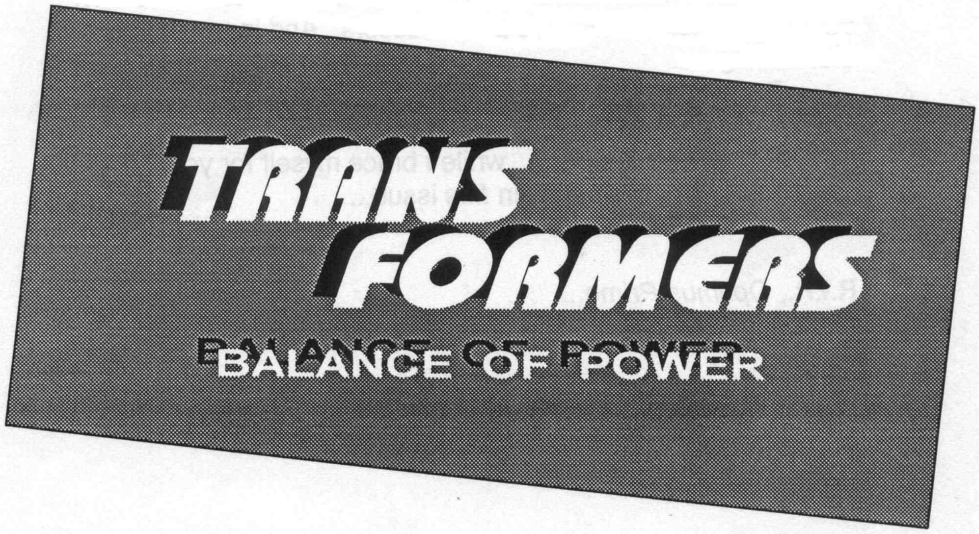
Bye bye, Optimus Prime...

Andromeda Publishing

PRESENTS



"Fall From Glory"

Part Three

Issue 3, Volume 1 *January 1994*

The best issue yet...?

So... what do you think so far, folks? Be sure to send in any comments or suggestions you may have... I love to get 'em. Even if they're complaints... but what *is* there to complain about? Yes, I *know* I killed too many characters in issue #2...

Well, when I started writing this issue, a major part of a Transformers story that is destined to go down in Transformer history (insert false modesty here), I could tell that it would turn out even *better* than its two predecessors. And in my opinion, it did. Go figure.

But you people are the audience... so *you* be the judges. The best yet? And the really good stuff is yet to come...

Enjoy, loyal readers... while I brace myself for your reactions to what happens in *this* issue...

R.I.P., *Optimus Prime*...

Transformers: Balance of Power

Created by Tom Yaghi

Number 3; Volume 1

"Fall From Glory"

Part Three

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1994 Andromeda Publishing

Fall From Glory (Part 3)

By Tom Zavier

The fires have stopped burning.

There's nothing left to burn.

Autobot City has been reduced to nothing but wreckage and smoldering ashes... everything destroyed, except the supply shuttle that the Decepticons had stolen to get here... and all it took to bring Autobot City down was some Seacon sabotage and that commandeered shuttle. Very cost-efficient destruction indeed...

The death count continues to rise. Very few remain of Autobot City's population... Fortress Maximus is dead. Kup is dead. Rapido and Turbofire are dead. Warpath, Powerglide and Cosmos are dead.

The Decepticons too, have suffered losses. After Galvatron ordered the remaining Seacons to leave the hydro electricity channels and join the battle, they became an easy target on land. Already Snaptrap, Nautilator and Scalor have fallen. Among the others, Octane is unconscious, but alive; due to Prowl's discretion.

With enough effort and endurance, the remaining Autobots could possibly turn the tide... but whatever fighting spirit they possessed to begin with, it has left them. The Decepticons warriors are now merely butchers, moving about the rubble, finishing off the survivors they encounter... while Galvatron watches with a sick sense of pleasure, contemplating what to do with his conquered planet... a new headquarters for the Decepticon empire, perhaps?

Perhaps.

But, there are those among the survivors who refuse to fall; those who continue to resist the inevitable...

Wheeljack laid on the ground, his body charred, his spirit drained. Blitzwing stood over the Autobot, his electro-sword at the ready...

"N-No... please!" sputtered Wheeljack, "Don't... p-please... have mercy, please..."

