

Ladybird

THE **TRANS**

TM

FORMERS

**AUTOBOT
HOSTAGE**





Once, long ago, a race of robot beings called Autobots were forced to wage war against their evil counterparts, the Decepticons, to bring peace back to their home planet Cybertron. When chance brought both sides to Earth, the war went on.

Over many centuries leaders have come and gone. Now the fight continues in a far flung corner of the galaxy, on the planet Nebulos. Both Autobots and Decepticons have formed new alliances, each with a rival group of native Nebulans.

The Decepticons are determined to destroy the Autobots and reign supreme. Will they succeed?

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THE TRANSFORMERS™

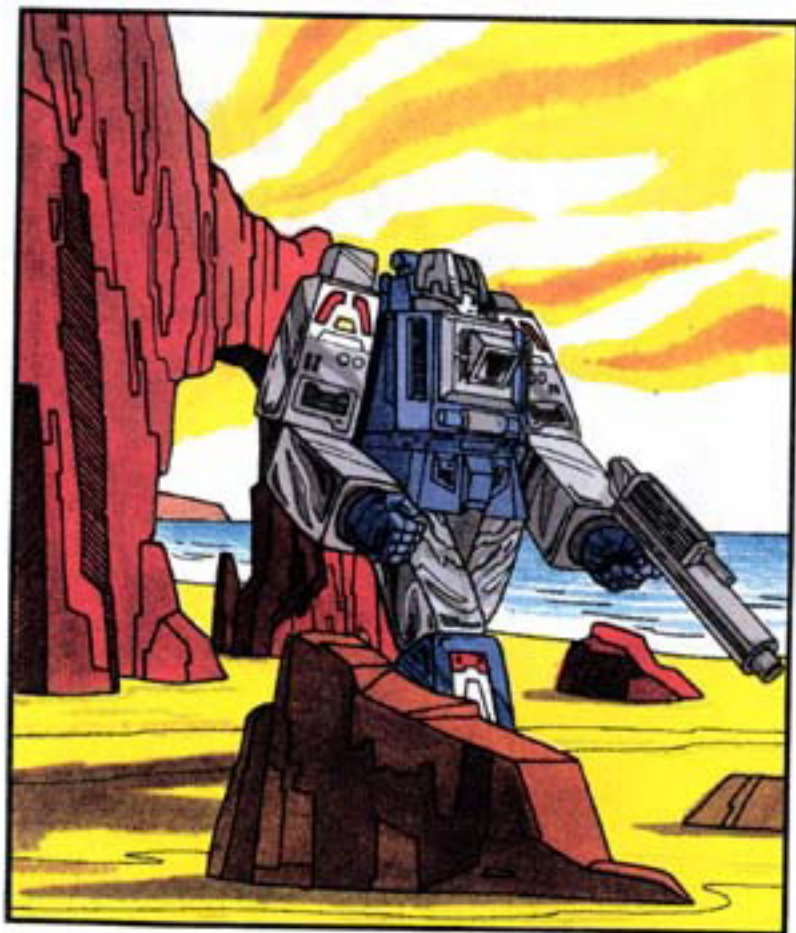


by JOHN GRANT
illustrated by GLENN STEWARD

Ladybird Books

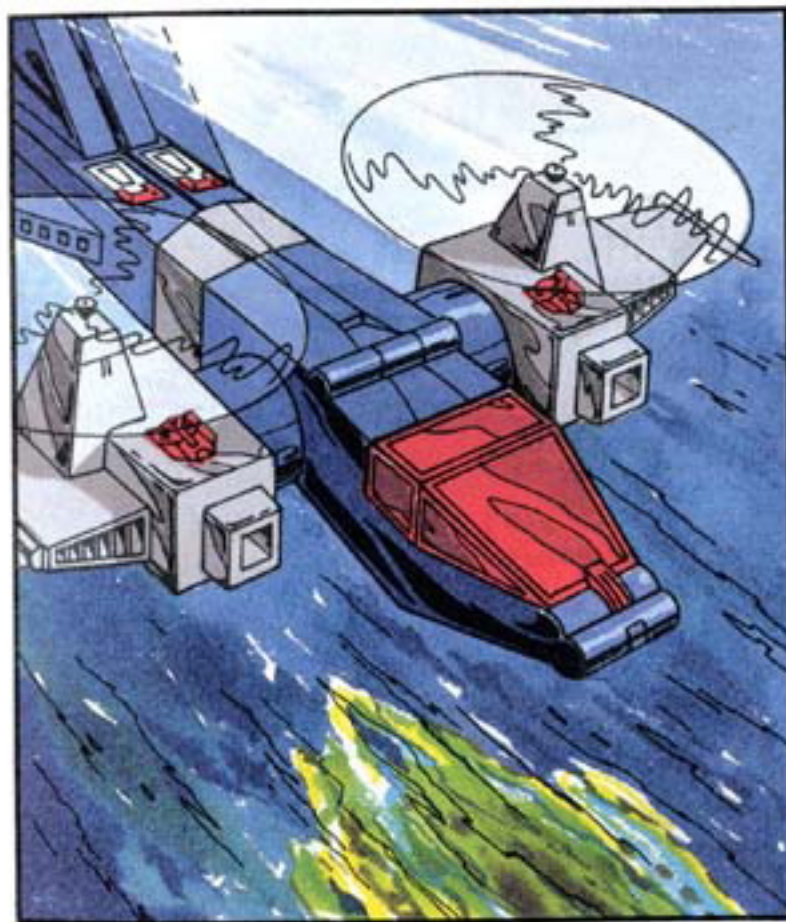
It was important for the Autobots to keep a careful watch on their enemies the Decepticons. They took it in turns to patrol the planet, Nebulos, and report anything suspicious to the Autobot leader, Optimus Prime.

