

## HEROES AND LEGENDS

### Prowl

By Tony “Thunder” Klepack

“Autobots, transform and roll out!”

For the first time, we all changed into our new Earth forms. Our new modes were intended to help us blend in with the native machine life on this world. From our preliminary data, this world was organic yet populated by living machines. Presumably they had been transplanted here at some earlier time by an unknown force.

Our leader, the great Optimus Prime, had decided to send a small contingent of Autobots out on this initial scouting mission since we didn't know exactly what to expect. Teletraan-1 had given us some data but the system was damaged and it was largely inconclusive. We didn't know if the alien machines would be friendly or hostile—or for that matter, what their politics were like towards off-world visitors. This way, we could move among them undetected and gather intelligence until we determined that we were ready to reveal our presence.

The others chatted idly while I considered our best route to the nearest population center using the satellite telemetry at our disposal. I made my decision and relayed it to the others nav systems via secure link.

We began our drive in a desert-like area but quickly realized the area was quite diverse. The rough road we traversed was surrounded by vegetation everywhere, both small and large. Beyond us, a valley of green vegetation added to the coarse organic beauty of this world.

It was strange. This world was nothing like our home of Cybertron, with its steel spires and towers yet it held its own beauty. I could see why an organic life form would love this place... Even a machine could grow to like it. You could just drive and drive--lose yourself in the varying landscapes and terrain without a care in the world.

Freedom...

I quickly dismissed such thinking from my mind. We didn't have time for flights of fancy. We never did... not here and certainly not on Cybertron millennia ago. We were Autobots and even in the thick of this alien landscape, we had a job to do. Gather information, find local sources of fuel and determine if making first contact with the local life forms was a viable option or not.

And then there was the Decepticons. They'd been brought back online right when we were, a symptom of Teletraan-1's damaged logic circuits being unable to distinguish friend from foe. Megatron and his cabal had swiftly made their escape but they were still out there somewhere, with new resources for the taking.

All they would need was time...

But if we could move fast enough, forge alliances and locate our own energy sources, we could put a stop to all of that. My brethren didn't all see the big picture but I did. I was determined to make sure that Optimus' plan be seen through to fruition.

Logic, rhythm and rhyme, patterns of organization. That's me. It's what I do best. A small cog in the machine that is the Autobot army but an important one regardless.

It's funny. All of my life I've always been the responsible one, trying to pick up the pieces when others drop them I guess that's just how I'm wired... I could never be someone like Jazz or Cliffjumper. I don't truly understand where they're coming from.

But I guess that's just how things go. The resistance needs passionate impulsive people, true, but it also needs soldiers like me. Ones that are organized, logical and able to get things done when it comes to doing things *other* than storming into battle head first.

Maybe some of the others don't realize that, but I know Optimus does. That's why I've gotten to where I am so fast—well, it *was* fast before our big sleep, anyway. I guess it's all relative now...

At least most of us are together here on this Earth. I was relieved that my form brother, Bluestreak, was among the survivors that were successfully re-animated. There were a few of us that didn't make it—the Dynobots come to mind. I didn't see them anywhere... there are others too—Bumper, Hubcap, Drift, Hauler... presumably they were too damaged in the initial crash to be rebuilt.

Only Ratchet knows if they'll ever be restored or not. He's the best surgeon among the Autobots ranks, bar none. But he's only one Autobot—I can see his task being monumental in the coming weeks and months. That's assuming, of course, that we can secure a foothold on this world before the Decepticons and in spite of the dominant machine life here.

It was rare to encounter mechanical life forms on alien worlds. Granted, our people didn't stray too far off Cybertron for the most part but by and large the Galaxy seemed to be made up of organic life. To find machine life on an environment such as this was unthinkable.

I wondered if they had originated here or more likely been transplanted at some point—either by outside means or through migration. Even by accident such as our own crash here.

We might never find the answer—assuming we can befriend these people and help them see the threat the Decepticons are to them, of course. If not, all bets are off.

Still, locating another world with machine life was encouraging on some level. Who even knew if Cybertron was out there any more. We eliminated those asteroids all those years ago but it could have encountered so many more threats in the mean time.

Even if it had survived, had the world run out of energon? The supplies had been tight when we left—had either side found a method to re-energize our world? Or another place to mine for the much needed energy we all utilized to fuel our society and our unending war.

There were so many unanswered questions, so many possibilities! So many variables it could've boggled a lesser bot's mind—but not mine. I was made for this sort of thing, after all.

The Ark's systems were still too damaged to be of much use trying to contact an interstellar destination. I doubted even now that they'd be able to keep contact with our scout party, given the damage and the small amount of time we'd had to reverse it. Never mind something that may be out there in the cosmos somewhere, thousands or even millions of miles away!