Blitzwing sneered. "Mercy. That's a good one." Sparks flew as, with a single stroke, Blitzwing parted Wheeljack's head module into two equal halves.

"Here's another one!" cried Scavenger, digging under some debris. Astrotrain moved closer and lifted the revealed Autobot from his hiding place.

"You're just a little one, aren't you?" taunted Astrotrain, the Autobot hanging limply from his grasp.

"W-Why must you... pain..."

"Don't worry; you won't feel pain much longer!" Astrotrain tore what was left of the Autobot apart with his bare hands... ignoring the screams that ensued.

"This is getting boring," he muttered, dropping the Autobot's remains. "It was more interesting when these Autobrats actually put up a fight..."

Scavenger was digging deeper into a nearby pile of debris, when suddenly, his shovel was

stuck. He tried to pull it out, but couldn't... at that moment, he was thrown into the air, and knocked over Blitzwing as they collided...

Four figures burst up from under the debris, assuming fighting stances.

"We'll make it more interesting for you..." cried Sideswipe. "Prepare to be trashed!!"

Astrotrain lunged at the Autobots, only to be intercepted as Jazz removed his helmet and threw it at the Decepticon. "What goes around, comes around, dude."

Blitzwing had recovered, and attacked; transforming to tank mode, he fired a deadly energy burst at the Autobots. Prowl, Sideswipe and Inferno easily dodged the blast, but Jazz came extremely close to getting hit, jumping aside at the last moment. Only slightly shaken up, he decided to even out the odds a little, by splitting apart into his inner robot and Pretender shell...

His Pretender shell reconnected, the Autobots now outnumbered the Decepticons five to three... and Scavenger was still reeling. With a thought, Jazz sent his Pretender shell to deal with Scavenger, while Sideswipe and Prowl leapt at Astrotrain. Blitzwing transformed back to robot mode, and charged at Jazz, his electro-sword at the ready.

With characteristic finesse, Jazz ducked down and dodged Blitzwing's first sword slash, and grabbed his arm before he could make another. Wrestling the sword from the Decepticon, Jazz leapt back, putting some distance between them.

"That won't help you one bit..." Blitzwing quickly transformed into his plane mode, and rocketed straight at Jazz. Jazz flattened himself to the ground as the jet passed over him, and veered up into the sky, to make another attempt. As Blitzwing did so, Jazz hurled the electro-sword at him, embedding the blade in the Decepticon's wing.

"Yo, Inferno!" yelled Jazz, pointing, "There! One-o-clock! Fire the secret weapon!"

"Gladly!" Inferno transformed into his fire-engine mode, and aimed his hoses at Blitzwing, releasing a stream of high-pressure water; drenching the Triple Changer...

"Yiiiieeeee!!!" Blitzwing screamed, the full charge of his electro-sword coursing through his metal body. Stunned and unconscious, he quickly crashed into the ground.

Meanwhile, with a well-placed blow, Astrotrain had knocked Prowl to the ground... revealing a laser pistol, the Decepticon stood over him, taking aim...

"It's sort of a pity that I have to do this, Prowl," said Astrotrain. "After all, you Autobots did get rid of Starscream for us. Do understand, we are grateful."

Prowl smiled. "I'm sure you are." With astounding quickness, Prowl swept Astrotrain's legs out from under him, and grabbed the Decepticon's weapon as he fell... after Prowl lifted himself up, the roles had been reversed.

A short distance away, Jazz's Pretender shell was fighting off Scavenger's clumsy attacks.Picking the small Decepticon up, the shell tossed him into a pile of nearby debris. Before the shell could move in, a particle beam erupted from out of nowhere, obliterating it...

Jazz screamed, convulsing with unimaginable pain. He fell to his knees, still shaking, whimpering incoherent fragments of Earthen slang.

Next to the ashes that were once Jazz's Pretender shell, he stood:

Galvatron.

"I am tiring of this futile resistance, Autobots," he boomed, lifting Scavenger out of the debris.

"Now it ends!" After telling Scavenger to go find the other Constructicons, he let loose upon the four Autobots; firing a fearsome barrage of particle beams at them.

Inferno grabbed Jazz to take him to cover, and was hit in the process. Sideswipe and Prowl escaped to safety, while Astrotrain cowered.