On a lonely shore by the Nebulan Ocean, Highbrow was on patrol. The sea was calm, and

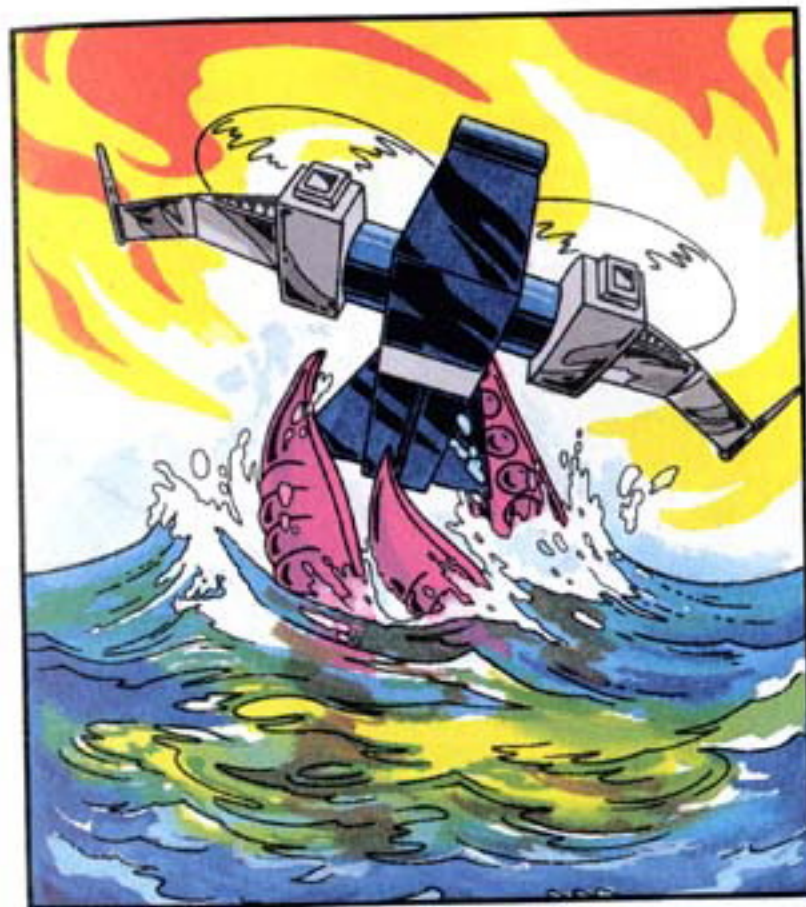
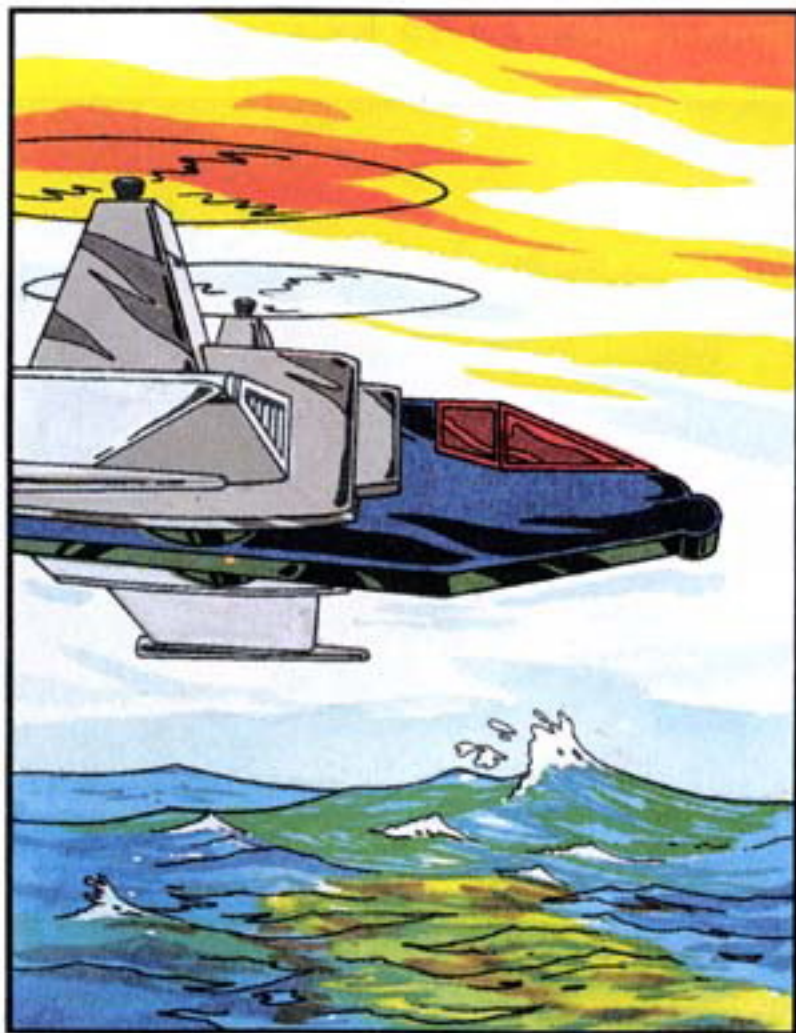


