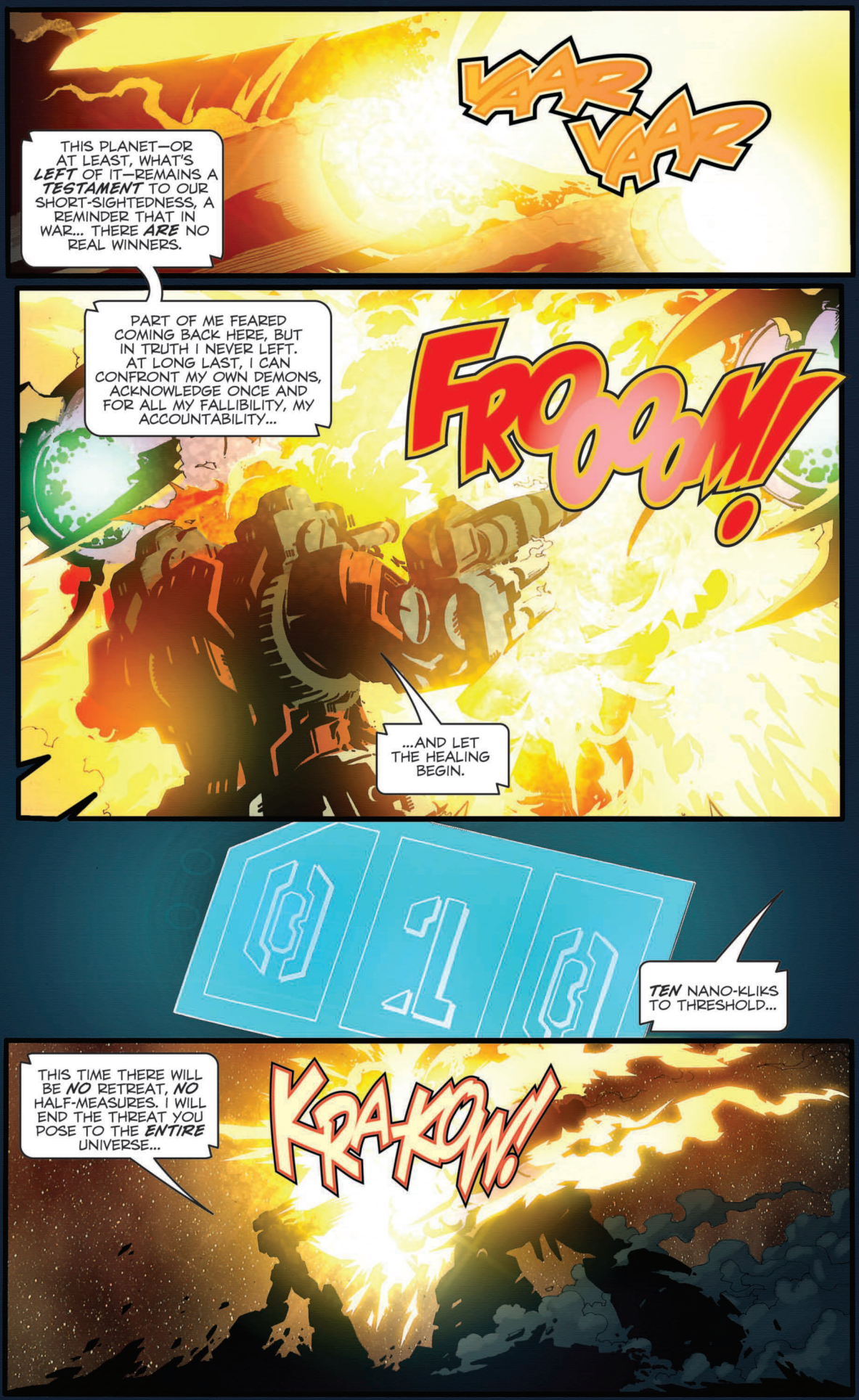

TELL YOU WHAT, WRECKERS...
...WHY DON'T YOU LET US TAKE OVER?
TRUTH BE TOLD, I'VE BEEN ITCHING FOR ANOTHER CRACK AT THE BIG BAD.
SO, LIKE, SAVIN' YOUR SORRY BUTTS...
...IS KIND OF COINCIDENTAL!
DECEPTICONS– LET'S HEAR THE CALL...
"...NO ONE GETS OUT ALIVE!"
KRK!
VRRR-


-RRRRRR!
DOGFIGHT, ARE WE SET?
ALMOST, SIR.
NEARLY...
...READY!
CENTURION UNITS...
...MOVE IN!
ZZ-CHNK! ZZ-CHNK!
VAP! VAP! VAP!
JETFIRE?
I'M READING A MASSIVE SPIKE IN INTERNAL CATALYTIC FLUX. THE REPROGRAMMED CENTURIONS, EN MASSE, ARE HURTING IT.
QUESTION IS...


"...IS IT ENOUGH?"
SKOOM!
VAVAASH!
IT'S... DEFINITELY REELING! HIT IT AGAIN! AGAIN! AG–
WAIT!
WHAT'S IT DOING? IT'S GOT...

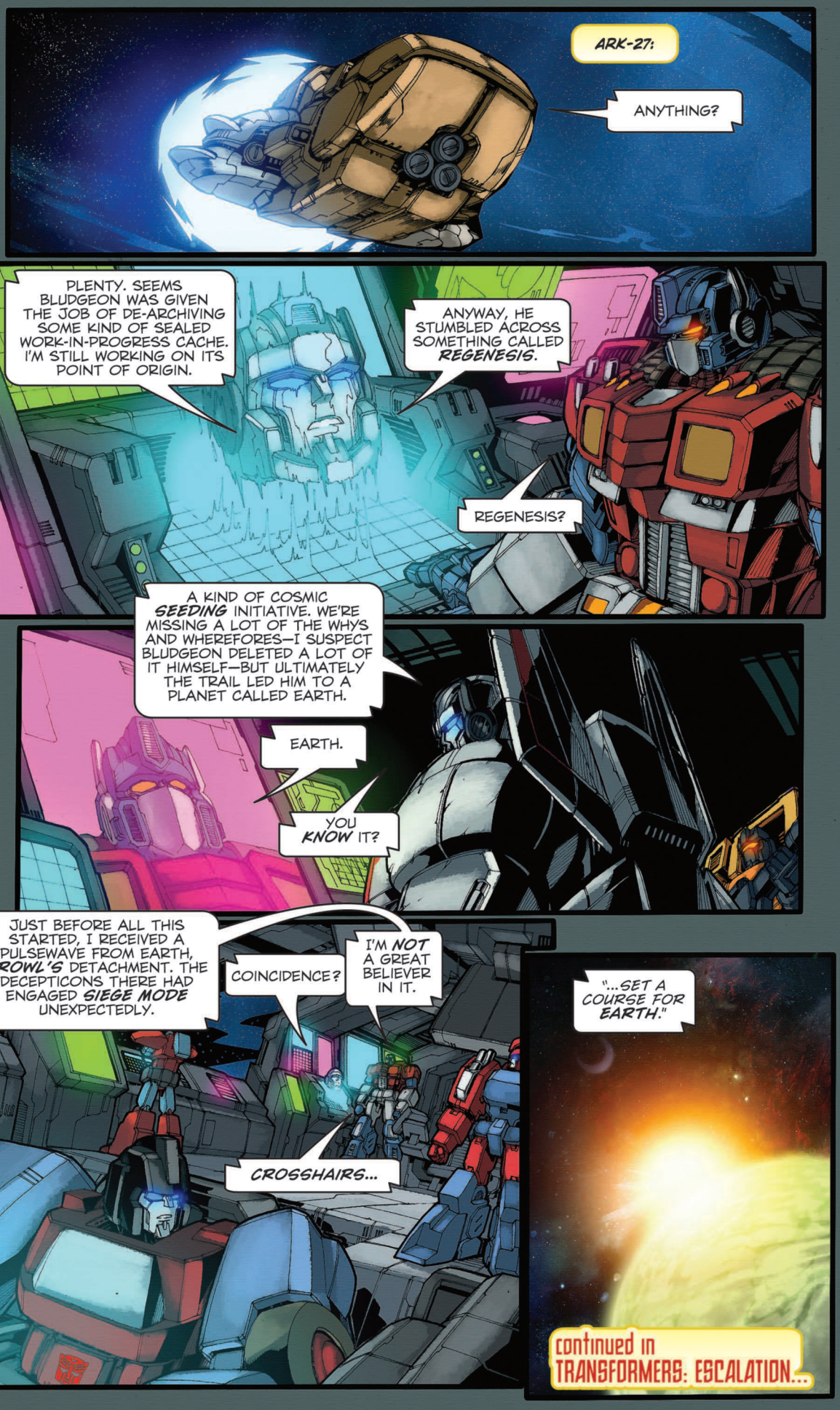

...SOME KIND OF SECONDARY ULTRA MODE!
THANATOS:
RAMPAGE—TIME TO BARRAGE?
WE'RE ALMOST AT THE FIRING SEQUENCE THRESHOLD. IF WE WANT TO ABORT, IT HAS TO BE SOON.
SOUND THE WITHDRAWAL. ONCE BOTH SQUADS ARE ABOARD, PULL US BACK TO MINIMUM SAFE DISTANCE AND RAISE SHIELDS.
"TOO BAD, CYBERTRON..."
"...I'LL MISS YOU."
THUNDERWING...
...THIS ENDS
NOW!

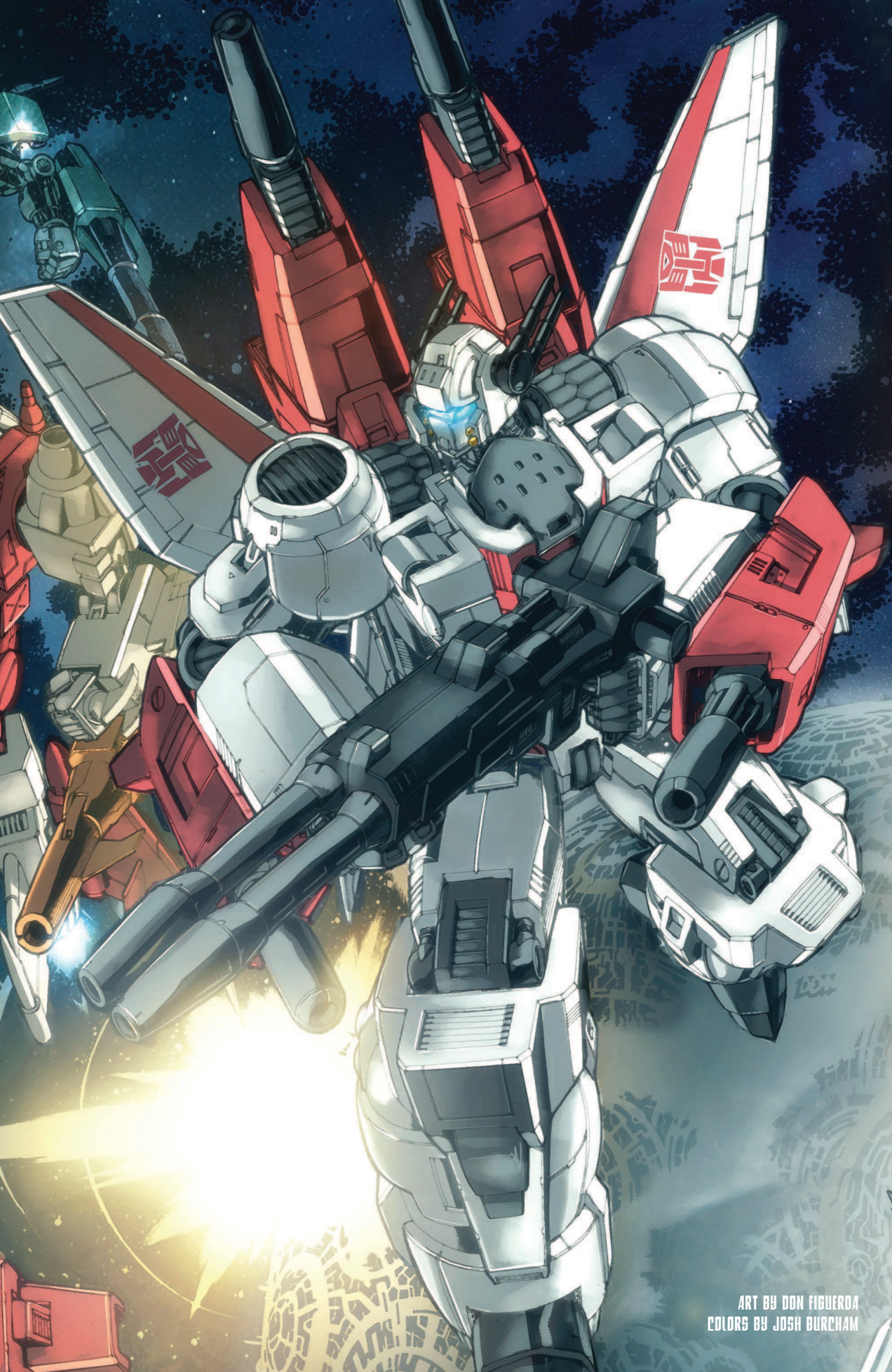

THIS IS HOW IT ENDS...
UNDERSTAND... WE ARE ALL CULPABLE HERE, ALL PARTICIPANTS IN THE TRAGEDY THAT IS CYBERTRON.
KA-RAAM!
BY THE TIME WE LOOKED UP FROM OUR BITTER ENTRENCHMENTS, IT WAS TOO LATE. CYBERTRON WAS LOCKED IN ITS DEATH THROES. THE DAMAGE HAD BEEN DONE.
TRUE, YOU SAW IT COMING, BUT YOUR RESPONSE WAS MISGUIDED AT BEST, INFLAMMATORY AT WORST.
THIRTY NANO-KLIKS TO THRESHOLD...
KA-TOOM!
IN TRYING TO SAVE YOURSELF, YOU TAPPED TECHNOLOGIES NEITHER TRIED NOR TESTED AND SO BEGAN A DESCENT INTO MADNESS...
...THAT ALMOST WIPED OUT OUR ENTIRE RACE!


VAAR VAAR
THIS PLANET—OR AT LEAST, WHAT'S *LEFT* OF IT—REMAINS A *TESTAMENT* TO OUR SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS, A REMINDER THAT IN WAR... THERE *ARE* NO REAL WINNERS.
PART OF ME FEARED COMING BACK HERE, BUT IN TRUTH I NEVER LEFT. AT LONG LAST, I CAN CONFRONT MY OWN DEMONS, ACKNOWLEDGE ONCE AND FOR ALL MY FALLIBILITY, MY ACCOUNTABILITY...
FROOOM!
...AND LET THE HEALING BEGIN.
TEN NANO-KLIKS TO THRESHOLD...
THIS TIME THERE WILL BE *NO* RETREAT, *NO* HALF-MEASURES. I WILL END THE THREAT YOU POSE TO THE *ENTIRE* UNIVERSE...
KRAKOW!


...OR DIE TRYING!
RAMPAGE... ABORT FIRING SEQUENCE!


THRESHOLD PLUS SIXTEEN CYCLES:
WELL?
NO SIGN OF EVEN THE MOST BASIC MOLECULAR ACTIVITY.
IT'S OVER.
IS IT? WHO KNOWS WHAT DAMAGE THUNDERWING DID WHEREVER BLUDGEON SENT HIM?
AND THEN THERE'S THIS ULTRA-ENERGON... WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?
I WANT ANSWERS, JETFIRE, SOONER RATHER THAN LATER. BECAUSE, AS BAD AS THIS HAS BEEN...
...I FEAR THERE'S THE POTENTIAL HERE FOR THINGS TO GET MUCH, MUCH WORSE!


ARK-27:
ANYTHING?
PLENTY. SEEMS BLUDGEON WAS GIVEN THE JOB OF DE-ARCHIVING SOME KIND OF SEALED WORK-IN-PROGRESS CACHE. I'M STILL WORKING ON ITS POINT OF ORIGIN.
ANYWAY, HE STUMBLED ACROSS SOMETHING CALLED REGENESIS.
REGENESIS?
A KIND OF COSMIC SEEDING INITIATIVE. WE'RE MISSING A LOT OF THE WHYS AND WHEREFORES—I SUSPECT BLUDGEON DELETED A LOT OF IT HIMSELF—BUT ULTIMATELY THE TRAIL LED HIM TO A PLANET CALLED EARTH.
EARTH.
YOU KNOW IT?
JUST BEFORE ALL THIS STARTED, I RECEIVED A PULSEWAVE FROM EARTH, PROWL'S DETACHMENT. THE DECEPTICONS THERE HAD ENGAGED SIEGE MODE UNEXPECTEDLY.
COINCIDENCE?
I'M NOT A GREAT BELIEVER IN IT.
CROSSHAIRS...
"...SET A COURSE FOR EARTH."
continued in TRANSFORMERS: ESCALATION...

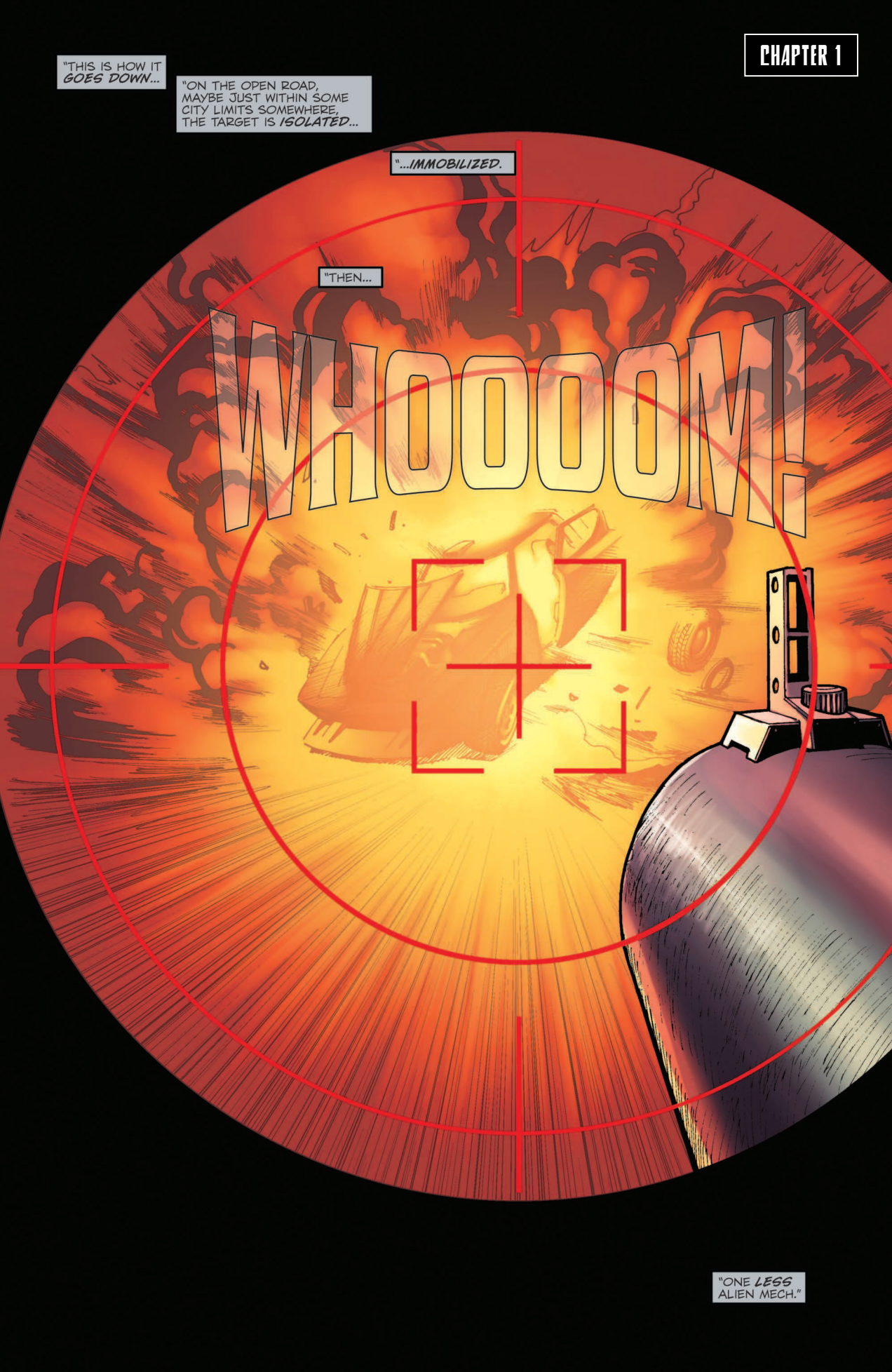


ART BY DON FIGUERDA
COLORS BY JOSH BURCHAM

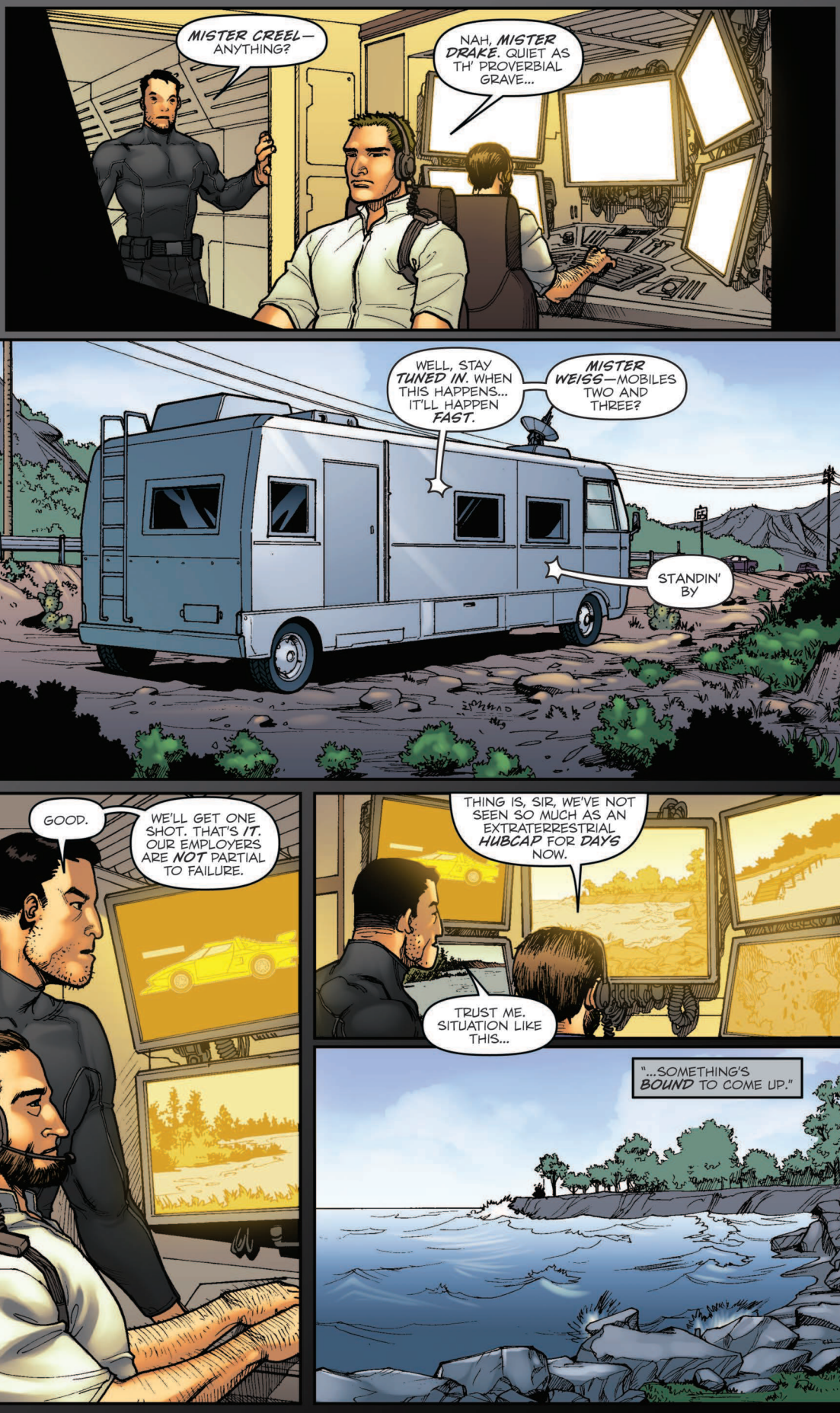
THE TRANSFORMERS
ESCALATION



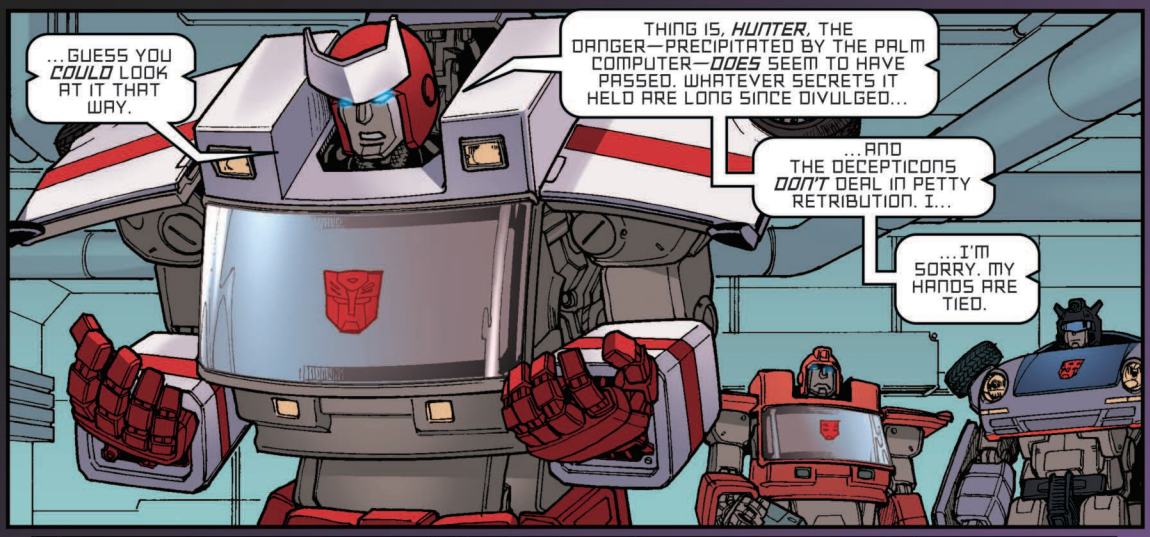
ART BY E.J. SU

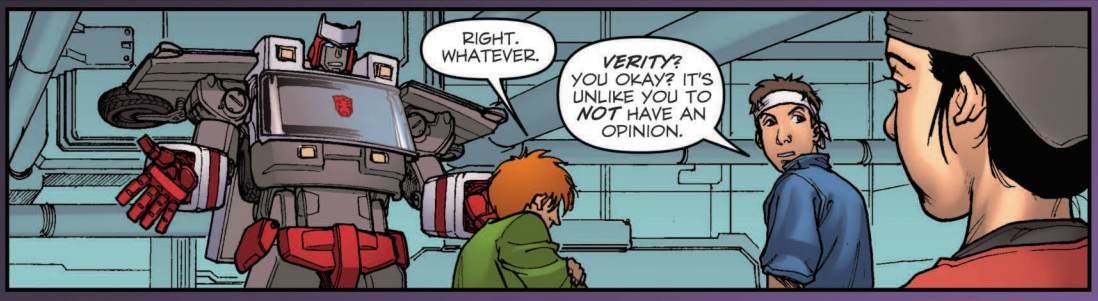

CHAPTER 1
"THIS IS HOW IT GOES DOWN...
"ON THE OPEN ROAD, MAYBE JUST WITHIN SOME CITY LIMITS SOMEWHERE, THE TARGET IS ISOLATED...
"...IMMOBILIZED.
"THEN...
WHOOOOM!
"ONE LESS ALIEN MECH."


"OF COURSE..."
...OUT THERE, IN THE FIELD, IT MIGHT ALL BE VERY DIFFERENT.
WHICH IS WHY WE HAVE TO BE PREPARED FOR ANY EVENTUALITY, ANY GIVEN SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES.
MACHINATION FIELD UNIT: SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN.
THAT'S IT FOR NOW. ORDINANCE CHECK IS AT 0900, NEXT SIMULATION AT 0945.
AND REMEMBER, FROM THIS POINT ON, SOON AS WE GET AN ACTIONABLE PROFILE...
...WE ROLL!


MISTER CREEL— ANYTHING?
NAH, MISTER DRAKE. QUIET AS TH' PROVERBIAL GRAVE...
WELL, STAY TUNED IN. WHEN THIS HAPPENS... IT'LL HAPPEN FAST.
MISTER WEISS—MOBILES TWO AND THREE?
STANDIN' BY
GOOD.
WE'LL GET ONE SHOT. THAT'S IT. OUR EMPLOYERS ARE NOT PARTIAL TO FAILURE.
THING IS, SIR, WE'VE NOT SEEN SO MUCH AS AN EXTRATERRESTRIAL HUBCAP FOR DAYS NOW.
TRUST ME. SITUATION LIKE THIS...
"...SOMETHING'S BOUND TO COME UP."

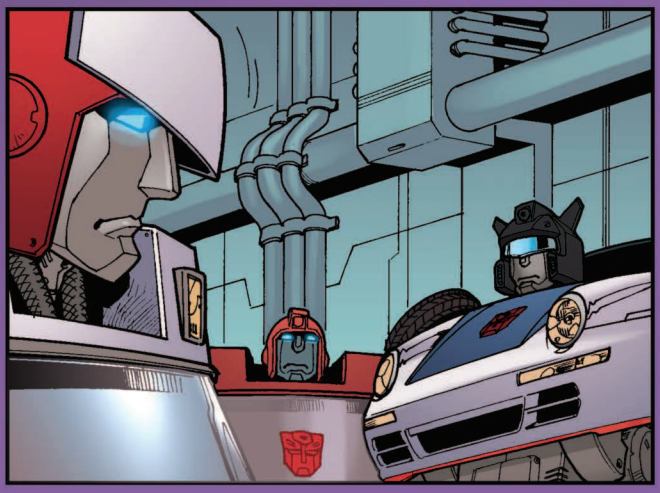

ARK-19:
WE'RE WHAT?
YOU'RE GOING BACK. TO YOUR HOMES, YOUR LIVES.
BUT...
...I THOUGHT WE WERE A PART OF THIS NOW, KIND OF, I DUNNO, HONORARY AUTOBOTS.
I—WE—DON'T WANT TO GO BACK. RATCHET, AFTER ALL WE'VE SEEN... AND DONE... HOW CAN WE?
HECK, SOME OF US DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO GO BACK TO. MY GARAGE, WELL....
...I DON'T THINK THE INSURANCE WILL COVER IT.
ALIEN
DEATHRAY
IF IT WAS UP TO ME...
OH, I GET IT. THIS IS PROWL'S DOING, ISN'T IT? HE'S THE ONE SHOWING US THE DOOR.
FIGURES.
DOESN'T MATTER WE CAME THROUGH FOR YOU GUYS, ALMOST GOT OURSELVES KILLED IN THE PROCESS... WE'RE NOW JUST SURPLUS TO REQUIREMENTS. RIGHT?
I...

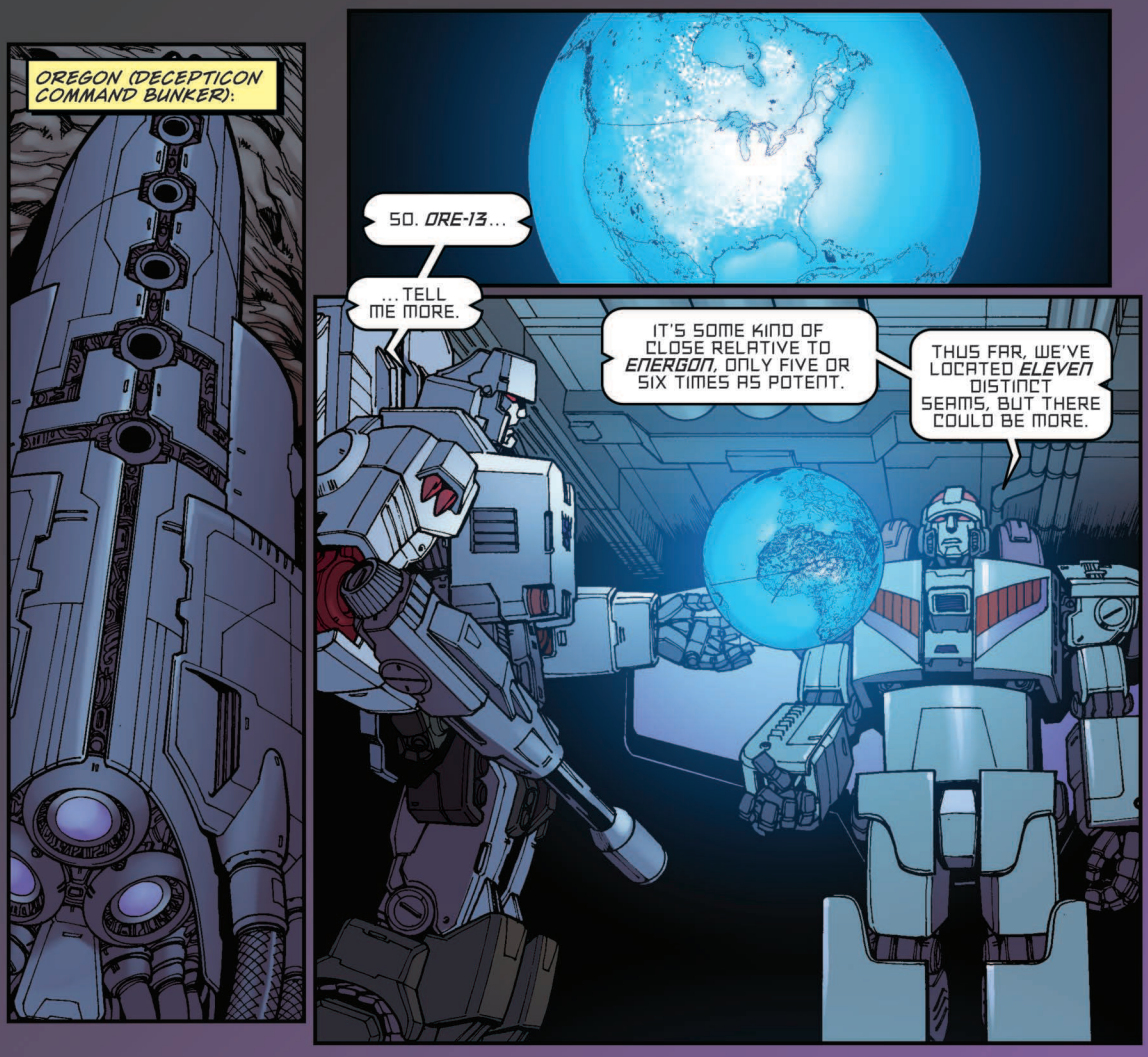

...GUESS YOU *COULD* LOOK AT IT THAT WAY.
THING IS, *HUNTER*, THE DANGER—PRECIPITATED BY THE PALM COMPUTER—*DOES* SEEM TO HAVE PASSED. WHATEVER SECRETS IT HELD ARE LONG SINCE DIVULGED...
...AND THE DECEPTICONS *DON'T* DEAL IN PETTY RETRIBUTION. I...
...I'M SORRY. MY HANDS ARE TIED.

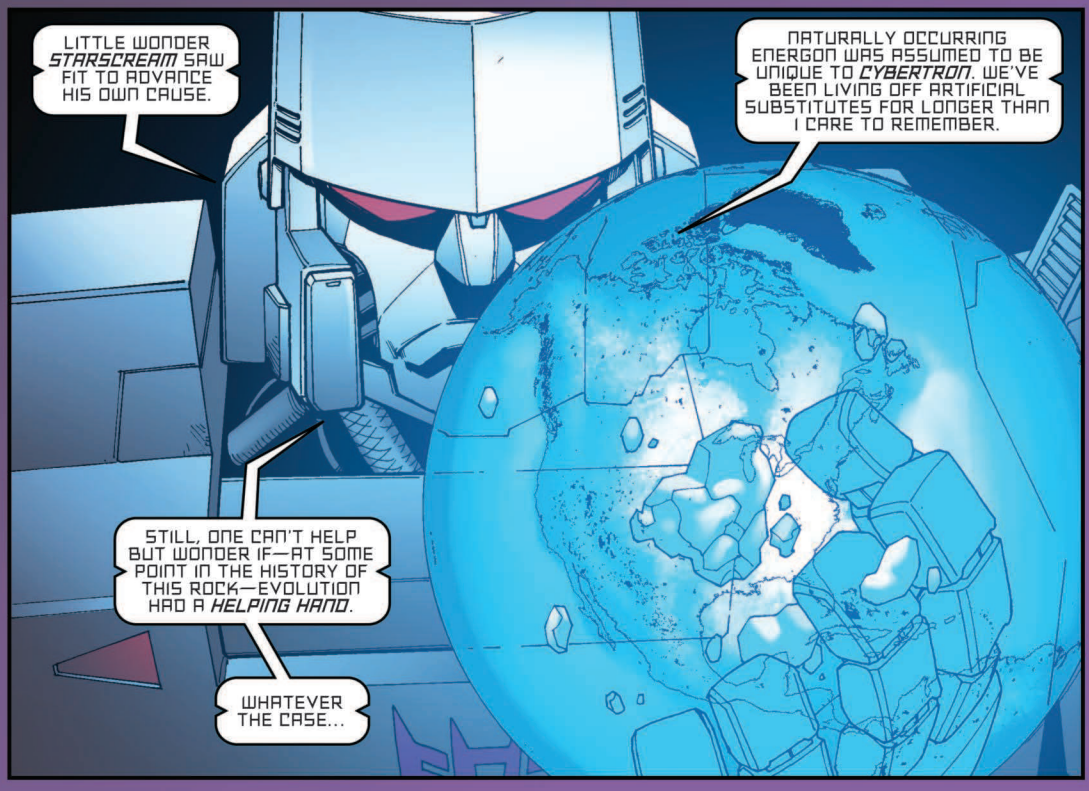

RIGHT. WHATEVER.
VERITY? YOU OKAY? IT'S UNLIKE YOU TO *NOT* HAVE AN OPINION.


FH. I'VE NOT BEEN WANTED ANYWHERE, BY ANYONE, SINCE I STARTED CRAWLING.

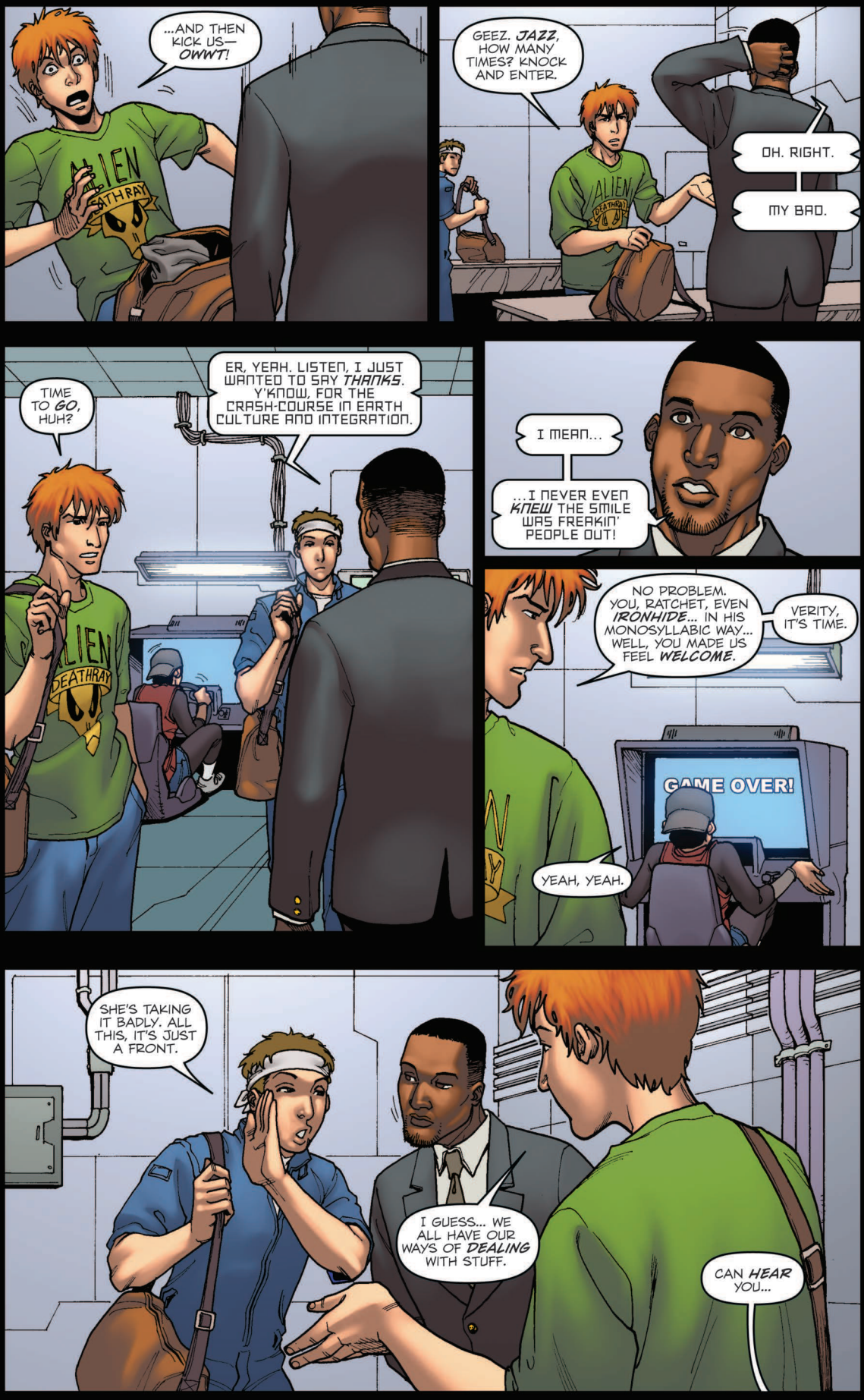

WHY SHOULD IT BE ANY *DIFFERENT* THIS TIME AROUND?

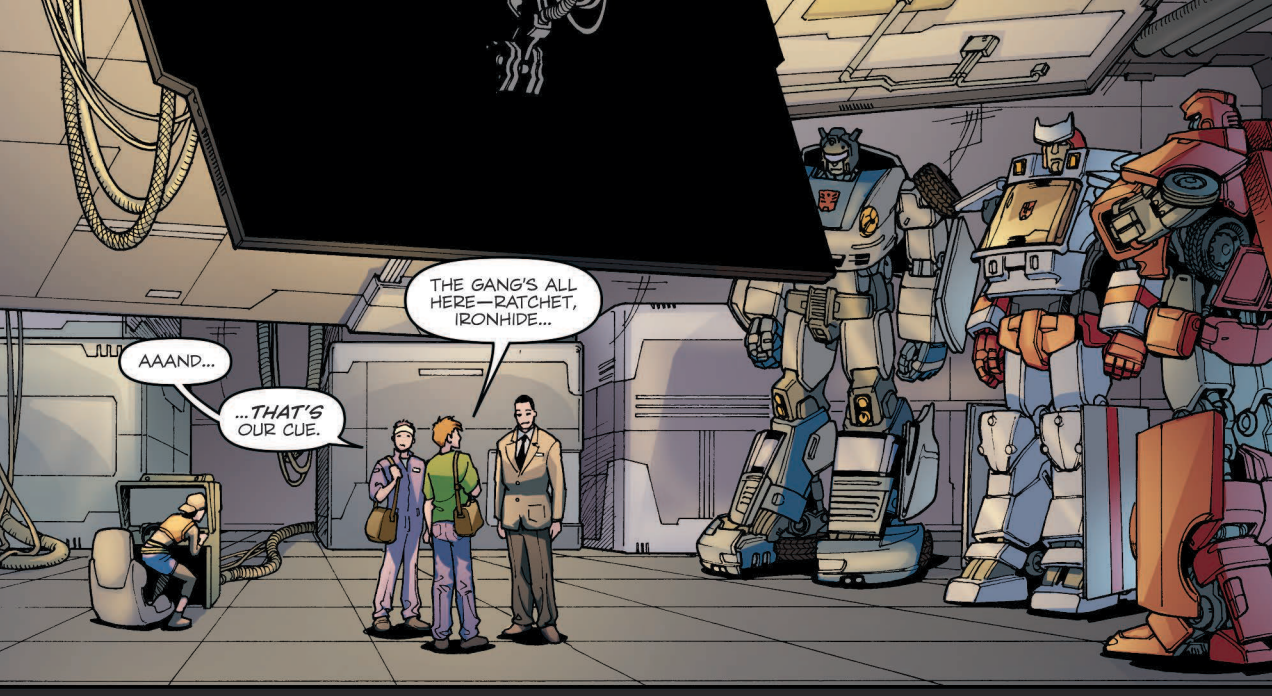


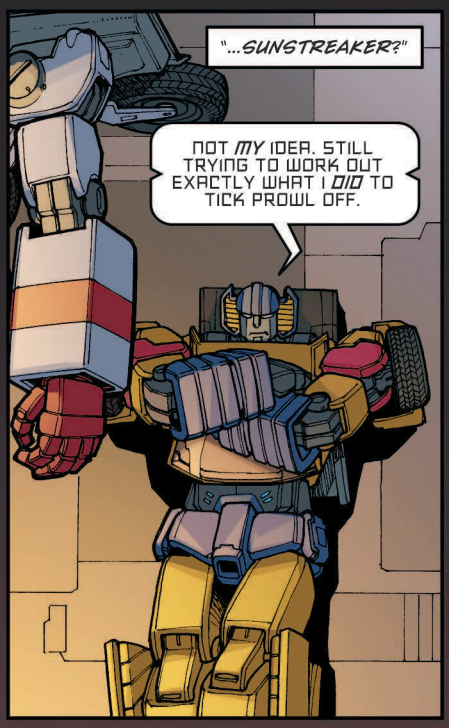

OREGON (DECEPTICON COMMAND BUNKER):
SO. ORE-13...
...TELL ME MORE.
IT'S SOME KIND OF CLOSE RELATIVE TO ENERGON, ONLY FIVE OR SIX TIMES AS POTENT.
THUS FAR, WE'VE LOCATED ELEVEN DISTINCT SEAMS, BUT THERE COULD BE MORE.

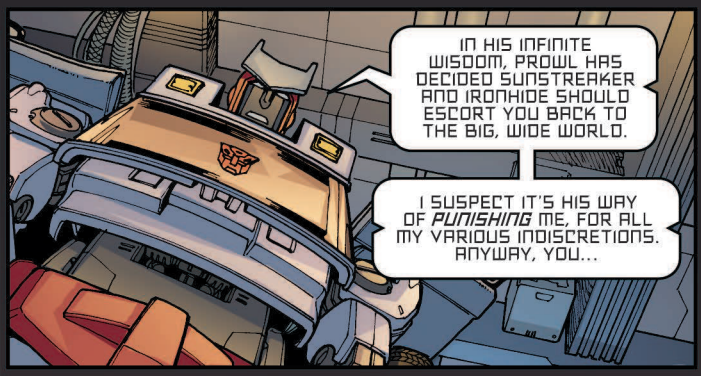

LITTLE WONDER STARSCREAM SAW FIT TO ADVANCE HIS OWN CAUSE.
NATURALLY OCCURRING ENERGON WAS ASSUMED TO BE UNIQUE TO CYBERTRON. WE'VE BEEN LIVING OFF ARTIFICIAL SUBSTITUTES FOR LONGER THAN I CARE TO REMEMBER.
STILL, ONE CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER IF—AT SOME POINT IN THE HISTORY OF THIS ROCK—EVOLUTION HAD A HELPING HAND.
WHATEVER THE CASE...

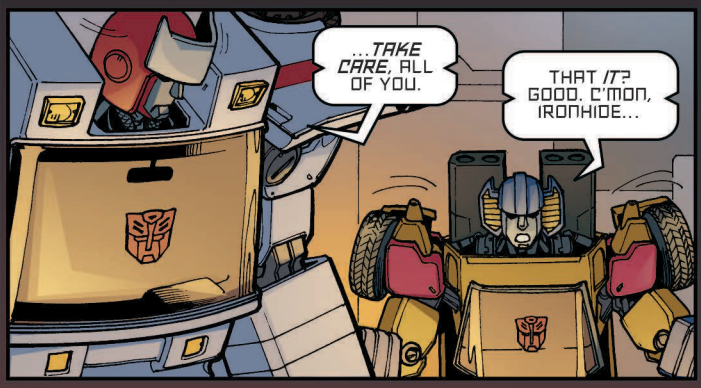

...ITS PRESENCE HERE COULD BE DECISIVE.
ASTROTRAIN—I WANT A FULL TACTICAL TOUR OF THE INFILTRATION PHASE.
AT ONCE, LORD MEGATRON.
WHERE STARSCREAM SAW VAINGLORIOUS SELF-ADVANCEMENT, I SEE TOTAL LONG-TERM VICTORY. THE STAGED PROCESS HERE MUST BE ADVANCED.
PERHAPS EVEN...
"...ACCELERATED."
VROOM!
PTUP!
TNK!
FKWUUMM!
300 pts.
IMAGINE THE EGO REQUIRED...
...TO DESIGN A CONSOLE GAME AND MAKE YOURSELF THE STAR OF THE SHOW!
300 pts.
ALIEN DEATHRAY
STRANGE. TO GO TO ALL THE TROUBLE OF MAKING US AS COMFORTABLE AS POSSIBLE...

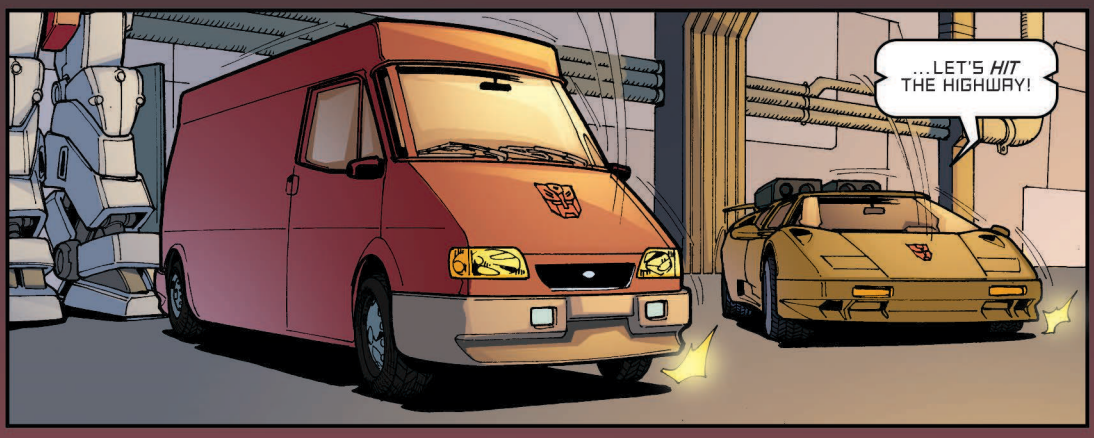

...AND THEN KICK US— OWWT!
GEEZ. JAZZ, HOW MANY TIMES? KNOCK AND ENTER.
OH. RIGHT.
MY BAD.
ER, YEAH. LISTEN, I JUST WANTED TO SAY THANKS. Y'KNOW, FOR THE CRASH-COURSE IN EARTH CULTURE AND INTEGRATION.
TIME TO GO, HUH?
I MEAN...
...I NEVER EVEN KNEW THE SMILE WAS FREAKIN' PEOPLE OUT!
NO PROBLEM. YOU, RATCHET, EVEN IRONHIDE... IN HIS MONOSYLLABIC WAY... WELL, YOU MADE US FEEL WELCOME.
VERITY, IT'S TIME.
GAME OVER!
YEAH, YEAH.
SHE'S TAKING IT BADLY. ALL THIS, IT'S JUST A FRONT.
I GUESS... WE ALL HAVE OUR WAYS OF DEALING WITH STUFF.
CAN HEAR YOU...

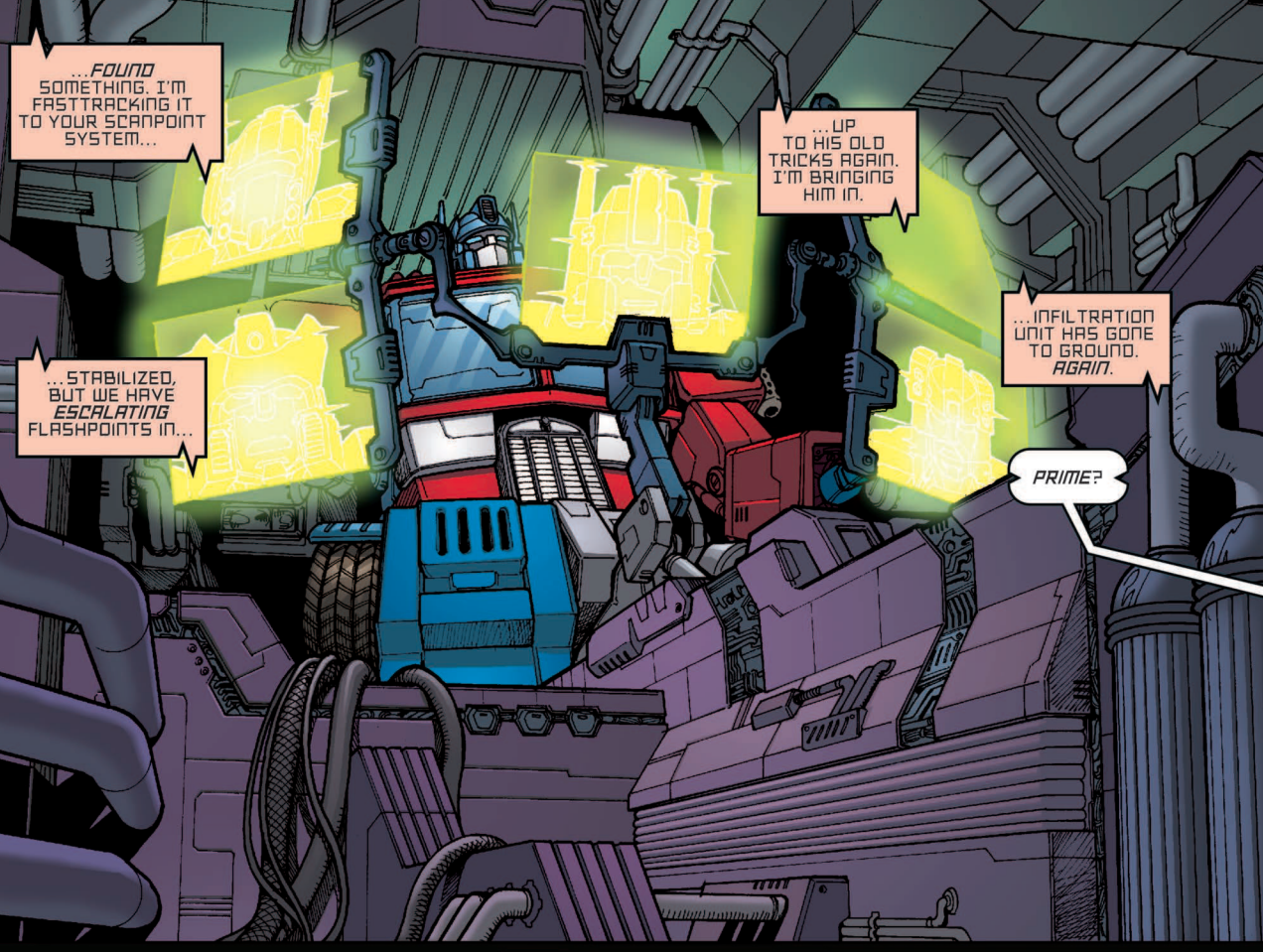

AAAND...
...THAT'S OUR CUE.
THE GANG'S ALL HERE—RATCHET, IRONHIDE...


"...SUNSTREAKER?"
NOT MY IDEA. STILL TRYING TO WORK OUT EXACTLY WHAT I DID TO TICK PROWL OFF.

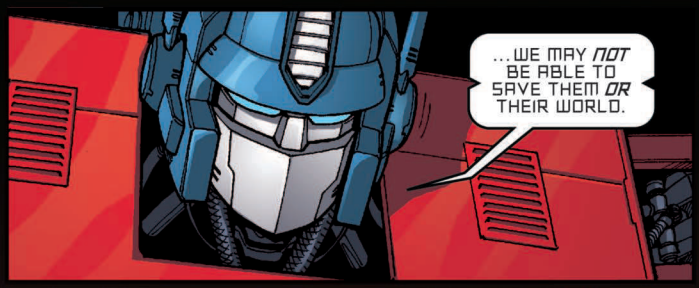

IN HIS INFINITE WISDOM, PROWL HAS DECIDED SUNSTREAKER AND IRONHIDE SHOULD ESCORT YOU BACK TO THE BIG, WIDE WORLD.
I SUSPECT IT'S HIS WAY OF PUNISHING ME, FOR ALL MY VARIOUS INDISCRETIONS. ANYWAY, YOU...

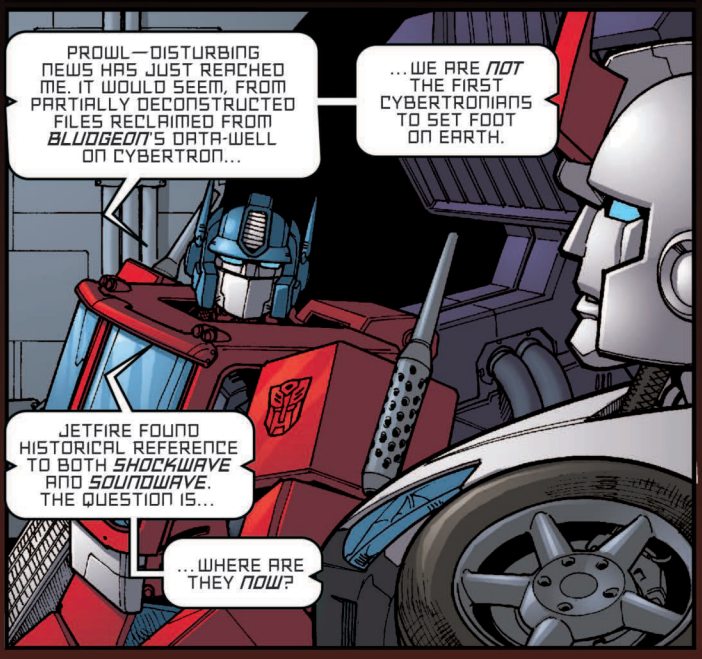

...TAKE CARE, ALL OF YOU.
THAT IT? GOOD. C'MON, IRONHIDE...

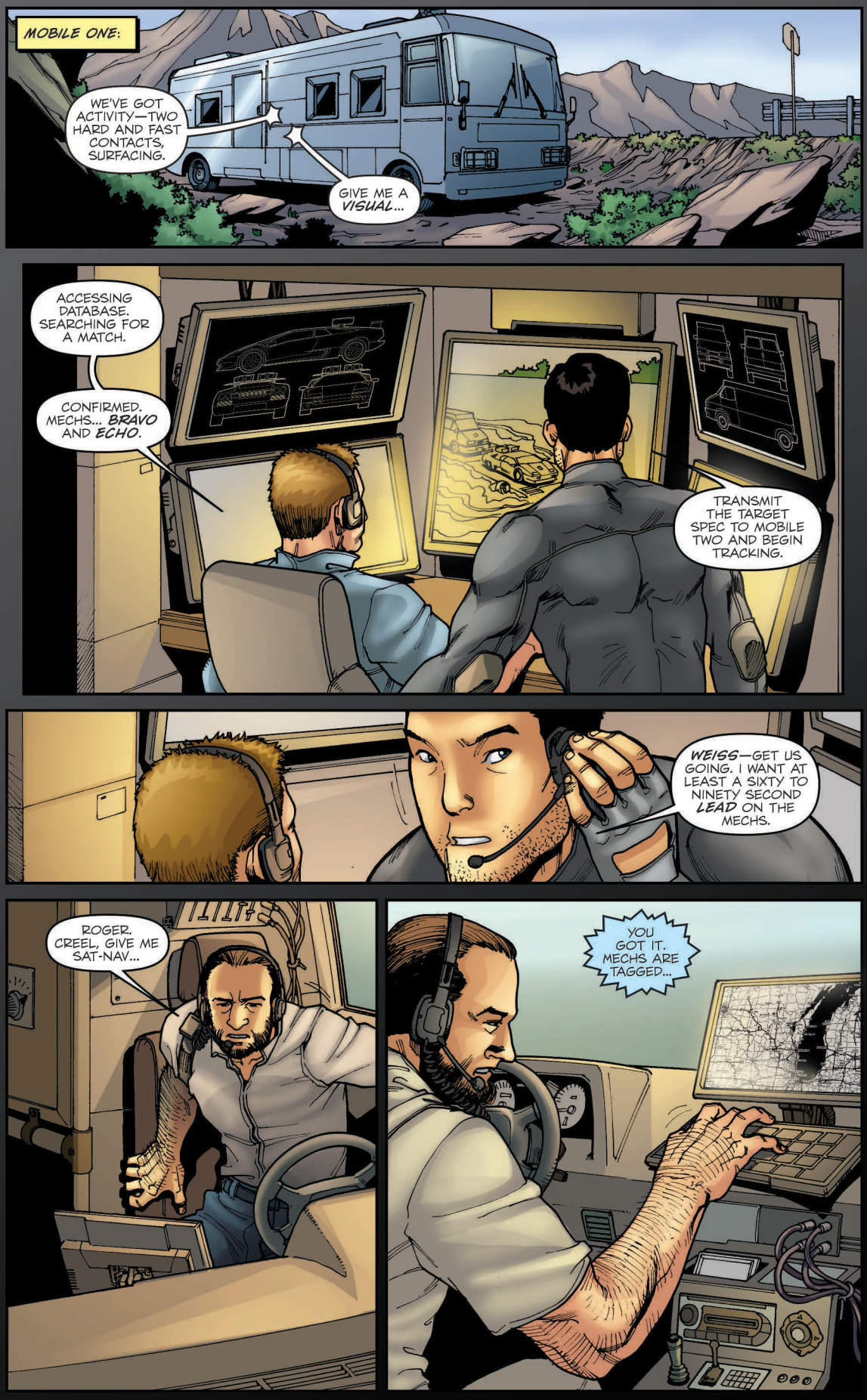

...LET'S HIT THE HIGHWAY!


...FOUND SOMETHING. I'M FASTTRACKING IT TO YOUR SCANPOINT SYSTEM...
...UP TO HIS OLD TRICKS AGAIN. I'M BRINGING HIM IN.
...INFILTRATION UNIT HAS GONE TO GROUND. AGAIN.
...STABILIZED, BUT WE HAVE ESCALATING FLASHPOINTS IN...
PRIME?

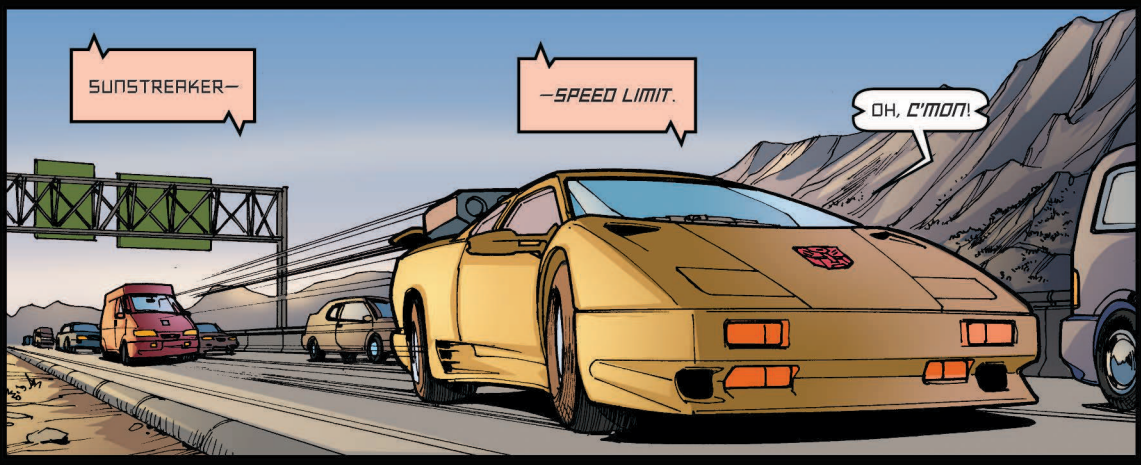

THE HUMANS ARE GONE.
THANK YOU, PROWL. IT'S IMPORTANT WE MAINTAIN A HEALTHY DISTANCE FROM ANY INDIGENT SPECIES. ESPECIALLY WHEN, ULTIMATELY...


...WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO SAVE THEM OR THEIR WORLD.

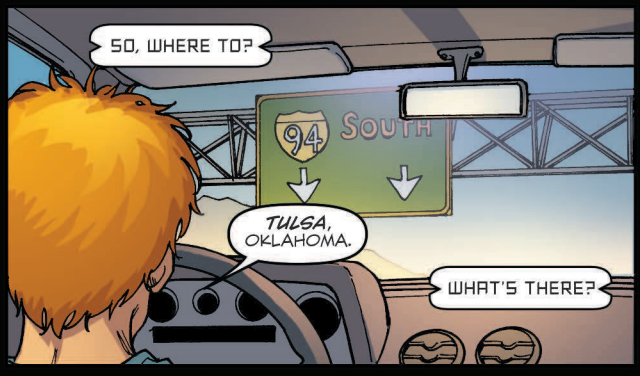

PROWL—DISTURBING NEWS HAS JUST REACHED ME. IT WOULD SEEM, FROM PARTIALLY DECONSTRUCTED FILES RECLAIMED FROM BLUDGEON'S DATA-WELL ON CYBERTRON...
...WE ARE NOT THE FIRST CYBERTRONIANS TO SET FOOT ON EARTH.
JETFIRE FOUND HISTORICAL REFERENCE TO BOTH SHOCKWAVE AND SOUNDWAVE. THE QUESTION IS...
...WHERE ARE THEY NOW?


MOBILE ONE:
WE'VE GOT ACTIVITY—TWO HARD AND FAST CONTACTS, SURFACING.
GIVE ME A VISUAL...
ACCESSING DATABASE. SEARCHING FOR A MATCH.
CONFIRMED. MECHS... BRAVO AND ECHO.
TRANSMIT THE TARGET SPEC TO MOBILE TWO AND BEGIN TRACKING.
WEISS—GET US GOING. I WANT AT LEAST A SIXTY TO NINETY SECOND LEAD ON THE MECHS.
ROGER. CREEL, GIVE ME SAT-NAV...
YOU GOT IT. MECHS ARE TAGGED...

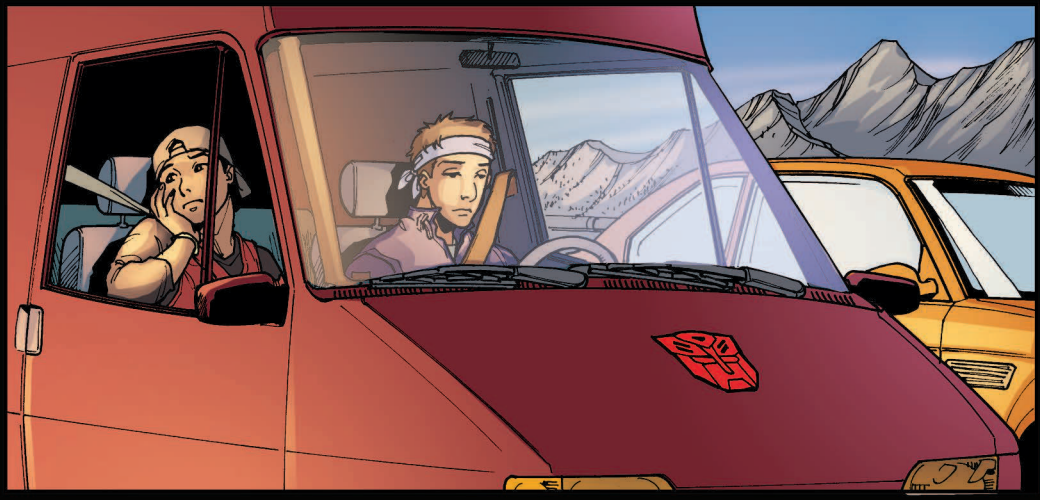

"...AND MOBILE."
GOT 'EM. PROCEEDING SOUTH TO THE 94. BRAVO AND ECHO...
...ARE IN THE SLIPSTREAM.
GOOD. SOON AS WE HAVE A FIRM DIRECTIONAL INTENT, WE'LL ESTABLISH AN INTERCEPT ZONE.
MOBILES TWO AND THREE, ACKNOWLEDGE.
Chicago
Kansas City
St. Louis
Memphis
MOBILE TWO. TRACKING...
MOBILE THREE. TRACKING...

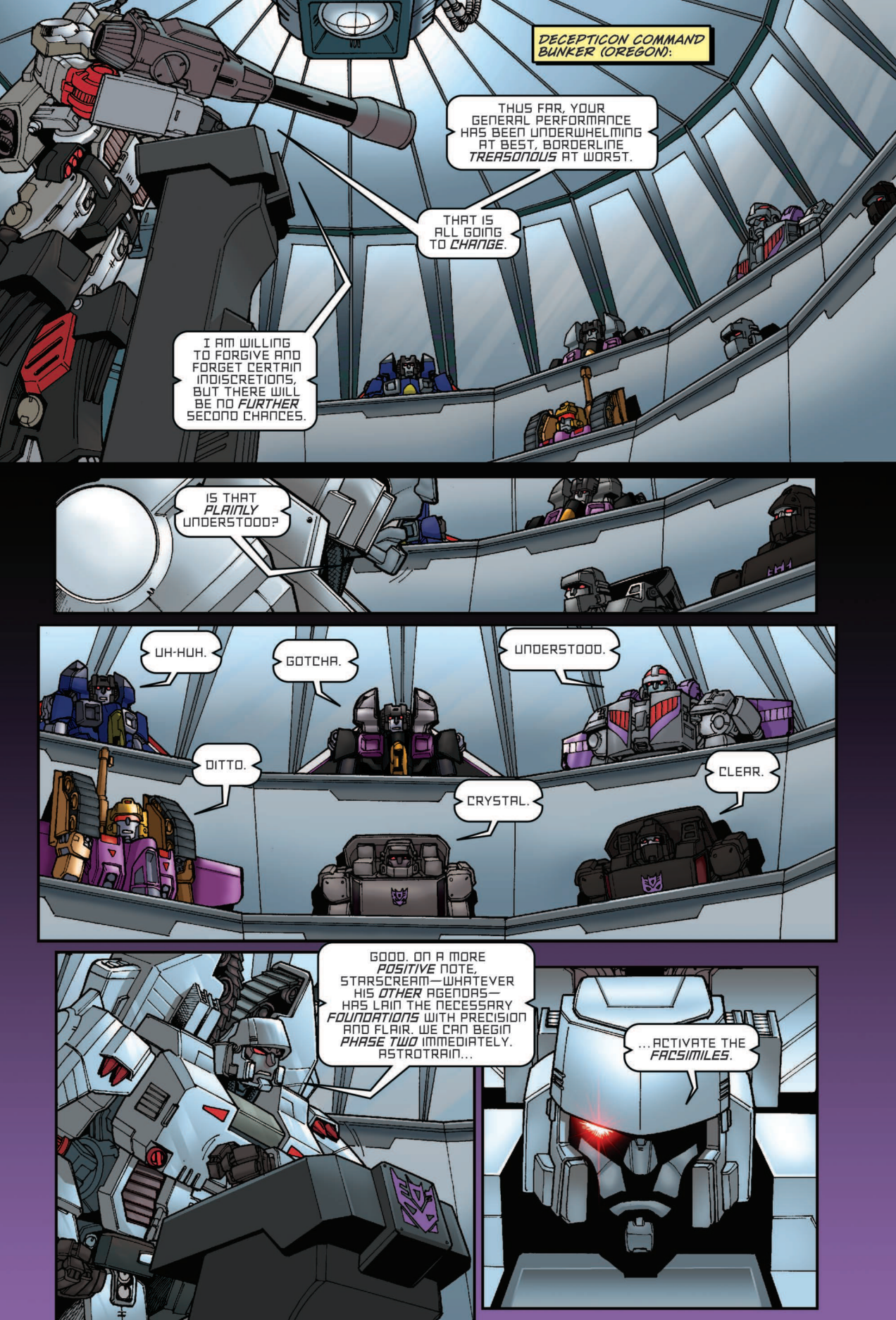

SUNSTREAKER—
—SPEED LIMIT.
OH, C'MON!


BAD ENOUGH I GOTTA SHARE MY UPHOLSTERY WITH A SPECIES THAT SHEDS SKIN ON A REGULAR BASIS, BUT NOW I GOTTA SUPER-SIZE THE EXPERIENCE?


SO, WHERE TO?
94 SOUTH
TULSA, OKLAHOMA.
WHAT'S THERE?

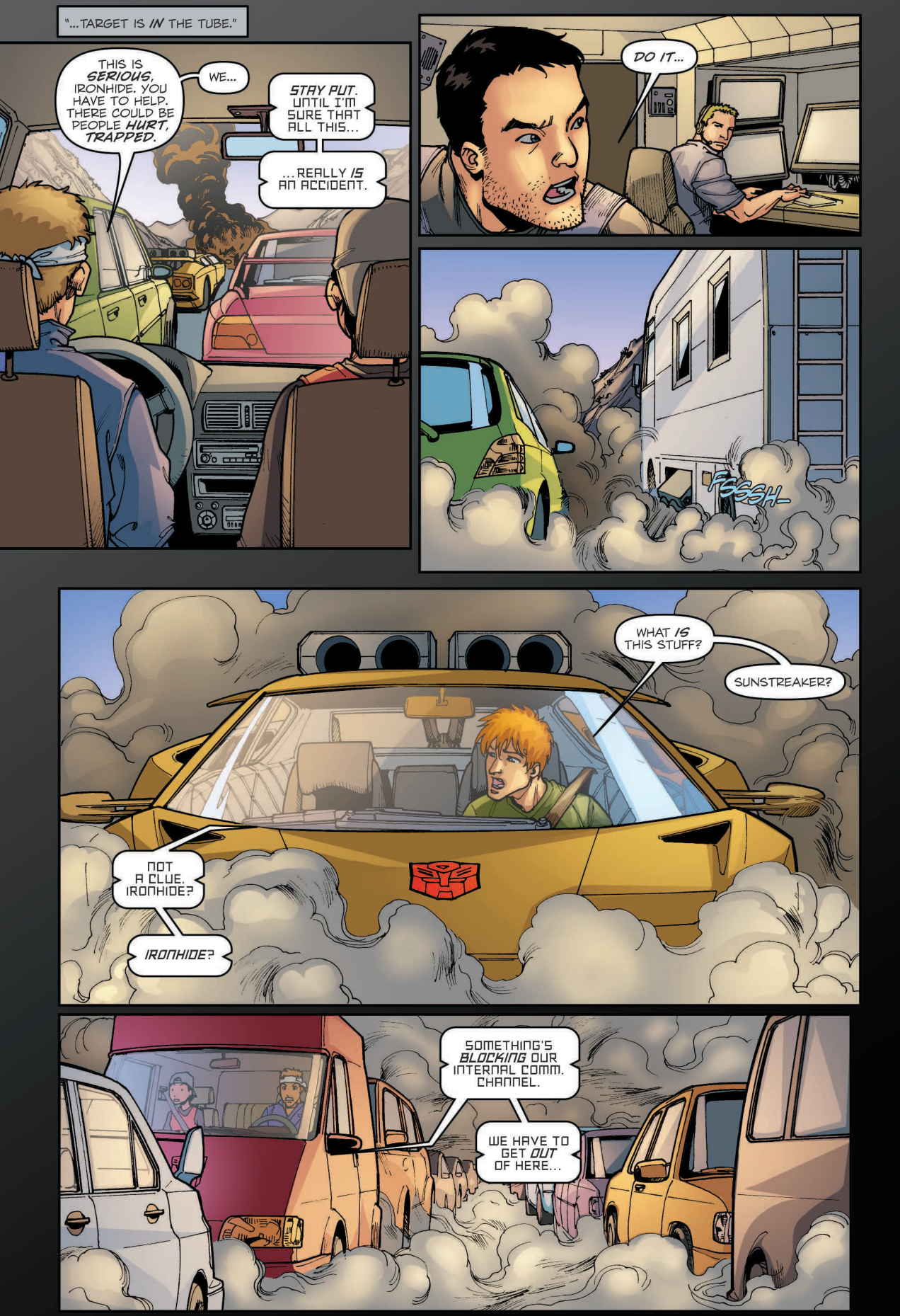

MY LIFE.



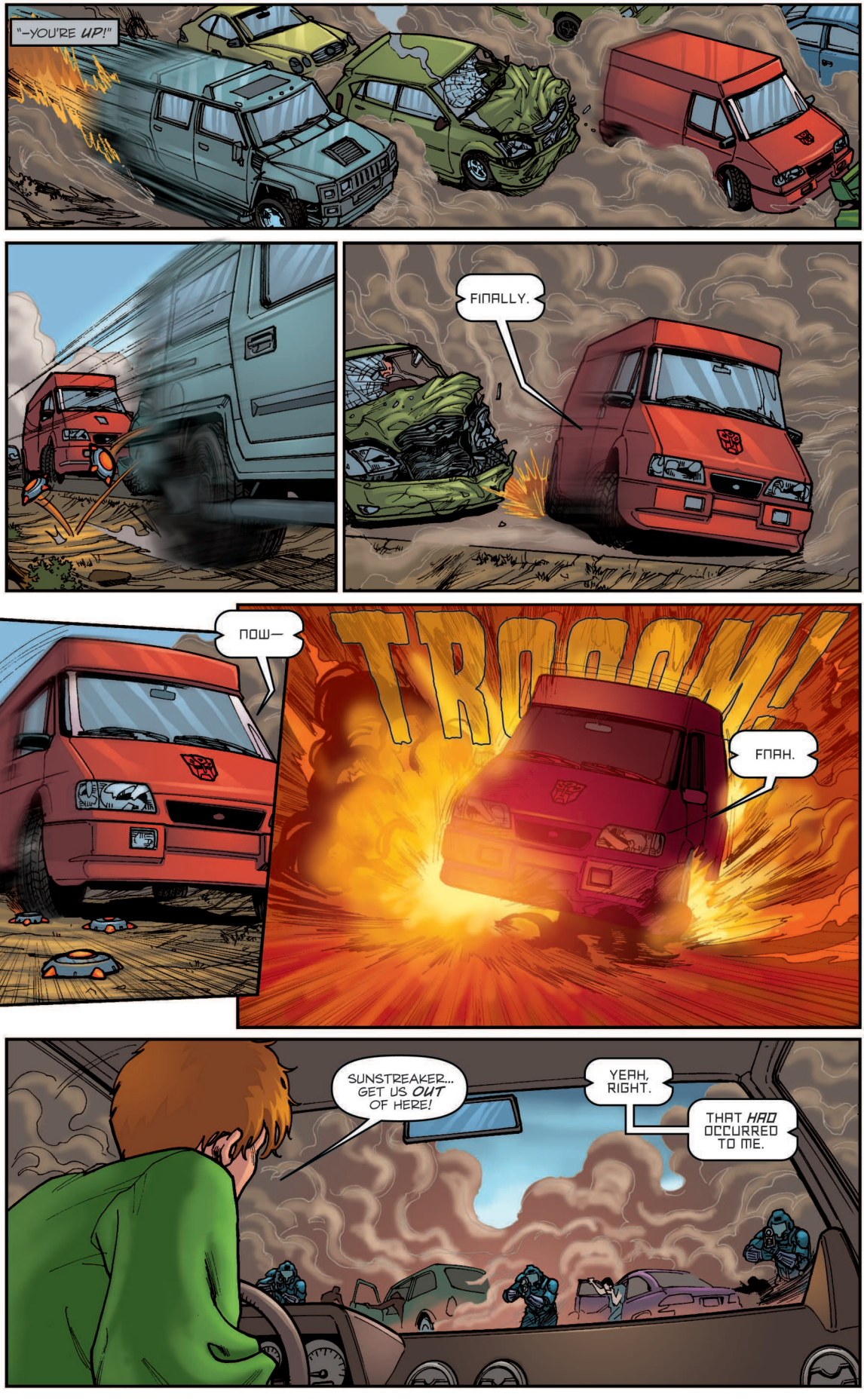

DECEPTICON COMMAND BUNKER (OREGON):
THUS FAR, YOUR GENERAL PERFORMANCE HAS BEEN UNDERWHELMING AT BEST, BORDERLINE *TREASONOUS* AT WORST.
THAT IS ALL GOING TO *CHANGE*.
I AM WILLING TO FORGIVE AND FORGET CERTAIN INDISCRETIONS, BUT THERE WILL BE NO *FURTHER* SECOND CHANCES.
IS THAT *PLAINLY* UNDERSTOOD?
UH-HUH.
GOTCHA.
UNDERSTOOD.
DITTO.
CRYSTAL.
CLEAR.
GOOD. ON A MORE *POSITIVE* NOTE, STARSCREAM—WHATEVER HIS *OTHER* AGENDAS—HAS LAID THE NECESSARY *FOUNDATIONS* WITH PRECISION AND FLAIR. WE CAN BEGIN *PHASE TWO* IMMEDIATELY. ASTROTRAIN...
...ACTIVATE THE *FACSIMILES*.


(VICINITY OF) LEBANON, MI:
YEAH, THIS IS MOBILE TWO. WE ARE IN POSITION.
ISSHH
MOBILE TWO, WE ARE INBOUND, ONE POINT TWO MILES FROM THE INTERCEPT ZONE.
CONTACT IS STILL HOT. WE ARE GO, I REPEAT...
"...WE ARE GO.
"ACTIVATE THE DRONES."
VRRR-
-MMM!
HONNNK!
SKRRREEE
DUNT!


CHUNT!
"NOW...
"...GIMME GRIDLOCK!"
TSHHH!!
HOOOM!
RIGHT. EVERYONE TO THEIR MARKERS...


"...TARGET IS IN THE TUBE."
THIS IS SERIOUS, IRONHIDE. YOU HAVE TO HELP. THERE COULD BE PEOPLE HURT, TRAPPED.
WE...
STAY PUT. UNTIL I'M SURE THAT ALL THIS...
...REALLY IS AN ACCIDENT.
DO IT...
FSSSH-
WHAT IS THIS STUFF?
SUNSTREAKER?
NOT A CLUE, IRONHIDE?
IRONHIDE?
SOMETHING'S BLOCKING OUR INTERNAL COMM. CHANNEL.
WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE...


...NOW!
WH-NNN!
SHNNNG!
DON-TTT!
CHNNNG!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
APART FROM MAKING MATTERS WORSE!
WE'VE BEEN BOXED IN...
...AND THEY'RE CLOSING THE DOOR!
MOBILE TWO—DELIVER THE PACKAGE.
MOBILE THREE—

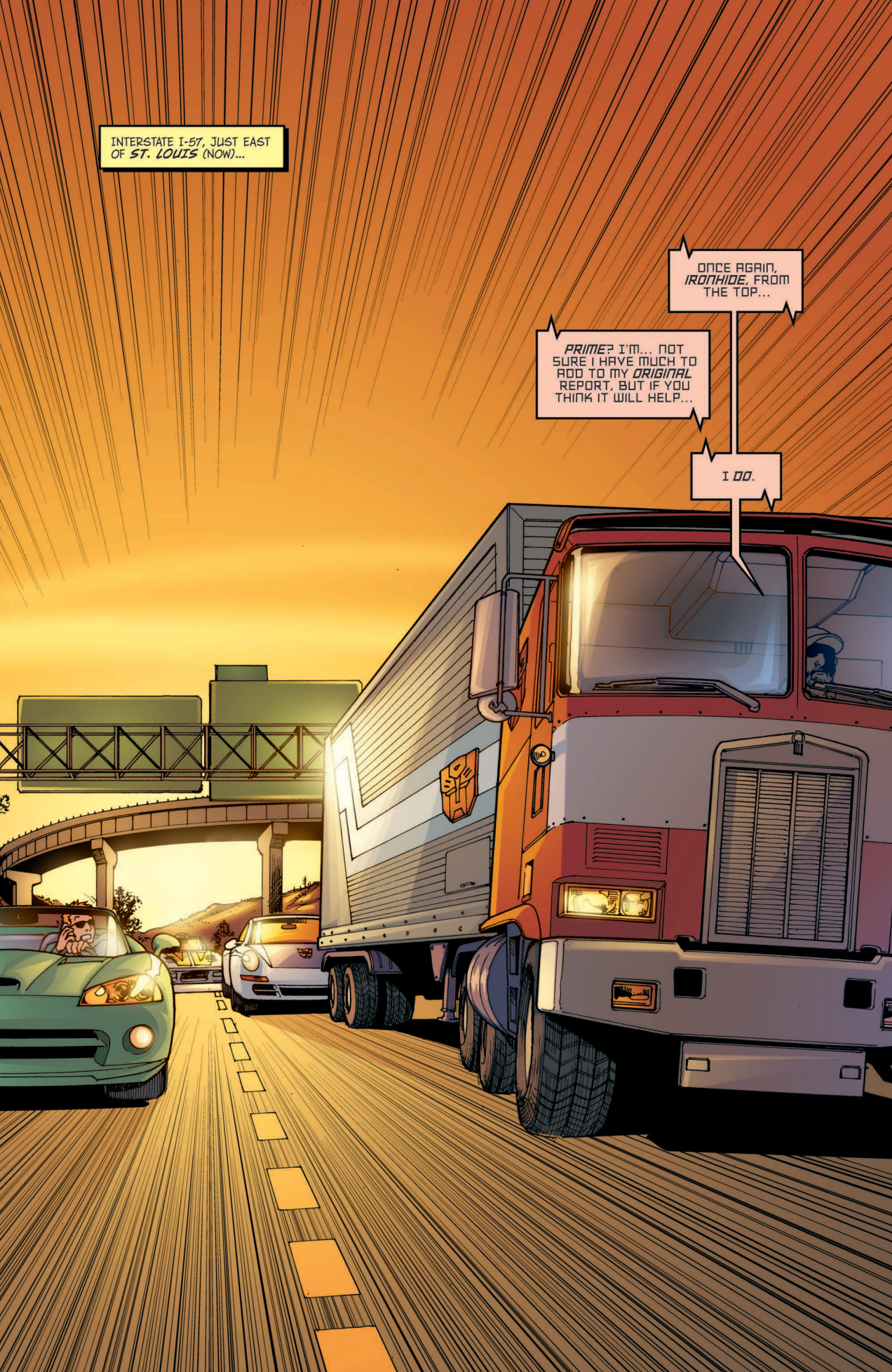

"–YOU'RE UP!"
FINALLY.
NOW–
TROOOM!
FNRH.
SUNSTREAKER... GET US OUT OF HERE!
YEAH, RIGHT.
THAT HAD OCCURRED TO ME.

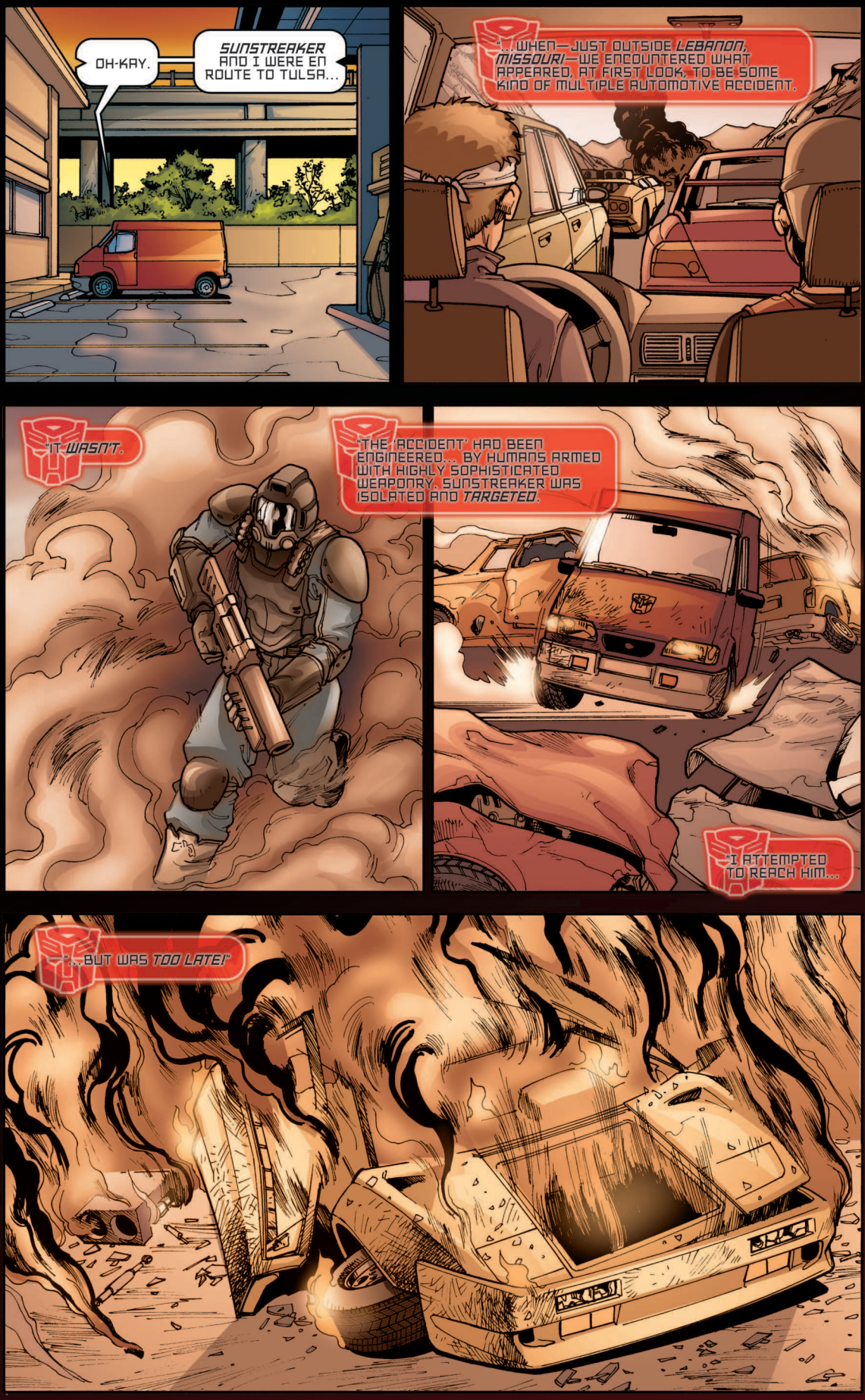

WHOA, WHOA!
VEENT—
THERE ARE SURVIVORS, CASUALTIES... YOU CAN'T JUST RANDOMLY OPEN FIRE!
THEN WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST?
TRANSFORM...
"...NOW! BEFORE..."
SHRIIIK!
GHEEEAH!
SUNSTREAKER!
TINK!


"THIS IS HOW IT GOES DOWN...
"ON THE OPEN ROAD, MAYBE JUST WITHIN SOME CITY LIMITS SOMEWHERE, THE TARGET IS ISOLATED...
HAVE TO CUT ACROSS...
"...IMMOBILIZED.
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
CAN'T SEE!
"THEN..."
WHOOOOM!


HOLD...
...TIGHT...
...SUNSTREAKER, I'M...
...COM—
SUNSTREAKER!
HUNTER..?

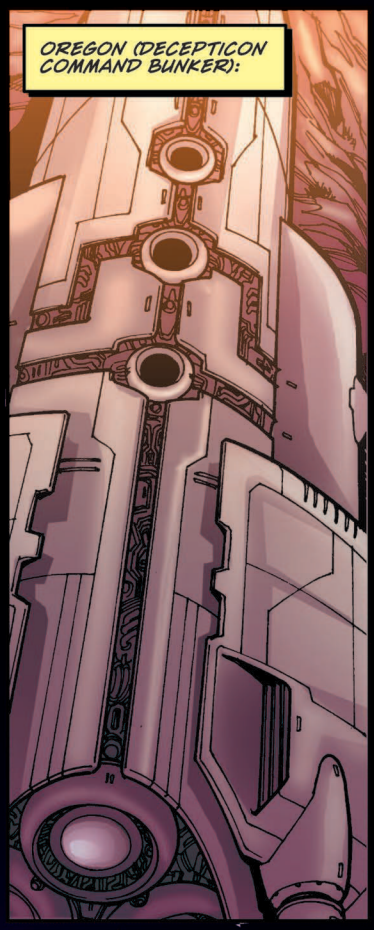

WASHINGTON DC (NINE MONTHS AGO):
GENERAL.
SENATOR.
WHAT IS IT I CAN DO FOR YOU?
WELL. BETWEEN YOU AND ME, MY OFFICE IS FUNDED, FOR THE MOST PART, BY AN OIL COMPANY OF SOME REPUTE AND INFLUENCE, DOMESTICALLY SPEAKING.
TALK OF TROOP WITHDRAWLS AND CEASEFIRES IN CERTAIN DISPUTED REGIONS OF THE GULF IS MAKING THEM ANTSY. THEY WANT...
JAMES A. GARFIELD
1831 - 1881
...REASSURANCES.
STABILITY OVER THERE IS, AH, BAD FOR BUSINESS HERE. IS THAT IT?
EXACTLY.
WELL RELAX, SENATOR. YOU TELL THEM...
...WE'RE IN FOR THE LONG HAUL!
IDENTITY CONFIRMED.
COMMENCING PRIMARY TARGET ACQUISITION...

