

Transformers: The Dark Saga

The First Confrontation

By Thomas Zavier

The ship's central chamber was dark and almost silent, illuminated only by several glowing red bars lining the floor and ceiling. The only sound was the muffled repeating boom, boom of the ship's huge engines. Suddenly, the hatch opened-

The figure that stepped slowly into the dimness was wrapped in a thick cloak and hood, their metallic sheen glinting blood red in the lighting. He carried a large metal box with a handle on the lid. The figure moved forward into the chamber, looking carefully at the large computer console in the center of it all, and even more intently at the rows of cylindrical tubes that lined the chamber walls; each tube containing a dormant mechanoid.

A Transformer, waiting to be released.

The figure shuddered, the memories of his own many missions, the sensation of stasis they were now experiencing--it was all now repellent to him. That was why he was here, after all... to finally change it all, if he could...

Alpha-Trion, one of the oldest of all Decepticon generals, drew back his hood and placed the heavy case on the floor. His eyes burned a harsh yellow in his dark metal face. He frowned, peering down at the box, still closed, on the floor.

"We're here..." he rasped, "Which one...?"

I will choose.

Alpha-Trion stepped up to the console. He pressed a single key--lights suddenly flashed to brilliance around him, shining white beams upon the stasis tubes, increasing the overall light considerably. It could now be seen that the metal case had a Decepticon insignia engraved on all sides...

A few more keys, and a large apparatus deployed from the wall: not unlike a huge operating table, tilted vertically, surrounded by spidery arms tipped with various tools. Alpha-Trion walked up to it, and started to make adjustments.

I have chosen.

Alpha-Trion spun around. "Which one?"

He turned and stared at a single cylinder. "*That* one? Why, he's just an Autobot!"

Then, for no explicable reason he chuckled to himself, almost devilishly.

That one.

"Are you sure?"

That one.

"Very well." Alpha-Trion returned to the console, and pressed several keys, glancing occasionally back at the cylinder in question.

"Orion Pax..." he muttered, reading aloud the name that appeared on the console's display. "Hmmm." He turned back to the box. "Why him, in particular, might I ask?" The box gave no answer.

"Hmmpf." Alpha-Trion pressed another key, and the cylinder moved slowly forward with a metallic *hiss*. It leaned forward and down, resting horizontally upon the floor. Then, it cracked open along a central seam, releasing a spray of blue steam. At the press of another button, a set

of robotic arms descended, and pried the dormant Autobot from its shell.

Alpha-Trion watched as the arms hauled the red and blue mechanoid over to the table. With some assistance from Alpha-Trion, the sleeping Autobot had been locked down upon the maintenance table. The renegade Decepticon then promptly used the available tools to open the mechanoid's chest compartment.

He then, almost casually, walked over and retrieved the metal case, bringing to the side of the maintenance table. Kneeling down, he opened the lid-

A sudden radiance burst from the case, filling the whole chamber with white light. From within the box he lifted a round crystalline orb, light dancing on its mufti-faceted surface. Slowly raising it up by the handles on either side, he placed it within Orion Pax's open chest.

"Goodbye, old friend ...!" Alpha-Trion whispered, while working to complete the necessary connections. "I don't suppose we'll meet again... I just hope you know what you're doing."

The orb sent its telepathic reply:

HE will know.

Alpha-Trion smiled. "That's the idea, isn't it?"

It was much later when Orion Pax awoke.

The chamber was dark again--it took the WorkMaster a moment to understand where he was. He was still hooked up to the maintenance table, with a tingling sensation in his body and limbs.

[Slow charge...] he thought; [I've been activated. Why?]

Orion Pax had been sufficiently fueled to stand. He carefully removed himself from the table, looking around. He walked slowly toward the computer console.

"Teletraan One, respond," he said aloud, "What is ship's status?"

"VOICE RECOGNITION ERROR" the computer responded in a soft feminine voice.

"WorkMaster unit I.D. forty-two 'A', designation Autobot, Orion Pax, confirm."

"VOICE RECOGNITION COMPLETE. AUTOBOT ORION PAX RECOGNIZED."

"What is the ship's status?"

"STATUS NORMAL. ON COURSE FOR TARGET 1746009, E.T.A. FIVE HOURS, FORTY ONE MINUTES."