he stood on the beach gazing out across the water. But there was no sign of Decepticon activity. He was about to turn away when something caught his eye... a disturbance in the water. It was far out from the shore.

Transforming to helicopter mode, Highbrow lifted into the air and flew low across the waves.



Below, Highbrow could see a swirl of foam. But he couldn't make out what was causing it. He dropped down to within a metre or two of the water. There was something moving... something large.



Without warning, a metal tentacle flashed upwards and wrapped itself around Highbrow's tail section! Startled, he pulled away at full engine power, but the tentacle tightened its grip. He tried to bring his weapons to bear, but a second tentacle whipped round him and he felt himself dragged towards the water.

Highbrow transformed.



As he changed to robot mode, the tentacles lost their grip for a moment. With a mighty splash Highbrow hit the water, colliding with a giant robot squid... the Decepticon Tentakil!

Highbrow fought heroically. Again and again he broke free from the magnetic grip of the Decepticon's tentacles. He managed to activate one of his rifles, blowing a hole in the monster's armour plate.

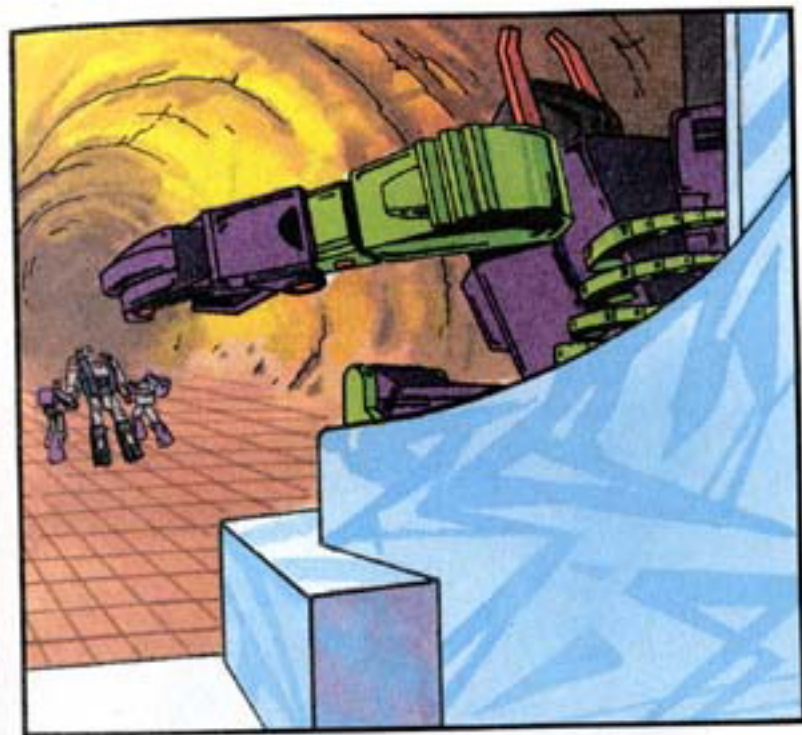
Then suddenly, his arms were pinned to his sides. Helplessly he was held steady while Tentakil touched his body lightly with two long antennae. There was a loud buzzing sound... and Highbrow was immobilised!

Holding his victim firmly in his tentacles, the Decepticon set off for his headquarters, radioing ahead that he had the prisoner as ordered.