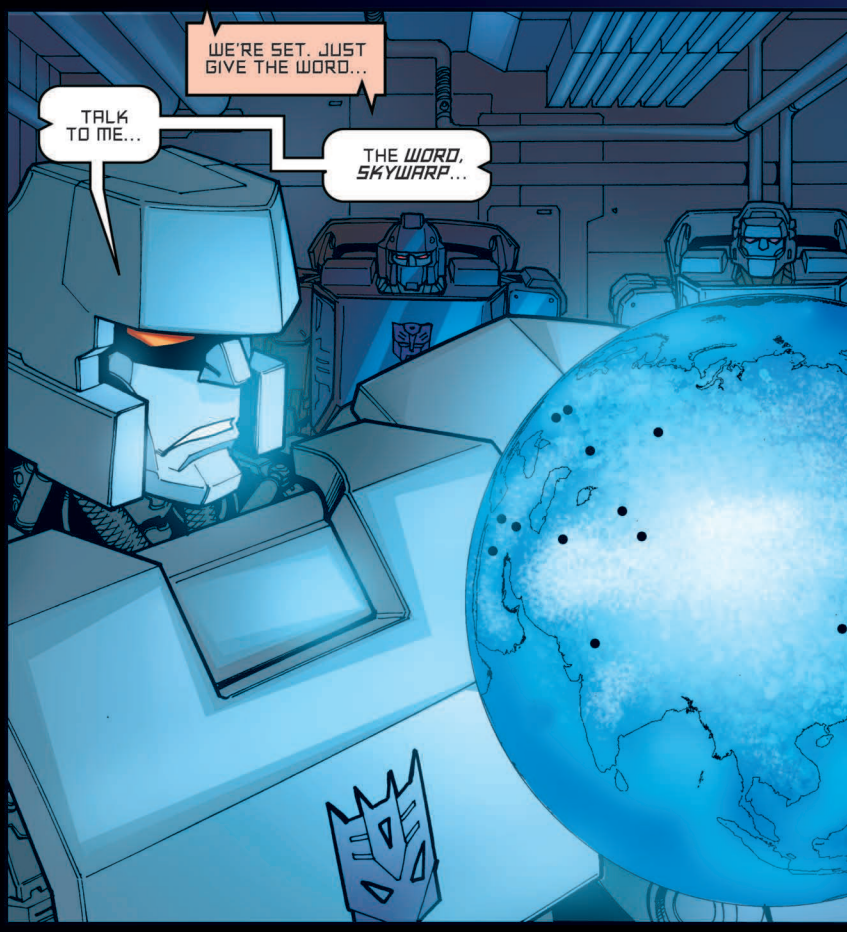

INTERSTATE I-57, JUST EAST OF ST. LOUIS (NOW)...
ONCE AGAIN, IRONHIDE, FROM THE TOP...
PRIME? I'M... NOT SURE I HAVE MUCH TO ADD TO MY ORIGINAL REPORT, BUT IF YOU THINK IT WILL HELP...
I DO.

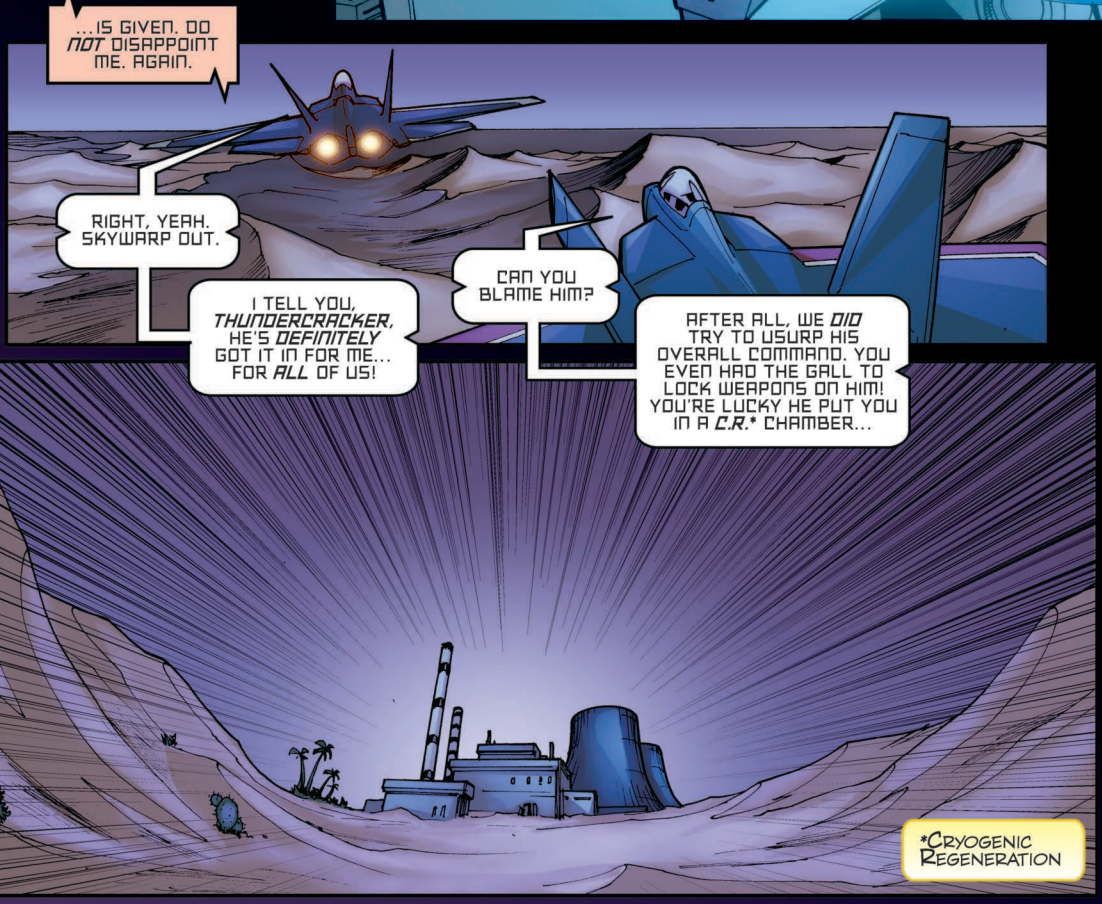

OH-KAY.
SUNSTREAKER AND I WERE EN ROUTE TO TULSA...
"...WHEN—JUST OUTSIDE LEBANON, MISSOURI—WE ENCOUNTERED WHAT APPEARED, AT FIRST LOOK, TO BE SOME KIND OF MULTIPLE AUTOMOTIVE ACCIDENT.
"IT WASN'T.
"THE 'ACCIDENT' HAD BEEN ENGINEERED... BY HUMANS ARMED WITH HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED WEAPONRY. SUNSTREAKER WAS ISOLATED AND TARGETED.
"I ATTEMPTED TO REACH HIM...
"...BUT WAS TOO LATE!"


ANY CHANCE AT ALL HE WAS STILL FUNCTIONAL?
NONE. WHATEVER THEY HIT HIM WITH WAS HARD-CORE. THERE... WASN'T MUCH LEFT!
THE REMAINS?
IN A POLICE COMPOUND, JAZZ, HERE IN SPRINGFIELD. THE HUMAN EMERGENCY SERVICES ARRIVED AT THE SCENE BEFORE I COULD SECURE THE AREA. I... HAD TO BACK OFF.
UNDERSTOOD, BIG RED. NO ONE THINKS OTHERWISE. WHAT ABOUT VERITY AND JIMMY?
SAFE. BUT... UPSET. THEIR FRIEND–HUNTER–WAS INSIDE SUNSTREAKER WHEN HE WAS HIT. HE MUST HAVE PERISHED INSTANTLY.
PRIME...
...THIS HAS TO BE A DECEPTICON ORCHESTRATED ASSAULT. THE WEAPONS USED WERE TAILOR-MADE FOR THE JOB. THEY KNEW EXACTLY WHERE AND HOW TO HURT US.
I SAY WE TAKE THIS RIGHT TO THEIR DOOR... AND KICK IT IN!
NO. ABSOLUTELY NOT!

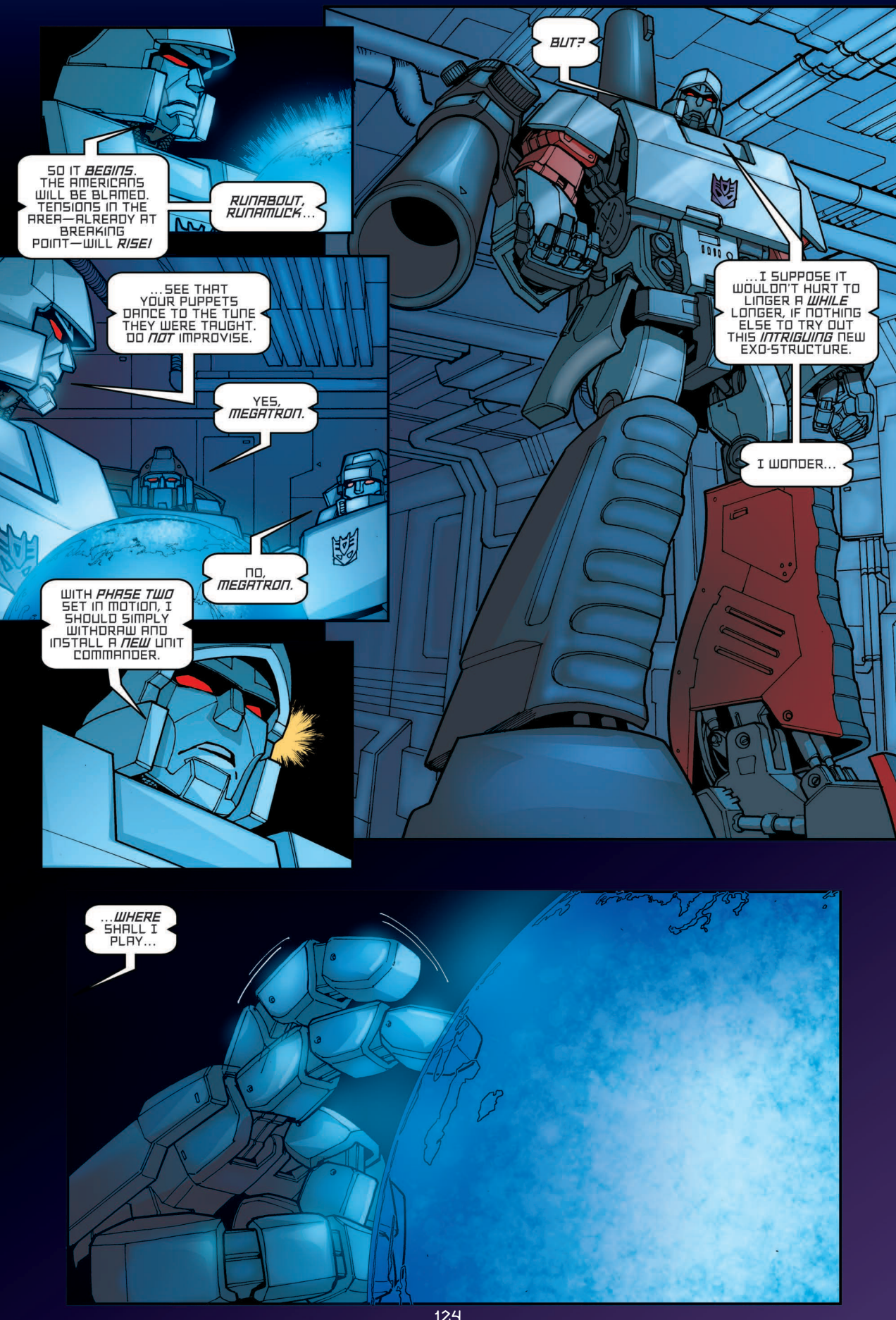

IT MIGHT NOT BE THE DECEPTICONS AT ALL, AND EVEN IF IT IS, A KNEE-JERK RESPONSE MAY BE *EXACTLY* WHAT THEY WANT.
IRONHIDE, GET THE HUMANS BACK TO *ARK-19*, IN CASE THIS *WAS* SOME KIND OF REPRISAL.
BUT, PRIME—
WHEELJACK, JAZZ AND I WILL SECURE SUNSTREAKER'S REMAINS. THAT'S OUR *FIRST* PRIORITY. IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE HUMANS REALIZE HE'S SOMEWHAT *MORE* THAN MEETS THE EYE. YOU... RETURN TO BASE.
IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?
...
YES.
DAMN AND BLAST.
VERITY? *VERITY?*
POINTLESS ASKING IF YOU'RE OKAY. PERSONALLY I'M PRETTY FREAKIN' *FAR* FROM OKAY. BUT, HEY...
...*TALK* TO ME.


OREGON (DECEPTICON COMMAND BUNKER):

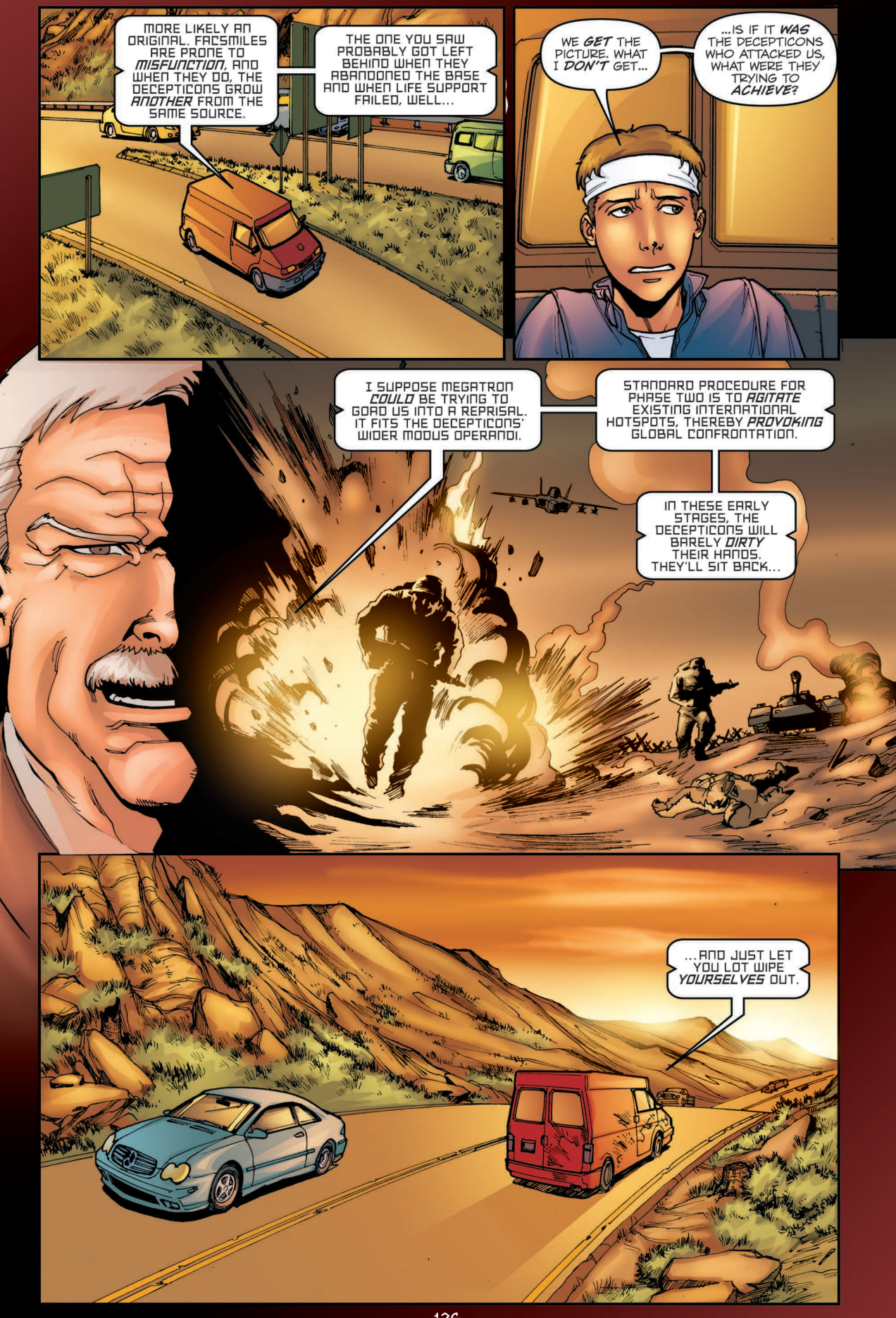

WE'RE SET. JUST GIVE THE WORD...
TALK TO ME...
THE WORD, SKYWARP...


...IS GIVEN. DO NOT DISAPPOINT ME. AGAIN.
RIGHT, YEAH. SKYWARP OUT.
I TELL YOU, THUNDERCRACKER, HE'S DEFINITELY GOT IT IN FOR ME... FOR ALL OF US!
CAN YOU BLAME HIM?
AFTER ALL, WE DID TRY TO USURP HIS OVERALL COMMAND. YOU EVEN HAD THE GALL TO LOCK WEAPONS ON HIM! YOU'RE LUCKY HE PUT YOU IN A C.R.* CHAMBER...
*CRYOGENIC REGENERATION


...AND NOT THE GROUND!
FEH. COULD BE WORSE, I SUPPOSE...
WHADOOM!
...COULD BE STARSCREAM.


SO IT BEGINS. THE AMERICANS WILL BE BLAMED. TENSIONS IN THE AREA—ALREADY AT BREAKING POINT—WILL RISE!
RUNABOUT, RUNAMUCK...
...SEE THAT YOUR PUPPETS DANCE TO THE TUNE THEY WERE TAUGHT. DO NOT IMPROVISE.
YES, MEGATRON.
NO, MEGATRON.
WITH PHASE TWO SET IN MOTION, I SHOULD SIMPLY WITHDRAW AND INSTALL A NEW UNIT COMMANDER.
BUT?
...I SUPPOSE IT WOULDN'T HURT TO LINGER A WHILE LONGER, IF NOTHING ELSE TO TRY OUT THIS INTRIGUING NEW EXO-STRUCTURE.
I WONDER...
...WHERE SHALL I PLAY...

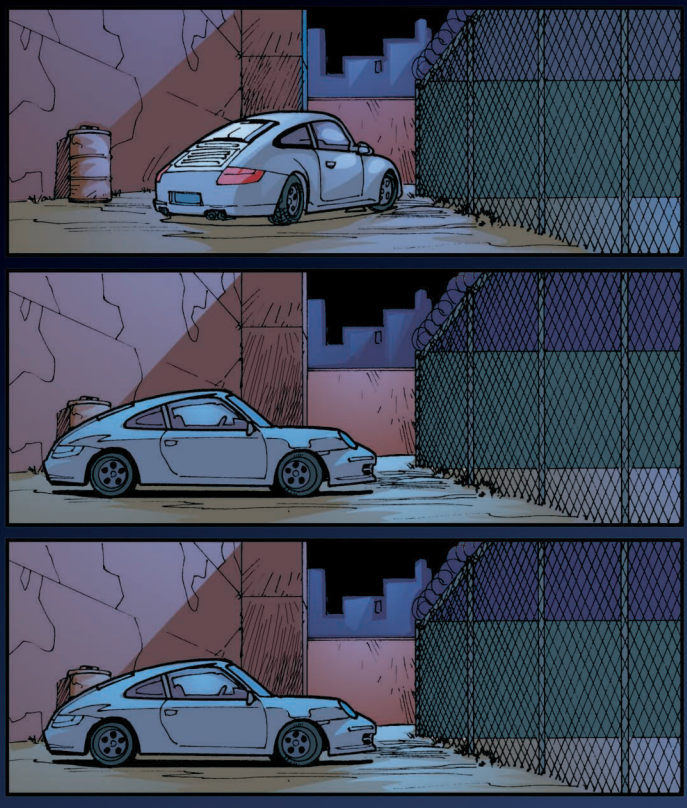

THE I-57 NORTH:
I DON'T GET IT, IRONHIDE. HOW COULD IT BE THE DECEPTICONS?
THOSE GUYS WERE FLESH AND BLOOD, NO QUESTION.
THING IS, JIMMY, THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN. NOT ENTIRELY.
THE DECEPTICONS EMPLOY FACSIMILE AVATARS, BIO-TECHNOLOGICAL ORGANISMS GROWN IN FUSION TUBES.
AND THESE FACSIMILES, THEY LOOK LIKE US?
LOOK LIKE YOU, THINK LIKE YOU. MANY ARE IMPLANTED WITH ACTUAL MEMORY ENGRAMS, TAKEN FROM THE ORIGINAL SUBJECT. UNTIL THEY'RE ACTIVATED, THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW THEY'RE ARTIFICIAL.
EESH.
WAS...
WAS THAT WHAT I SAW IN NEBRASKA?
A FACSIMILE?

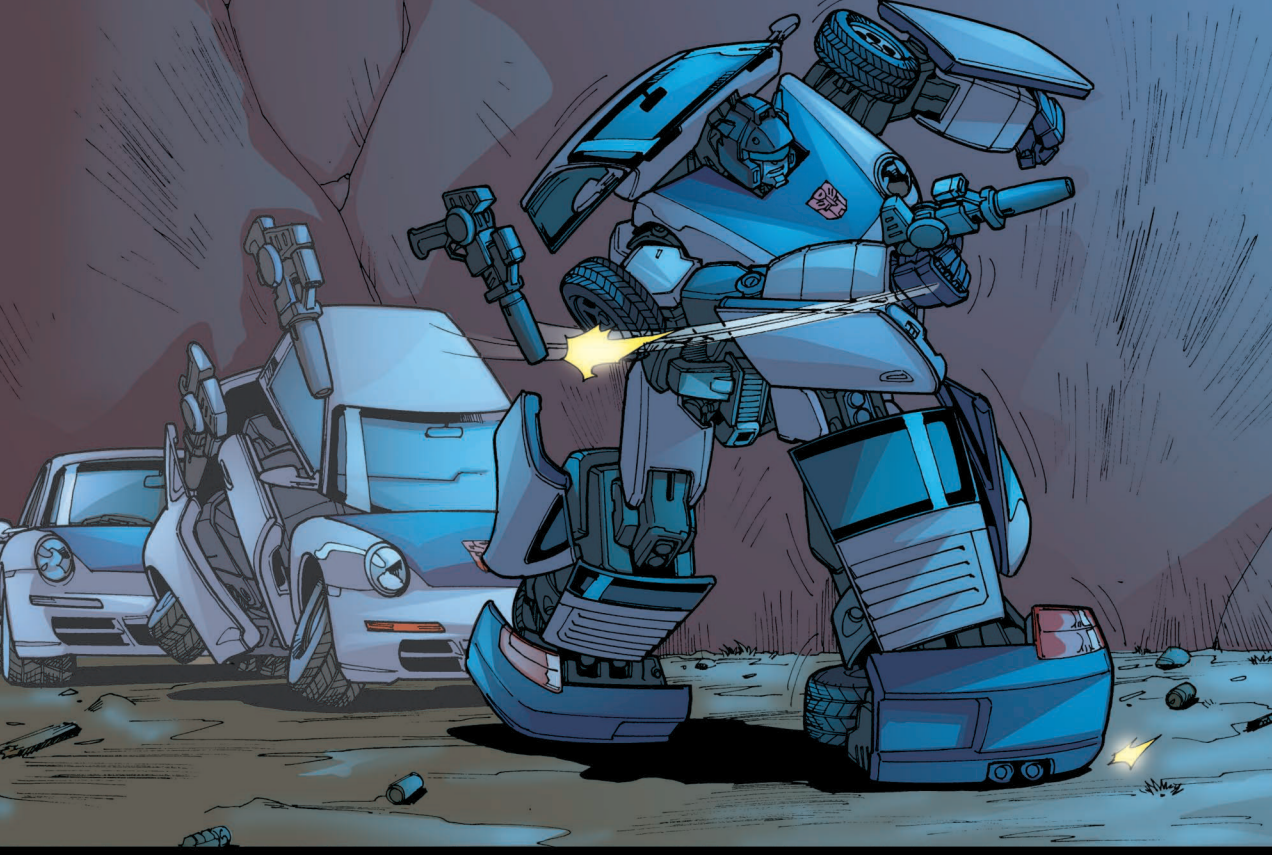

MORE LIKELY AN ORIGINAL. FACSMILES ARE PRONE TO MISFUNCTION, AND WHEN THEY DO, THE DECEPTICONS GROW ANOTHER FROM THE SAME SOURCE.
THE ONE YOU SAW PROBABLY GOT LEFT BEHIND WHEN THEY ABANDONED THE BASE AND WHEN LIFE SUPPORT FAILED, WELL...
WE GET THE PICTURE. WHAT I DON'T GET...
...IS IF IT WAS THE DECEPTICONS WHO ATTACKED US, WHAT WERE THEY TRYING TO ACHIEVE?
I SUPPOSE MEGATRON COULD BE TRYING TO GOAD US INTO A REPRISAL. IT FITS THE DECEPTICONS' WIDER MODUS OPERANDI.
STANDARD PROCEDURE FOR PHASE TWO IS TO AGITATE EXISTING INTERNATIONAL HOTSPOTS, THEREBY PROVOKING GLOBAL CONFRONTATION.
IN THESE EARLY STAGES, THE DECEPTICONS WILL BARELY DIRTY THEIR HANDS. THEY'LL SIT BACK...
...AND JUST LET YOU LOT WIPE YOURSELVES OUT.

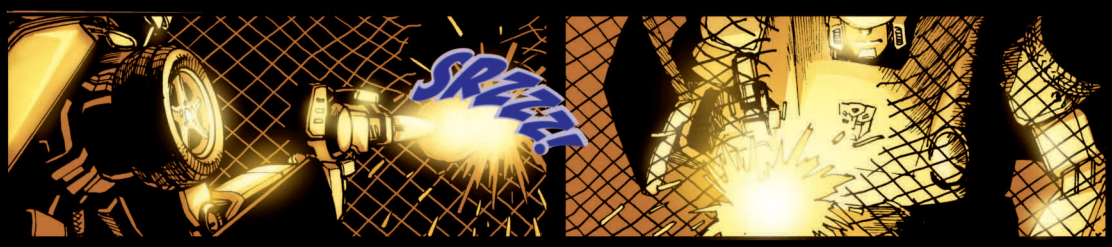

SPRINGFIELD PD, IMPOUND LOT:
THIS IS THE PLACE. WHEELJACK...
KEEP OUT

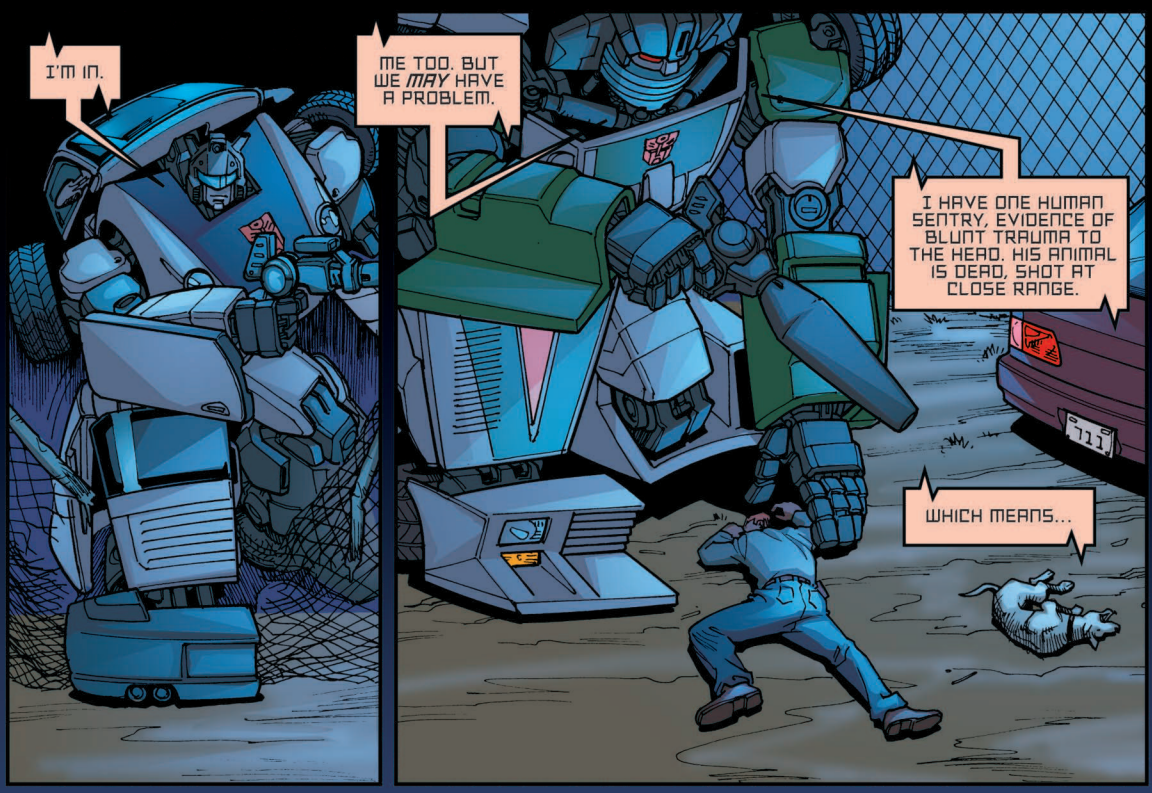

NO SIGN OF SUNSTREAKER'S MORTAL REMAINS, JAZZ. HE MUST BE WITHIN THE MAIN STRUCTURE.
SECURITY?
MINIMAL. PERIMETER FENCE IS ALARMED AND THERE'S CCTV. I CAN TAKE OUT BOTH WITH A LOCALIZED EMP.


DO IT, M'MAN. THERE'S AN OBSERVATION BLIND SPOT FORTY METERS ALONG THE WEST PERIMETER. I'LL GO IN THERE.
ACKNOWLEDGED. SEE YOU ON THE INSIDE.

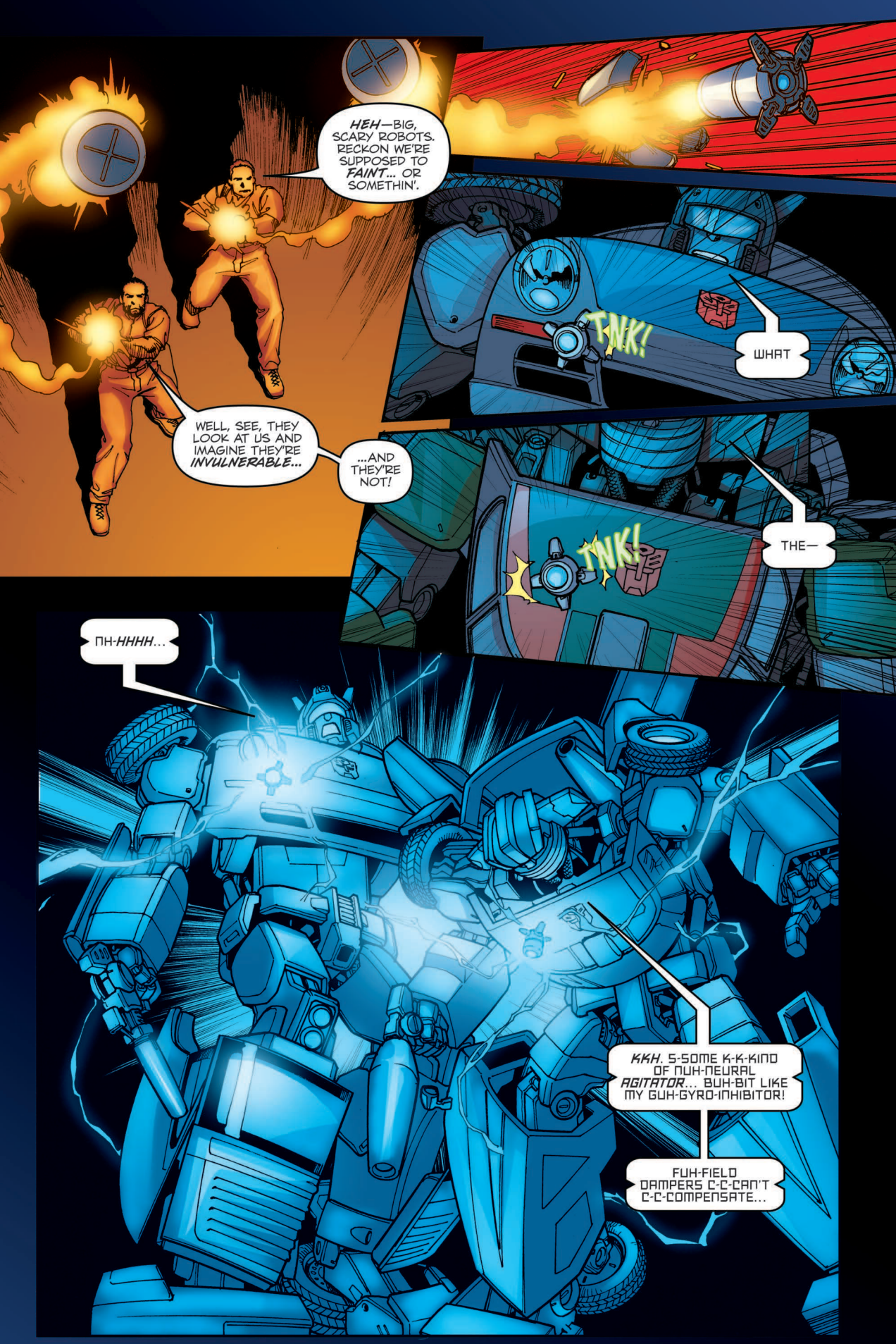





SRZZZ!

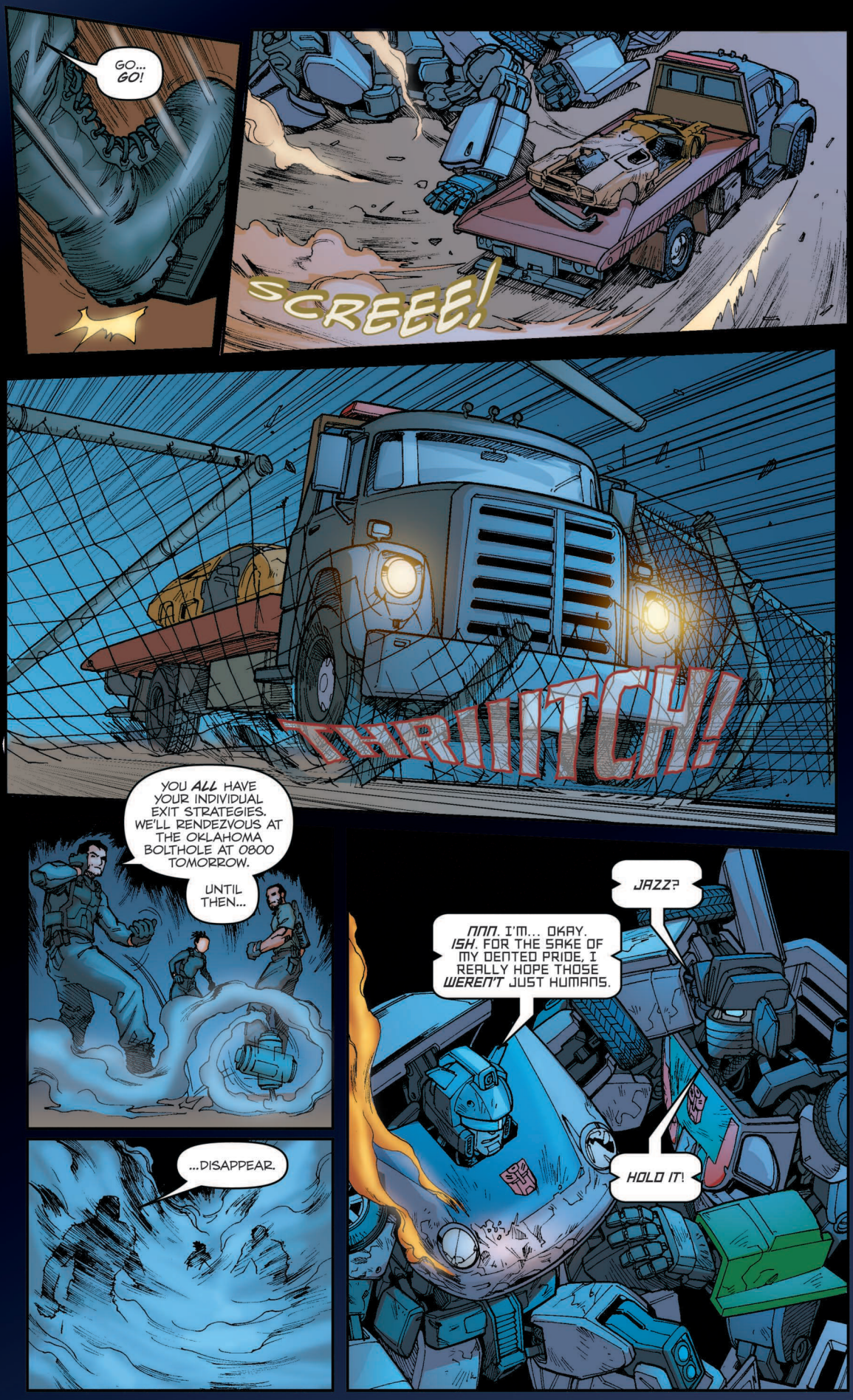

I'M IN.
ME TOO. BUT WE *MAY* HAVE A PROBLEM.
I HAVE ONE HUMAN SENTRY, EVIDENCE OF BLUNT TRAUMA TO THE HEAD. HIS ANIMAL IS DEAD, SHOT AT CLOSE RANGE.
WHICH MEANS...


"...COMPANY."
C'MON, PEOPLE... HUSTLE!
KAMEN, WEISS—GET THAT WRECK TIED OFF. GOSS, CREEL—DOORS.
SCHMIDT...
...TAKE IT AWAY!
RRRM!
SO...
...IS THIS A PRIVATE PARTY, OR CAN ANYONE CRASH?
IF YOU'RE WHO DID THIS TO SUNSTREAKER, THERE WILL BE HELL TO PAY.
SCRAMBLERS, NOW!


HEH—BIG, SCARY ROBOTS. RECKON WE'RE SUPPOSED TO FAINT... OR SOMETHIN'.
WELL, SEE, THEY LOOK AT US AND IMAGINE THEY'RE INVULNERABLE...
...AND THEY'RE NOT!
TNK!
WHAT
TNK!
THE—
NH-HHHH...
KKH. S-SOME K-K-KIND OF NUH-NEURAL AGITATOR... BUH-BIT LIKE MY GUH-GYRO-INHIBITOR!
FUH-FIELD DAMPERS C-C-CAN'T C-C-COMPENSATE...

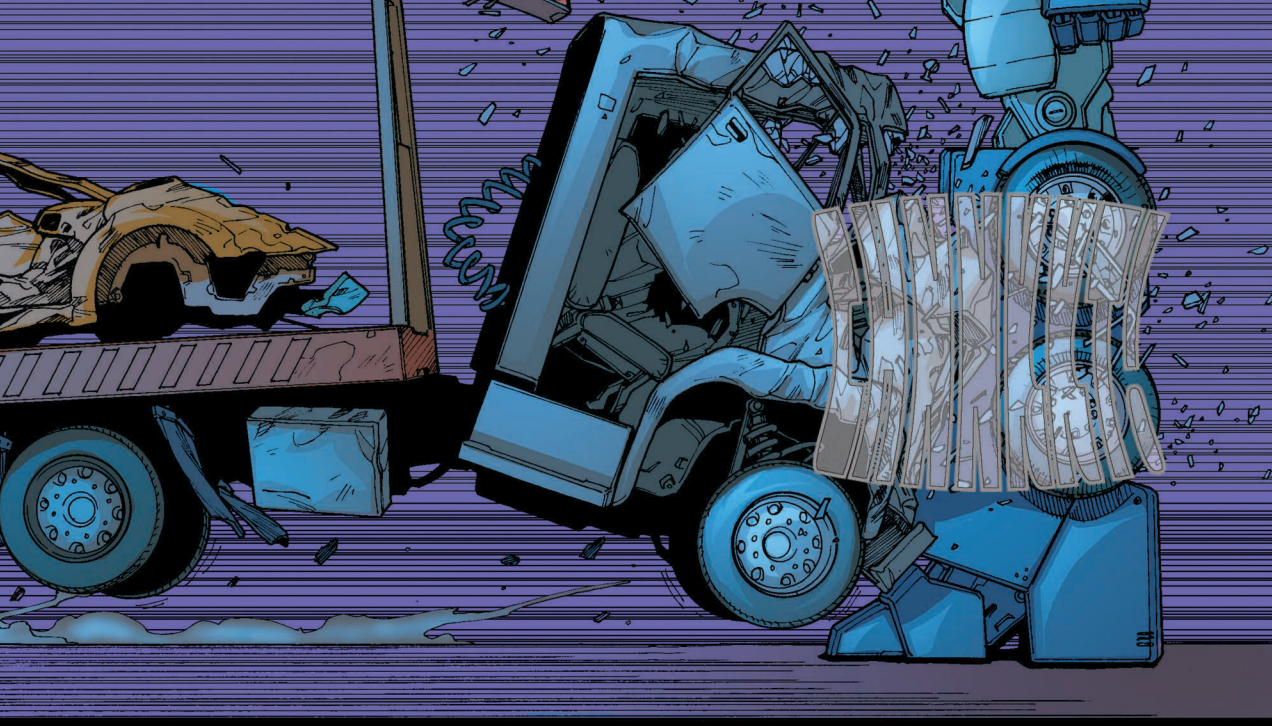

NOW. WHILE THEY'RE ON ROPES...
...PUT 'EM DOWN.
CHK!
NUH-NOTHING'S WUHRKING! WUH-WHEELJACK... WHAT...
...ARE... YOU... D-DOING?
JUH-JUST...
...K-K-KEEP... STILL...
K-K-KEEP STILL?
YUH'VE G-G-GOT TO BE K-K-KIDDING!
RZAP!

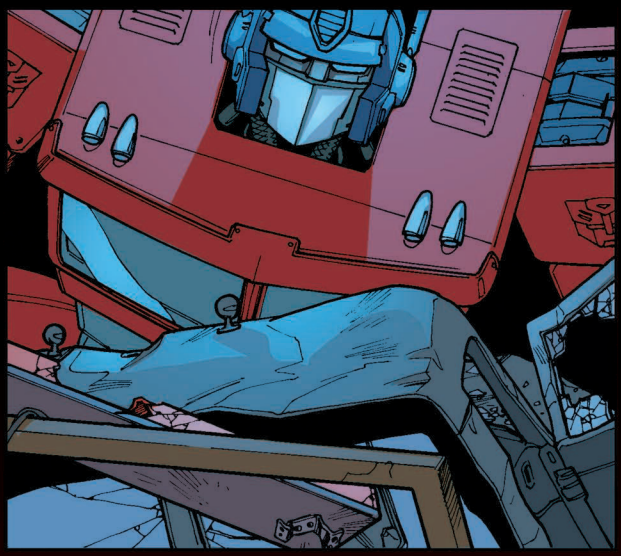

TSHK!
HH! ALRIGHT! NICE SHOOTIN' PARDNER.
AND NOW...
...LET ME REPAY THE FAVOR.
QEH-QUICKLY... B-B-BEFORE THEY—
CHST!
DUCK AND COVER!
EHARRR!
OHT!
VA-WHOOOM!


GO... GO!
SCREEE!
SKRIIITCH!
YOU ALL HAVE YOUR INDIVIDUAL EXIT STRATEGIES. WE'LL RENDEZVOUS AT THE OKLAHOMA BOLTHOLE AT 0800 TOMORROW.
UNTIL THEN...
...DISAPPEAR.
JAZZ?
NNN. I'M... OKAY. ISH. FOR THE SAKE OF MY DENTED PRIDE, I REALLY HOPE THOSE WEREN'T JUST HUMANS.
HOLD IT!


WHAT?
OH. OH!
ROLL IT!
THWBOOOOM!!

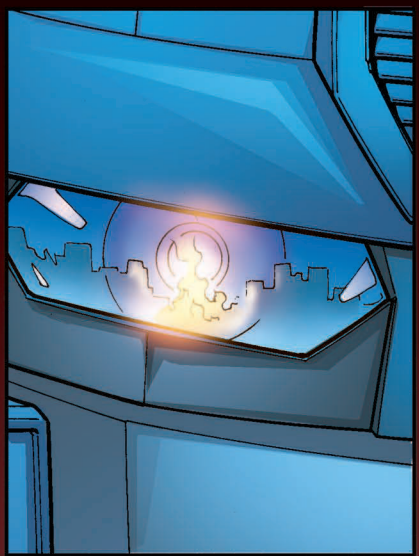

ENH! WHOEVER THEY ARE, WHEELJACK...
...THEY DON'T BELIEVE IN LEAVING LOOSE ENDS!
PRIME—THIS IS WHEELJACK. YOU HAVE ONE HOSTILE...
"...INBOUND."
HOO-HAH!
CALL ME IMMATURE...
...BUT I DO LOVE THE FIREWORKS!
WHAM-BA—

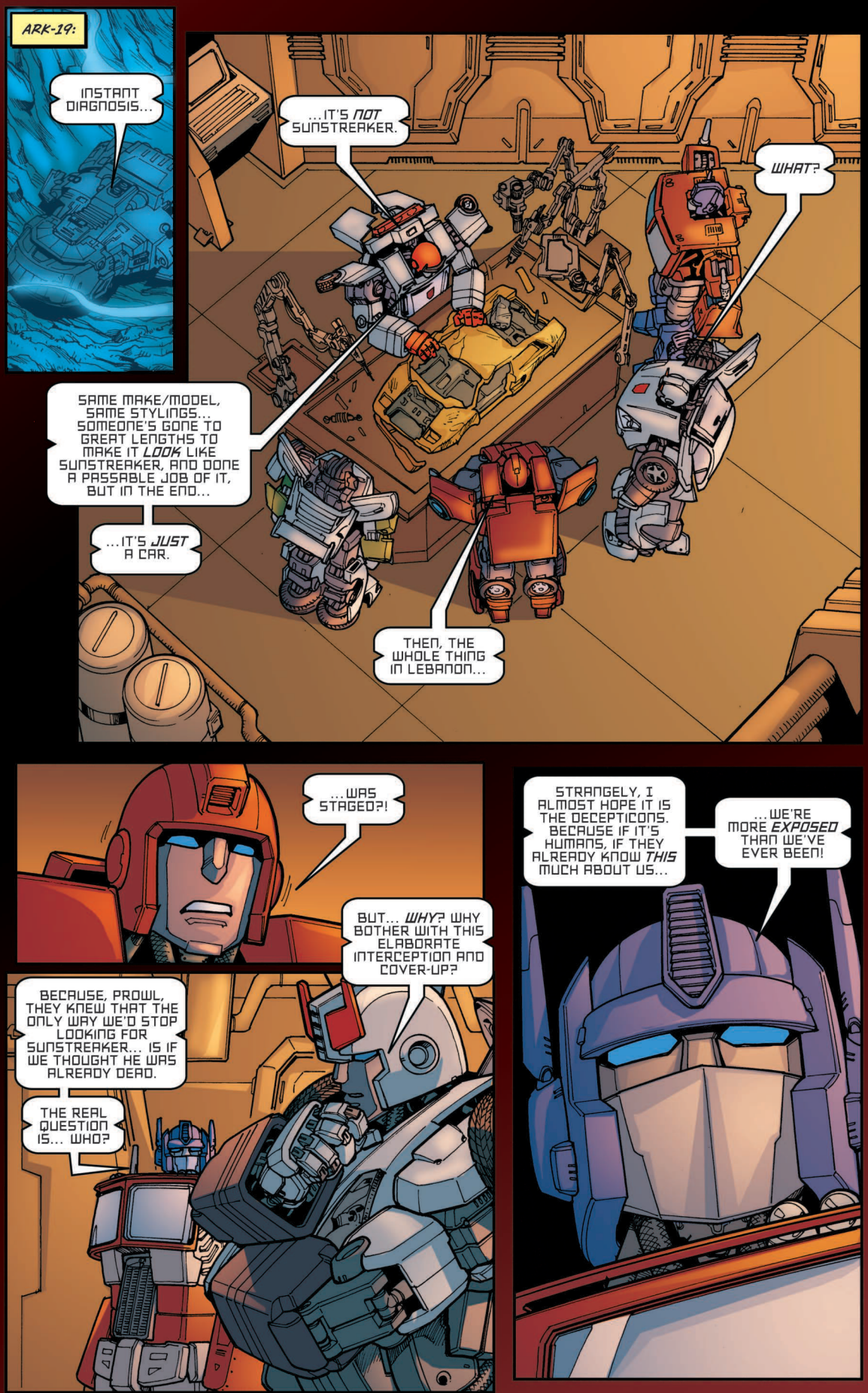


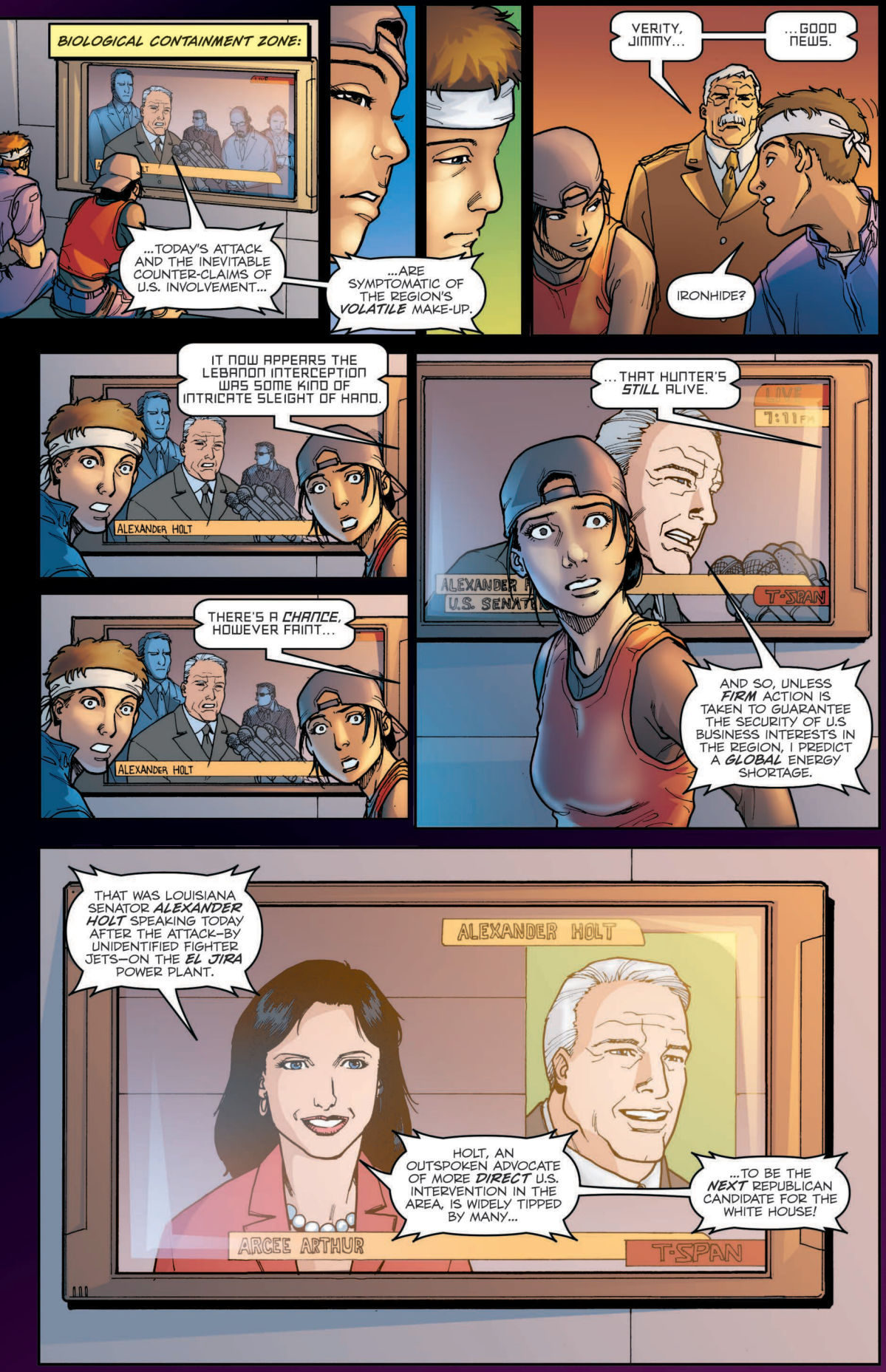



KH-
TT-

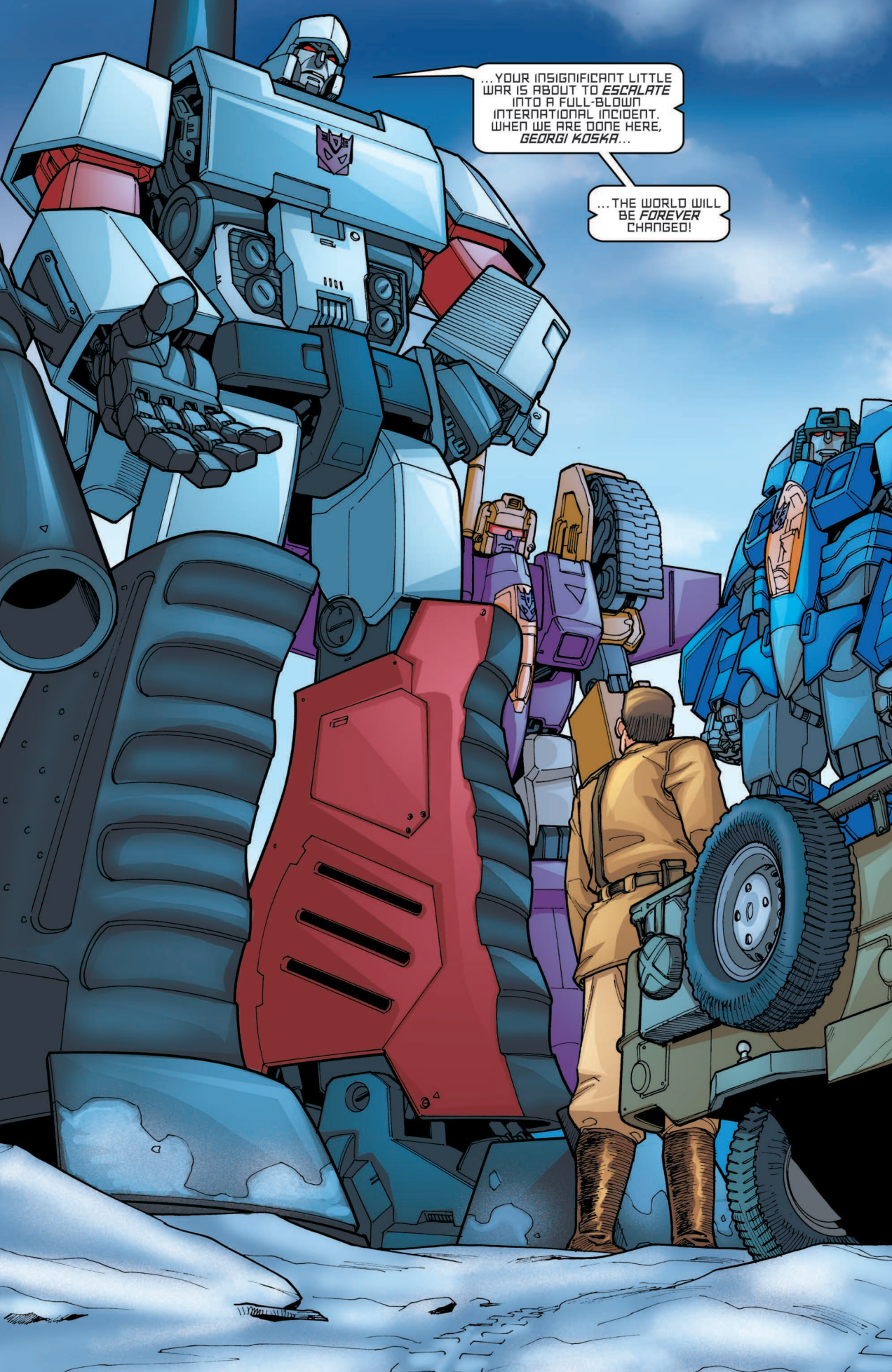

WHOOP
WHOOOP!

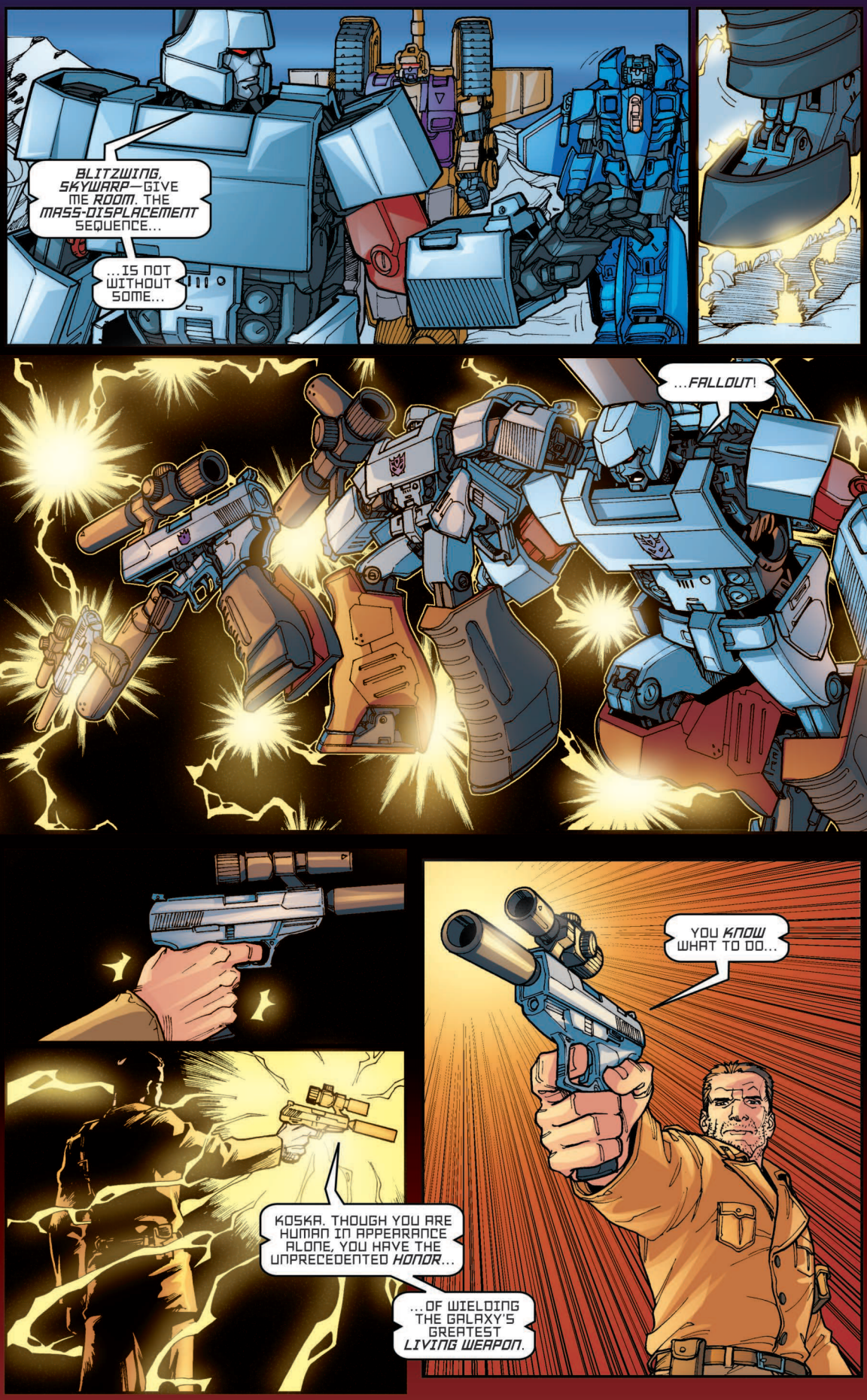


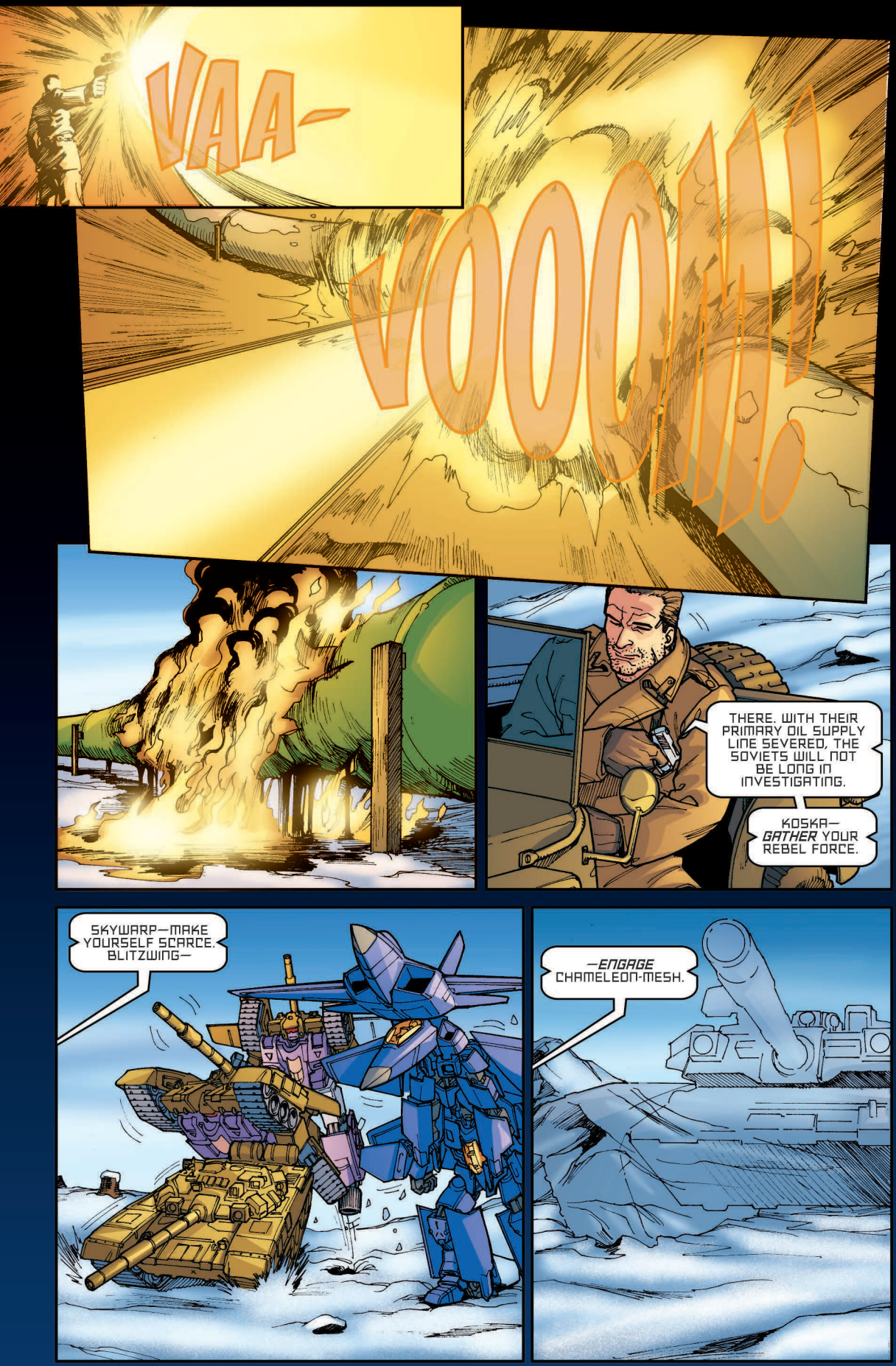

ARK-19:
INSTANT DIAGNOSIS...
...IT'S NOT SUNSTREAKER.
WHAT?
SAME MAKE/MODEL, SAME STYLINGS... SOMEONE'S GONE TO GREAT LENGTHS TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE SUNSTREAKER, AND DONE A PASSABLE JOB OF IT, BUT IN THE END...
...IT'S JUST A CAR.
THEN, THE WHOLE THING IN LEBANON...
...WAS STAGED?!
BUT... WHY? WHY BOTHER WITH THIS ELABORATE INTERCEPTION AND COVER-UP?
BECAUSE, PROWL, THEY KNEW THAT THE ONLY WAY WE'D STOP LOOKING FOR SUNSTREAKER... IS IF WE THOUGHT HE WAS ALREADY DEAD.
THE REAL QUESTION IS... WHO?
STRANGELY, I ALMOST HOPE IT IS THE DECEPTICONS. BECAUSE IF IT'S HUMANS, IF THEY ALREADY KNOW THIS MUCH ABOUT US...
...WE'RE MORE EXPOSED THAN WE'VE EVER BEEN!

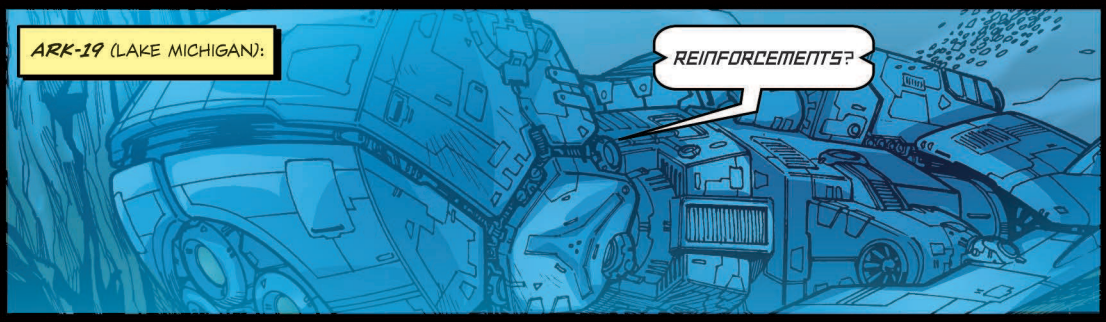

BIOLOGICAL CONTAINMENT ZONE:
...TODAY'S ATTACK AND THE INEVITABLE COUNTER-CLAIMS OF U.S. INVOLVEMENT...
...ARE SYMPTOMATIC OF THE REGION'S VOLATILE MAKE-UP.
VERITY, JIMMY...
...GOOD NEWS.
IRONHIDE?
IT NOW APPEARS THE LEBANON INTERCEPTION WAS SOME KIND OF INTRICATE SLEIGHT OF HAND.
ALEXANDER HOLT
...THAT HUNTER'S STILL ALIVE.
LIVE
7:11 PM
T-SPAN
AND SO, UNLESS FIRM ACTION IS TAKEN TO GUARANTEE THE SECURITY OF U.S BUSINESS INTERESTS IN THE REGION, I PREDICT A GLOBAL ENERGY SHORTAGE.
THERE'S A CHANCE, HOWEVER FAINT...
ALEXANDER HOLT
THAT WAS LOUISIANA SENATOR ALEXANDER HOLT SPEAKING TODAY AFTER THE ATTACK-BY UNIDENTIFIED FIGHTER JETS-ON THE EL JIRA POWER PLANT.
ALEXANDER HOLT
HOLT, AN OUTSPOKEN ADVOCATE OF MORE DIRECT U.S. INTERVENTION IN THE AREA, IS WIDELY TIPPED BY MANY...
...TO BE THE NEXT REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE!
ARCEE ARTHUR
T-SPAN

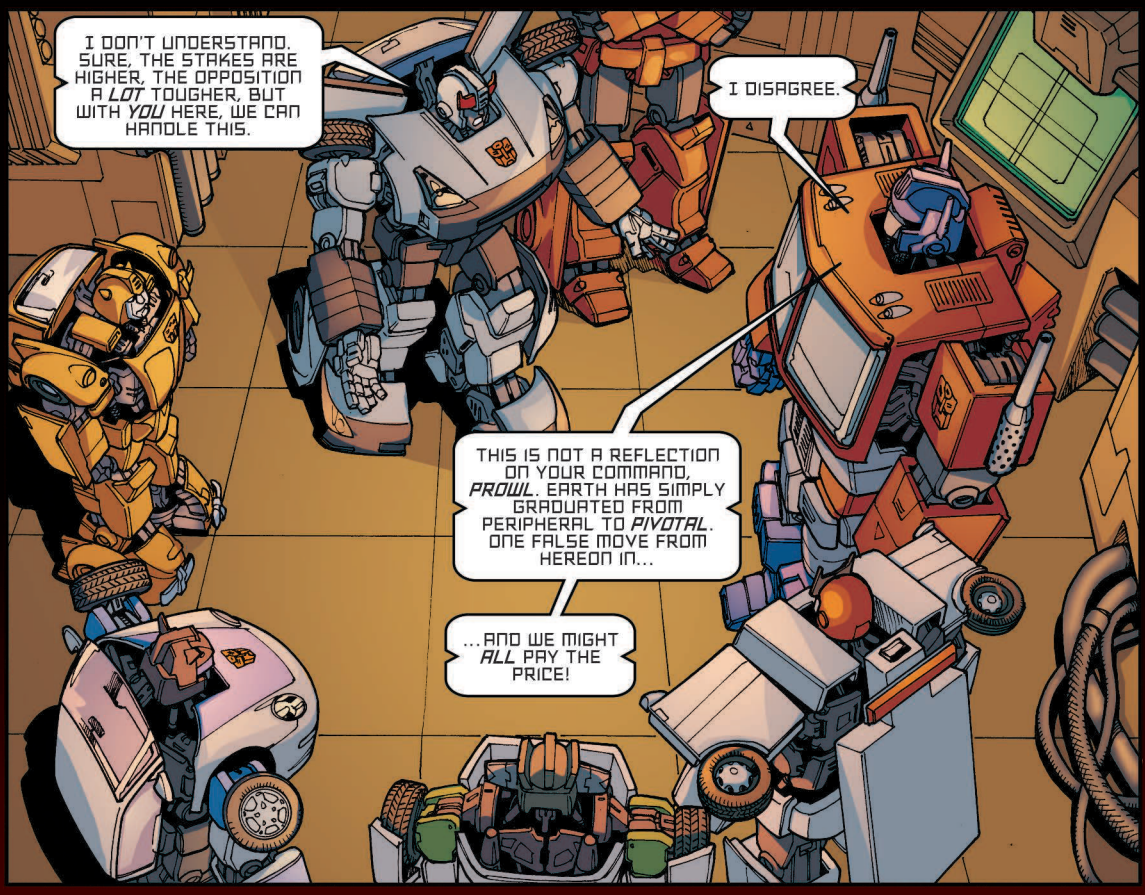

CHAPTER 3
BREAKAWAY SOVIET STATE OF BRASNYA:
GEORGI, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
THESE RUMORS OF A DEAL BETWEEN THE FEDERALISTS AND MOSCOW MEAN THAT NOW—MORE THAN EVER—THE OTHERS NEED REASSURANCE... NO, ACTION!
WE'VE LOST TOO MANY GOOD PEOPLE. WE CAN'T JUST ROLL OVER!
ALEXI, ALEXI...
...WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT ROLLING OVER? WE FIGHT TO THE BITTER END, FOR WHAT IS OURS BY BIRTHRIGHT.
AS FOR ACTION, TRUST ME WHEN I SAY...
...IT'S COMING.
VOP
AND NOW...


...YOUR INSIGNIFICANT LITTLE WAR IS ABOUT TO *ESCALATE* INTO A FULL-BLOWN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT. WHEN WE ARE DONE HERE, *GEORGI KOSKA*...
...THE WORLD WILL BE *FOREVER* CHANGED!


BLITZWING, SKYWARP—GIVE ME ROOM. THE MASS-DISPLACEMENT SEQUENCE...
...IS NOT WITHOUT SOME...
...FALLOUT!
YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO...
KOSKA, THOUGH YOU ARE HUMAN IN APPEARANCE ALONE, YOU HAVE THE UNPRECEDENTED HONOR...
...OF WIELDING THE GALAXY'S GREATEST LIVING WEAPON.

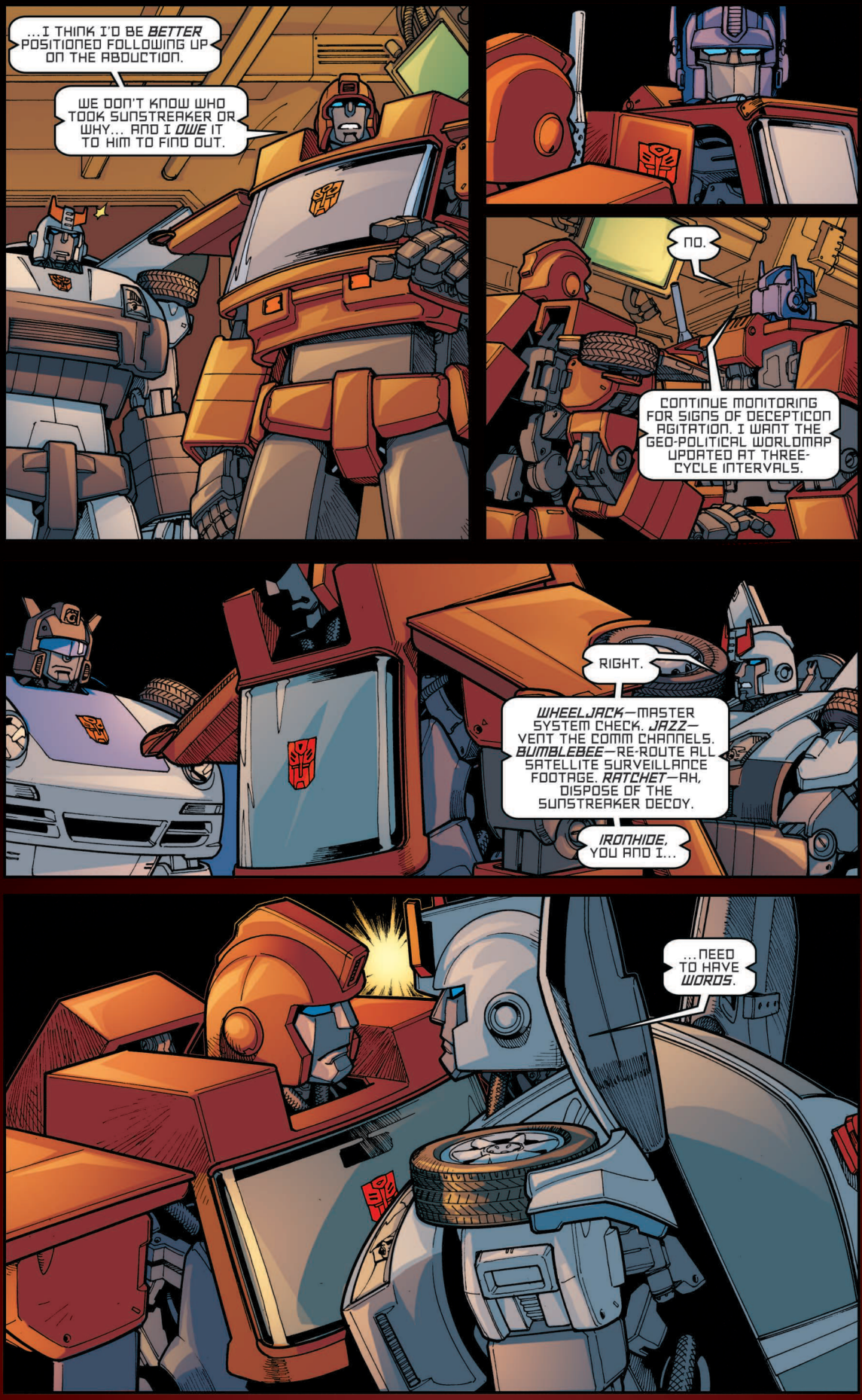

VAA-
VOOM!
THERE. WITH THEIR PRIMARY OIL SUPPLY LINE SEVERED, THE SOVIETS WILL NOT BE LONG IN INVESTIGATING.
KOSKA— *GATHER* YOUR REBEL FORCE.
SKYWARP—MAKE YOURSELF SCARCE. BLITZWING—
—*ENGAGE* CHAMELEON-MESH.


ARK-19 (LAKE MICHIGAN):
REINFORCEMENTS?


I DON'T UNDERSTAND. SURE, THE STAKES ARE HIGHER, THE OPPOSITION A LOT TOUGHER, BUT WITH YOU HERE, WE CAN HANDLE THIS.
I DISAGREE.
THIS IS NOT A REFLECTION ON YOUR COMMAND, PROWL. EARTH HAS SIMPLY GRADUATED FROM PERIPHERAL TO PIVOTAL. ONE FALSE MOVE FROM HEREON IN...
...AND WE MIGHT ALL PAY THE PRICE!

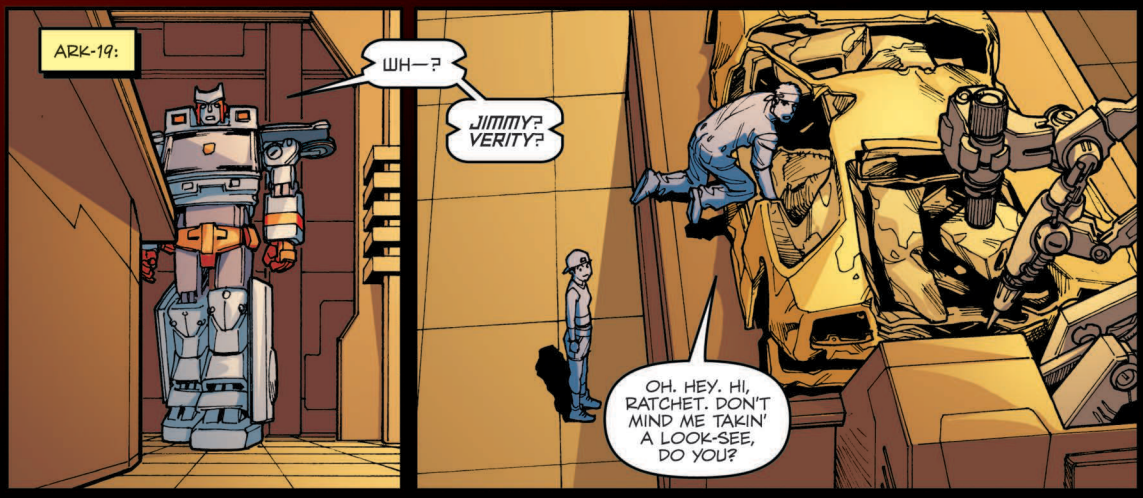

BUT—
IT'S ALREADY DONE. WITH MEGATRON ACTIVE ON EARTH AND SUNSTREAKER M.I.A., I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO PULL RESOURCES FROM ELSEWHERE.
I DO NOT DO SO LIGHTLY.

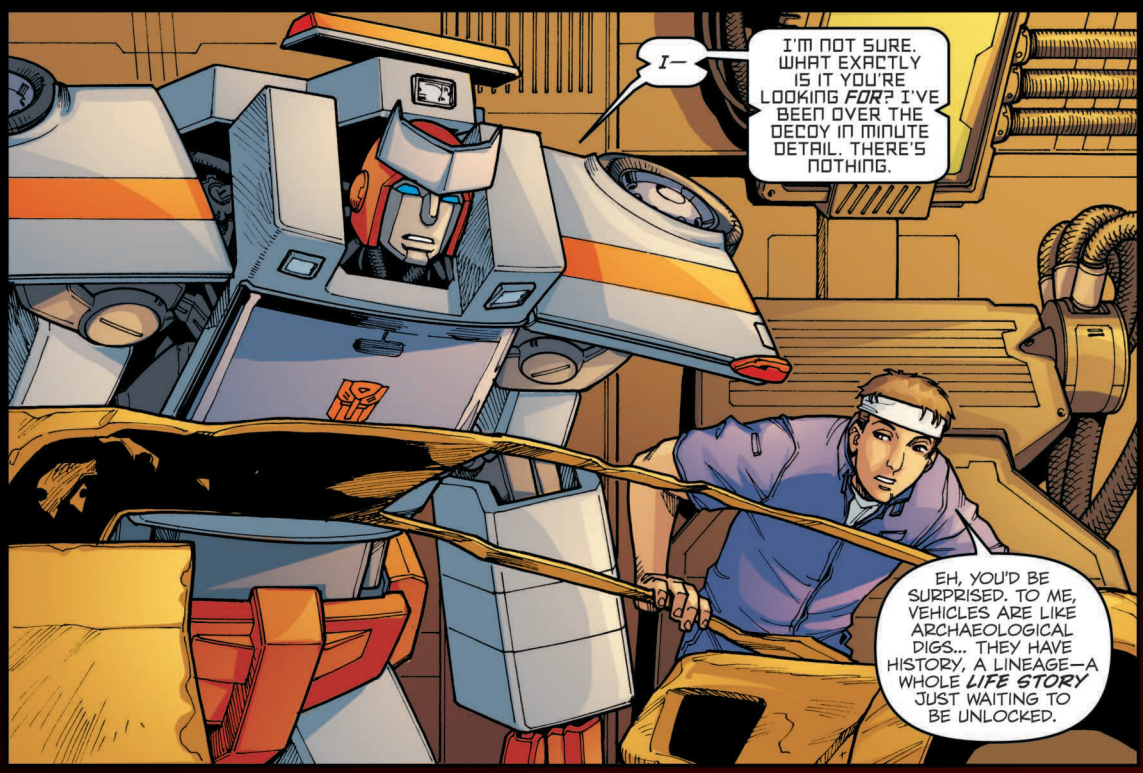

OF COURSE. FORGIVE ME.
PRIME—WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION...

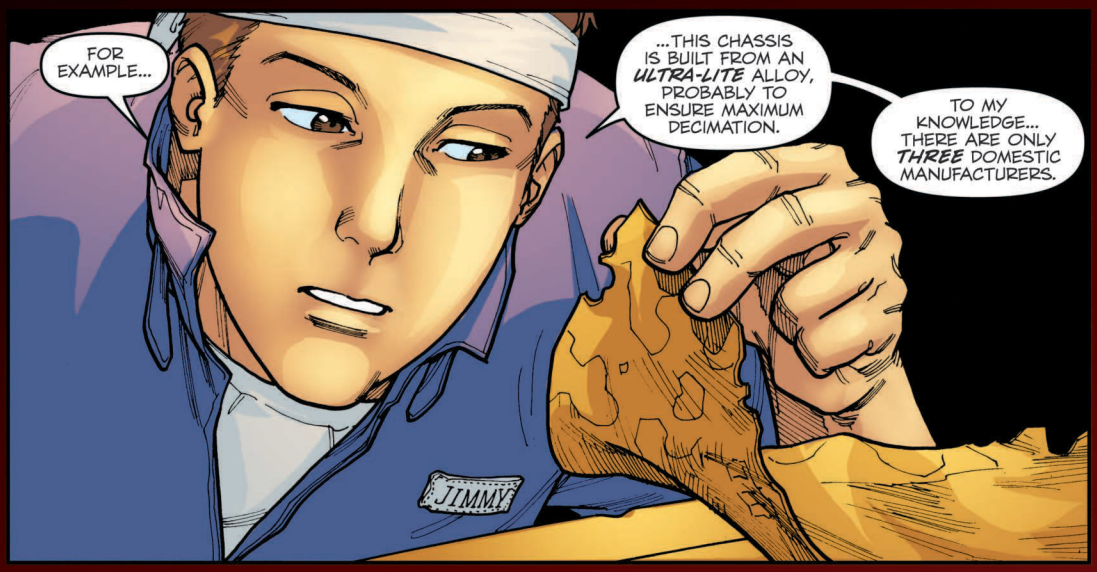

...I THINK I'D BE BETTER POSITIONED FOLLOWING UP ON THE ABDUCTION.
WE DON'T KNOW WHO TOOK SUNSTREAKER OR WHY... AND I OWE IT TO HIM TO FIND OUT.
NO.
CONTINUE MONITORING FOR SIGNS OF DECEPTICON AGITATION. I WANT THE GEO-POLITICAL WORLDMAP UPDATED AT THREE-CYCLE INTERVALS.
RIGHT.
WHEELJACK—MASTER SYSTEM CHECK. JAZZ—VENT THE COMM CHANNELS. BUMBLEBEE—RE-ROUTE ALL SATELLITE SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE. RATCHET—AH, DISPOSE OF THE SUNSTREAKER DECOY.
IRONHIDE, YOU AND I...
...NEED TO HAVE WORDS.

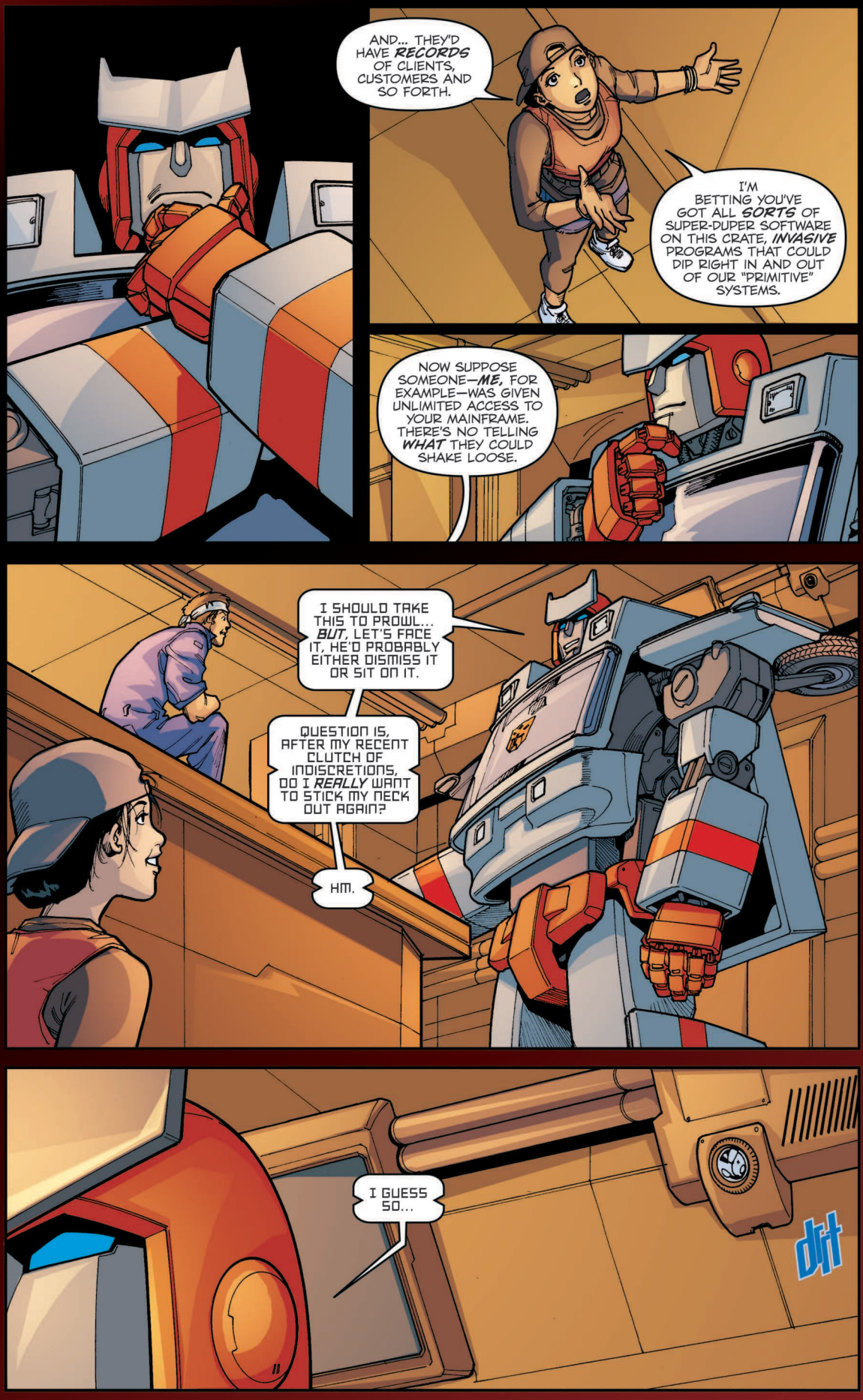

BRASNYA:
STOP! LOOK!
SO MUCH FOR "TECHNICAL PROBLEM!" THIS IS SABOTAGE!
CALL IT IN— IMMEDIATELY! BEFORE—
THWM
UNH!
THEY SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN WHERE THE BORDER IS.
REMIND THEM!


NOW.
HURT THEM.
VAA
VOOOM
WE ARE UNDER ATTACK! I REPEAT—WE ARE UNDER ATTACK! ARMED BRASNAN SEPARATISTS, MAYBE TWENTY, THIRTY...
WE NEED HEAVY ARMOR... NOW!
EXCELLENT. THE SOVIETS WILL SEND TANKS, AN ACTION THE BRASNAN GOVERNMENT WILL DEEM A HOSTILE INCURSION, AT WHICH POINT WE...
...MAKE MATTERS MUCH, MUCH WORSE!

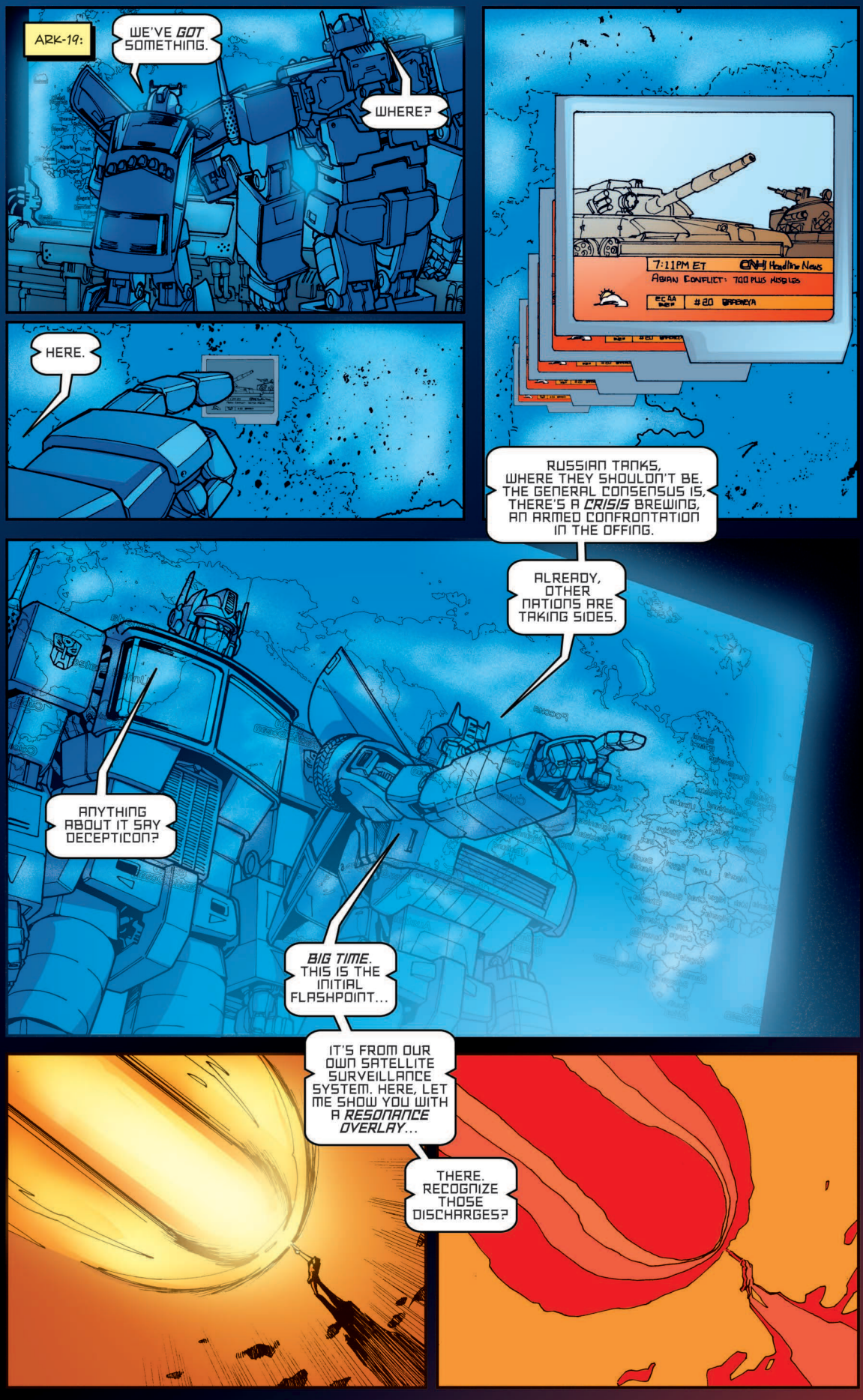

ARK-19:
WH—?
JIMMY? VERITY?
OH. HEY. HI, RATCHET. DON'T MIND ME TAKIN' A LOOK-SEE, DO YOU?

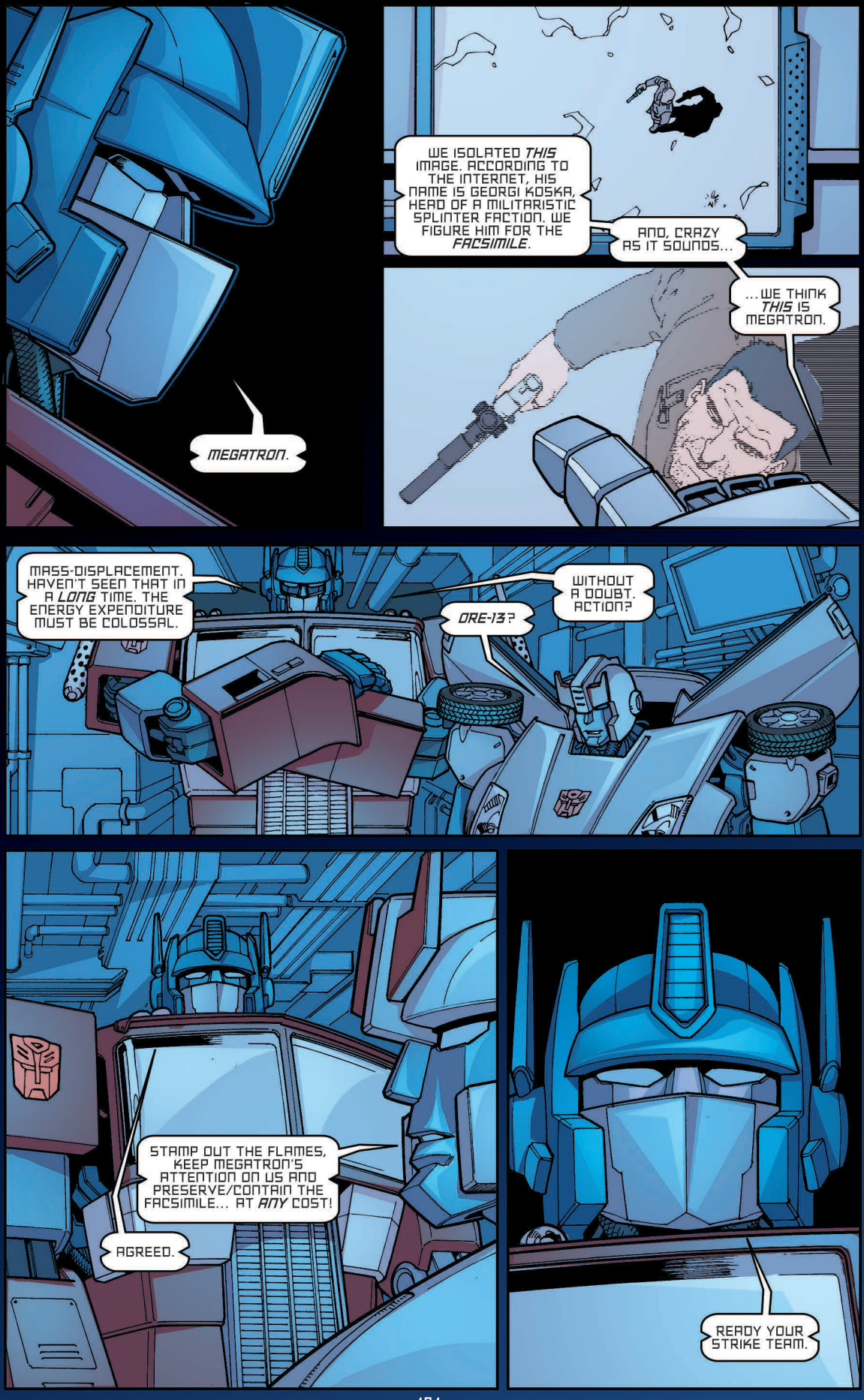

I—
I'M NOT SURE. WHAT EXACTLY IS IT YOU'RE LOOKING *FOR*? I'VE BEEN OVER THE DECOY IN MINUTE DETAIL. THERE'S NOTHING.
EH, YOU'D BE SURPRISED. TO ME, VEHICLES ARE LIKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIGS... THEY HAVE HISTORY, A LINEAGE—A WHOLE *LIFE STORY* JUST WAITING TO BE UNLOCKED.