"How many more of you will I have to kill before you realize you cannot win?" said Galvatron, continuing his assault. "Can't you comprehend that it's over? You have no hope! Earth is mine!!"

Suddenly, the center of the battlefield was flooded with blinding light... as the light faded, eight figures stood where none had stood before. One figure stood, higher, prouder than the others...

Galvatron spun around, his spirit of victory torn away as he saw who had arrived...

"Optimus Prime!!"

* * *

Washington, D.C., The United States of America...

In a high-rise office, a large group of men and women sit around a circular table. Dressed in a wide variety of cultural attires, they are the Council of United Nations ... a ruling council formed in the year 2004. Each person represents a specific area of the planet, and meeting in this manner allows every country's needs to be easily addressed .

They have gathered today, to discuss a most pressing and unusual matter...

Council Member #2: "What, we're just going to sit here?? We can't let these robots walk all over us!!"

Council Member #4: "We are not letting the robots 'walk all over us'. As you know, we made a number of agreements with the Autobots when they wanted to build their city. Those agreements are not invalidated by the Decepticons' attack."

Council Member #2: "All of southern British Columbia is covered with smoke! Directly or indirectly, that attack is threatening Human lives! It is our concern now, no matter what--"

Council Member #3: "You agreed to letting the Autobots use Vancouver Island, Jim. And the people living around it were fully aware of the risks. Are you going back on your word, Jim?"

Council Member #2: "Don't patronize me, Sarah; I--"

Council Member #1: "This discussion is getting nowhere. We agreed that in case of such an attack, we would not interfere if the Autobots sent us a certain radio signal. We have received that signal."

Council Member #2: "Just moments before their communications were completely silenced."

Council Member #1: "That is irrelevant. The Decepticons have made no direct aggressive action against Earth itself. Unless they do, we will honor our agreements with the Autobots."

Council Member #9: "But William, what should we consider as 'direct aggressive action'?"

Council Member #1: "When Human lives are taken intentionally and... plentifully by Decepticon weaponry."

Council Member #2: "I'm quoting you on that."

Council Member #3: "I'm sure you would!"

Council Member #12: "But our weapons have always proved ineffective against the Decepticons in the past. How will we fight them?"

Council Member #1: "If all goes well for the Autobots, we won't have to. But if we do, I

recommend we contact G.B. Blackrock. We could definitely make use of his... resources."

Council Member #12: "Agreed."

* * *

"Well, well, well. The coward isn't going to hide on Cybertron as I expected. Of course, if you did, the timeline would have been even further disrupted..."

"I knew I would see the Decepticons again," replied Optimus Prime. "But I didn't expect to find you leading them."

"Life is full of surprises." Galvatron raised his particle cannon slightly. "So is death. That is, except for me."

"What do you mean?"

"Of course you can't understand. Do you not realize, that I have lived two lives? I have lead an attack against this Autobot City before... in a different time, a different universe... as Megatron... and thanks to Unicron, I get to live it all over again..."

Before Optimus Prime could reply, a series of unusual sounds caught his attention: the sound of six small robots transforming and combining into one large one...

"Devastator..." whispered Arcee.

"Yes," said Galvatron. "My little solution to the only drawback of Autobot City: the Autobots infesting it."

Devastator immediately got to work, searching for any surviving Autobots, intending to crush any he would find.

Optimus Prime got down to business: "Arcee, you and Perceptor help the survivors. Grimlock, take the Dinobots and stop Devastator."

"Me Grimlock love challenge," he said, as the Autobots dispersed.

"And you, Optimus Prime?" asked Galvatron, "What do you intend to do?"

Optimus reached behind his back, and removed his laser rifle. "One shall stand, one shall fall."

Galvatron smiled. "I knew you would say that."

Prime wasn't going to be distracted by Galvatron's comments. He fired at his adversary, but the Decepticon leader easily dodged the blast. Prime ducked and rolled out of the way as Galvatron returned fire...

It had begun. Optimus Prime's final battle.

* * *

Moonbase, Cybertron's second moon...

The Decepticon Predators are well known throughout Decepticon ranks as being an extremely powerful force, and completely loyal to their creator, Galvatron. He would have taken them to Earth with him, but Galvatron wanted them here instead, to aid in Iacon's downfall...