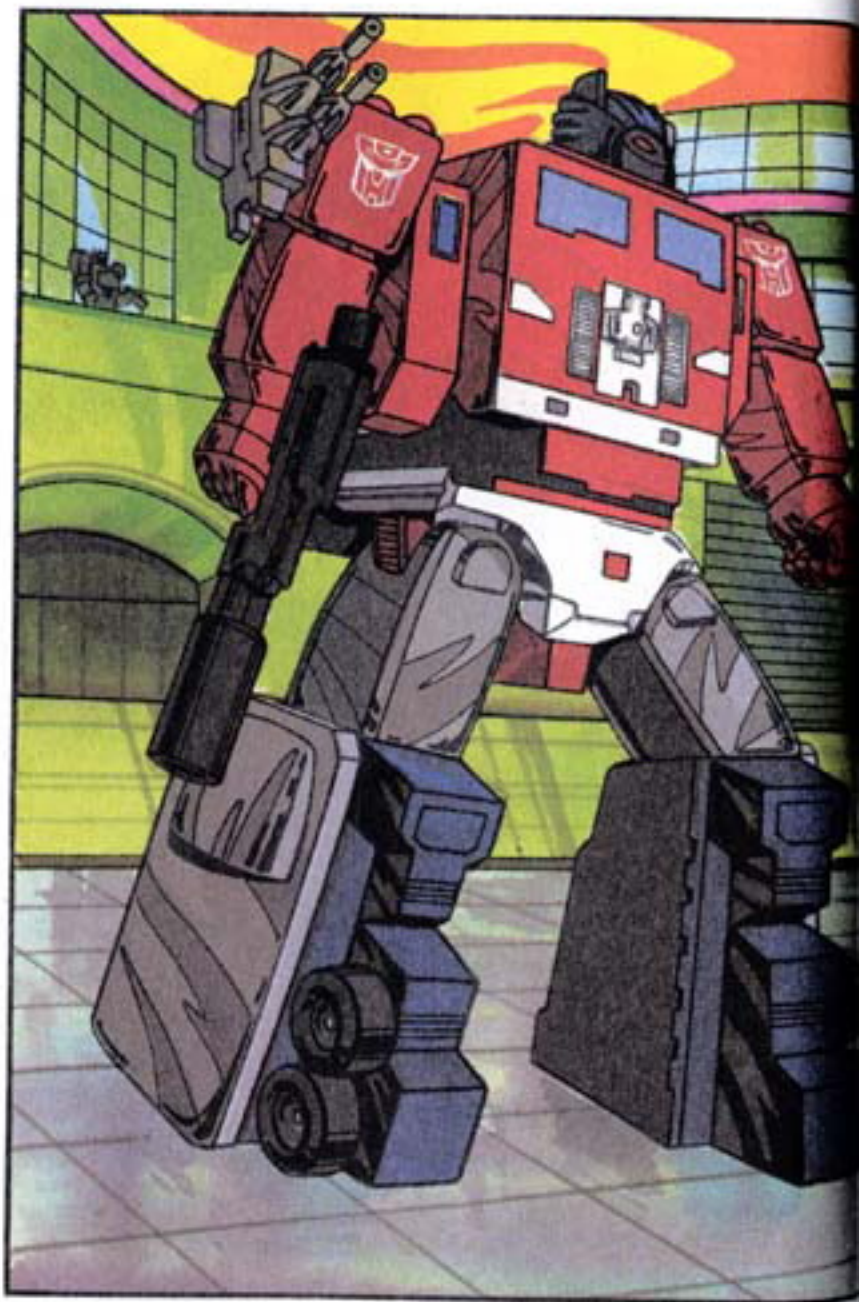
In a remote mountain hideout, Scorponok watched as the immobilised Highbrow was brought before him. He gave an order, and one of the Decepticons aimed an energy regenerator at the Autobot. There was a flicker of light over his metal surface, and he could move... and speak!

"You'll pay for this, Scorponok!" he shouted. "When Optimus Prime hears what has..."



But Scorponok interrupted, "Optimus Prime already knows. I took the trouble to inform him of your misfortune. You will be released when he agrees to surrender himself as my prisoner." Then he snapped, "Take him away!"

Highbrow was dragged off to a remote spot outside the Decepticon base. A small metal device was clamped to his body by a magnet. "Just to make sure you're not thinking of running away," said one of the Decepticons. He pressed a switch... and Highbrow was once more immobilised.