FOR EXAMPLE...
...THIS CHASSIS IS BUILT FROM AN *ULTRA-LITE* ALLOY, PROBABLY TO ENSURE MAXIMUM DECIMATION.
TO MY KNOWLEDGE... THERE ARE ONLY *THREE* DOMESTIC MANUFACTURERS.
JIMMY


AND... THEY'D HAVE RECORDS OF CLIENTS, CUSTOMERS AND SO FORTH.
I'M BETTING YOU'VE GOT ALL SORTS OF SUPER-DUPER SOFTWARE ON THIS CRATE, INVASIVE PROGRAMS THAT COULD DIP RIGHT IN AND OUT OF OUR "PRIMITIVE" SYSTEMS.
NOW SUPPOSE SOMEONE—ME, FOR EXAMPLE—WAS GIVEN UNLIMITED ACCESS TO YOUR MAINFRAME. THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT THEY COULD SHAKE LOOSE.
I SHOULD TAKE THIS TO PROWL... BUT, LET'S FACE IT, HE'D PROBABLY EITHER DISMISS IT OR SIT ON IT.
QUESTION IS, AFTER MY RECENT CLUTCH OF INDISCRETIONS, DO I REALLY WANT TO STICK MY NECK OUT AGAIN?
HM.
I GUESS SO...
dlt


BRASNYA:
"AH. THE RUSSIANS. RIGHT ON TIME."
CAN YOU BE SURE THE BRASNANS WILL RESPOND IN KIND? THEY MAY SEEK A... DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION.
YOU ARE NOT THE ONLY FACSIMILE IN PLAY, GEORGI KOSKA.
AS WE SPEAK, SPEECHES ARE BEING MADE IN ZYARGY, SABERS RATTLED. WHERE NECESSARY, PRESSURE WILL BE BROUGHT TO BEAR.
NOTHING HAS BEEN LEFT TO CHANCE.
AND WHEN THEY COME? IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THIS INDIVIDUAL, SUCH CONFRONTATIONS USUALLY END IN A STANDOFF.
"WHEN THEY COME?
"BLITZWING WILL BE WAITING!"

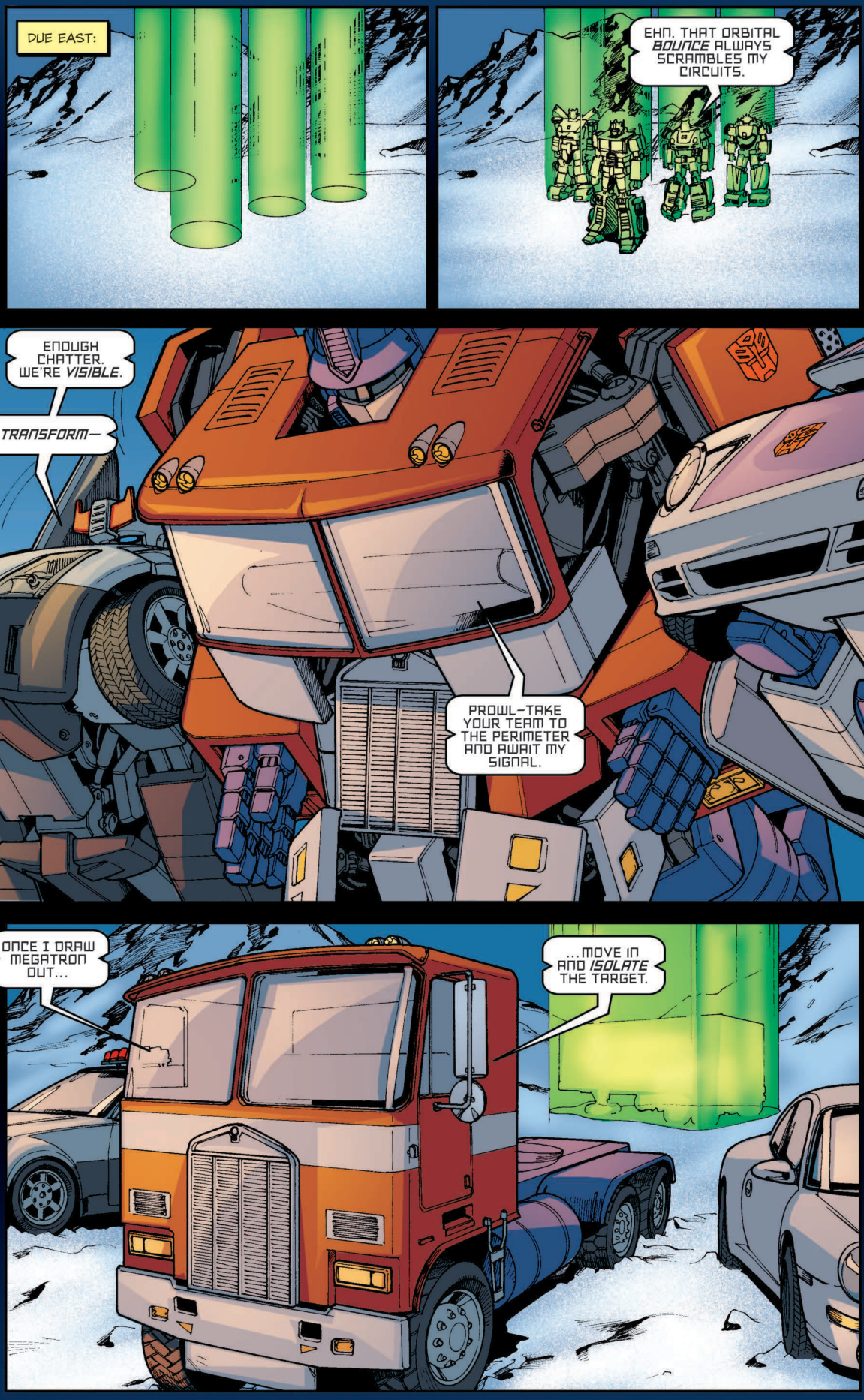

ARK-19:
WE'VE GOT SOMETHING.
WHERE?
HERE.
7:11PM ET
CNN Headline News
Afghan Conflict: 700 plus killed
RUSSIAN TANKS, WHERE THEY SHOULDN'T BE. THE GENERAL CONSENSUS IS, THERE'S A CRISIS BREWING, AN ARMED CONFRONTATION IN THE OFFING.
ALREADY, OTHER NATIONS ARE TAKING SIDES.
ANYTHING ABOUT IT SAY DECEPTICON?
BIG TIME. THIS IS THE INITIAL FLASHPOINT...
IT'S FROM OUR OWN SATELLITE SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM. HERE, LET ME SHOW YOU WITH A RESONANCE OVERLAY...
THERE. RECOGNIZE THOSE DISCHARGES?

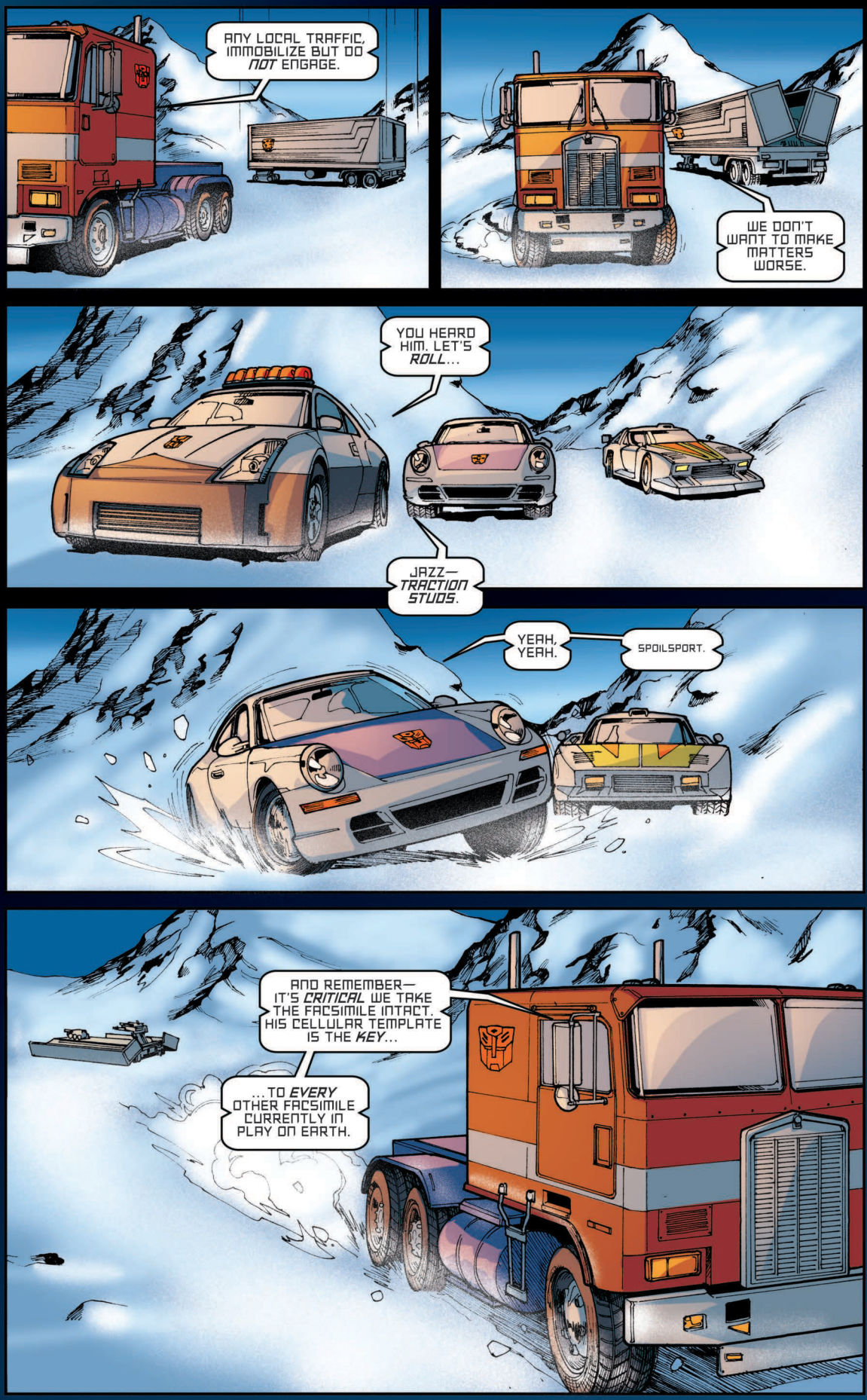

MEGATRON.
WE ISOLATED THIS IMAGE. ACCORDING TO THE INTERNET, HIS NAME IS GEORGI KOSKA, HEAD OF A MILITARISTIC SPLINTER FACTION. WE FIGURE HIM FOR THE FACSIMILE.
AND, CRAZY AS IT SOUNDS...
...WE THINK THIS IS MEGATRON.
MASS-DISPLACEMENT. HAVEN'T SEEN THAT IN A LONG TIME. THE ENERGY EXPENDITURE MUST BE COLOSSAL.
ORE-13?
WITHOUT A DOUBT. ACTION?
STAMP OUT THE FLAMES, KEEP MEGATRON'S ATTENTION ON US AND PRESERVE/CONTAIN THE FACSIMILE... AT ANY COST!
AGREED.
READY YOUR STRIKE TEAM.


BRASNYA:
THAT'S CLOSE ENOUGH. HOLD POSITION HERE!
NOW WHAT?
YOU'RE NEW, AREN'T YOU, BRESKI? OTHERWISE, YOU'D KNOW WHAT NOW.
WE HOLD POSITION, THE SOVIETS HOLD POSITION. EVENTUALLY...
...THE POLITICIANS AGREE TO SOME KIND OF MUTUALLY FACE-SAVING COMPROMISE AND WE ALL GO HOME.
THING IS, CAPTAIN, I'VE BEEN AROUND THE CAPITAL LONG ENOUGH TO READ THE SIGNS, AND RIGHT NOW NONE OF THEM ARE GOOD.
TRUST ME...
...I'VE BEEN A COMMISSIONED OFFICER FOR SIXTEEN YEARS AND HAVEN'T YET FIRED A SHOT IN ANG—
—AAH!
KA-DOOOM!


TUMM
FA-DAMMM!
I'M TELLING YOU—THEY'RE FIRING ON US!
CONFIRMED?! WHO ELSE COULD IT BE?
YES, I UNDERSTAND. HOLD ON...


THAT'S CONFIRMED. I REPEAT—WE HAVE SOVIET ARMOR FIRING ON OUR POSITION.
SIR, I NEED A DIRECT ORDER HERE!
KT-TOOOM!
UNDERSTOOD. ALL UNITS...
...FIRE AT WILL!


DUE EAST:
EHH. THAT ORBITAL BOUNCE ALWAYS SCRAMBLES MY CIRCUITS.
ENOUGH CHATTER. WE'RE VISIBLE.
TRANSFORM—
PROWL—TAKE YOUR TEAM TO THE PERIMETER AND AWAIT MY SIGNAL.
ONCE I DRAW MEGATRON OUT...
...MOVE IN AND ISOLATE THE TARGET.

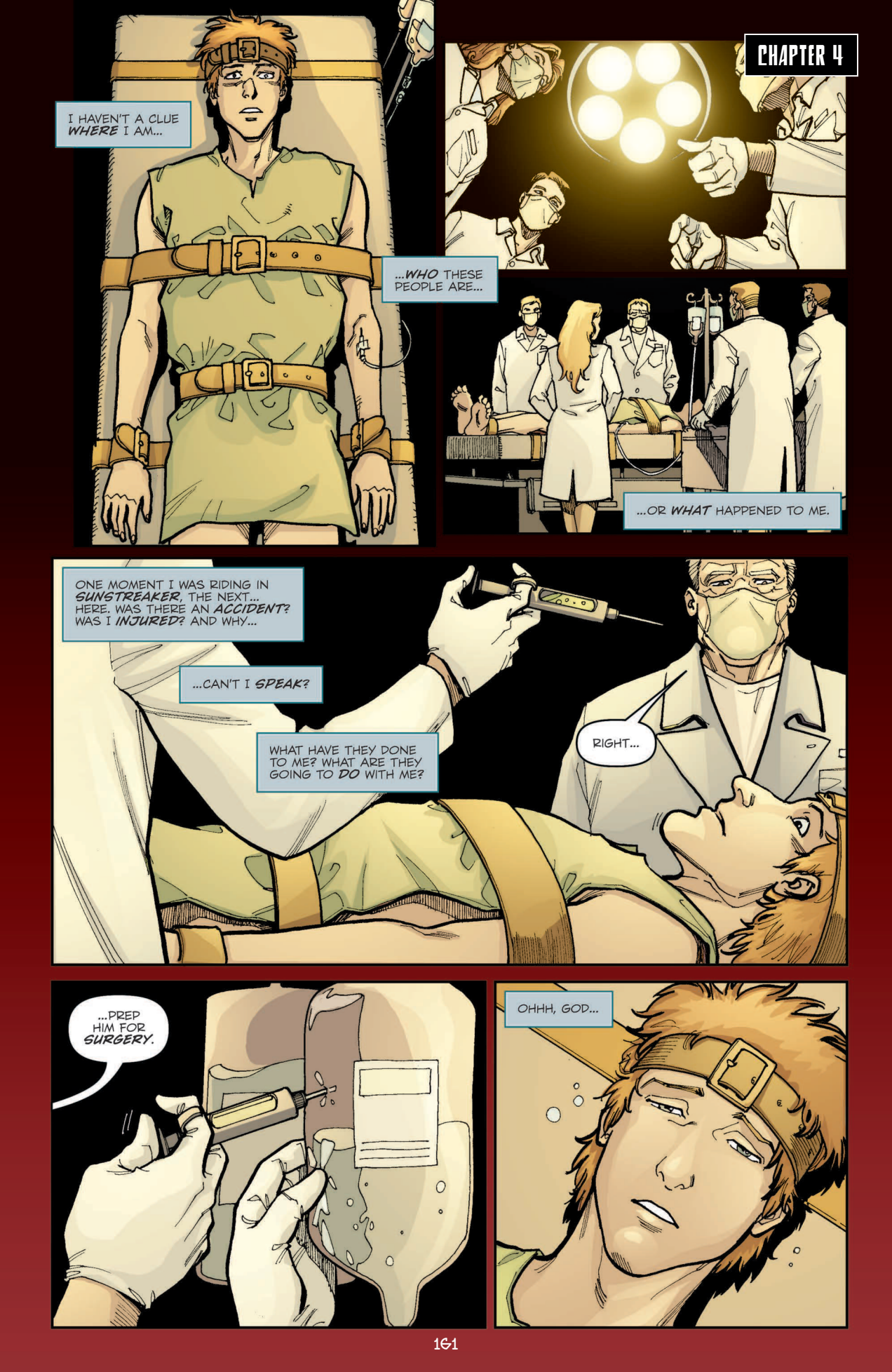

ANY LOCAL TRAFFIC, IMMOBILIZE BUT DO *NOT* ENGAGE.
WE DON'T WANT TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE.
YOU HEARD HIM. LET'S *ROLL*...
JAZZ— *TRACTION STUDS*.
YEAH, YEAH.
SPOILSPORT.
AND REMEMBER— IT'S *CRITICAL* WE TAKE THE FACSIMILE INTACT. HIS CELLULAR TEMPLATE IS THE *KEY*...
...TO *EVERY* OTHER FACSIMILE CURRENTLY IN PLAY ON EARTH.

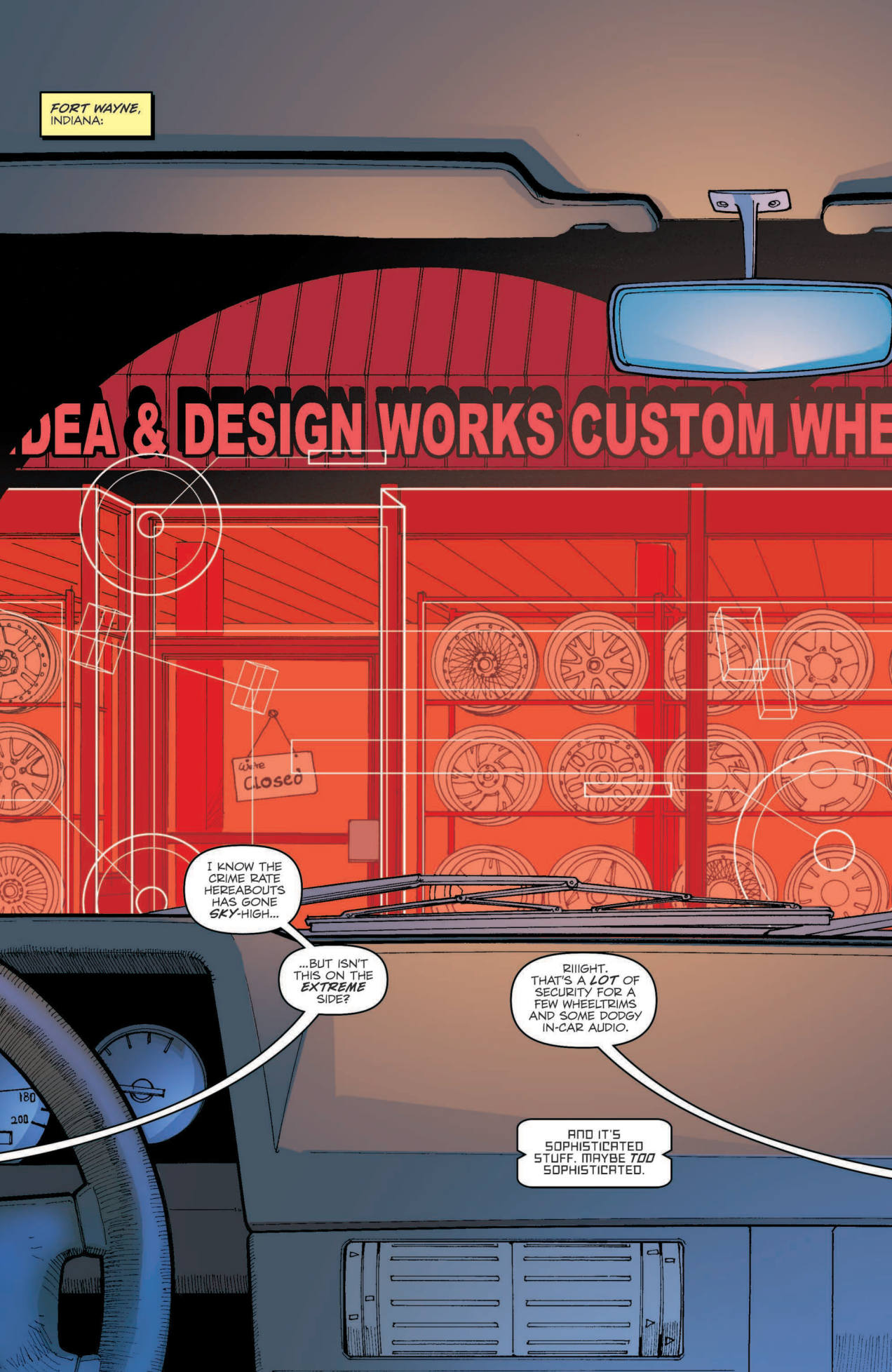

THE BORDER:
NOW WHAT?
WE WITHDRAW. YOU—HAVING FULFILLED YOUR ASSIGNED ROLE—WILL BE DECOMMISSIONED.
BLITZWING...
...
BLITZWING?
BOSS, YOU WON'T BELIEVE THIS...
...BUT I'VE GOT OPTIMUS PRIME HIMSELF, BANG IN MY SIGHTS.
SHOULD I TAKE THE SHOT?
HAS HE SEEN YOU?
NOPE.

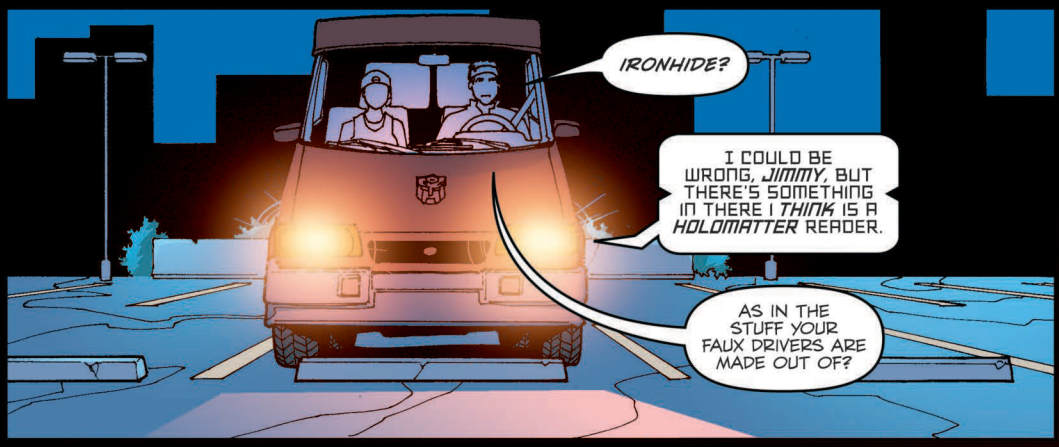

MAKE SURE HE *DOESN'T*. AND WHEN HE'S IN RANGE...
"...*TAKE* THE SHOT!"
SKYWARP...
HERE.
WHERE THERE'S ONE AUTOBOT, THERE'S MORE THAN LIKELY TWO. OR MORE. WHEN THEY MAKE THEIR MOVE...
...*YOU* MAKE YOURS.
GOTCHA.
OH, AND SKYWARP...
...BRING *ASTROTRAIN* WITH YOU.


ARK-32:
UNDERSTOOD. NIGHTBEAT OUT.
LOOKS LIKE WE TURNED UP IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING, HOT ROD. PRIME AND MOST OF THE TACTICAL UNIT ARE IN THE FIELD. SEEMS MEGATRON'S MAKING HIS MOVE.
WE'RE TO SIT TIGHT UNTIL WE GET OUR BEARINGS AND THEN—
HEY, NIGHTBEAT, YOU CAN SIT TIGHT IF YOU WANT. ME AND HARDHEAD...
...WE'RE GOING IN!
HOO-HAH!

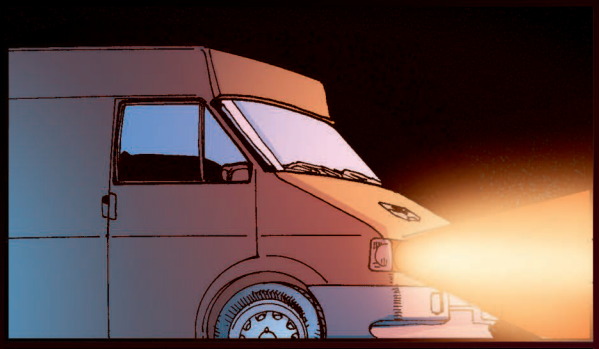

ARK-19:
UH-UH. THOSE ARE BULK-MANUFACTURE, FOR THE EXPORT MARKET. HOW ABOUT THIS ONE?
ULTRALITE AMERICA. YEAH, COULD BE.
CAN YOU SORT THE ORDERS BY SIZE AND DATE? IT WOULD HAVE BEEN RECENT...
...AND CHANCES ARE THEY ONLY TOOK WHAT THEY NEEDED.
UH... THERE. THOSE TWO. A GARAGE IN BEAVER, UTAH... AND... A CUSTOM CAR OUTLET IN FORT WAYNE, INDIANA.
YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS, DON'T YOU?
ROAD TRIP!
I HOPE YOU WEREN'T THINKING OF GOING ANYWHERE?
...WITHOUT ME!

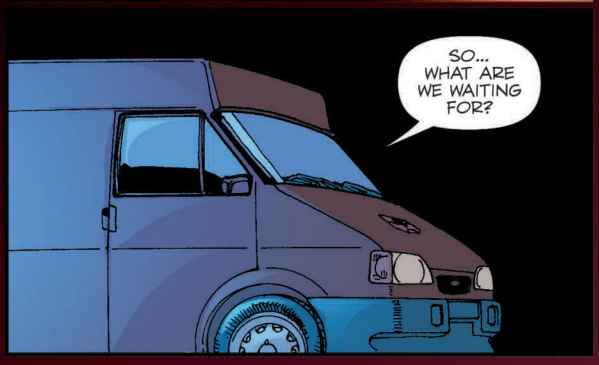

CHAPTER 4
I HAVEN'T A CLUE *WHERE* I AM...
...*WHO* THESE PEOPLE ARE...
...OR *WHAT* HAPPENED TO ME.
ONE MOMENT I WAS RIDING IN *SUNSTREAKER*, THE NEXT... HERE. WAS THERE AN *ACCIDENT*? WAS I *INJURED*? AND WHY...
...CAN'T I *SPEAK*?
WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO ME? WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO *DO* WITH ME?
RIGHT...
...PREP HIM FOR *SURGERY*.
OHHH, GOD...


FORT WAYNE, INDIANA:
DEA & DESIGN WORKS CUSTOM WHE
We're Closed
I KNOW THE CRIME RATE HEREABOUTS HAS GONE SKY-HIGH...
...BUT ISN'T THIS ON THE EXTREME SIDE?
RIIIGHT. THAT'S A LOT OF SECURITY FOR A FEW WHEELTRIMS AND SOME DODGY IN-CAR AUDIO.
AND IT'S SOPHISTICATED STUFF. MAYBE TOO SOPHISTICATED.

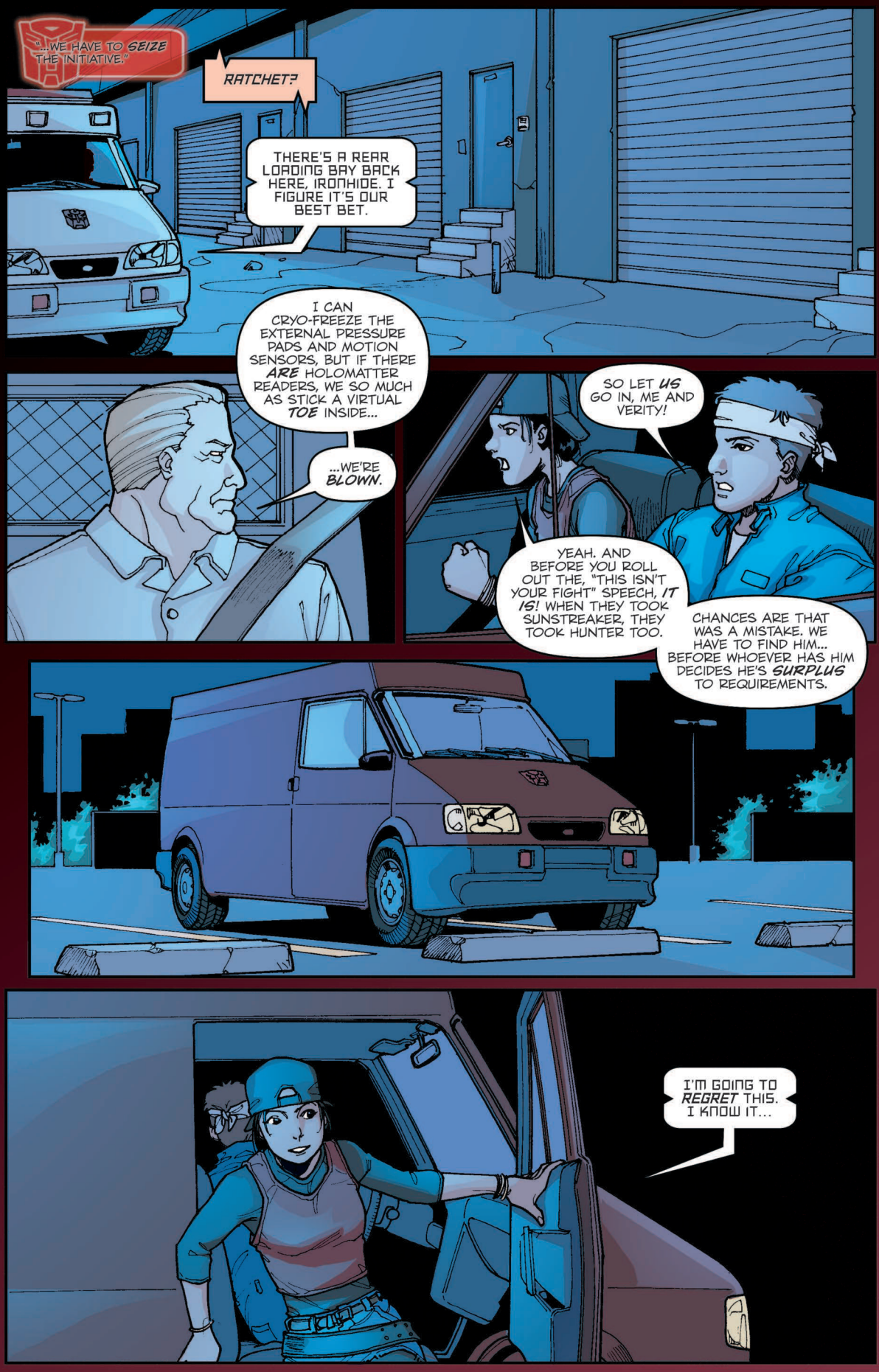

IRONHIDE?
I COULD BE WRONG, JIMMY, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING IN THERE I THINK IS A HOLOMATTER READER.
AS IN THE STUFF YOUR FAUX DRIVERS ARE MADE OUT OF?


RIGHT.
THEN THIS...
...HAS TO BE THE PLACE!

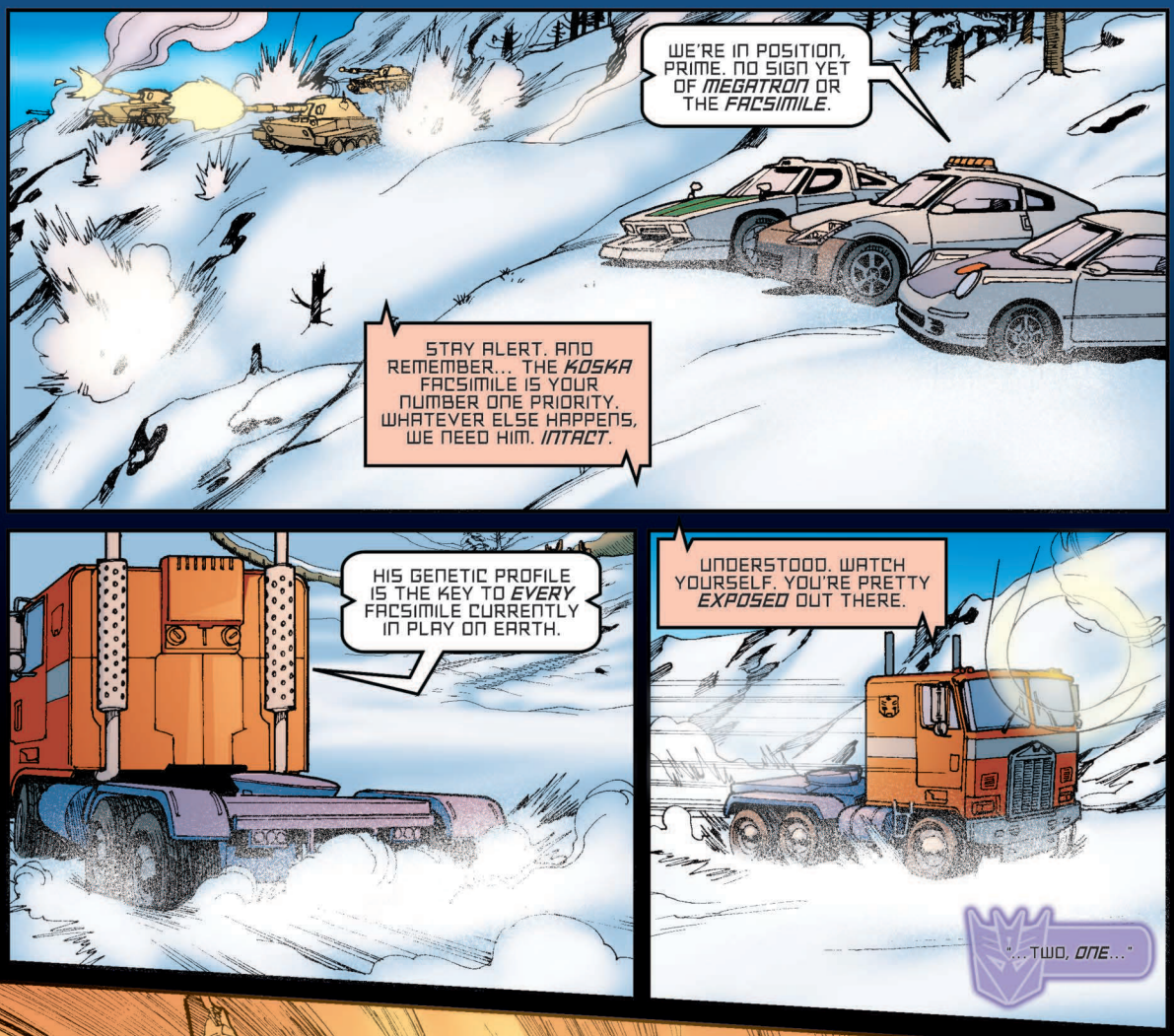



SO... WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

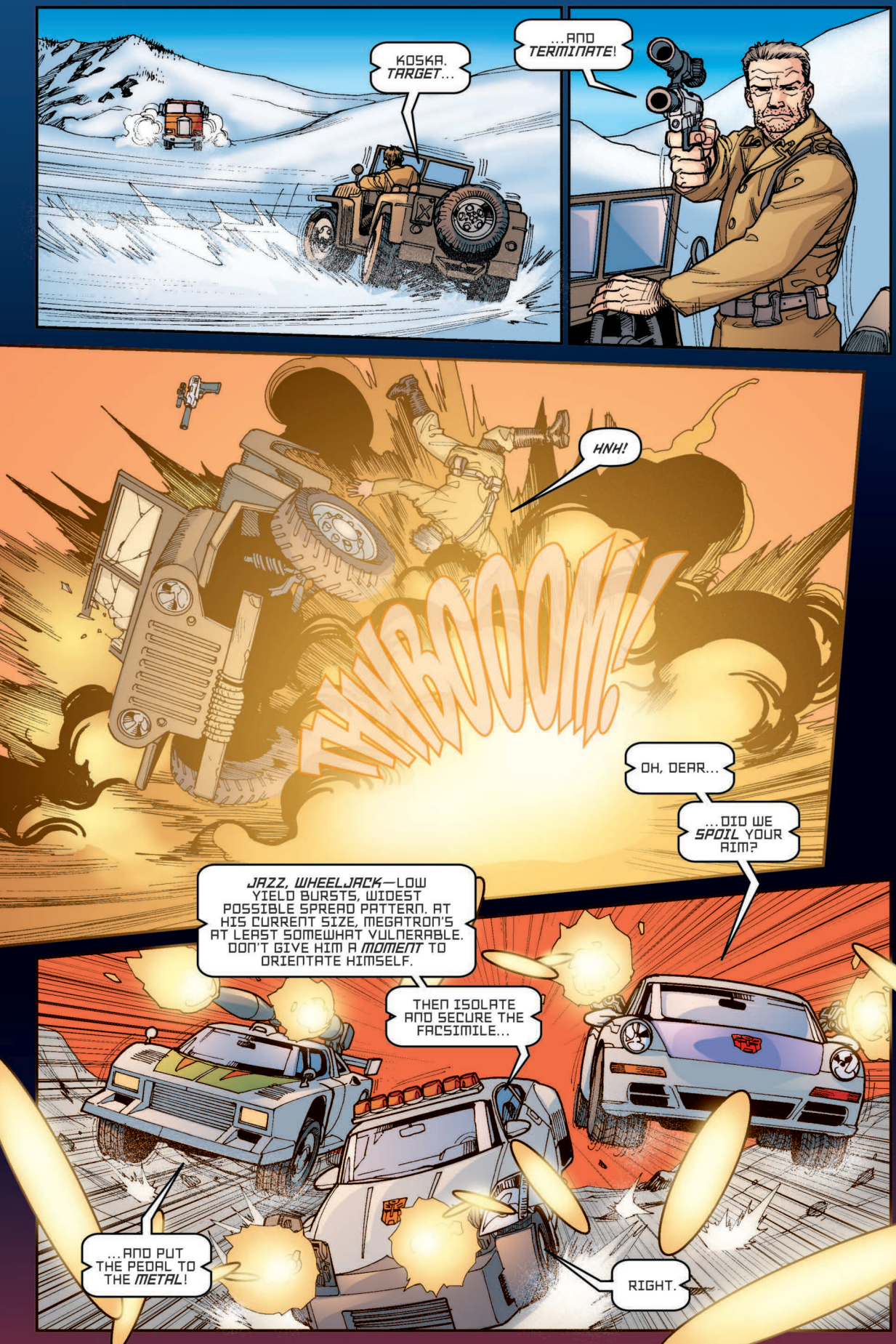

A SOLID, RISK-FREE STRATEGY, VERITY. IF THIS PLACE IS LINKED TO THE PEOPLE WHO'VE GOT SUNSTREAKER...
AND HUNTER!
AND HUNTER. THEN WE PROCEED ONLY WITH THE UTMOST CAUTION.
BUT—
BUT NOTHING. WE'VE SEEN—TWICE NOW—JUST HOW WELL-ARMED AND ORGANIZED THIS GROUP IS. AND THEY HAVE A HABIT, WHEN EXPOSED, OF COVERING THEIR TRACKS... EXPLOSIVELY. THIS TIME...


"...WE HAVE TO SEIZE THE INITIATIVE."
RATCHET?
THERE'S A REAR LOADING BAY BACK HERE, IRONHIDE. I FIGURE IT'S OUR BEST BET.
I CAN CRYO-FREEZE THE EXTERNAL PRESSURE PADS AND MOTION SENSORS, BUT IF THERE ARE HOLOMATTER READERS, WE SO MUCH AS STICK A VIRTUAL TOE INSIDE...
...WE'RE BLOWN.
SO LET US GO IN, ME AND VERITY!
YEAH. AND BEFORE YOU ROLL OUT THE, "THIS ISN'T YOUR FIGHT" SPEECH, IT IS! WHEN THEY TOOK SUNSTREAKER, THEY TOOK HUNTER TOO.
CHANCES ARE THAT WAS A MISTAKE. WE HAVE TO FIND HIM... BEFORE WHOEVER HAS HIM DECIDES HE'S SURPLUS TO REQUIREMENTS.
I'M GOING TO REGRET THIS. I KNOW IT...


SOVIET STATE OF BRASNYA, THREE HOURS EARLIER...
"...I'VE GOT OPTIMUS PRIME HIMSELF, BANG IN MY SIGHTS."
SHOULD I TAKE THE SHOT?
HAS HE SEEN YOU?
NOPE.
MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T. AND WHEN HE'S IN RANGE... TAKE THE SHOT!
PEACHY.
TIME TO OPTIMUM FIRING RANGE, SIX NANO-KLIKS...
"...AND COUNTING."
PROWL—SIT-REP.


WE'RE IN POSITION, PRIME. NO SIGN YET OF MEGATRON OR THE FACSIMILE.
STAY ALERT. AND REMEMBER... THE KOSKA FACSIMILE IS YOUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY. WHATEVER ELSE HAPPENS, WE NEED HIM. INTACT.
HIS GENETIC PROFILE IS THE KEY TO EVERY FACSIMILE CURRENTLY IN PLAY ON EARTH.
UNDERSTOOD. WATCH YOURSELF. YOU'RE PRETTY EXPOSED OUT THERE.
"...TWO, ONE..."
...FI—YAAAH!
SKRIZAK!


PRIME? YOU OKAY?
FINE.
"REMOTE TACTICAL HAD ALREADY CONFIRMED *BLITZWING'S* PRESENCE."
"THE REST..."
"...I LEFT TO *ROLLER*."
WATCHIN' YOUR *OWN* BACK, HUH?
EXACTLY. NOW, ASSUMING MEGATRON IS STILL IN THE AREA...
"...I'M HOPING FOR A *REACTION*."


KOSKA. TARGET...
...AND TERMINATE!
HNH!
KWBOOM!
OH, DEAR...
...DID WE SPOIL YOUR AIM?
JAZZ, WHEELJACK—LOW YIELD BURSTS, WIDEST POSSIBLE SPREAD PATTERN. AT HIS CURRENT SIZE, MEGATRON'S AT LEAST SOMEWHAT VULNERABLE. DON'T GIVE HIM A MOMENT TO ORIENTATE HIMSELF.
THEN ISOLATE AND SECURE THE FACSIMILE...
...AND PUT THE PEDAL TO THE METAL!
RIGHT.

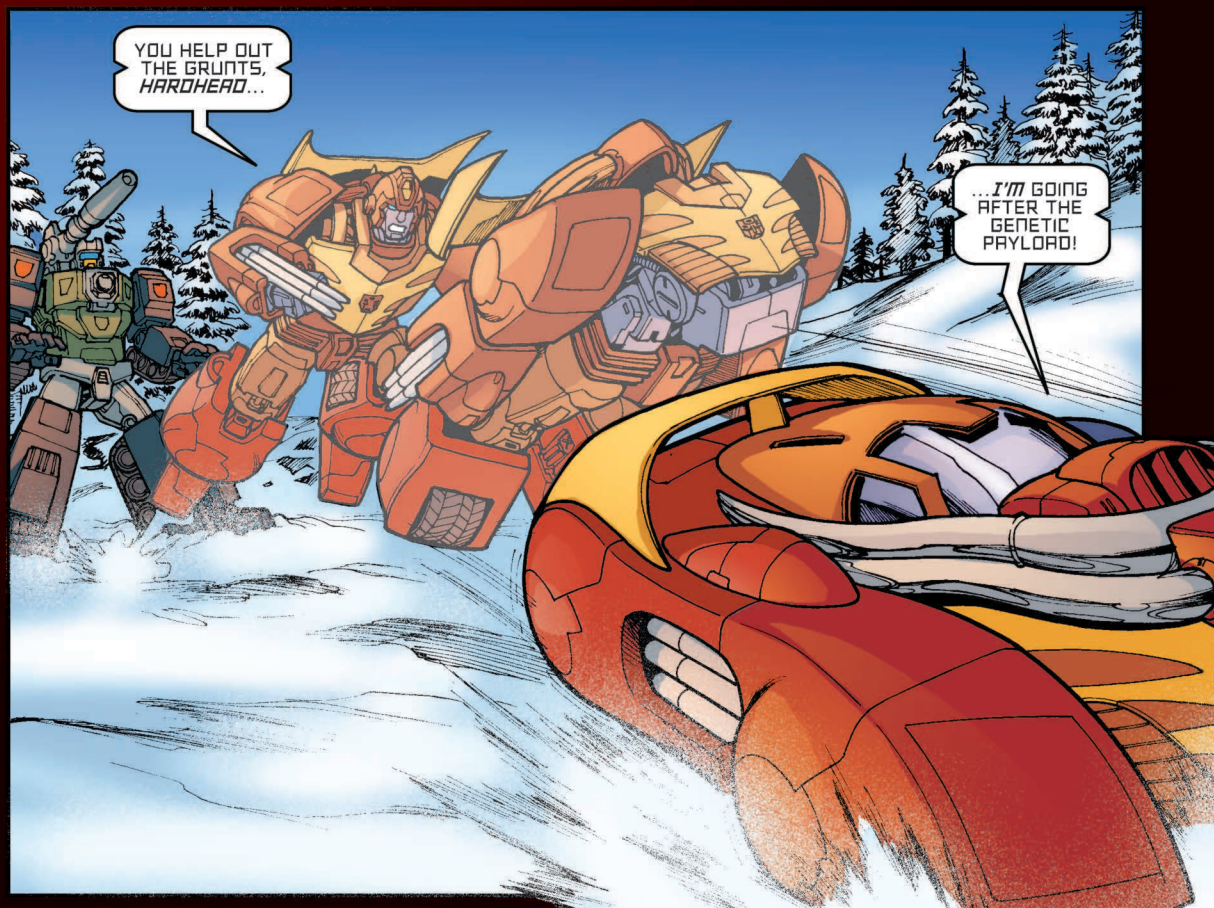

KOSKA...
...BEGIN SELF-DECOMMISSIONING.
NO, YOU DON'T. READYING NERVE PARALYSIS PULSE...
VDP
WELL, WELL! COULDN'T HAVE TIMED THAT ANY BETTER.
ASTROTRAIN...
...SCORCHED EARTH!
DAMMIT! EVASIVE! PRIME... TARGET IS UNSECURED AND MOBILE. I REPEAT...

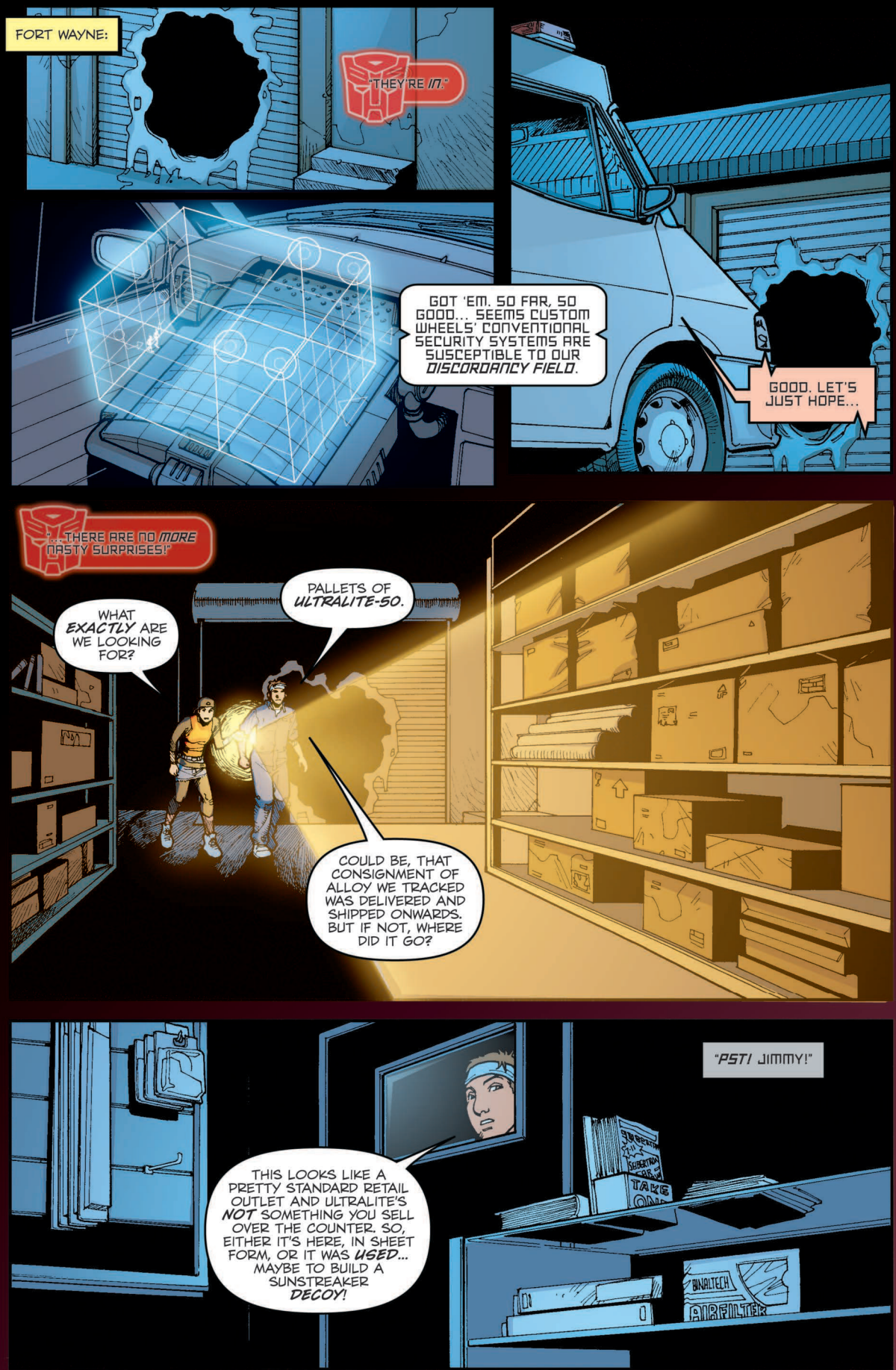

"...MOBILE."


YOU *GET* ALL THAT?

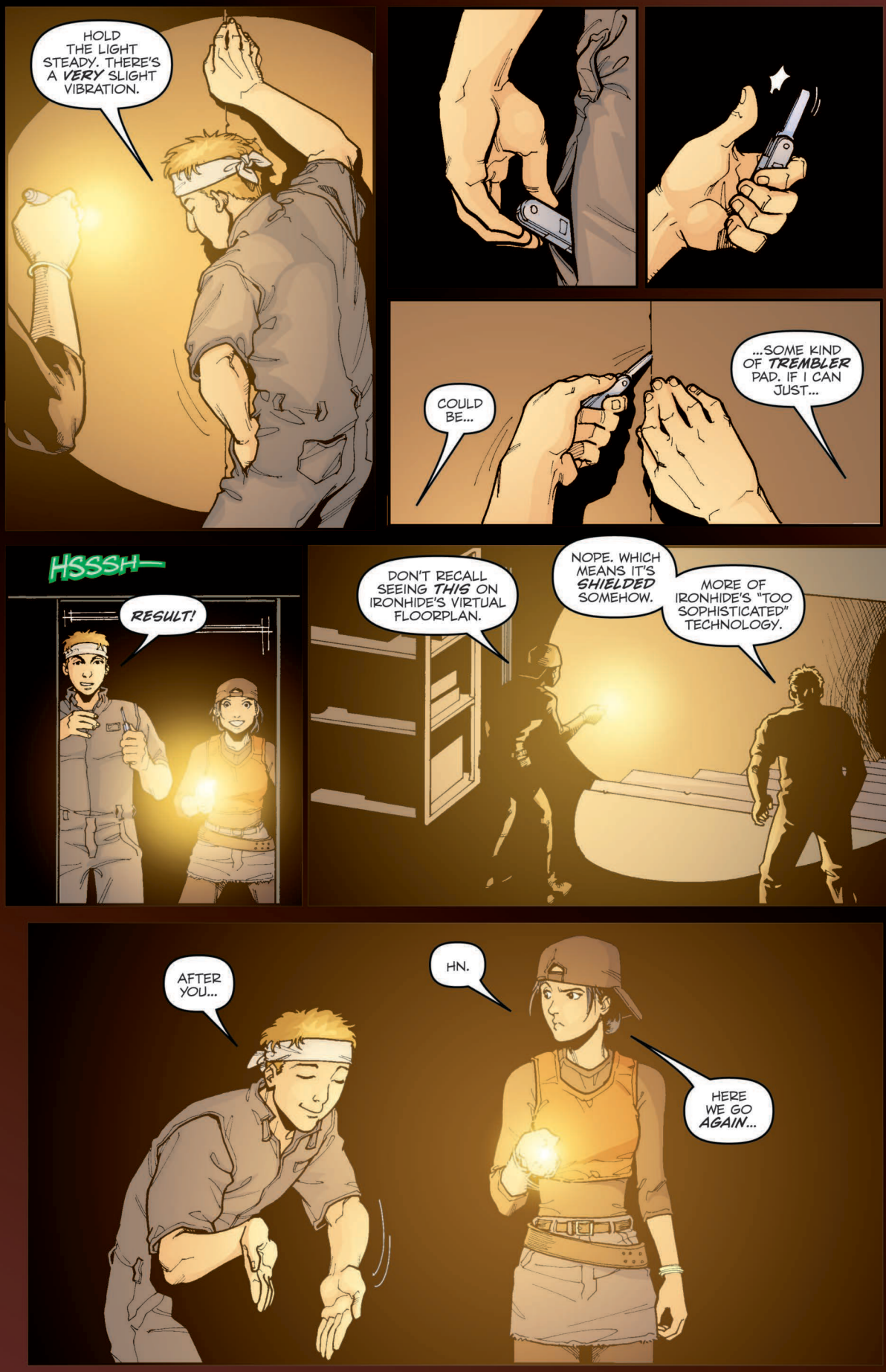

UH-HUH. ONE FACSIMILE. TAG AND BAG.
WE SHOULD PROBABLY REPORT IN FIRST, *HOT ROD*, LET THEM KNOW WE'RE IN PLAY.

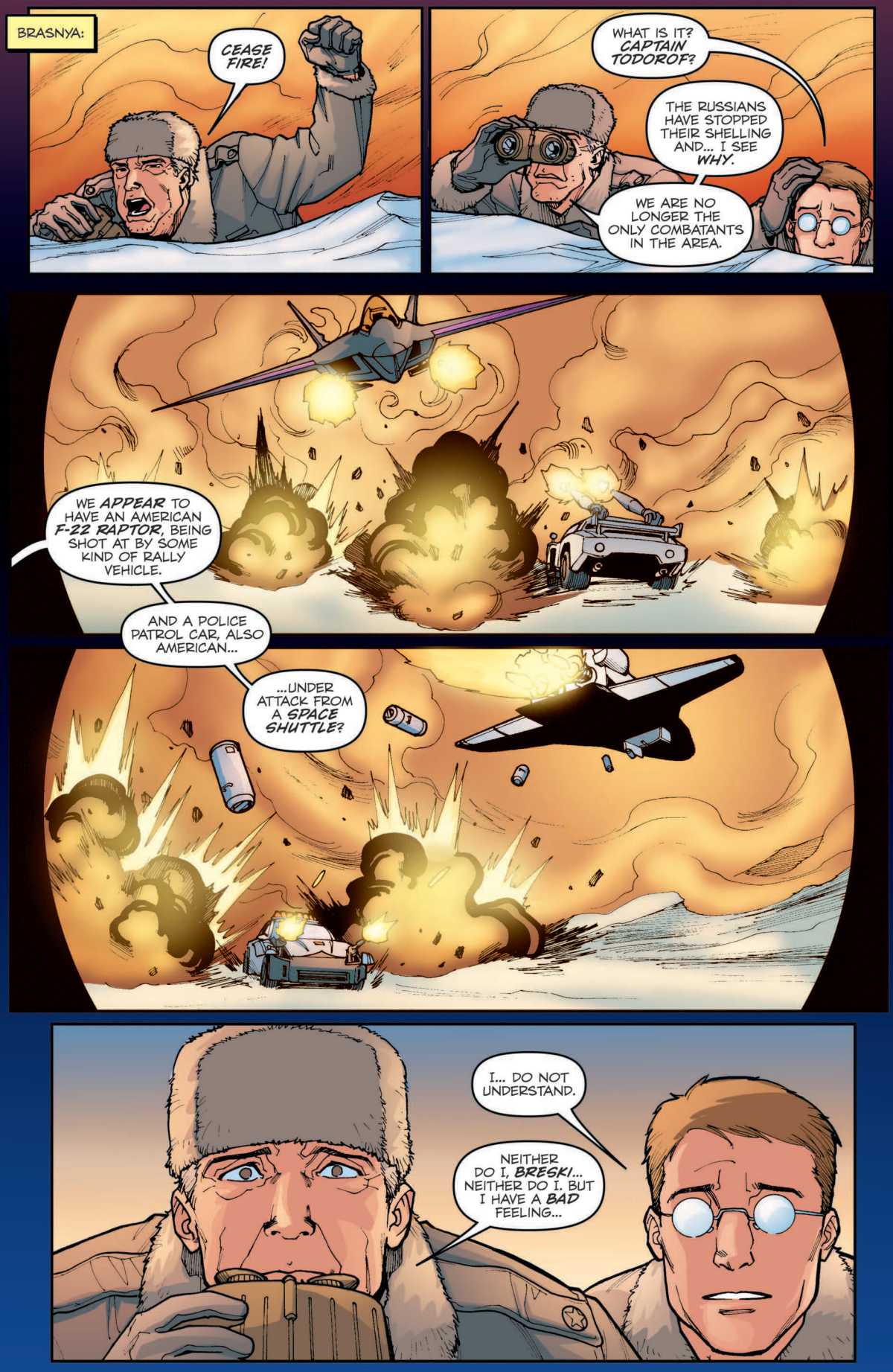

NO TIME. AND ANYWAY, LOOKS LIKE THEY'VE GOT THEIR HANDS FULL.

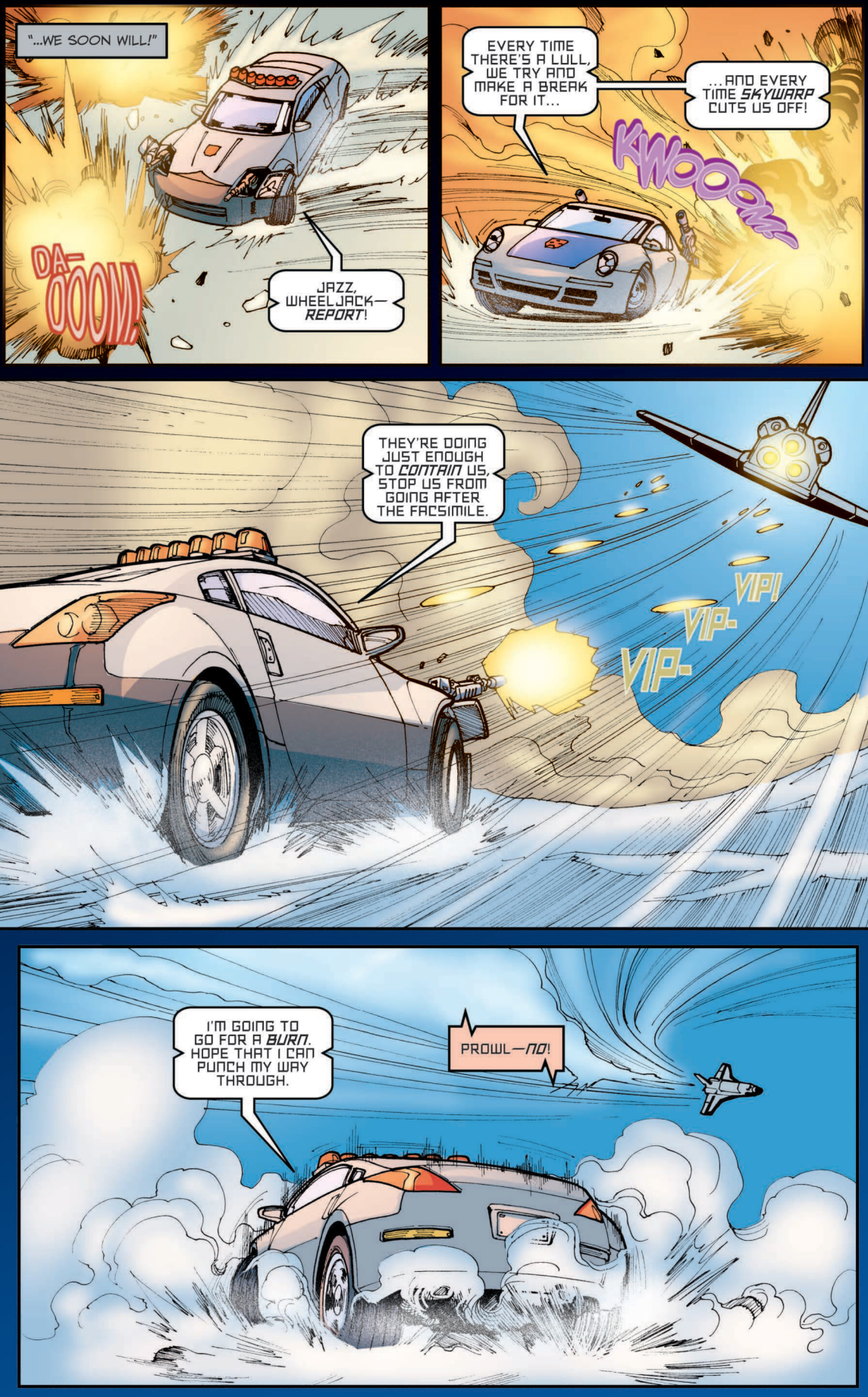

YOU HELP OUT THE GRUNTS, *HARDHEAD*...
...*I'M* GOING AFTER THE GENETIC PAYLOAD!

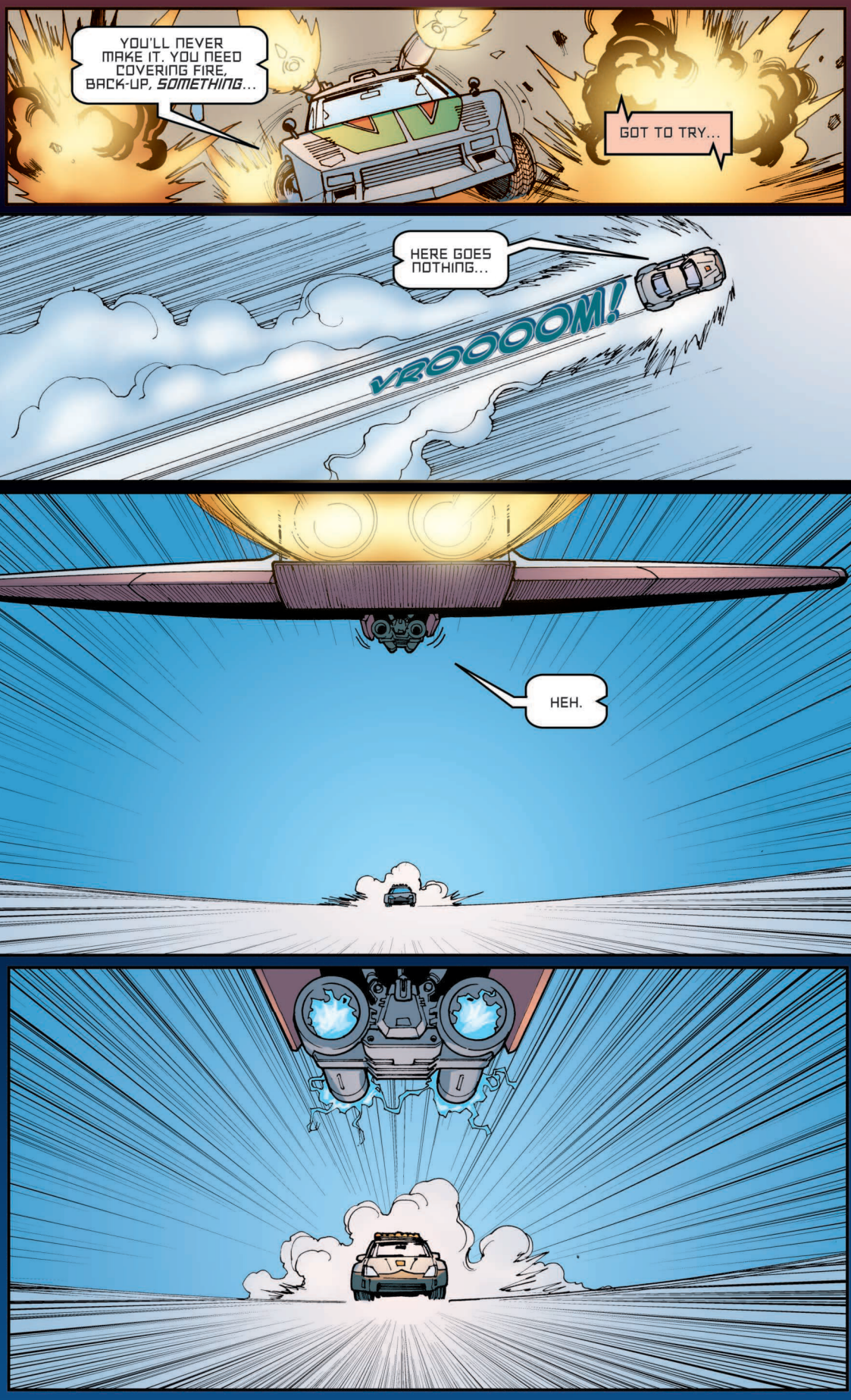

FORT WAYNE:
"THEY'RE IN."
GOT 'EM. SO FAR, SO GOOD... SEEMS CUSTOM WHEELS' CONVENTIONAL SECURITY SYSTEMS ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO OUR DISCORDANCY FIELD.
GOOD. LET'S JUST HOPE...
"...THERE ARE NO MORE NASTY SURPRISES!"
WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE LOOKING FOR?
PALLETS OF ULTRALITE-50.
COULD BE, THAT CONSIGNMENT OF ALLOY WE TRACKED WAS DELIVERED AND SHIPPED ONWARDS. BUT IF NOT, WHERE DID IT GO?
"PST! JIMMY!"
THIS LOOKS LIKE A PRETTY STANDARD RETAIL OUTLET AND ULTRALITE'S NOT SOMETHING YOU SELL OVER THE COUNTER. SO, EITHER IT'S HERE, IN SHEET FORM, OR IT WAS USED... MAYBE TO BUILD A SUNSTREAKER DECOY!
BINALTECH
AIRFILTER

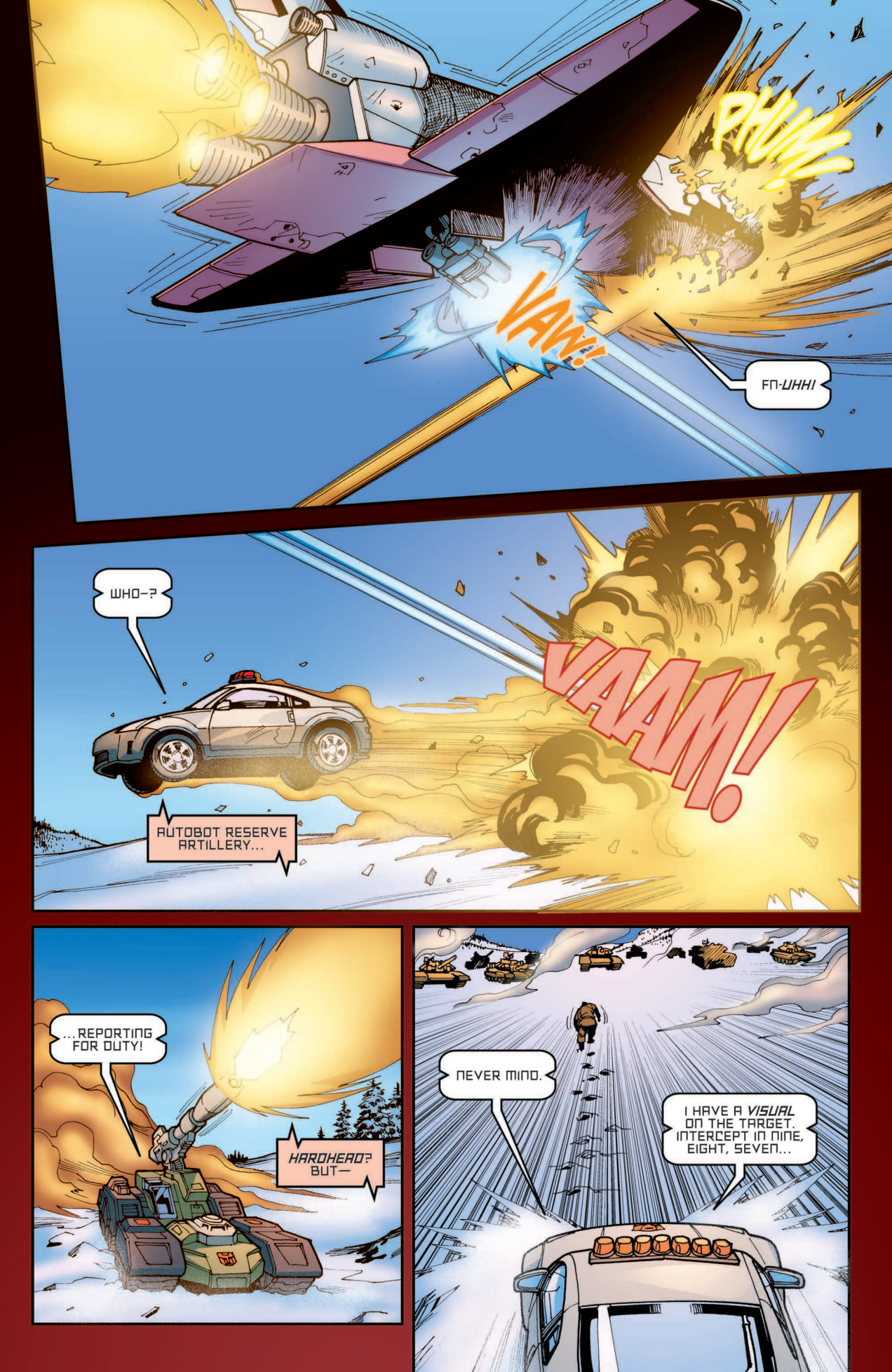

THERE'S SOMETHING HERE. LOOK!
SEE THAT GROOVE? IT GOES RIGHT UP AND AROUND, THEN DOWN AGAIN HERE. I THINK MAYBE IT'S A DOOR.
COULD BE. HERE, HELP ME PUSH THIS TO ONE S—
—IIDE?
YOU'RE EITHER A LOT STRONGER THAN YOU LOOK, JIMMY... OR THAT THING'S BUILT TO MOVE!
PROBABLY ON A RAIL.
HM. NO VISIBLE CATCH OR HANDLE. LET'S SEE NOW...
AH.


HOLD THE LIGHT STEADY. THERE'S A VERY SLIGHT VIBRATION.
COULD BE...
...SOME KIND OF TREMBLER PAD. IF I CAN JUST...
HSSSH—
RESULT!
DON'T RECALL SEEING THIS ON IRONHIDE'S VIRTUAL FLOORPLAN.
NOPE. WHICH MEANS IT'S SHIELDED SOMEHOW.
MORE OF IRONHIDE'S "TOO SOPHISTICATED" TECHNOLOGY.
AFTER YOU...
HN.
HERE WE GO AGAIN...

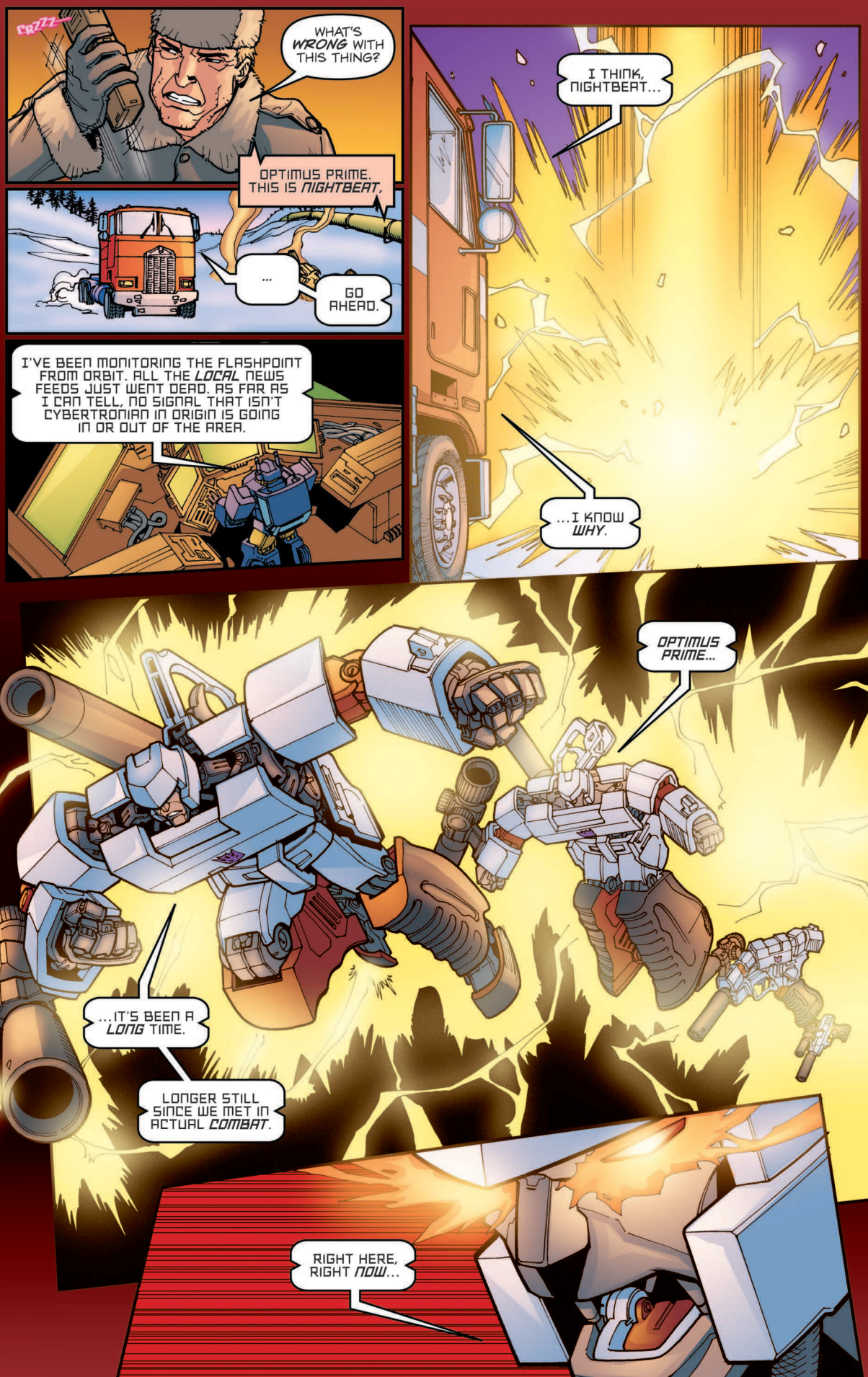

BRASNYA:
CEASE FIRE!
WHAT IS IT? CAPTAIN TODOROF?
THE RUSSIANS HAVE STOPPED THEIR SHELLING AND... I SEE WHY.
WE ARE NO LONGER THE ONLY COMBATANTS IN THE AREA.
WE APPEAR TO HAVE AN AMERICAN F-22 RAPTOR, BEING SHOT AT BY SOME KIND OF RALLY VEHICLE.
AND A POLICE PATROL CAR, ALSO AMERICAN...
...UNDER ATTACK FROM A SPACE SHUTTLE?
I... DO NOT UNDERSTAND.
NEITHER DO I, BRESKI... NEITHER DO I. BUT I HAVE A BAD FEELING...

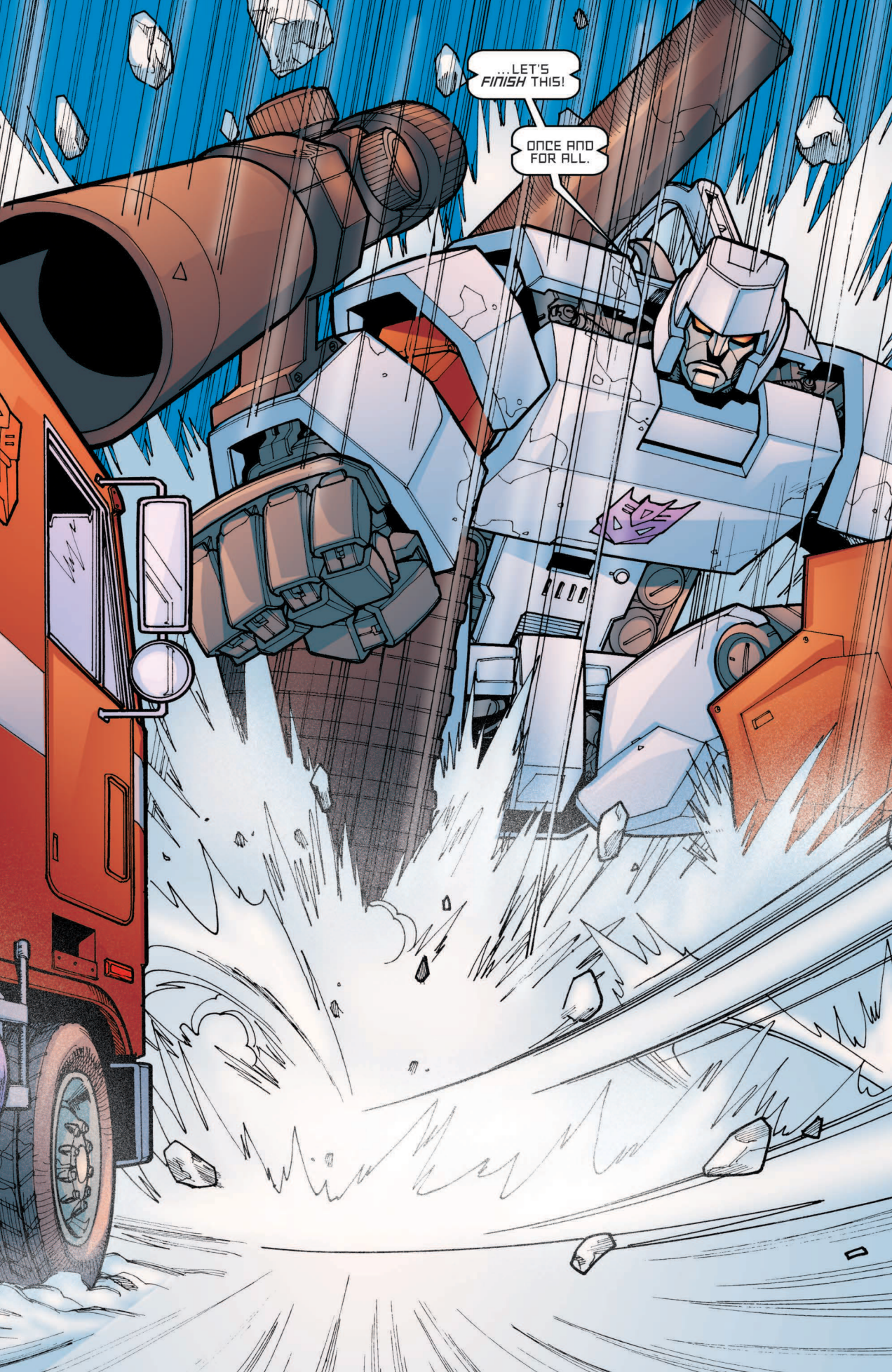

"...WE SOON WILL!"
DA-
OOOM!
JAZZ, WHEELJACK— REPORT!
EVERY TIME THERE'S A LULL, WE TRY AND MAKE A BREAK FOR IT...
...AND EVERY TIME SKYWARP CUTS US OFF!
KWOOOM!
THEY'RE DOING JUST ENOUGH TO CONTAIN US, STOP US FROM GOING AFTER THE FACSIMILE.
VIP!
VIP-
VIP-
I'M GOING TO GO FOR A BURN. HOPE THAT I CAN PUNCH MY WAY THROUGH.
PROWL—NO!

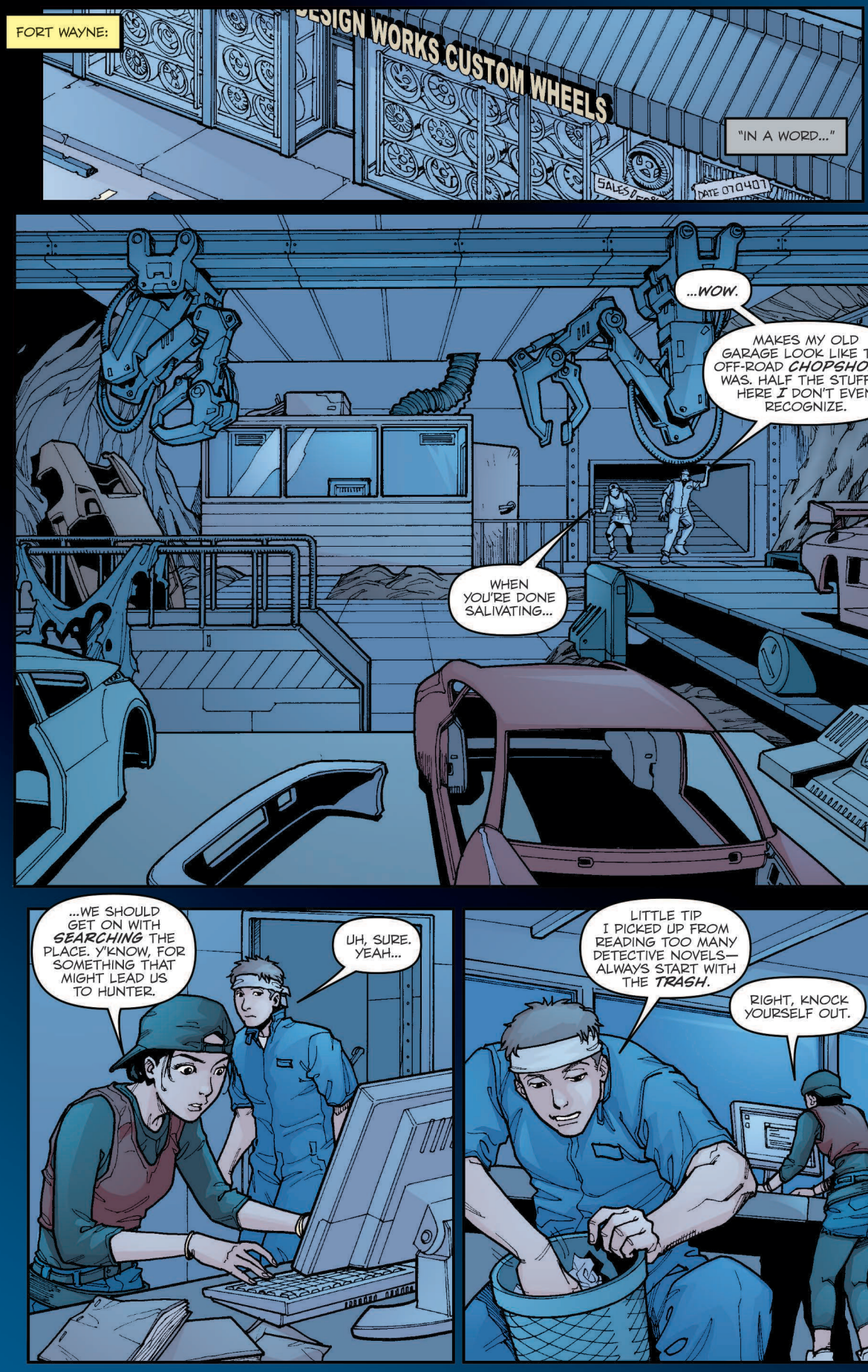

YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT. YOU NEED COVERING FIRE, BACK-UP, SOMETHING...
GOT TO TRY...
HERE GOES NOTHING...
VROOOOOM!
HEH.


PHUM!
VAW!
FN-UHH!
WHO–?
VAAM!
AUTOBOT RESERVE ARTILLERY...
...REPORTING FOR DUTY!
HARDHEAD? BUT–
NEVER MIND.
I HAVE A VISUAL ON THE TARGET. INTERCEPT IN NINE, EIGHT, SEVEN...

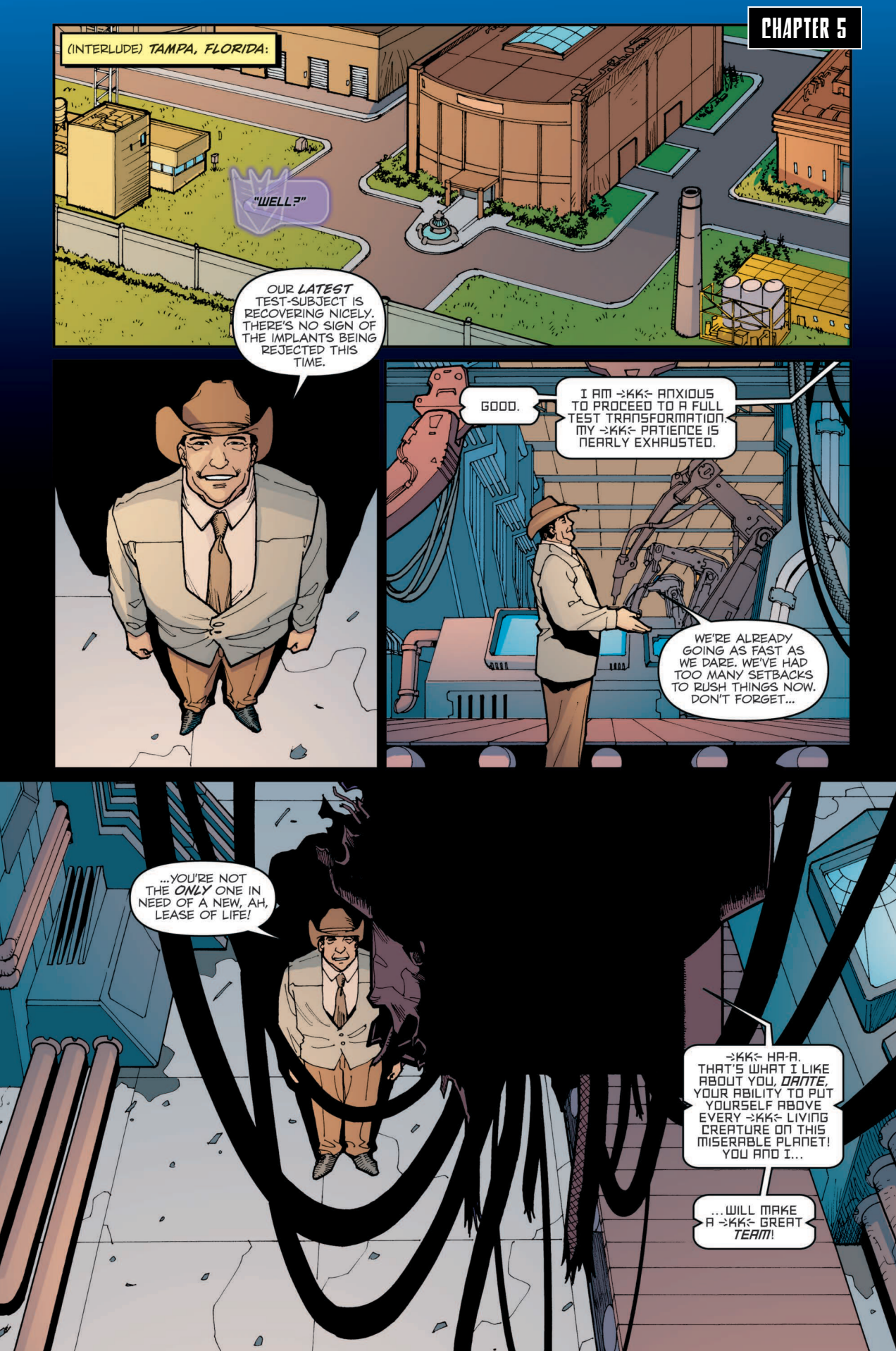

WHAT THE—?
WHOA! OF ALL THE PLACES TO RUN INTO TRAFFIC!
SCREE!
EΠHH!
GEEEZ!
GET ME THE RADIO...
...I'M CALLING THIS IN!
WHAT IS IT? WHAT DID YOU SEE?
NOTHING.
THIS IS CAPTAIN TODOROF, FOURTEENTH INFANTRY. GET ME A SECURE LINE TO MAJOR ARKURIN. PRIORITY ALPHA-NINE-NINE.

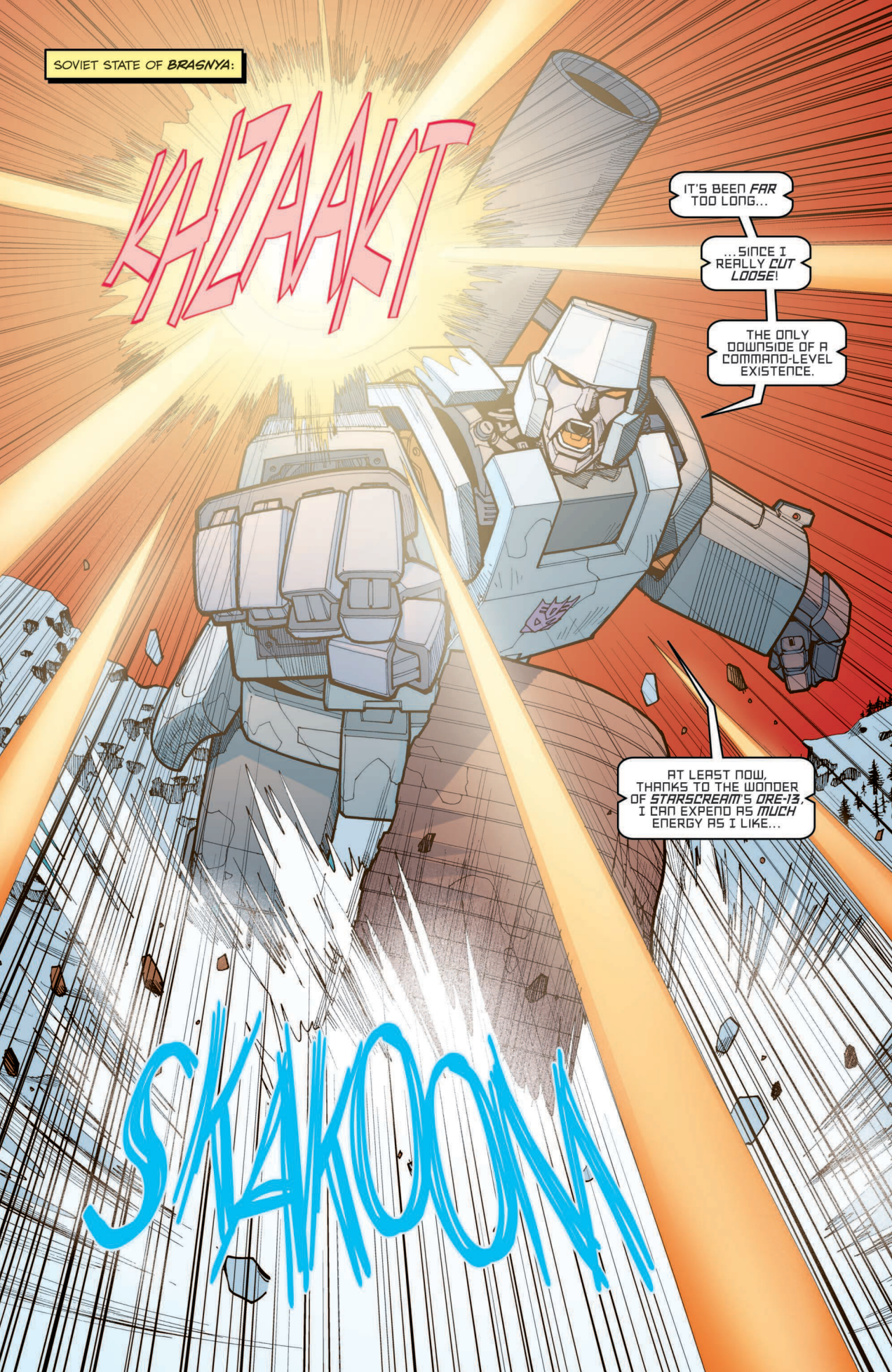

CRZZZ
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS THING?
OPTIMUS PRIME. THIS IS NIGHTBEAT.
...
GO AHEAD.
I'VE BEEN MONITORING THE FLASHPOINT FROM ORBIT. ALL THE LOCAL NEWS FEEDS JUST WENT DEAD. AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, NO SIGNAL THAT ISN'T CYBERTRONIAN IN ORIGIN IS GOING IN OR OUT OF THE AREA.
I THINK, NIGHTBEAT...
...I KNOW WHY.
OPTIMUS PRIME...
...IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.
LONGER STILL SINCE WE MET IN ACTUAL COMBAT.
RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW...