Skyquake, the Predator leader, reluctantly entered the Moonbase control center. It was empty, for all but one; almost all of the Decepticons were readying themselves for the assault on Cybertron. The only presence in the large room was Lightning, looking suspiciously innocent, leaning against a computer console...

"You called me here...?" Skyquake began.

"And you definitely took your sweet time getting here!" Lightning taunted, flaunting his higher rank. "We've received the attack signal from Galvatron."

"Why hasn't Shockwave been notified of this?" demanded Skyquake.

"He has, moron. He's preparing our troops for battle as we speak. But you..." Lightning revealed an electronic message pad, holding it up teasingly. "You have special orders!"

Skyquake didn't trust Lightning; and rightfully so. "What 'orders'?"

"You're to take our shuttlecraft, and proceed to Earth, along with your Predator team, to aid Galvatron in the invasion of Earth."

"But--I don't..."

"Autobot City is history!" snapped Lightning. "Don't you keep up on current events?"

Skyquake stiffened up. "Why don't I hear this from Galvatron?"

"Oh, the big 'G' is far too busy squashing fleshlings and flattening cities to talk to you..." Lightning held out the message pad. "But here are his official written orders... including his electronic signature code to prove their authenticity."

Skyquake had always hated Lightning... he moved closer, towering over the smaller Decepticon. Only loyalty to Galvatron, and to the Decepticon hierarchy, kept him from crushing the object of his hatred. He took the pad, and examined it carefully.

Lightning smiled slightly, at the affirmation of his forgery skills. Skyquake handed the pad back to Lightning, grudgingly convinced.

"I'll find the Predators and leave immediately."

"I should hope so!"

Skyquake started for the door; but as he turned, he suddenly felt something... a sudden wave of mild, but considerable, pain passed through his cerebro-circuitry, making him feel almost dizzy... like some sort of phantom headache...

He turned to look at Lightning. Lightning looked back up at him, smiling, an expression of mock concern on his face. "Is something wrong, friend?"

Skyquake didn't reply. He hurridly left the control room, instead.

Alone in the control center, Lightning couldn't help bursting into a fit of maniacal laughter.

* * *

Autobot City...

"Dinobots, transform!!"

Converting into their dinosaur modes (all but Grimlock, of course), they rushed straight at Devastator. While Grimlock had shown the capacity for logical, strategic thought in the past, he was in no mood to use it now. Not after Autobot City had been flattened by these butchers...

Devastator stood before them, unfazed. With a single blow, he easily knocked Grimlock aside, while the other Dinobots attacked. Swoop had taken to the air; he dived at Devastator, dropping several bombs as he passed. While Devastator tried to shield himself, Slag took the initiative to drive his horns into Devastator's left leg.

The first attack had gone well. Swoop's bombs had considerably damaged Devastator's arms, and the damage to his leg was even more evident, as the contents of Mixmaster's mixing drum trickled out, sizzling.

But Devastator ignored the pain. He was a killing machine, nothing else, and would do only that. But he seemed out of place here... old, obsolete. Swoop made another pass; this time the bombs hit Devastator's left arm, blasting it right off of his body.

Slag tried another charge, but was kicked aside. Snarl also attacked, but he too was deflected. Swoop dived down to finish the job he started... but was unprepared for Devastator's

new strategy. He grabbed Swoop out of mid-air, crushing the Dinobot in his iron grip...

Sludge slammed his tail into Devastator's injured leg... Devastator reared back in the agony that followed. He threw Swoop's body at Sludge, sending both Dinobots flying with the force of the impact.

Devastator was ready to fall now, but was regaining strength quickly. Grimlock was now conscious again; the remaining three Dinobots had to act quickly, or they might never defeat Devastator... Slag transformed to robot mode, and threw his sword at Devastator's waist. The blade embedded itself deeply in his torso, but did little to slow him down, as he knocked Slag to the ground. Sludge also transformed, and threw his own sword... at the same moment, Grimlock did the same... the two blades flew right into Devastator's face, causing a shower of sparks as they sliced into it. The three remaining Dinobots scattered as the Decepticon behemoth crashed to the ground...

Devastator was beaten.

* * *

Iacon...

"How can there be no indication of where they are?" demanded Tornado.

"I don't know, alright? I don't know!! Damn it..."