Assuming it was even there at all anymore, I reminded myself.

I decided I should stay positive. There's no practical point in sharing my thoughts with my comrades—at least, not right now. Speculating on whether or not Cybertron had been destroyed in all this time was counter productive and demoralizing. Better to not be the catalyst for such thoughts at a time when Optimus needed us all to be in top combat form.

There would time for recriminations if and when that became necessary. For now, we had a job to do and I intended to make certain it was carried out.

I'm interrupted from my thoughts by Hound.

"My scope's locked on to some vital machine signs... just over this ridge."

We drive up to the nearby ledge and investigate. Below us, in the valley, are about thirty of this world's machine life. All are the ground car units like we've disguised ourselves as. They're parked before a large screen displaying images of organic life forms interacting with each other.

"Is that the earthlings?" Bumblebee asks me nearby.

"I—I don't know," I reply honestly. According to our data they are but something strikes us all as bizarre about the scenario we're observing.

"Let's move in closer and do some reconnaissance," I tell the others. Instantly, we fall back into line and head down the curving road into the valley.

"I wonder if that was some sort of religious ritual we were observing," Bumblebee says as we drive.

"The only way we'll know is by asking," I reply. Indeed, it would be interesting to find out just

exactly what these machines are doing here. Downloading information? Worshiping organic creatures for some reason? There's a lot of unorthodox possibilities that flood my mind but no way of knowing which, if any, are the correct ones.

I lead our convoy into the large courtyard of the Earthlings and quickly our team scatters about, each taking positions relative to each other—just in case. We have no idea how these machines will react to our presence here.

Before I can consider the ramifications further, Bumblebee has decided to act rash. He drives off, proclaiming that he's going to be the first to greet an Earthling. Damn him! Doesn't he understand what's at stake here?

I try futilely to call him back but he ignores me.

"You can't check the exuberance of youth," Hound says nearby.

He's right, of course, but this not the time for it. We're on alien soil here and we have no idea what we're up against. What if these machines don't take kindly to our being here?

I plan to pursue him but that option is abruptly cut off. A salvo of laser fire strikes the ground near us. My sensors pick up four bogies above us in the skies.

The Decepticons have found us!

"What's wrong with the Earthlings?" I ask. "They don't seem to be defending themselves! Are they in such a deep trance or was the Ark's data wrong?"

"Let's transform and take a stand!" Brawn says nearby. "I hate being target practice!"

We change form in unison, our robot modes towering over the cars about us. Instantly, my team scatters, opening fire on the Decepticons as they drop low to engage us.

How did the Decepticons find us, I wonder. Was one of them spying on us all along? It seems to be the only logical conclusion.

I target Starscream and cut loose with my rifle. I taunt him to come down closer and fight me honorably but he's too much of a coward to give up the advantage his aerial form gives him. He soars off after realizing I'm not such easy prey.

The battle is short and indecisive. Cliffjumper uses his glass gas compound to freeze Skywarp and Thundercracker, forcing them to retreat. Hound and Mirage seem to deal with Soundwave and Ravage long enough to keep them from being a threat to us.

All that time, I observe the little life forms that exit the inanimate cars around us. My conclusion is swift and abrupt:

Teletraan-1 was wrong.

The inhabitants here are organic, not mechanical in nature. The cars and machines did not react to the Decepticons threat because they cannot. They're merely tools—the same as so many other cultures our people have visited in the distant past.

This new information changes everything.

The organics—the Earthlings are fleeing left and right. Clearly they are unable to defend themselves—at least, these ones are helpless against our might and weaponry anyway. If we stay longer, they might suffer injury or death. That will not help our cause and so I am left with only one alternative.

I reveal my thoughts to Cliffjumper who is nearby. He agrees with my assessment.

I signal a general retreat to the others. We swiftly convert back into our vehicle modes and clear the area, taking any threat to the Earthlings away with us.

One of the others asks about Bumblebee—he didn't come with us and I didn't observe him during the battle. He must be injured somewhere—he's young and reckless but not disobedient when it really counts.

But the situation is dire. We have to clear out immediately and lead the Decepticons away. We can't risk leaving even one of our number behind to search for our lost comrade. We have to hope he can seek shelter while we're otherwise engaged then we can circle back for him later on.

It's a cold and calculated maneuver. Logical and efficient, if not heartfelt. But that's what I do and it's why I'm second in command here. The others don't always have the sheer logical capacity to do what's necessary when it calls for it. They'd rather sacrifice everyone to try and save one—but I know better.

I'm Prowl. Logic is what I do—even at the expense of heart. Someone has to make the tough calls when Optimus Prime's not around. When seconds count and everything's on the line.

And I guess that's me.