

Optimus Prime: Dreamscape

By Thomas Zavier

Systems shutdown.

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Optimus Prune sits, slouched, tired by the burden that has been his for millions of years... a war without an end, a battle without nest. His body is heavy with fatigue, his mind cluttered with self-doubt...

Another aspect of systems shutdown are the *dreams*, so they are called, for lack of a better word. While the shutdown itself brings healing, the dreams are often more unnerving than they are comforting.

And even the great Optimus Prime knows not the source of his dreams...

He runs. He runs across a vast, endless plain of stone and dust... The empty sky looms above him... There is no life here, save for *himself*... and that too may soon be changed...

He runs, fleeing from evil he can no longer face, fleeing from the ghosts of his past, embracing his own cowardice. He is ashamed of himself, but unable to bear the thoughts of what will happen if he does *not* run...

"Are you truly a coward, Optimus Prime?" booms the Evil from all around him, without form, without substance, yet undeniably *there*... "Is the greatest, most powerful Autobot of all time truly *afraid*?"

"No!" Prime yells, but it is not a scream of defiance; it echoes across the plain as the child-like cry of denial it is...

"Then face me!" thunders the voice. "Prove yourself worthy of Autobot leadership!"

"No... I..." But it is too late now. Optimus Prime can feel the Evil falling upon him... he has no choice but to fight it...

As if he *ever* had a choice.

All is still, as Optimus Prime trembles, waiting for the Evil to appear...

And it does:

"Remember *me*, Optimus Prime?" the new voice snarls.

"*Megatron*?"

His steel body, in its original form, shining silver in the sunlight... it seems all so familiar to Prime... his fear almost vanishes. He has defeated Megatron before. Besides, it's not real...

The blast from Megatron's fusion cannon rips through Prime's torso.

All of a sudden, it seems *much* more real.

"Fool!" taunts Megatron, his cannon charging for a second blast. "You never *could* destroy me! I came back! I *always* came back!"

Optimus lurches over, in denial to the pain of his wound...

Megatron's fusion cannon is almost recharged. "Prepare to die," he growls, "Once and for all, Optimus Prime!" Megatron takes aim...

Prime is reeling. How could the pain seem so real, if the source *wasn't*? But if he didn't *do* something... he forces his head to clear...

Almost instinctively, Prime drops to the ground; the second fusion cannon blast streaking over him. There isn't time to second-guess himself, Only time to *act*.

Prime leaps forward, forcing Megatron to the ground. Megatron struggles for a moment, as Optimus expects... but suddenly, the struggling stops and Prime stumbles forward, realizing that Megatron is *gone*.

He doesn't question what has happened. It's time to get out of here.

Prime starts running again, now transforming to truck mode. He doesn't know where to go. All he knows is that he must get away from the sound of laughter that echoes through his audio sensors.

He drives only for a few moments, as the laughing fades...

A sudden sense of danger sweeps over him. He stops and reverts to his robot form...

"Kaieeee!" screams Bludgeon, leaping out of nowhere, his sword at the ready. Prime can hear the samurai armor rattle musically as Bludgeon attacks.... *Slash*. A near miss. *Slash*. A lot *closer* that time. *Slash*. The blade tears across Prime's arm.

No time to think. Face the Evil. *Act*.

Prime lunges forward, thrusting his fist into the center of the apparition. Like delicate stained glass, it *shatters*; falling away, leaving Bludgeon's inner robot mode standing before Prime.

Don't think. *Act*.

A second punch shatters the image of Bludgeon's inner robot. The fragments slowly spiral to the ground, as if they were caught in molasses... slowly, dramatically...

Prime stares at the pieces on the ground, trying to make sense of what he has seen. Is he truly in danger? Is he...

Prime's body felt like it was set on fire.

The laser blast had screamed out of the open sky, as the attacker approached...

"You put up a reasonably convincing front, Optimus Prime," says the space-gun as it hovers above. "A being of less than average intelligence might actually believe that you possess the bravery and valor that you appear to." The space-gun transforms. Its image shifting and morphing to form the Decepticon known as *Shockwave*, his metal feet slamming down against the ground... "But to consider this situation realistically, your resistance is as futile as it is illogical. You will not survive."

Optimus fights against the pain, pushing it out of his mind, trying to stand up straight again. "No... you're *not* Shockwave..." he sputters. "You *can't* be... I... *what are you?*"

Shockwave raises his gun arm menacingly, his yellow eye sensor glowing with a sinful presence; staring into Prime's eyes, searing deeply into Prime's very *soul*... "You are obviously experiencing difficulty accepting *reality*, Optimus Prime. A pity that I must lower myself to such a level, to destroy a mechanoid in *your* condition..."

Rising to his feet, ignoring the pain that did not exist, Optimus Prime had finally been pushed too far. "*Destroy me?*" Prime begins to walk forward, closing the gap between him and his apparent adversary, "You *can't* destroy me. I *won't* let you destroy me. The dead can't hurt the living. Not if the living are *strong* enough."