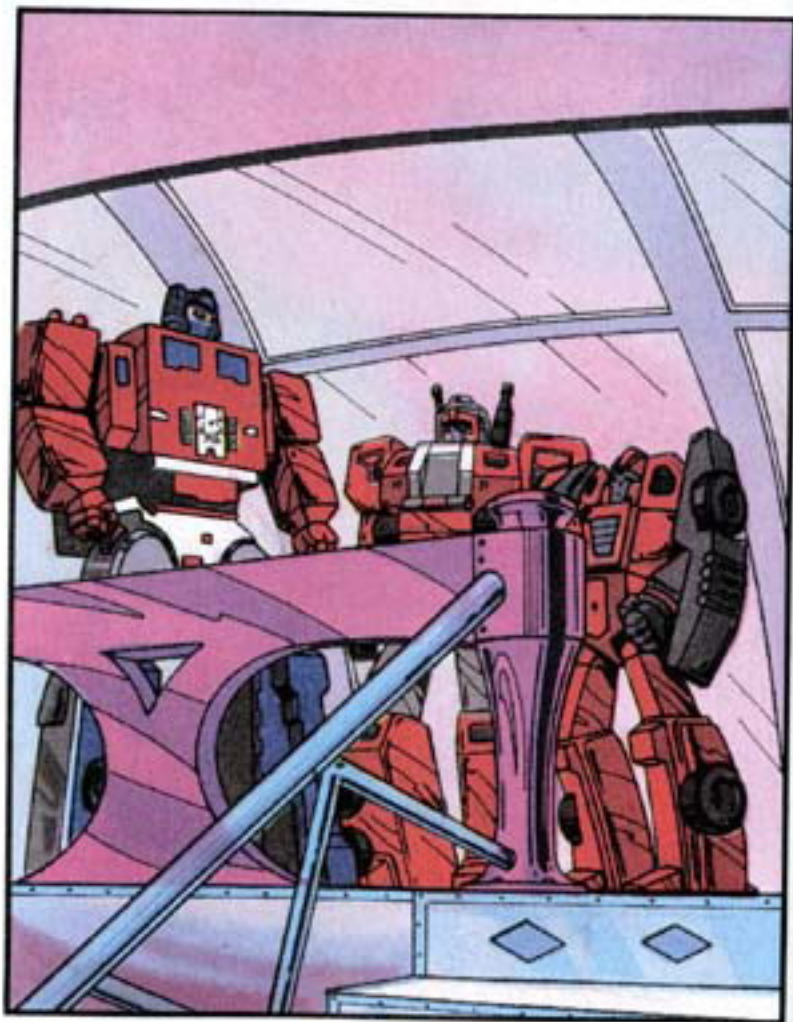
The Autobots were horrified when Optimus Prime agreed to give himself up in exchange for Highbrow. But he explained to them that he planned to use his surrender as cover for a rescue operation. "I don't think that Scorponok expected me to give in so easily. With luck, we've thrown him off guard," he finished.

"I'll come with you," said Kup.

"No," replied Optimus Prime. "I've already decided on my plan, and who is to help to put it into action."

Optimus Prime sent for Hosehead and Fizzle.

"My job," he said, "is to cause a distraction. My surrender to Scorponok will attract the attention of all the Decepticons. *Your* job is to find Highbrow and get him safely away."



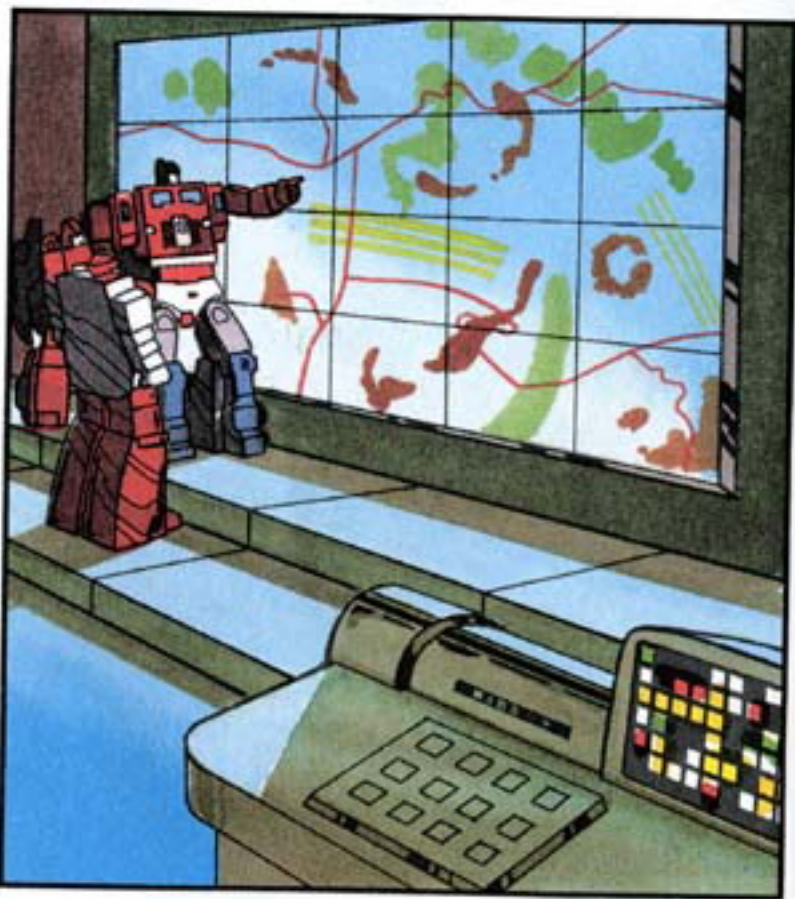
"But I thought Scorponok had agreed to free Highbrow," said Fizzle.

"That's what we're meant to believe," said the Autobot leader. "But it doesn't ring true. Scorponok just isn't like that!"



On a map of Nebulos Optimus Prime pointed out the location of the Decepticon stronghold where Highbrow was being held.