"What?" Orion Pax leaned over the console. "We're not at the target?"

"NEGATIVE." Teletraan answered.

"Then why am I awake? Why am I awake, and nobody else is? Was there a malfunction?"

There was no malfunction.

The voice tore suddenly into Pax's consciousness, bursting from somewhere within. It was not audibly heard so much as thrust in arguably into his mechanical mind. "What... what was that...?"

"THERE WAS NO MALFUNCTION DETECTED," Teletraan was saying, "NORMAL REVIVAL PROTOCOL IS IN OVERRIDE."

Pax shook his head. He was sure that wasn't the computer that answered... "But... only a General... or a Maker... has that kind of security clearance..." He steadied himself. "Who authorized it?"

"PROTOCOL OVERRIDE INITIATED BY DECEPTICON ALPHA-TRION, GENERAL, STATUS: LATENT."

"Latent?" Pax was even more confused now. "He's not the commanding officer of this operation... why is he on board..?" A button press indicated that no other active Mechanoids were on board the ship--at least not anymore--and an escape pod was missing.

[We're still in hyperspace...] Pax thought, *[who would be crazy enough to launch a pod under these conditions?]*

He was always impulsive--it was his weakness.

Pax was certain he heard that one. "Who's there?!" he cried, staggering back. "Show yourself!"

Aggressive, for a worker. You are not a warrior. How would you fight?

"Where are you?" Pax replied. The voice itself seemed soft, calm and gentle, with what seemed to be a feminine tinge; but it was deep with an intangible, unknown strength and power. The strange sensation of this new inner voice was terrifying, overwhelming...

It is fear that motivates you, then! Where do you think I am?

"I don't know..."

I am with you, in your mind. In your body. Does that frighten you?

"How...?!".

Let go of your fear, Orion Pax. Let go, and learn.

Orion Pax fell to the floor with a clatter. He tried to speak--but he had no idea what to say...

Calm this mind. Only then, you will understand.

With no other alternative, Pax tried to relax, and suddenly

Set in a cluster of stars near the center of the galaxy, a planet--pale blue and green; colors of life, recognizable from millions of miles away. This planet had no name that Pax could understand--only a designation, applied by the Makers:

Target 7506-A.

Just another target in the Quintesson's grand scheme, another source of resources, fuel for the fire. Orion Pax understood. He was an Autobot--a worker, a cog in the vast war machine.

A pang of new emotion, as he drew closer to this ancient world; was that all there was for him? A servile automaton? He had feelings too--the Makers had created an entire race of machines, whose intellectual and emotional scope, he was sure, must now at least rival their own--

You begin to understand. Do you want to learn more?

[What is this world?] Pax answered in his mind.

It was my home.

[Was... ?]

Observe carefully.

Down he spiraled, though the thick, wet atmosphere--to the surface. A vast ocean, jagged mountains, lush with plant and animal life. And something else; a presence...

There were no signs of a civilization on this world, yet it was inhabited--a race of beings so far removed from their organic beginnings, as to be best described as being no more than pure energy; pure thought and memory, pure emotion. Pax was overwhelmed by the concept--life, with no physical form.... Then, a light in the sky--a tremendous crash in the night.

The Transformers had arrived.

Even from distant Quintessa, your masters sent probes to our world. Detecting its richness in fossil fuels and crystalline energon, it wasn't long before their invasion force arrived.

[You were there? How long ago... ?]

Not very long. Nearly five-hundred thousand cycles of your sun.

Pax observed as the routine invasion unfolded: the landed vessel dispatched probes to locate and identify the dominant form of intelligent life. Upon finding such an organism, the hundreds of Decepticon warriors that slept in the ship's belly would be modified by automated

equipment--given an alternate physical form, a completely convincing "disguise", under which they could infiltrate, and *conquer*.

But this time, no dominant life form could be identified. The system awakened the Decepticons in default mode--with no alternate form. None seemed necessary. To all appearances, this world was uninhabited by any life form that could resist them.

Pax was suddenly disoriented as time shifted, bent forward--he watched his mechanical kindred burn, strip-mine, draw every source of energy from the planet.

[Why...] Pax was confused, his emotions conflicted. *[Why didn't you fight them?]*

That was not our wry. We are incapable of violence. We had evolved beyond such a mundane concept--and yet, it was our downfall. We existed only for peace, wisdom, understanding--the Quintesson war machine was stronger, in the end.