Shockwave recoils slightly. "You are not behaving logically. Keep your distance."

"Don't tell me about *logic*. You're *not* Shockwave." Prime suddenly takes hold of the apparition's gun arm. "If you were Shockwave, would you let me get this close?" Prime places his other hand on the weapon's barrel... "If you were Shockwave, could I do *this*?" Optimus tears the gun barrel right off of Shockwave's wrist. "*Could I?*"

With a flash of light and a sound like thunder, the third apparition is gone. Great winds now circle around the Autobot leader, lifting dust from the ground, howling like an animal in pain. The Evil is very near.

"Show yourself!" Optimus Prime yells, "You call *me* a coward, but continue to *hide* behind *illusions*? Come on! Face *me*!"

The plain is gone. The cold, dark emptiness of space now surrounds Optimus Prime. As he floats in the starlit blackness, he can see a huge hand reaching for him... and a voice invades his mind, a voice that is all too familiar...

"Very good, Optimus Prime," booms Unicron, "I did not think a tiny being such as yourself could make it this far. You have my...*congratulations*."

The hand closes around Prime, catching him between thumb and forefinger. Now, Prime could see the rest of Unicron's immense body...

"You must indeed possess a strong spirit, to have reached *me*. But you will go no further. I am the source of all this Evil, Optimus Prime... and now, I will destroy you."

Optimus Prime stares at this monster, the single most powerful force of evil that he has ever faced... and bursts into laughter.

Unicron scowls. "You *dare* to mock me?! I am Unicron! I am the Dark God! The Chaos Bringer! The destroyer of *worlds*!"

Prime's laughter continues. "You're *nothing*! You're *dead*. I killed you... the *Matrix* killed you. You don't *exist* anymore."

"*I will crush the life from you!*"

"I don't think so. I have had *enough* of this masquerade. Show your *true* yourself to me. *Now!*"

Unicron is gone. The darkness of space suddenly gives way to a sea of blinding white light... and Prime is not alone.

Another figure slowly steps toward him. A strong, powerful body of red and blue chrome... a silver mask, yellow eyes...

As the figure approaches, Optimus Prime can *feel* its presence... it *exists*. It is not an illusion. It is the true face of the Evil.

It is *himself*.

The figure offers a metallic hand in greeting. "Allow me to introduce myself," it says politely, "I am Optimus Prime."

Prime backs away. "You have got to be joking."

"Am I? I am the strongest force of Evil, that you face every day, every *moment* of your existence... I am *you*."

"But... I don't understand."

"I am your indecision, your cowardice, your self-doubt, your hate, your weakness... everything that you deem evil in yourself, I *am*. I now offer you what you have always desired..."

Prime could feel the handle of the laser rifle in his hand... it was just suddenly *there*. Instinctively, he raises the weapon, his finger on the trigger, pointing the rifle at this perversion of his true self...

"Kill me," says Prime's opposite. "Burn me down and purge yourself of all that you loath. Kill me, and cleanse yourself of all Evil!"

Optimus stands there, his grip tightening, the temptation to pull the trigger almost overwhelming him...

"Kill me."

Prime throws the laser rifle to the ground. "No."

"It is the only way."

"No, it isn't... there must be a better way..."

Suddenly, Prime's opposite lunges at him. "You are a *fool!* If you will not destroy the Evil within yourself, *it* will destroy *you!*"

Optimus Prime collided with Optimus Prime; the two sides of a being, trying to destroy himself... they writhe in each other's grasp, struggling, wrestling for the upper hand... punches and kicks are exchanged, until Prime's opposite is forced to the ground...

"You cannot win! You *must* finish me..."

"*No!*" Prime screams at his adversary, throwing him to the ground. "I *won't*... I'll admit the line between good and evil might be a little fuzzier than I've led myself to believe... but I can't destroy you. Good and evil *can't* exist without each other... *Nothing* can be completely good or completely evil!"

The opposite slowly lifts himself up. "And you just *realized* this?" Standing up straight again, he takes a step toward Optimus... "How can you be so sure? Do you speak from experience or *confusion?*"

"That doesn't matter. I still won't hurt you. I need you. You *are* a part of me... Without you, I simply wouldn't be myself... I wouldn't be Optimus Prime."

The opposite offered his hand again, reaching out to Prime... "If that is what you truly believe, then accept me. Accept *yourself* for what you *are.*"

Prime takes his opposite's hand.

"I am Optimus Prime."

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Optimus Prime, for one, does not.

He alone, of all the Autobots, must bear the responsibility, the duty, of the fiery demon known as the Cybertronian War...

It is Optimus Prime who is the line between Good and Evil, a burden only *he* can carry on his weary shoulders...

For Optimus Prime, there is no time to question his purpose, no time to relax, no time to *sleep*...

No time to heal.