"The Decepticons will be watching every approach," he said. "They will expect to see me. But they mustn't see either of you. Fizzle, your memory banks hold a lot of data on the geography of Nebulos. Find me a route through

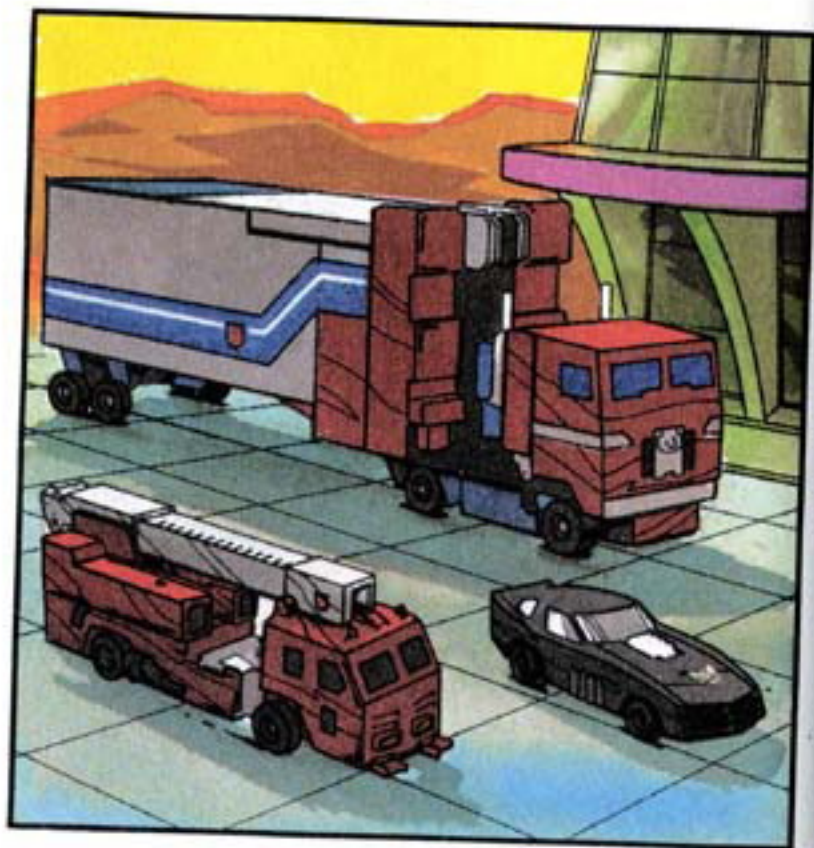


these mountains to the Decepticon base. The route has to have one special feature." And he explained exactly what he had in mind.

Fizzle looked at the map. Lights flickered across his data retrieval panel. Then he ran a finger along the map.

"That's our route," he said.

"Good," said Optimus Prime. "We leave first thing in the morning."

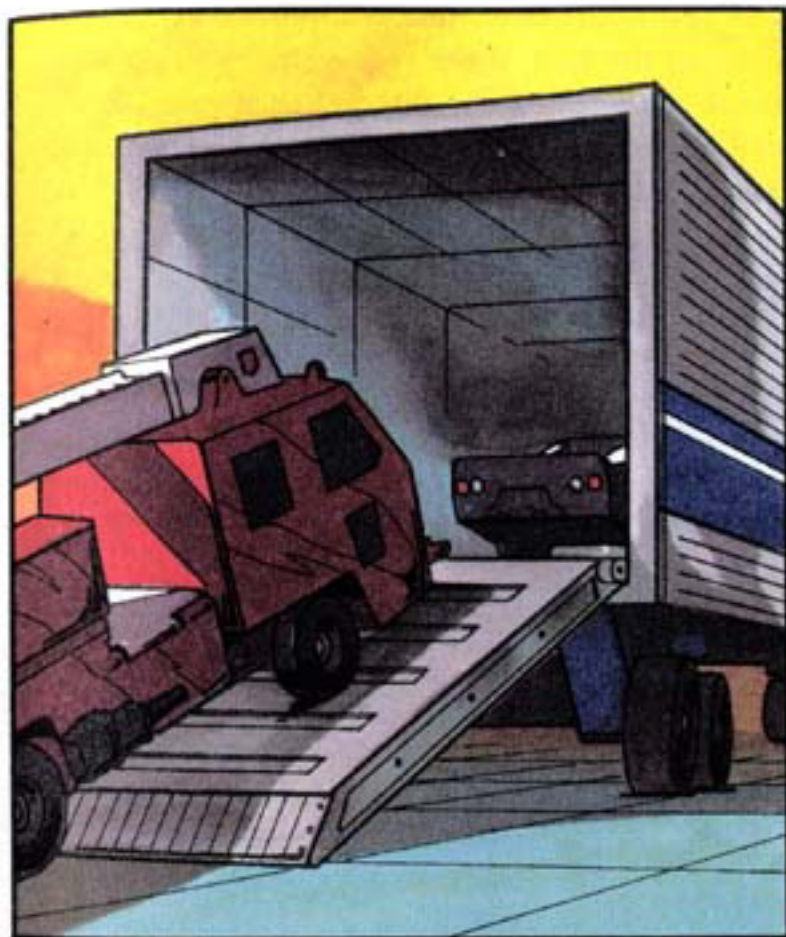


Next morning, Optimus Prime was ready to start. He transformed to his trailer mode as Fizzle rolled up already transformed into his buggy shape.