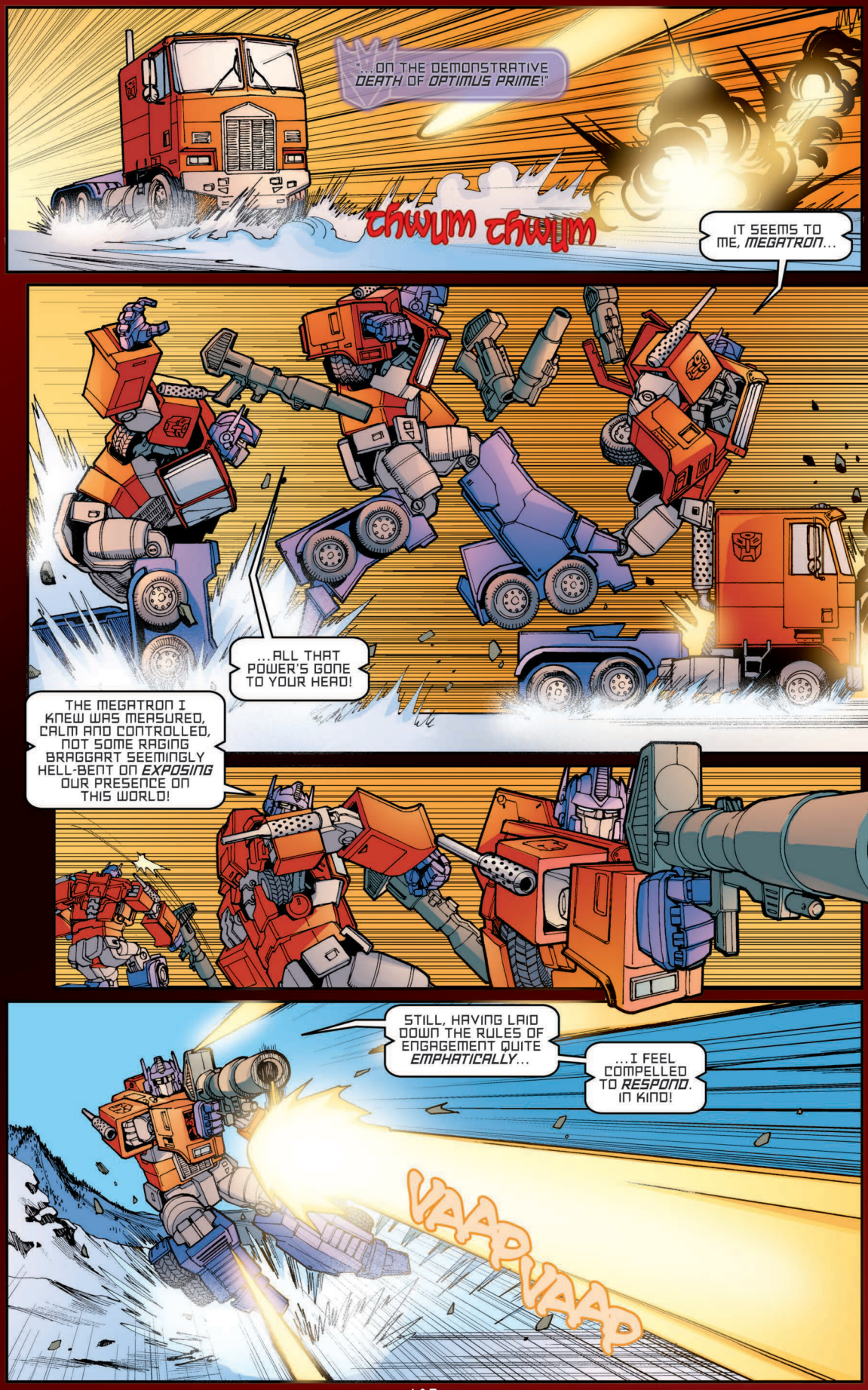

...LET'S FINISH THIS!
ONCE AND FOR ALL.


FORT WAYNE:
DESIGN WORKS CUSTOM WHEELS
"IN A WORD..."
SALES
DATE 070407
...WOW.
MAKES MY OLD GARAGE LOOK LIKE THE OFF-ROAD CHOPSHOP IT WAS. HALF THE STUFF IN HERE I DON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE.
WHEN YOU'RE DONE SALIVATING...
...WE SHOULD GET ON WITH SEARCHING THE PLACE. Y'KNOW, FOR SOMETHING THAT MIGHT LEAD US TO HUNTER.
UH, SURE. YEAH...
LITTLE TIP I PICKED UP FROM READING TOO MANY DETECTIVE NOVELS—ALWAYS START WITH THE TRASH.
RIGHT, KNOCK YOURSELF OUT.

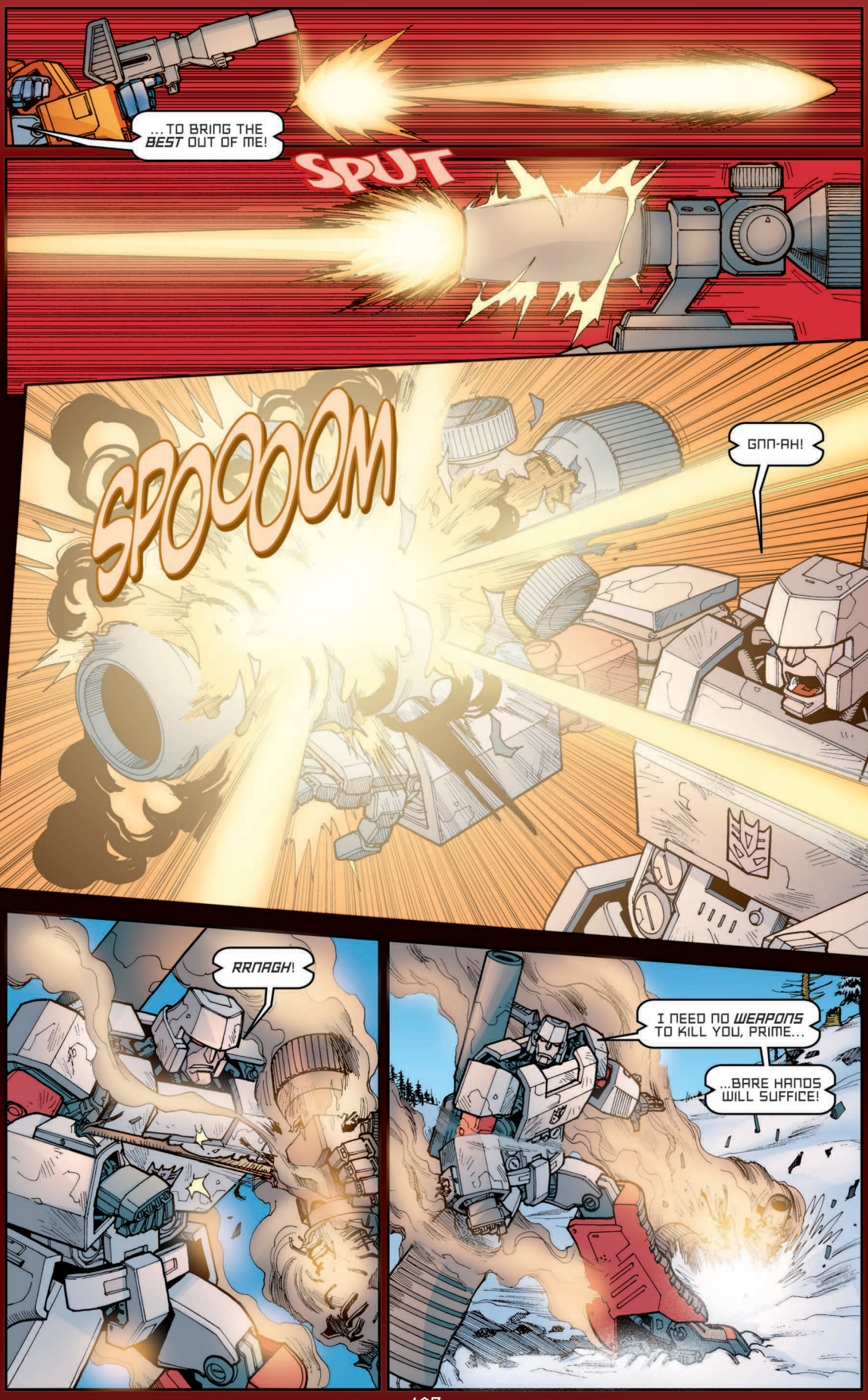

WHAT WITH ALMOST BEING BURIED ALIVE, THESE DAYS I TEND TO GET A LITTLE ANTSY BELOW GROUND, SO LET'S BE...
HM.
TAKAI
M
COULDN'T BE THIS SIMPLE... COULD IT?
M.
EH. STRANGE. A BUSINESS CARD WITH NO—
SSH!
CRUSH—
—TNNG!
KHAAK! V-VERITY... WHAT DID YOU DO?
NOTHING, I—KK—
G—
10:00
09:59
09:58

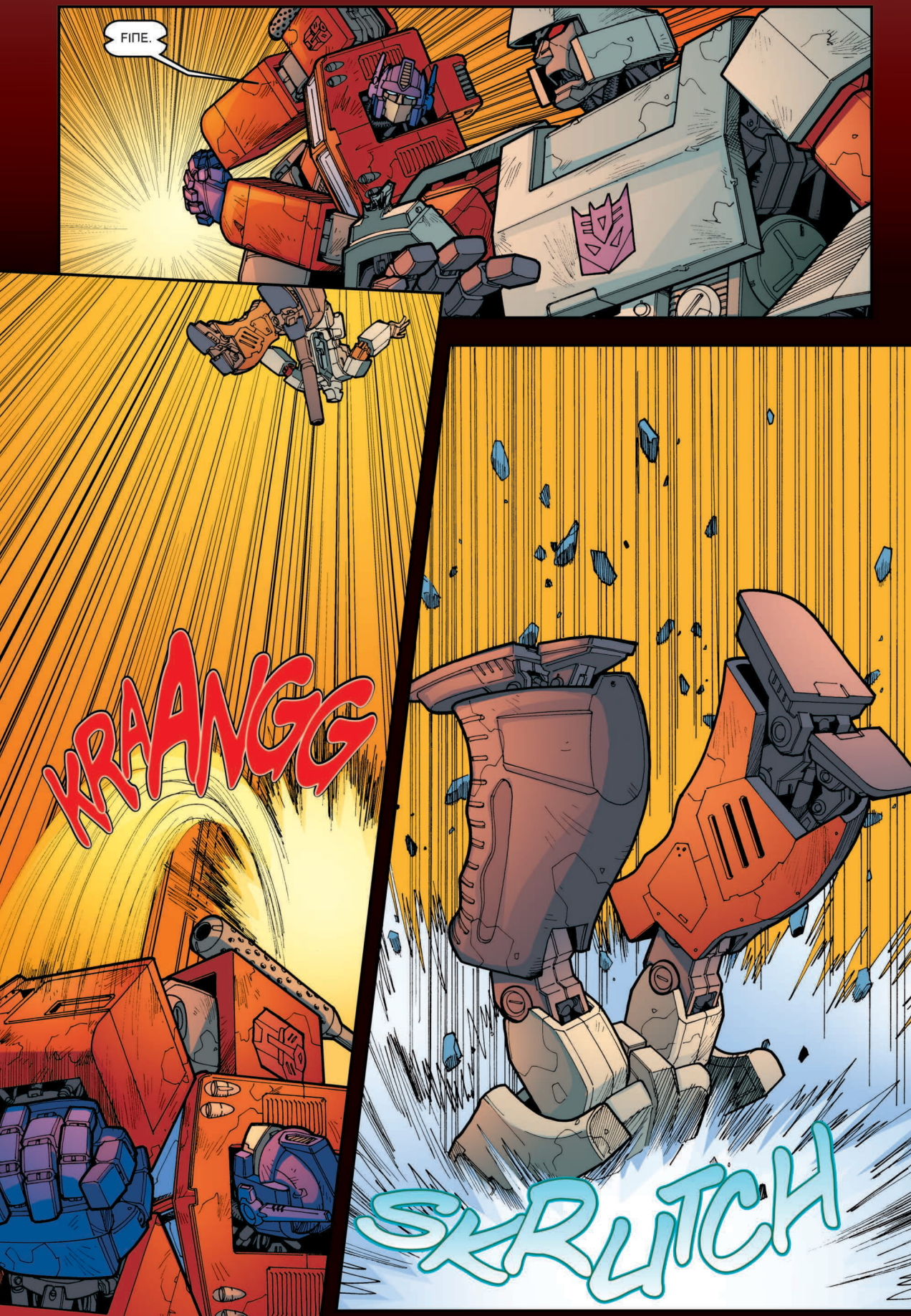

CHAPTER 5
(INTERLUDE) TAMPA, FLORIDA:
"WELL?"
OUR LATEST TEST-SUBJECT IS RECOVERING NICELY. THERE'S NO SIGN OF THE IMPLANTS BEING REJECTED THIS TIME.
GOOD.
I AM =KK= ANXIOUS TO PROCEED TO A FULL TEST TRANSFORMATION. MY =KK= PATIENCE IS NEARLY EXHAUSTED.
WE'RE ALREADY GOING AS FAST AS WE DARE. WE'VE HAD TOO MANY SETBACKS TO RUSH THINGS NOW. DON'T FORGET...
...YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE IN NEED OF A NEW, AH, LEASE OF LIFE!
=KK= HA-A. THAT'S WHAT I LIKE ABOUT YOU, DANTE, YOUR ABILITY TO PUT YOURSELF ABOVE EVERY =KK= LIVING CREATURE ON THIS MISERABLE PLANET! YOU AND I...
...WILL MAKE A =KK= GREAT TEAM!


SOVIET STATE OF BRASNYA:
KHZAAKT
IT'S BEEN FAR TOO LONG...
...SINCE I REALLY CUT LOOSE!
THE ONLY DOWNSIDE OF A COMMAND-LEVEL EXISTENCE.
AT LEAST NOW, THANKS TO THE WONDER OF STARSCREAM'S ORE-13, I CAN EXPEND AS MUCH ENERGY AS I LIKE...
SKAKOOM

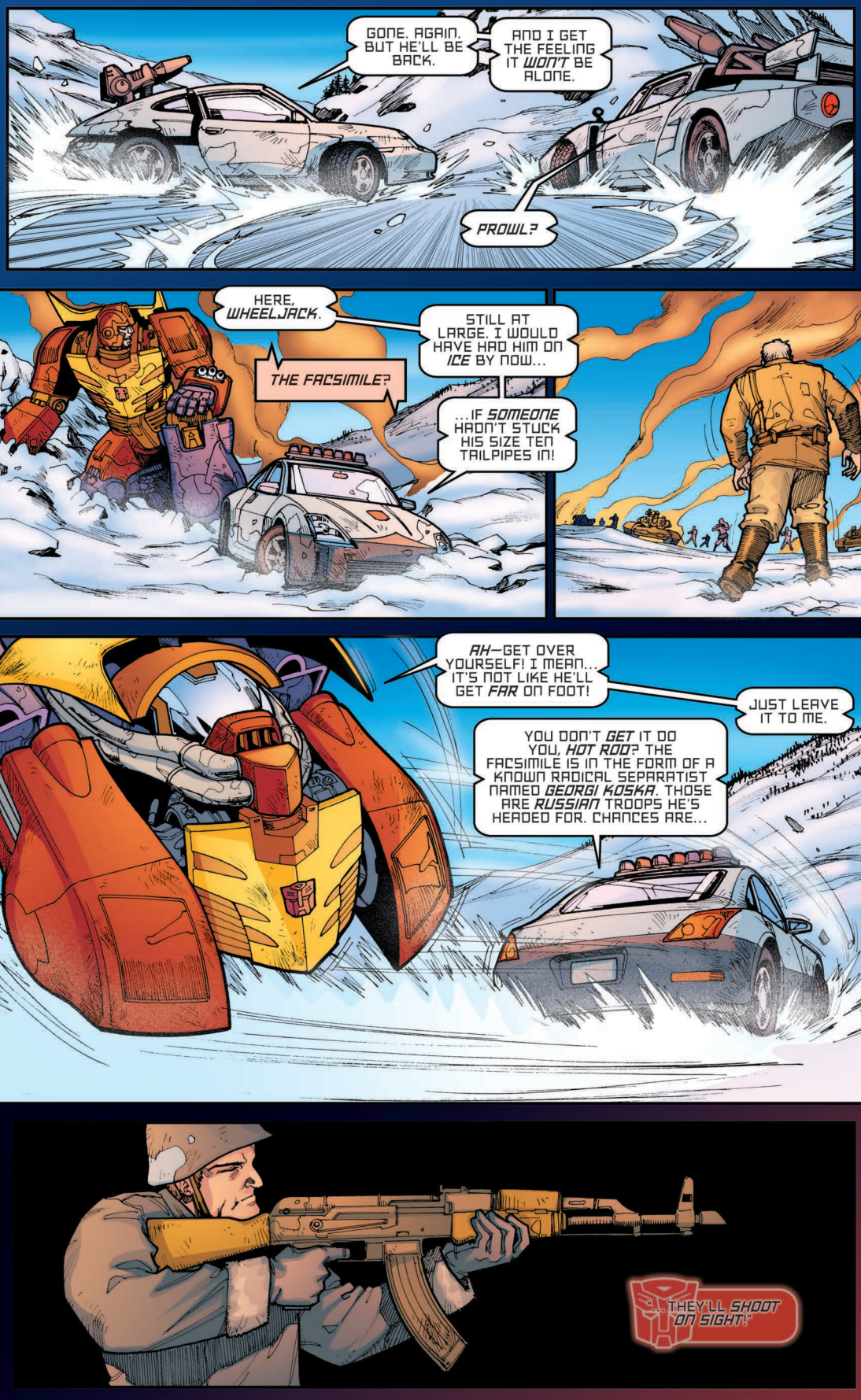

"...ON THE DEMONSTRATIVE DEATH OF OPTIMUS PRIME!"
thwum thwum
IT SEEMS TO ME, MEGATRON...
...ALL THAT POWER'S GONE TO YOUR HEAD!
THE MEGATRON I KNEW WAS MEASURED, CALM AND CONTROLLED, NOT SOME RAGING BRAGGART SEEMINGLY HELL-BENT ON EXPOSING OUR PRESENCE ON THIS WORLD!
STILL, HAVING LAID DOWN THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT QUITE EMPHATICALLY...
...I FEEL COMPELLED TO RESPOND. IN KIND!
VAAP VAAP


KTOOOM
PERHAPS, OPTIMUS PRIME, THIS MEGATRON YOU CLAIM YOU KNEW IS THE PRETENDER, AND MY TRUE ASPECT IS ONLY NOW BEING REVEALED TO YOU.
AS FOR WITNESSES, TRUST ME...
...THERE WILL BE NONE.
UHH! YOU ALWAYS DID KNOW WHAT TO SAY...
ZRAKT

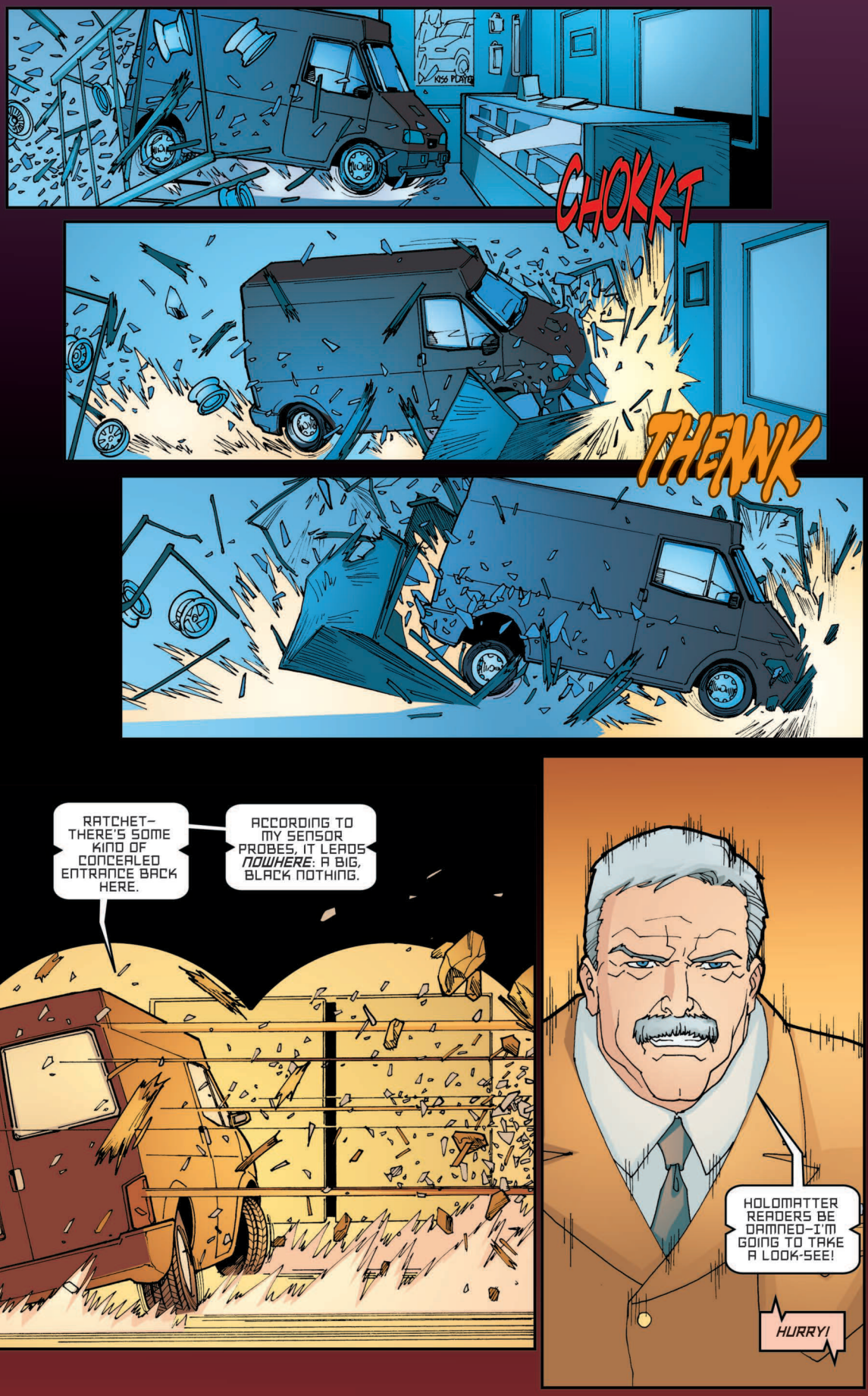

...TO BRING THE BEST OUT OF ME!
SPUT
SPOOOOM
GNN-AH!
RRNAGH!
I NEED NO WEAPONS TO KILL YOU, PRIME...
...BARE HANDS WILL SUFFICE!


FINE.
KRAANGG
SKRUTCH

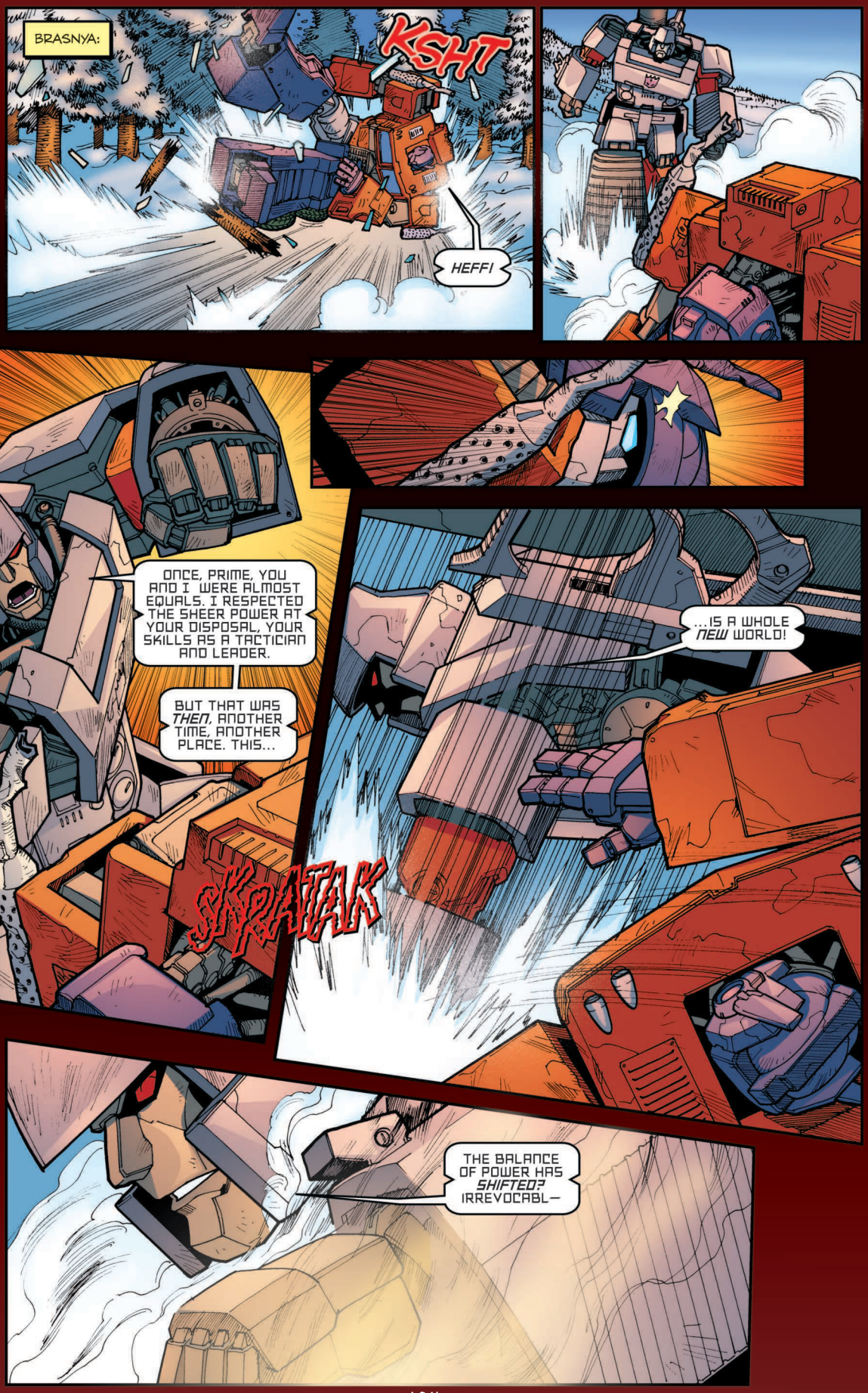

VOP
"IT'S A NICE TRICK, SKYWARP..."
WH—? UHNT!
...BUT IT GETS OLD REAL FAST.
ESPECIALLY WHEN YOUR HAVEN'T GOT YOUR BUDDY LAYING DOWN COVER FIRE!
ASTROTRAIN? DAMMIT—WHERE ARE YOU?
GOT AN EXTRA AUTOBOT ON MY CASE! NO ONE SAID NOTHIN' TO ME ABOUT REINFORCEMENTS!
REINFORCEMENTS, EH? WELL...
VOP
"...TWO CAN PLAY AT THAT GAME!"


GONE. AGAIN. BUT HE'LL BE BACK.
AND I GET THE FEELING IT *WON'T* BE ALONE.
PROWL?
HERE, *WHEELJACK*.
THE FACSIMILE?
STILL AT LARGE. I WOULD HAVE HAD HIM ON *ICE* BY NOW...
...IF *SOMEONE* HADN'T STUCK HIS SIZE TEN TAILPIPES IN!
AH—GET OVER YOURSELF! I MEAN... IT'S NOT LIKE HE'LL GET *FAR* ON FOOT!
JUST LEAVE IT TO ME.
YOU DON'T *GET* IT DO YOU, *HOT ROD*? THE FACSIMILE IS IN THE FORM OF A KNOWN RADICAL SEPARATIST NAMED *GEORGI KOSKA*. THOSE ARE *RUSSIAN* TROOPS HE'S HEADED FOR. CHANCES ARE...
"...THEY'LL *SHOOT ON SIGHT!*"


FORT WAYNE, INDIANA:
IT'S BEEN TOO LONG.
AGREED. TEN-MINUTE INTERVALS, WE SAID. ONE OF THEM SHOULD HAVE SIGNALLED US.
OF COURSE, THEY COULD JUST BE IGNORING EVERYTHING WE TOLD THEM. THEY'RE RATHER, AH, FREE-SPIRITED.
OR THEY COULD BE INCAPACITATED, OR DEAD.
I'M GOING IN.
SCREE
AAAS!

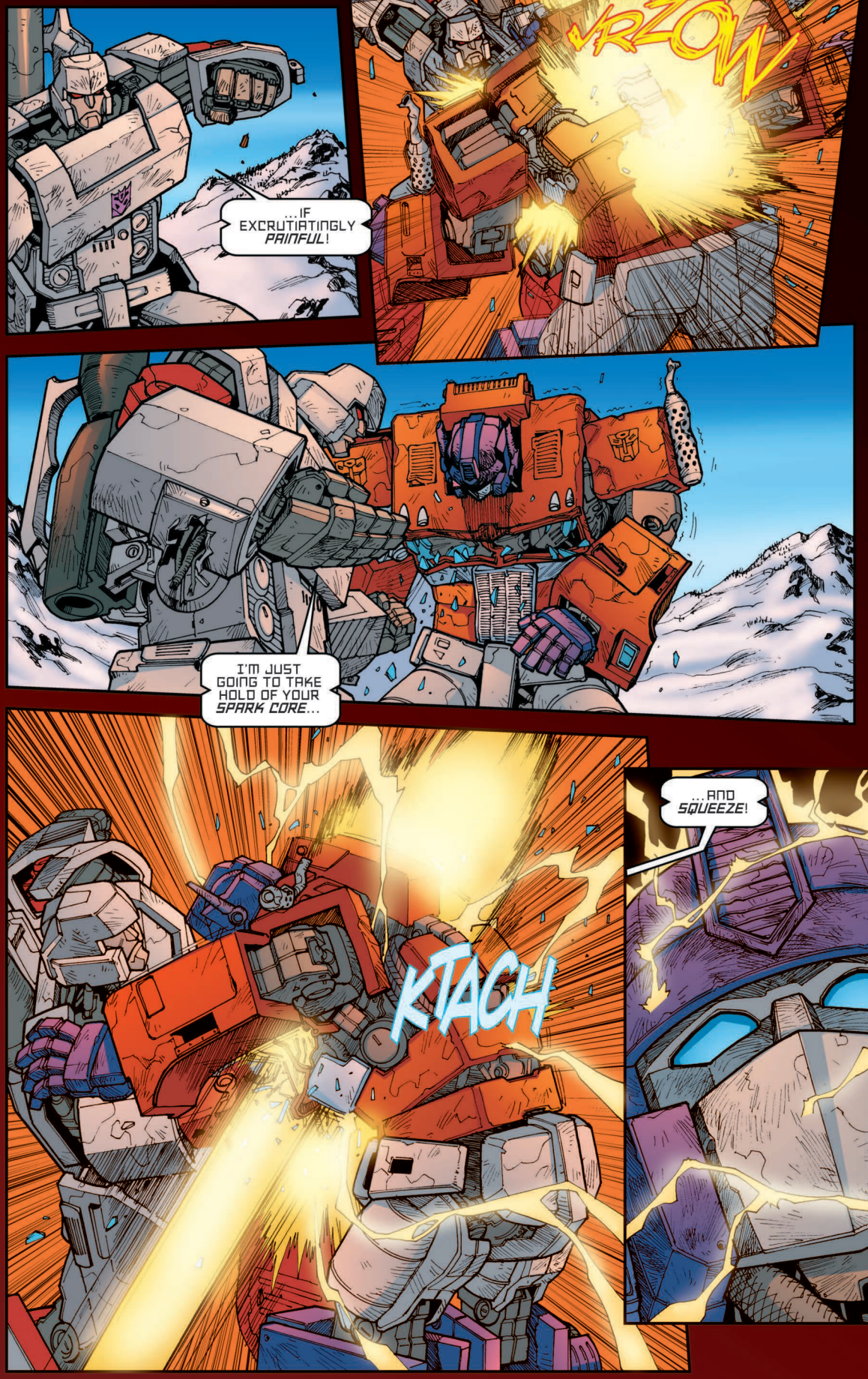

CHOKKT
THENNK
RATCHET– THERE'S SOME KIND OF CONCEALED ENTRANCE BACK HERE.
ACCORDING TO MY SENSOR PROBES, IT LEADS *NOWHERE*: A BIG, BLACK NOTHING.
HOLOMATTER READERS BE DAMNED–I'M GOING TO TAKE A LOOK-SEE!
HURRY!


VEDO-VEDO
COMPANY'S COMING...
ROGER, DESPATCH. UNIT-SEVEN RESPONDING. E.T.A. AT PARKSIDE MALL FOUR MINUTES...
FRAG.
IRONHIDE? WHAT IS IT?
03:50
IRONHIDE?
IT'S BAD.
03:19


BRASNYA:
KSHT
HEFF!
ONCE, PRIME, YOU AND I WERE ALMOST EQUALS. I RESPECTED THE SHEER POWER AT YOUR DISPOSAL, YOUR SKILLS AS A TACTICIAN AND LEADER.
BUT THAT WAS *THEN*, ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE. THIS...
SKRATAK
...IS A WHOLE *NEW* WORLD!
THE BALANCE OF POWER HAS *SHIFTED?* IRREVOCABL—

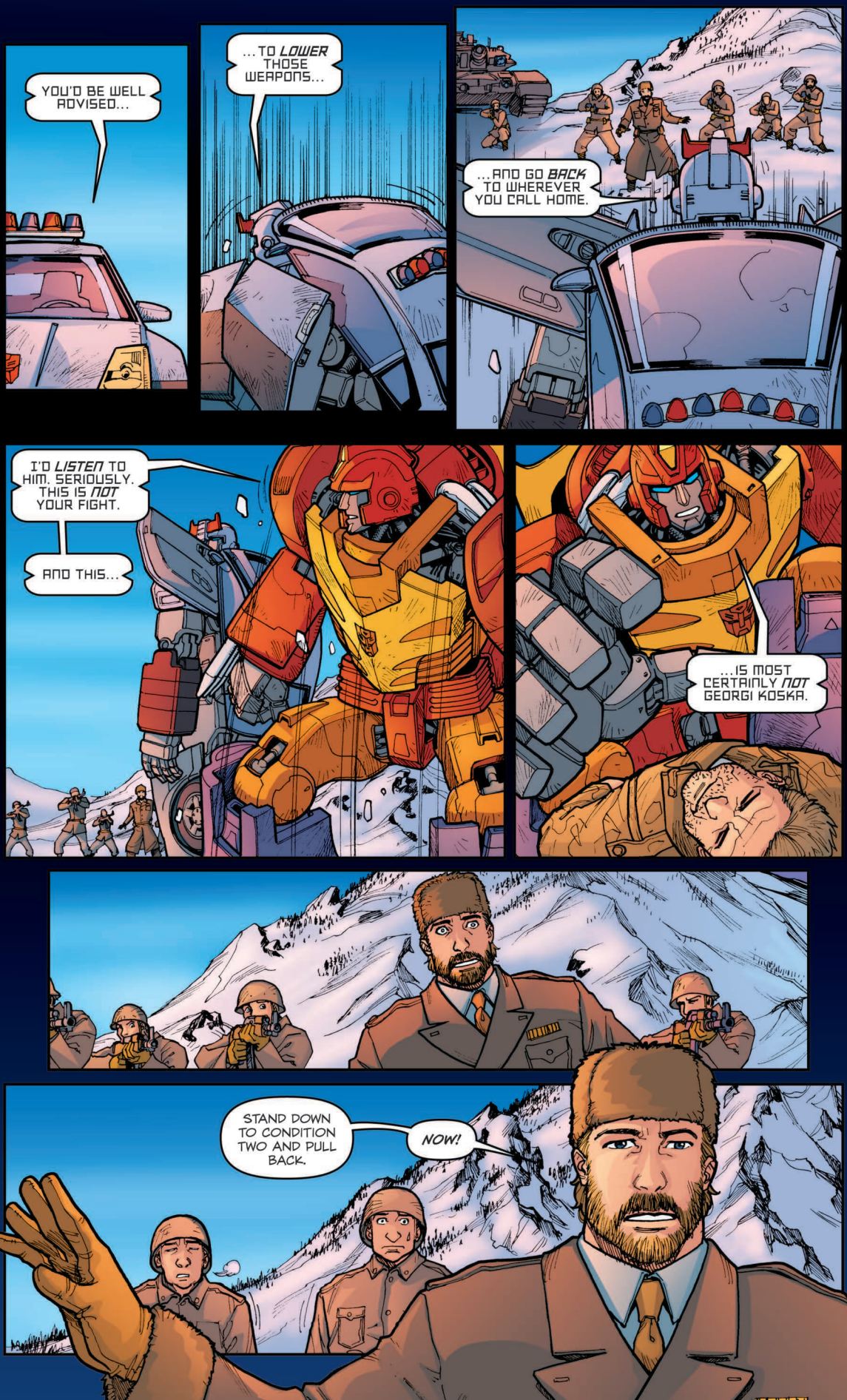

-FFHI
SPLT
TANNGG
AS FAR AS I CAN SEE, ALL THIS ORE-13 HAS DONE...
...IS LOOSEN YOUR VOCAL ROUTERS!
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. EVENTUALLY YOU WILL WEAKEN AND FALL. I... CAN KEEP THIS UP FOREVER!
R-REALLY?
KA-RANNK
WE'LL SEE.
HNNN! PRIME...

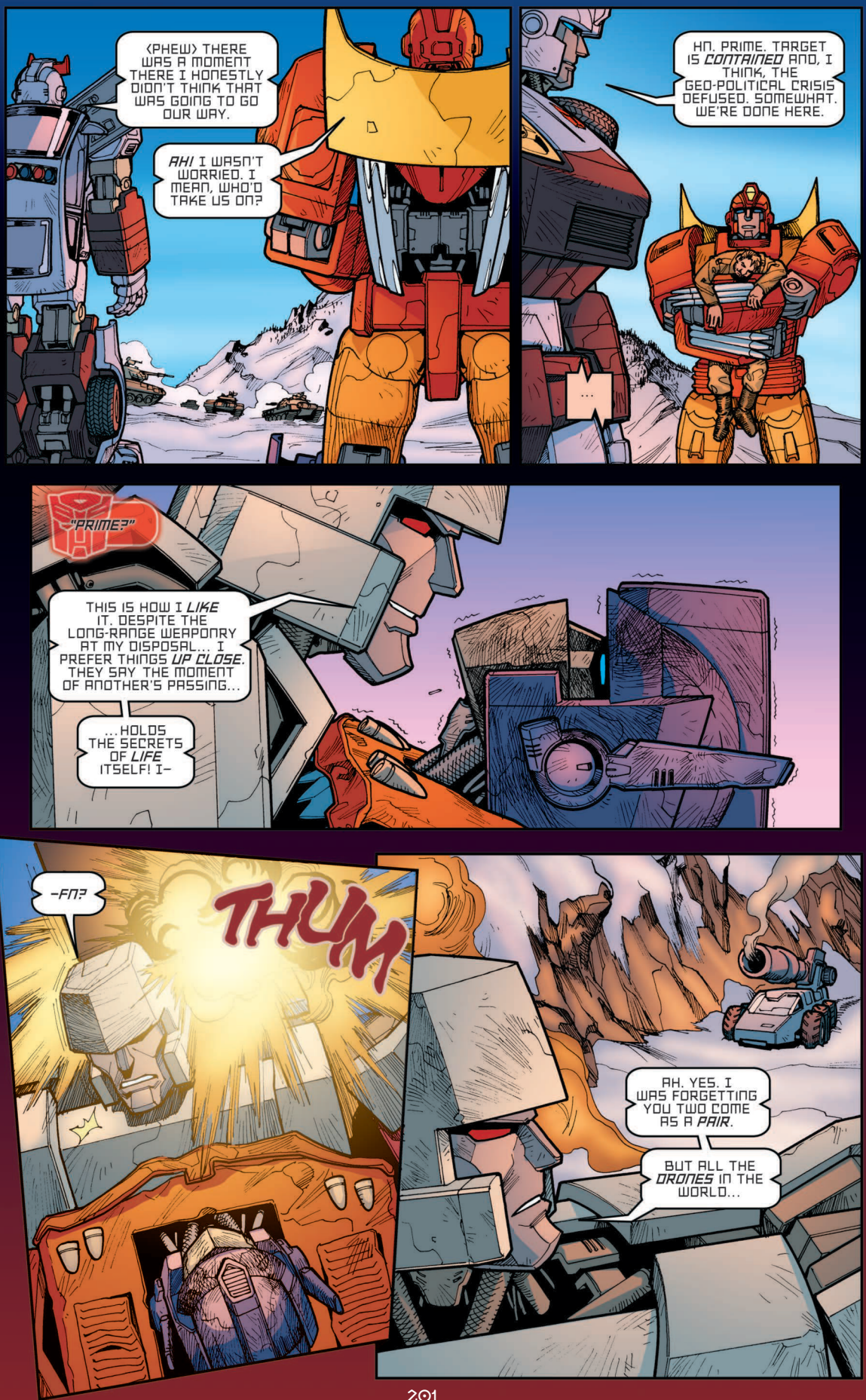

...YOU WON'T BELIEVE THE THINGS I CAN DO NOW!
KK-HH...
VAASH
NUUAHI
YOU AND I HAVE A LOT OF HISTORY, PRIME. SO, I'LL DO YOU THE HONOR...
...OF MAKING THIS QUICK...
KATOOOM


...IF EXCRUTIATINGLY *PAINFUL*!
VRZOW
I'M JUST GOING TO TAKE HOLD OF YOUR *SPARK CORE*...
KTACH
...AND *SQUEEZE*!


MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT, I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT. OUR LITTLE FACSIMILE...
...HAS HIMSELF A DEATH WISH.
LIBERTY FOR BRASNYA! DEATH TO THE INVADERS!
ONE OF US'LL HAVE TO RUN INTERFERENCE.
ER, IF THAT'S OPERATIONAL JARGON FOR GETTING SHOT AT... I VOTE YOU.
YEAH, THANKS.
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? THIS MAN IS A KNOWN AND DANGEROUS TERRORIST!
FIRE AT WILL!

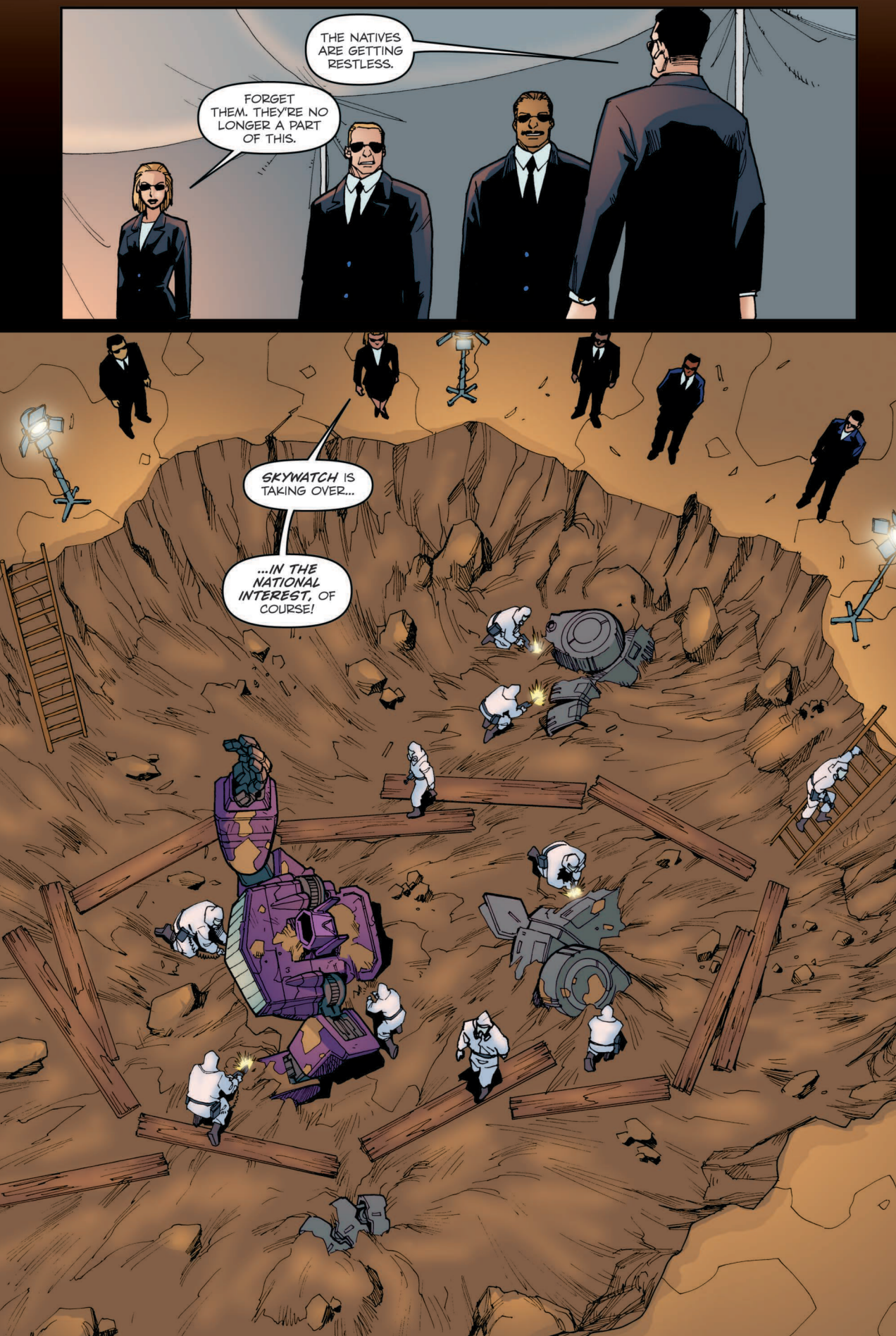

BRT BRT BRT BRT
TNG
TNG
TNG
TNG
TNG
TNG
НЛ. ПОШ, HOT ROD...
...ПОШ!
DUNK
ННТ!

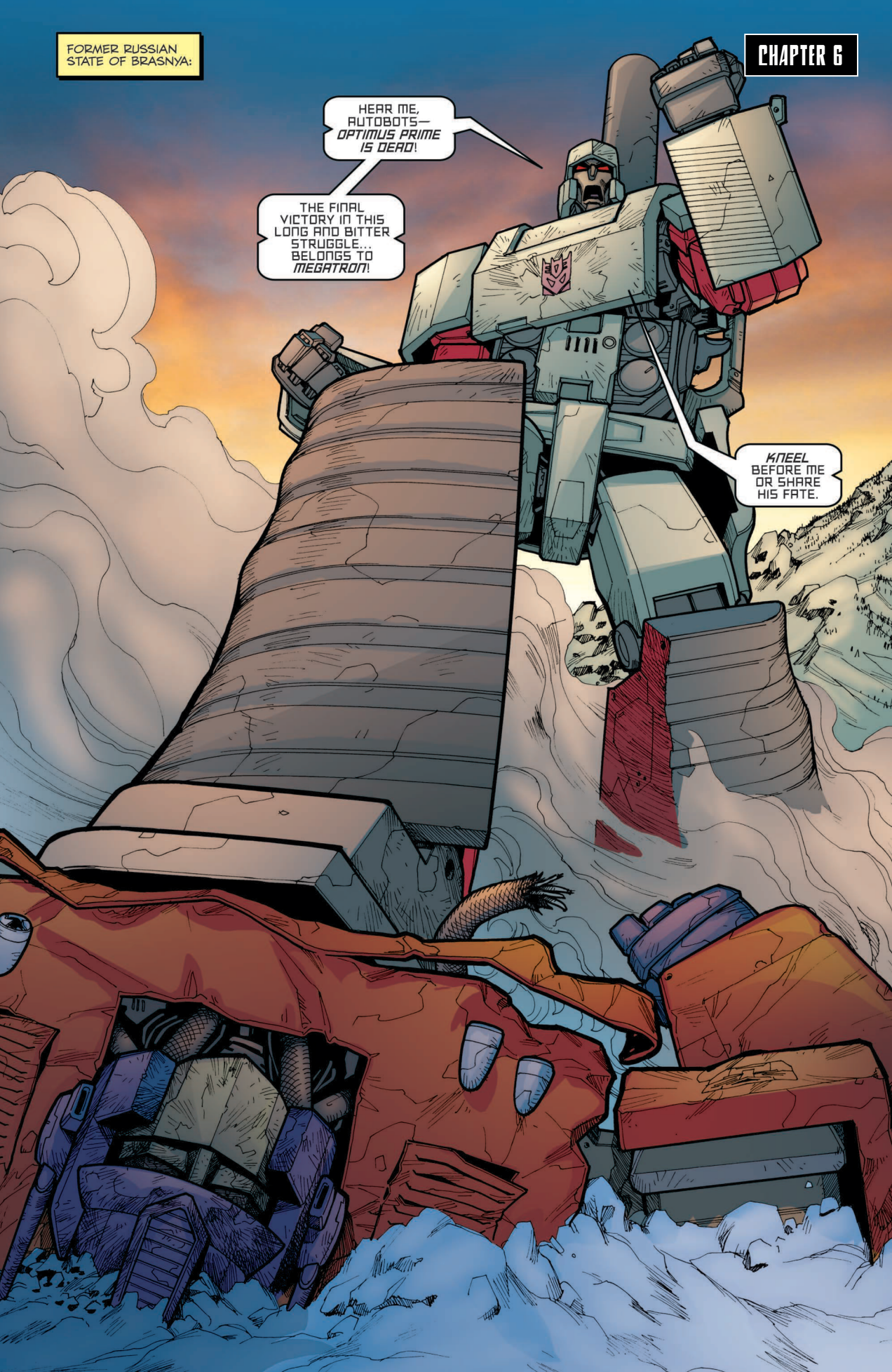

YOU'D BE WELL ADVISED...
...TO LOWER THOSE WEAPONS...
...AND GO BACK TO WHEREVER YOU CALL HOME.
I'D LISTEN TO HIM. SERIOUSLY. THIS IS NOT YOUR FIGHT.
AND THIS...
...IS MOST CERTAINLY NOT GEORGI KOSKA.
STAND DOWN TO CONDITION TWO AND PULL BACK.
NOW!


(PHEW) THERE WAS A MOMENT THERE I HONESTLY DIDN'T THINK THAT WAS GOING TO GO OUR WAY.
AH! I WASN'T WORRIED. I MEAN, WHO'D TAKE US ON?
HN. PRIME. TARGET IS CONTAINED AND, I THINK, THE GEO-POLITICAL CRISIS DEFUSED. SOMEWHAT. WE'RE DONE HERE.
...
"PRIME?"
THIS IS HOW I LIKE IT. DESPITE THE LONG-RANGE WEAPONRY AT MY DISPOSAL... I PREFER THINGS UP CLOSE. THEY SAY THE MOMENT OF ANOTHER'S PASSING...
...HOLDS THE SECRETS OF LIFE ITSELF! I—
—FN?
THUM
AH. YES. I WAS FORGETTING YOU TWO COME AS A PAIR.
BUT ALL THE DRONES IN THE WORLD...


...COULDN'T SAVE YOU THIS TIME.
THUM
KRANNK
CHRRR
TSHHK
THERE. NOW...
PRIME?
HN. PITY. GIVEN ALL THAT QUASI-MYSTICAL NONSENSE YOU PRIMES ROUTINELY SPOUT, I'D EXPECTED SOMETHING MORE...
...ENLIGHTENING.


EUREKA, NEVADA:
WHAT'S GOING ON? CLIVE?
PROFESSOR GORING!
THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE HERE! THEY'RE TELLING US WE CAN'T GO IN, THAT THE DIG'S BEEN PLACED UNDER OFFICIAL JURISDICTION.
OFFICIAL—? BUT... WHAT ABOUT OUR SPONSORS? THE UNIVERSITY?
WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?
NO IDEA. NOT THE COPS.
THEY'RE JUST TO KEEP US OUT. THE GUYS RUNNING THE SHOW...
...AREN'T EXACTLY FLASHING THEIR CREDENTIALS!

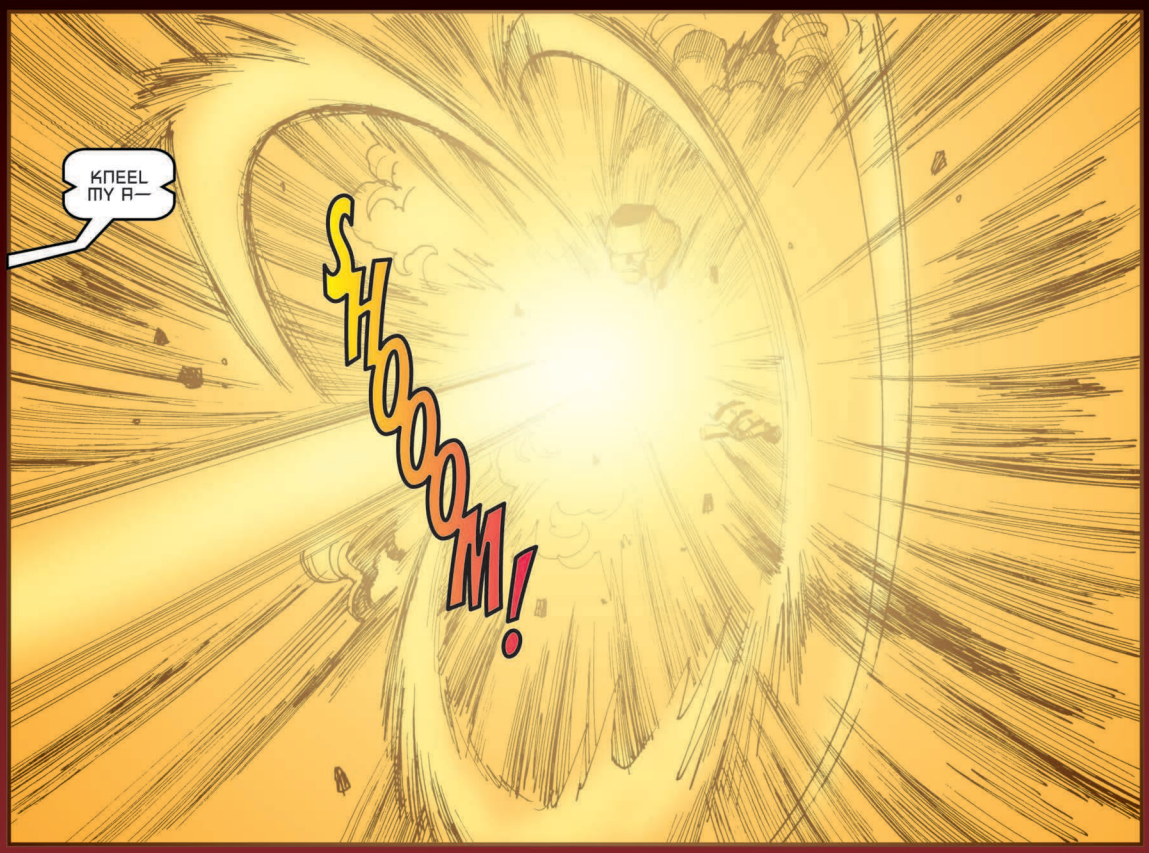

THE NATIVES ARE GETTING RESTLESS.
FORGET THEM. THEY'RE NO LONGER A PART OF THIS.
SKYWATCH IS TAKING OVER...
...IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST, OF COURSE!

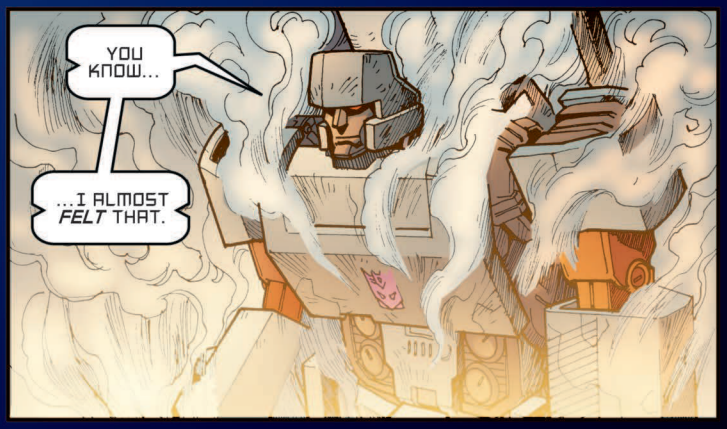

FORMER RUSSIAN STATE OF BRASNYA:
CHAPTER 6
HEAR ME, AUTOBOTS— *OPTIMUS PRIME IS DEAD*!
THE FINAL VICTORY IN THIS LONG AND BITTER STRUGGLE... BELONGS TO *MEGATRON*!
KNEEL BEFORE ME OR SHARE HIS FATE.


IT CAN'T BE.
SEE FOR YOURSELF. PRIME'S DOWN AND *OUT*!
THEN... WE'RE TOO LATE!


TO SAVE HIM, PERHAPS.
BUT *NOT* TOO LATE...

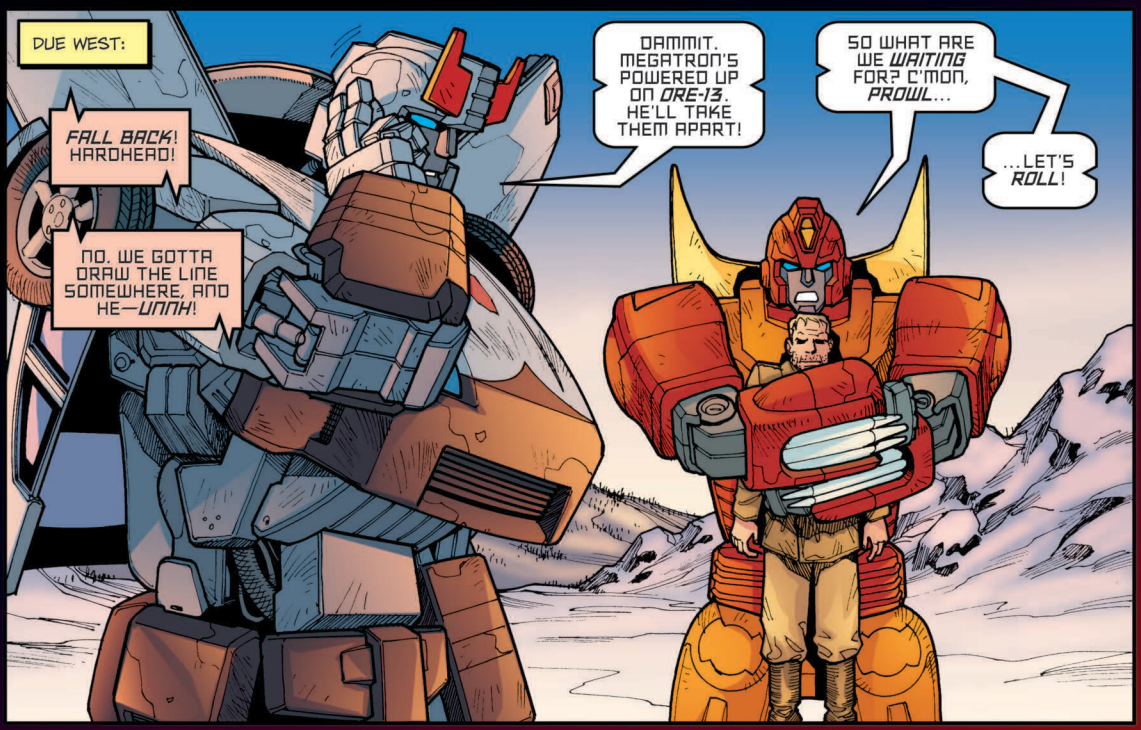

...TO *AVENGE* HIM!

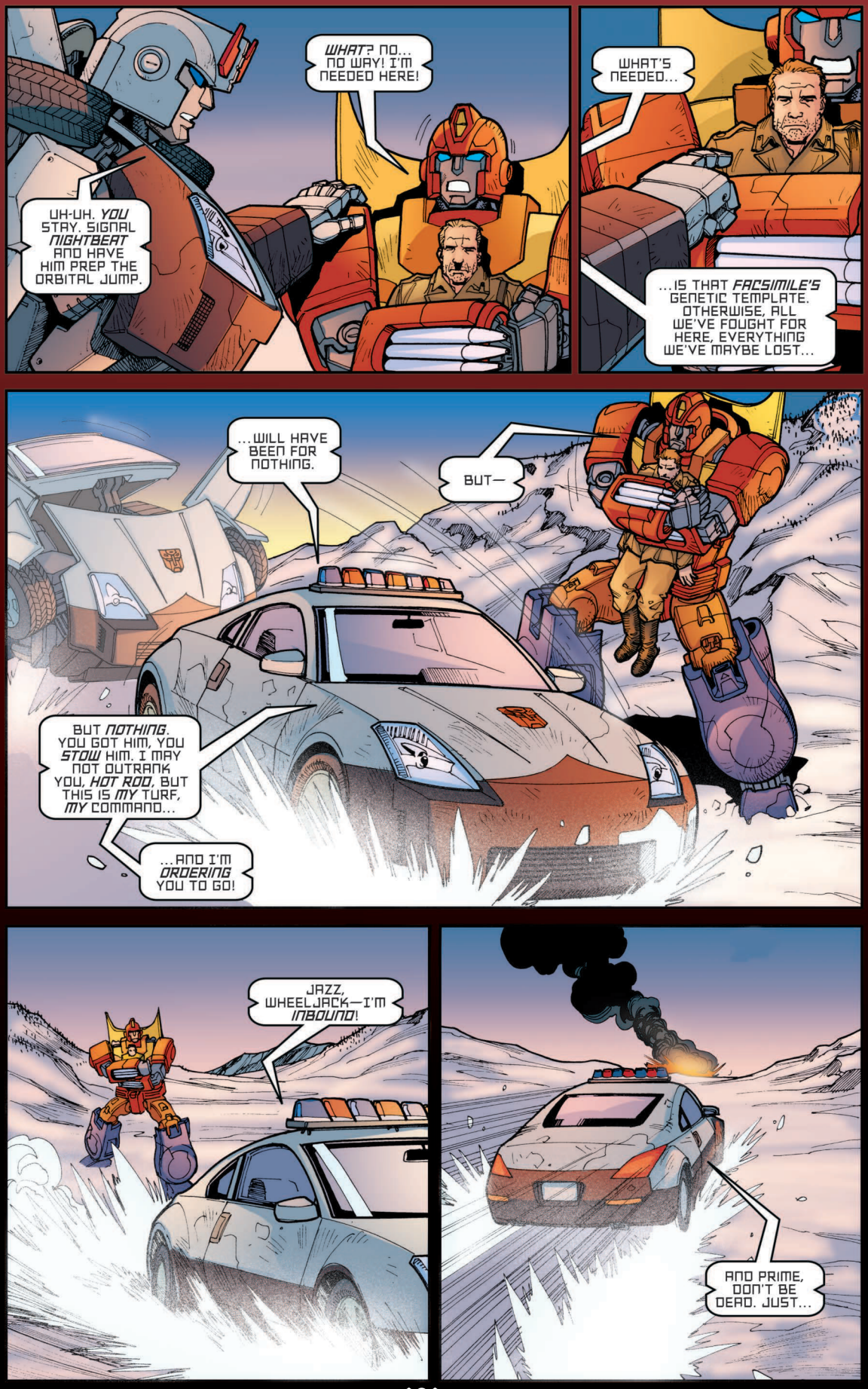

KNEEL MY A—
SHOOOM!

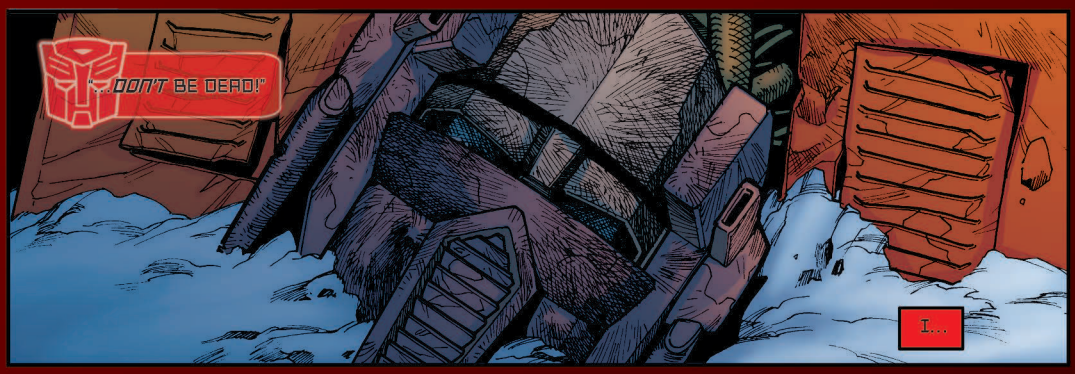

YOU KNOW...
...I ALMOST *FELT* THAT.

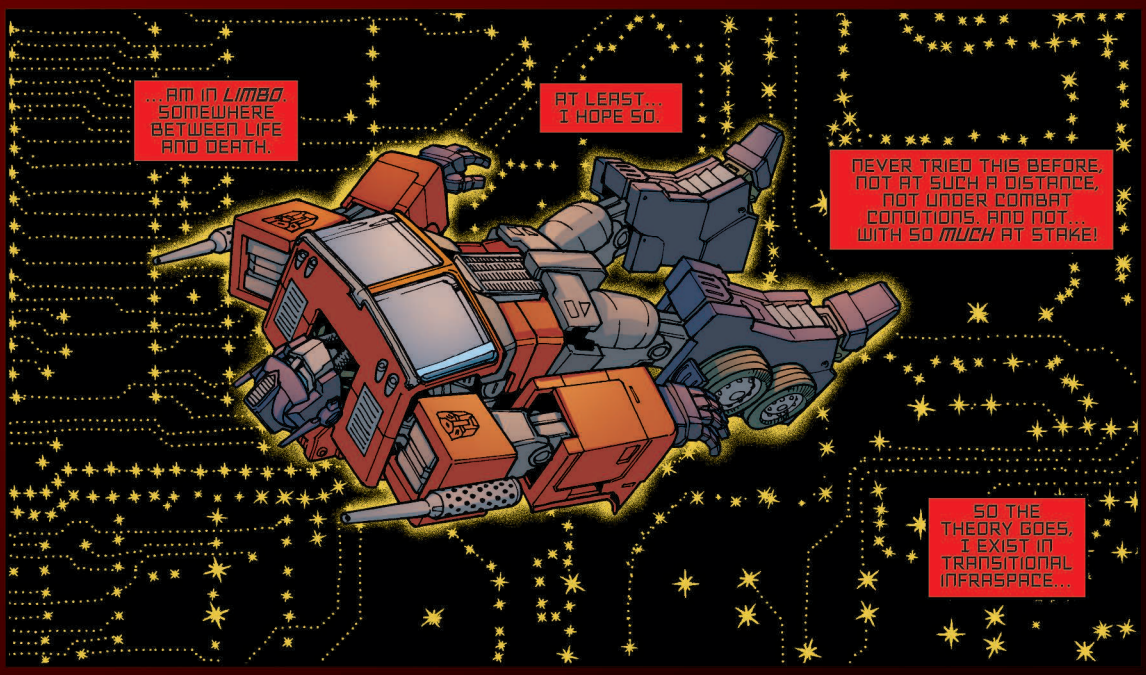

"...DOESN'T *EVEN* PASS MUSTER!"

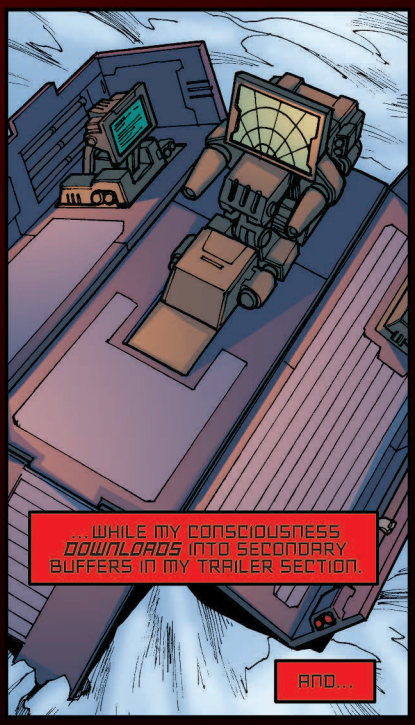

HARDHEAD, JAZZ—TAKE HIM DOWN!
HOW?
I WOULDN'T HAVE EXACTLY RATED OUR CHANCES BEFORE, *WHEELJACK*, BUT *NOW* IT'S LIKE OUR BEST...


DUE WEST:
FALL BACK! HARDHEAD!
NO. WE GOTTA DRAW THE LINE SOMEWHERE, AND HE—*UNNH*!
DAMMIT. MEGATRON'S POWERED UP ON *ORE-13*. HE'LL TAKE THEM APART!
SO WHAT ARE WE *WAITING* FOR? C'MON, *PROWL*...
...LET'S *ROLL*!

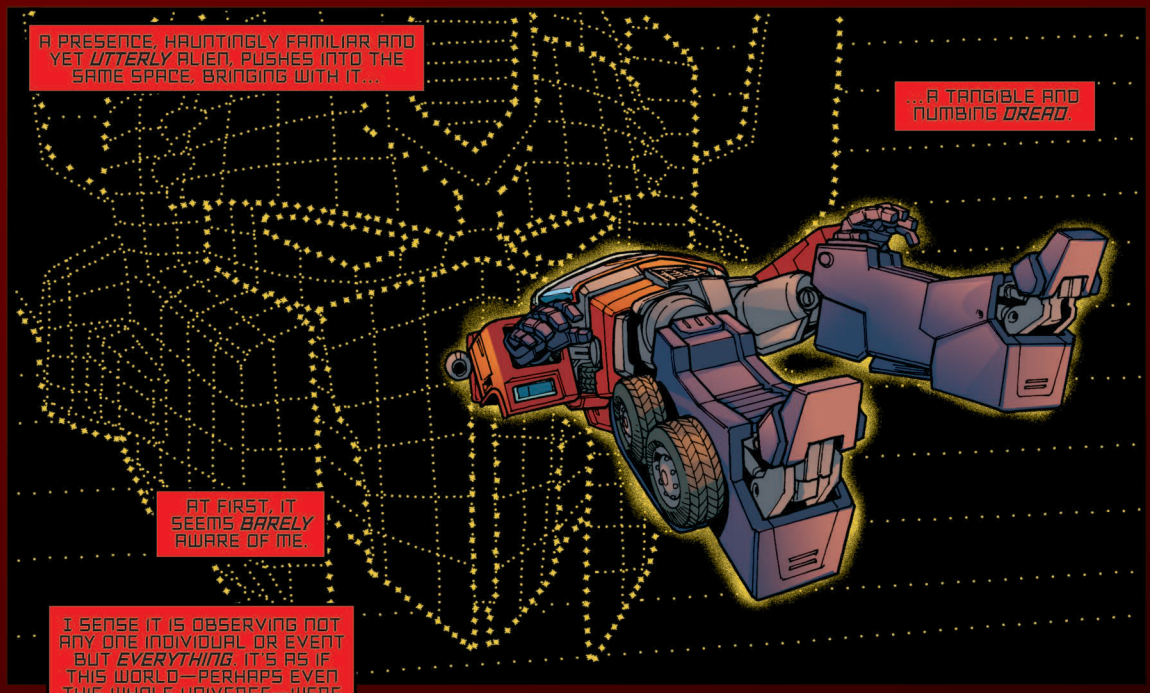

WHAT? NO... NO WAY! I'M NEEDED HERE!
UH-UH. YOU STAY. SIGNAL NIGHTBEAT AND HAVE HIM PREP THE ORBITAL JUMP.
WHAT'S NEEDED...
...IS THAT FACSIMILE'S GENETIC TEMPLATE. OTHERWISE, ALL WE'VE FOUGHT FOR HERE, EVERYTHING WE'VE MAYBE LOST...
...WILL HAVE BEEN FOR NOTHING.
BUT—
BUT NOTHING. YOU GOT HIM, YOU STOW HIM. I MAY NOT OUTRANK YOU, HOT ROD, BUT THIS IS MY TURF, MY COMMAND...
...AND I'M ORDERING YOU TO GO!
JAZZ, WHEELJACK—I'M INBOUND!
AND PRIME, DON'T BE DEAD. JUST...


...DON'T BE DEAD!"
I...

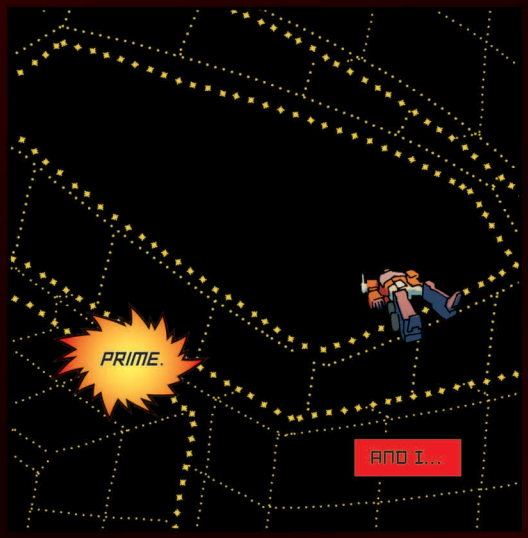

...AM IN LIMBO. SOMEWHERE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.
AT LEAST... I HOPE SO.
NEVER TRIED THIS BEFORE, NOT AT SUCH A DISTANCE, NOT UNDER COMBAT CONDITIONS, AND NOT... WITH SO MUCH AT STAKE!
SO THE THEORY GOES, I EXIST IN TRANSITIONAL INFRASPACE...

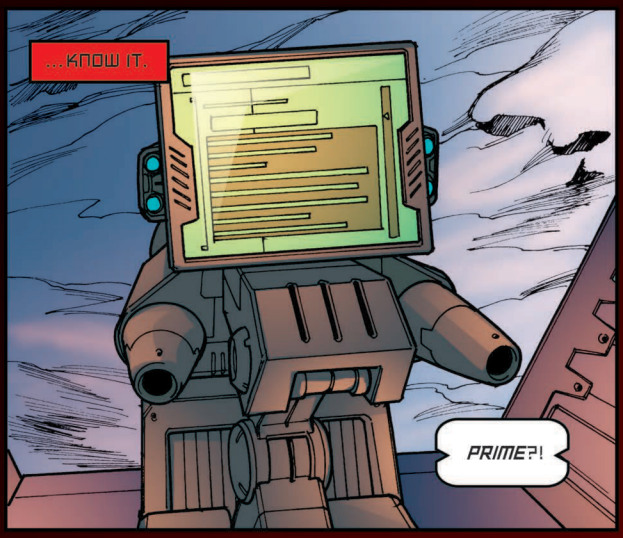

...WHILE MY CONSCIOUSNESS DOWNLOADS INTO SECONDARY BUFFERS IN MY TRAILER SECTION.
AND...

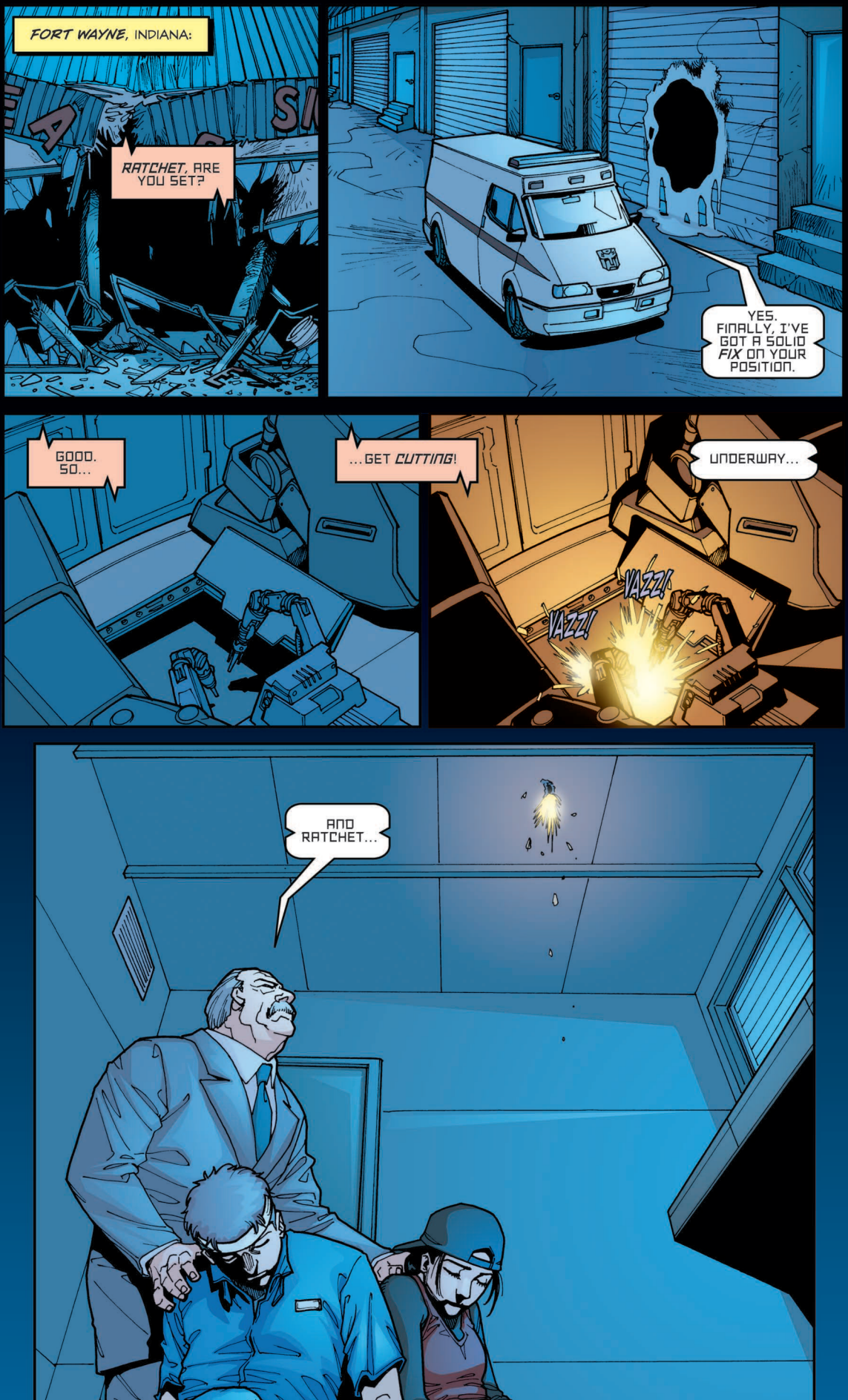

...I AM NOT ALONE.

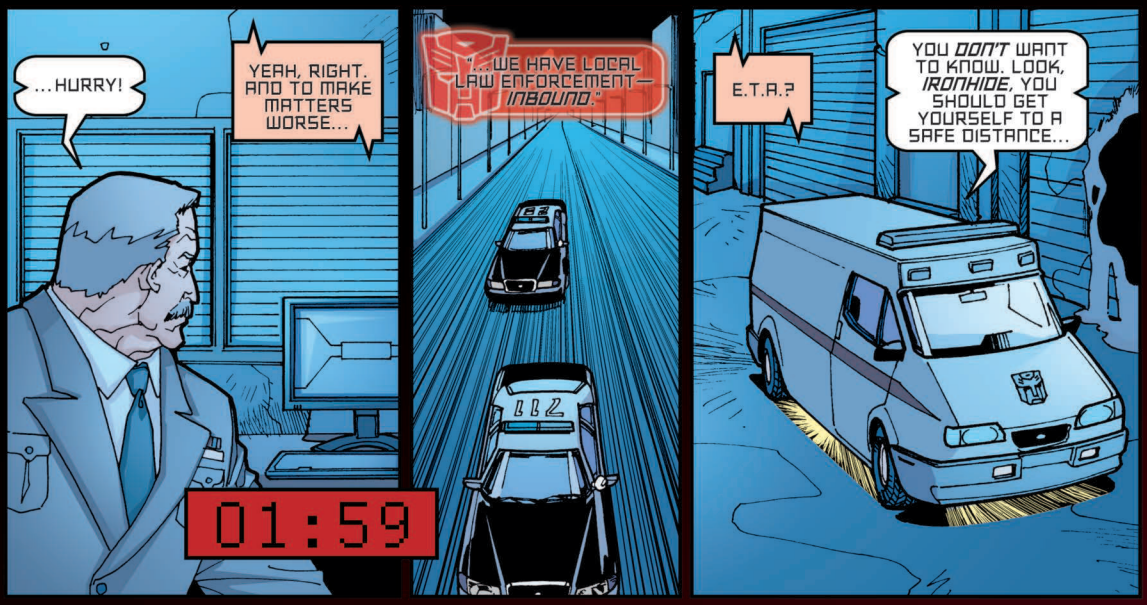

A PRESENCE, HAUNTINGLY FAMILIAR AND YET *UTTERLY* ALIEN, PUSHES INTO THE SAME SPACE, BRINGING WITH IT...
...A TANGIBLE AND NUMBING *DREAD*.
AT FIRST, IT SEEMS *BARELY* AWARE OF ME.
I SENSE IT IS OBSERVING NOT ANY ONE INDIVIDUAL OR EVENT BUT *EVERYTHING*. IT'S AS IF THIS WORLD—PERHAPS EVEN THIS WHOLE UNIVERSE—WERE LAID BARE LIKE SOME MORTUARY CADAVER.

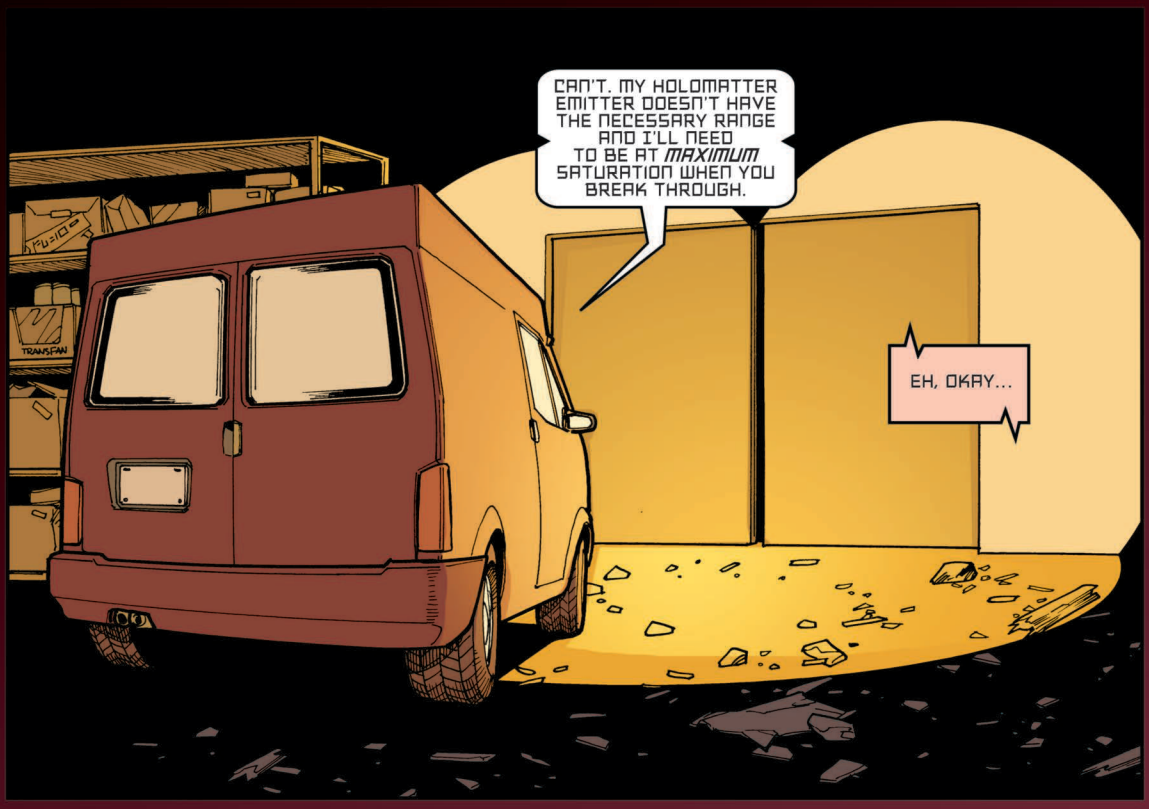

THEN, I AM *NOTICED*. AN UNSPEAKABLE, UNQUANTIFIABLE *TERROR* GRIPS ME AS ITS NECROGRAPHER'S GAZE FALLS ON ME.
IT *KNOWS* ME.

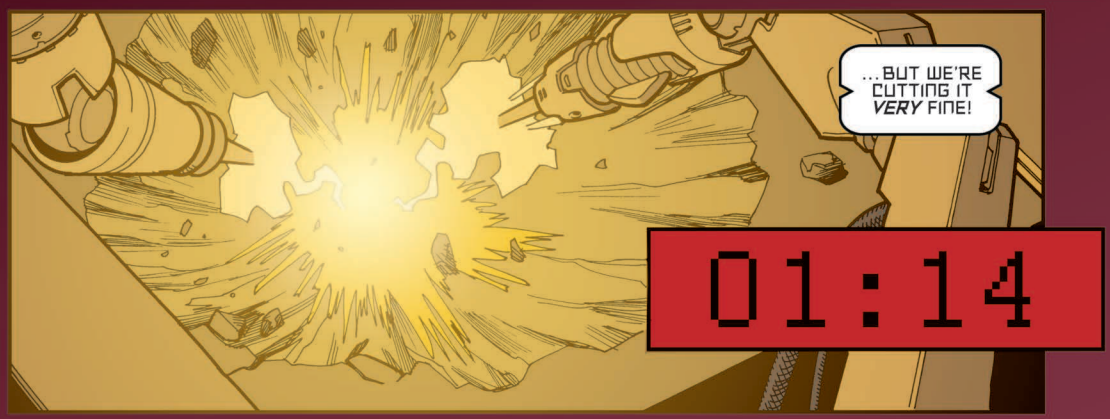

PRIME.
AND I...


...KNOW IT.
PRIME?!

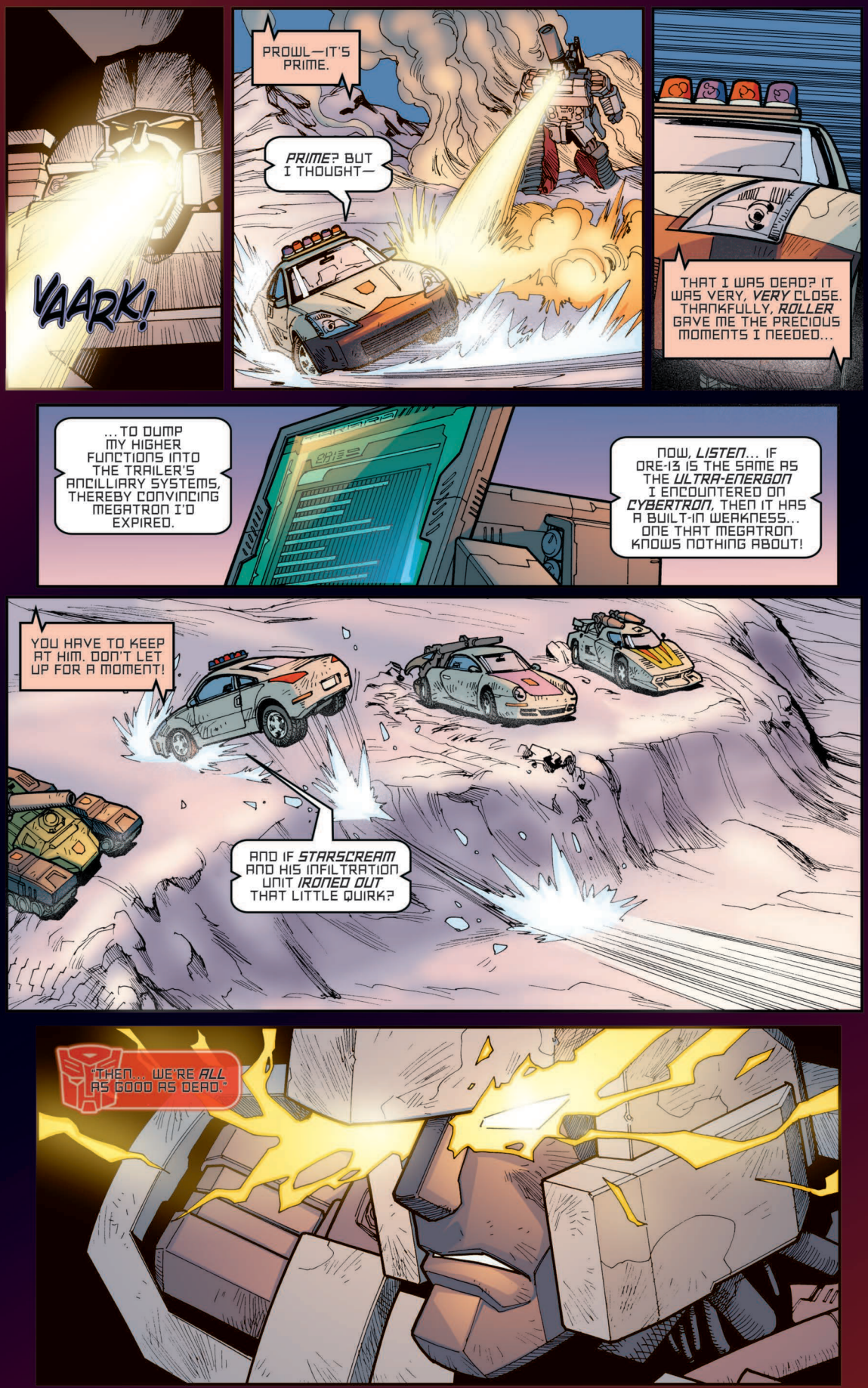

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA:
RATCHET, ARE YOU SET?
YES. FINALLY, I'VE GOT A SOLID FIX ON YOUR POSITION.
GOOD. SO...
...GET CUTTING!
UNDERWAY...
YAZZ!
YAZZ!
AND RATCHET...

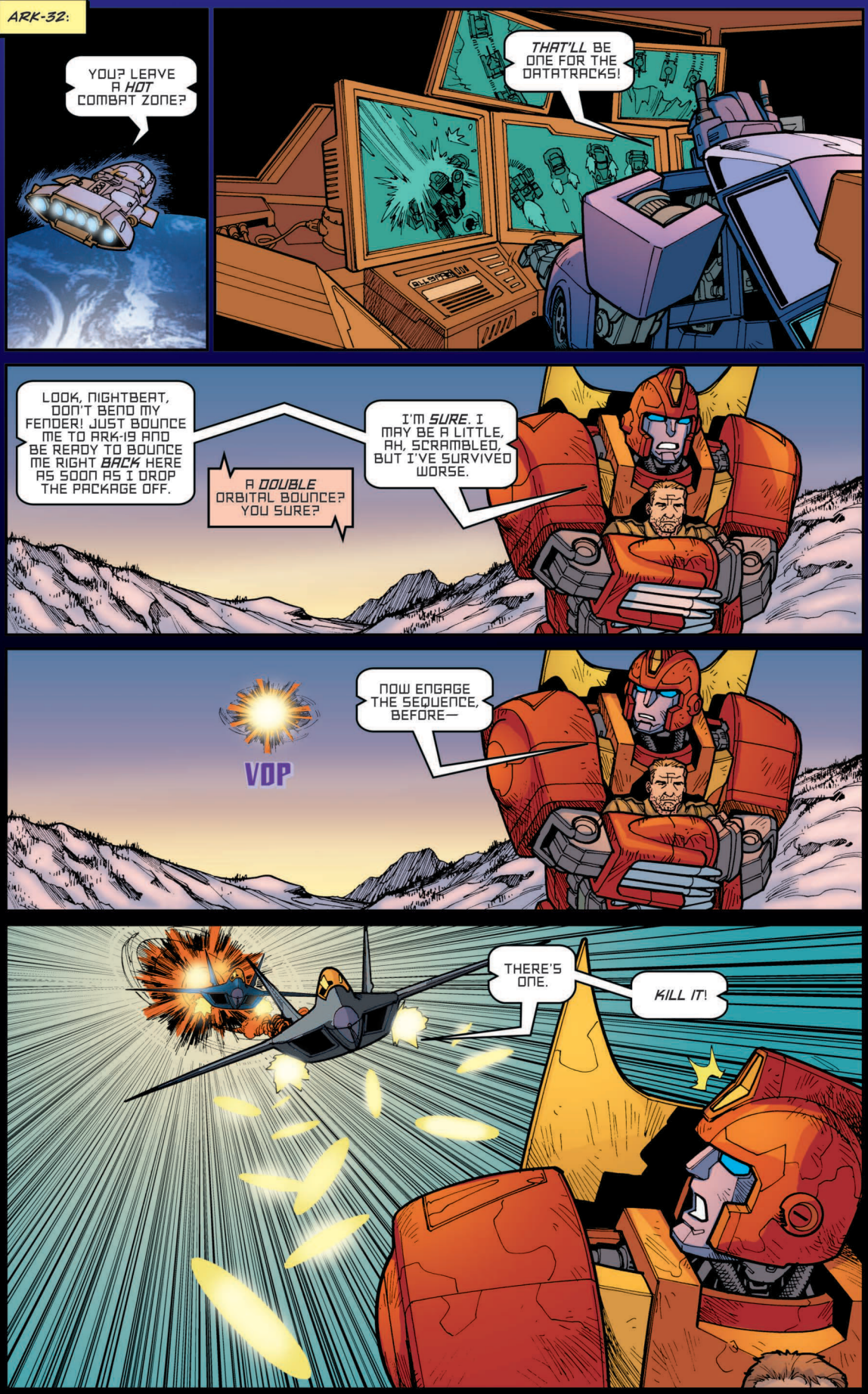

...HURRY!
YEAH, RIGHT. AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE...
01:59
"...WE HAVE LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT— *INBOUND.*"
E.T.A.?
YOU *DON'T* WANT TO KNOW. LOOK, *IRONHIDE*, YOU SHOULD GET YOURSELF TO A SAFE DISTANCE...