"Calm down, Rad," suggested Sunfire, leaning against one of the lab's large computer stations. "I'm sure there must be some explanation."

"I somehow doubt they were just disintegrated," said Ultra Magnus, carefully examining the portal generator. "There wasn't any on-screen error messages?"

"I told you, none! See??" Rad pointed to the large display screen, where the words 'TRANSPORT COMPLETE' were written.

Ultra Magnus paused. "The only way to solve this, is to send somebody else through this thing... to look for Optimus and the others."

"And lose him, too? No, we..." Rad thought for a moment. "Of course! I should've thought of it before..." Rad dashed across the room.

"Thought of what?" asked Tornado.

Rad was digging through a large box. "A-ha!" He removed a small, flat object. "If we put this tracking device on whoever goes through, we'll be able to locate them anywhere in the Sol or Proxima systems."

"Then all we need is a volunteer," said Ultra Magnus.

"I'll go," said Tornado.

"How 'bout me, instead?" asked Sunfire. "I've never been to Earth."

Ultra Magnus looked at Tornado. "What do you think? Is she up to it?

Tornado nodded. "She can take care of herself." He turned to look at Sunfire. "But I hope you realize, that you might end up right in the middle of a war zone..."

"Or nowhere at all," Rad added gloomily.

"What kind of Autobot would I be, if I was always worried about 'if's?" Sunfire replied. "One must live for the moment; seize the day."

Rad placed the tracking device on Sunfire's arm. "Be careful it doesn't fall off," he said to her, "I have no idea how old it is."

Ultra Magnus lead Sunfire to the corner of the room where the portal was set to open. Suddenly, a high-pitched alarm started blaring in their audio receptors...

"What is that?" asked Sunfire.

"The force field dome is down." Ultra Magnus dashed for the door, along with Tornado. "We have to get back to the control tower...good luck, Sunfire."

They were gone.

Rad was at the controls. "Don't worry, Sunny; this won't hurt too much..."

* * *

Autobot City...

The fighting has toned down... in a way. Like some macabre ritual, the Autobots and Decepticons stood, in their separate groups, watching...watching as Optimus prime and Galvatron tried to kill each other. None would interfere; for it was tradition... a taboo that even the Decepticons observed. This was the leaders' fight, and the prize was planet Earth...

Prime was keeping his distance from his opponent. Galvatron constantly fired his particle cannon, almost blindly. Prime, in the ceaseless effort to avoid the blasts, performed acrobatics that defied most physical laws... it was all that he could do to stay alive. Galvatron was far too powerful to attack directly... an indirect strategy was Prime's only hope.

But, twenty years without battle practice had taken it's toll... Optimus' left knee seized up, sending him crashing to the ground.

Galvatron laughed. "Is that your best, Prime? Tripping over your own feet? You were much more formidable the other time..."

Optimus didn't reply; he fired his laser rifle instead.

Galvatron wasn't prepared for the blast--he cried out as it tore through his shoulder. Transforming to cannon mode, he eagerly returned fire.

Optimus didn't feel the pain, as the particle beam ripped almost half of his torso away... he merely shot back, sending a blast right down the barrel of Galvatron's particle cannon...

"Aaiiggh!!" Galvatron screamed, sent rolling backwards by the force of the hit. He transformed back to robot mode, an expression of pure rage on his metal face...

Optimus Prime tried to stand, and then he felt the pain of his wound... tongues of fire shooting through his entire body... He dropped his laser rifle, his fingers no longer strong enough to grip the weapon... he could feel the life seeping out of his body....

Grimlock could no longer sit back and watch his leader be dismembered... with cries of protest from his companions, he left the group...

"I don't need my cannon to kill an insect like you, Prime..." growled Galvatron. "I will crush you with my bare hands!!"

"Me don't think so." Grimlock rushed at Galvatron. He turned to look at the Dinobot, standing almost perfectly still. Grimlock leapt at the Decepticon leader... And was unprepared to find Galvatron's right hand wrapped around his throat...

Galvatron lifted the struggling Dinobot into the air, and used his left hand to rip open Grimlock's chest compartment. He dropped the wounded Autobot. Placing a foot on Grimlock's leg, he grabbed one of the Autobot's arms, and tore it from it's socket...

"No!" cried Optimus, "Grim...lock..."