"Come aboard," said Optimus Prime. "What's keeping Hosehead?"

"Here he comes," replied Fizzle, as the fire engine Autobot drew up.

"Been taking on water," he said. "Golden rule... tanks full!"



"Get in," said Optimus Prime. "We've no time to lose."

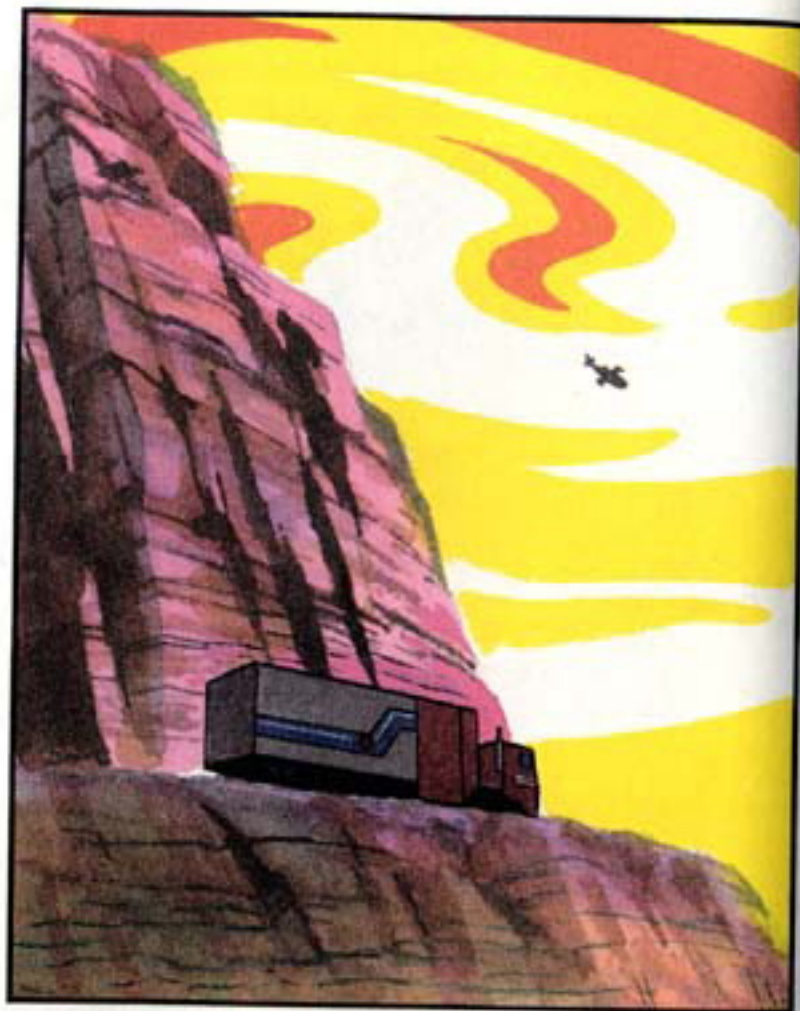
Hosehead rolled up the ramp to join Fizzle inside Optimus Prime's trailer section. A moment later they were driving at speed across the Nebulan landscape towards the Decepticon mountain stronghold.

A few hours later, just as Optimus Prime reached the foot of the mountains, a shining speck appeared in the sky. When it came lower and hovered above the truck trailer, they saw it was a Decepticon helicopter patrol.

"They've spotted us," said the Autobot leader. "Stand by for the next part of my plan."

Decepticon Spinister, in his helicopter mode, took another look at the speeding vehicle on the mountain road below, then signalled Decepticon base. "Autobot approaching unescorted. Prepare for reception."





Optimus Prime watched the road ahead. According to Fizzle's memory banks they would soon approach a large overhang. For a hundred metres or so the road would be hidden from anyone watching from above... such as a Decepticon helicopter patrol.

Optimus Prime slowed right down as the overhanging mountainside came in sight. Once under it, he stopped for a moment – just long enough for the two smaller Autobots to roll down the ramp and onto the road.

The Autobot leader accelerated out from under the overhang, while Hosehead and Fizzle quickly transformed to robot mode and scrambled to take cover among the rocks.



Further along the mountain road, Optimus Prime also transformed to robot mode and started to stride along. Suddenly, two Decepticons sprang out, brandishing weapons.

"That's far enough, Autobot!" they cried. "Lay down your weapons."