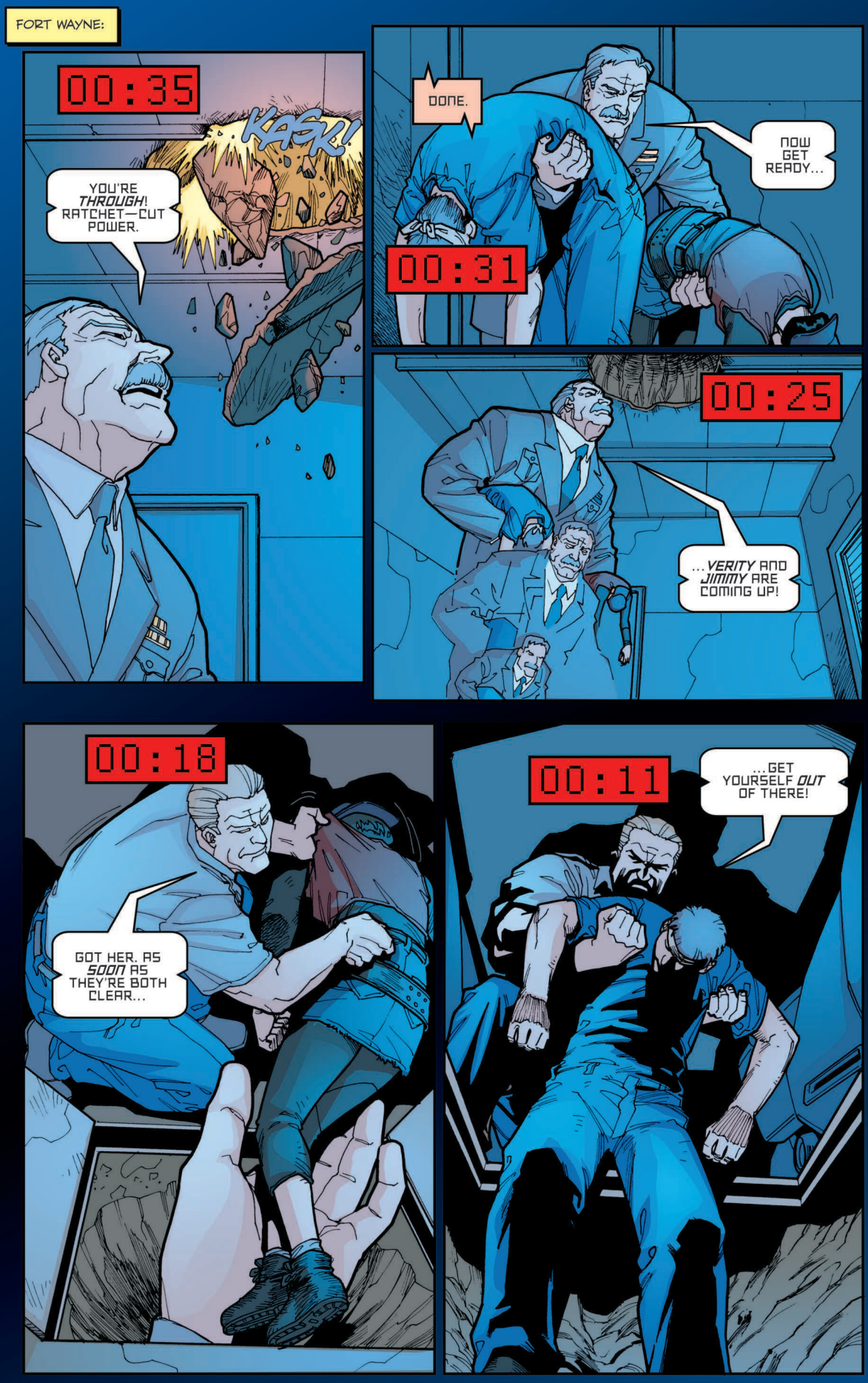

CAN'T. MY HOLOMATTER EMITTER DOESN'T HAVE THE NECESSARY RANGE AND I'LL NEED TO BE AT *MAXIMUM* SATURATION WHEN YOU BREAK THROUGH.
EH, OKAY...

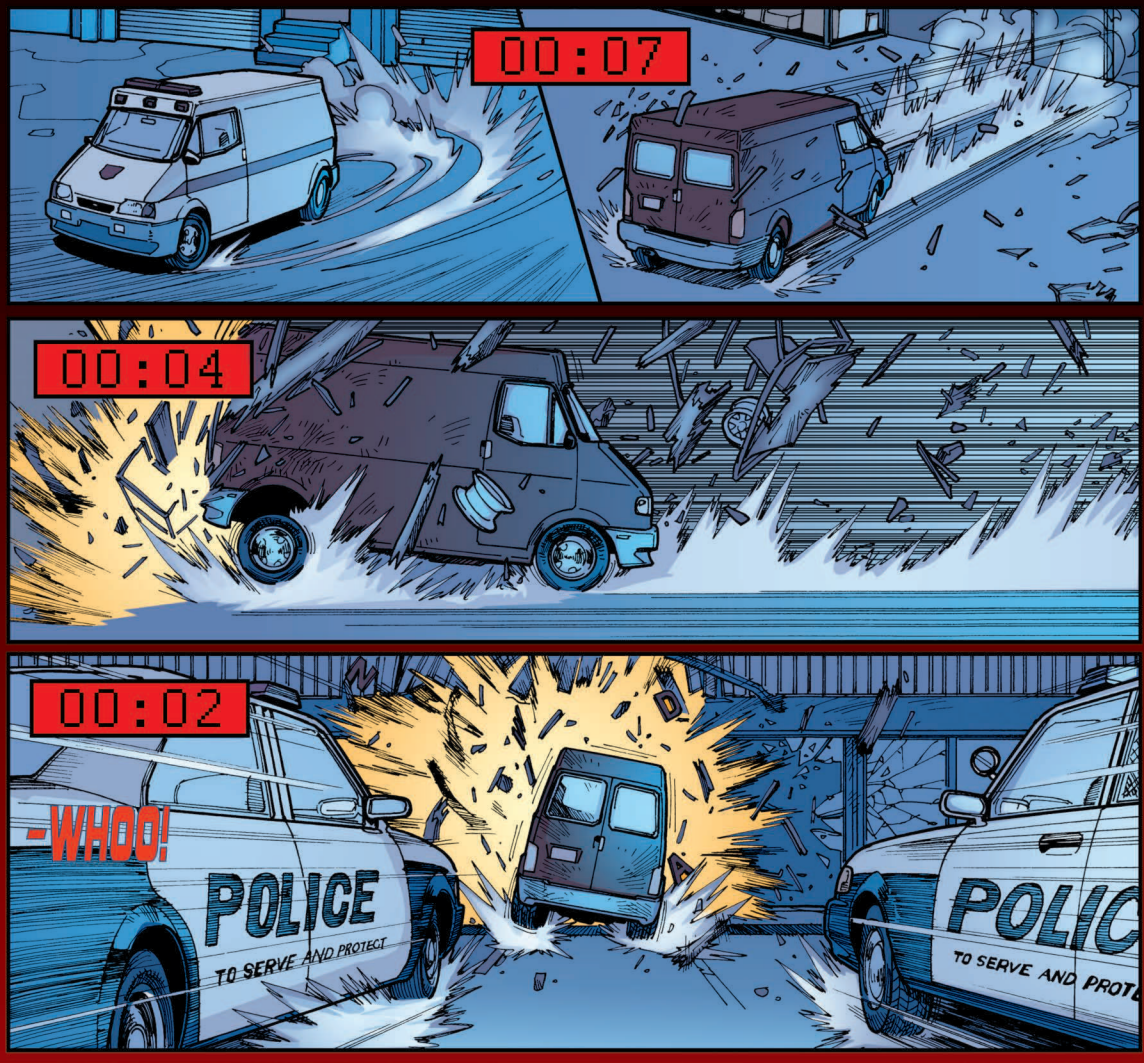

...BUT WE'RE CUTTING IT *VERY* FINE!
01:14

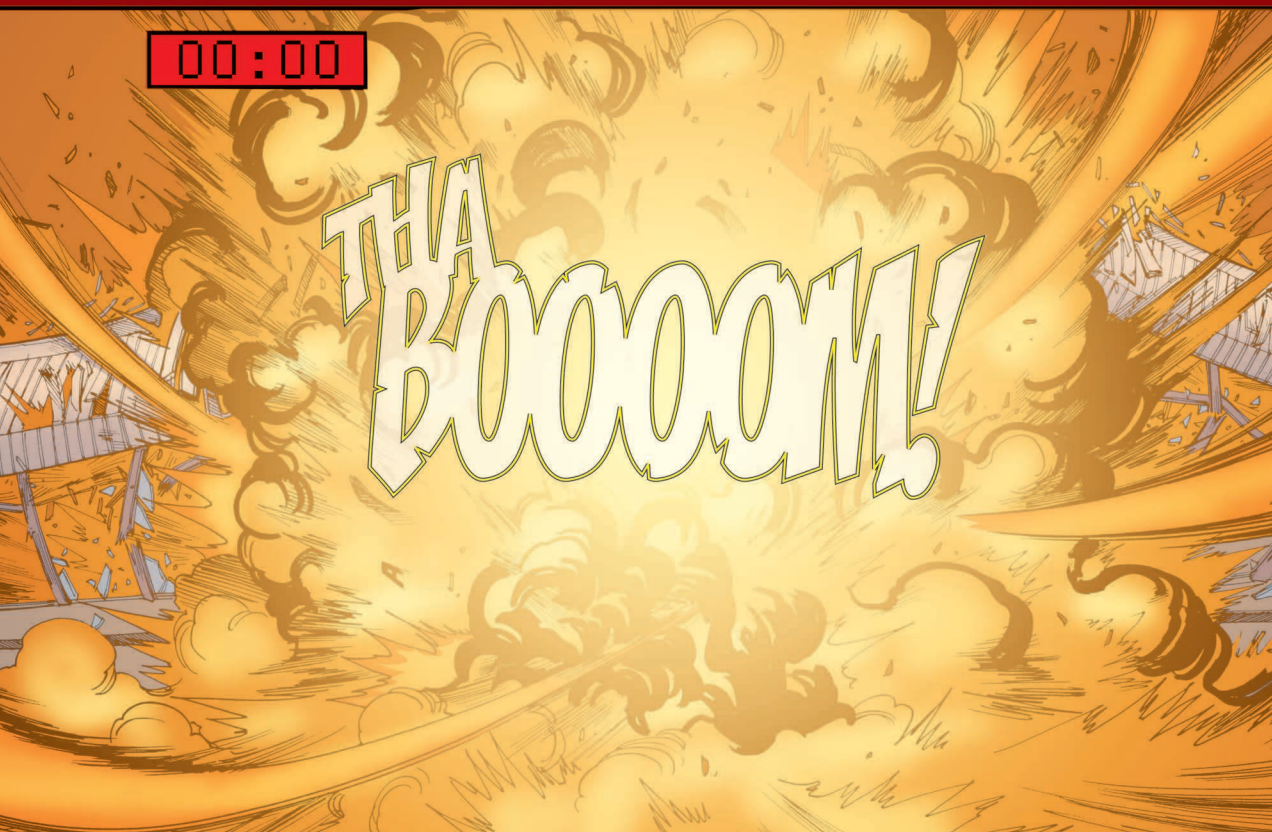

BRASNYA:
ALL OF YOU...
...BACK OFF—NOW!
THWUMMM!
SEEMS MEGATRON'S GOT NO REAL LONG-RANGE WEAPONRY AT HIS DISPOSAL AND NO WAY TO ACCESS HIS ALT-MODE WITHOUT SOMEONE TO HOLD AND AIM HIM. SO...
...WE KEEP FALLING BACK. WHEN WE'VE GOT SOME DISTANCE, WE ATTACK AGAIN. NOW MOVE!
YOU TOO, HARDHEAD.
YEH, YEH.
FTUM!
FTUM!

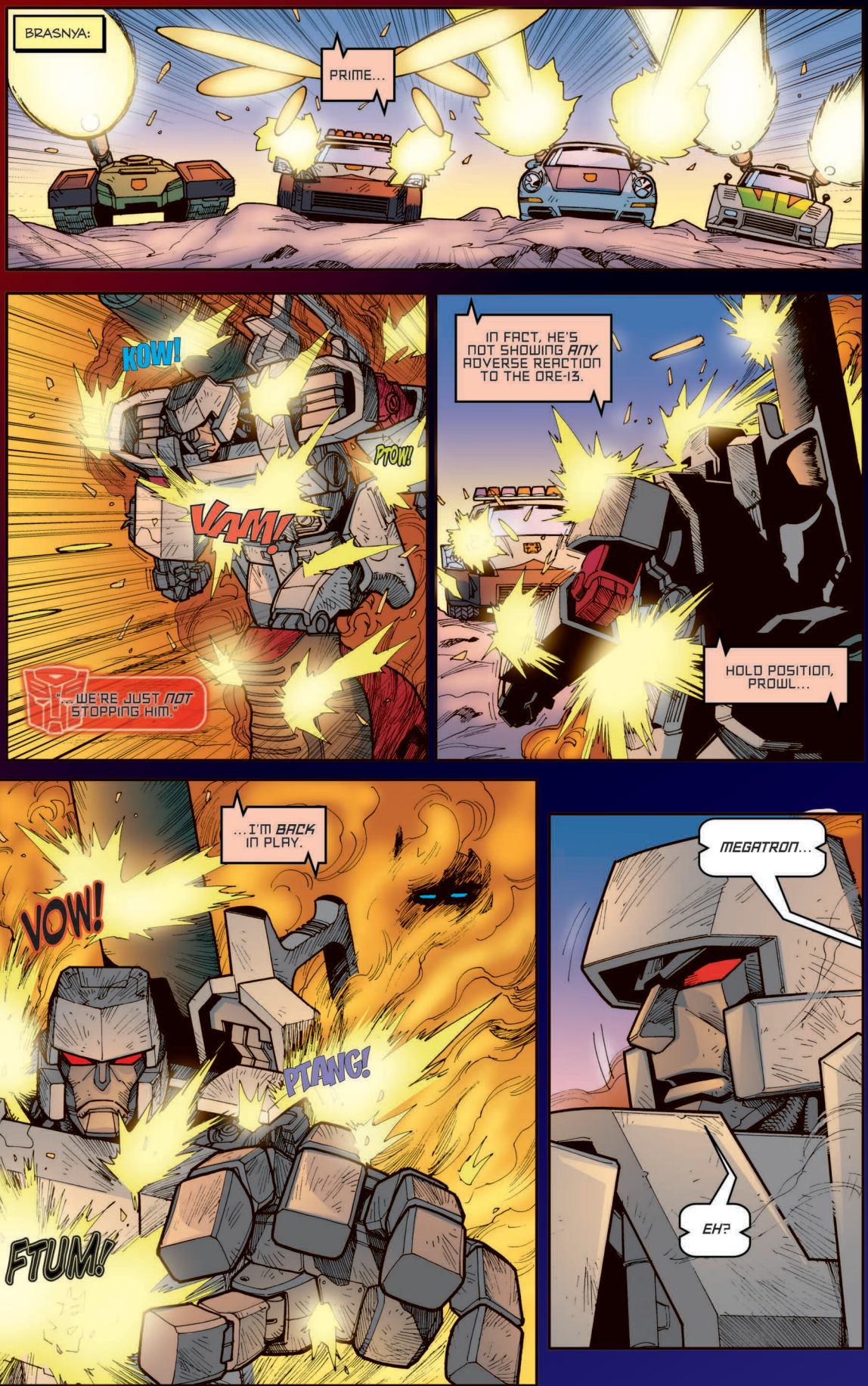

YAARK!
PROWL—IT'S PRIME.
PRIME? BUT I THOUGHT—
THAT I WAS DEAD? IT WAS VERY, VERY CLOSE. THANKFULLY, ROLLER GAVE ME THE PRECIOUS MOMENTS I NEEDED...
...TO DUMP MY HIGHER FUNCTIONS INTO THE TRAILER'S ANCILLIARY SYSTEMS, THEREBY CONVINCING MEGATRON I'D EXPIRED.
NOW, LISTEN... IF ORE-13 IS THE SAME AS THE ULTRA-ENERGON I ENCOUNTERED ON CYBERTRON, THEN IT HAS A BUILT-IN WEAKNESS... ONE THAT MEGATRON KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT!
YOU HAVE TO KEEP AT HIM. DON'T LET UP FOR A MOMENT!
AND IF STARSCREAM AND HIS INFILTRATION UNIT IRONED OUT THAT LITTLE QUIRK?
"THEN... WE'RE ALL AS GOOD AS DEAD."


ARK-32:
YOU? LEAVE A HOT COMBAT ZONE?
THAT'LL BE ONE FOR THE DATATRACKS!
LOOK, NIGHTBEAT, DON'T BEND MY FENDER! JUST BOUNCE ME TO ARK-19 AND BE READY TO BOUNCE ME RIGHT BACK HERE AS SOON AS I DROP THE PACKAGE OFF.
A DOUBLE ORBITAL BOUNCE? YOU SURE?
I'M SURE. I MAY BE A LITTLE, AH, SCRAMBLED, BUT I'VE SURVIVED WORSE.
VOP
NOW ENGAGE THE SEQUENCE, BEFORE—
THERE'S ONE.
KILL IT!


FORT WAYNE:
00:35
KASH!
YOU'RE *THROUGH*! RATCHET—CUT POWER.
DONE.
NOW GET READY...
00:31
00:25
...*VERITY* AND *JIMMY* ARE COMING UP!
00:18
GOT HER. AS *SOON* AS THEY'RE BOTH CLEAR...
00:11
...GET YOURSELF *OUT* OF THERE!


00:07
00:04
00:02
-WHOO!
POLICE
TO SERVE AND PROTECT
POLIC
TO SERVE AND PROT

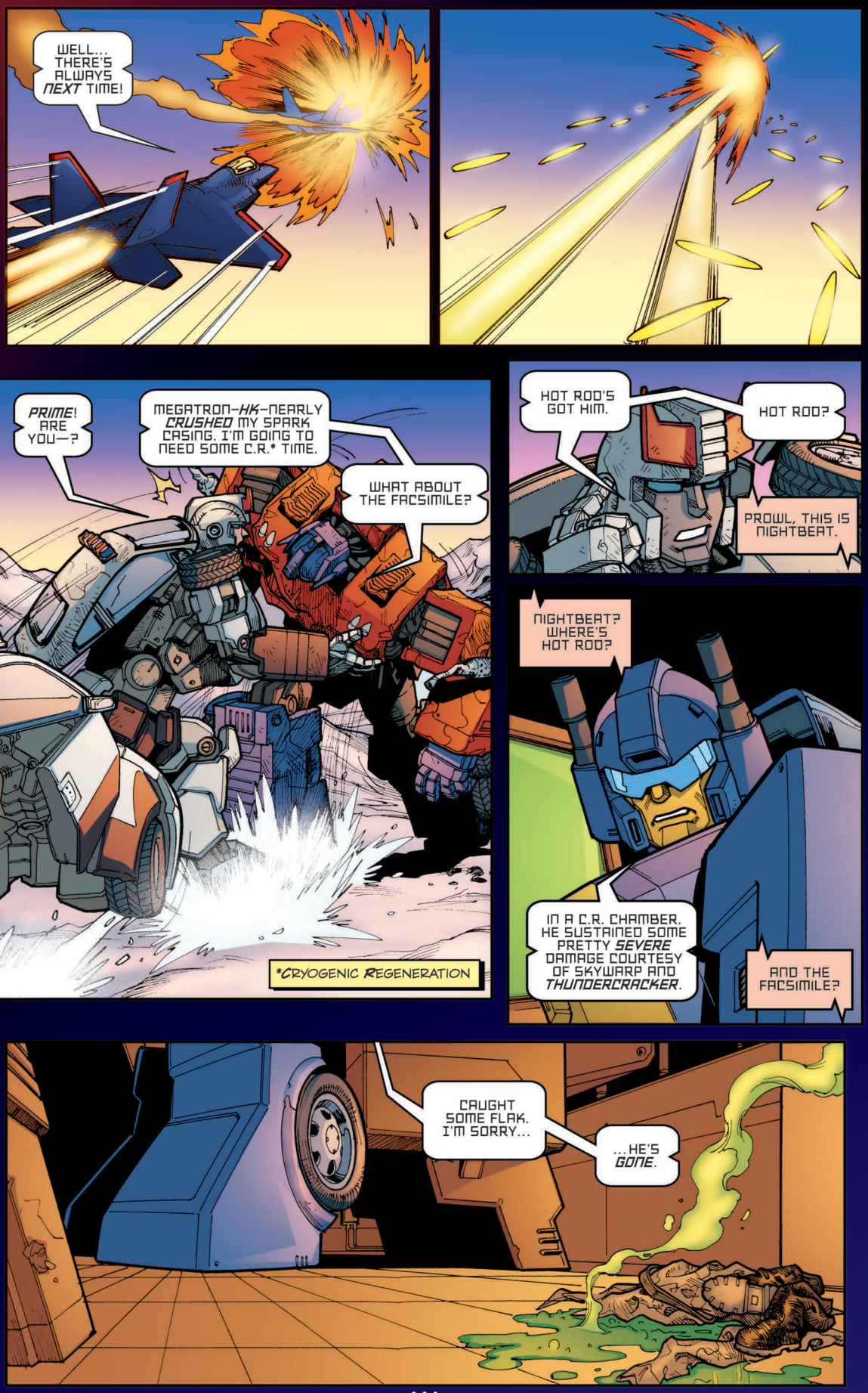

00:00
THA
BOOOOM!

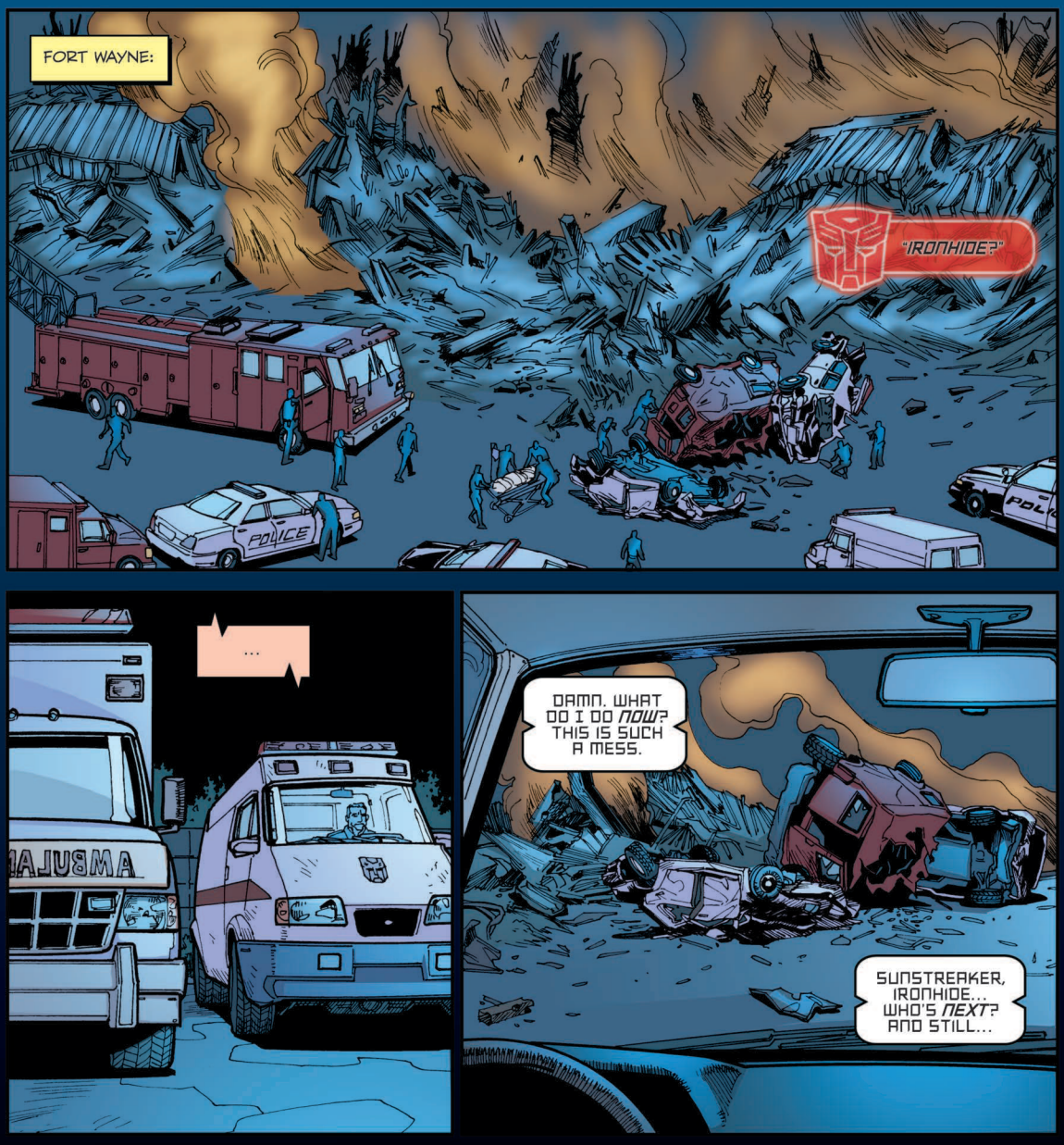

BRASNYA:
PRIME...
KOW!
PTOW!
VAM!
"...WE'RE JUST *NOT* STOPPING HIM."
IN FACT, HE'S NOT SHOWING *ANY* ADVERSE REACTION TO THE ORE-13.
HOLD POSITION, PROWL...
...I'M *BACK* IN PLAY.
VOW!
PTANG!
FTUM!
MEGATRON...
EH?


...BURN!
CHEEOOOM!
DUE WEST:
AHK! KNN! NIGHTBEAT— JUST GET ME OUT OF HERE!
NNNOW!


VAMP!
VAMP!
NNN–
–NOT...
...ENOUGH...
...I–
HNRGH!
FNEH! WHAT... IS... HAPPENING TO ME?
UNFORTUNATELY, MEGATRON, THE POWER YOU HAVE HARVESTED...
...COMES AT A PRICE!

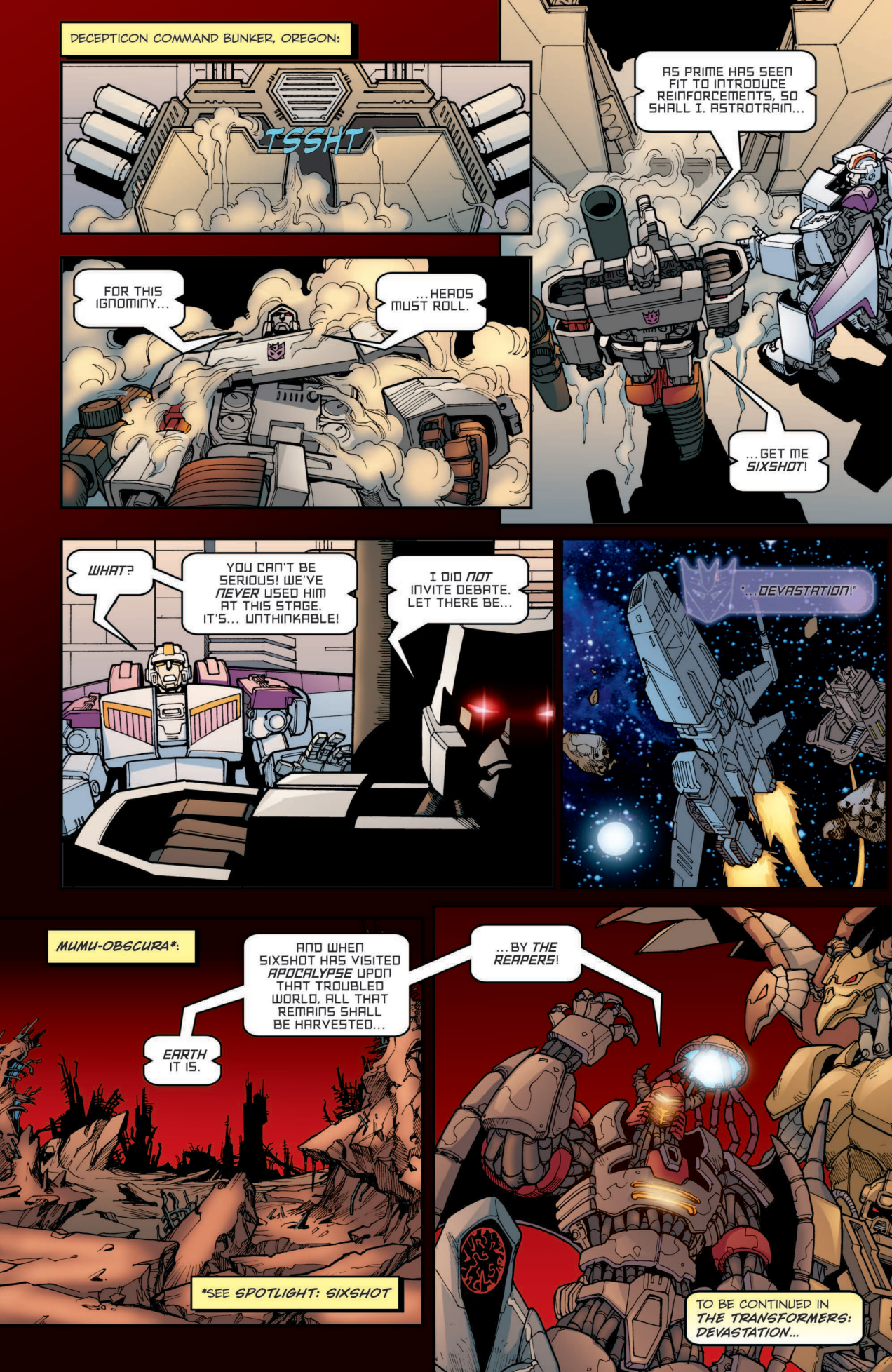

"FINISH HIM."
SKA-SKYWARP!
GET ME OUT OF HERE!
YOU GOT IT, BOSS.
TOO BAD, THOUGH...
-KKHH...
UNH-
EGH-
...I WAS HOPING FOR A HEADCOUNT!
VOP


WELL... THERE'S ALWAYS NEXT TIME!
PRIME! ARE YOU—?
MEGATRON—HK—NEARLY CRUSHED MY SPARK CASING. I'M GOING TO NEED SOME C.R.* TIME.
WHAT ABOUT THE FACSIMILE?
*CRYOGENIC REGENERATION
HOT ROD'S GOT HIM.
HOT ROD?
PROWL, THIS IS NIGHTBEAT.
NIGHTBEAT? WHERE'S HOT ROD?
IN A C.R. CHAMBER. HE SUSTAINED SOME PRETTY SEVERE DAMAGE COURTESY OF SKYWARP AND THUNDERCRACKER.
AND THE FACSIMILE?
CAUGHT SOME FLAK. I'M SORRY...
...HE'S GONE.


FORT WAYNE:
"IRONHIDE?"
POLICE
...
DAMN. WHAT DO I DO *NOW*? THIS IS SUCH A MESS.
SUNSTREAKER, IRONHIDE... WHO'S *NEXT*? AND STILL...
"...WE HAVE *NO IDEA* WHO'S BEHIND ALL THIS!"


TAMPA, FLORIDA:
"AS YOU CAN SEE..."
...THIS ONE SEEMS TO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY ASSIMILATED THE UPGRADE.
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME? WHO ARE YOU PEOPLE?
AND WHAT IS THAT?
THE ->KK<- NEW HEALING ACCELERANTS HAVE ->KK<- EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS. BEGIN ->KK<- MASS-PRODUCTION.
LOOK, WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME?
YOU? NOTHING. YOU'VE SERVED YOUR PURPOSE.
THOUGH, I SUPPOSE, WITH THE RIGHT RECONDITIONING...
...YOU COULD STILL PLAY A PART IN THE MACHINATION'S NEW WORLD ORDER.


WASHINGTON D.C.:
IT'S CONFIRMED.
THAT WAS MAJOR ARKURIN, OUR CONTACT IN ZYARGY. THEY'RE HERE...
...IN NUMBERS!
WHAT'S OUR STATUS?
LET'S SEE... SKYWATCH INDIGO REPORTS THE EUREKA EXCAVATION IS ON SCHEDULE. BUT WE DON'T EXPECT YIELD FOR SOME WHILE.
AS FOR THESE TWO, AGENT RED...
...THEY'RE CHOMPING AT THE BIT!


DECEPTICON COMMAND BUNKER, OREGON:
TSSHT
AS PRIME HAS SEEN FIT TO INTRODUCE REINFORCEMENTS, SO SHALL I. ASTROTRAIN...
...GET ME SIXSHOT!
FOR THIS IGNOMINY...
...HEADS MUST ROLL.
WHAT?
YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS! WE'VE NEVER USED HIM AT THIS STAGE. IT'S... UNTHINKABLE!
I DID NOT INVITE DEBATE. LET THERE BE...
"...DEVASTATION!"
MUMU-OBSCURA*:
AND WHEN SIXSHOT HAS VISITED APOCALYPSE UPON THAT TROUBLED WORLD, ALL THAT REMAINS SHALL BE HARVESTED...
EARTH IT IS.
*SEE SPOTLIGHT: SIXSHOT
...BY THE REAPERS!
TO BE CONTINUED IN THE TRANSFORMERS: DEVASTATION...


ART BY E.J. SU

THE TRANSFORMERS

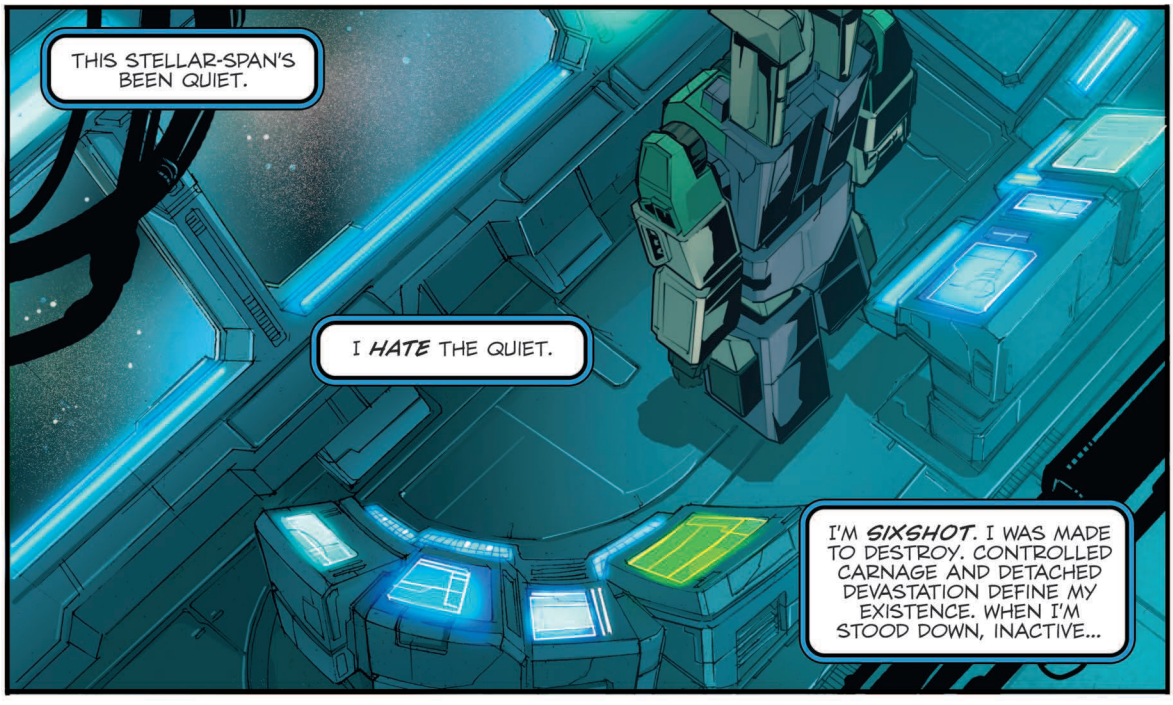
SPOTLIGHT: SIXSHOT

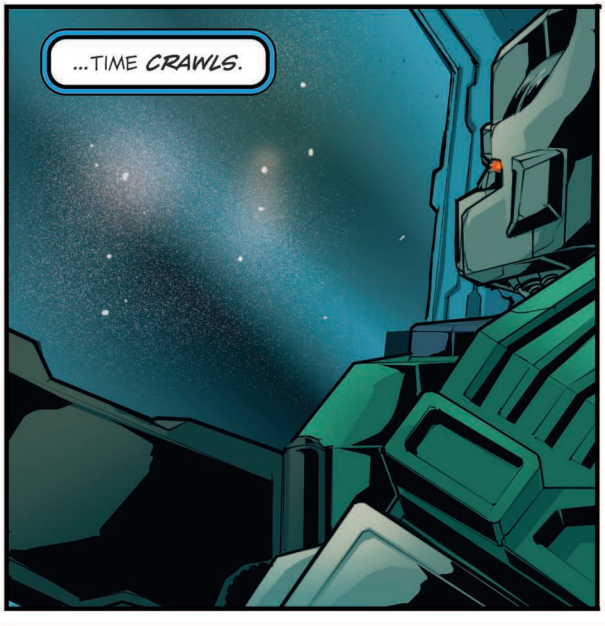


ART BY ROB RUFFALD

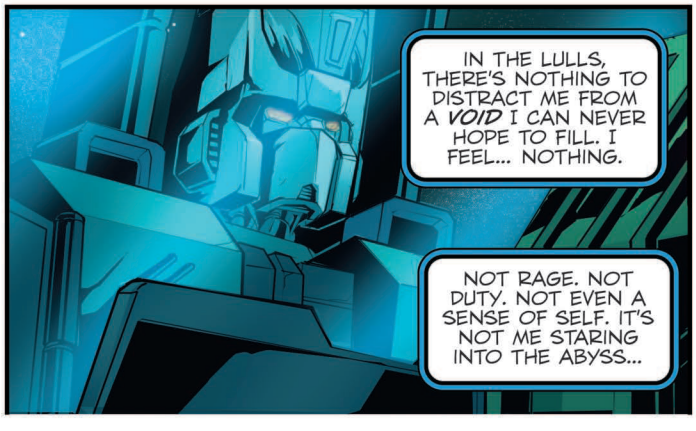

THE PLANET YS'DEVIAN:
LAST STELLAR-SPAN, I DESTROYED AN ENTIRE WORLD...
KRAAK

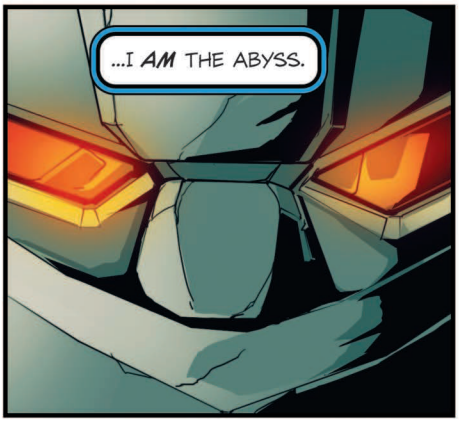

KRRRRM
CHATTADOOM
SHUUUK
VEEASSHT

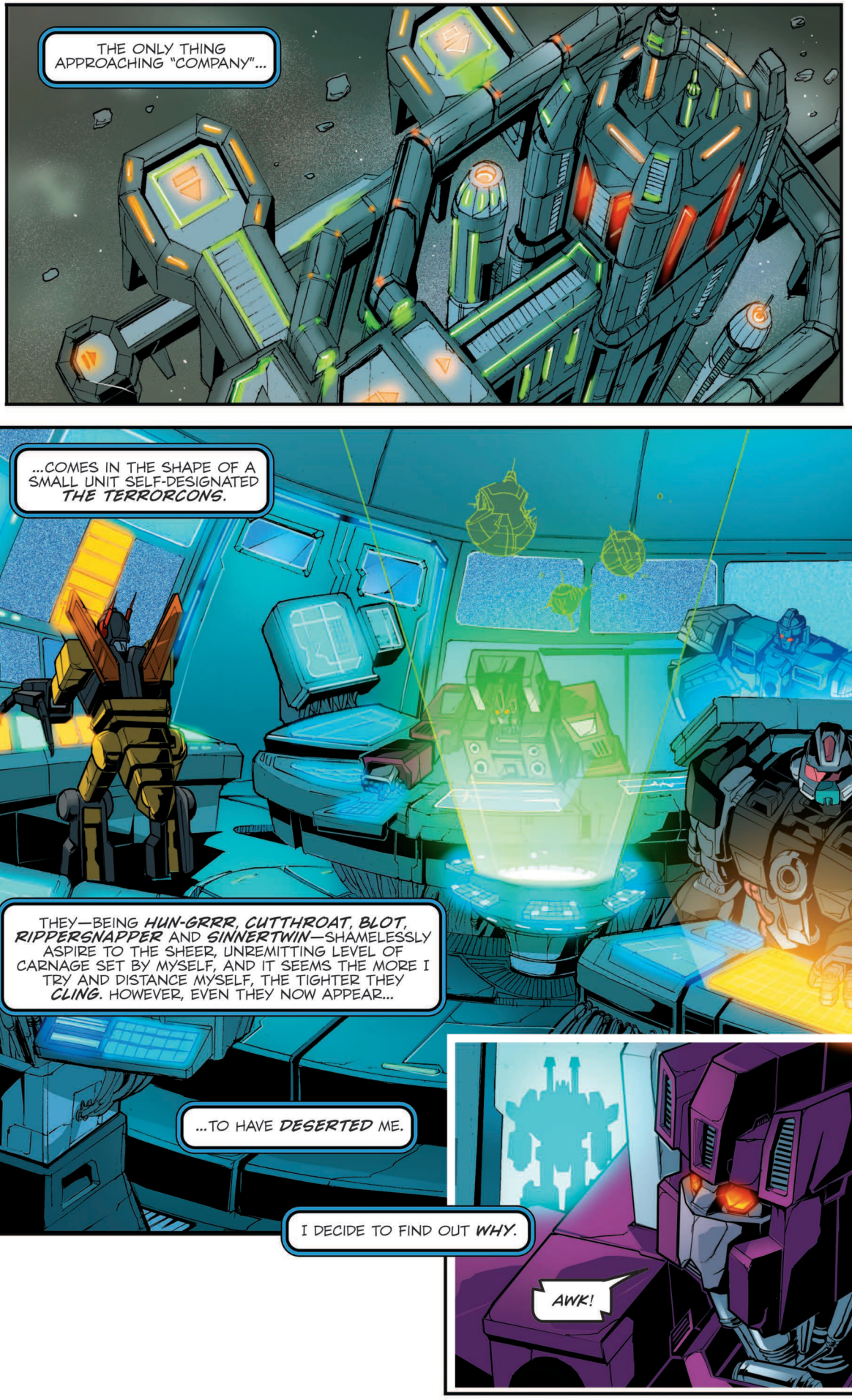

THIS STELLAR-SPAN'S BEEN QUIET.
I *HATE* THE QUIET.
I'M *SIXSHOT*. I WAS MADE TO DESTROY. CONTROLLED CARNAGE AND DETACHED DEVASTATION DEFINE MY EXISTENCE. WHEN I'M STOOD DOWN, INACTIVE...

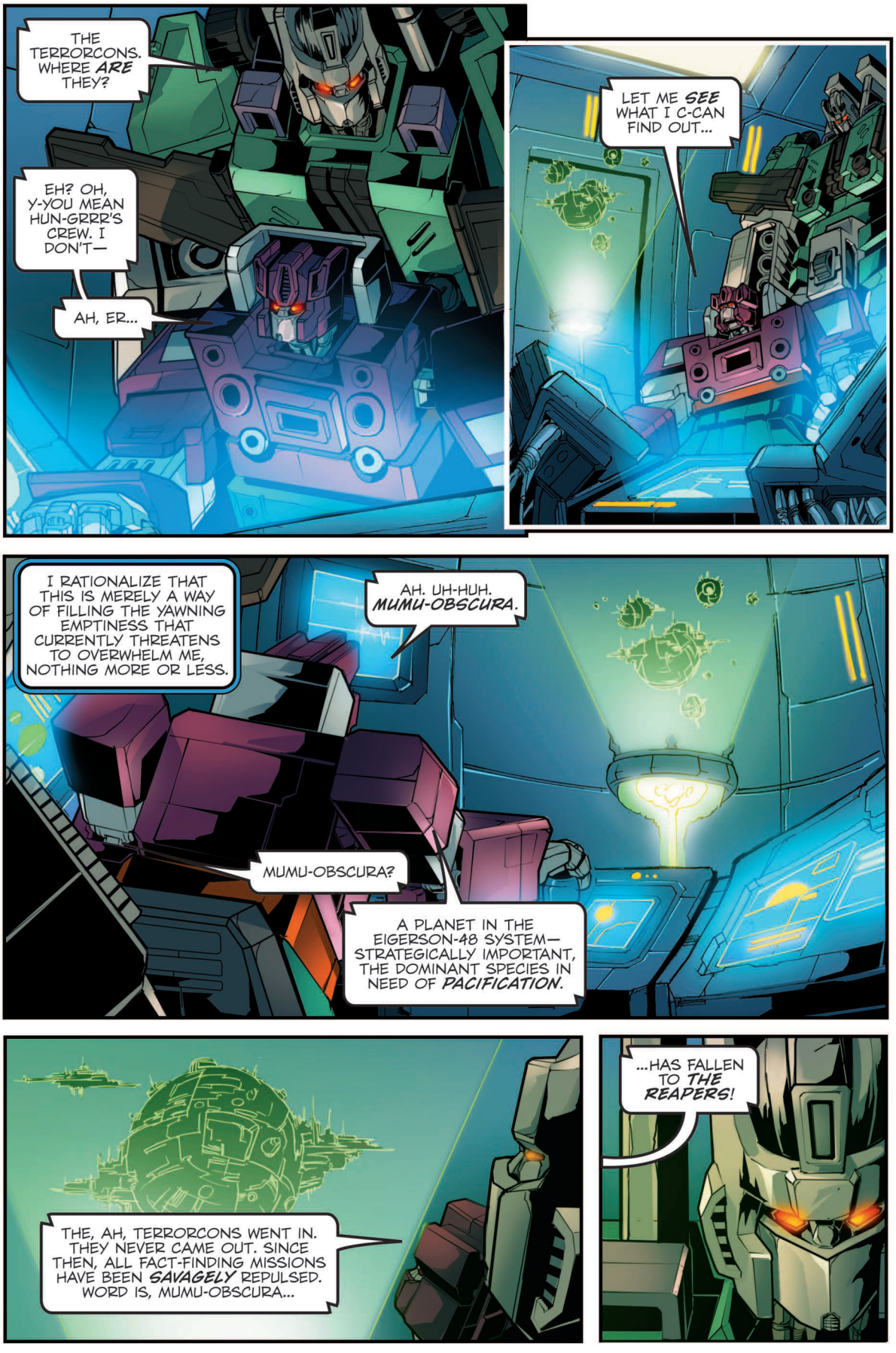

...TIME *CRAWLS*.

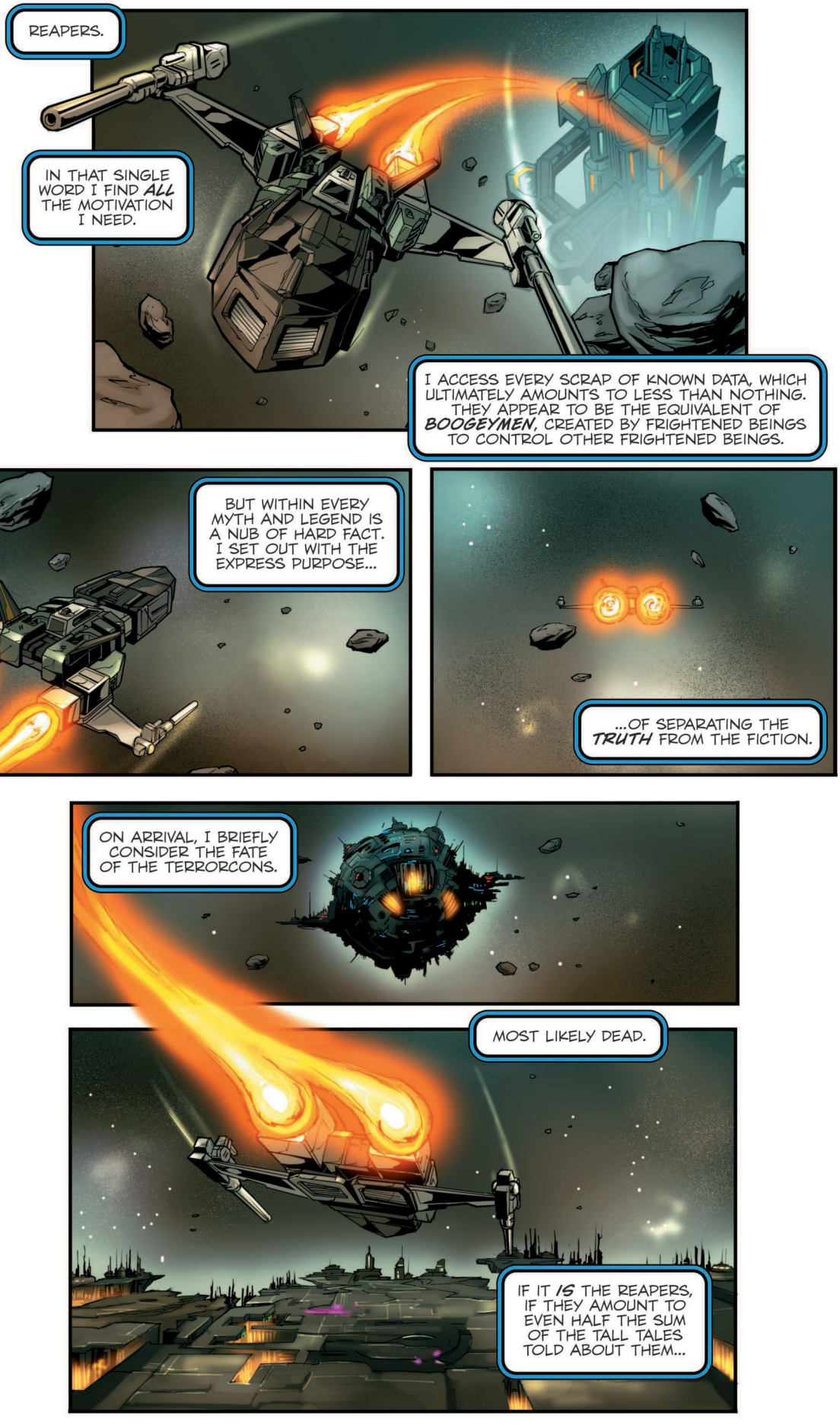

MY FELLOW *DECEPTICONS* AVOID ME. SHUN ME. I SCARE THEM, ALMOST AS MUCH AS I DO THE *AUTOBOTS* I'M OCCASIONALLY TURNED LOOSE ON. AROUND ME...
...THERE'S *ALWAYS* COLLATERAL DAMAGE.


IN THE LULLS, THERE'S NOTHING TO DISTRACT ME FROM A *VOID* I CAN NEVER HOPE TO FILL. I FEEL... NOTHING.
NOT RAGE. NOT DUTY. NOT EVEN A SENSE OF SELF. IT'S NOT ME STARING INTO THE ABYSS...


...I *AM* THE ABYSS.

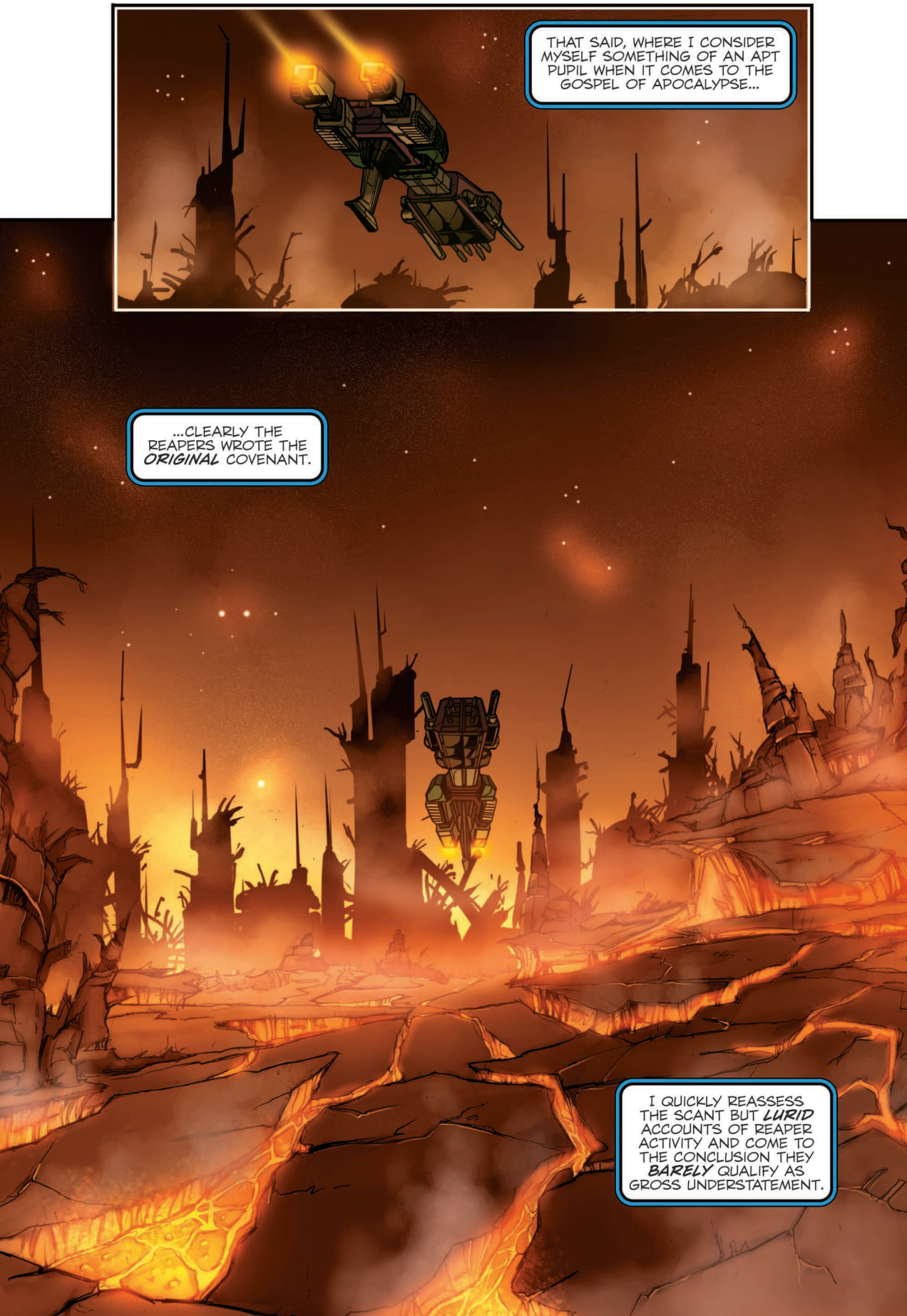

THE ONLY THING APPROACHING "COMPANY"...
...COMES IN THE SHAPE OF A SMALL UNIT SELF-DESIGNATED *THE TERRORCONS*.
THEY—BEING *HUN-GRRR*, *CUTTHROAT*, *BLOT*, *RIPPERSNAPPER* AND *SINNERTWIN*—SHAMELESSLY ASPIRE TO THE SHEER, UNREMITTING LEVEL OF CARNAGE SET BY MYSELF, AND IT SEEMS THE MORE I TRY AND DISTANCE MYSELF, THE TIGHTER THEY *CLING*. HOWEVER, EVEN THEY NOW APPEAR...
...TO HAVE *DESERTED* ME.
I DECIDE TO FIND OUT *WHY*.
AWK!


THE TERRORCONS. WHERE *ARE* THEY?
EH? OH, Y-YOU MEAN HUN-GRRR'S CREW. I DON'T—
AH, ER...
LET ME *SEE* WHAT I C-CAN FIND OUT...
I RATIONALIZE THAT THIS IS MERELY A WAY OF FILLING THE YAWNING EMPTINESS THAT CURRENTLY THREATENS TO OVERWHELM ME, NOTHING MORE OR LESS.
AH. UH-HUH. *MUMU-OBSCURA.*
MUMU-OBSCURA?
A PLANET IN THE EIGERSON-48 SYSTEM— STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT, THE DOMINANT SPECIES IN NEED OF *PACIFICATION.*
THE, AH, TERRORCONS WENT IN. THEY NEVER CAME OUT. SINCE THEN, ALL FACT-FINDING MISSIONS HAVE BEEN *SAVAGELY* REPULSED. WORD IS, MUMU-OBSCURA...
...HAS FALLEN TO *THE REAPERS!*

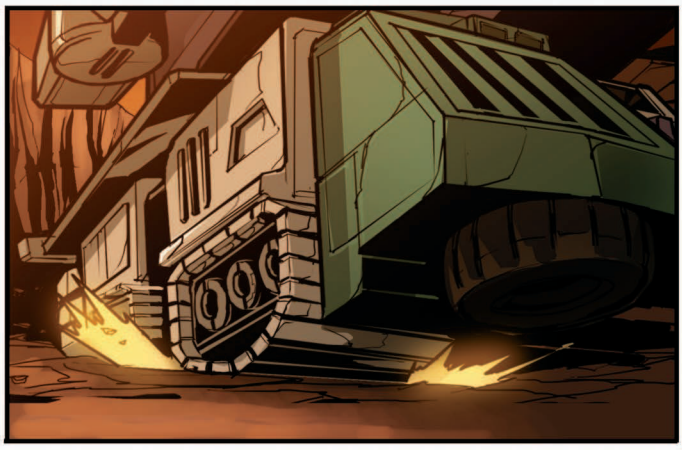

REAPERS.
IN THAT SINGLE WORD I FIND ALL THE MOTIVATION I NEED.
I ACCESS EVERY SCRAP OF KNOWN DATA, WHICH ULTIMATELY AMOUNTS TO LESS THAN NOTHING. THEY APPEAR TO BE THE EQUIVALENT OF BOOGEYMEN, CREATED BY FRIGHTENED BEINGS TO CONTROL OTHER FRIGHTENED BEINGS.
BUT WITHIN EVERY MYTH AND LEGEND IS A NUB OF HARD FACT. I SET OUT WITH THE EXPRESS PURPOSE...
...OF SEPARATING THE TRUTH FROM THE FICTION.
ON ARRIVAL, I BRIEFLY CONSIDER THE FATE OF THE TERRORCONS.
MOST LIKELY DEAD.
IF IT IS THE REAPERS, IF THEY AMOUNT TO EVEN HALF THE SUM OF THE TALL TALES TOLD ABOUT THEM...


...THEY TAKE NO PRISONERS!
SURFACE-TO-AIR SEEKER WARHEADS.
NO WAY AROUND THEM. SO...
WHOOOM
...I GO THROUGH!
THE REAPERS, DEMONSTRABLY...

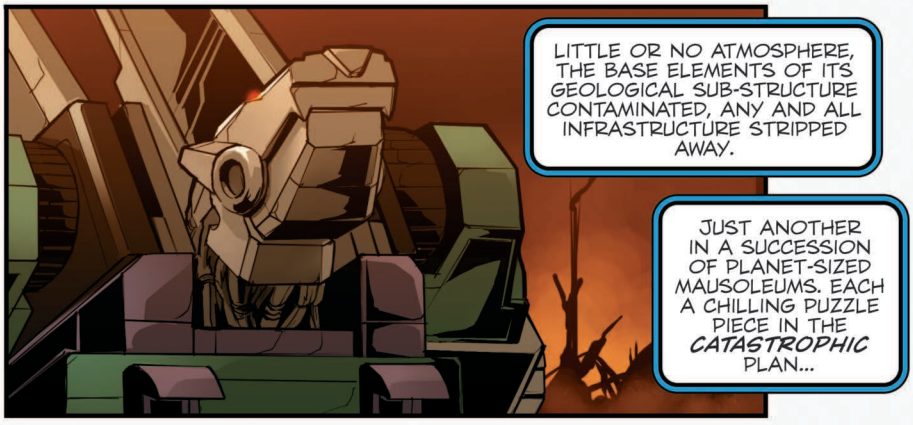

...ENFORCE THE PARAMETERS OF THEIR PERSONAL SPACE.
VAAARK
IN SO MANY WAYS...
...WE ARE ALIKE.
KTUSH


THAT SAID, WHERE I CONSIDER MYSELF SOMETHING OF AN APT PUPIL WHEN IT COMES TO THE GOSPEL OF APOCALYPSE...
...CLEARLY THE REAPERS WROTE THE ORIGINAL COVENANT.
I QUICKLY REASSESS THE SCANT BUT LURID ACCOUNTS OF REAPER ACTIVITY AND COME TO THE CONCLUSION THEY BARELY QUALIFY AS GROSS UNDERSTATEMENT.


WHAT I—AND THOSE FEW, UNRELIABLE WITNESSES—FAIL TO GRASP IS ***WHY***. WHAT ***PURPOSE*** DOES THIS LEVEL OF DEVASTATION SERVE?
WHATEVER TACTICAL WORTH OR OTHER EXPLOITABLE ATTRIBUTES MUMU-OBSCURA DID OR DIDN'T HAVE, IT'S ALL GONE.

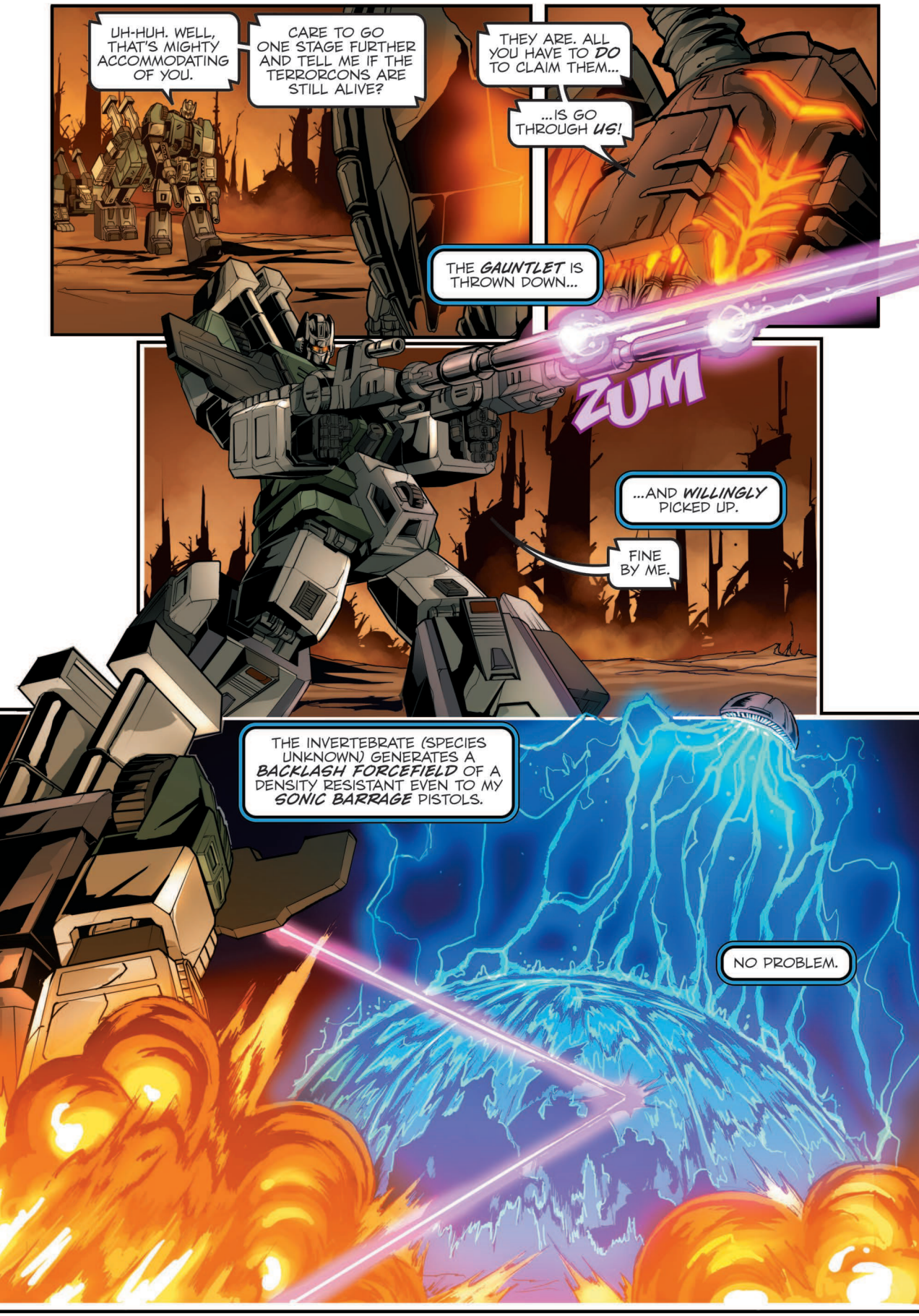



THE REAPERS SEEM TO GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO LEAVE BEHIND THEM A DEAD WORLD IN ***EVERY*** RESPECT.


LITTLE OR NO ATMOSPHERE, THE BASE ELEMENTS OF ITS GEOLOGICAL SUB-STRUCTURE CONTAMINATED, ANY AND ALL INFRASTRUCTURE STRIPPED AWAY.
JUST ANOTHER IN A SUCCESSION OF PLANET-SIZED MAUSOLEUMS. EACH A CHILLING PUZZLE PIECE IN THE ***CATASTROPHIC*** PLAN...


...OF THE REAPERS!


ONE OR TWO OF THE SPECIES...
...I RECOGNIZE. OTHERS I DON'T. BUT THEIR UNIFIED PURPOSE AND INTENT IS CLEAR. THEY EXIST TO RAVAGE... TO DESTROY!
LIKE ME...
...IT'S WHAT THEY WERE BUILT TO DO.
AT LONG LAST... WE MEET. WELCOME, SIXSHOT, TO OUR WORLD.

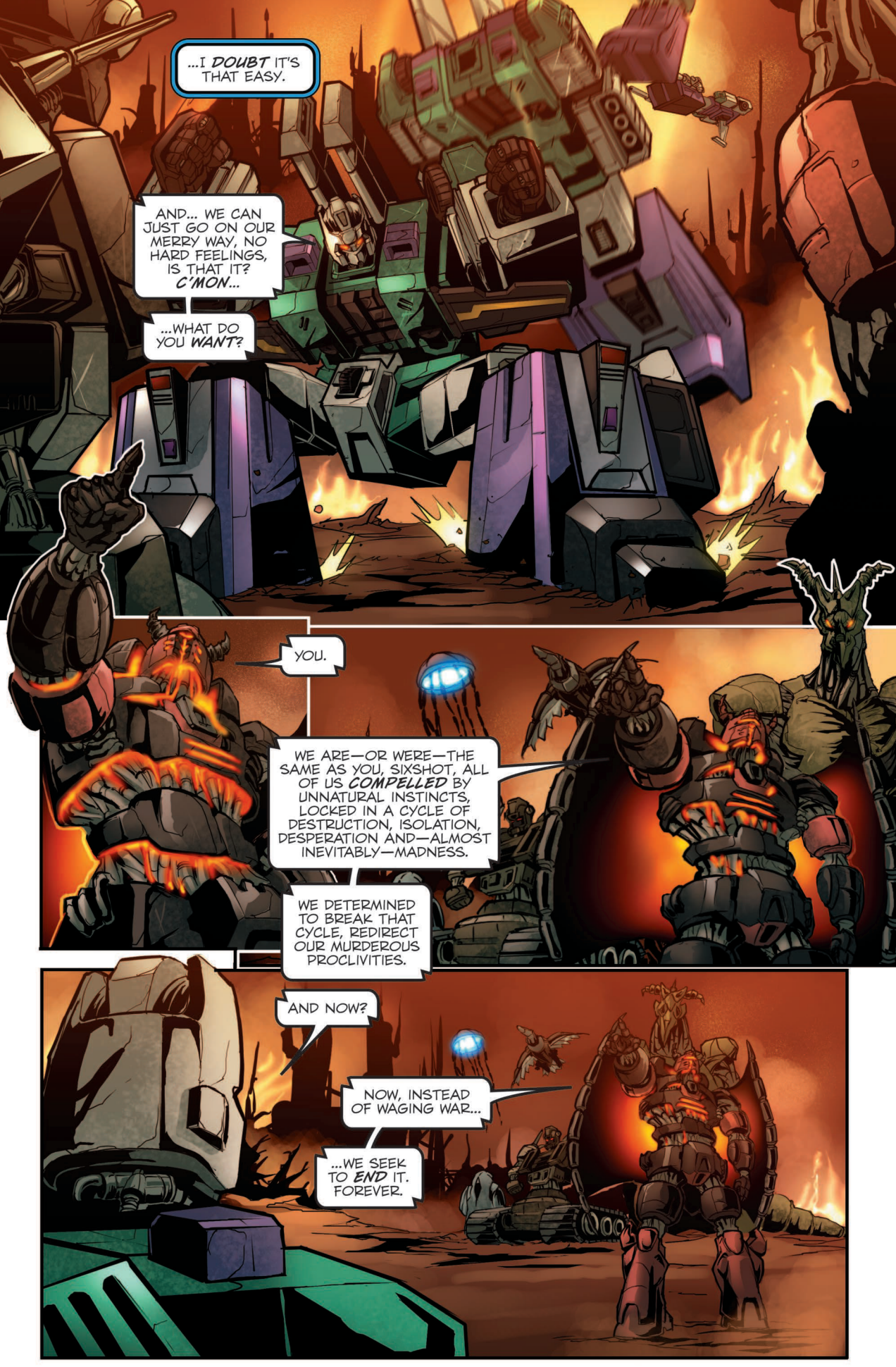

UH-HUH. WELL, THAT'S MIGHTY ACCOMMODATING OF YOU.
CARE TO GO ONE STAGE FURTHER AND TELL ME IF THE TERRORCONS ARE STILL ALIVE?
THEY ARE. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO TO CLAIM THEM...
...IS GO THROUGH US!
THE GAUNTLET IS THROWN DOWN...
ZUM
...AND WILLINGLY PICKED UP.
FINE BY ME.
THE INVERTEBRATE (SPECIES UNKNOWN) GENERATES A BACKLASH FORCEFIELD OF A DENSITY RESISTANT EVEN TO MY SONIC BARRAGE PISTOLS.
NO PROBLEM.

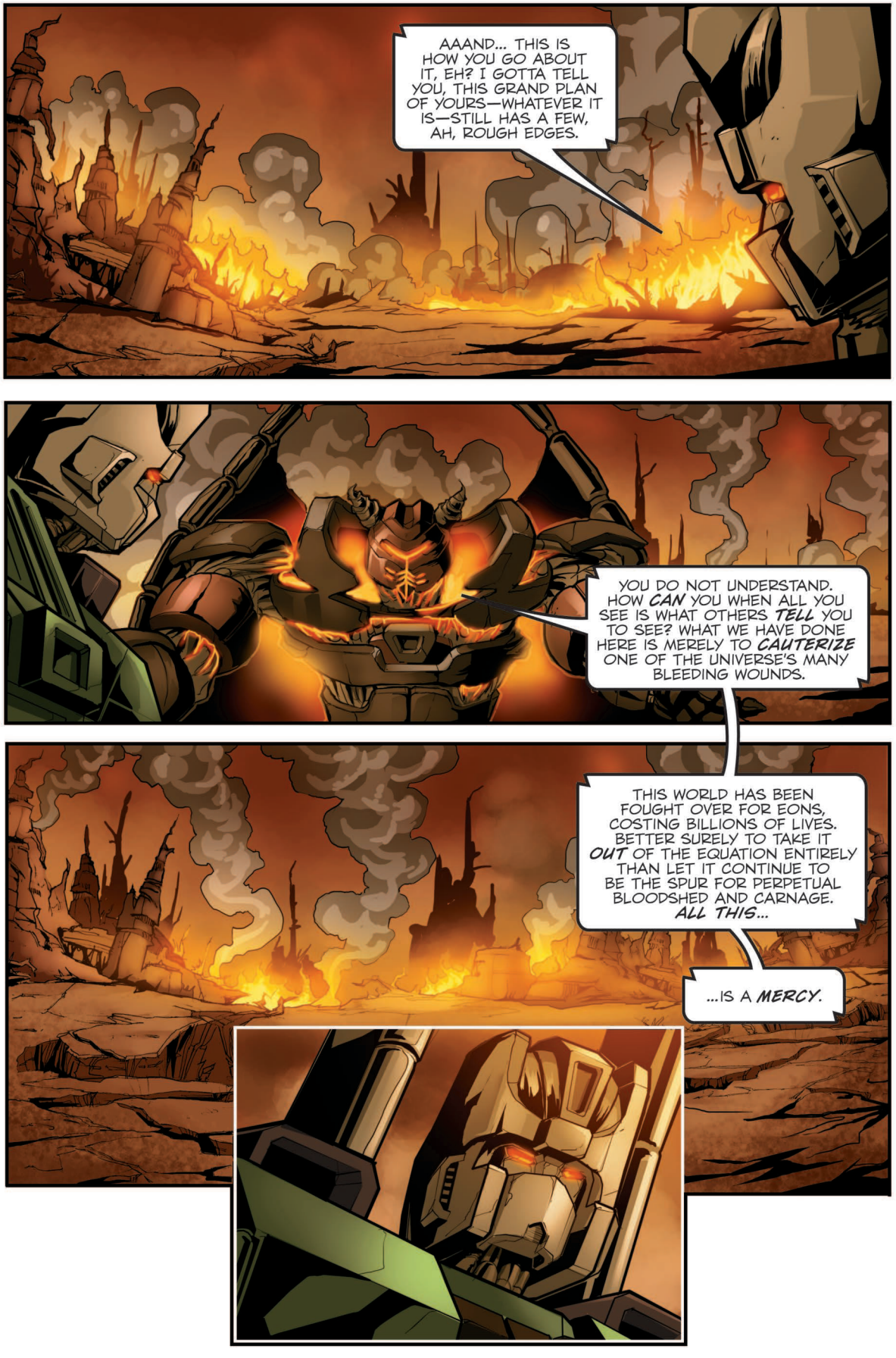

I GOT A WHOLE CASELOAD OF TRICKS!
FIRST, I TAKE OUT THE GROUND UNDER THEIR FEET...
THEN I GET DOWN TO BUSINESS!
BARAAK
I CONCLUDE THAT THE DEATHBRINGER—A BIO-MECH BRED FOR COMBAT IN THE HARSHEST OF ENVIRONMENTS—POSES THE GREATEST THREAT...
...AND SO I TAKE HIM OUT FIRST!
VA
VAAAM
THE OTHERS...TAKE THEIR BEST SHOT!


I REMIND MYSELF THESE SIX BEINGS LAID WASTE TO AN ENTIRE PLANET. SO, NOTHING FANCY...
...JUST GET THE JOB DONE!
THE FLIER'S A RAVENOUS—INFECTED WITH A BERSERKER CY-VIRUS, COMBAT ZONES JUST SERVE TO STRIP AWAY ANY LAST VENEER OF CIVILIZATION.
THEY'RE FAST...
SCREEE
...AND FURIOUS.
SO AM I.
VATTAK
THIS ONE I DON'T KNOW. BUT AGAIN, CLEARLY A DESIGNER WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION.
ONLY ONE THING ON ITS MIND—MY COMPLETE AND UTTER OBLITERATION.


THINGS...
BDOOM
...ESCALATE.
ZAK
VHARK
FINALLY, IT GETS TOO HOT...
KRUSHT
...EVEN FOR ME!
AND I REALIZE, GRUDGINGLY, THEY'RE TOYING WITH ME. OR, PERHAPS...


...TESTING ME.
WHATEVER THE CASE, THE BATTLE...
...APPEARS TO BE OVER.
AND A BUZZ OF INTERDIMENSIONAL WHITE NOISE...
...HERALDS THE RETURN OF THE TERRORCONS.
WHAT?
SOMEHOW, THOUGH...

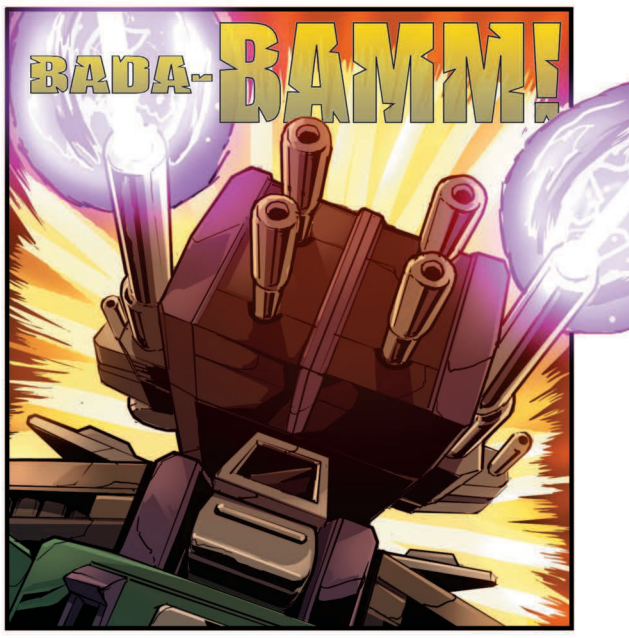

...I DOUBT IT'S THAT EASY.
AND... WE CAN JUST GO ON OUR MERRY WAY, NO HARD FEELINGS, IS THAT IT? C'MON...
...WHAT DO YOU WANT?
YOU.
WE ARE—OR WERE—THE SAME AS YOU, SIXSHOT, ALL OF US COMPELLED BY UNNATURAL INSTINCTS, LOCKED IN A CYCLE OF DESTRUCTION, ISOLATION, DESPERATION AND—ALMOST INEVITABLY—MADNESS.
WE DETERMINED TO BREAK THAT CYCLE, REDIRECT OUR MURDEROUS PROCLIVITIES.
AND NOW?
NOW, INSTEAD OF WAGING WAR...
...WE SEEK TO END IT. FOREVER.

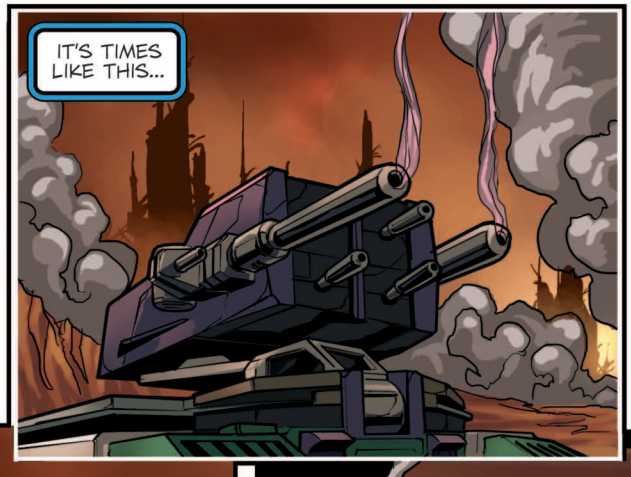

AAAND... THIS IS HOW YOU GO ABOUT IT, EH? I GOTTA TELL YOU, THIS GRAND PLAN OF YOURS—WHATEVER IT IS—STILL HAS A FEW, AH, ROUGH EDGES.
YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND. HOW ***CAN*** YOU WHEN ALL YOU SEE IS WHAT OTHERS ***TELL*** YOU TO SEE? WHAT WE HAVE DONE HERE IS MERELY TO ***CAUTERIZE*** ONE OF THE UNIVERSE'S MANY BLEEDING WOUNDS.
THIS WORLD HAS BEEN FOUGHT OVER FOR EONS, COSTING BILLIONS OF LIVES. BETTER SURELY TO TAKE IT ***OUT*** OF THE EQUATION ENTIRELY THAN LET IT CONTINUE TO BE THE SPUR FOR PERPETUAL BLOODSHED AND CARNAGE. ***ALL THIS...***
...IS A ***MERCY.***

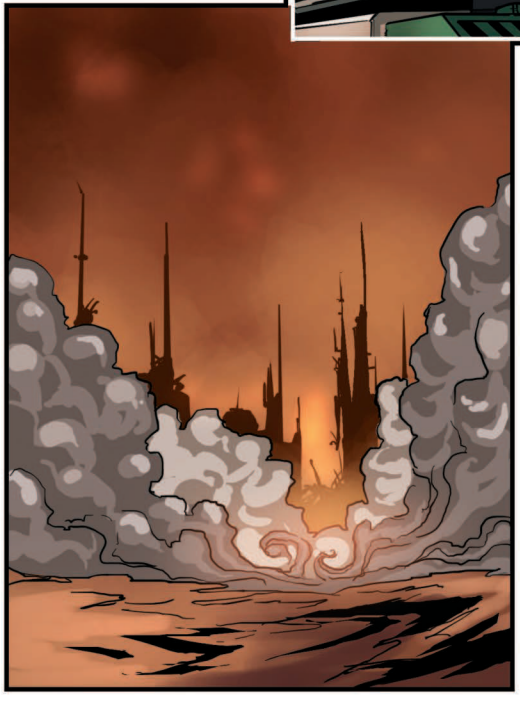

JOIN US, SIXSHOT. WE OFFER YOU A CAUSE, A FOCUS. WE OFFER YOU A HOME.
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO, TO PROVE YOU HAVE TRULY CAST OFF THE SHACKLES OF YOUR PREVIOUS LIFE...
...IS ERADICATE THESE FIVE.
WHO? US?!
WHAT? NO... YOU WOULDN'T!
SIXSHOT— C'MON! WE... HAVE A BOND. YOU DON'T NEED THESE MISFITS. YOU ALREADY GOT... ER...
US MISFITS.
YEAH, RIGHT. RIGHT?

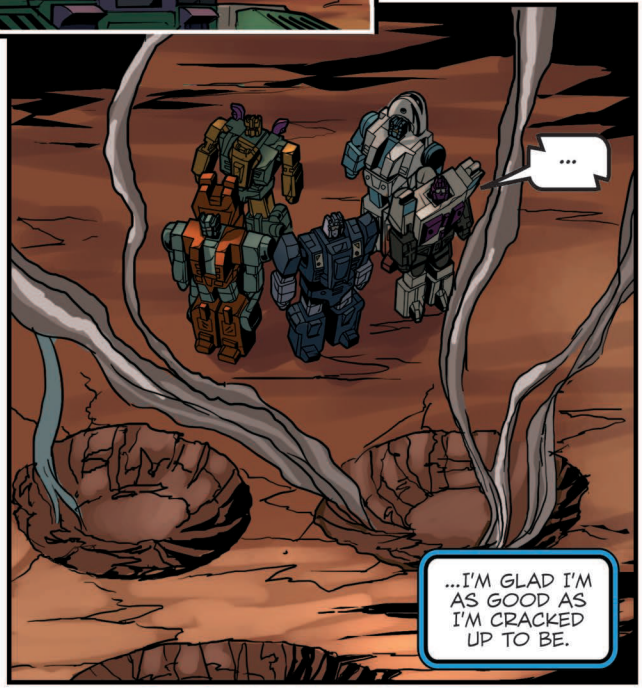

SIXSHOT! N-
FRAKOOOM!
CHEEOW!
VADAMM!

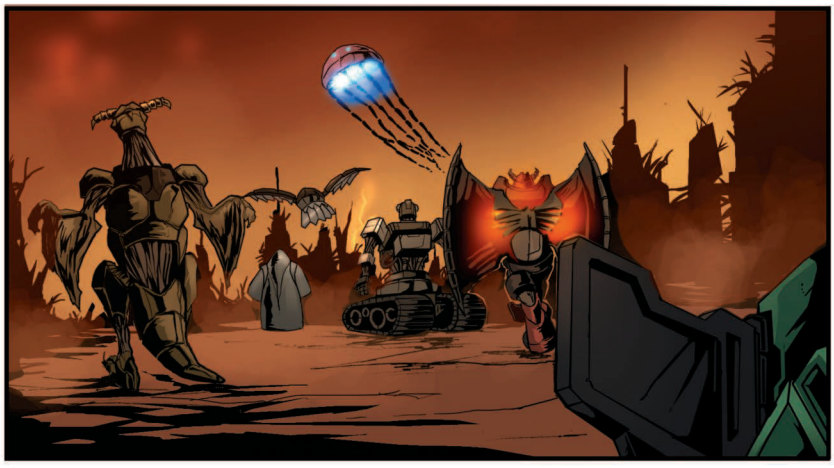


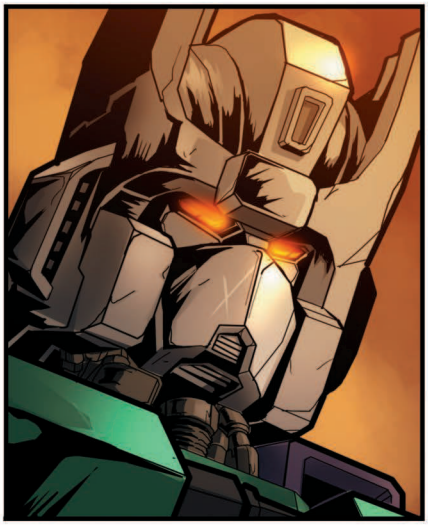

BADA-BAMM!

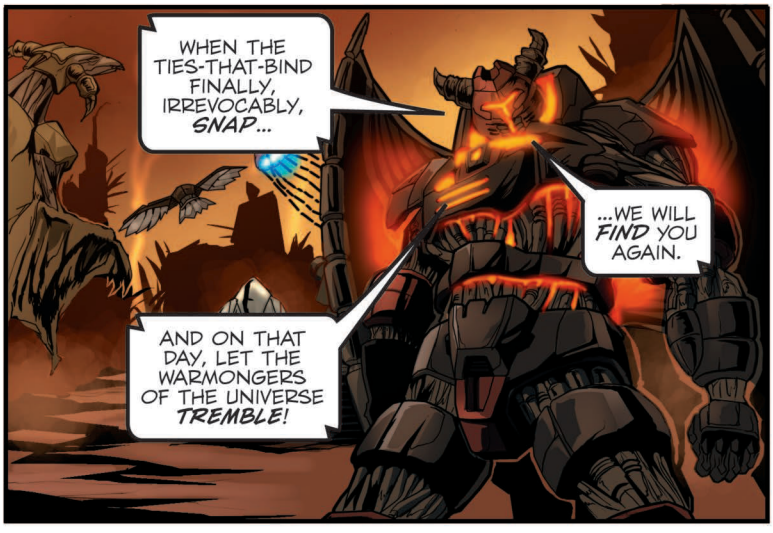

IT'S TIMES LIKE THIS...




...
...I'M GLAD I'M AS GOOD AS I'M CRACKED UP TO BE.

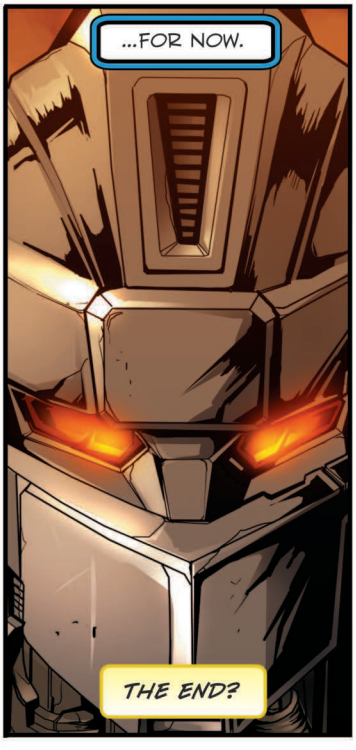




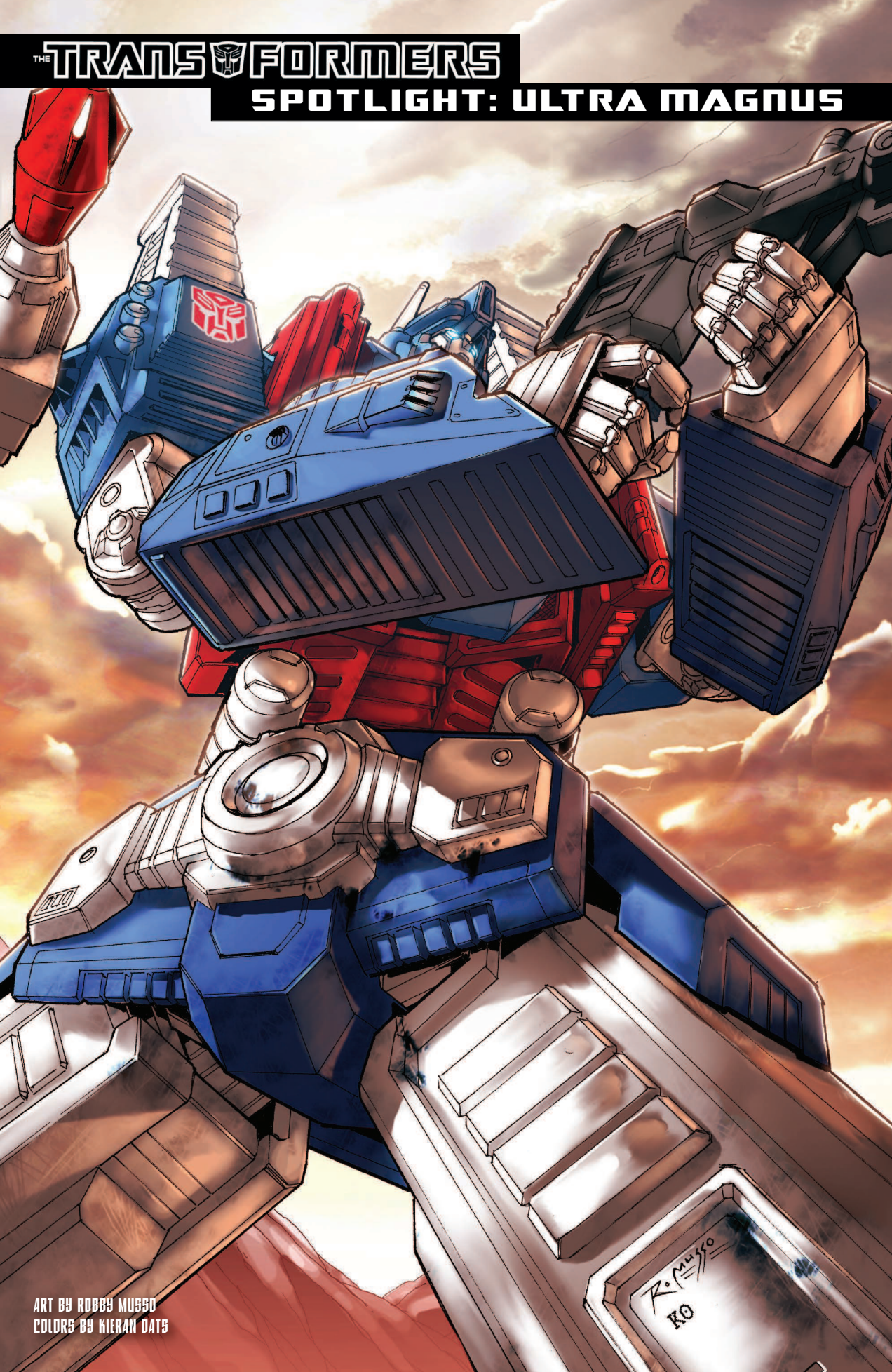

WHEN THE TIES-THAT-BIND FINALLY, IRREVOCABLY, SNAP...
...WE WILL FIND YOU AGAIN.
AND ON THAT DAY, LET THE WARMONGERS OF THE UNIVERSE TREMBLE!


THEY GO, AND A PART OF ME GOES WITH THEM. I FEEL THE WRENCH ALL THE WAY DOWN TO MY SPARK.


BUT I WAS WRONG. I'M NOT A LOST CAUSE, NOT QUITE. THE BADGE I WEAR STILL MEANS SOMETHING, THE ODD INDIVIDUAL—OR GROUP—STILL STIR EMPATHY, OF A SORT.
IT'S ENOUGH...


...FOR NOW.
THE END?

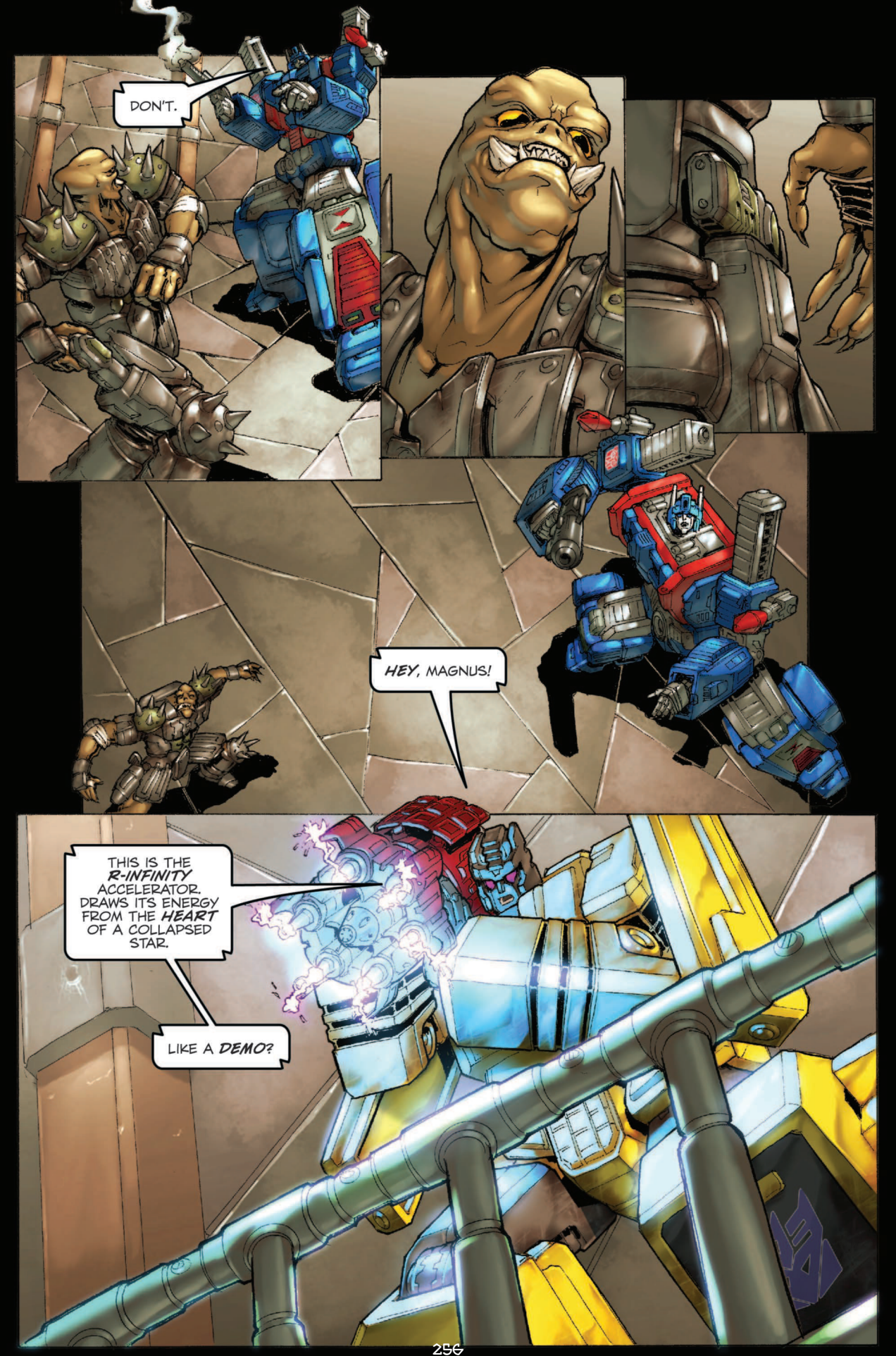

ART BY JAMES RAIZ


THE TRANSFORMERS
SPOTLIGHT: ULTRA MAGNUS
ART BY ROBBY MUSSO
COLORS BY KIERAN DAYS


THE PLANET ZULL:
"HE'S HERE, NOW, INSIDE YOUR PERIMETER..."
HE'S COME FOR ME!
AND WHAT IF HE HAS?
REMEMBER WHY YOU SOUGHT ME OUT ME IN THE FIRST PLACE—THIS WHOLE PLANET IS ONE VAST, IMPREGNABLE FORTRESS. NO ONE CAN GET AT YOU UNLESS I PERMIT IT.
YOU DON'T KNOW HIM, LORCHA, HE'LL FIND A WAY. HE'S—
KZAK!
ZEOW!
FWOOOOM!