Pax watched, as the planet was stripped of its resources, its life-energy--so the life-forms that dwelt upon it also faded away...

[Including your kind]

That is correct. We existed only in direct association with the life-force of the planet. As it was removed, so were we. We were consumed and turn from our world as easily as any other source of energy.

[But you... ?]

We foresaw our fate, though we could not prevent it. I was entrusted to collect all of our knowledge and experience, and carry it into the future, to wherever it would be needed...

[Then why are you here? With me, of anyone... ?]

That was my own decision. Who was in more dire need of our help, than our ignorant invaders?

[How could you, with what the Decepticons did...]

Hate has been a forgotten notion for millennia, for us, child. Any single member of our kind would have done the same. Once I had gathered enough energy to be able to manifest in a visible form--it was long and difficult, for our planet was by then a wasteland, and all of my kind destroyed.. lift

energy was scarce, and I was weak--I confronted the leader of the invasion farce, the one you know as Alpha-Trion, Decepticon General.

He had an experience not unlike your own, child, as I professed my plight, and the profound error in his ways--through his mind, I learned much about your masters, and much more was to come. For Alpha-Trion was perhaps unique among his own kind; he was sufficiently advanced and experienced to feel pity, and regret, and shame.

It was too late for my world, my kind--that was understood by us both. Upon his return to your world of Cybertron, however, Alpha-Trion» took it upon himself to change the state of affairs under which your people existed. He resigned from your military. In the millennia that have followed, I have taught him, and he has taught me--he 'fed' me, providing his own life-energy to restore me...

[What is your name?]

My "name " could not be expressed to you in a manner this mundane--however, Alpha-Trion called me the "Matrix " because of the knowledge and history I hold...

Pax felt suddenly "present" again--back in the hull of the Cybertronian vessel that was carrying him and his kind to another "target" world. "So..." he muttered aloud, "it was Alpha-Trion who brought you here, to me... but why? Why me? Why here?"

Search yourself child! Your emotions are deeper even than the ancient Alpha-Trion. You have watched countless missions of this sort unfold. Are you comfortable with the carnage? The useless exploitation and destruction? The extinction of uncounted civilizations?

[No... no. Not for a long time. But I am only a worker, an Autobot. I cannot fight the Decepticons, or the Quintessons. What could I possibly do to change things?]

You share Alpha-Trion's attitude. Once he understood the vast scope of the Quintesson empire, he knew they could never be physically overthrown. It was a problem a Decepticon such as himself could never overcome--violence was all he had known. He contented himself to wait, and learn--until he decided, finally, to act. You are the result of that action. He wanted to share what he had learned. He believed he was not the one--he knew from early on, an Autobot would be the catalyst.

Suppressed, overworked, ignored--he felt only they could change the course of your history. The warriors could not.

Pax rose shakily to his feet. What did *he* believe? Could anyone stop their own Makers? Who would *dare* to try?

What was a Transformer, after all, without the Quintessons?

"Free..."

That's it.

"Free! Why should we be content, as a race of slaves?!" Orion Pax clenched his fists. "They may have made us... but we are aware, *alive*, we think, and feel..."

His cerebro-circuitry was spinning with the sudden realization; why couldn't something be done about it? Even the Decepticons were slaves, in their fashion--none of them needed to submit. They were living, sentient creatures, and they had rights--

He slammed his metal fist upon the console. "Freedom is the right of *all* sentient beings! Not only us--! All of the others, the Makers have used us to destroy..."

Peering down, he suddenly noticed the blinking lights on the display--three more mechanoids were charging up; in fact, nearly fully charged, and moments from awaking. Three Decepticons.

"What is this... they were on a preset timer, from before launch... why..." He pressed a few keys, and the designations of the three warriors appeared on the display panel...

"Oh, *no*... not General Megatron!"

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Pax took cover behind some cargo cases. If the General found him, he would insist upon an explanation for why he was active--and Pax couldn't even begin to articulate what had happened, nor should he, if there was to be any hope for the future...

Simultaneously, three loud cracks, followed by the hiss of steam. The mist filled the room; as it settled, Pax, peering carefully from his hiding place, could make out Megatron's mighty form...