Galvatron picked up Prime's laser rifle. He took aim, and sent several shots burning through Grimlock's body... when the light show was over, Grimlock was motionless.

Breaking the laser rifle in half, Galvatron threw the pieces aside and started walking toward Optimus. "Your turn, Prime."

Optimus Prime was as close to death as he could possibly be. The pain wouldn't stop... he could hardly see Galvatron as he was approaching... But he had to fight the pain... overcome it... it couldn't end yet, not while Galvatron was still standing...

In a flash of light, Sunfire had arrived. She wasn't stunned by Autobot City's ruins. She wasn't confused by the inactivity of the Autobots and Decepticons. The first, and only thing she saw, was Optimus Prime trembling on the ground, and Galvatron walking up to him, to deliver the final blow...

She didn't think. She didn't have time for thought. She leapt into the air, and transformed into her spacecraft mode... She rocketed toward Galvatron, her laser cannons blazing.

Galvatron felt a minimal amount of pain as the laser shots bounced off of his thick armor. He grabbed Sunfire out of the air... Sunfire felt agony like never before, as his fingers dug into her underside. He threw Sunfire at Optimus Prime... causing him even more internal damage as she crashed into him...

"Sunfire... get out of here, Sunfire..." Optimus moaned, still trying to get up.

But she still wasn't thinking. She transformed back to robot mode, and took potshots at Galvatron with her laser pistol. The shots burned into the Decepticon's torso, only making him even more angry. He grabbed her; as he did so, she tried to fight him... delivering a punch to his head and a kick to his waist... but Galvatron didn't even flinch. He twisted her arm behind her back, and removed the laser pistol from her grasp. He tossed her aside like a rag doll, and proceeded toward Optimus Prime.

"This is going to be so much better than before, Prime," he said menacingly. "Perhaps you want to beg for mercy this time! That would make it perfect..."

Optimus had lost almost all his fuel through the wound... but he wasn't dead quite yet. If he could concentrate, channel all of his remaining strength into one more blow...

"No?" Galvatron continued, "In that case, I can only say that it is finally over, Prime..."

"NEVER!!" Optimus Prime, his hands clasped together, lunged upward; launching a punch with all of his remaining strength behind it.

But Galvatron leaned back, just at the right moment to avoid the blow... as if he knew Prime was going to try that... he grabbed Prime by the throat, and forced him to the ground again..

"Nice try, Prime..." Galvatron rasped, "But you can't fool me twice."

Optimus Prime was beyond pain now. He could only lie there as Galvatron kicked the Autobot leader in his side... as Galvatron decided to relieve him of the burden of Optimus' legs... as Galvatron dug his hand into the gaping wound that was Prime's torso, and pulled circuitry out, a handful at a time... as Galvatron set Sunfire's laser pistol to it's highest setting, and carved out what was left of Prime's chest compartment... until the small weapon was drained of power...

Galvatron walked up to the cowering Sunfire, and handed her the laser pistol. "Thank you, Autobot; it came in quite handy."

She stared at him, not comprehending what he was saying. If she had not intervened, Optimus might have still had a chance against Galvatron.

She was thinking now... a single, horrible thought that kept racing through her mind...

I killed Optimus Prime.

I KILLED OPTIMUS PRIME!!

Galvatron laughed at her as she dashed toward the fallen Autobot leader.

Sunfire fell to her knees, next to Prime's broken body. "Optimus, please, I was only

trying to help... forgive me....”

Optimus’ voice was an almost inaudible, low, rasping whisper. “D-Do not blame yourself...” he began, “My time has come... I am old, a-a-and the old must always give w-way... to the new...” He tensed up. “So... tired...”

“Don’t try to talk, Optimus; we’ll get the Last Autobot, and he’ll--”

“No...j-j-ust listen, Sunfire... I always knew... a time would come... w-when Auto-b-bot values and ideals would be p-put to the ultimate test... that time is-s now...”

“But you can’t die...” she whimpered.

“Be strong, Sunfire... t-this is only the beginning... I want you to make sure the Autobots stay pure and g-g-ood...”

“I will Optimus, I promise... I swear it...”

“T-thank you... R-Remember, in the ashes of the p-past, lay the seeds o-of the future...”

“Optimus?”

“Be strong, Sunfire... for the fires of change are upon us...”