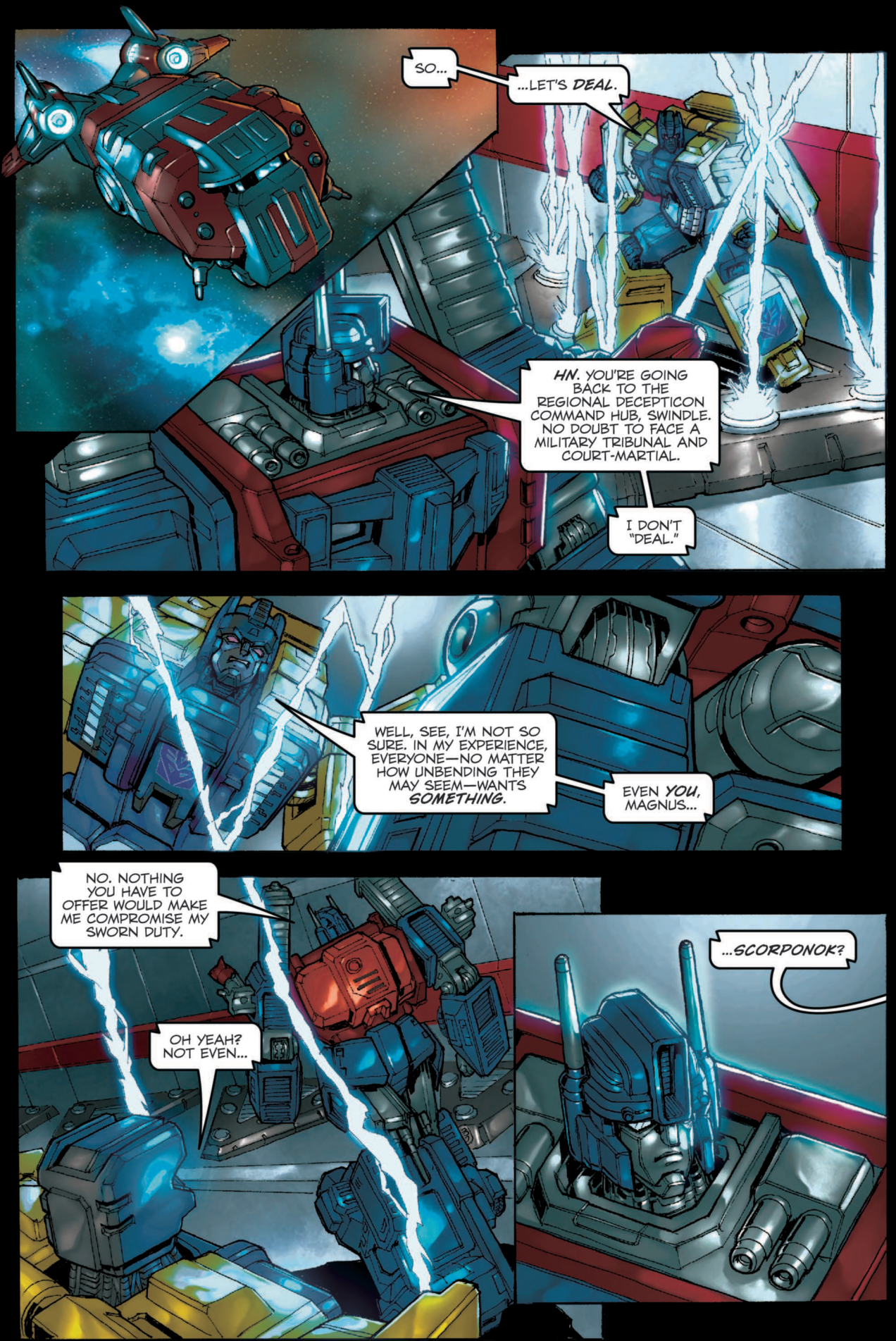

ULTRA MAGNUS!
ALL OF YOU—STAND DOWN! I AM A DULY APPOINTED ENFORCER OF THE TYREST ACCORD. WE CAN DO THIS MY WAY...
...OR THE HARD WAY.
SWINDLE, YOU...
DATAFILE NUMBER G-185-881/SWINDLE. ALLEGIANCE: DECEPTICON. CURRENTLY WANTED FOR TRADING IN CRITICAL MASS WEAPONRY.
...ARE COMING WITH ME!

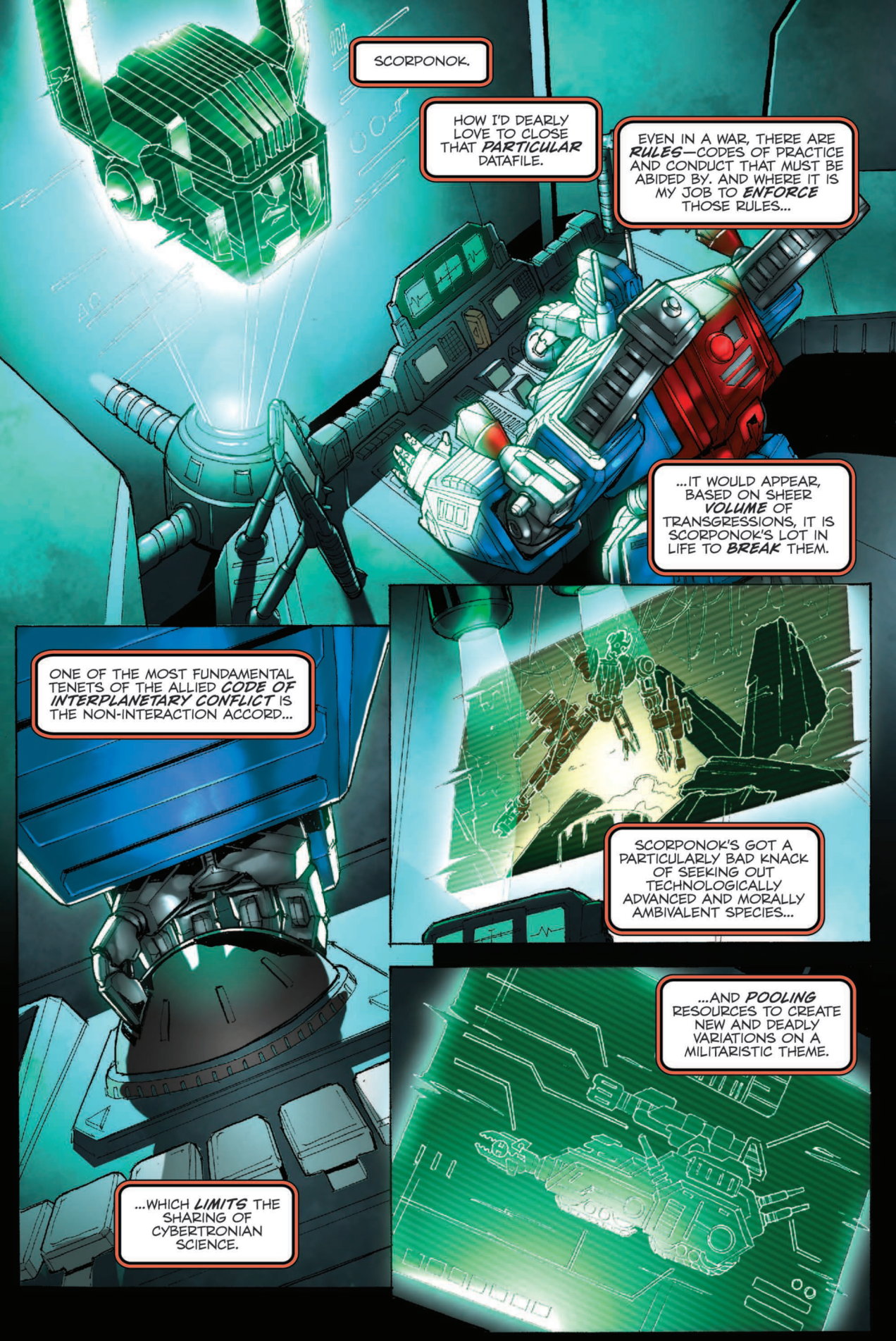

YOU HAVE NO AUTHORITY HERE, CYBERTRONIAN. AND SWINDLE... IS UNDER MY PROTECTION. GUARDS...
...EXECUTE HIM!
HM.
UF!
FHN!
HT?
HH!
NNT!
ZAK-ZAK-ZAK-ZAK-ZAK-

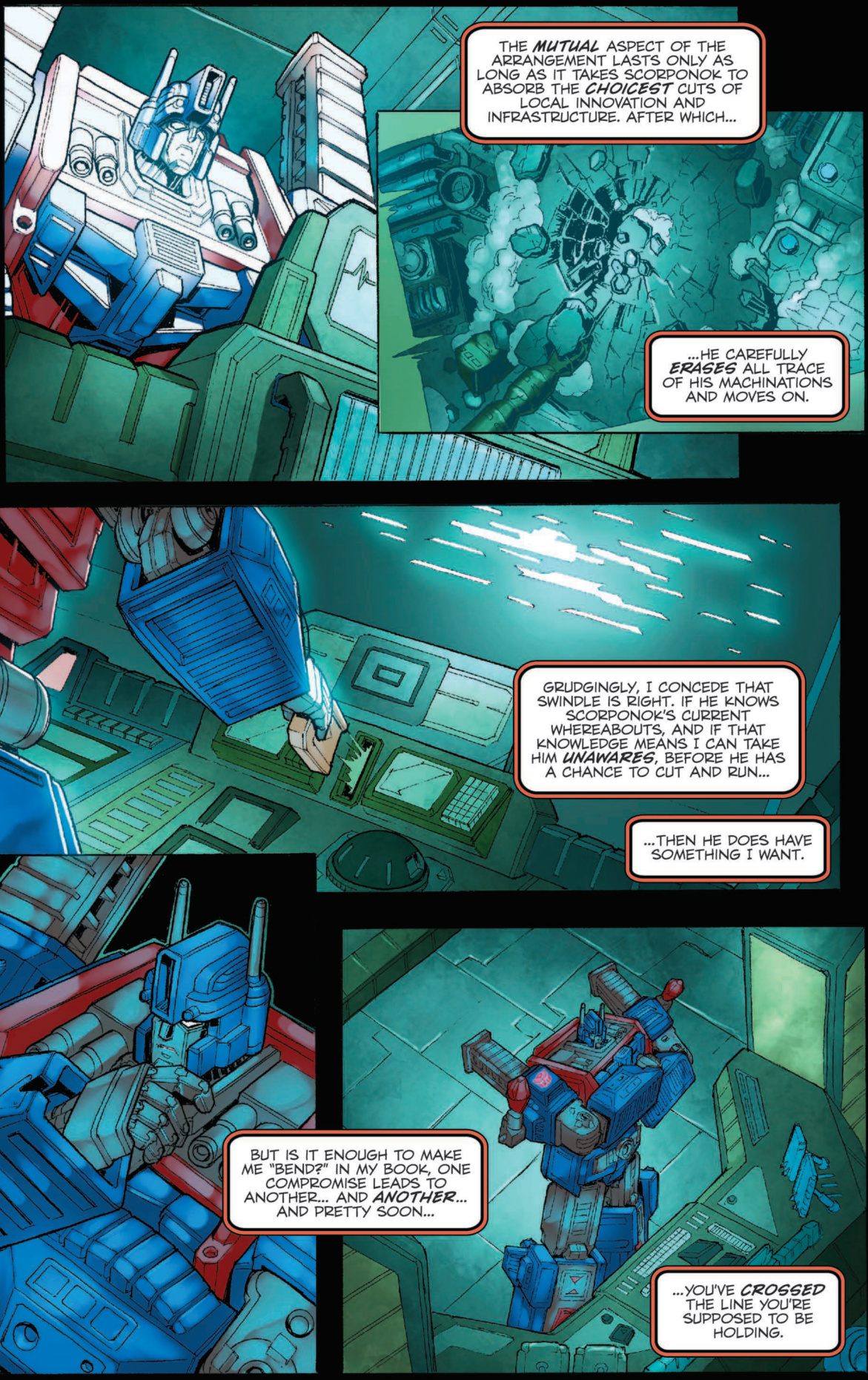

DON'T.
HEY, MAGNUS!
THIS IS THE R-INFINITY ACCELERATOR. DRAWS ITS ENERGY FROM THE HEART OF A COLLAPSED STAR.
LIKE A DEMO?

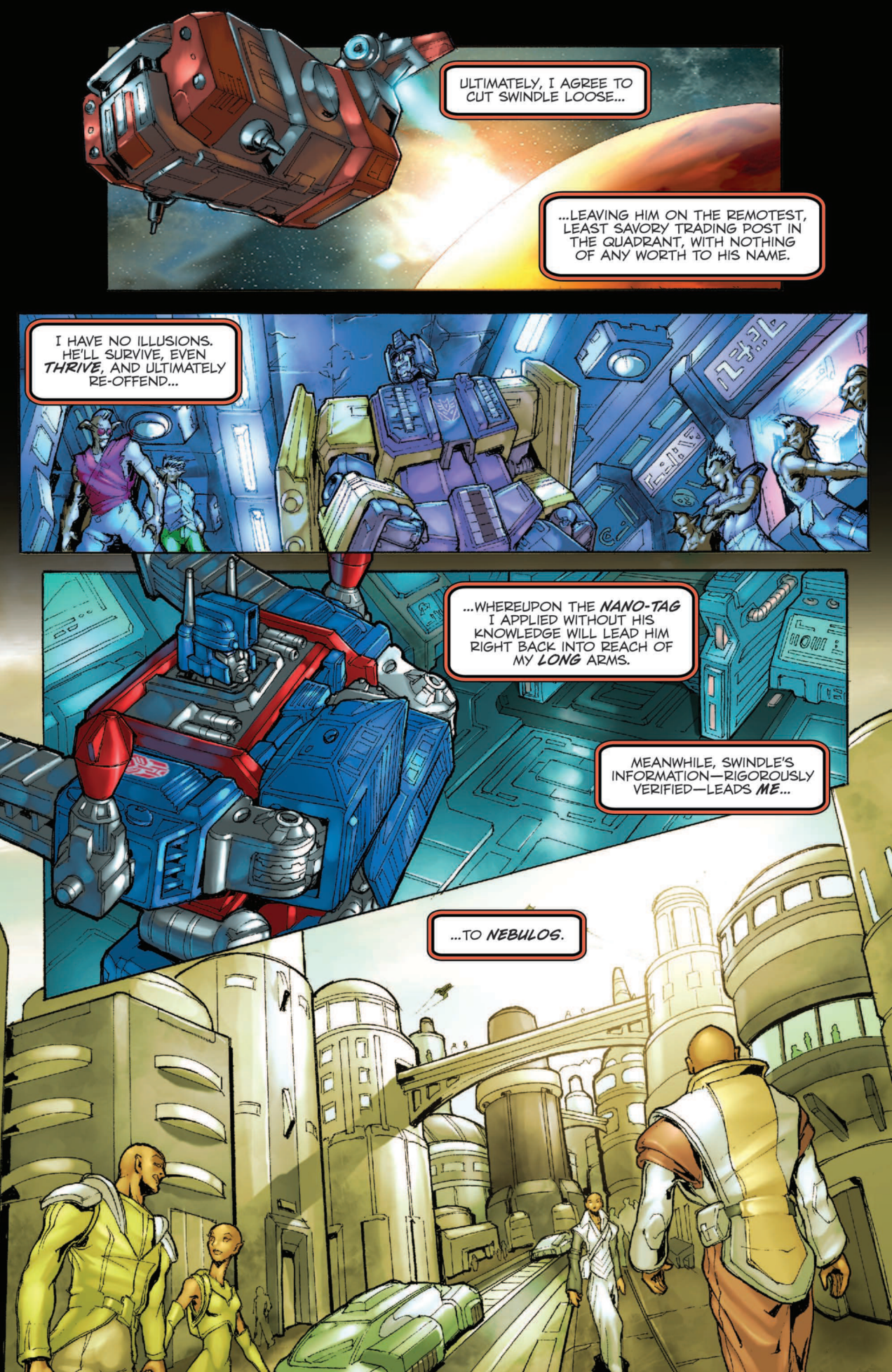

BRRR

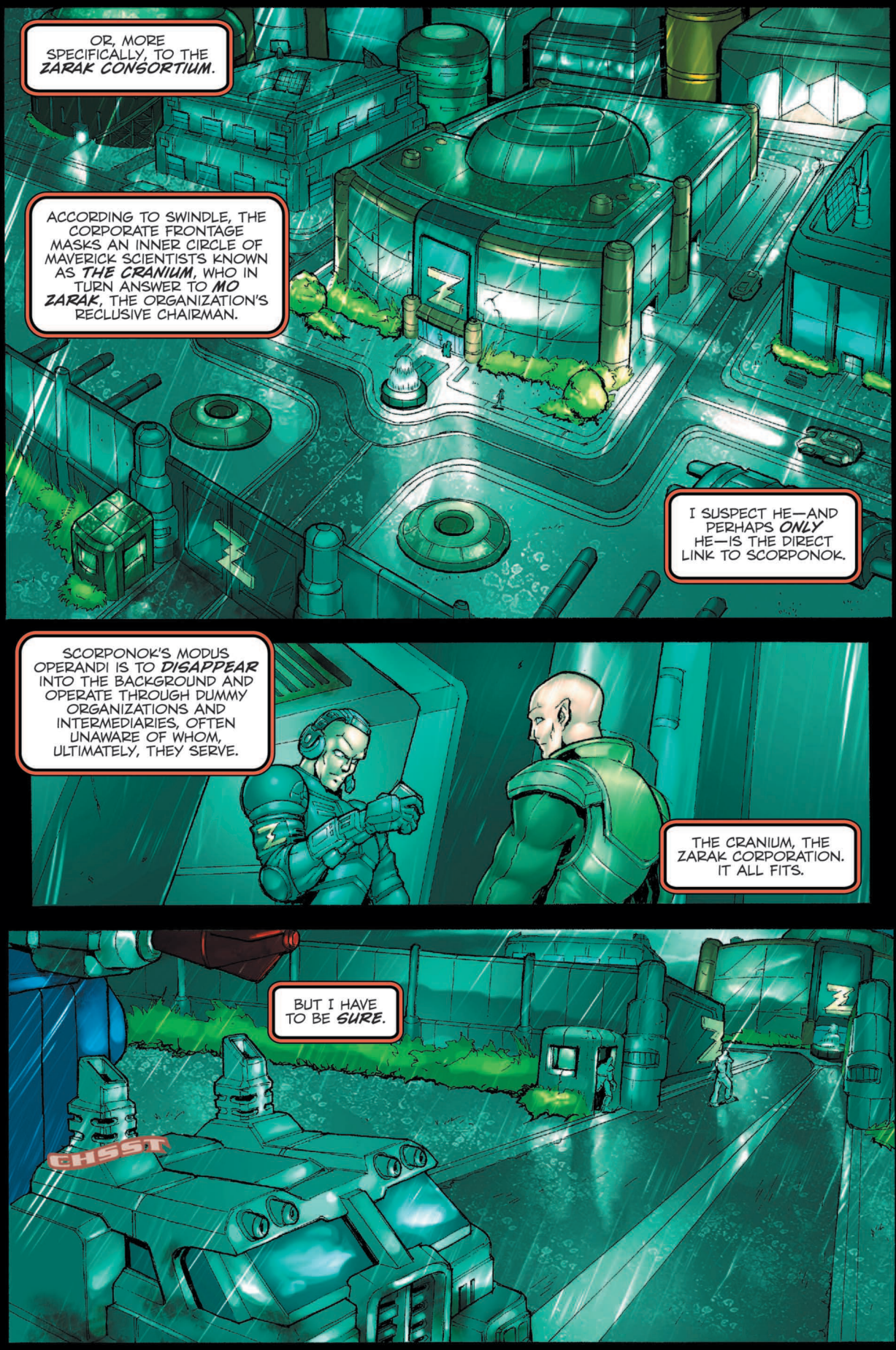

HNNNG!
JUST...
...GIVE ME AN EXCUSE!
AS FOR YOU, KARZAI LORCHA, YOU HAVE A BAD HABIT OF OFFERING MISCREANTS SAFE HARBOR IN RETURN FOR, SHALL WE SAY, UTILIZATION OF THEIR VIOLENT OR CRIMINAL PROCLIVITIES.
DO SO AGAIN, FOR OTHER WANTED CYBERTRONIANS...
"...AND I'LL BRING THE WALLS OF ZULL TUMBLING DOWN."


SO...
...LET'S DEAL.
HN. YOU'RE GOING BACK TO THE REGIONAL DECEPTICON COMMAND HUB, SWINDLE. NO DOUBT TO FACE A MILITARY TRIBUNAL AND COURT-MARTIAL.
I DON'T "DEAL."
WELL, SEE, I'M NOT SO SURE. IN MY EXPERIENCE, EVERYONE—NO MATTER HOW UNBENDING THEY MAY SEEM—WANTS SOMETHING.
EVEN YOU, MAGNUS...
NO. NOTHING YOU HAVE TO OFFER WOULD MAKE ME COMPROMISE MY SWORN DUTY.
OH YEAH? NOT EVEN...
...SCORPONOK?

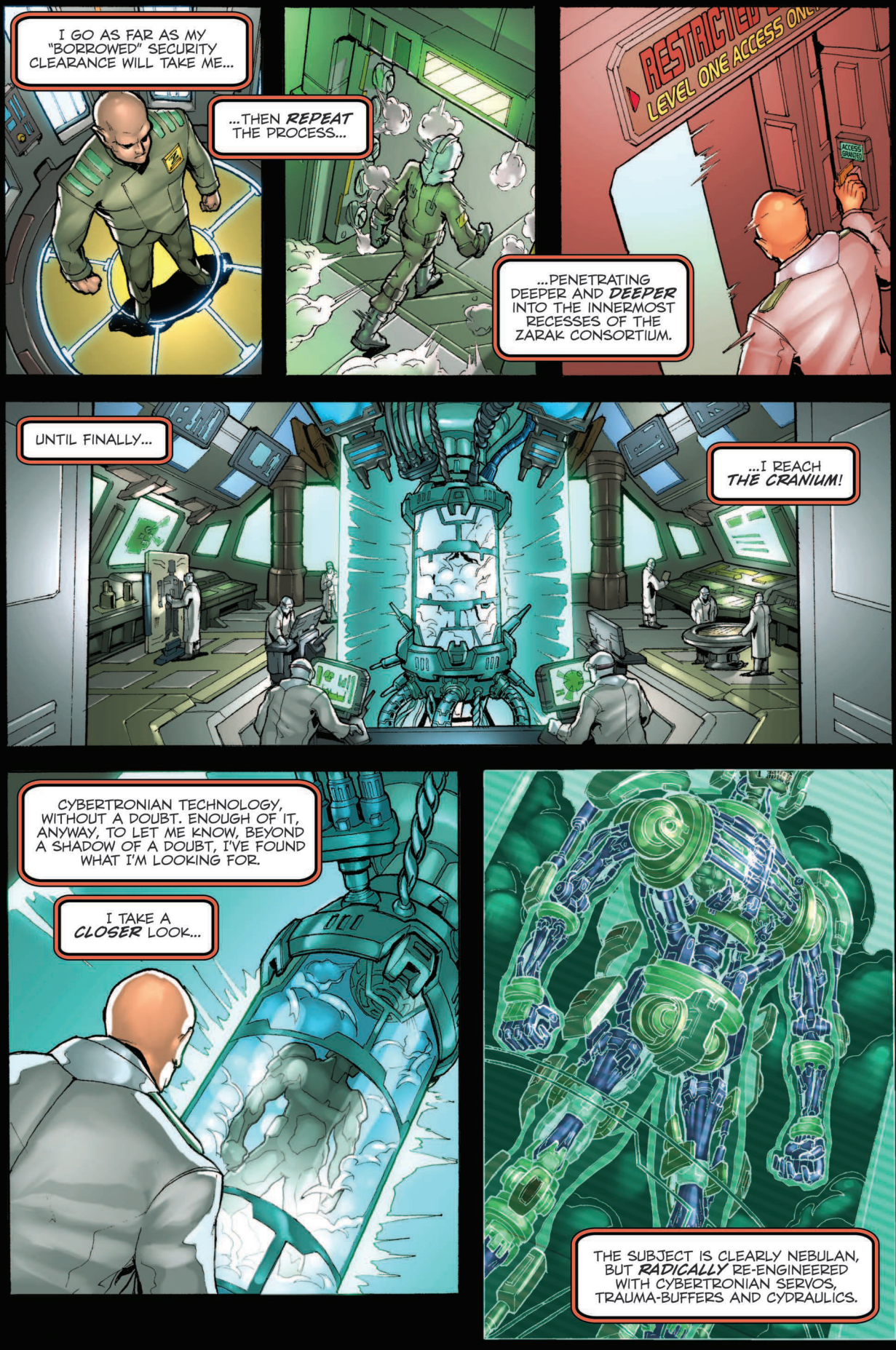

SCORPONOK.
HOW I'D DEARLY LOVE TO CLOSE THAT *PARTICULAR* DATAFILE.
EVEN IN A WAR, THERE ARE *RULES*—CODES OF PRACTICE AND CONDUCT THAT MUST BE ABIDED BY. AND WHERE IT IS MY JOB TO *ENFORCE* THOSE RULES...
...IT WOULD APPEAR, BASED ON SHEER *VOLUME* OF TRANSGRESSIONS, IT IS SCORPONOK'S LOT IN LIFE TO *BREAK* THEM.
ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL TENETS OF THE ALLIED *CODE OF INTERPLANETARY CONFLICT* IS THE NON-INTERACTION ACCORD...
SCORPONOK'S GOT A PARTICULARLY BAD KNACK OF SEEKING OUT TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED AND MORALLY AMBIVALENT SPECIES...
...WHICH *LIMITS* THE SHARING OF CYBERTRONIAN SCIENCE.
...AND *POOLING* RESOURCES TO CREATE NEW AND DEADLY VARIATIONS ON A MILITARISTIC THEME.

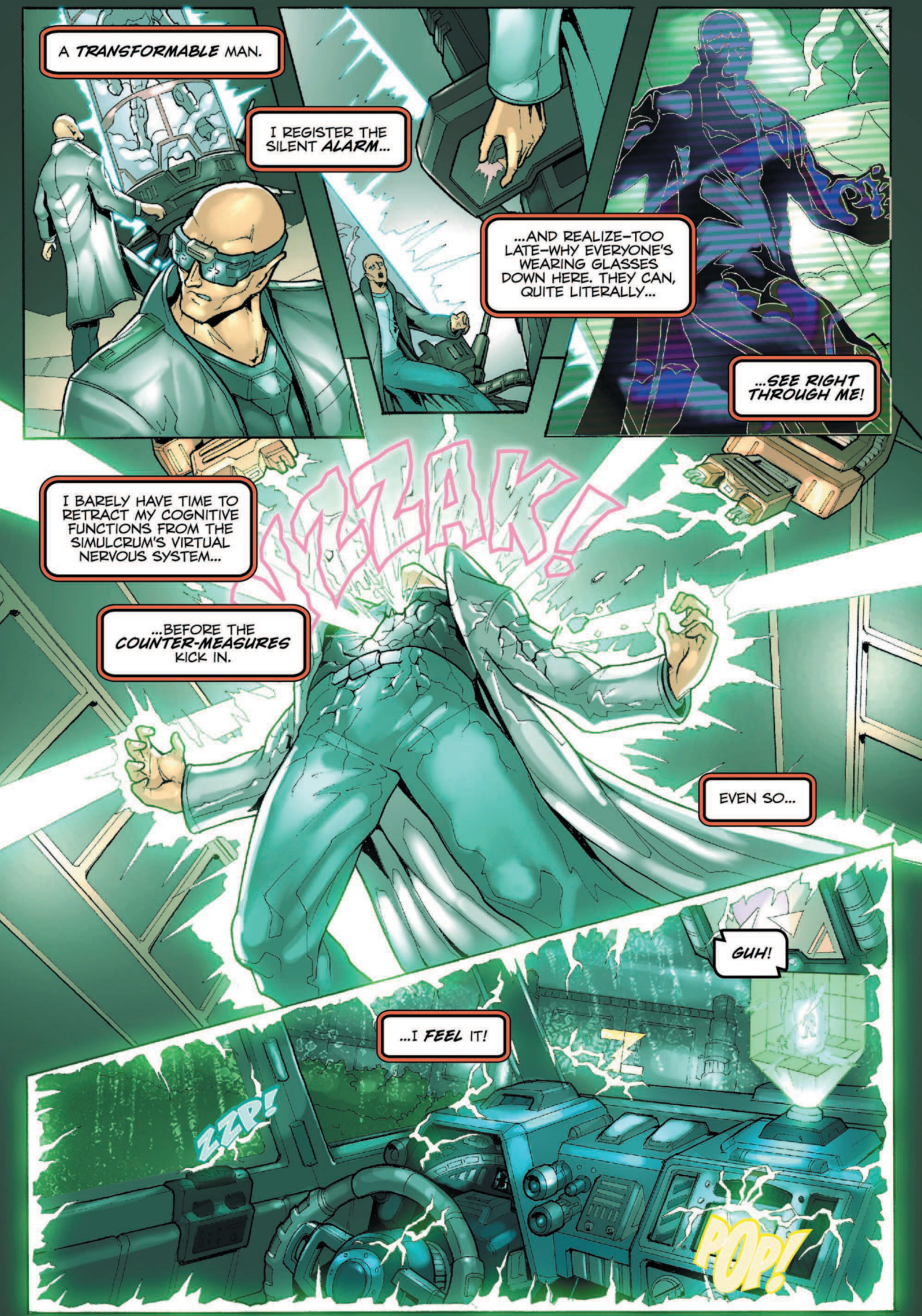

THE MUTUAL ASPECT OF THE ARRANGEMENT LASTS ONLY AS LONG AS IT TAKES SCORPONOK TO ABSORB THE CHOICEST CUTS OF LOCAL INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE. AFTER WHICH...
...HE CAREFULLY ERASES ALL TRACE OF HIS MACHINATIONS AND MOVES ON.
GRUDGINGLY, I CONCEDE THAT SWINDLE IS RIGHT. IF HE KNOWS SCORPONOK'S CURRENT WHEREABOUTS, AND IF THAT KNOWLEDGE MEANS I CAN TAKE HIM UNAWARES, BEFORE HE HAS A CHANCE TO CUT AND RUN...
...THEN HE DOES HAVE SOMETHING I WANT.
BUT IS IT ENOUGH TO MAKE ME "BEND?" IN MY BOOK, ONE COMPROMISE LEADS TO ANOTHER... AND ANOTHER... AND PRETTY SOON...
...YOU'VE CROSSED THE LINE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE HOLDING.

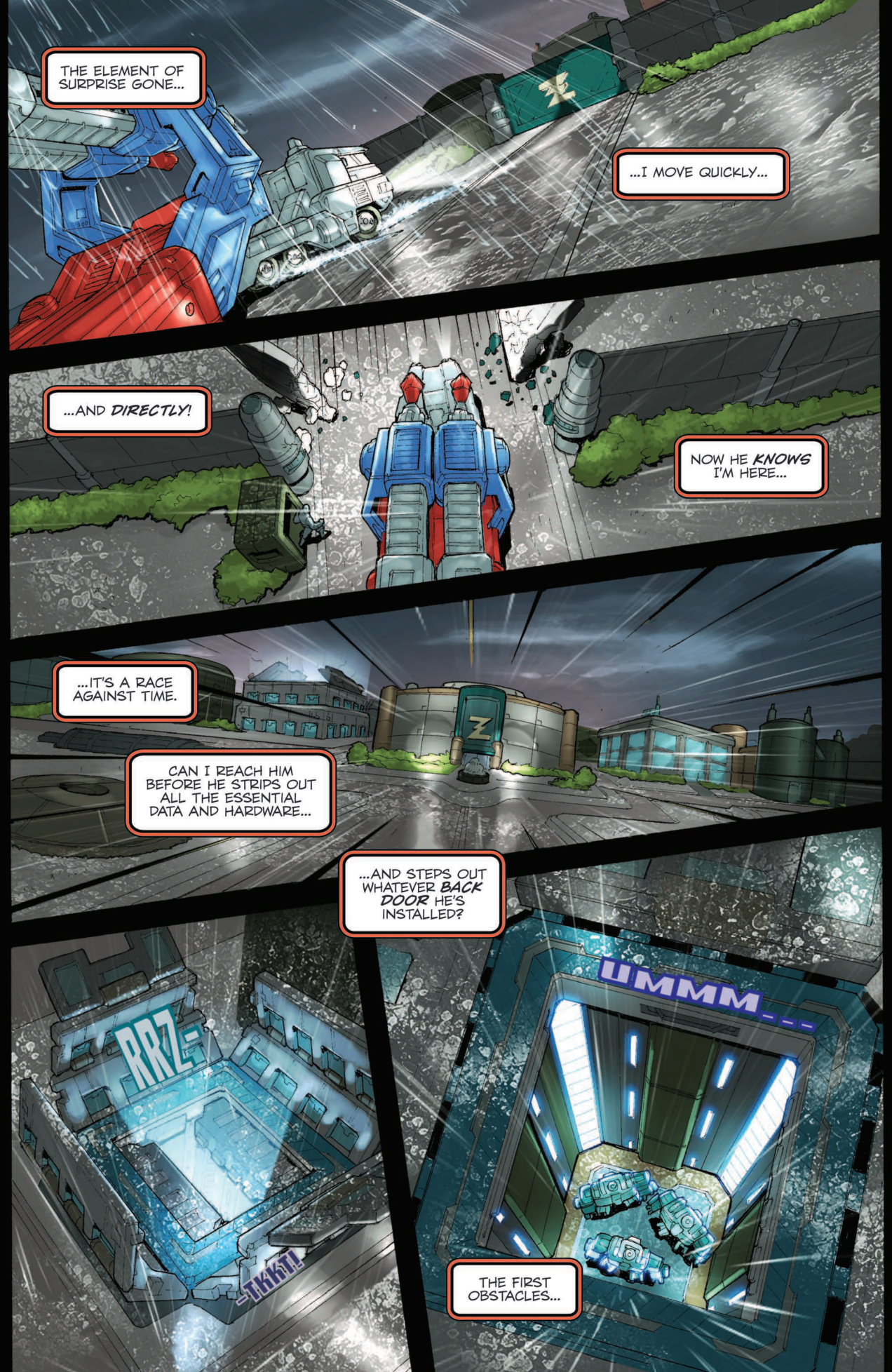

ULTIMATELY, I AGREE TO CUT SWINDLE LOOSE...
...LEAVING HIM ON THE REMOTEST, LEAST SAVORY TRADING POST IN THE QUADRANT, WITH NOTHING OF ANY WORTH TO HIS NAME.
I HAVE NO ILLUSIONS. HE'LL SURVIVE, EVEN *THRIVE*, AND ULTIMATELY RE-OFFEND...
...WHEREUPON THE *NANO-TAG* I APPLIED WITHOUT HIS KNOWLEDGE WILL LEAD HIM RIGHT BACK INTO REACH OF MY *LONG* ARMS.
MEANWHILE, SWINDLE'S INFORMATION—RIGOROUSLY VERIFIED—LEADS *ME*...
...TO *NEBULOS*.


OR, MORE SPECIFICALLY, TO THE ZARAK CONSORTIUM.
ACCORDING TO SWINDLE, THE CORPORATE FRONTAGE MASKS AN INNER CIRCLE OF MAVERICK SCIENTISTS KNOWN AS THE CRANIUM, WHO IN TURN ANSWER TO MO ZARAK, THE ORGANIZATION'S RECLUSIVE CHAIRMAN.
I SUSPECT HE—AND PERHAPS ONLY HE—IS THE DIRECT LINK TO SCORPONOK.
SCORPONOK'S MODUS OPERANDI IS TO DISAPPEAR INTO THE BACKGROUND AND OPERATE THROUGH DUMMY ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERMEDIARIES, OFTEN UNAWARE OF WHOM, ULTIMATELY, THEY SERVE.
THE CRANIUM, THE ZARAK CORPORATION. IT ALL FITS.
BUT I HAVE TO BE SURE.
CHSST

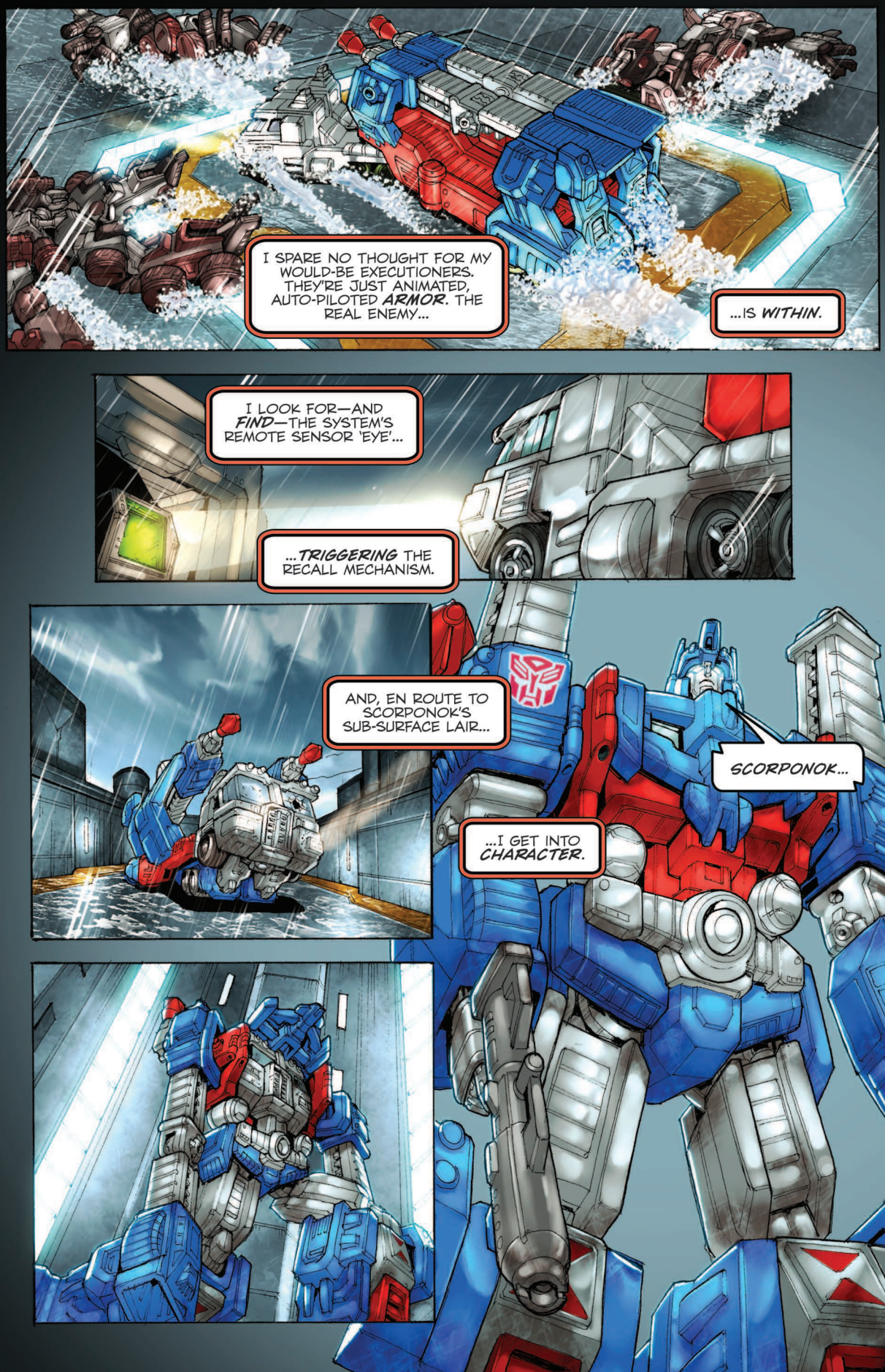

REPLICATED IDENTITY DOCUMENTS AND A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CREATIVE COMMERCIAL BLUSTER GET MY HOLOMATTER SIMULCRUM PAST SECURITY AND RECEPTION...
...AND INTO A MEETING WITH THE CONSORTIUM'S DIRECTOR OF MARKETING.
ONE NON-PERMANENT IMMOBILIZATION LATER...
...AND A QUICK PATTERN REALIGNMENT OF THE HOLOMATTER MATRIX...
...I'M ALL THE WAY IN.


I GO AS FAR AS MY "BORROWED" SECURITY CLEARANCE WILL TAKE ME...
...THEN REPEAT THE PROCESS...
RESTRICTED
LEVEL ONE ACCESS ONLY
ACCESS GRANTED
...PENETRATING DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE INNERMOST RECESSES OF THE ZARAK CONSORTIUM.
UNTIL FINALLY...
...I REACH THE CRANIUM!
CYBERTRONIAN TECHNOLOGY, WITHOUT A DOUBT. ENOUGH OF IT, ANYWAY, TO LET ME KNOW, BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT, I'VE FOUND WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR.
I TAKE A CLOSER LOOK...
THE SUBJECT IS CLEARLY NEBULAN, BUT RADICALLY RE-ENGINEERED WITH CYBERTRONIAN SERVOS, TRAUMA-BUFFERS AND CYDRAULICS.


A TRANSFORMABLE MAN.
I REGISTER THE SILENT ALARM...
...AND REALIZE–TOO LATE–WHY EVERYONE'S WEARING GLASSES DOWN HERE. THEY CAN, QUITE LITERALLY...
...SEE RIGHT THROUGH ME!
I BARELY HAVE TIME TO RETRACT MY COGNITIVE FUNCTIONS FROM THE SIMULCRUM'S VIRTUAL NERVOUS SYSTEM...
SSSZZAK!
...BEFORE THE COUNTER-MEASURES KICK IN.
EVEN SO...
GUH!
...I FEEL IT!
ZZP!
POP!


THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE GONE...
...I MOVE QUICKLY...
...AND DIRECTLY!
NOW HE KNOWS I'M HERE...
...IT'S A RACE AGAINST TIME.
CAN I REACH HIM BEFORE HE STRIPS OUT ALL THE ESSENTIAL DATA AND HARDWARE...
...AND STEPS OUT WHATEVER BACK DOOR HE'S INSTALLED?
RRZ-
-TKKT!
UMMM...
THE FIRST OBSTACLES...


...PRESENT THEMSELVES.
AND SUDDENLY I'M WONDERING ABOUT THAT BIO-ENGINEERED NEBULAN AND HOW, PERHAPS, SCORPONOK'S INTENT IS TO TAKE THE SYNTHESIS OF ALIEN AND CYBERTRONIAN TO A WHOLE OTHER LEVEL.
KZ-TUSH!
BUDDA-BUDDA!
IF SO...
...THEN STOPPING HIM...
SPOW!
UHP!
...JUST BECAME AN EVEN GREATER PRIORITY!
KRAAANG!

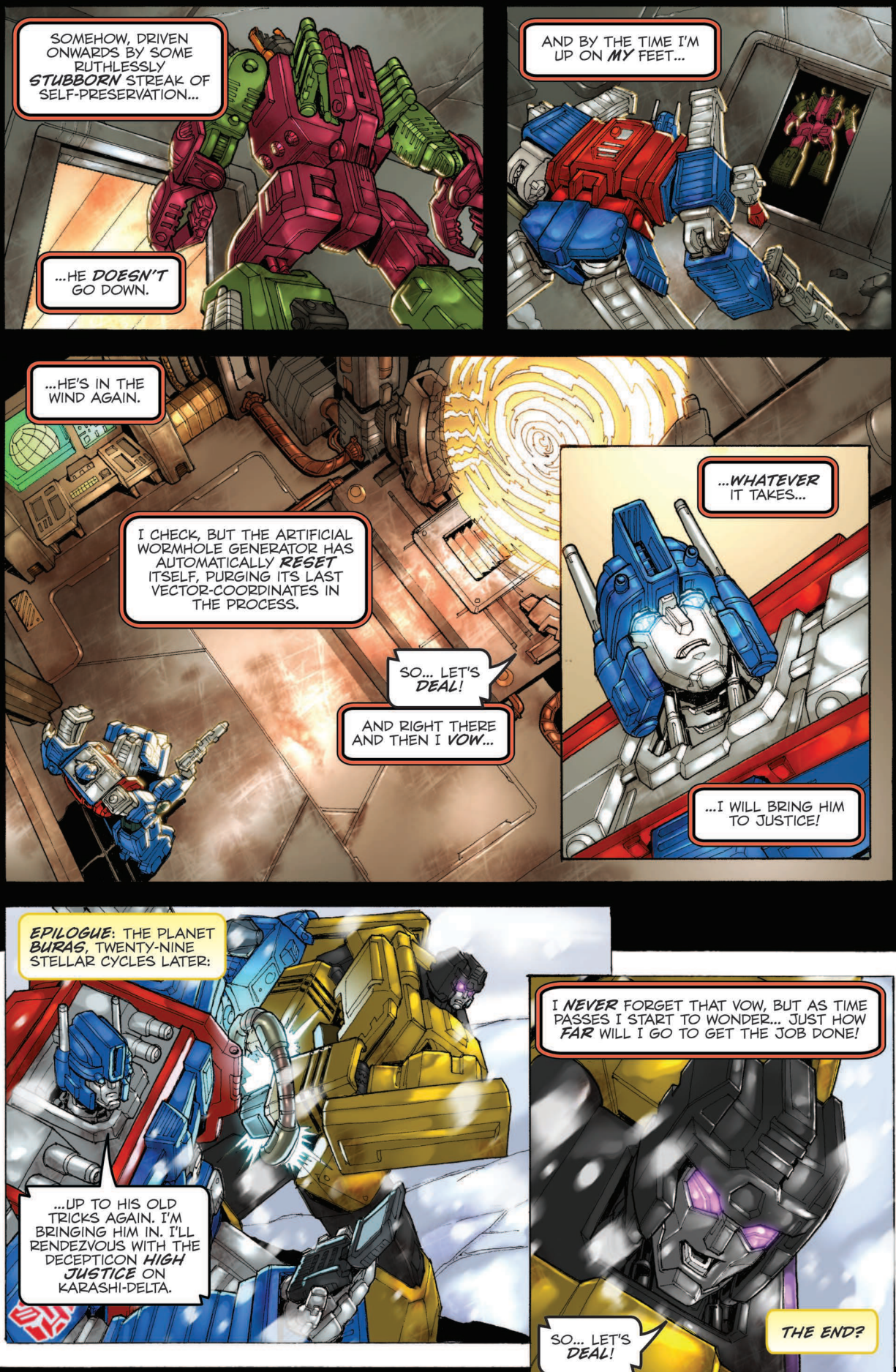

I SPARE NO THOUGHT FOR MY WOULD-BE EXECUTIONERS. THEY'RE JUST ANIMATED, AUTO-PILOTED ARMOR. THE REAL ENEMY...
...IS WITHIN.
I LOOK FOR—AND FIND—THE SYSTEM'S REMOTE SENSOR 'EYE'...
...TRIGGERING THE RECALL MECHANISM.
AND, EN ROUTE TO SCORPONOK'S SUB-SURFACE LAIR...
SCORPONOK...
...I GET INTO CHARACTER.


...I AM A DULY APPOINTED ENFORCER OF THE TYREST ACCORD. WE CAN DO THIS *MY* WAY...
...OR—
YOU...
...WILL *INSIST* STICKING YOUR OLFACTORY SENSORS WHERE THEY DON'T BELONG!
SKAKT!
UNH!
IN THE PAST, I'VE SIMPLY WOUND UP MY OPERATIONS AND MOVED ON. BUT I'M ON THE VERGE OF SOMETHING QUITE *BREATHTAKING* IN SCOPE HERE.
SO...
RUNNG
HUK!
...IT'S *YOU* WHO MUST *GO*.


AS IN DEAD AND GONE!
EH—
KUNNCH!
—UNNNG!
SINCE OUR PATHS LAST CROSSED, MAGNUS, THERE HAVE BEEN...
...REFINEMENTS.
AND THIS LITTLE STORY...


...HAS A STING IN THE TAIL!
TKK-TAANG!
AARK!
SCORPONOK— STOP! STOP! YOU'LL DESTROY EVERYTHING WE'VE BUILT HERE!
DON'T—
ZARAK? NO!
ZAK-
GET BACK! I CAN'T ST—
TAANG!


NO...
WHAT HAVE I DONE?
ZARAK...?
MAAAAGNUS!
THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT!
SCORPONOK, STOP!
DON'T... MAKE... ME...
YAK!
KIZZT!
TT—


SOMEHOW, DRIVEN ONWARDS BY SOME RUTHLESSLY STUBBORN STREAK OF SELF-PRESERVATION...
...HE DOESN'T GO DOWN.
AND BY THE TIME I'M UP ON MY FEET...
...HE'S IN THE WIND AGAIN.
I CHECK, BUT THE ARTIFICIAL WORMHOLE GENERATOR HAS AUTOMATICALLY RESET ITSELF, PURGING ITS LAST VECTOR-COORDINATES IN THE PROCESS.
SO... LET'S DEAL!
AND RIGHT THERE AND THEN I VOW...
...WHATEVER IT TAKES...
...I WILL BRING HIM TO JUSTICE!
EPILOGUE: THE PLANET BURAS, TWENTY-NINE STELLAR CYCLES LATER:
...UP TO HIS OLD TRICKS AGAIN. I'M BRINGING HIM IN. I'LL RENDEZVOUS WITH THE DECEPTICON HIGH JUSTICE ON KARASHI-DELTA.
I NEVER FORGET THAT VOW, BUT AS TIME PASSES I START TO WONDER... JUST HOW FAR WILL I GO TO GET THE JOB DONE!
SO... LET'S DEAL!
THE END?


ART BY KLAUS SCHERWINSKI

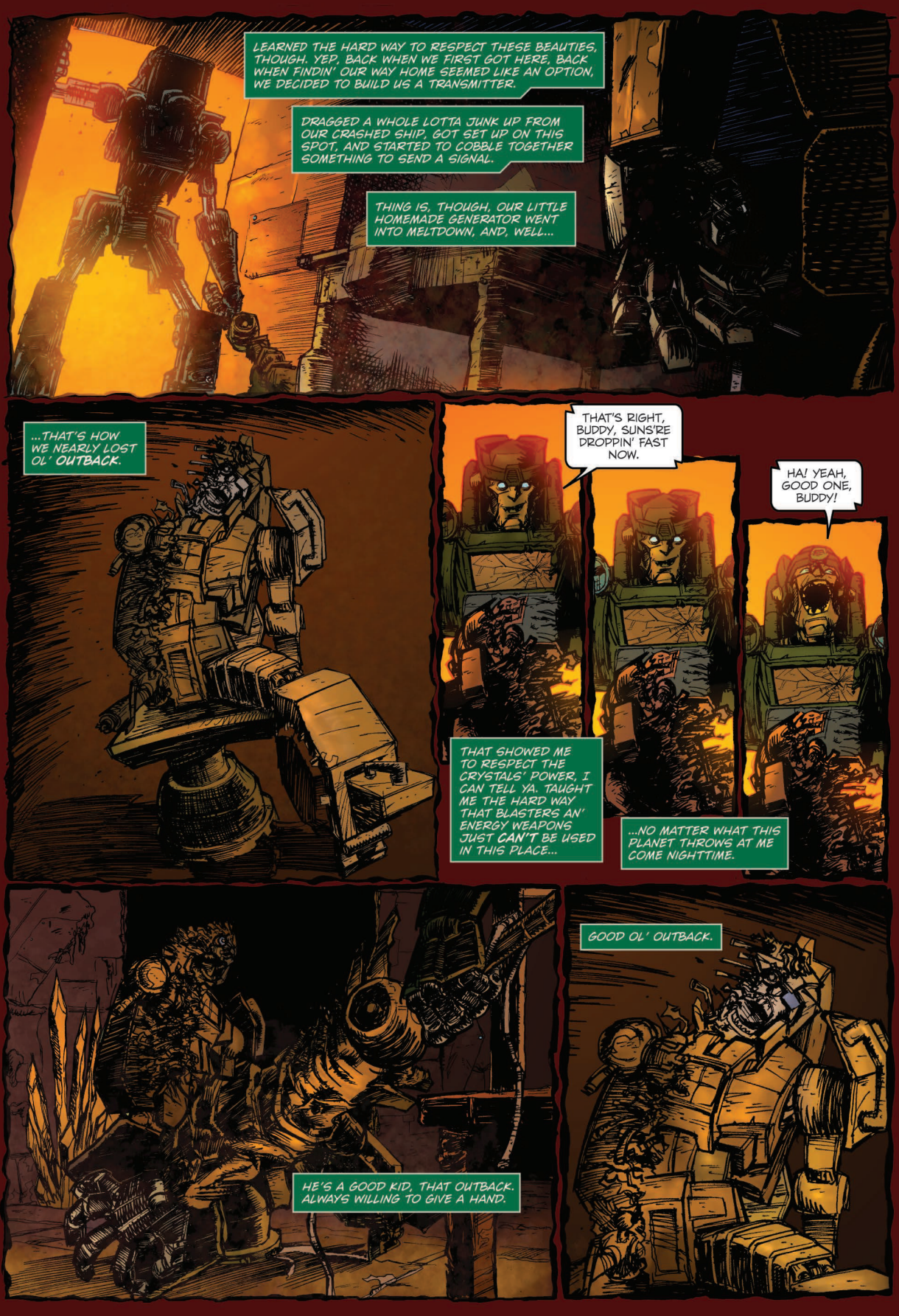

THE TRANSFORMERS
SPOTLIGHT: KUP
ART BY ALEX MILNE
COLORS BY JOSH PEREZ

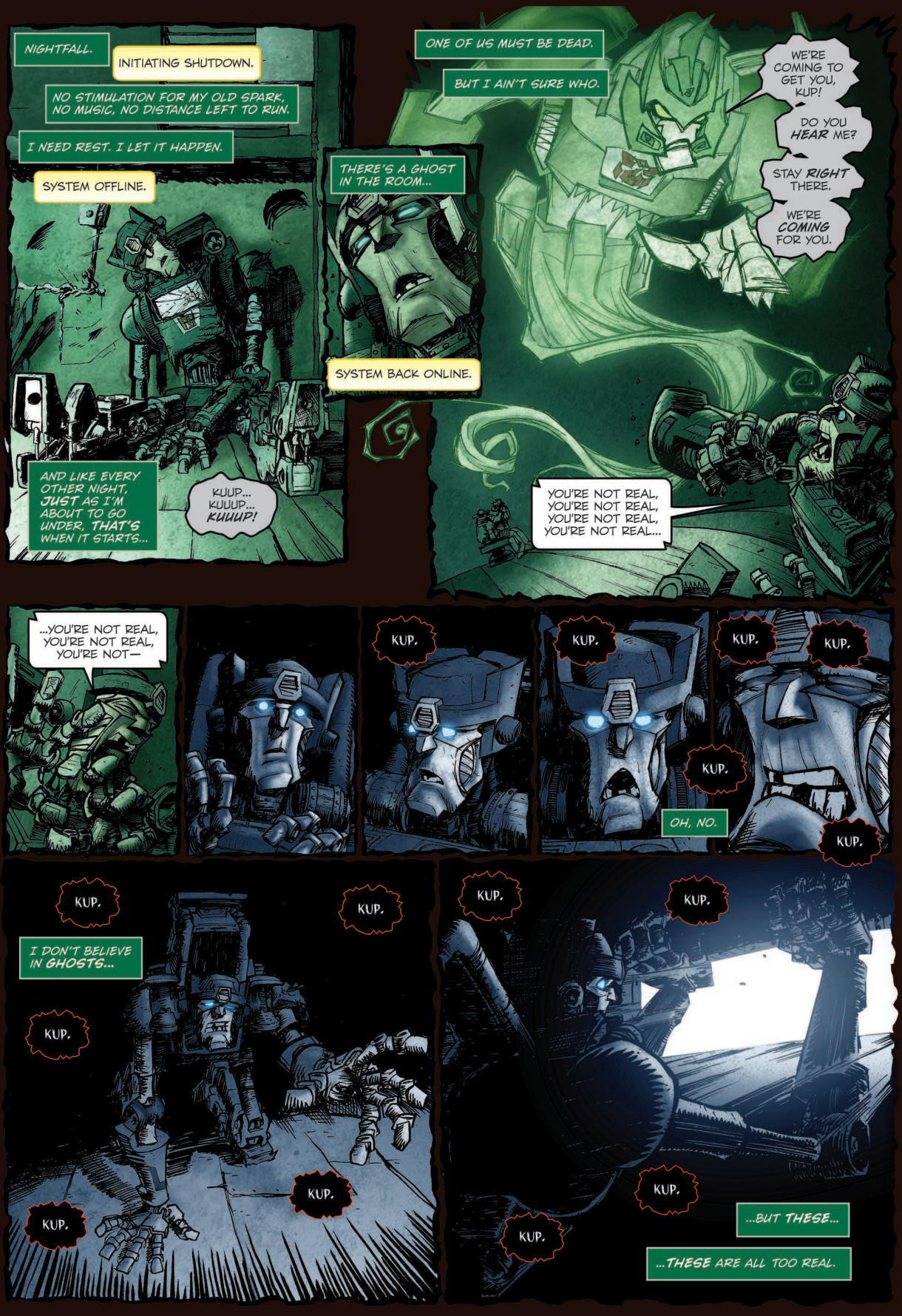

SUH-SALVATION!

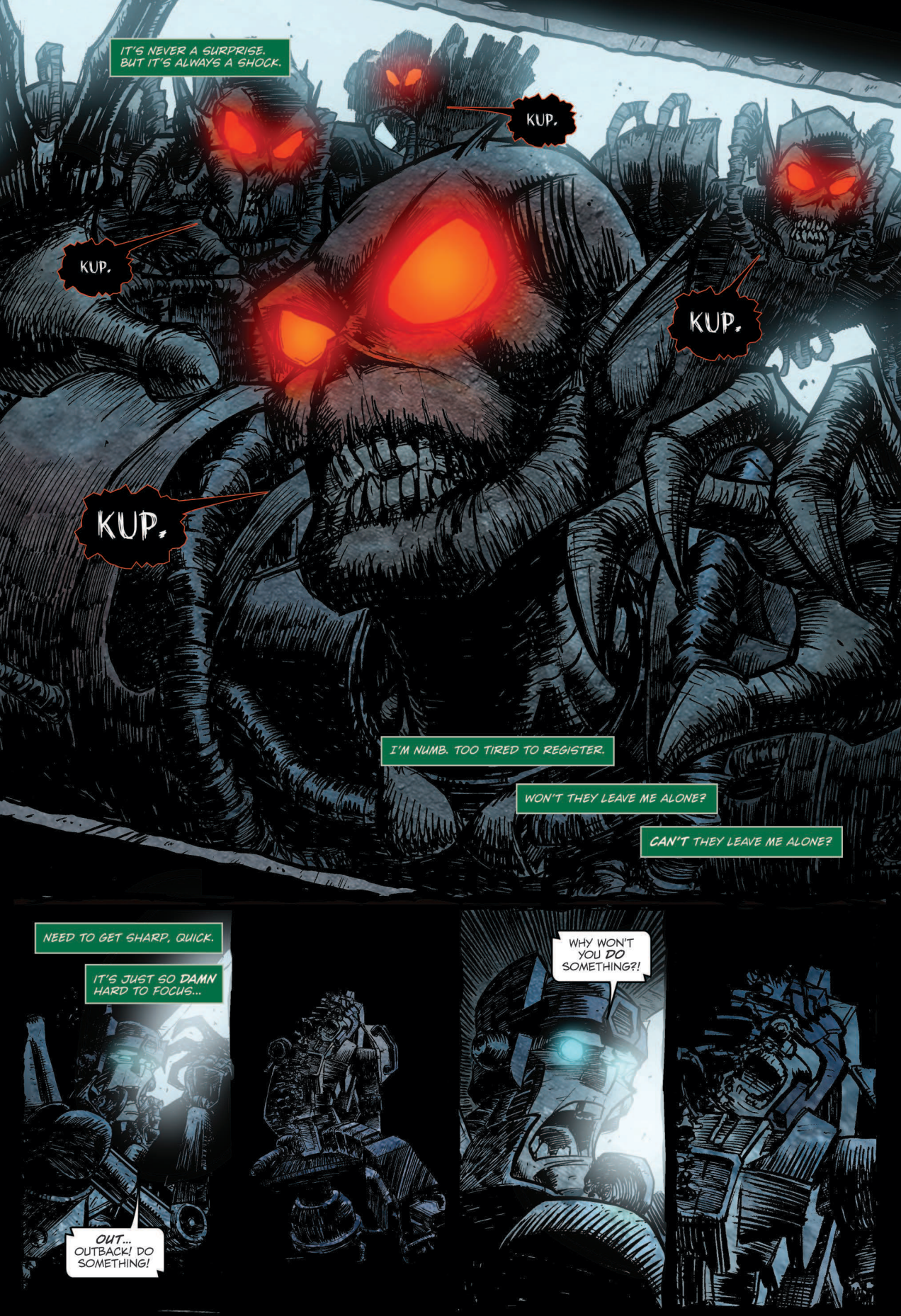

FRIEND... FRIEND? MY SHIP... I CRASH...
...YOU HELP?
WHOOSH
LAST THING I NEED IS ANOTHER SET OF EYES STARING INTO MY SOUL.

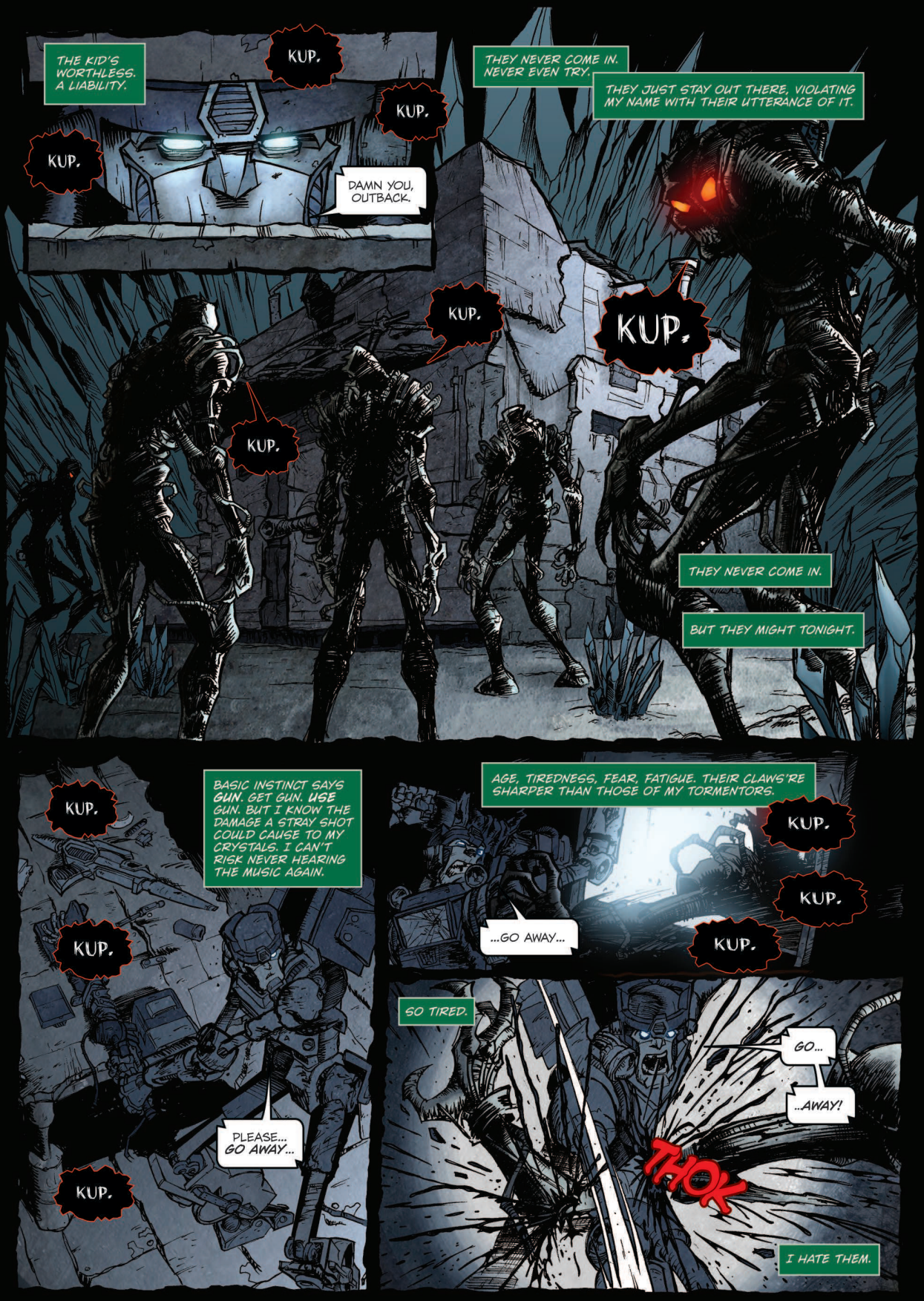

ANOTHER DAY IN THIS PLACE. ANOTHER DAY IN THE LAND OF TWO SUNS. ANOTHER DAY AMONG THE CRYSTALS—MY CRYSTALS, SWEETLY SINGIN' THEIR TUNE TO ME.
CAN YOU HEAR IT? MAYBE YOU CAN'T. MAYBE THE MUSIC'S PRIVATE, MEANT FOR ME AND ME ONLY.
YEAH, I'D LIKE TO THINK THAT.
HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN HERE? I CAN'T ANSWER THAT. I MEAN—I'D LIKE TO, I REALLY WOULD. I'VE TRIED TO FIGGER IT OUT, BUT MY BRAIN JUST WANTS ME TO LISTEN TO THE CRYSTALS, AND I'M HAPPY WITH THAT.
'SIDES, ANY SENSE A' TIME I HAD DIED WHEN OUR HOPE OF RESCUE DID.
I'M OLD. REAL OLD. USETA BE THAT MY AGE WAS AGAINST ME, BUT NOT SINCE I GOT HERE. NOT SINCE OUR SHIP CRASHED N' SPLASHED IN THE SAME LAKE I TOSSED THAT INTERLOPER'S HEAD INTO...
WHO WAS HE? WHAT WAS HE? ONE A' THEM? MAYBE THEY'VE CHANGED APPEARANCE? OR MAYBE IT'S SOME NEW FIEND SENT TO TEST ME?
NAW. GOTTA BE ONE A' THEM. HAS TO BE.
THEY NEVER USED TO COME OUT IN THE DAY, THOUGH, WHEN THE SUNS ARE OUT, AND THE CRYSTALS ARE SINGIN' THEIR LOUDEST.
NEVER USED TO SHOW WHEN I WAS ONLINE BEFORE... ONLY WHEN I DRIFTED... ONLY AT NIGHT...
IT'S NOT NIGHTTIME NOW. SO ENJOY THE LIGHT. ENJOY THE WAY THE SUNS' RAYS PLAY ON THE SKIN A' THESE LIVIN' GEMSTONES.
THE FEAR AND PARANOIA'S JUST LIFTIN' RIGHT OFFA' ME.
IT'S THIS PLACE. THIS WORLD. THESE CRYSTALS. I KNOW LIFE IS WORTH LIVIN' COS' THEY SING ME SO.
AND ONE DAY SOON, THEY'RE GONNA SING ME A SOLUTION TO ALL MY PROBLEMS.


HEH. HOME. IF I'M GONNA LIVE SOMEWHERE, I WANNA BE WHERE THE SONG'S THE LOUDEST, AND THE MUSIC FILLS THIS SPOT.
WE BUILT OUR SHELTER IN THIS THICK OL' CROP OF CRYSTALS, THE DENSEST WE COULD FIND. ALL DAY LONG, SUNLIGHT GLANCES AND DANCES THROUGH THESE WONDERS, RESONATING AND PULSING LIKE A STRONG, VITAL HEART.
IT'S ALMOST ENOUGH TO MAKE ME FORGET I NEED SHUTDOWN.
ALMOST.
I TRY TO WILL THE SUNS TO STAY IN THE SKY JUST AS LONG AS THEY CAN. 'COS AS THE DAY SLIPS AWAY, SO DO I.
YEAH. MY WEARINESS IS CREEPIN' UP ON ME, REMINDIN' ME THAT I HAVEN'T SLEPT A DAY SINCE I GOT HERE.
BUT HOW CAN I?
NO SOONER DO I GO INTO OFFLINE MODE THEN MY ATONEMENT FOR WHATEVER SINS I COMMITTED IN THE PAST BEGINS.
IT'S A MIRACLE I'VE STAYED ALIVE THIS LONG, WITH NO RECHARGE, NO ENERGON, NO REST...
...IN THE DAY, I NEVER NOTICE. IT'S AS IF THE WORLDSONG ITSELF KEEPS ME ONLINE.
MAYBE IT DOES, OR MAYBE IT'S JUST TOO BEAUTIFUL TO MISS, SO I STUPIDLY PUSH MYSELF FURTHER AND HARDER, STAYING ONLINE JUST TO HEAR IT.

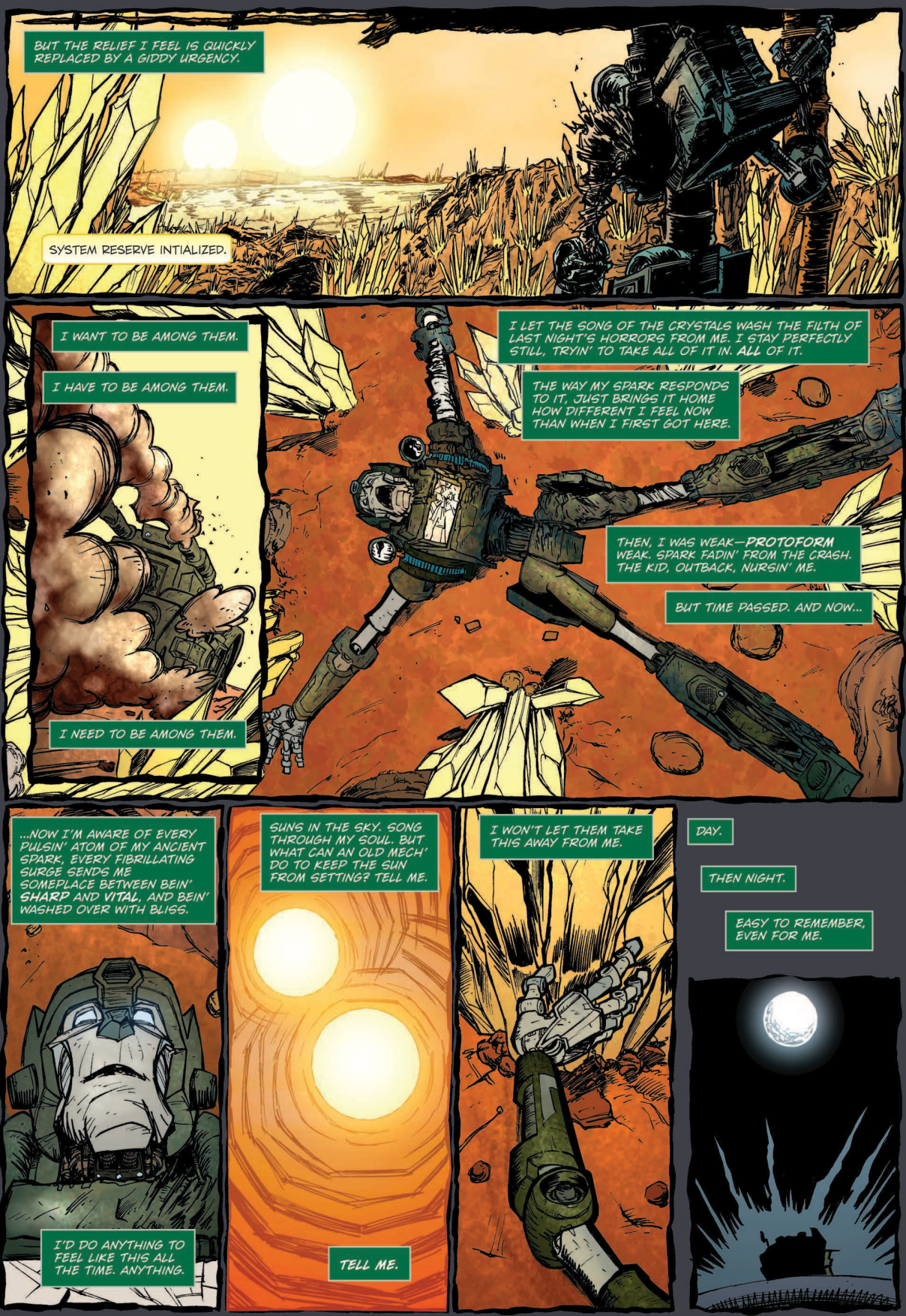

LEARNED THE HARD WAY TO RESPECT THESE BEAUTIES, THOUGH. YEP, BACK WHEN WE FIRST GOT HERE, BACK WHEN FINDIN' OUR WAY HOME SEEMED LIKE AN OPTION, WE DECIDED TO BUILD US A TRANSMITTER.
DRAGGED A WHOLE LOTTA JUNK UP FROM OUR CRASHED SHIP, GOT SET UP ON THIS SPOT, AND STARTED TO COBBLE TOGETHER SOMETHING TO SEND A SIGNAL.
THING IS, THOUGH, OUR LITTLE HOMEMADE GENERATOR WENT INTO MELTDOWN, AND, WELL...
...THAT'S HOW WE NEARLY LOST OL' OUTBACK.
THAT'S RIGHT, BUDDY, SUNS'RE DROPPIN' FAST NOW.
HA! YEAH, GOOD ONE, BUDDY!
THAT SHOWED ME TO RESPECT THE CRYSTALS' POWER, I CAN TELL YA. TAUGHT ME THE HARD WAY THAT BLASTERS AN' ENERGY WEAPONS JUST CAN'T BE USED IN THIS PLACE...
...NO MATTER WHAT THIS PLANET THROWS AT ME COME NIGHTTIME.
HE'S A GOOD KID, THAT OUTBACK. ALWAYS WILLING TO GIVE A HAND.
GOOD OL' OUTBACK.


NIGHTFALL.
INITIATING SHUTDOWN.
NO STIMULATION FOR MY OLD SPARK, NO MUSIC, NO DISTANCE LEFT TO RUN.
I NEED REST. I LET IT HAPPEN.
SYSTEM OFFLINE.
AND LIKE EVERY OTHER NIGHT, JUST AS I'M ABOUT TO GO UNDER, THAT'S WHEN IT STARTS...
KUUP... KUUUP... KUUUP!
THERE'S A GHOST IN THE ROOM...
SYSTEM BACK ONLINE.
ONE OF US MUST BE DEAD.
BUT I AIN'T SURE WHO.
WE'RE COMING TO GET YOU, KUP!
DO YOU HEAR ME?
STAY RIGHT THERE.
WE'RE COMING FOR YOU.
YOU'RE NOT REAL, YOU'RE NOT REAL, YOU'RE NOT REAL, YOU'RE NOT REAL...
...YOU'RE NOT REAL, YOU'RE NOT REAL, YOU'RE NOT—
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
OH, NO.
KUP.
KUP.
I DON'T BELIEVE IN GHOSTS...
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
...BUT THESE...
...THESE ARE ALL TOO REAL.

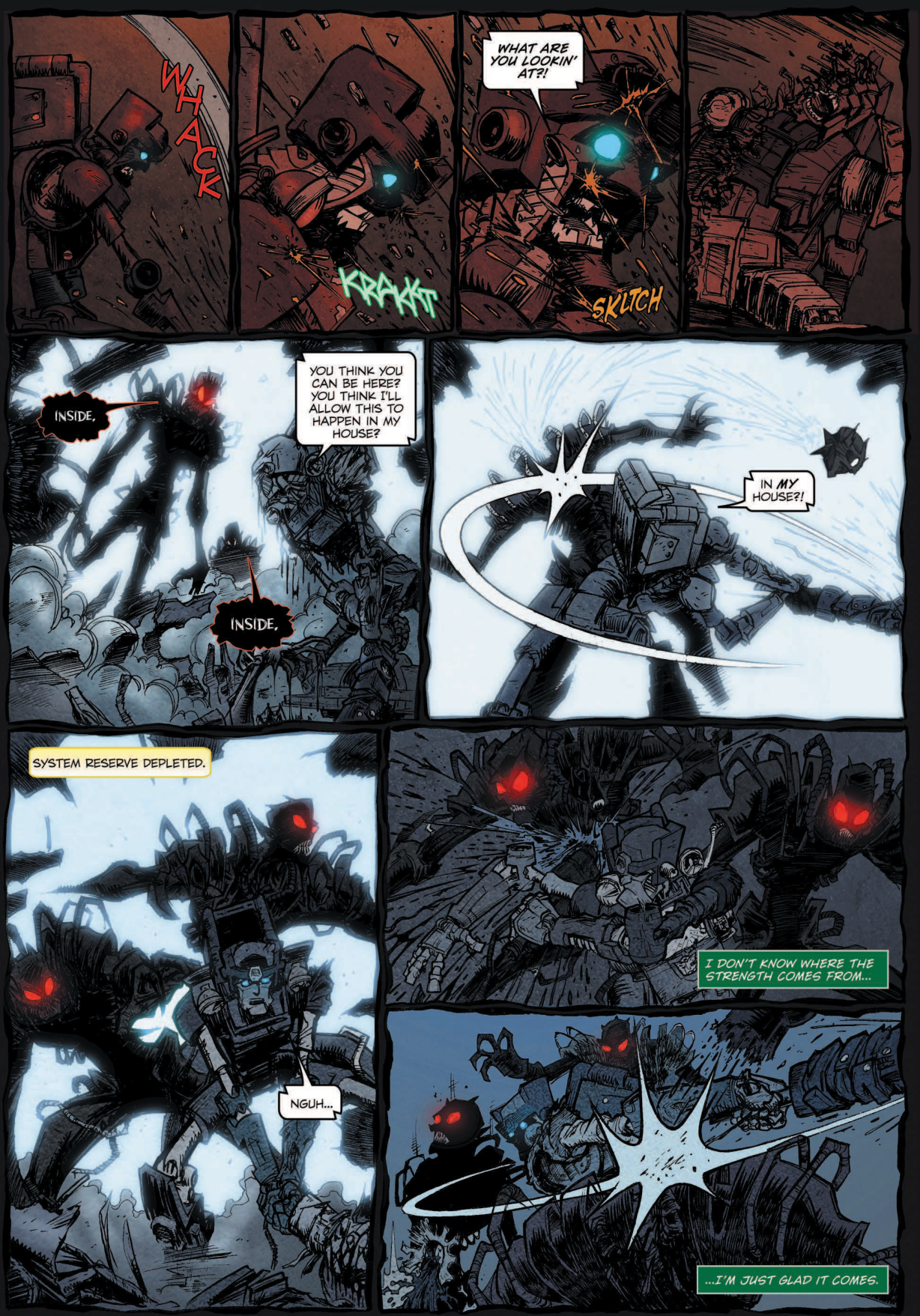

IT'S NEVER A SURPRISE. BUT IT'S ALWAYS A SHOCK.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
I'M NUMB. TOO TIRED TO REGISTER.
WON'T THEY LEAVE ME ALONE?
CAN'T THEY LEAVE ME ALONE?
NEED TO GET SHARP. QUICK.
IT'S JUST SO DAMN HARD TO FOCUS...
OUT... OUTBACK! DO SOMETHING!
WHY WON'T YOU DO SOMETHING?!


THE KID'S WORTHLESS. A LIABILITY.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
DAMN YOU, OUTBACK.
KUP.
KUP.
THEY NEVER COME IN. NEVER EVEN TRY.
THEY JUST STAY OUT THERE, VIOLATING MY NAME WITH THEIR UTTERANCE OF IT.
THEY NEVER COME IN.
BUT THEY MIGHT TONIGHT.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
BASIC INSTINCT SAYS GUN. GET GUN. USE GUN. BUT I KNOW THE DAMAGE A STRAY SHOT COULD CAUSE TO MY CRYSTALS. I CAN'T RISK NEVER HEARING THE MUSIC AGAIN.
PLEASE... GO AWAY...
KUP.
AGE, TIREDNESS, FEAR, FATIGUE. THEIR CLAWS'RE SHARPER THAN THOSE OF MY TORMENTORS.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
...GO AWAY...
SO TIRED.
GO...
...AWAY!
THOK
I HATE THEM.

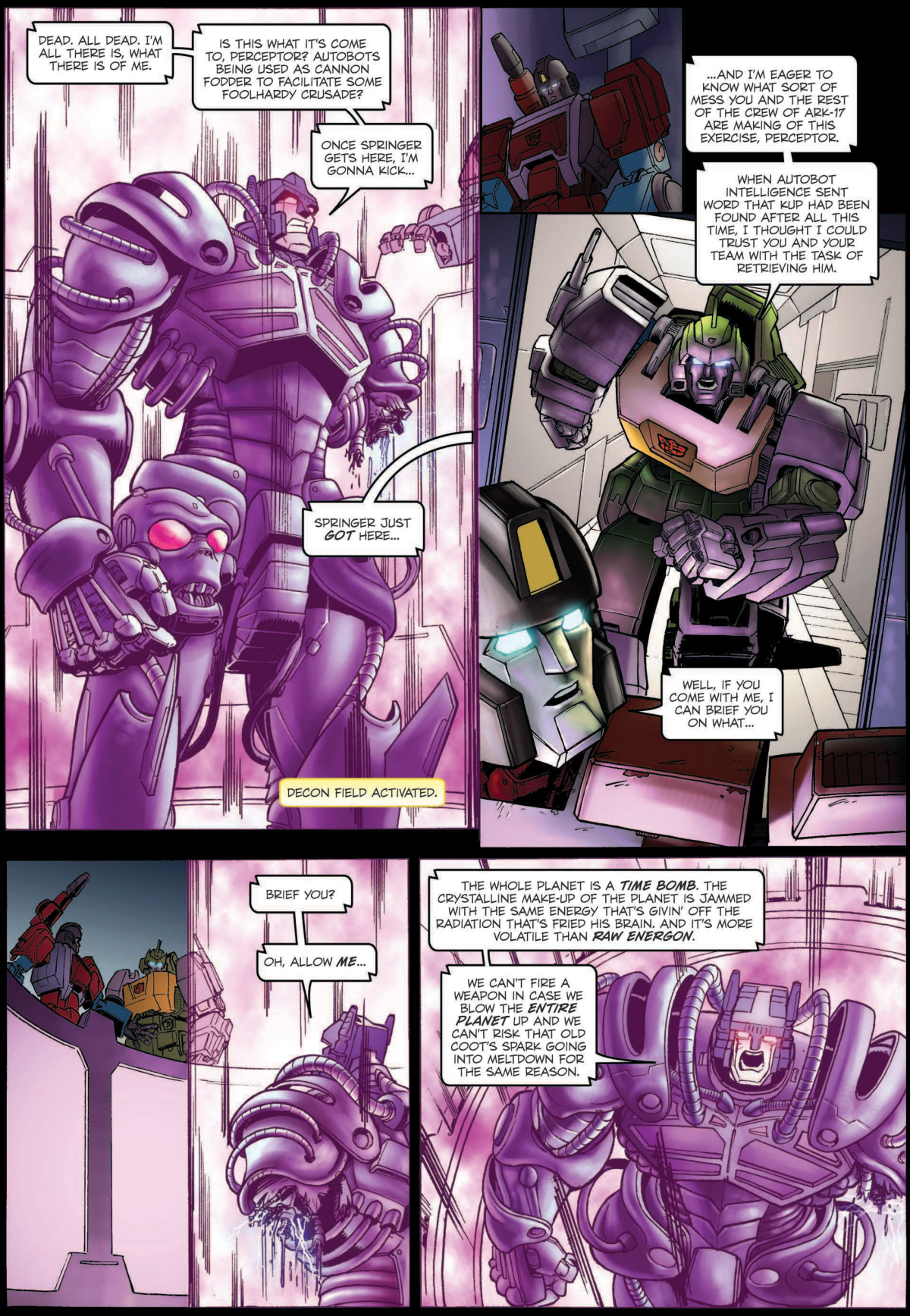

KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
BUT I CAN'T REST...
...KNOWING...
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
KUP.
...THEY'RE OUT THERE.
BUT THEN... IT STOPS.
ALL QUIET.
AND THEN I REALIZE WHY...
SUN'S UP.
IT'S MORNING.
I CAN HEAR MUSIC.
...AH HA...
...AH HA HA...
...AH HA HA HA HA!
I MADE IT THROUGH ANOTHER NIGHT.

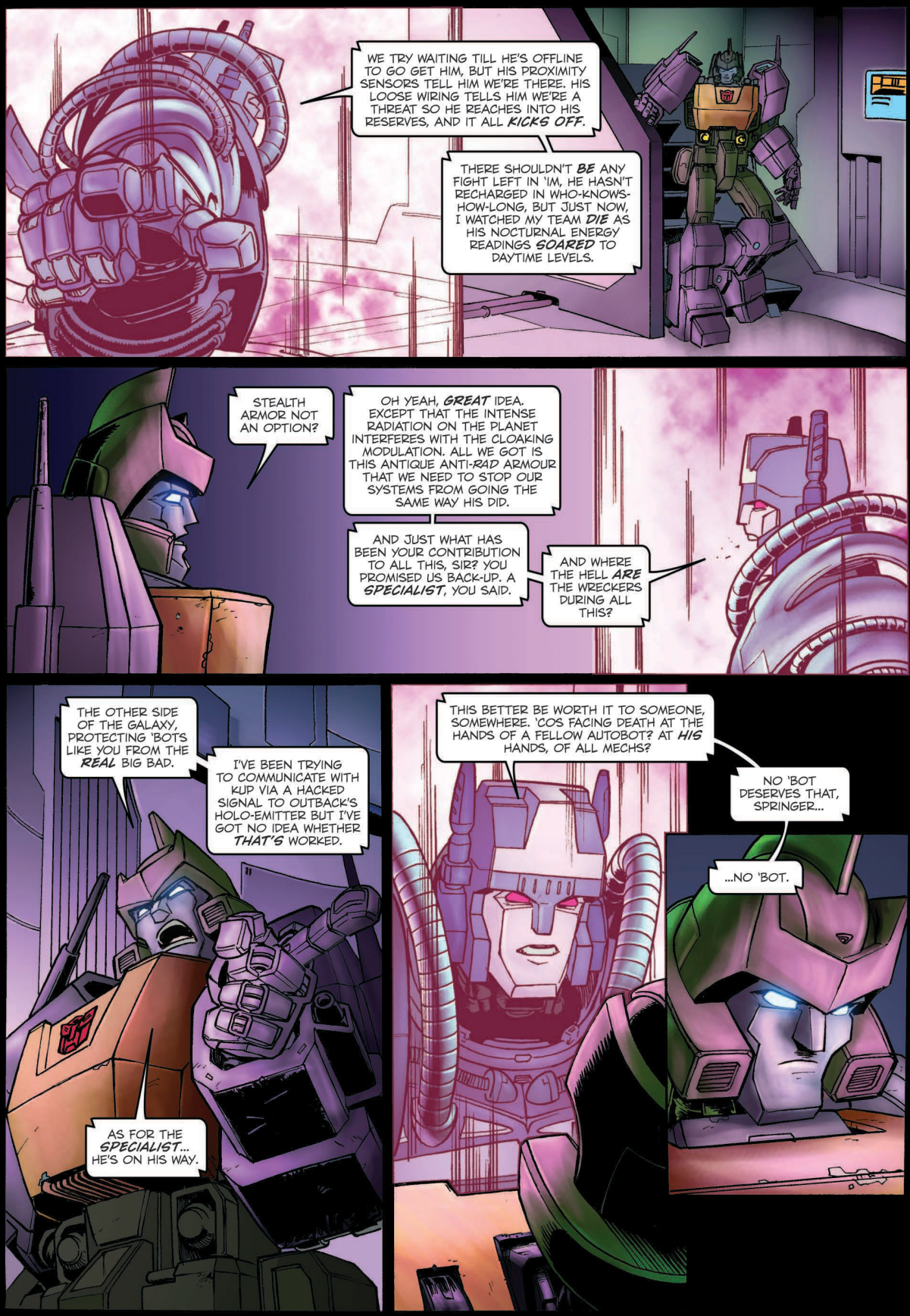

BUT THE RELIEF I FEEL IS QUICKLY REPLACED BY A GIDDY URGENCY.
SYSTEM RESERVE INTIALIZED.
I WANT TO BE AMONG THEM.
I HAVE TO BE AMONG THEM.
I NEED TO BE AMONG THEM.
I LET THE SONG OF THE CRYSTALS WASH THE FILTH OF LAST NIGHT'S HORRORS FROM ME. I STAY PERFECTLY STILL, TRYIN' TO TAKE ALL OF IT IN. ALL OF IT.
THE WAY MY SPARK RESPONDS TO IT, JUST BRINGS IT HOME HOW DIFFERENT I FEEL NOW THAN WHEN I FIRST GOT HERE.
THEN, I WAS WEAK—PROTOFORM WEAK. SPARK FADIN' FROM THE CRASH. THE KID, OUTBACK, NURSIN' ME.
BUT TIME PASSED. AND NOW...
...NOW I'M AWARE OF EVERY PULSIN' ATOM OF MY ANCIENT SPARK, EVERY FIBRILLATING SURGE SENDS ME SOMEPLACE BETWEEN BEIN' SHARP AND VITAL, AND BEIN' WASHED OVER WITH BLISS.
I'D DO ANYTHING TO FEEL LIKE THIS ALL THE TIME. ANYTHING.
SUNS IN THE SKY. SONG THROUGH MY SOUL. BUT WHAT CAN AN OLD MECH' DO TO KEEP THE SUN FROM SETTING? TELL ME.
TELL ME.
I WON'T LET THEM TAKE THIS AWAY FROM ME.
DAY.
THEN NIGHT.
EASY TO REMEMBER, EVEN FOR ME.

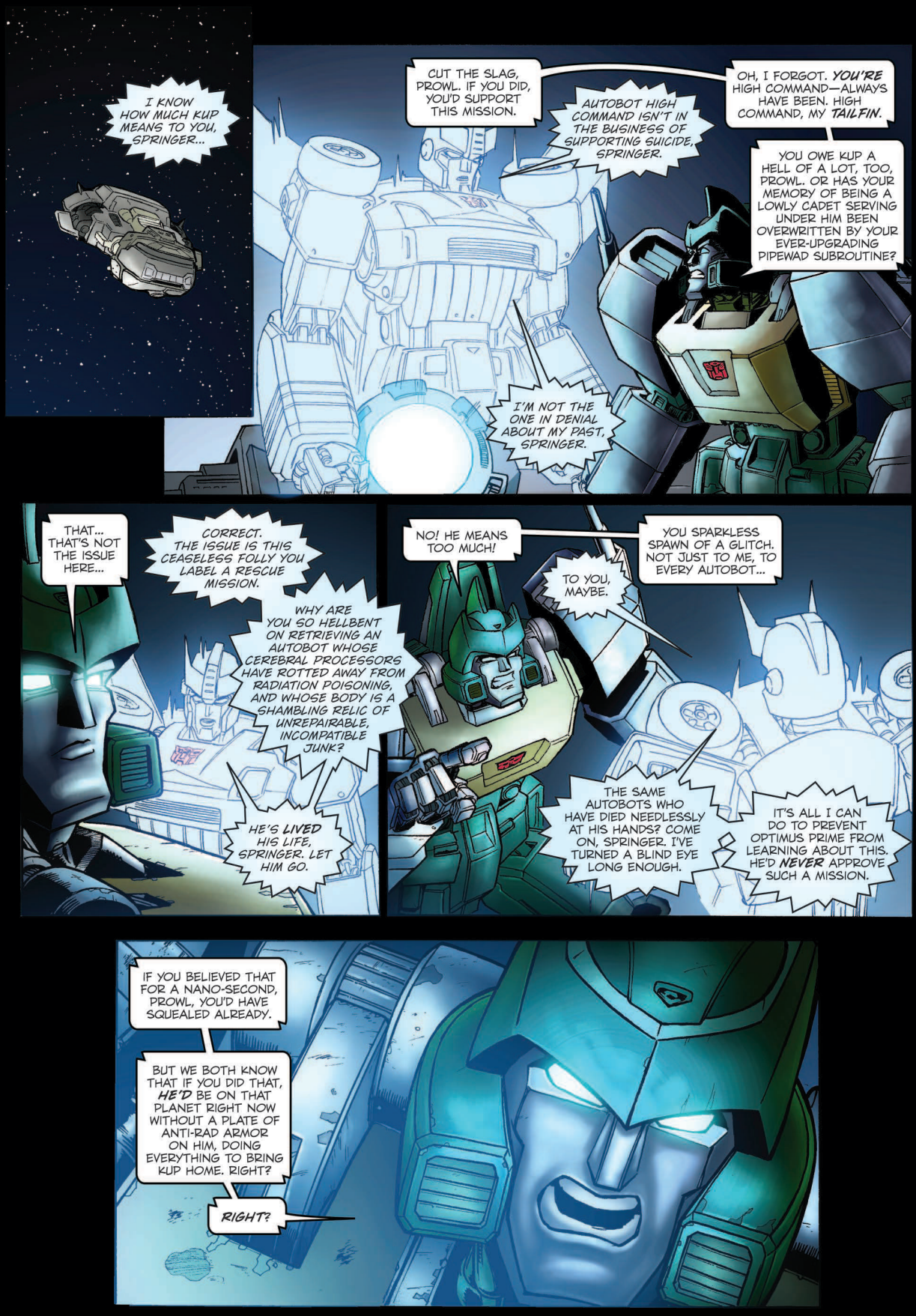

SOON, KUP, SOON...
GO AWAY.
AND SO IT BEGINS AGAIN.
WE'LL BE THERE SOON...
I PROMISE YOU THAT...
KUP.
EVEN AS A GHOST, HE'S TRUE TO HIS WORD.
DAMMIT. OLD FOOL. FORGOT TO SECURE ALL THE SHUTTERS.
DON'T YOU EVEN WANT TO HELP?
DON'T YOU EVEN CARE?
...I DO!
DON'T YOU LOVE THE MUSIC ENOUGH TO FIGHT FOR IT?
NO?
WELL I DO...