He was a massive silver mechanoid, his thick plated armor gracefully curved, most likely from customized cyber-forming between missions. Two gleaming yellow eyes were set in his dark, hard face; above his heavy brow rose a pointed crest, not unlike a crown. Over his left shoulder flowed a brilliant purple cape marked in red with the Decepticon signet, a sign of his rank... on his right arm, however, was a long and slender particle cannon, mounted at the elbow. He was the highest-ranking Decepticon that still performed any field operations.

He slowly stepped forward, giving the chamber a look-over as his lieutenants stepped forward to join him. At his right hand was a blue and purple armored mechanoid, somewhat stout and boxy looking. His face was nothing but a mask, a glowing visor hiding his optic sensors. From the equipment installed into his chest and various parts of his armor, Pax recognized

him as Soundwave, a Comm-Master, a specialist in communications... his spirits sank. At Megatron's left hand was Starscream, easily recognized by his angular silver and red armor, his large flaring wings, and the sneer upon his face. He was well known as a skilled and brutal killer.

[What are they doing awake, now?] Pax wondered.. [He shouldn't awake until after landing and cyber-forming, even if he is a General...]

Haven't you realized yet? Why else would there be a variance in your unbreakable procedure?

Before Pax could ponder further, the mighty General spoke: "Hmmm," he growled, smiling. "On course, and on schedule." His voice was low and harsh, intimidating merely to hear. He turned to Soundwave. "Cut the ether space line to Quintessa. Send the call sign to Shockwave, on Cybertron, and coordinate."

Soundwave's voice was even lower, but lacking any trace of emotion or inflection. "As you command, Megatron." He bent over the console, and began what appeared to be a complex operation.

Megatron chuckled to himself. "Isn't it excellent, Lieutenant?" he asked of Starscream beside him. "At last, the time has come. From this day forward, the Decepticons shall be free of their bonds! The Makers, so old and foolish..." He laughed out loud, a laugh fortified with complete confidence. "They have no clue what even to do anymore, with such a vast empire..."

Starscream's grin widened. His voice was shrill. "It's only fitting, then, that their children claim their inheritance!"

"Well put, Starscream." Megatron nodded his head. "Well put indeed."

The realization hit Pax like a thunderbolt--a rebellion was already happening!

You see, child? Megatron is already sufficiently advanced to grasp this concept of freedom--but with it has also come a lust for power that most certainly will only exceed his former masters. Alpha-Trion may have waited too long.

"Shockwave has coordinated, commander," Soundwave said, without looking up. "He confirms all is ready at Cybertron. We are clear to proceed."

"Increase hyperspace factor," Megatron replied, nodding. "I want us landed as soon as possible..."

[What am I supposed to do? Tell me!] Pax shuddered, and sagged to the floor in his despair. Starscream turned around. "What was that?"

I cannot direct you; that is not my purpose. They are your kin. It is your own matter to resolve. I can only teach, and lend you my strength--

Orion Pax suddenly found himself lifted off the ground--his neck clenched in Starscream's less than gentle grip. "Look at this, General! An Autobot is awake!"

Megatron turned slowly, and looked carefully at Pax, dangling helplessly. "A WorkMaster..." he muttered thoughtfully. "What is your designation, robot?"

Pax answered immediately, a habit deeply ingrained. "Orion Pax, sir..." he replied shakily. Megatron nodded slowly. "Thank You. What are you doing here, Orion Pax? What did you hear?"

Pax squirmed. "I... ah..."

Megatron's gaze hardened. "I asked you a question, robot. Two questions, actually--two very simple, direct questions. Don't try my patience."

"I couldn't begin... to explain... *I can't...*"

"The little one seems confused, commander," Starscream interjected. "What should we do with him?"

Megatron frowned. "I do not appreciate your lack of cooperation, WorkMaster Pax. I'm giving you one last chance to redeem yourself." Pax couldn't help but notice Megatron's right arm lift slightly. The arm with the particle cannon mounted on it.

[Help me!]

You must decide, child--how you deal with life and death is crucial to any success, any change you can exact upon your society. Reveal me, reveal your desire--and it ends. Megatron will not tolerate competition. Decide now your commitment. My energy is your energy. Can you put your fear aside and make use of it? If fear guides your actions, you can never be free. You know that already, or I wouldn't have chosen you, Orion Pax.