The light in Optimus Prime’s optics faded.

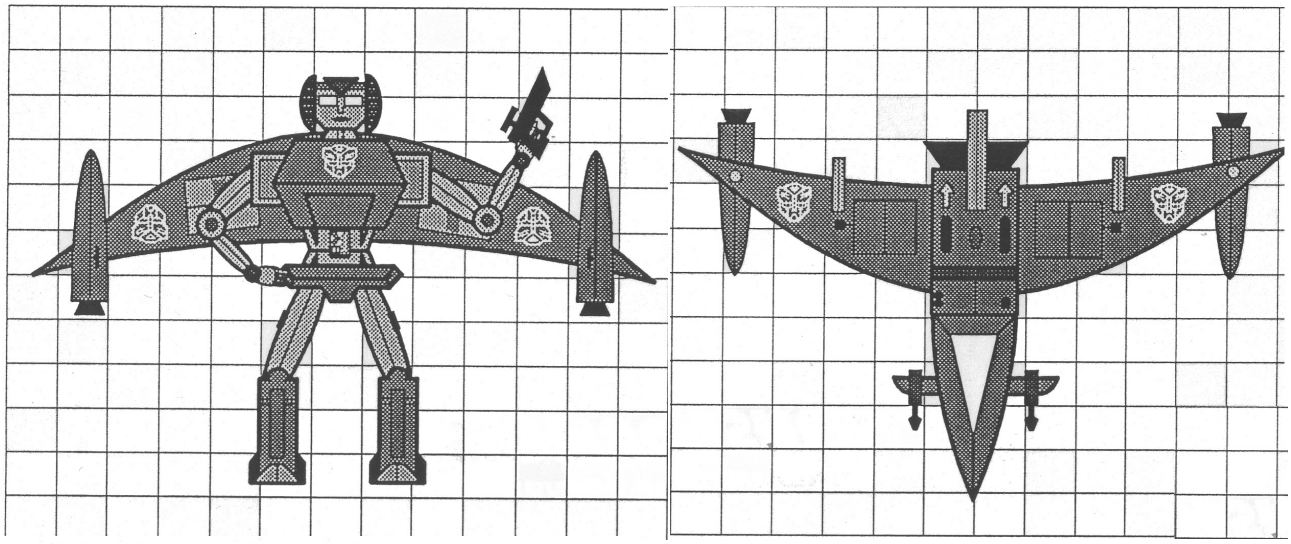
He was gone.

Sunfire lowered her head, shuddering. If she were Human, it is needless to say that she would have been crying.

Sunfire

Function: Scientific Advisor
Sub-Group: Air Defense Force
First Appearance: TF: Balance of Power #3

You only live once... so enjoy it!



Sunfire is a philosopher at heart. She has a passion for contemplating abstract concepts... ususally to the point of ignoring her duties. She has no interest in fighting; only a direct order from a superior will get her on the battlefield. She is a brilliant scientist, and extremely intelligent... but absent-minded. Her favorite pastime is just to drift in the silent emptiness of outer space and ponder over life's mysteries. She can be a charming conversationalist, and her fellow Autobots always enjoy talking to her; because of her ceaseless optimism. *Sunfire*'s cheery personality is a source of strength for all of her comrades. It is her firm belief that no matter what happens, something good will always come from it...



Sunfire is designed for interstellar travel, and is perfectly at home in the vacuum of space. In aircraft mode, she can reach and maintain lightspeed with ease; and is armed with dual laser cannons. In robot mode, she uses a high-power laser pistol. She isn't very strong nor agile... she's actually rather clumsy. *Sunfire* does have the ability to protect herself by generating an impenatrable force-field around herself, in either mode; but this is a great drain on her fuel supply, so she can't keep it up for long.

Sunfire's greatest downfall is the fact that she is *not* very fuel effecient. And because of her absent-mindedness, she will often run completely out of fuel at the most awkward times. Despite her great intellect, she tends to be disorganized, scatterbrained, and forgetful. She will occasionally start new experiments before the ones she has running have even been completed. Her habit of daydreaming will often prevent her from getting things done... but she tries hard to serve the Autobot cause, and all of her comrades respect that, despite her downfalls.

NEXT ISSUE:

Requiem...

Plus, a look back, at how a *maniac* was born...