WHACK
KRAKK
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKIN' AT?!
SKLTCH
INSIDE.
YOU THINK YOU CAN BE HERE? YOU THINK I'LL ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN IN MY HOUSE?
INSIDE.
IN MY HOUSE?!
SYSTEM RESERVE DEPLETED.
NGUH...
I DON'T KNOW WHERE THE STRENGTH COMES FROM...
...I'M JUST GLAD IT COMES.


MY SPARK LURCHES AND FLICKERS. THIS CAN'T GO ON...
GAH—
-AAAAAHHHH!!
BACK.
SPARKCORE MELTDOWN.
SPARKCORE MELTDOWN.
INTIALIZING EMERGENCY SPARKCORE STABILIZERS.
HHHH... NOW... YOU KNOW...
...WHAT IT'S LIKE...
...TO STARE STRAIGHT INTO ANOTHER 'BOT'S HEART!
ORBITAL JUMP ACTIVATED.
WELL?
WELL?


DEAD. ALL DEAD. I'M ALL THERE IS, WHAT THERE IS OF ME.
IS THIS WHAT IT'S COME TO, PERCEPTOR? AUTOBOTS BEING USED AS CANNON FODDER TO FACILITATE SOME FOOLHARDY CRUSADE?
ONCE SPRINGER GETS HERE, I'M GONNA KICK...
SPRINGER JUST *GOT* HERE...
DECON FIELD ACTIVATED.
...AND I'M EAGER TO KNOW WHAT SORT OF MESS YOU AND THE REST OF THE CREW OF ARK-17 ARE MAKING OF THIS EXERCISE, PERCEPTOR.
WHEN AUTOBOT INTELLIGENCE SENT WORD THAT KUP HAD BEEN FOUND AFTER ALL THIS TIME, I THOUGHT I COULD TRUST YOU AND YOUR TEAM WITH THE TASK OF RETRIEVING HIM.
WELL, IF YOU COME WITH ME, I CAN BRIEF YOU ON WHAT...
BRIEF YOU?
OH, ALLOW *ME*...
THE WHOLE PLANET IS A ***TIME BOMB***. THE CRYSTALLINE MAKE-UP OF THE PLANET IS JAMMED WITH THE SAME ENERGY THAT'S GIVIN' OFF THE RADIATION THAT'S FRIED HIS BRAIN. AND IT'S MORE VOLATILE THAN ***RAW ENERGON***.
WE CAN'T FIRE A WEAPON IN CASE WE BLOW THE ***ENTIRE PLANET*** UP AND WE CAN'T RISK THAT OLD COOT'S SPARK GOING INTO MELTDOWN FOR THE SAME REASON.

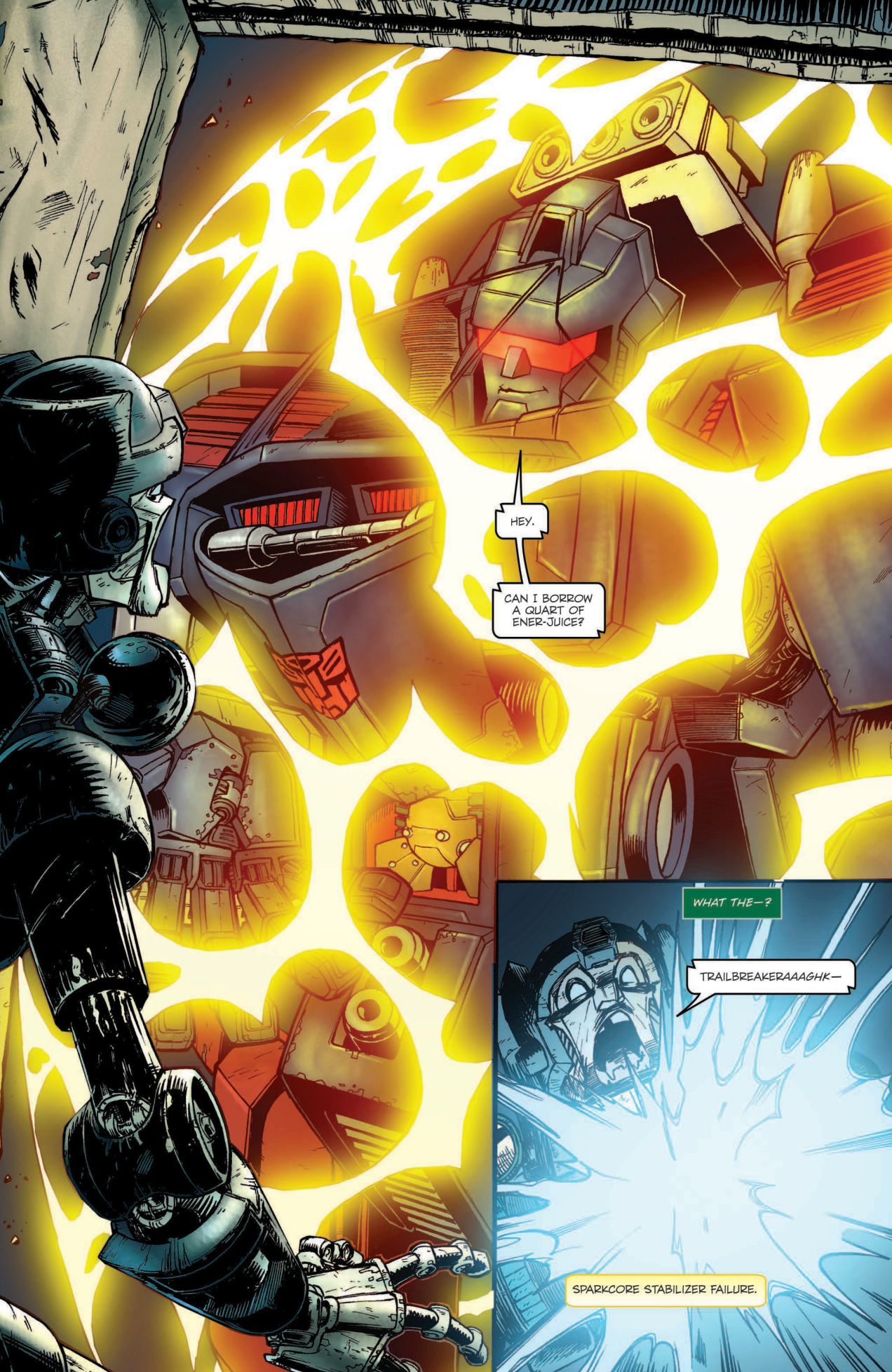

WE TRY WAITING TILL HE'S OFFLINE TO GO GET HIM, BUT HIS PROXIMITY SENSORS TELL HIM WE'RE THERE. HIS LOOSE WIRING TELLS HIM WE'RE A THREAT SO HE REACHES INTO HIS RESERVES, AND IT ALL KICKS OFF.
THERE SHOULDN'T BE ANY FIGHT LEFT IN 'IM, HE HASN'T RECHARGED IN WHO-KNOWS-HOW-LONG, BUT JUST NOW, I WATCHED MY TEAM DIE AS HIS NOCTURNAL ENERGY READINGS SOARED TO DAYTIME LEVELS.
STEALTH ARMOR NOT AN OPTION?
OH YEAH, GREAT IDEA. EXCEPT THAT THE INTENSE RADIATION ON THE PLANET INTERFERES WITH THE CLOAKING MODULATION. ALL WE GOT IS THIS ANTIQUE ANTI-RAD ARMOUR THAT WE NEED TO STOP OUR SYSTEMS FROM GOING THE SAME WAY HIS DID.
AND JUST WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO ALL THIS, SIR? YOU PROMISED US BACK-UP. A SPECIALIST, YOU SAID.
AND WHERE THE HELL ARE THE WRECKERS DURING ALL THIS?
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GALAXY, PROTECTING 'BOTS LIKE YOU FROM THE REAL BIG BAD.
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO COMMUNICATE WITH KUP VIA A HACKED SIGNAL TO OUTBACK'S HOLO-EMITTER BUT I'VE GOT NO IDEA WHETHER THAT'S WORKED.
AS FOR THE SPECIALIST... HE'S ON HIS WAY.
THIS BETTER BE WORTH IT TO SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE. 'COS FACING DEATH AT THE HANDS OF A FELLOW AUTOBOT? AT HIS HANDS, OF ALL MECHS?
NO 'BOT DESERVES THAT, SPRINGER...
...NO 'BOT.


I KNOW HOW MUCH KUP MEANS TO YOU, SPRINGER...
CUT THE SLAG, PROWL. IF YOU DID, YOU'D SUPPORT THIS MISSION.
AUTOBOT HIGH COMMAND ISN'T IN THE BUSINESS OF SUPPORTING SUICIDE, SPRINGER.
OH, I FORGOT. YOU'RE HIGH COMMAND—ALWAYS HAVE BEEN. HIGH COMMAND, MY TAILFIN.
YOU OWE KUP A HELL OF A LOT, TOO, PROWL. OR HAS YOUR MEMORY OF BEING A LOWLY CADET SERVING UNDER HIM BEEN OVERWRITTEN BY YOUR EVER-UPGRADING PIPEWAD SUBROUTINE?
I'M NOT THE ONE IN DENIAL ABOUT MY PAST, SPRINGER.
THAT... THAT'S NOT THE ISSUE HERE...
CORRECT. THE ISSUE IS THIS CEASELESS FOLLY YOU LABEL A RESCUE MISSION.
WHY ARE YOU SO HELLBENT ON RETRIEVING AN AUTOBOT WHOSE CEREBRAL PROCESSORS HAVE ROTTED AWAY FROM RADIATION POISONING, AND WHOSE BODY IS A SHAMBLING RELIC OF UNREPAIRABLE, INCOMPATIBLE JUNK?
HE'S LIVED HIS LIFE, SPRINGER. LET HIM GO.
NO! HE MEANS TOO MUCH!
YOU SPARKLESS SPAWN OF A GLITCH. NOT JUST TO ME, TO EVERY AUTOBOT...
TO YOU, MAYBE.
THE SAME AUTOBOTS WHO HAVE DIED NEEDLESSLY AT HIS HANDS? COME ON, SPRINGER. I'VE TURNED A BLIND EYE LONG ENOUGH.
IT'S ALL I CAN DO TO PREVENT OPTIMUS PRIME FROM LEARNING ABOUT THIS. HE'D NEVER APPROVE SUCH A MISSION.
IF YOU BELIEVED THAT FOR A NANO-SECOND, PROWL, YOU'D HAVE SQUEALED ALREADY.
BUT WE BOTH KNOW THAT IF YOU DID THAT, HE'D BE ON THAT PLANET RIGHT NOW WITHOUT A PLATE OF ANTI-RAD ARMOR ON HIM, DOING EVERYTHING TO BRING KUP HOME. RIGHT?
RIGHT?

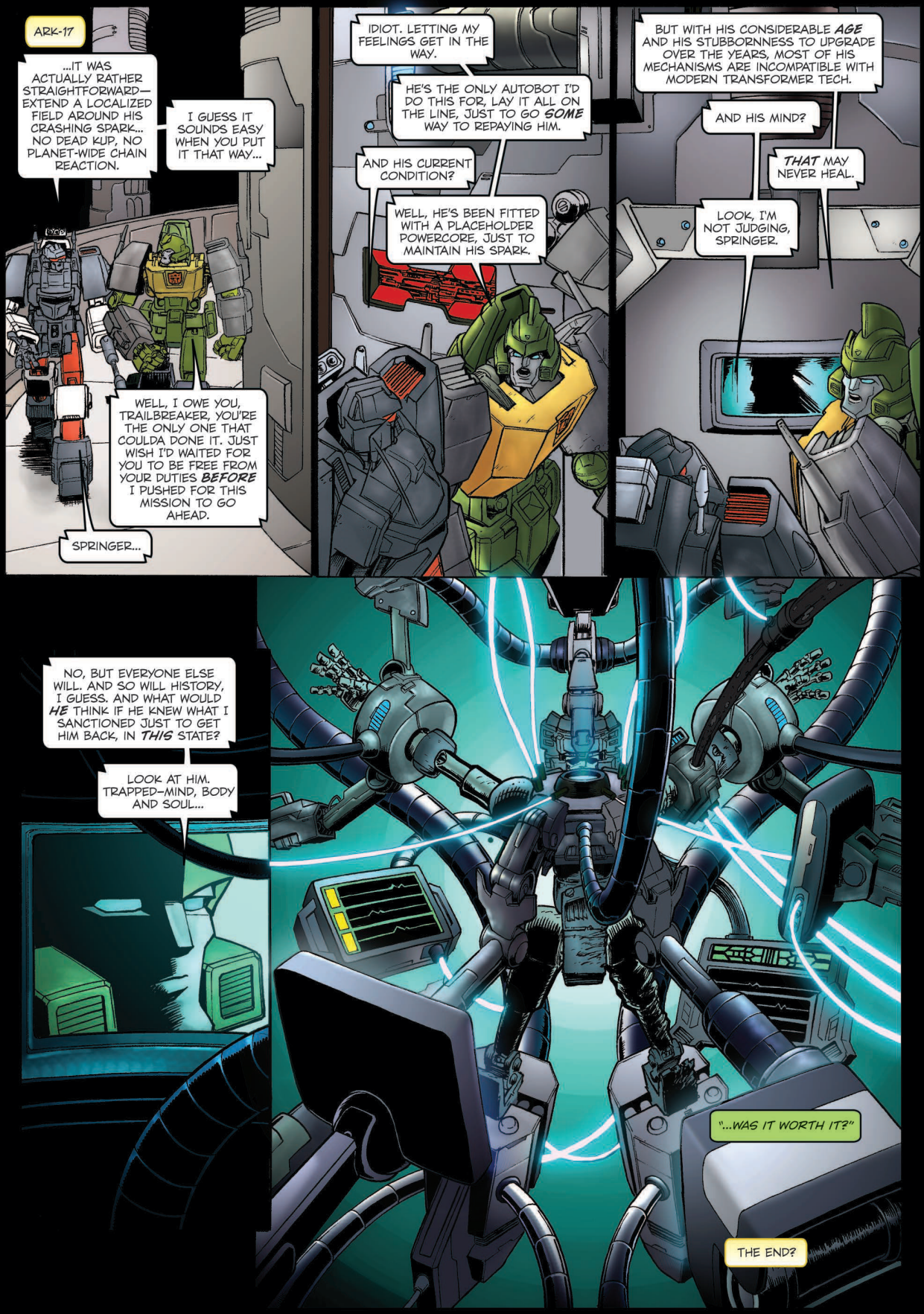

VERY WELL, SPRINGER. I SHALL LEAVE MATTERS IN YOUR CAPABLE HANDS. IF YOU CAN JUSTIFY AND ACCEPT THE VAST LOSS OF RESOURCES AND LIFE, ON YOUR OWN HEAD BE IT.
BUT I THINK YOU KNOW THIS CAN'T CONTINUE. RIGHT NOW, THE TALENTS OF THE LEADER OF THE WRECKERS COULD BE PUT TO MORE FRUITFUL USE WITH HIS TEAM.
THAT WOULD *REALLY* BE SERVING YOUR FELLOW AUTOBOTS.
PROWL OUT.
SPRINGER, I'M AFRAID PROWL'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCENARIO IS CORRECT.
LOOK, I KNOW, ALRIGHT? BUT IT'S NOT JUST ME THAT KUP'S TRAINED UP, THERE'S SIDESWIPE AND SUNSTREAKER, HOT ROD... PRIME HIMSELF, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!
THIS IS FOR *THEM*, TOO. WE, *THE AUTOBOTS*, WE OWE IT TO HIM.
I UNDERSTAND, SPRINGER. BUT PERHAPS WHAT YOU OWE TO KUP IS TO STAY TRUE TO THE IDEALS AND VALUES HE IMPARTED TO YOU ALL.
A DOGGED BELIEF IN NEVER GIVING UP MAY BE A VIRTUE HE EXTOLLED, BUT AT THE COST OF YOUR COMRADES' LIVES? WHAT WOULD *HE* THINK OF ALL THIS?
I—
SPRINGER!
HM?
HE'S *HERE*, SPRINGER. HIS SHIP DOCKED A DEMI-CYCLE AGO.
YES! *YESS!*
WHAT? WHAT IS IT?
BACK-UP.


TONIGHT, SOMETHING'S DIFFERENT.
I THINK IT'S ME.
KUP, JUST HANG ON. DON'T FIGHT IT.
IT'S NEARLY OVER.
WE'RE BRINGING YOU HOME.
KUP.
KUP.
COME FOR YOU, KUP.
NOT LEAVING TILL WE HAVE YOU.
WELL, THEN...
...COME GET ME.
EVERY PULSE OF MY SPARK TELLS ME...
...THIS IS IT.
OUTBACK!


...HHUHHHH...
SYSTEM RESERVE DEPLETED.
MY SPARK IS PURE, AND THESE MONSTERS HATE ME FOR IT.
I YEARN FOR THE SUN'S RAYS...
...BUT IT'D BE NO USE. I'LL HEAR THEIR SONG NO MORE.
NUGH—NO...
SPARKCORE MELTDOWN IMMINENT.
INITIALIZING EMERGENCY SPARKCORE STABILIZERS.
CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE.
THE LIGHT INSIDE ME SCARES THEM. GOOD.
WHILE THEY COWER, I MAKE GOOD MY ESCAPE.
SCREW IT. IF I'M TO BE DRIVEN OUT....
...IT'LL BE THROUGH MY OWN FRONT...


HEY.
CAN I BORROW A QUART OF ENER-JUICE?
WHAT THE—?
TRAILBREAKERAAAGHK—
SPARKCORE STABILIZER FAILURE.


MELTDOWN IMMINENT. MELTDOWN IMMINENT. MELTDOWN IMMINENT.
AW, SLAG. IT'S ALL GONNA GO OFF.
HANG ON...
MELTDOWN IMMINENT. MELTDOWN IMMI–
NOT AFTER I WRAP THIS BAD BOY UP, IT AIN'T.
WHUMP
HA! GOT IT! I GOT... KUP? KUP!
DAMN. SPRINGER? WE GOT AN EMERGENCY...
ORBITAL JUMP ACTIVATED.
KUP.
KUP...
WE GOT YOU, OLD-TIMER...
..WE GOT YOU.


ARK-17
...IT WAS ACTUALLY RATHER STRAIGHTFORWARD—EXTEND A LOCALIZED FIELD AROUND HIS CRASHING SPARK... NO DEAD KUP, NO PLANET-WIDE CHAIN REACTION.
I GUESS IT SOUNDS EASY WHEN YOU PUT IT THAT WAY...
WELL, I OWE YOU, TRAILBREAKER, YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE THAT COULDA DONE IT. JUST WISH I'D WAITED FOR YOU TO BE FREE FROM YOUR DUTIES BEFORE I PUSHED FOR THIS MISSION TO GO AHEAD.
SPRINGER...
IDIOT. LETTING MY FEELINGS GET IN THE WAY.
HE'S THE ONLY AUTOBOT I'D DO THIS FOR, LAY IT ALL ON THE LINE, JUST TO GO SOME WAY TO REPAYING HIM.
AND HIS CURRENT CONDITION?
WELL, HE'S BEEN FITTED WITH A PLACEHOLDER POWERCORE, JUST TO MAINTAIN HIS SPARK.
BUT WITH HIS CONSIDERABLE AGE AND HIS STUBBORNNESS TO UPGRADE OVER THE YEARS, MOST OF HIS MECHANISMS ARE INCOMPATIBLE WITH MODERN TRANSFORMER TECH.
AND HIS MIND?
THAT MAY NEVER HEAL.
LOOK, I'M NOT JUDGING, SPRINGER.
NO, BUT EVERYONE ELSE WILL. AND SO WILL HISTORY, I GUESS. AND WHAT WOULD HE THINK IF HE KNEW WHAT I SANCTIONED JUST TO GET HIM BACK, IN THIS STATE?
LOOK AT HIM. TRAPPED–MIND, BODY AND SOUL...
"...WAS IT WORTH IT?"
THE END?


ART BY NICK ROCHE
COLORS BY JOSH BURCHAM

THE TRANSFORMERS

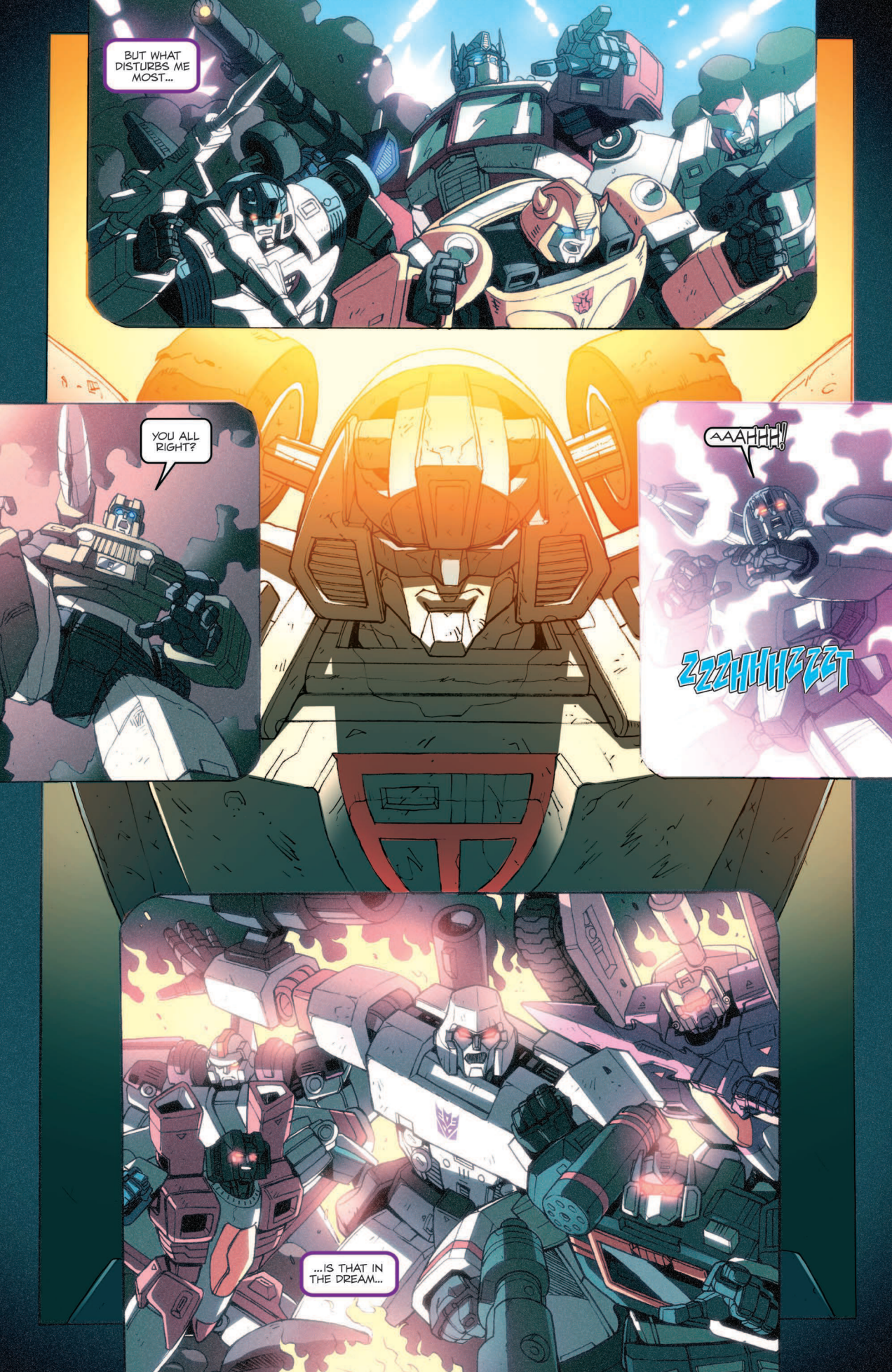
SPOTLIGHT: MIRAGE

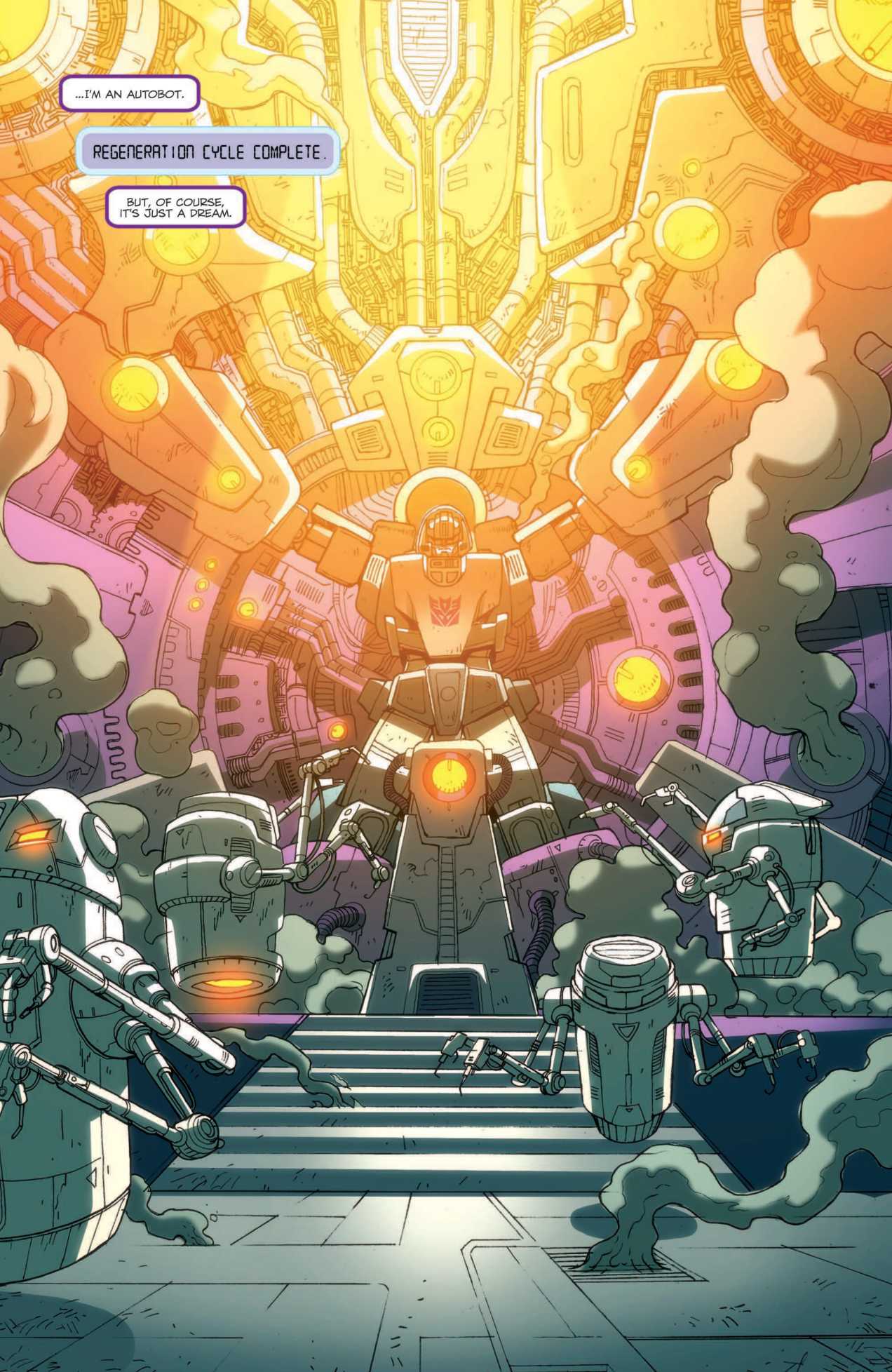


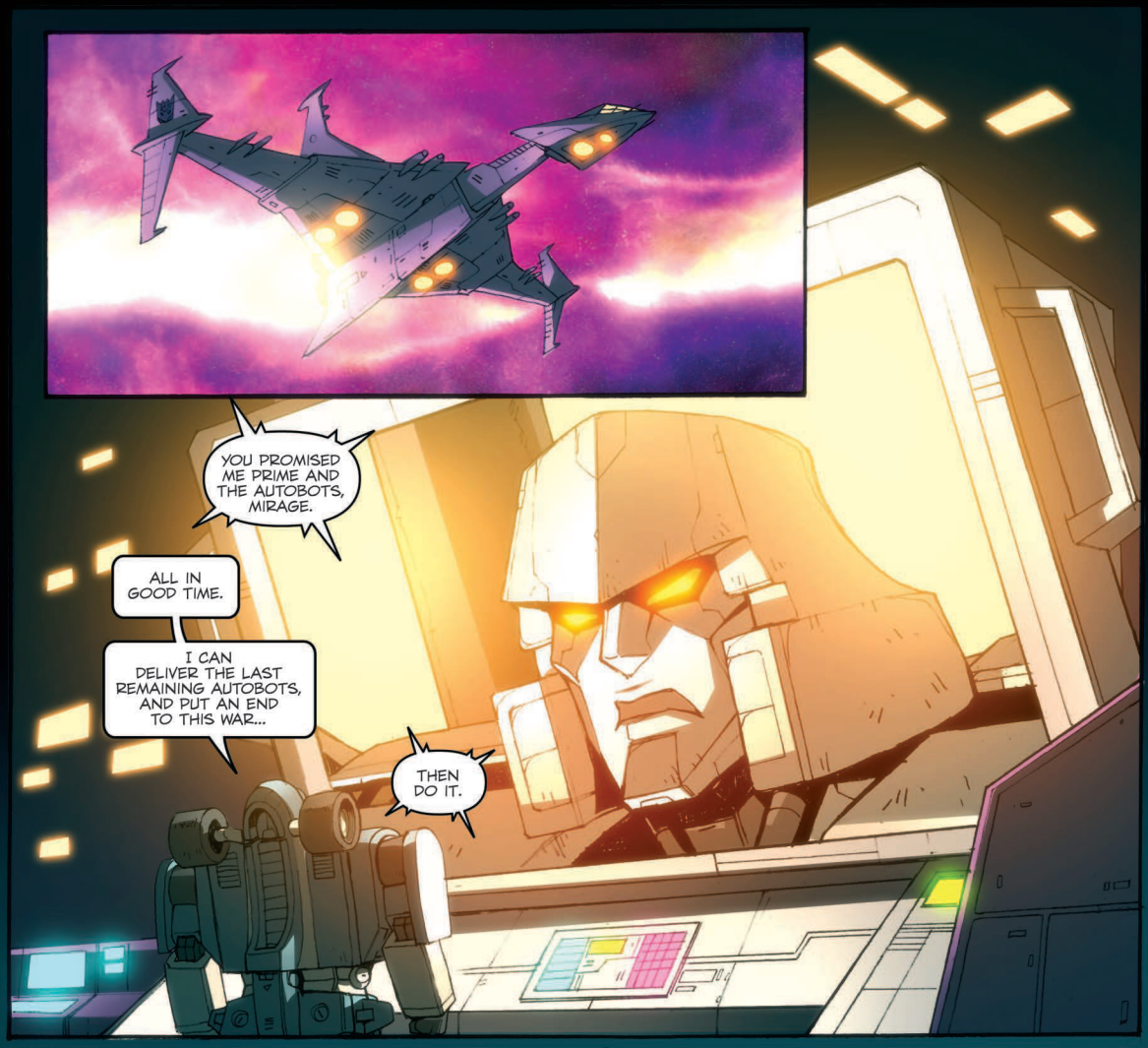
ART BY GUIDO GUIDI
COLORS BY LIAM SHALLOO

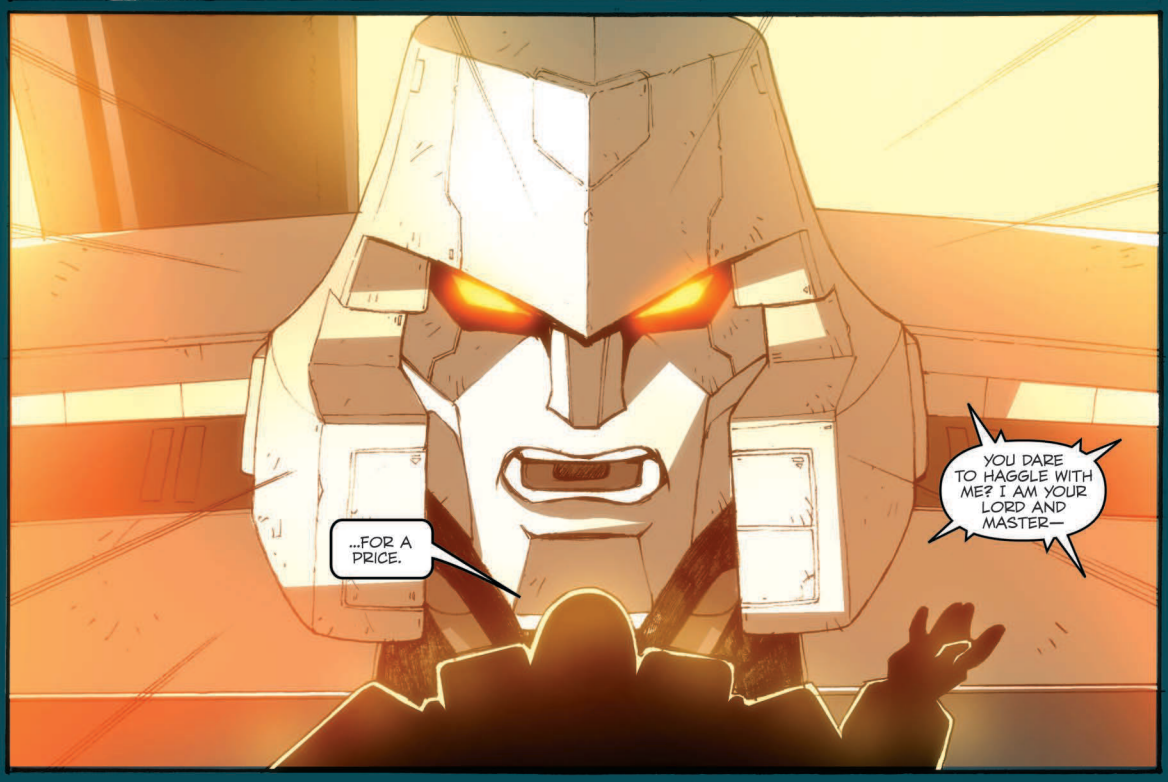

THE DREAM IS ALWAYS THE SAME.
PEGASUS STAR CLUSTER.
FFFF BOOOM
YOU ALL RIGHT?
SKKKKRRATT

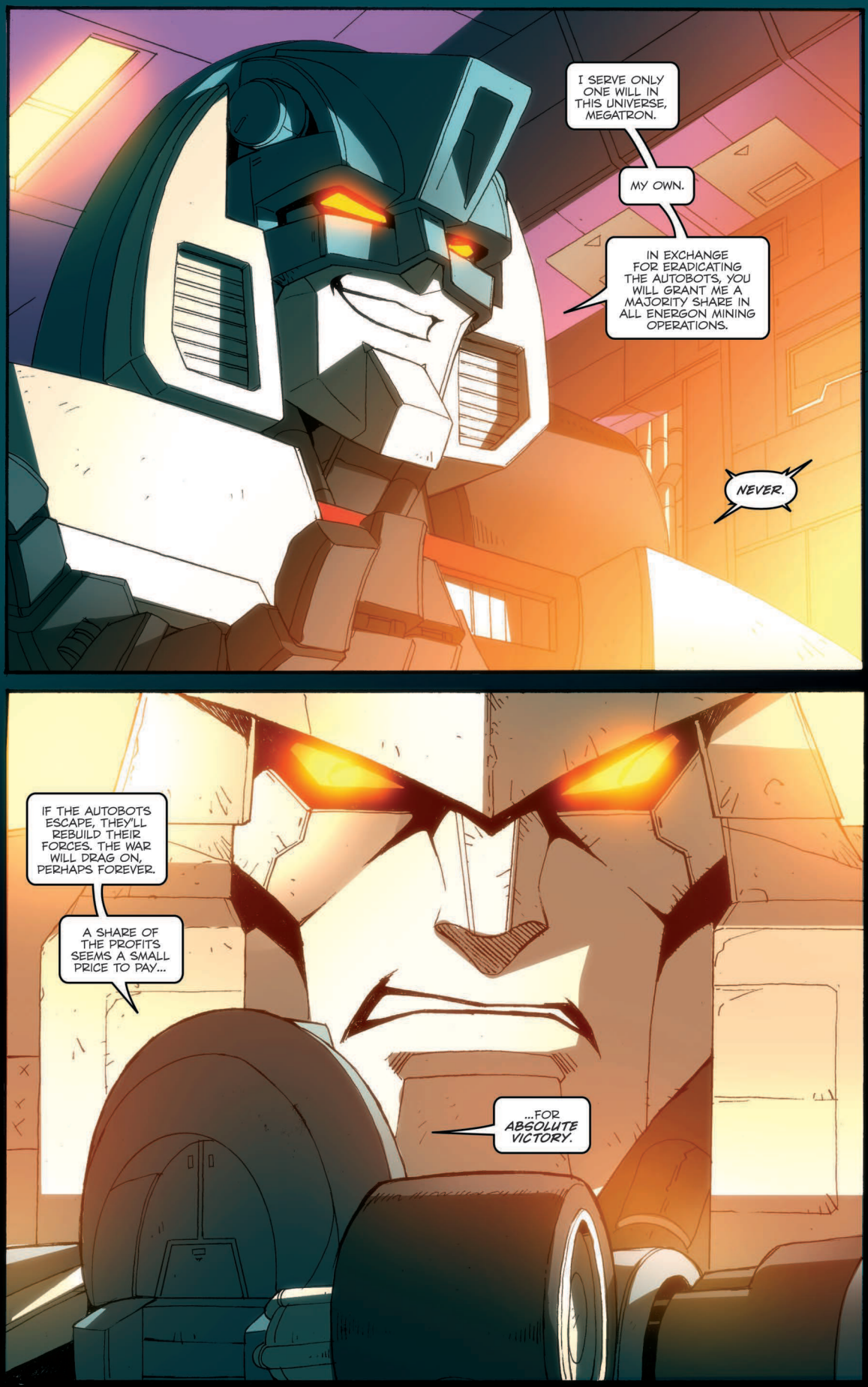

TIME SHIFTS BACK AND FORTH.
HURRY! HIS SPARKCORE STABILIZERS ARE FAILING!
HOUND?
AND YET IT ALL SEEMS TO HAPPEN IN THE SAME INSTANT.

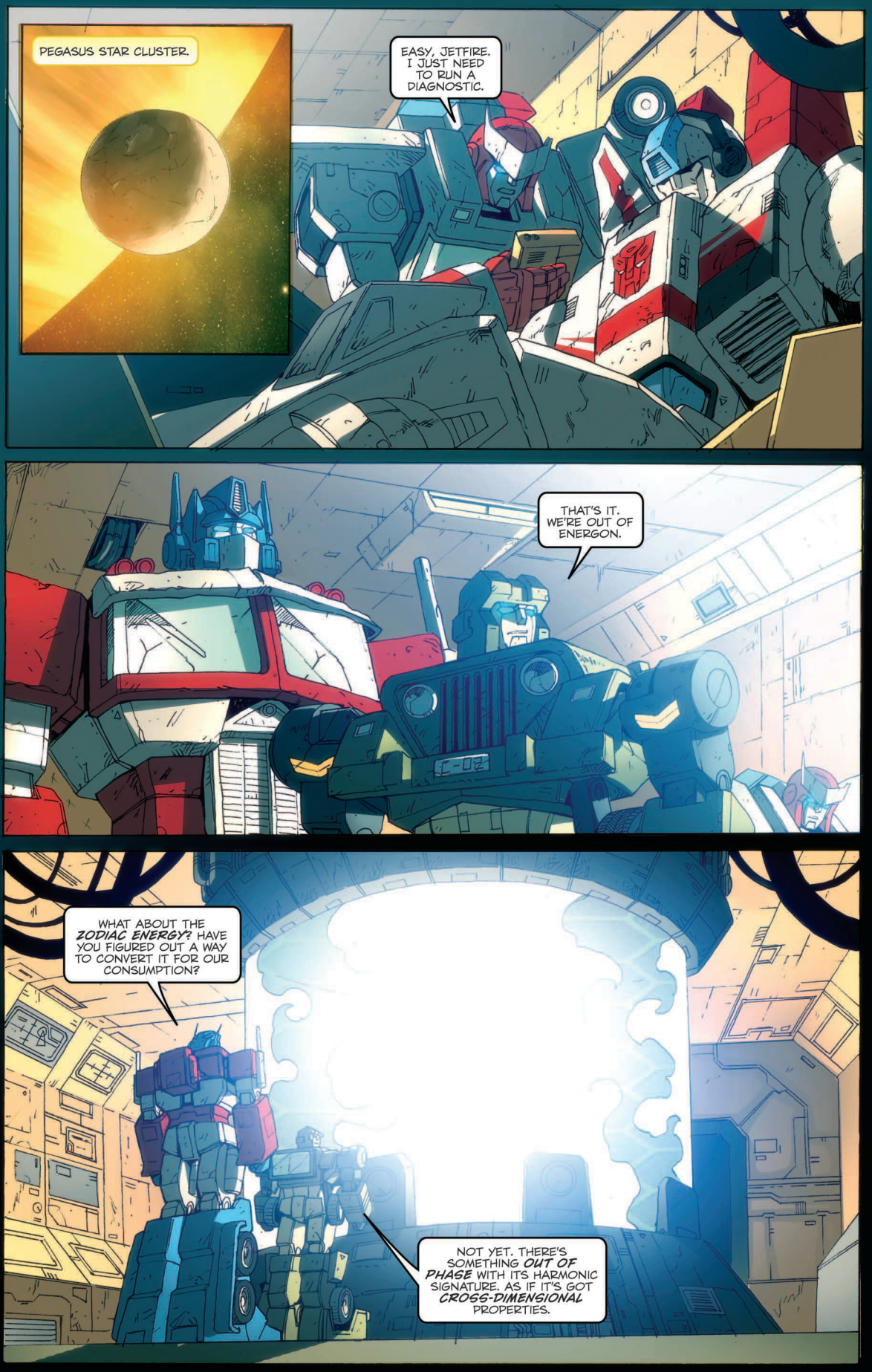

BUT WHAT DISTURBS ME MOST...
YOU ALL RIGHT?
AAAHHH!
ZZZHHHZZZT
...IS THAT IN THE DREAM...


...I'M AN AUTOBOT.
REGENERATION CYCLE COMPLETE.
BUT, OF COURSE, IT'S JUST A DREAM.


YOU PROMISED ME PRIME AND THE AUTOBOTS, MIRAGE.
ALL IN GOOD TIME.
I CAN DELIVER THE LAST REMAINING AUTOBOTS, AND PUT AN END TO THIS WAR...
THEN DO IT.


YOU DARE TO HAGGLE WITH ME? I AM YOUR LORD AND MASTER—
...FOR A PRICE.


I SERVE ONLY ONE WILL IN THIS UNIVERSE, MEGATRON.
MY OWN.
IN EXCHANGE FOR ERADICATING THE AUTOBOTS, YOU WILL GRANT ME A MAJORITY SHARE IN ALL ENERGON MINING OPERATIONS.
NEVER.
IF THE AUTOBOTS ESCAPE, THEY'LL REBUILD THEIR FORCES. THE WAR WILL DRAG ON, PERHAPS FOREVER.
A SHARE OF THE PROFITS SEEMS A SMALL PRICE TO PAY...
...FOR ABSOLUTE VICTORY.


PEGASUS STAR CLUSTER.
EASY, JETFIRE. I JUST NEED TO RUN A DIAGNOSTIC.
THAT'S IT. WE'RE OUT OF ENERGON.
WHAT ABOUT THE ZODIAC ENERGY? HAVE YOU FIGURED OUT A WAY TO CONVERT IT FOR OUR CONSUMPTION?
NOT YET. THERE'S SOMETHING OUT OF PHASE WITH ITS HARMONIC SIGNATURE. AS IF IT'S GOT CROSS-DIMENSIONAL PROPERTIES.


IT WOULD BE LIKE TAKING A MIRROR AND TRYING TO CONSUME THE REFLECTION, RATHER THAN THE ENERGY ITSELF.
WE'D HAVE MORE LUCK TRYING TO EAT A HOLOGRAM.
WELL, KEEP AT IT.
JETFIRE'S IN BAD SHAPE. HE NEEDS TO BE IN A REPAIR FACILITY.
DO WHAT YOU CAN.
THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO. OUR RESOURCES ARE DEPLETED AND THE DECEPTICONS ARE CLOSING IN. I SUGGEST WE CONSIDER SURRENDER.
NEVER. WE'LL BRING FREEDOM TO THE UNIVERSE OR DIE TRYING.
BWEEP BWEEP
SOMEONE JUST BYPASSED THE FIRST SECURITY PERIMETER.
IT'S BUMBLEBEE.
OPEN THE BLAST DOOR.


ZZHHHHHH
BOY, ARE WE GLAD TO SEE YOU!
WHERE ARE THE OTHERS?
DEAD. THE DECEPTICONS AMBUSHED US WHEN WE ENTERED THE CLUSTER.
I MANAGED TO ESCAPE, BUT THEY KNOW WE'RE HERE. WE NEED TO WARN OFF ANY OTHER AUTOBOTS WHO MIGHT BE EN ROUTE.
NOT NECESSARY. WE'RE ALL THAT'S LEFT.
GOOD.
KTHOOM
WHAT'RE YOU DOING? YOU JUST BLEW THE WHOLE SECURITY SYSTEM!
ZZZTT
YOUR COGNITIVE SKILLS ASTOUND ME, HOUND.
BUT THEN AGAIN, THAT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE MY EXPECTATIONS ARE SO LOW.


DECEPTICONS...
...HOLD ON A MOMENT.
PRIME, YOU'RE THE SMART ONE. YOU KNOW YOU DON'T HAVE A CHANCE. YOU KNOW HOW THIS WILL END.
THERE'S NO REASON FOR US TO DO THIS IF YOU'LL JUST SURRENDER.
YOU KNOW THAT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN, MIRAGE.

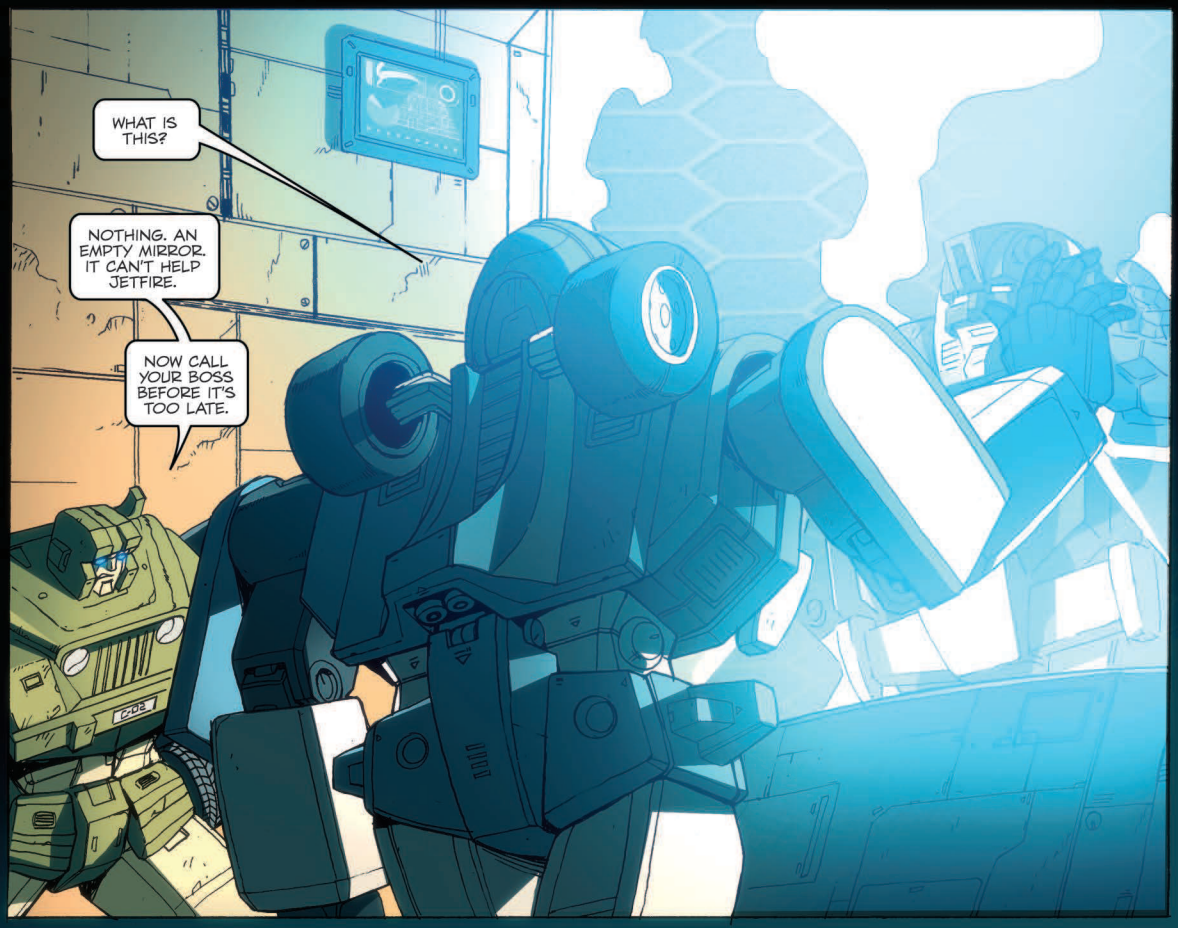

AUTOBOTS—!
DECEPTICONS—!


KRANGG
KLUNG
AH, JETFIRE. MORE LIKE *TARGET PRACTICE.*
BACK OFF, MIRAGE!
HE'S ALREADY DYING. HE'S NOT IN THIS FIGHT.


KRRRKK
KRUNG
-UNFH-
MAYBE NOT. BUT THEN, NEITHER ARE YOU.


KLANG
I'D PUT THAT DOWN, PRIME...
...IF I WERE YOU.
LAST CHANCE, PRIME. SURRENDER, AND I'LL ALLOW YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS TO LIVE.


YOU'LL GUARANTEE THEIR SAFETY?
YOU HAVE MY WORD.
THEN WE...
PRIME, DON'T—
...SURRENDER.
YOU CAN'T TRUST THEM PRIME! ANY OF THEM!
ESPECIALLY NOT HIM!
STAND DOWN. THAT'S AN ORDER!
CAN'T YOU SEE HE'S DYING?
YOU'RE—YOU'RE RIGHT.
HE NEEDS REPAIRS. NOW.


WHAT IS THIS?
NOTHING. AN EMPTY MIRROR. IT CAN'T HELP JETFIRE.
NOW CALL YOUR BOSS BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.


THE AUTOBOTS HAVE SURRENDERED. THE WAR IS OVER. VICTORY IS OURS.
WELL DONE, MIRAGE.
NOW... KILL THEM.

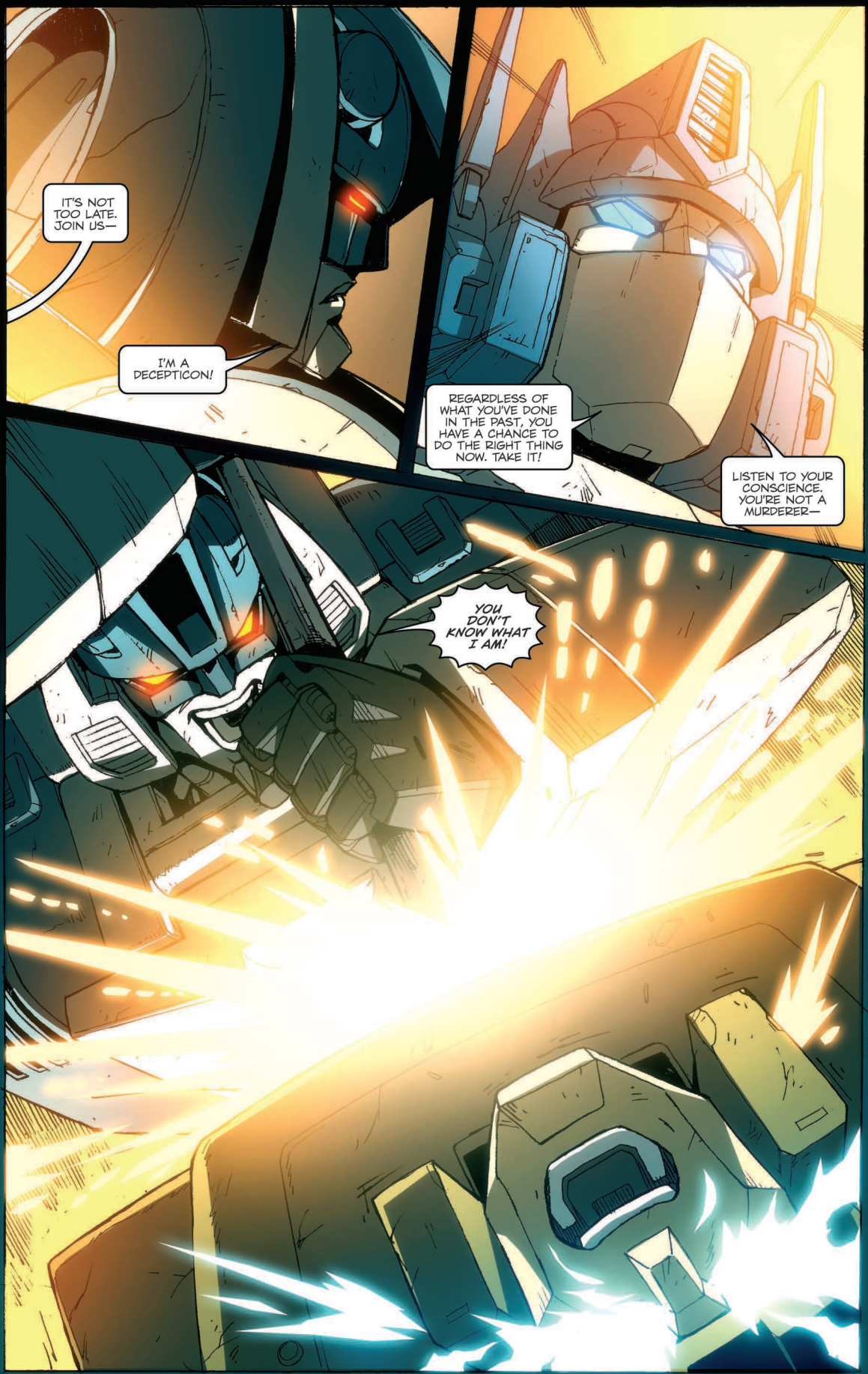

THEY'VE SURRENDERED. THEY SHOULD BE TREATED AS PRISONERS OF WAR—
YOU WANT YOUR PAYMENT? KILL THEM! NOW!



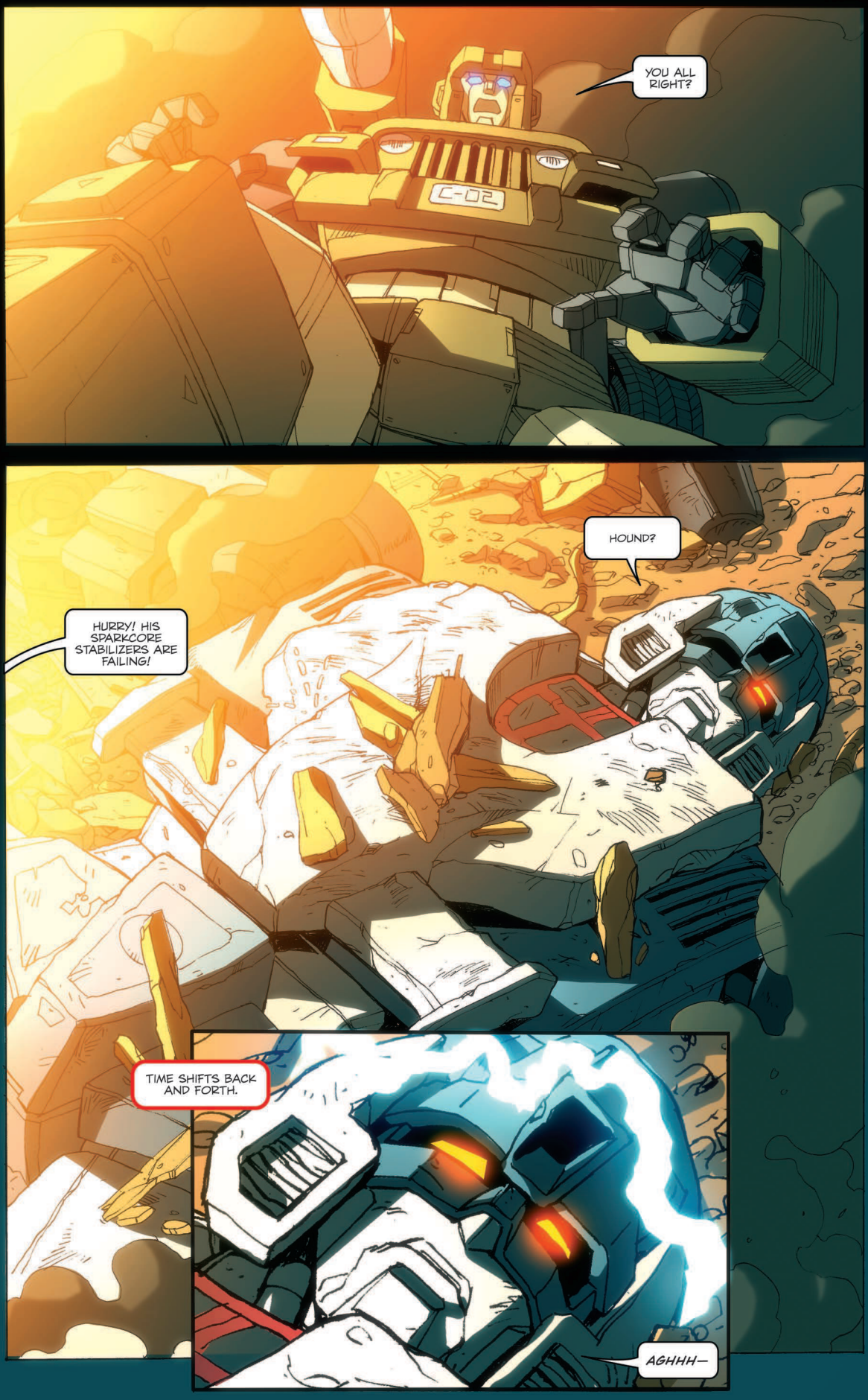

HOUND...
...YOU...
UNNH—
KLUNK


MIRAGE!
YOU GAVE YOUR WORD!
YOU RUST-HEARTED SON OF A GLITCH!


WE WERE FRIENDS ONCE, MIRAGE. BEFORE THE WAR.
I KNOW YOU WERE CONFLICTED ABOUT ALLYING YOURSELF WITH THE DECEPTICONS.
SHUT UP.


IT'S NOT TOO LATE. JOIN US—
I'M A DECEPTICON!
REGARDLESS OF WHAT YOU'VE DONE IN THE PAST, YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO DO THE RIGHT THING NOW. TAKE IT!
LISTEN TO YOUR CONSCIENCE. YOU'RE NOT A MURDERER—
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I AM!


NO!
THIS ISN'T YOU!
IT'S NOT—
AAGGHHH!
KRSHHH
ZAKT
RZZZT
FFFF BOOOM
THE DREAM IS ALWAYS THE SAME.


YOU ALL RIGHT?
C-02
HOUND?
HURRY! HIS SPARKCORE STABILIZERS ARE FAILING!
TIME SHIFTS BACK AND FORTH.
AGHHH—


AND YET IT ALL SEEMS TO HAPPEN IN THE SAME INSTANT.
BUT WHAT DISTURBS ME MOST...
REGENERATION CYCLE COMPLETE.
...IS THAT IN THE DREAM...

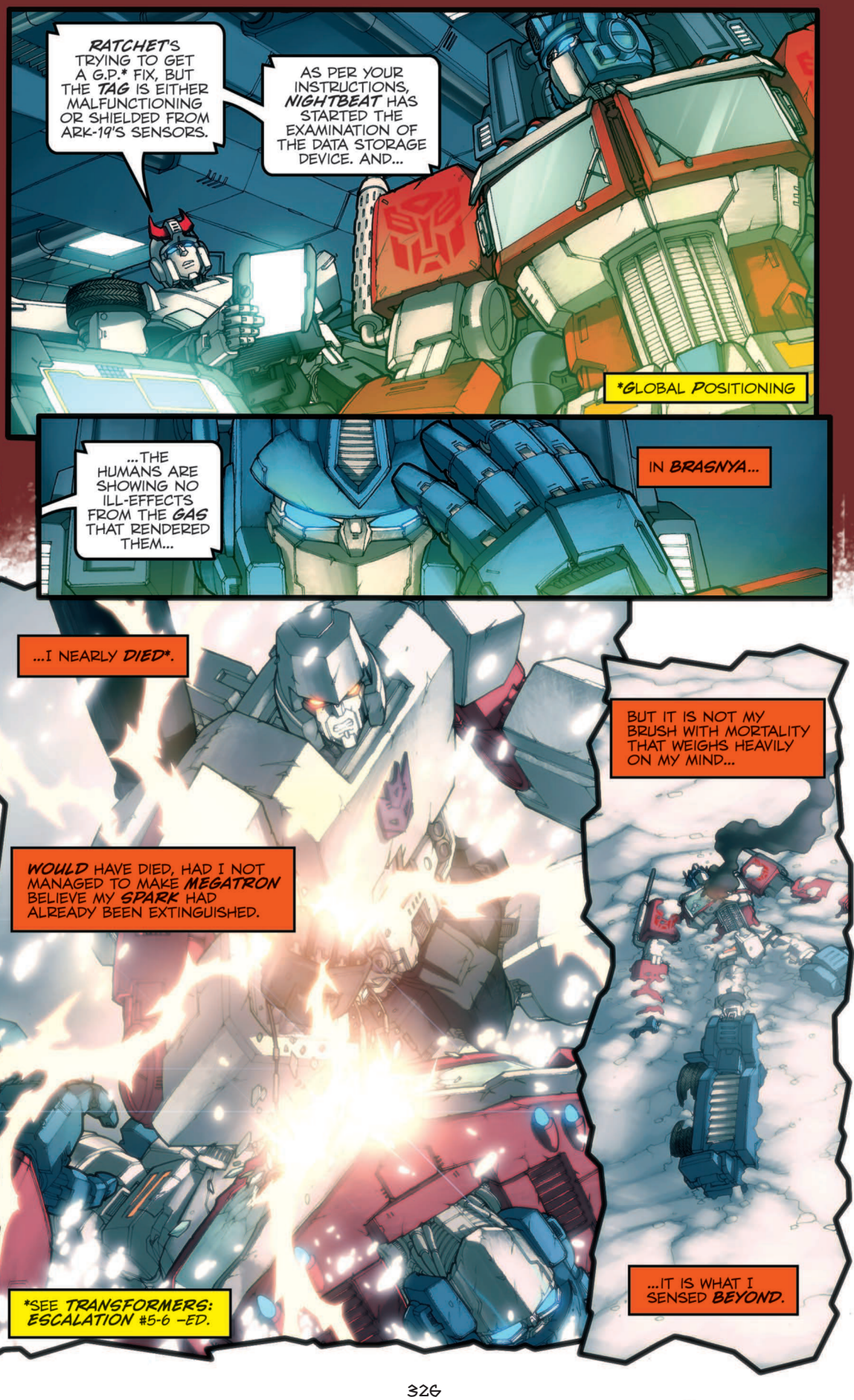

...I'M A DECEPTICON.
BUT OF COURSE, IT'S JUST A DREAM.
MIRAGE
THE END.

ART BY GUIDO GUIDI

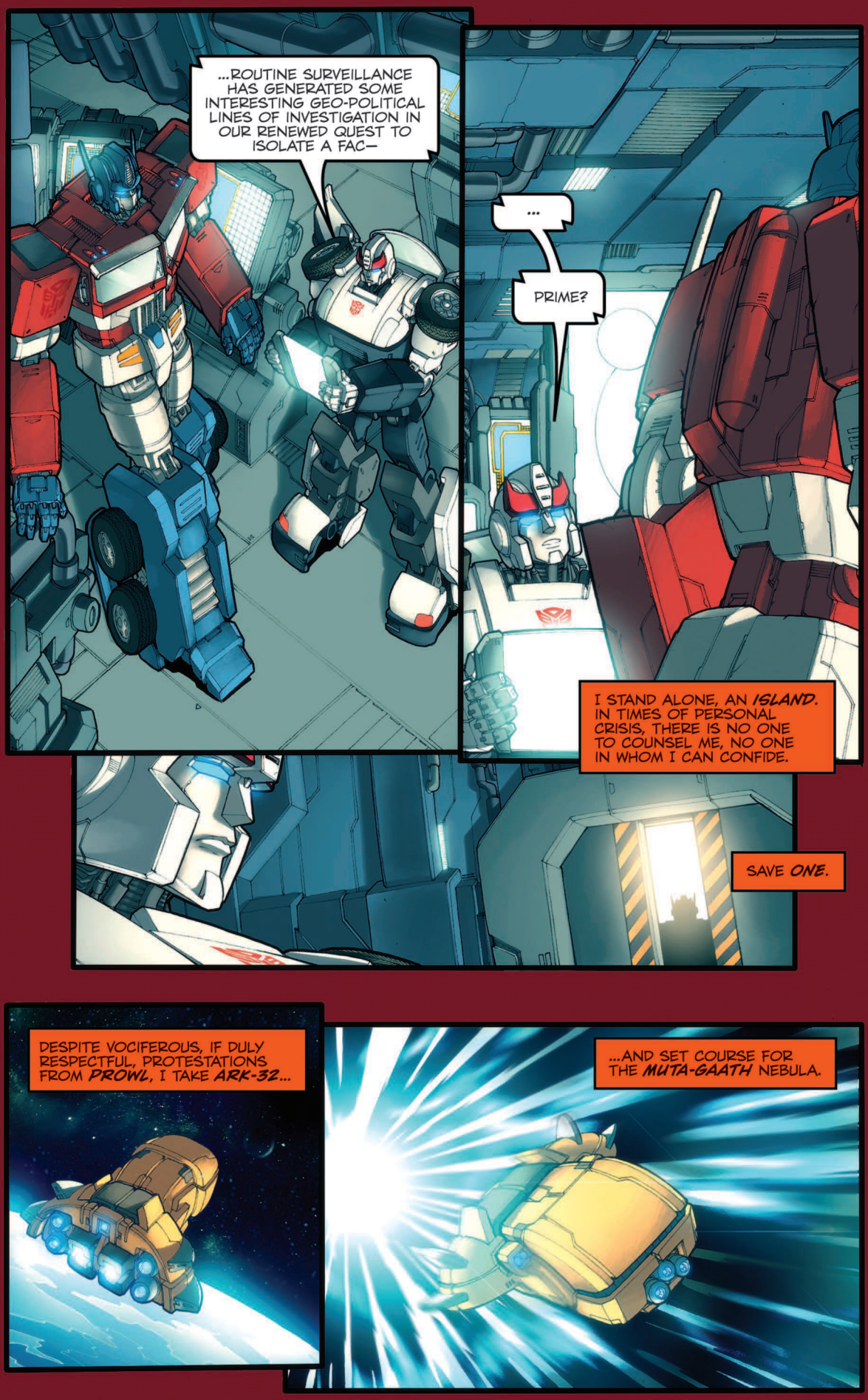



THE TRANSFORMERS
SPOTLIGHT: OPTIMUS PRIME
ART BY DON FIGUERDA
COLORS BY JOSH BURCHAM


ARK-19 (EARTH):
THE VISIBLE WOUNDS HAVE HEALED, BUT SOME SCARS...
...RUN DEEPER.
...I HAVE ANOTHER LEAD ON SCORPONOK, ONE THAT I'M IN THE PROCESS OF FOLLOWING UP...
...PHYSICALLY, KUP'S BETTER, BUT THERE'S NO TELLING WHEN OR EVEN IF HE'LL BE MENTALLY FIT FOR ACTIVE DUTY...
...IT'S THIS WHOLE SUNSTREAKER THING. HE JUST WON'T LET IT DROP...
ARE YOU RECEIVING ME? ANYONE?
...HOT ROD'S BACK ON HIS FEET, BUT THERE'S STILL NO WORD ON IRONHIDE.
DEAD OR ALIVE, HE SEEMS TO HAVE DROPPED OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH.

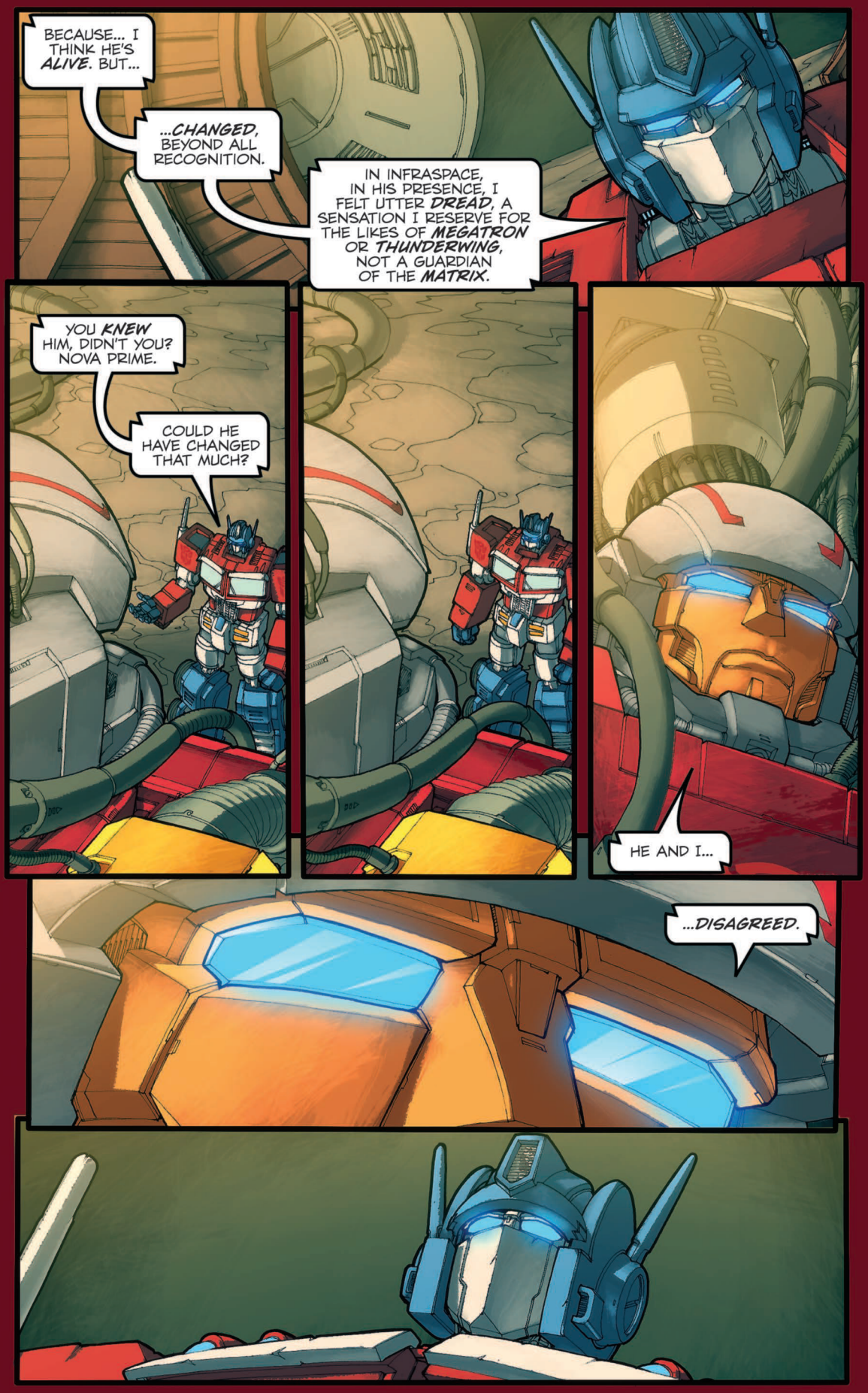

RATCHET'S TRYING TO GET A G.P.* FIX, BUT THE TAG IS EITHER MALFUNCTIONING OR SHIELDED FROM ARK-19'S SENSORS.
AS PER YOUR INSTRUCTIONS, NIGHTBEAT HAS STARTED THE EXAMINATION OF THE DATA STORAGE DEVICE. AND...
*GLOBAL POSITIONING
...THE HUMANS ARE SHOWING NO ILL-EFFECTS FROM THE GAS THAT RENDERED THEM...
IN BRASNYA...
...I NEARLY DIED*.
WOULD HAVE DIED, HAD I NOT MANAGED TO MAKE MEGATRON BELIEVE MY SPARK HAD ALREADY BEEN EXTINGUISHED.
*SEE TRANSFORMERS: ESCALATION #5-6 -ED.
BUT IT IS NOT MY BRUSH WITH MORTALITY THAT WEIGHS HEAVILY ON MY MIND...
...IT IS WHAT I SENSED BEYOND.

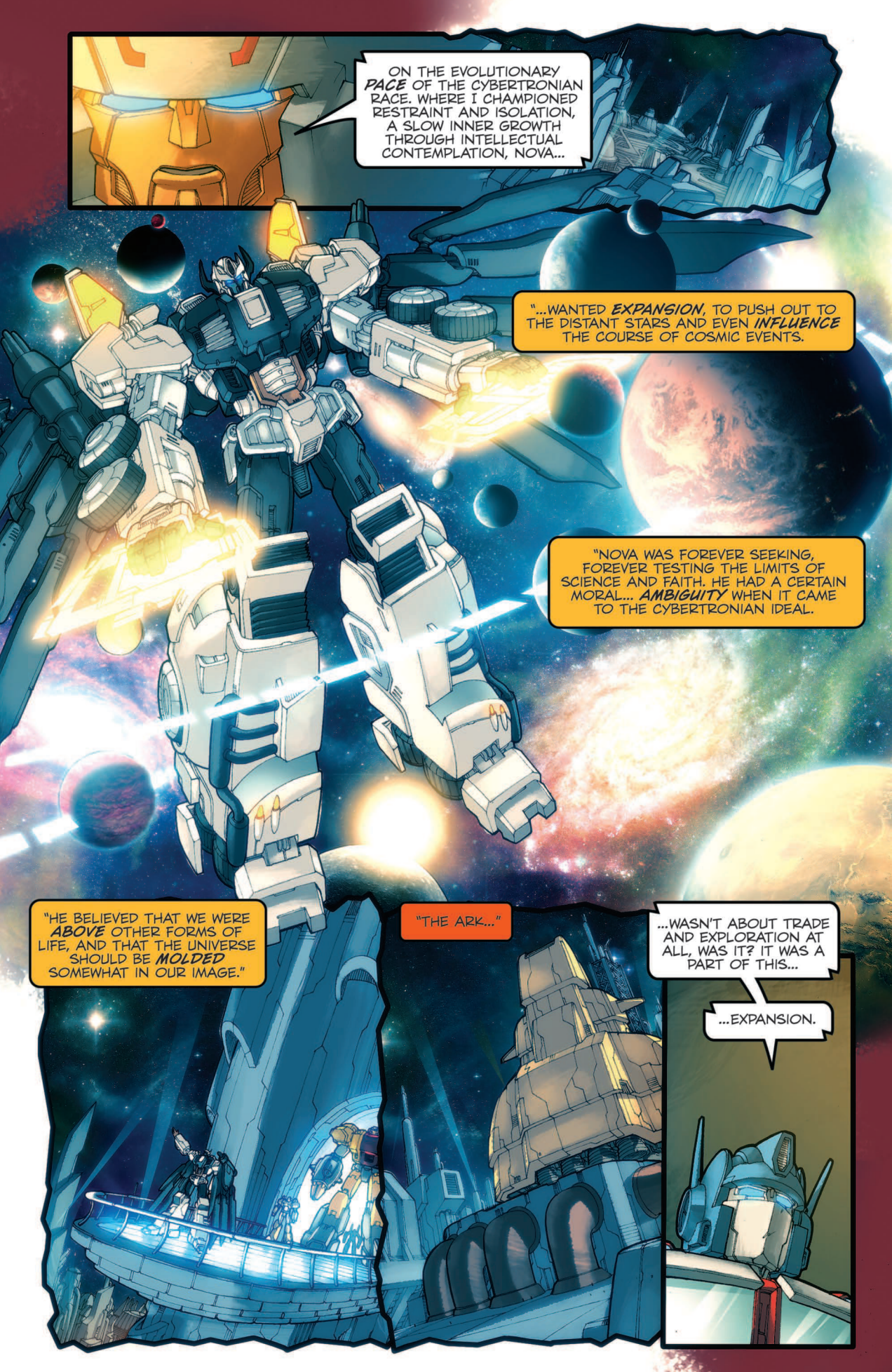

IN MID-DOWNLOAD, IN THE VIRTUAL NOTHINGNESS WE CALL INFRASPACE, I SENSED A PRESENCE.
NOT JUST ANY PRESENCE. A LEGEND. A WHOLE ERA OF CYBERTRONIAN HISTORY PERSONIFIED.
A PRIME.
WE PRIMES REPRESENT THE ENTIRE CYBERTRONIAN RACE, STANDING INVIOLATE, INCORRUPTIBLE—A FIGUREHEAD.
WE ENCAPSULATE AN IDEAL, AN ARCHETYPE, A SINGLE-MINDED COMMITMENT TO SAFEGUARD LIFE AND LIBERTY THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE.
BUT SCRATCH THE SURFACE... AND WE ARE JUST METAL AND CYDRAULICS.

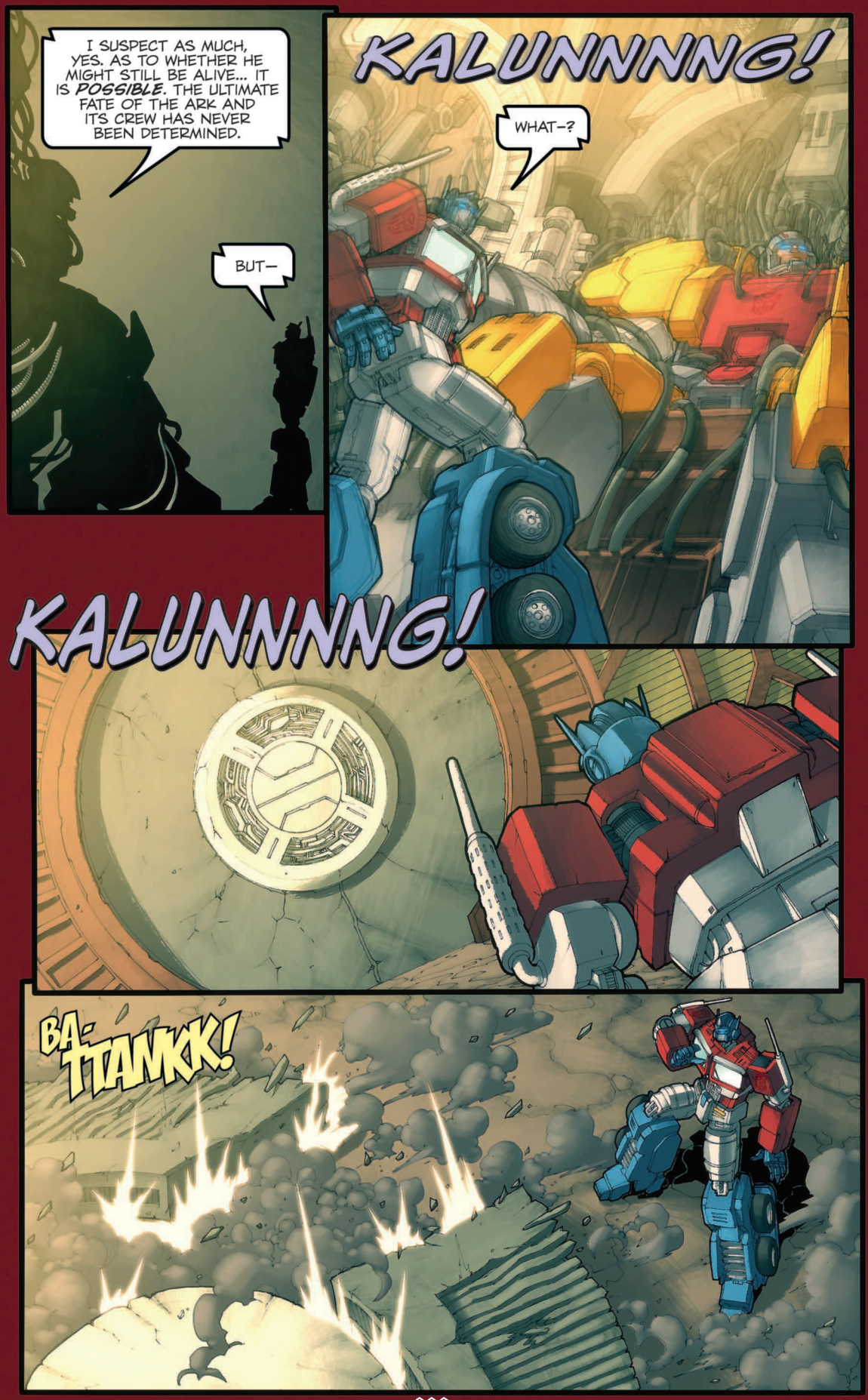

...ROUTINE SURVEILLANCE HAS GENERATED SOME INTERESTING GEO-POLITICAL LINES OF INVESTIGATION IN OUR RENEWED QUEST TO ISOLATE A FAC—
...
PRIME?
I STAND ALONE, AN ISLAND. IN TIMES OF PERSONAL CRISIS, THERE IS NO ONE TO COUNSEL ME, NO ONE IN WHOM I CAN CONFIDE.
SAVE ONE.
DESPITE VOCIFEROUS, IF DULY RESPECTFUL, PROTESTATIONS FROM PROWL, I TAKE ARK-32...
...AND SET COURSE FOR THE MUTA-GAATH NEBULA.


AND, WITHIN ITS FAR FROM WELCOMING, GASEOUS VOLATILITY...
...INSIDE AN ARTIFICIAL ASTEROID CAREFULLY SCREENED FROM PRYING SENSORS...
...I SEEK AN AUDIENCE...
...WITH OMEGA SUPREME.


"IS IT HIM?"
ONLY ONE SURE WAY TO FIND OUT.
WHICH IS?
SMASH OUR WAY IN...
...AND KILL WHOEVER AND WHATEVER WE FIND INSIDE!
SPEAK...
I BARELY KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN.
I SUPPOSE I NEED TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT THE FIRST ARK... AND NOVA PRIME!
WHY?


BECAUSE... I THINK HE'S ALIVE. BUT...
...CHANGED, BEYOND ALL RECOGNITION.
IN INFRASPACE, IN HIS PRESENCE, I FELT UTTER DREAD, A SENSATION I RESERVE FOR THE LIKES OF MEGATRON OR THUNDERWING, NOT A GUARDIAN OF THE MATRIX.
YOU KNEW HIM, DIDN'T YOU? NOVA PRIME.
COULD HE HAVE CHANGED THAT MUCH?
HE AND I...
...DISAGREED.


ON THE EVOLUTIONARY *PACE* OF THE CYBERTRONIAN RACE. WHERE I CHAMPIONED RESTRAINT AND ISOLATION, A SLOW INNER GROWTH THROUGH INTELLECTUAL CONTEMPLATION, NOVA...
"...WANTED *EXPANSION*, TO PUSH OUT TO THE DISTANT STARS AND EVEN *INFLUENCE* THE COURSE OF COSMIC EVENTS.
"NOVA WAS FOREVER SEEKING, FOREVER TESTING THE LIMITS OF SCIENCE AND FAITH. HE HAD A CERTAIN MORAL... *AMBIGUITY* WHEN IT CAME TO THE CYBERTRONIAN IDEAL.
"HE BELIEVED THAT WE WERE *ABOVE* OTHER FORMS OF LIFE, AND THAT THE UNIVERSE SHOULD BE *MOLDED* SOMEWHAT IN OUR IMAGE."
"THE ARK..."
...WASN'T ABOUT TRADE AND EXPLORATION AT ALL, WAS IT? IT WAS A PART OF THIS...
...EXPANSION.


I SUSPECT AS MUCH, YES. AS TO WHETHER HE MIGHT STILL BE ALIVE... IT IS *POSSIBLE*. THE ULTIMATE FATE OF THE ARK AND ITS CREW HAS NEVER BEEN DETERMINED.
BUT—
KALUNNNNG!
WHAT—?
KALUNNNNG!
BA-TTAMKK!


FOUND YOU. AT LAST! NOW YOU PAY!
GNRGHHH!
VRAAANK!
"WHAT IS IT?"


WHAT DOES IT WANT?
NOT "IT."
THEY.
AND THEY WANT...
...ME.
SKRUUUNK!
VARK!

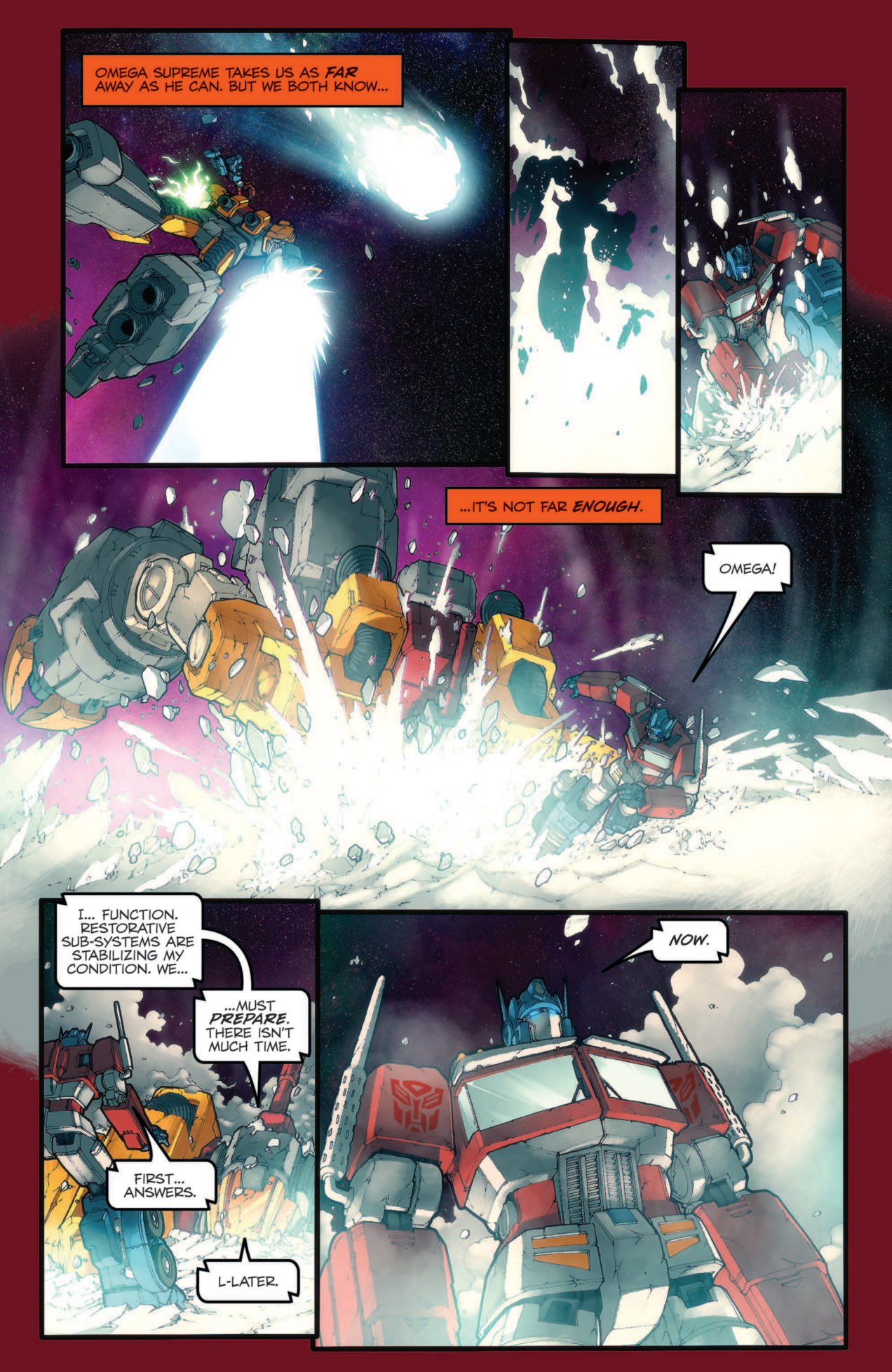

QUESTIONS... I HAVE SO MANY.
BUT THEY WILL HAVE TO WAIT.
THIS THING, WHATEVER IT—OR THEY—IS/ARE, HAS TO BE STOPPED.
SOMETHING OF A WEAPON OF LAST RESORT, OMEGA SUPREME WIELDS ENERGIES BEYOND MEASURE. BUT, AGAINST THIS CREATURE, EVEN UNQUANTIFIABLE...
...ISN'T ENOUGH!
ZRAKTT!

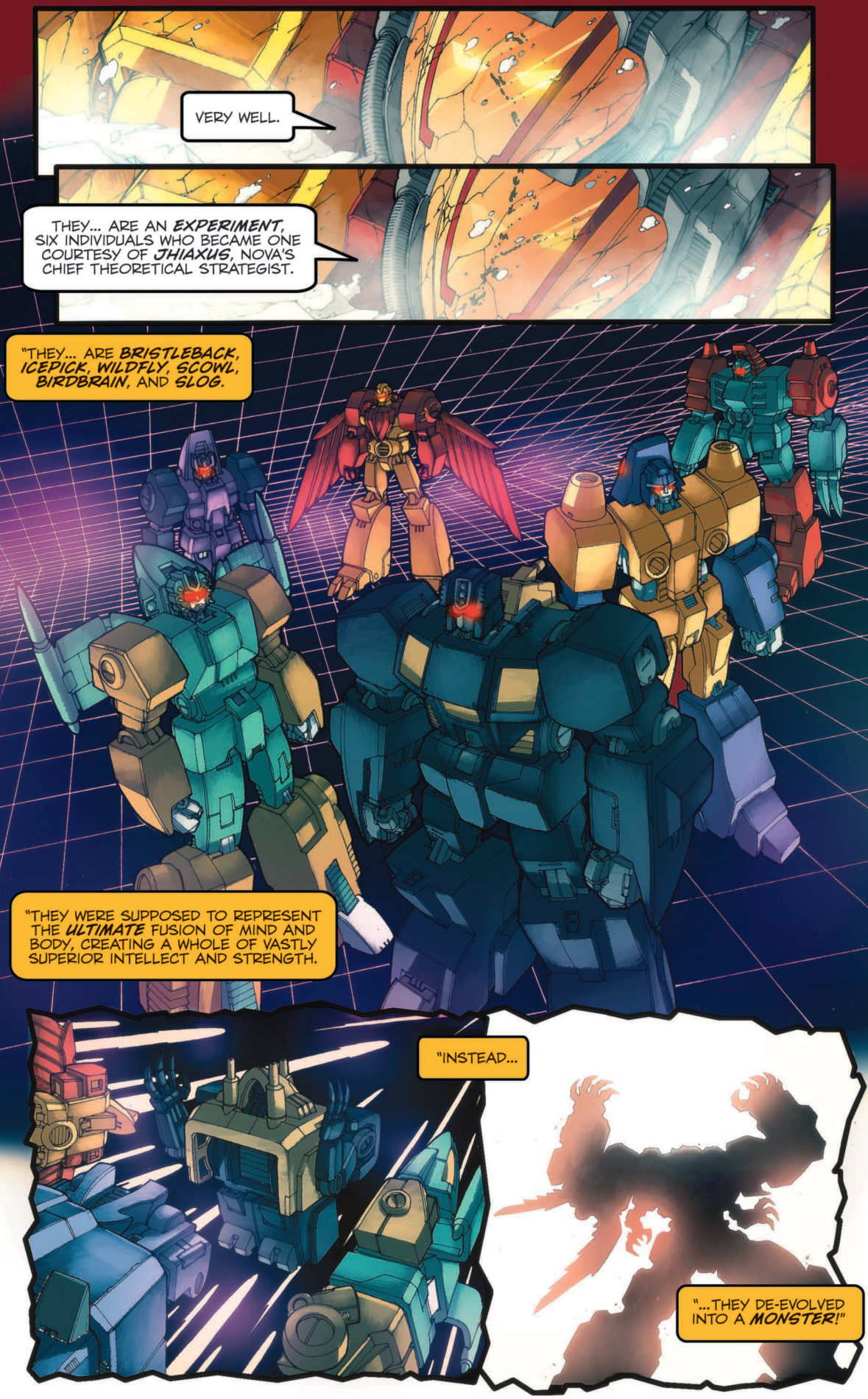

THASSHT!
MONSTRUCTOR...
...CRUSH!
KRUNNK!
IT WILL SURELY KILL HIM...
...UNLESS I DO SOMETHING!
LEAVE–
–HIM–


-BE!
ZOW!
TST!
THRAAAAM!!
NOTHING. NOT EVEN A FLINCH. THE CREATURE POSSESSES SOME KIND OF ENERGY-DAMPENING FIELD.
SO...
ZZZHT!
...I TRY A MORE *INDIRECT* APPROACH!