Pax could feel it now--the Matrix within him wasn't only the voice in his head--he could feel a wellspring of power, of pure life-energy. Would it be enough...?

Without a word, Pax bowed his head. He hung there a moment in Starscream's grasp, silent, ignoring his captor and interrogator.

"An unfortunate choice, Orion Pax," Megatron said quietly. "I'm sorry to have to do this." Then in a single swift motion, he raised the cannon and fired.

The bolt of white light struck Pax square in the chest compartment--and burned through. All went dark--

Starscream tossed the limp body aside with a clatter. Megatron was shaking his head, almost sadly.

"He may have only been an Autobot," he said, "but he was, in a way, still our own kind. But a disobedient WorkMaster is of no use to anyone. An... unfortunate loss."

Starscream walked back over toward the console. Megatron joined him, turning his back on the smouldering carcass...

But, in the blackness of Pax's mind:

[Are... are you... still here... ?]

Yes.

[I... shouldn't have survived...]

You knew you would. Our combined life-energy was enough.

[He killed a Transformer... our own kind... turning against each other... I have to stop him...] Are you ready to make that commitment?

[I need to do it! Give me your strength, what's left...]

What power we have left, is already at your disposal. What will you do now?

Pax focused, in the void, pushing to break through...

Have you learned nothing? You cannot answer violence with violence!

[Need strength... to survive... to fight him... it's the right thing to do... justice...! freedom!

Without strength, we cannot resist him! Give me my chance! It's my people's only hope.]

Are you certain? Might begets might. I could not allow two Megatrons to exist. Can you control what you want me to bestow?

[What do you think...? You said you chose me... then, trust me!]

Very well; though I am unsure of this. Your wish is granted, child. Strength and wisdom combined--

A light, in the void—

Orion Pax, WorkMaster of the Quintesson Empire, is dead.

The light brightens--

Arise, Optimus Prime.

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All three Decepticons spun around at the sudden radiance--watching dumbfounded as Pax's red and blue armored body lifted from the floor, light streaming from every joint and crack. The metal of the mechanoid's body itself began to bend and change shape, the armor thickening, his stature increasing. The small and weak WorkMaster's form grew into a strong warrior, his new armor lined in silver trim. His face had also changed--his optic sensors were now a pair of thin gleaming slits over a silver mask. A look of fierce determination was in those new eyes.

Megatron stepped forward, raising his weapon. "How...?"

"No further..." Optimus Prime raised his hands, and focused what power he had left--a blinding flash, and all three Decepticons were thrown back against the cylinders that lined the chamber walls. They didn't move, stunned.

Prime raced to the computer console. The ship was on a direct course for their destination world at maximum speed--and Soundwave had locked the controls. Prime couldn't reduce velocity. They were on a collision course, if he couldn't stop it...

With his attention directed at the console, Prime failed to notice Megatron groggily rising from the floor behind him.

The energy bolt hit Optimus Prime in the leg. The armor was shattered, and Prime stumbled. He turned in time to see Megatron rushing toward him--

With a blow of his fist, Megatron sent Prime spinning to the floor. "What... what *are* you ...!" he rasped, aiming his cannon a third time at the reborn Autobot.

"Stop this--" Prime rolled out of the path of the third bolt--and closer to the wall, where a storage tank of flammable fuel product was mounted. "You're as bad as the Quintessons... worse! I cannot let you follow their example any longer..."

"Example??" Megatron laughed, but his laugh seemed desperate. "I am a thousand times improved over our pitiful Makers. The Decepticons are the strongest force in the galaxy. We were made to rule. It is our destiny." He lunged, grabbing Prime and hefting him up against the wall. "Why do you stand in our way?" he asked, placing the tip of his cannon against his opponent's head module.

"For freedom--for all of us, even you--"

A moment in time: Prime grabbed the side of the cannon and pushed it outward, while slipping out of his assailant's grip at the same moment that Megatron fired. Megatron had only a split second to realize his error as his bolt ruptured the tank, and the fuel exploded--

The explosion was easily contained by the vessel's automated repair systems. The damaged mechanoids, as per Teletraan's programming, were retrieved and returned to dormancy for repair as well.

The vessel's course and speed, however, had not yet been changed...

And while the Quintessons knew the destination planet only as "Target 1746009", its inhabitants had an entirely different name for their world.

They called it "Earth".