VRUNNG!
DRUNNCH!
CLEARLY...
...SOMETHING MORE *DRASTIC* IS CALLED FOR.
I JUST PRAY...
...I AM NOT MAKING MATTERS *WORSE*!


I DETECT MOVEMENT ON THE PERIPHERY OF MY FIELD OF VISION...
...AND I UNDERSTAND THAT I HAVE ONLY BOUGHT US A SCANT RESPITE.

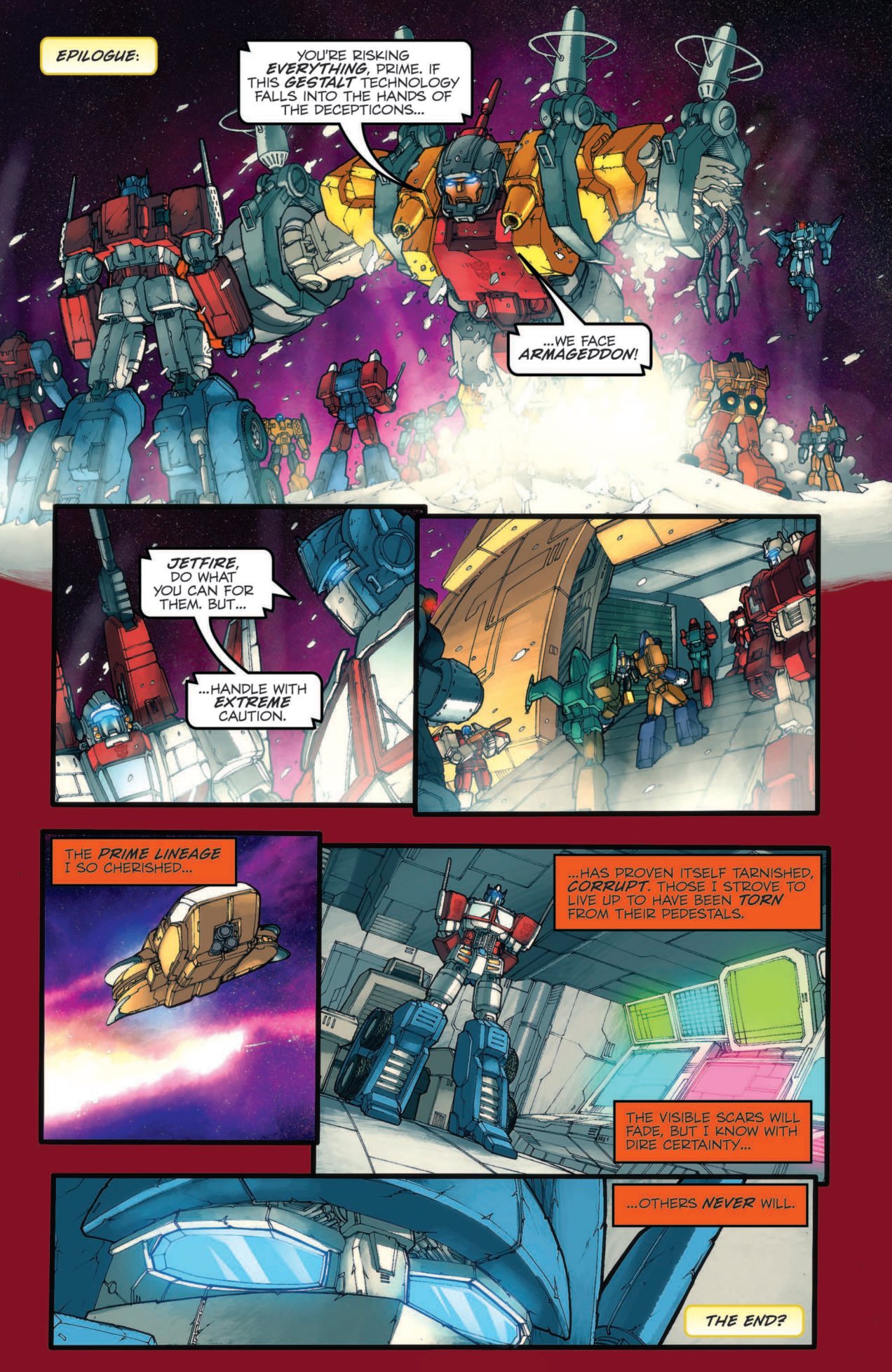

OMEGA SUPREME TAKES US AS FAR AWAY AS HE CAN. BUT WE BOTH KNOW...
...IT'S NOT FAR ENOUGH.
OMEGA!
I... FUNCTION. RESTORATIVE SUB-SYSTEMS ARE STABILIZING MY CONDITION. WE...
...MUST PREPARE. THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME.
FIRST... ANSWERS.
L-LATER.
NOW.


VERY WELL.
THEY... ARE AN EXPERIMENT, SIX INDIVIDUALS WHO BECAME ONE COURTESY OF JHIAXUS, NOVA'S CHIEF THEORETICAL STRATEGIST.
"THEY... ARE BRISTLEBACK, ICEPICK, WILDFLY, SCOWL, BIRDBRAIN, AND SLOG.
"THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO REPRESENT THE ULTIMATE FUSION OF MIND AND BODY, CREATING A WHOLE OF VASTLY SUPERIOR INTELLECT AND STRENGTH.
"INSTEAD...
"...THEY DE-EVOLVED INTO A MONSTER!"


WHEN NOVA PRIME—AND JHIAXUS—DISAPPEARED... I TOOK IT UPON MYSELF TO CONSIGN THEIR DEVIANT CREATION TO A DIMENSIONALLY DISPLACED PRISON...
...WHERE IT WOULD REMAIN FOR THE REST OF ITS UNNATURAL EXISTENCE.
YOU—
—YOU'RE NO BETTER THAN THEM!
ALL OF YOU... PLAYING GOD!
"PRIME, LISTEN CAREFULLY...
"...THE CREATURE HAS ONE WEAKNESS!"

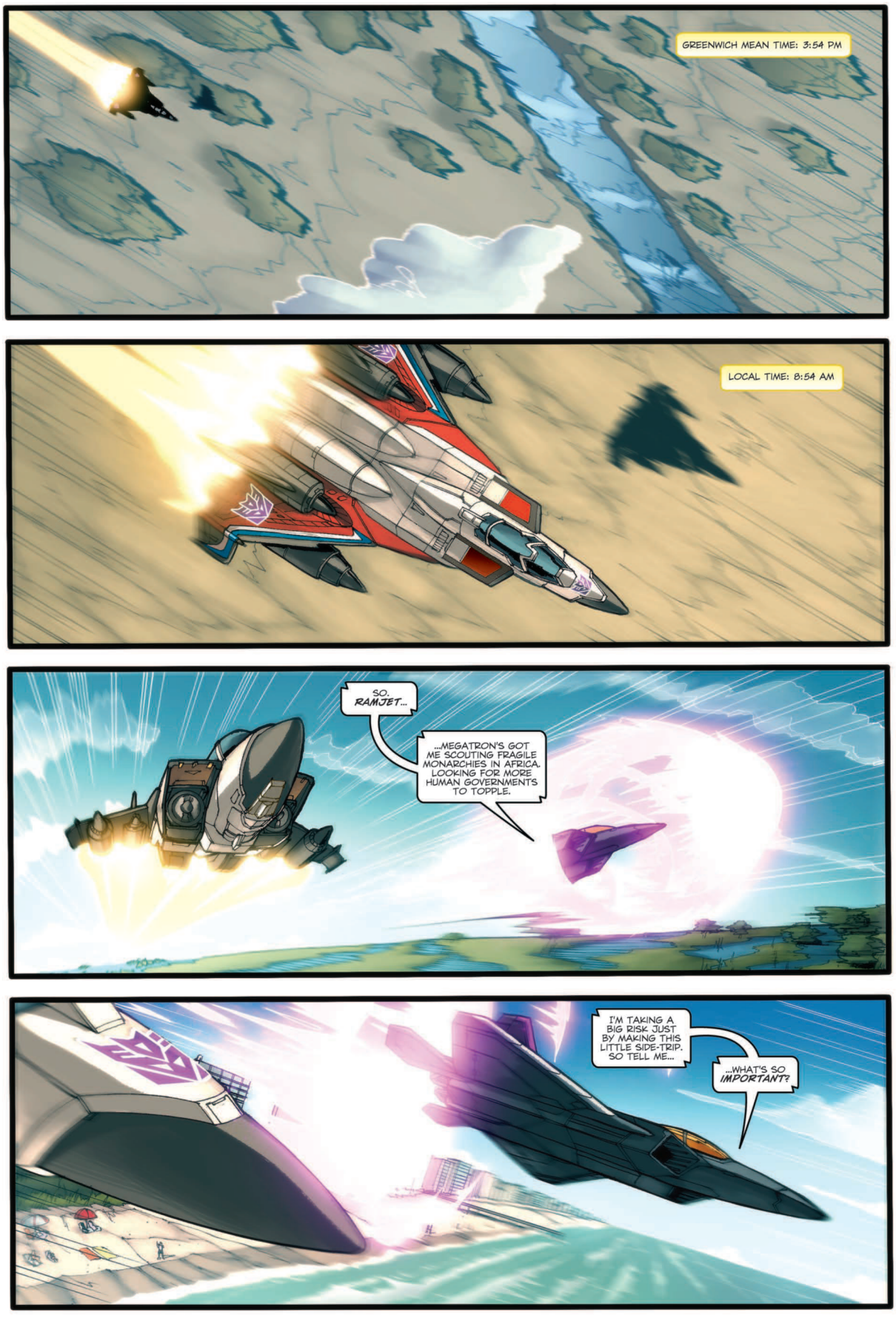

A CONNECTIVE FILAMENT DIRECTLY BENEATH THE MID-TORSO ARMATURE. STRIKING IT WITH ENOUGH FORCE...
...WILL SEND IT INTO SPASM.
WAIT! MONSTRUCTOR—I ENTREAT YOU TO STOP! A GRIEVOUS WRONG HAS BEEN DONE TO YOU, AND I WILL DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO HELP!
WE CAN—
—NNNN!
HELP US? IF YOU WANT TO HELP US...
...DIE QUICKLY.
AHAA... AT LEAST...

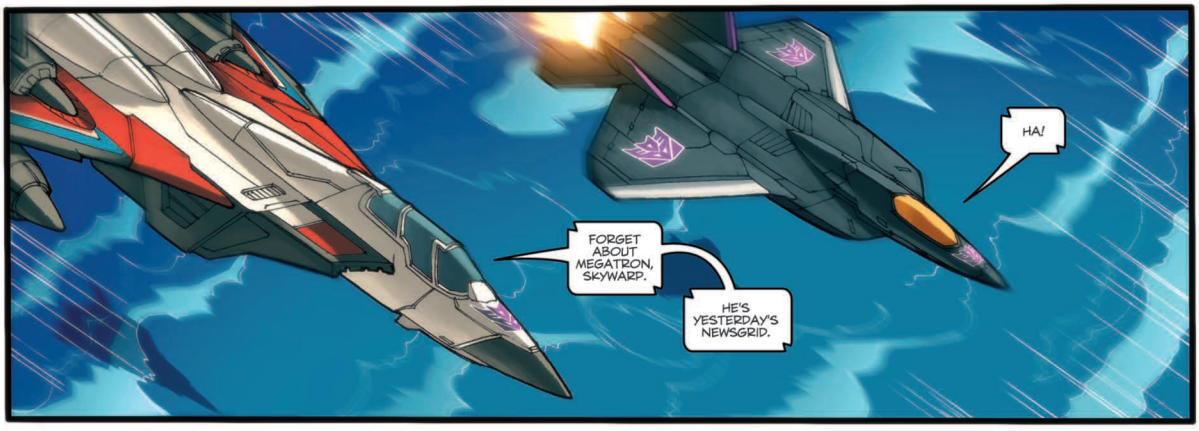

...I TRIED!
FLANNGG!
K-KRRRKK-
AK-
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER...
...YOU WILL BE HELPED.
I SWEAR IT.

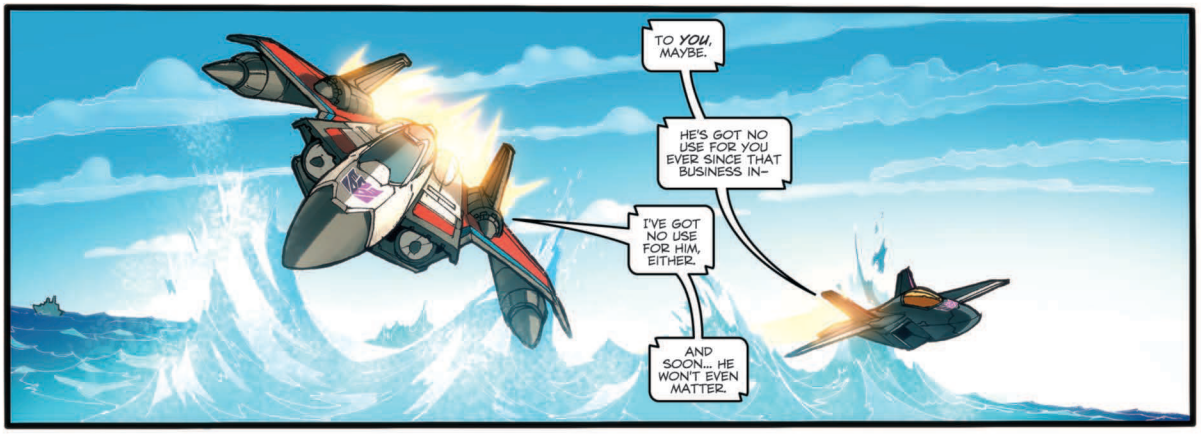

EPILOGUE:
YOU'RE RISKING EVERYTHING, PRIME. IF THIS GESTALT TECHNOLOGY FALLS INTO THE HANDS OF THE DECEPTICONS...
...WE FACE ARMAGEDDON!
JETFIRE, DO WHAT YOU CAN FOR THEM. BUT...
...HANDLE WITH EXTREME CAUTION.
THE PRIME LINEAGE I SO CHERISHED...
...HAS PROVEN ITSELF TARNISHED, CORRUPT. THOSE I STROVE TO LIVE UP TO HAVE BEEN TORN FROM THEIR PEDESTALS.
THE VISIBLE SCARS WILL FADE, BUT I KNOW WITH DIRE CERTAINTY...
...OTHERS NEVER WILL.
THE END?

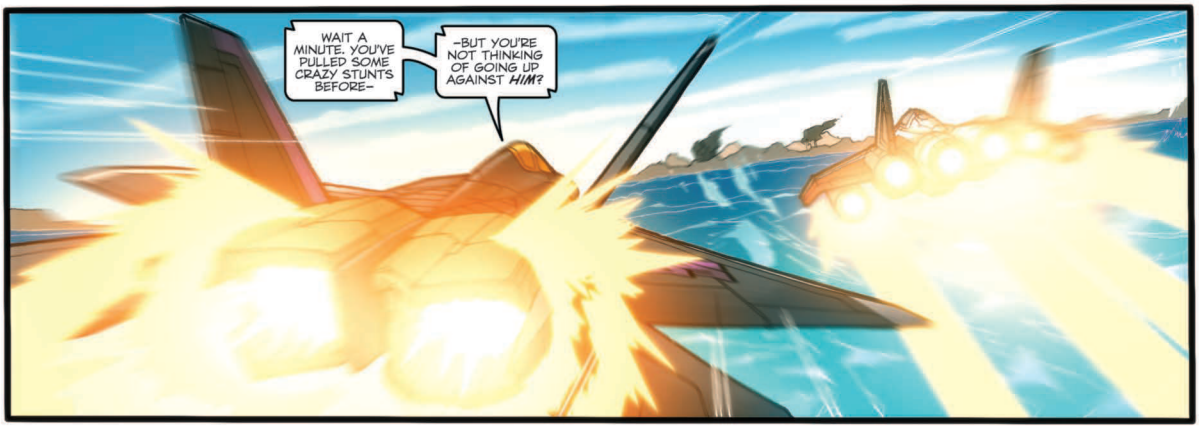

ART BY GABRIEL RODRIGUEZ

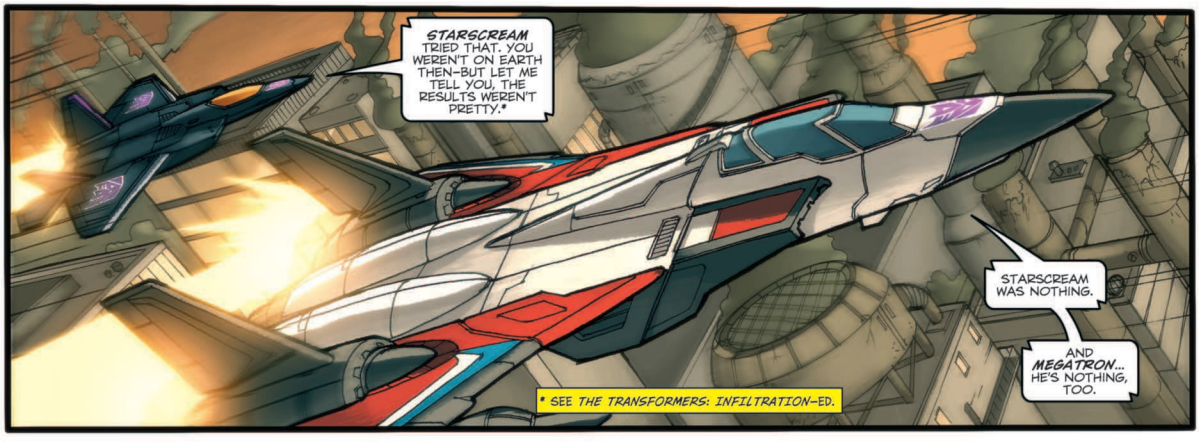

THE TRANSFORMERS
SPOTLIGHT: RAMJET
ART BY ROBBY MUSSO
COLORS BY KIERAN DAYS

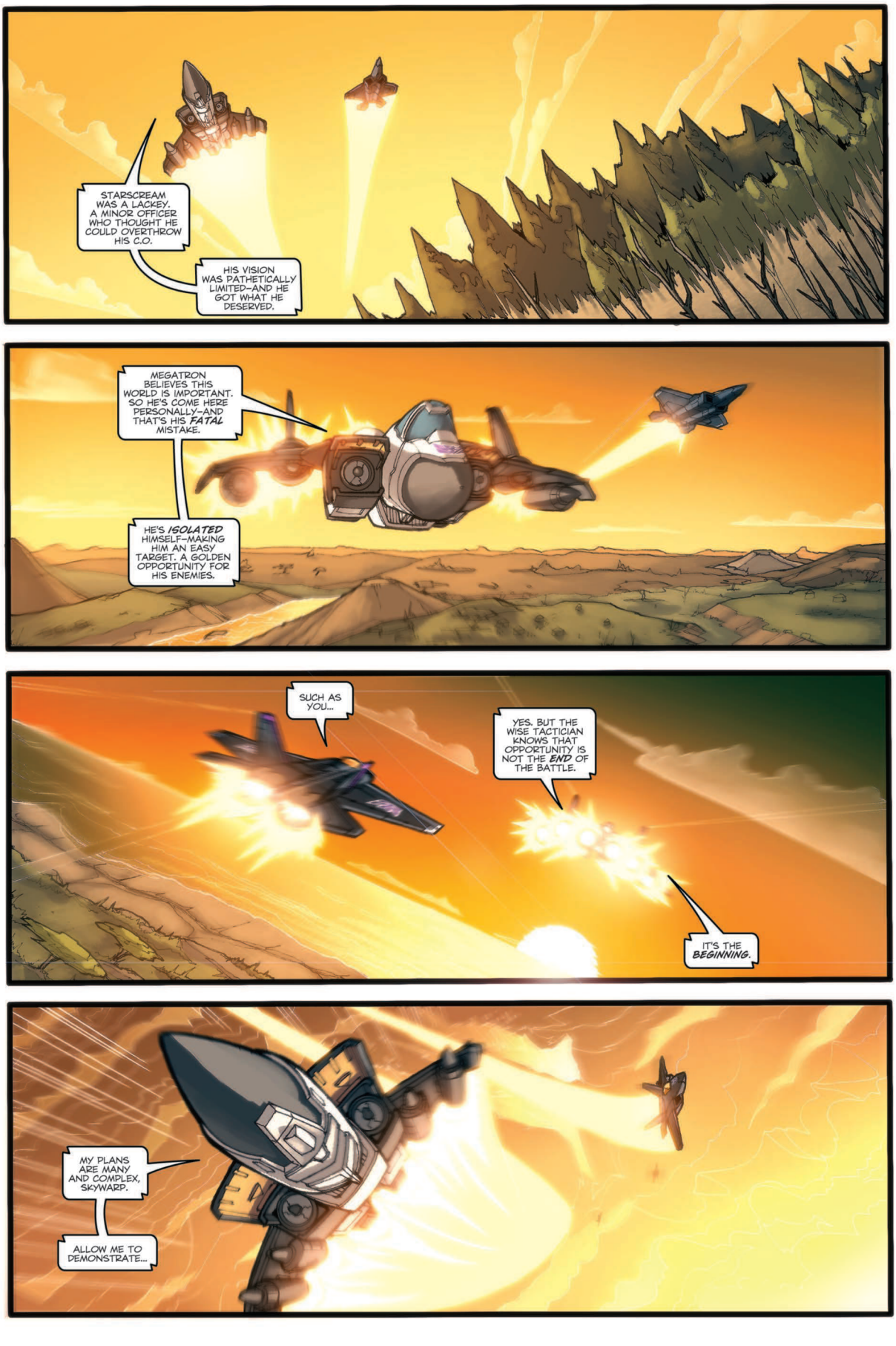

GREENWICH MEAN TIME: 3:54 PM
LOCAL TIME: 8:54 AM
SO. RAMJET...
...MEGATRON'S GOT ME SCOUTING FRAGILE MONARCHIES IN AFRICA. LOOKING FOR MORE HUMAN GOVERNMENTS TO TOPPLE.
I'M TAKING A BIG RISK JUST BY MAKING THIS LITTLE SIDE-TRIP. SO TELL ME...
...WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT?

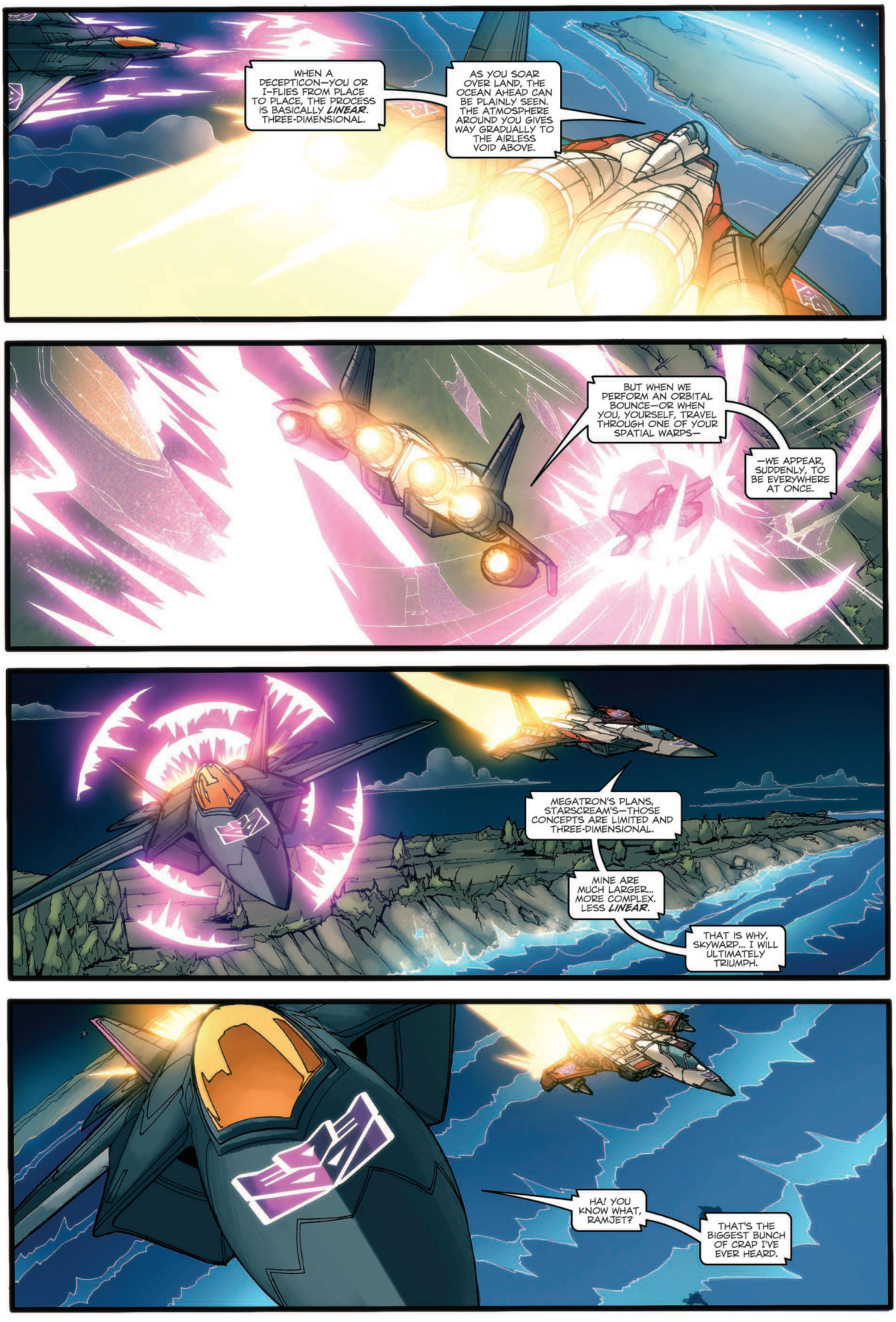

HA!
FORGET ABOUT MEGATRON, SKYWARP.
HE'S YESTERDAY'S NEWSGRID.

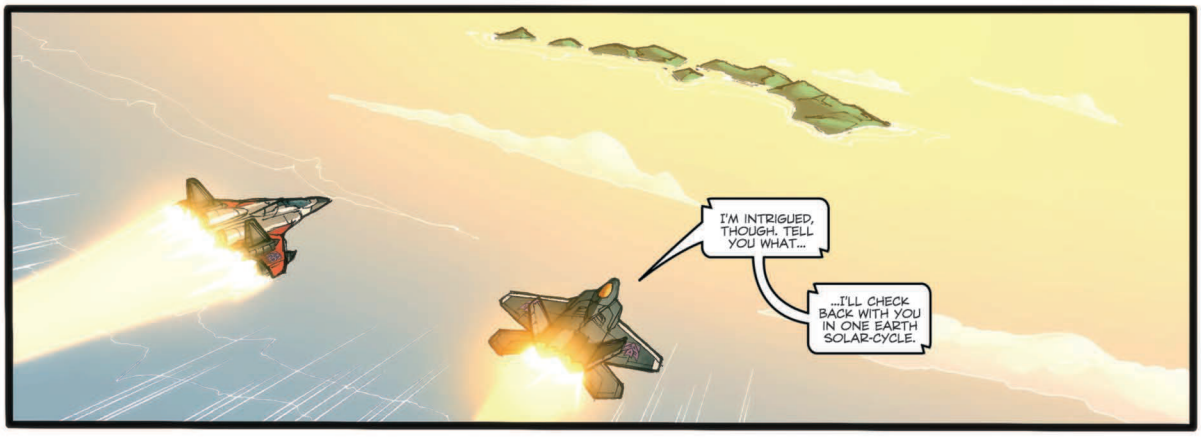

TO *YOU*, MAYBE.
HE'S GOT NO USE FOR YOU EVER SINCE THAT BUSINESS IN–
I'VE GOT NO USE FOR HIM, EITHER.
AND SOON... HE WON'T EVEN MATTER.

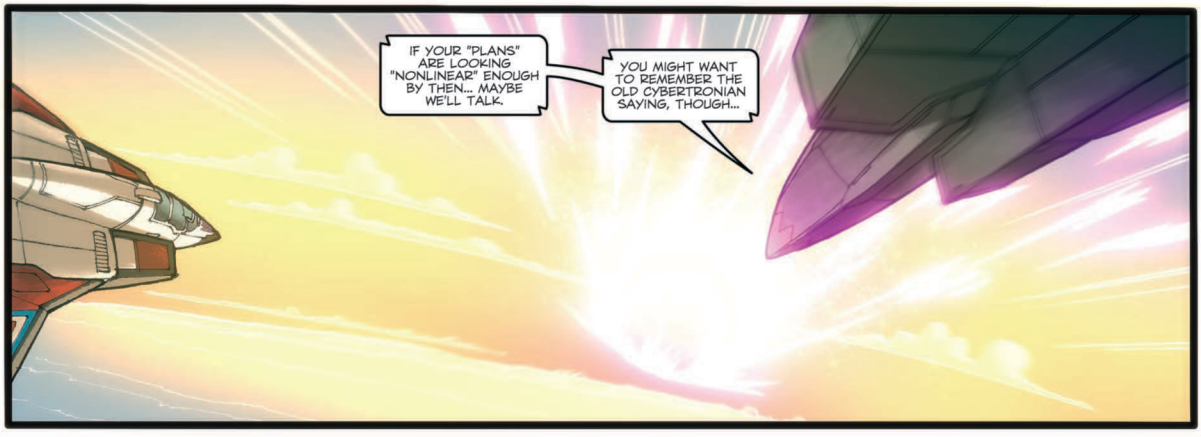

WAIT A MINUTE. YOU'VE PULLED SOME CRAZY STUNTS BEFORE–
–BUT YOU'RE NOT THINKING OF GOING UP AGAINST *HIM*?


STARSCREAM TRIED THAT. YOU WEREN'T ON EARTH THEN–BUT LET ME TELL YOU, THE RESULTS WEREN'T PRETTY.*
STARSCREAM WAS NOTHING.
AND ***MEGATRON***... HE'S NOTHING, TOO.
* SEE *THE TRANSFORMERS: INFILTRATION*–ED.

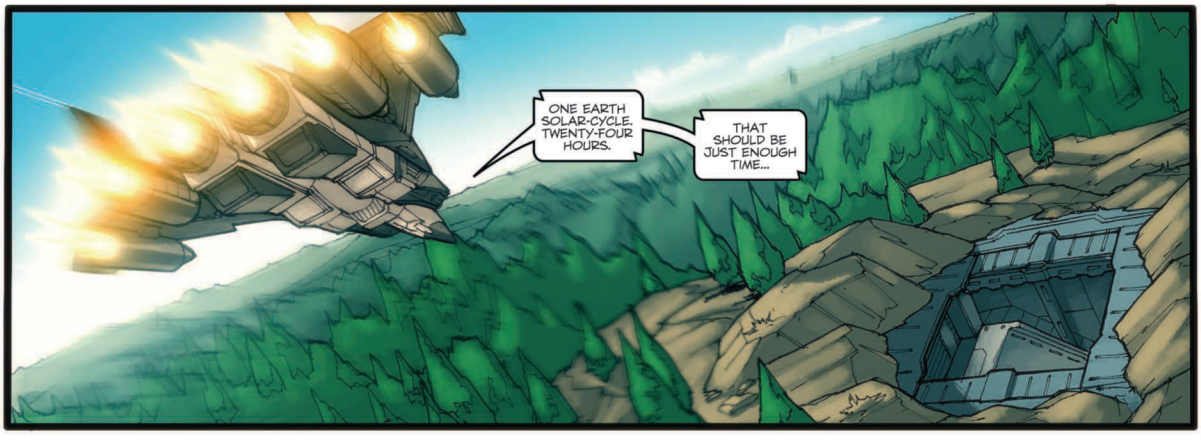

STARSCREAM WAS A LACKEY. A MINOR OFFICER WHO THOUGHT HE COULD OVERTHROW HIS C.O.
HIS VISION WAS PATHETICALLY LIMITED--AND HE GOT WHAT HE DESERVED.
MEGATRON BELIEVES THIS WORLD IS IMPORTANT. SO HE'S COME HERE PERSONALLY--AND THAT'S HIS FATAL MISTAKE.
HE'S ISOLATED HIMSELF--MAKING HIM AN EASY TARGET. A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY FOR HIS ENEMIES.
SUCH AS YOU...
YES. BUT THE WISE TACTICIAN KNOWS THAT OPPORTUNITY IS NOT THE END OF THE BATTLE.
IT'S THE BEGINNING.
MY PLANS ARE MANY AND COMPLEX, SKYWARP.
ALLOW ME TO DEMONSTRATE...

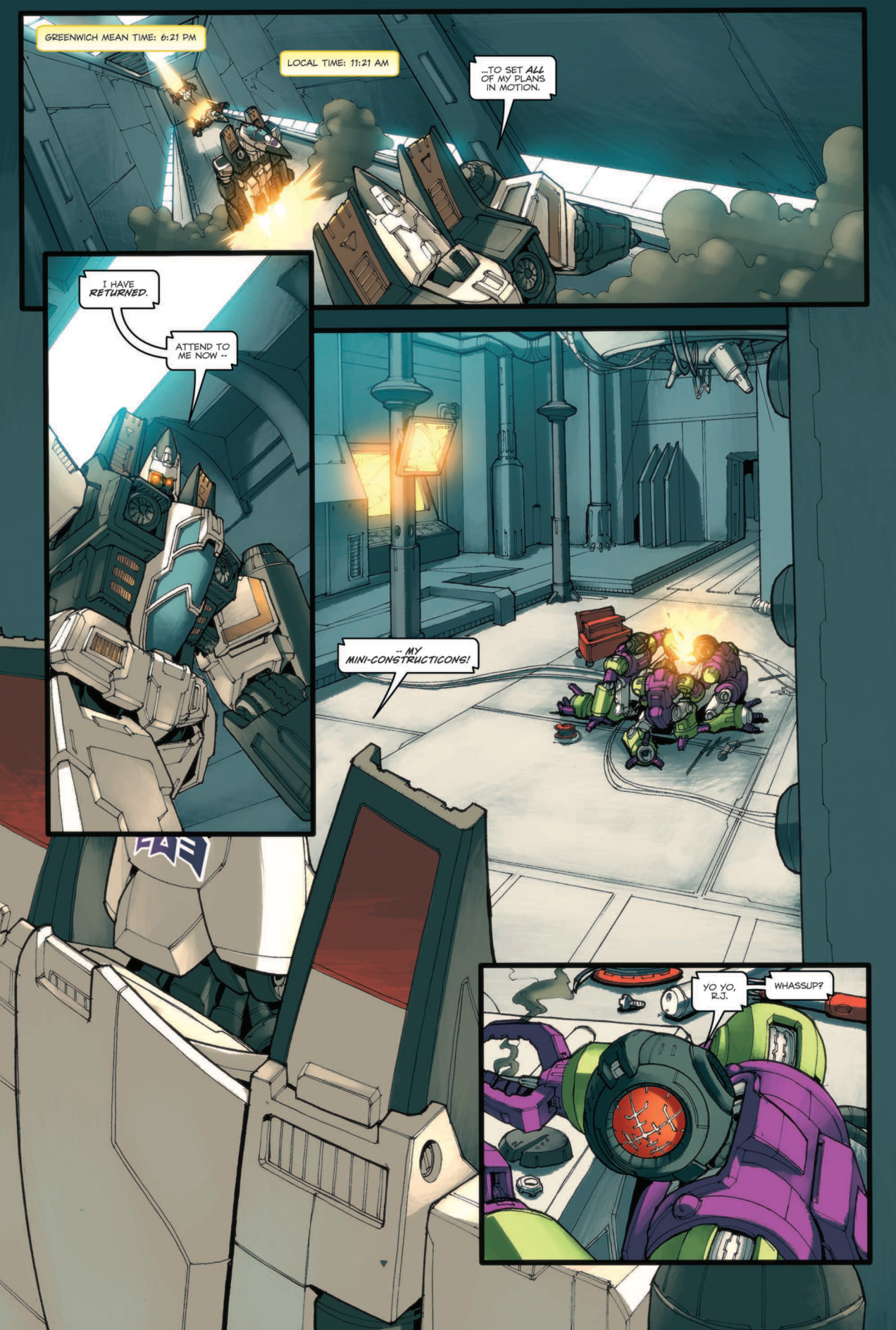

WHEN A DECEPTICON—YOU OR I—FLIES FROM PLACE TO PLACE, THE PROCESS IS BASICALLY LINEAR. THREE-DIMENSIONAL.
AS YOU SOAR OVER LAND, THE OCEAN AHEAD CAN BE PLAINLY SEEN. THE ATMOSPHERE AROUND YOU GIVES WAY GRADUALLY TO THE AIRLESS VOID ABOVE.
BUT WHEN WE PERFORM AN ORBITAL BOUNCE—OR WHEN YOU, YOURSELF, TRAVEL THROUGH ONE OF YOUR SPATIAL WARPS—
—WE APPEAR, SUDDENLY, TO BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE.
MEGATRON'S PLANS, STARSCREAM'S—THOSE CONCEPTS ARE LIMITED AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL.
MINE ARE MUCH LARGER... MORE COMPLEX. LESS LINEAR.
THAT IS WHY, SKYWARP... I WILL ULTIMATELY TRIUMPH.
HA! YOU KNOW WHAT, RAMJET?
THAT'S THE BIGGEST BUNCH OF CRAP I'VE EVER HEARD.

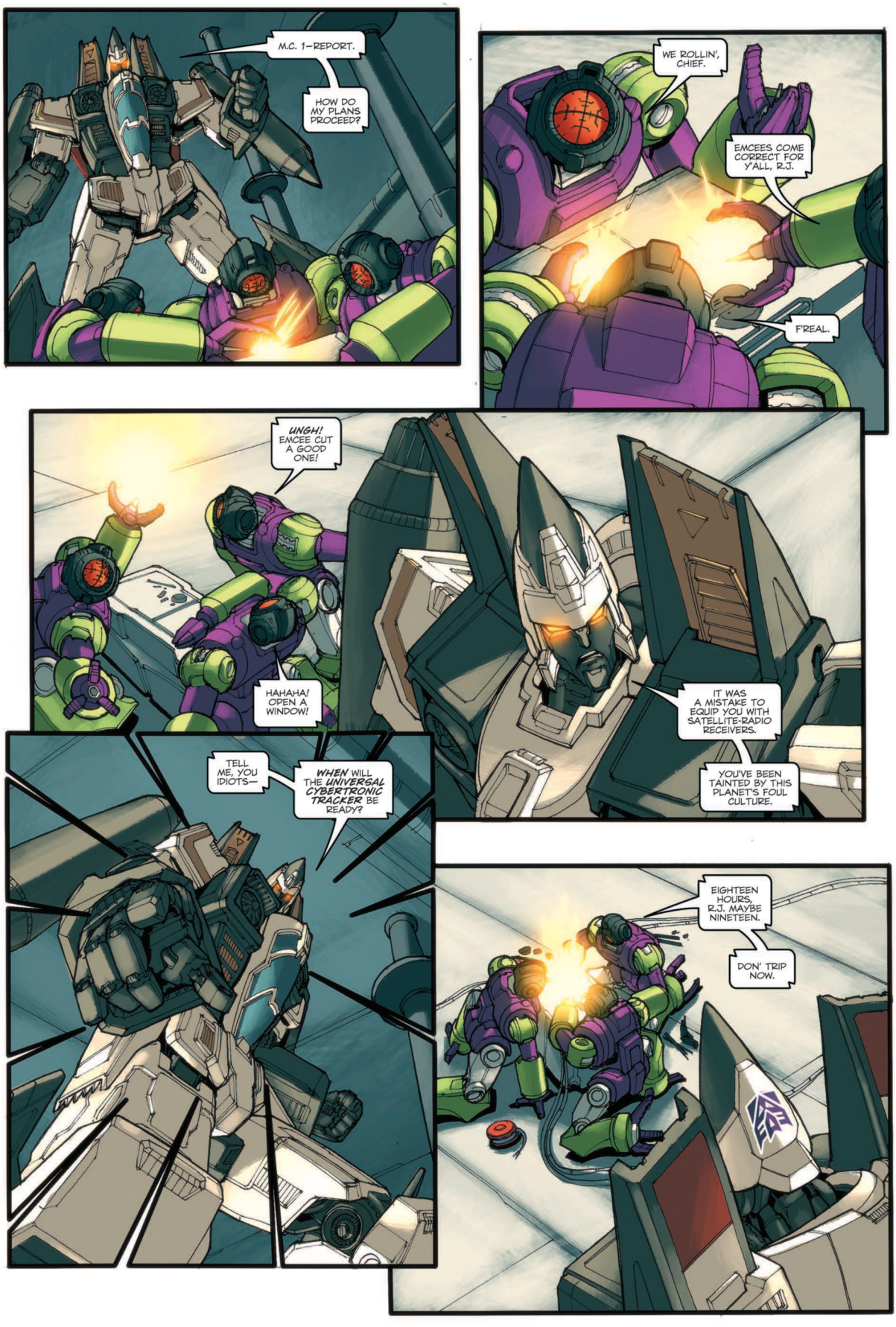

I'M INTRIGUED, THOUGH. TELL YOU WHAT...
...I'LL CHECK BACK WITH YOU IN ONE EARTH SOLAR-CYCLE.

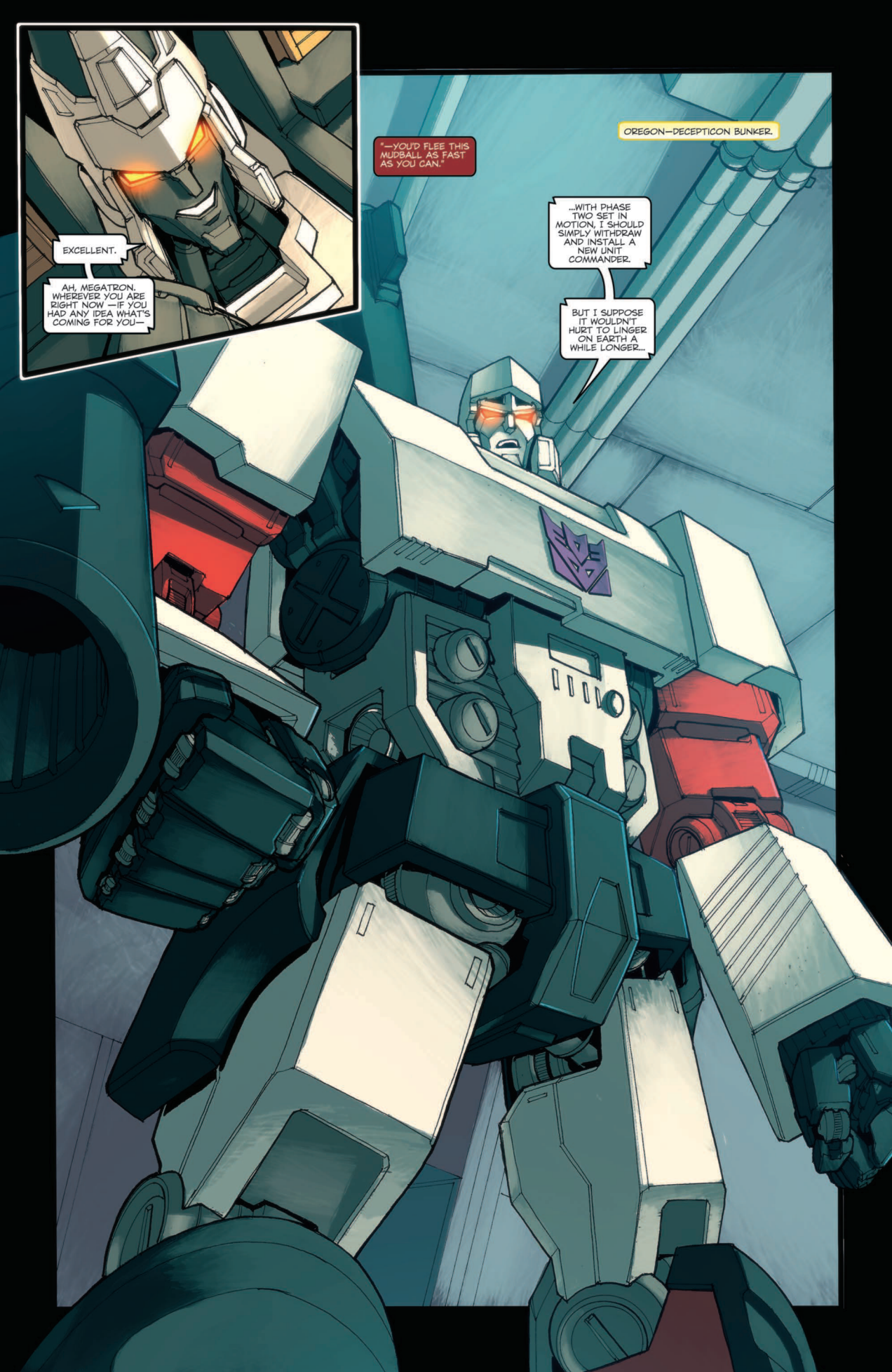

IF YOUR "PLANS" ARE LOOKING "NONLINEAR" ENOUGH BY THEN... MAYBE WE'LL TALK.
YOU MIGHT WANT TO REMEMBER THE OLD CYBERTRONIAN SAYING, THOUGH...

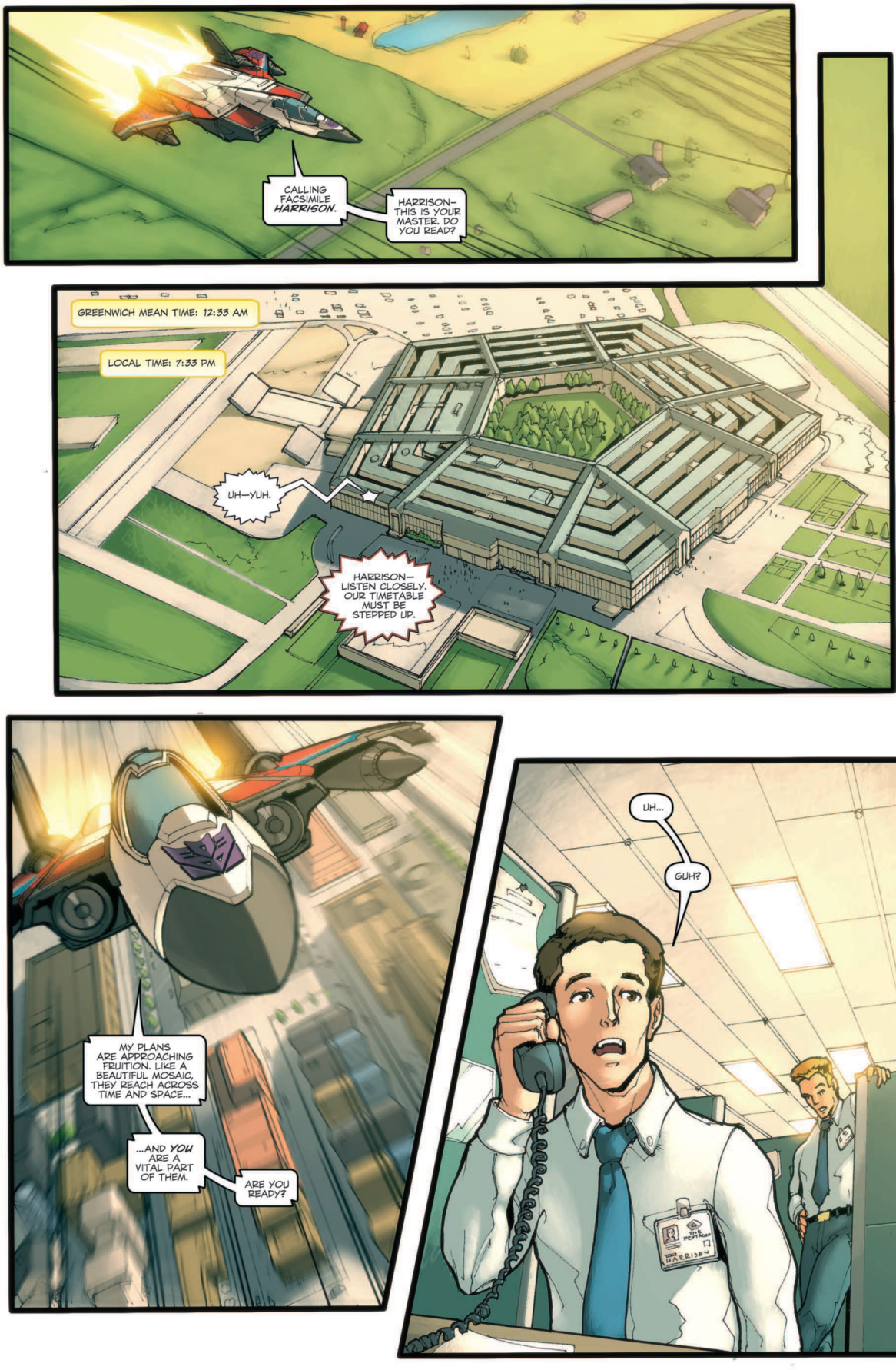

"...ALWAYS BET ON THE LEADER."

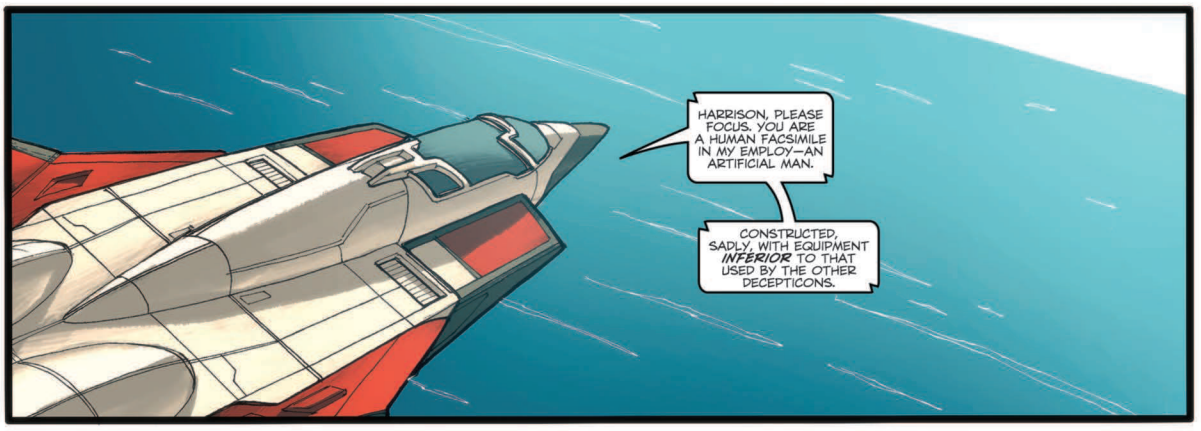

ONE EARTH SOLAR-CYCLE. TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.
THAT SHOULD BE JUST ENOUGH TIME...

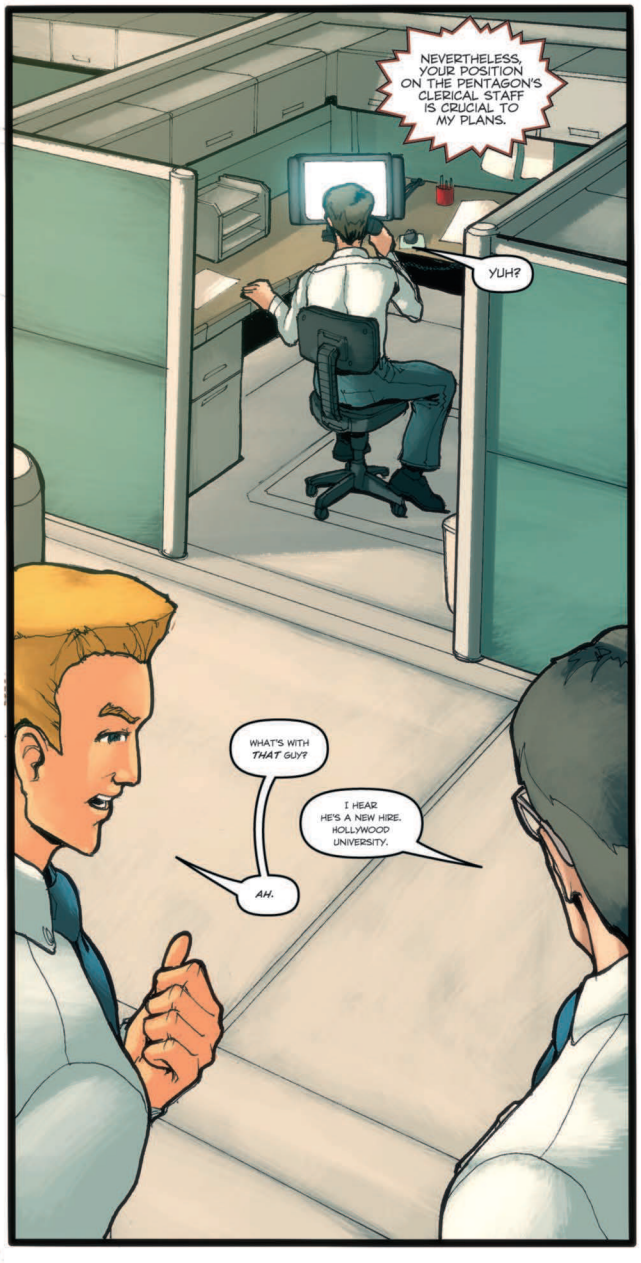

GREENWICH MEAN TIME: 6:21 PM
LOCAL TIME: 11:21 AM
...TO SET ALL OF MY PLANS IN MOTION.
I HAVE RETURNED.
ATTEND TO ME NOW --
-- MY MINI-CONSTRUCTICONS!
YO YO, R.J.
WHASSUP?

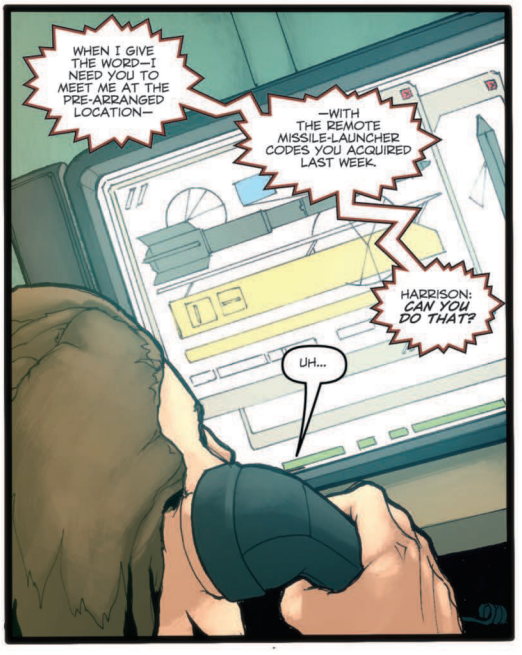

M.C. 1–REPORT.
HOW DO MY PLANS PROCEED?
WE ROLLIN', CHIEF.
EMCEES COME CORRECT FOR Y'ALL, R.J.
F'REAL.
UNGH! EMCEE CUT A GOOD ONE!
HAHAHA! OPEN A WINDOW!
IT WAS A MISTAKE TO EQUIP YOU WITH SATELLITE-RADIO RECEIVERS.
YOU'VE BEEN TAINTED BY THIS PLANET'S FOUL CULTURE.
TELL ME, YOU IDIOTS—
WHEN WILL THE *UNIVERSAL CYBERTRONIC TRACKER* BE READY?
EIGHTEEN HOURS, R.J. MAYBE NINETEEN.
DON' TRIP NOW.

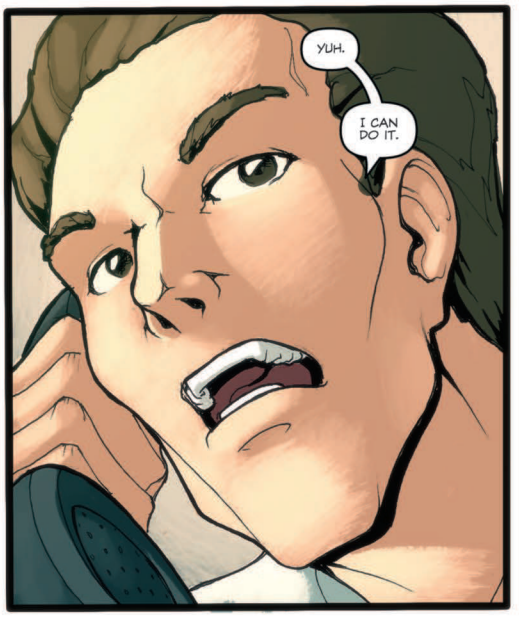

EXCELLENT.
AH, MEGATRON. WHEREVER YOU ARE RIGHT NOW —IF YOU HAD ANY IDEA WHAT'S COMING FOR YOU—
"—YOU'D FLEE THIS MUDBALL AS FAST AS YOU CAN."
OREGON—DECEPTICON BUNKER.
...WITH PHASE TWO SET IN MOTION, I SHOULD SIMPLY WITHDRAW AND INSTALL A NEW UNIT COMMANDER.
BUT I SUPPOSE IT WOULDN'T HURT TO LINGER ON EARTH A WHILE LONGER...

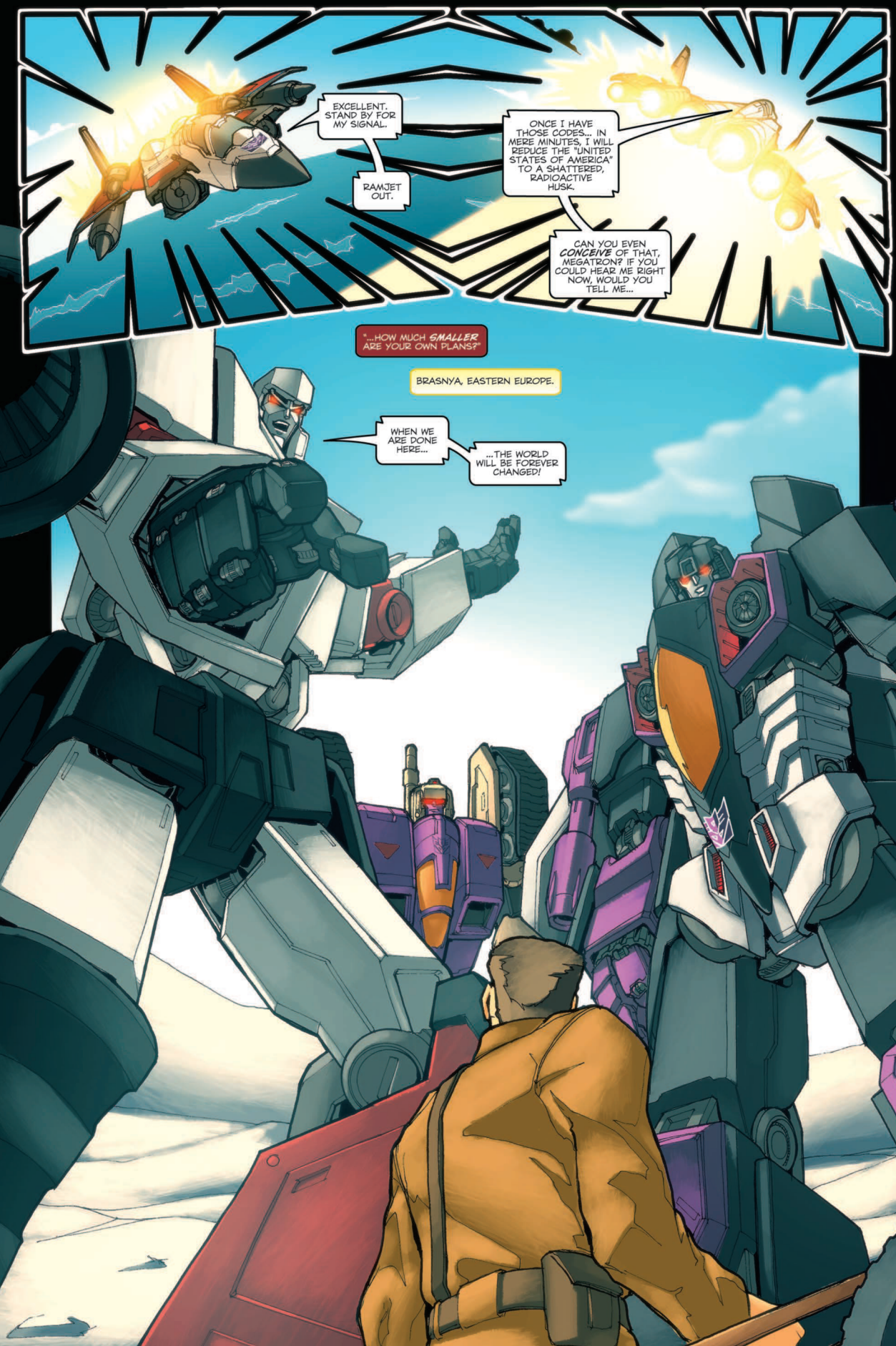

CALLING FACSIMILE HARRISON.
HARRISON— THIS IS YOUR MASTER. DO YOU READ?
GREENWICH MEAN TIME: 12:33 AM
LOCAL TIME: 7:33 PM
UH—YUH.
HARRISON— LISTEN CLOSELY. OUR TIMETABLE MUST BE STEPPED UP.
MY PLANS ARE APPROACHING FRUITION. LIKE A BEAUTIFUL MOSAIC, THEY REACH ACROSS TIME AND SPACE...
...AND YOU ARE A VITAL PART OF THEM.
ARE YOU READY?
UH...
GUH?


HARRISON, PLEASE FOCUS. YOU ARE A HUMAN FACSIMILE IN MY EMPLOY—AN ARTIFICIAL MAN.
CONSTRUCTED, SADLY, WITH EQUIPMENT *INFERIOR* TO THAT USED BY THE OTHER DECEPTICONS.


NEVERTHELESS, YOUR POSITION ON THE PENTAGON'S CLERICAL STAFF IS *CRUCIAL* TO MY PLANS.
YUH?
WHAT'S WITH *THAT GUY?*
I HEAR HE'S A NEW HIRE. HOLLYWOOD UNIVERSITY.
AH.

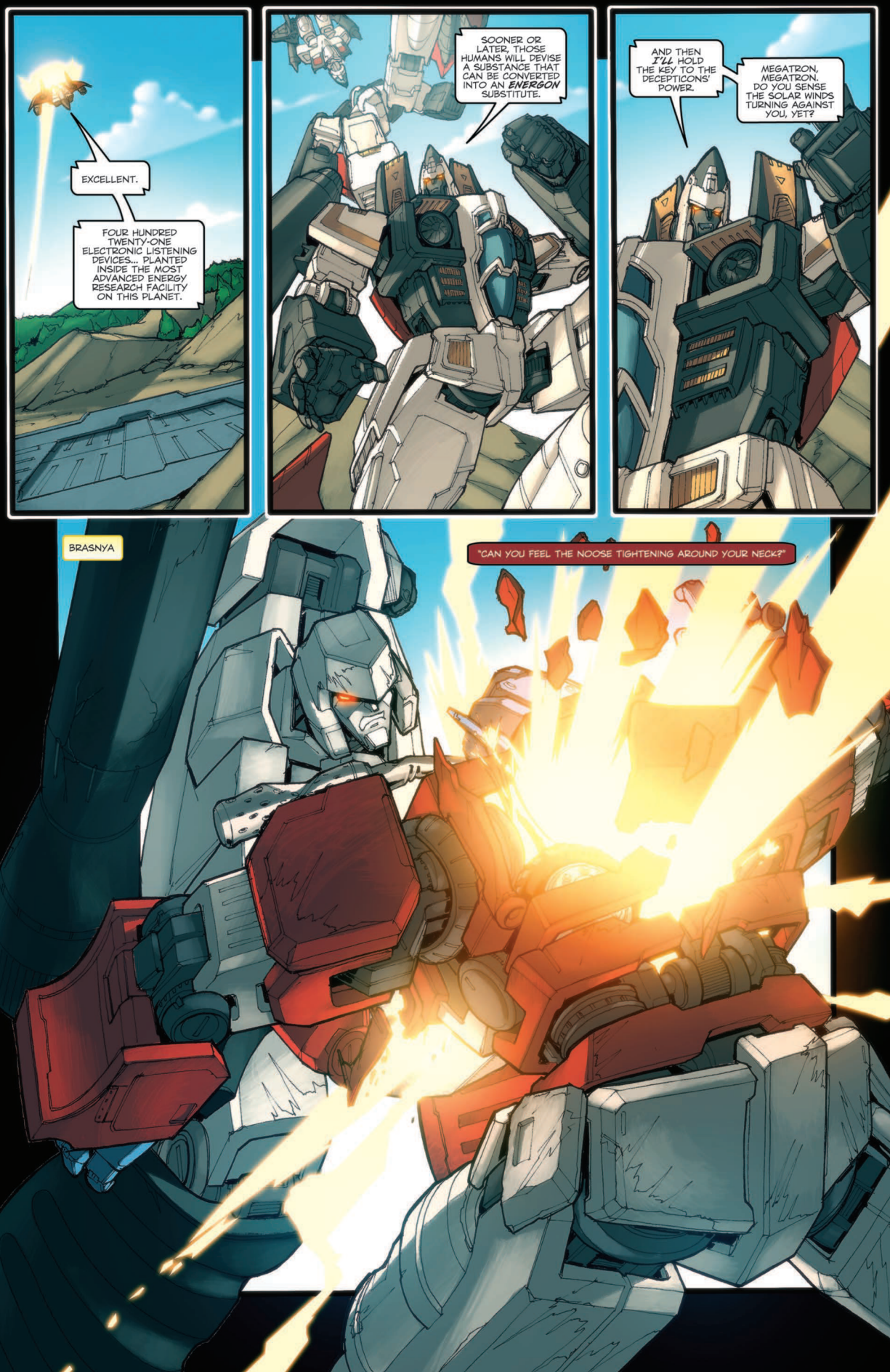

WHEN I GIVE THE WORD—I NEED YOU TO MEET ME AT THE PRE-ARRANGED LOCATION—
—WITH THE REMOTE MISSILE-LAUNCHER CODES YOU ACQUIRED LAST WEEK.
HARRISON: *CAN YOU DO THAT?*
UH...


YUH.
I CAN DO IT.


EXCELLENT. STAND BY FOR MY SIGNAL.
RAMJET OUT.
ONCE I HAVE THOSE CODES... IN MERE MINUTES, I WILL REDUCE THE "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" TO A SHATTERED, RADIOACTIVE HUSK.
CAN YOU EVEN *CONCEIVE* OF THAT, MEGATRON? IF YOU COULD HEAR ME RIGHT NOW, WOULD YOU TELL ME...
"...HOW MUCH *SMALLER* ARE YOUR OWN PLANS?"
BRASNYA, EASTERN EUROPE.
WHEN WE ARE DONE HERE...
...THE WORLD WILL BE FOREVER CHANGED!


GREENWICH MEAN TIME: 8:48 AM
LOCAL TIME: 9:48 AM
EUROPEAN UNION
ALTERNATIVE ENERGY RESEARCH
UNION EUROPÉENNE
CENTRE DE RECHERCHES D'ÉNERGIE ALT
WIN €30,000
NEW INTERNATIONAL COMPETIT
KEEP THIS FLYER

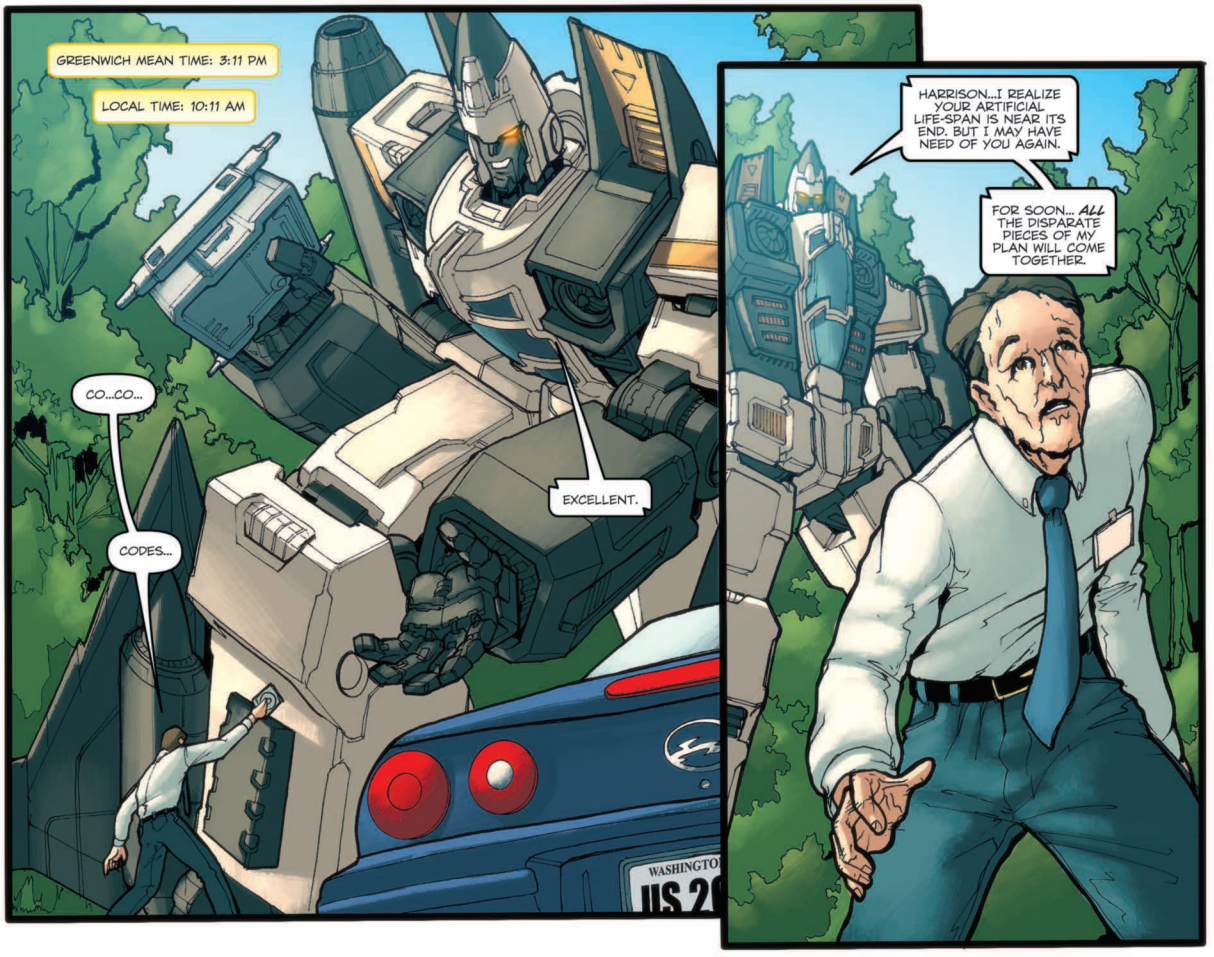

WIN £50,000
IN AN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION
KEEP THIS FLYER


EXCELLENT.
FOUR HUNDRED TWENTY-ONE ELECTRONIC LISTENING DEVICES... PLANTED INSIDE THE MOST ADVANCED ENERGY RESEARCH FACILITY ON THIS PLANET.
SOONER OR LATER, THOSE HUMANS WILL DEVISE A SUBSTANCE THAT CAN BE CONVERTED INTO AN ENERGON SUBSTITUTE.
AND THEN I'LL HOLD THE KEY TO THE DECEPTICONS' POWER.
MEGATRON, MEGATRON. DO YOU SENSE THE SOLAR WINDS TURNING AGAINST YOU, YET?
BRASNYA
"CAN YOU FEEL THE NOOSE TIGHTENING AROUND YOUR NECK?"

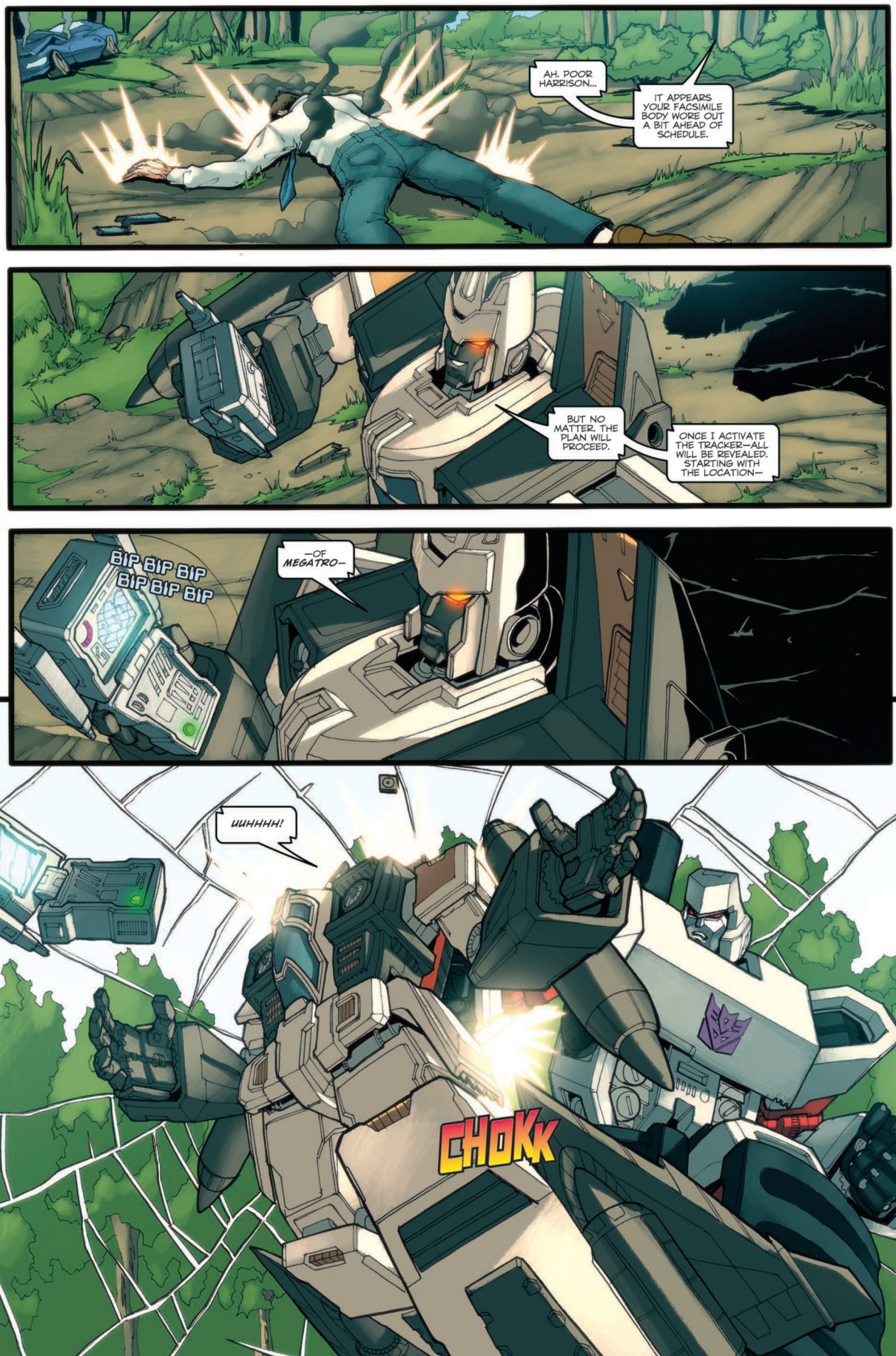

GREENWICH MEAN TIME: 1:07 PM
LOCAL TIME: 6:07 AM
WHASSUP, R.J.! ONE UNIVERSAL CYBERTRONIC TRACKER.
EMCEES GOOD AS OUR WORD, YO!
EXCELLENT. ASSUMING IT WORKS...
YO, R.J., MAN.
WHEN ALL THIS OVER—WHEN YOU KING—
—YOU GON' REMEMBER YOUR BOYS, YEAH?
STRAIGHT UP.
YOU GIVE US A TASTE, RIGHT?
RIGHT?
FZZAT
FZZAT

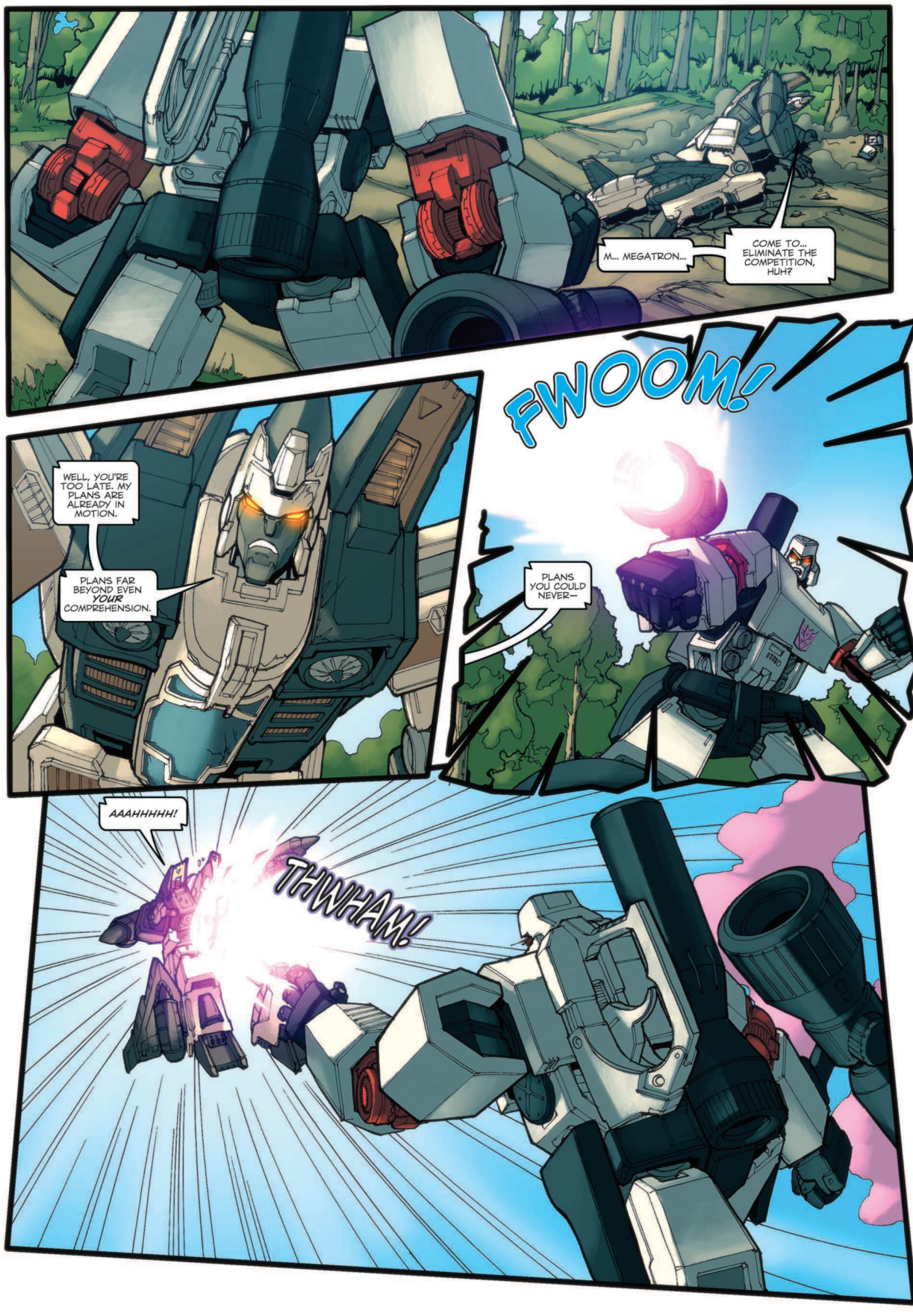

YOUR FRIENDS *OVERREACHED* THEMSELVES.
CONSIDER THE LESSONS OF THAT ERROR—

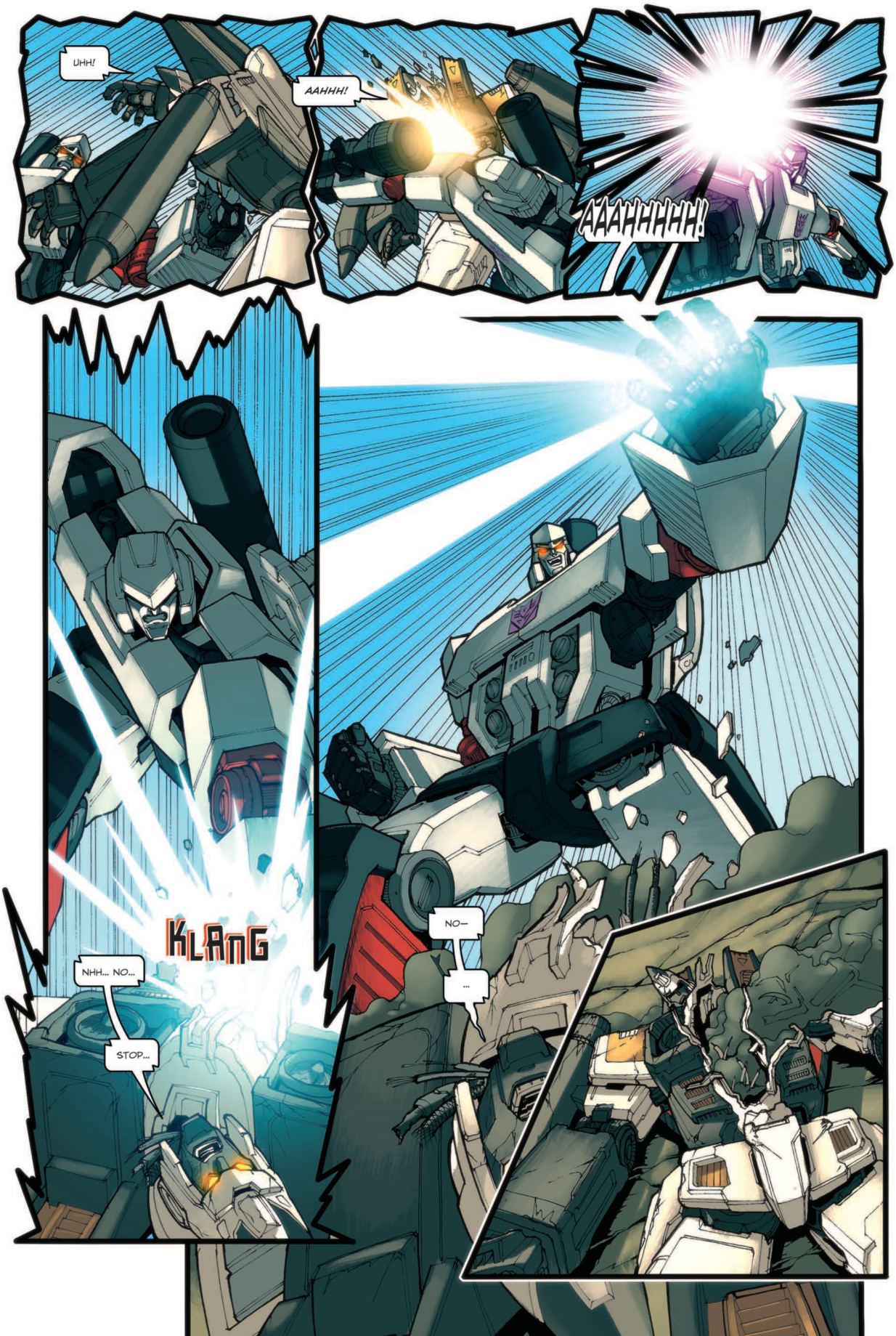

—WHILE I GO TO CONFRONT MY *DESTINY*.


GREENWICH MEAN TIME: 3:11 PM
LOCAL TIME: 10:11 AM
CO...CO...
CODES...
EXCELLENT.
HARRISON...I REALIZE YOUR ARTIFICIAL LIFE-SPAN IS NEAR ITS END. BUT I MAY HAVE NEED OF YOU AGAIN.
FOR SOON... *ALL* THE DISPARATE PIECES OF MY PLAN WILL COME TOGETHER.


"WITH THE UNIVERSAL TRACKER, I CAN MONITOR THE LOCATIONS OF *ALL* CYBERTRONIANS, ANYWHERE IN THE GALAXY—*AUTOBOTS* AND *DECEPTICONS* ALIKE.
"MEANWHILE, A NEWLY DEVELOPED ENERGON SUBSTITUTE WILL FREE ME FROM RELIANCE ON MEGATRON—AND FREE THE OTHER DECEPTICONS, AS WELL, TO FOLLOW *ME*.
"THEN, WHEN I SET OFF THIS NATION'S ENTIRE ARSENAL OF MISSILES—THE PLANET WILL BE THROWN INTO *CHAOS*—
"—ALLOWING MY FELLOW DECEPTICONS—BY THEN, MY *SLAVES*—TO STRIP THIS WORLD OF ITS PRECIOUS RESOURCES.
"AND YET, THAT TOO IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF MY PLANS. MY BEAUTIFUL, NONLINEAR VISION OF THE FUTURE.
"SOON MY M2C'S— *MICRO*CONSTRUCTICONS—WILL BE PERFECTED. WHEN INJECTED INTO THE HUMANS' BLOODSTREAMS, THEY WILL GRANT ME TOTAL CONTROL OF EVERY MAN AND WOMAN ON EARTH.
"AND THEN—ONCE A FEW FINAL ENGINEERING DEFECTS ARE OVERCOME—THE *SUPERSTRING SPACEBRIDGE* WILL ASSURE MY *ETERNAL DOMINION* OVER—"
THOK

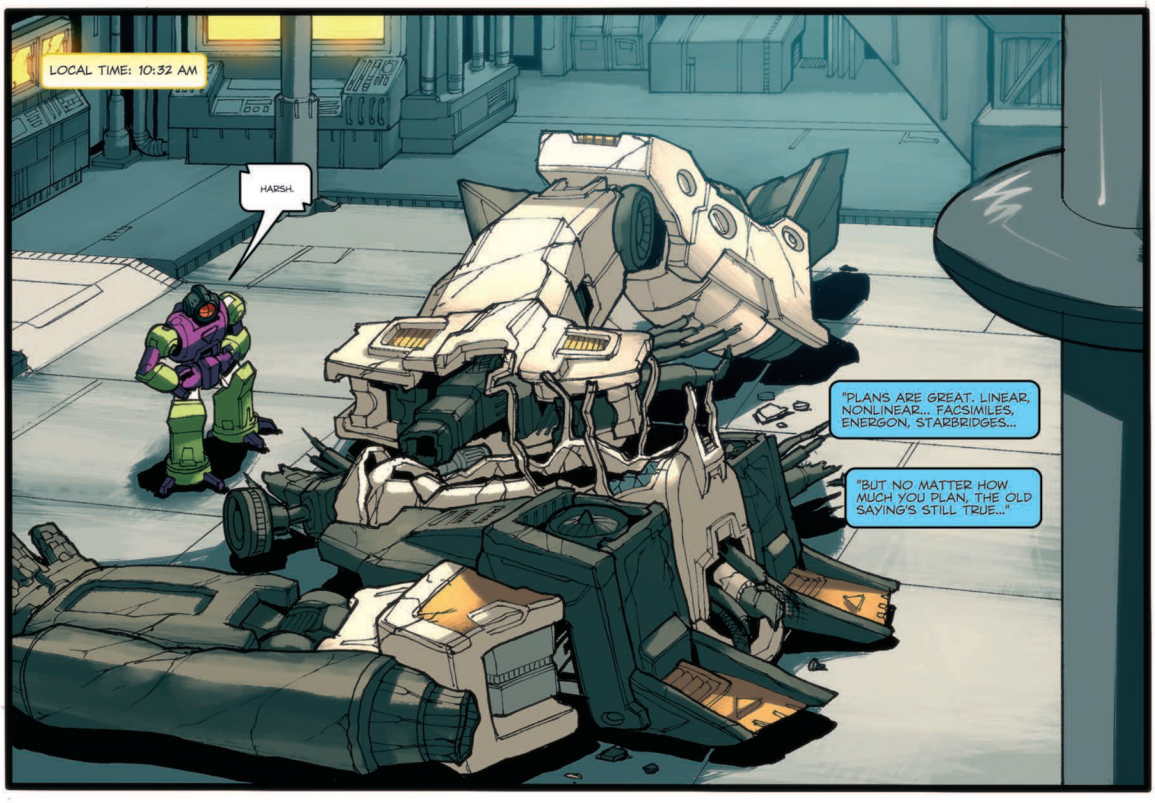

AH. POOR HARRISON...
IT APPEARS YOUR FACSIMILE BODY WORE OUT A BIT AHEAD OF SCHEDULE.
BUT NO MATTER. THE PLAN WILL PROCEED.
ONCE I ACTIVATE THE TRACKER—ALL WILL BE REVEALED. STARTING WITH THE LOCATION—
BIP BIP BIP
BIP BIP BIP
—OF MEGATRO—
UUHHHH!
CHOKK


M... MEGATRON...
COME TO... ELIMINATE THE COMPETITION, HUH?
WELL, YOU'RE TOO LATE. MY PLANS ARE ALREADY IN MOTION.
PLANS FAR BEYOND EVEN YOUR COMPREHENSION.
FWOOM!
PLANS YOU COULD NEVER—
AAAHHHHH!
THWHAM!


UHH!
AAHHH!
AAAHHHHH!
KLANG
NHH... NO...
STOP...
NO—
...


GREENWICH MEAN TIME: 5:32 PM
LOCAL TIME: 12:32 PM

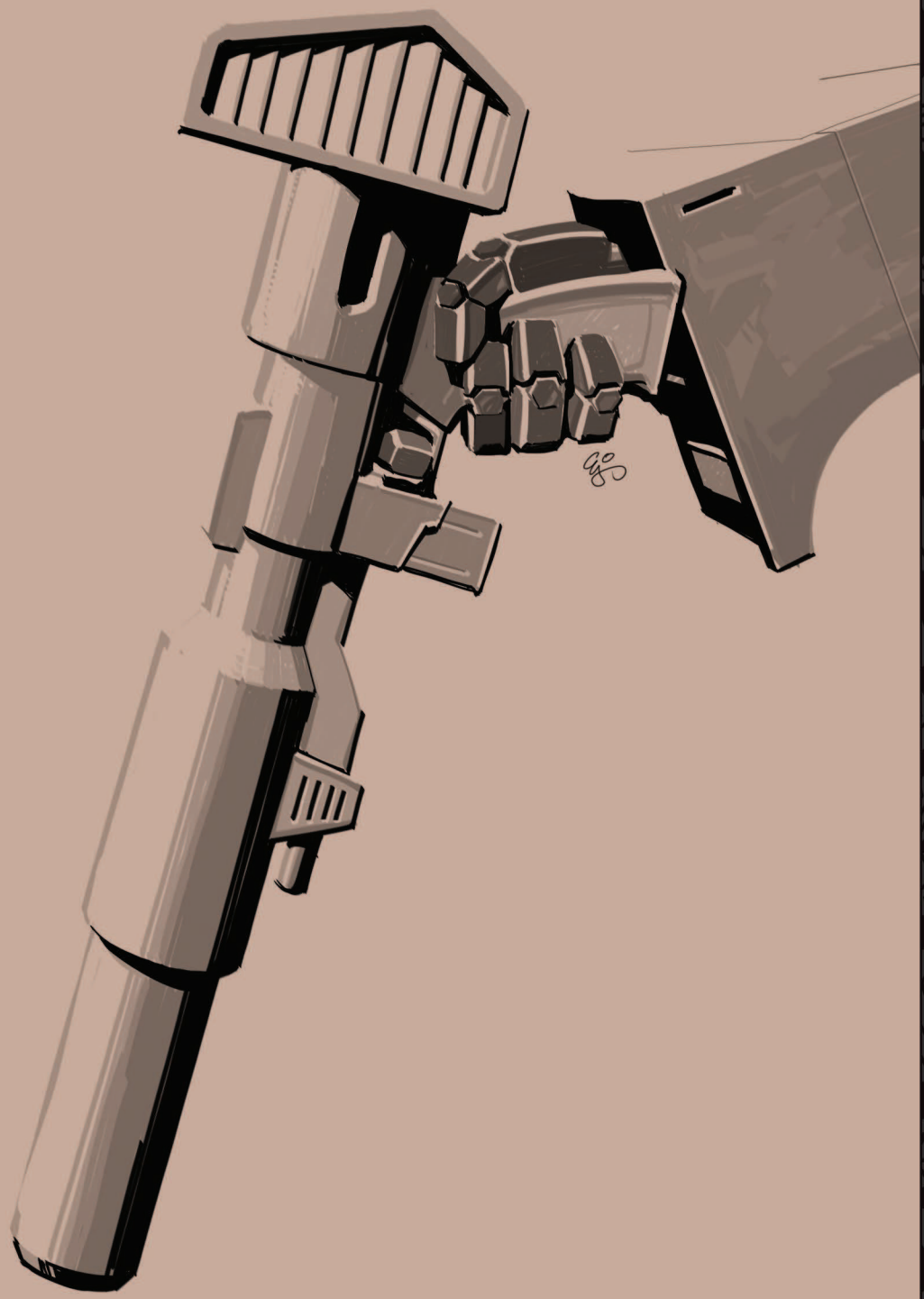

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY RESEARCH CENTER
UNION EUROPÉENNE
CENTRE DE RECHERCHES D'ÉNERGIE ALTERNATIVE
LOCAL TIME: 6:32 PM


LOCAL TIME: 10:32 AM
HARSH.
"PLANS ARE GREAT. LINEAR, NONLINEAR... FACSIMILES, ENERGON, STARBRIDGES...
"BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU PLAN, THE OLD SAYING'S STILL TRUE..."


...ALWAYS BET ON THE LEADER.
THE END.


ART BY GUIDO GUIDI
COLORS BY JOSH BURCHAM

PHASE TWO BEGINS...



The re-presentation of IDW's Transformers Universe continues in Volume 2! This volume includes the Transformers series Stormbringer and Escalation, as well as Spotlights: Sixshot, Ultra Magnus, Kup, Mirage, Optimus Prime, and Ramjet.