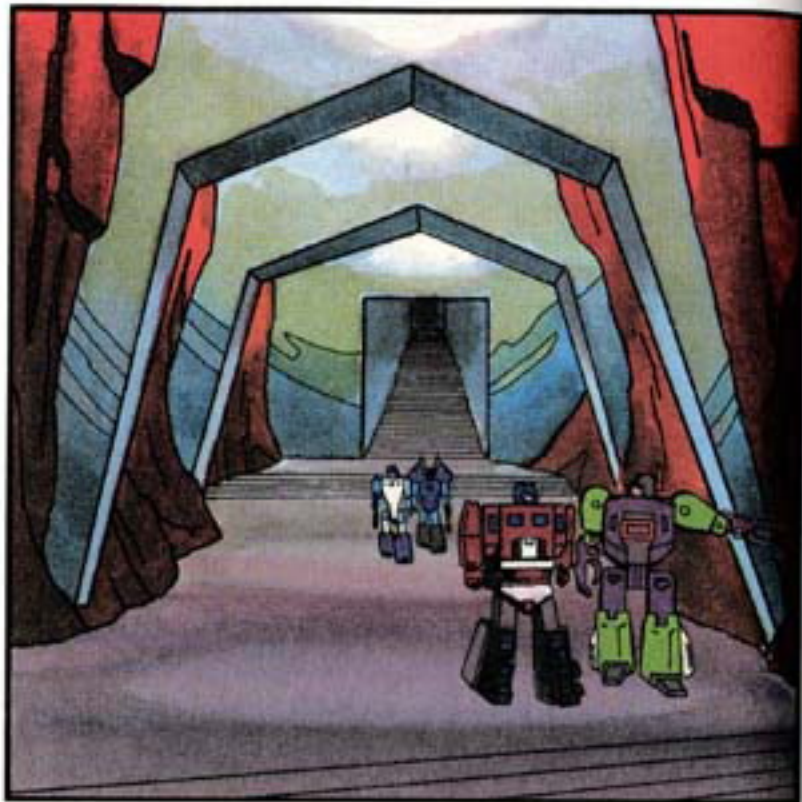
"You can see that I am unarmed," replied Optimus Prime.



"Just don't try anything clever," warned the Decepticons. "Our orders are to deliver you to Scorponok... undamaged!"

The road led past a Decepticon guard post and into the heavily fortified base where Highbrow was a prisoner. As Optimus Prime and his guards entered, the giant figure of Scorponok came to meet them.

"Welcome!" he cried. "I did not expect such a speedy answer to my message!"

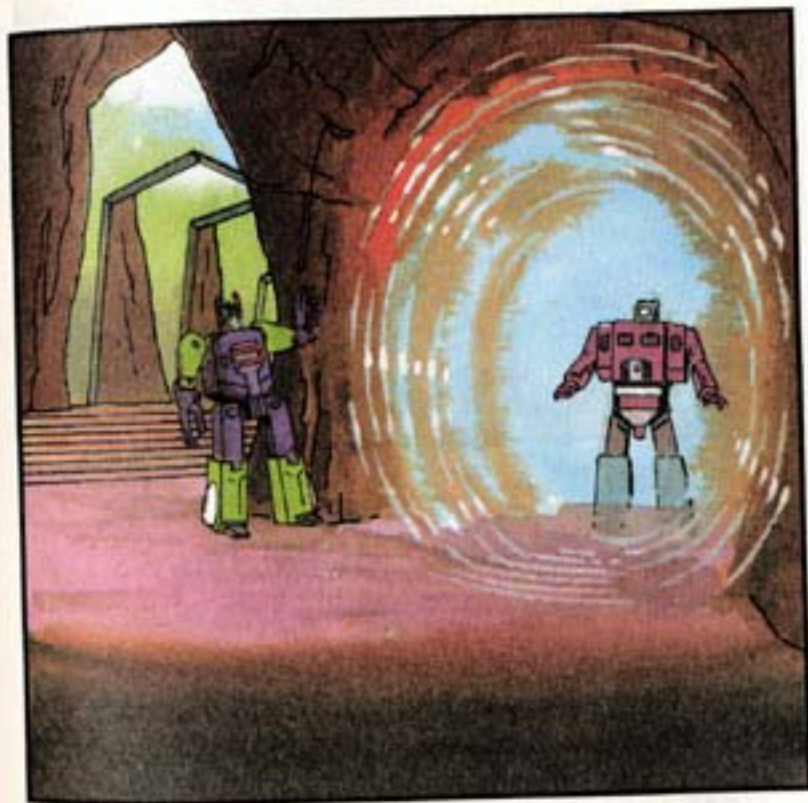


The Autobot leader was led deep into the Decepticon complex.

"I'm sorry not to have quarters more suited to your rank," said Scorponok. "This will have to do for the moment." And he led Optimus Prime into a shallow cave in the mountainside. Then he turned to go.

"Don't you want to post guards over me?" asked Optimus Prime. "You're not even locking me in."

Scorponok laughed. "Guard duty is very boring," he said. "And you can leave the cave if you wish... but I wouldn't advise it." He touched a hidden control, and the shimmering blue light of a mega-voltage electrical field filled the cave mouth.



"And, of course, I didn't really mean it when I offered to free your friend. I intend to keep him, you, and all the other foolish Autobots who are bound to come to your rescue."

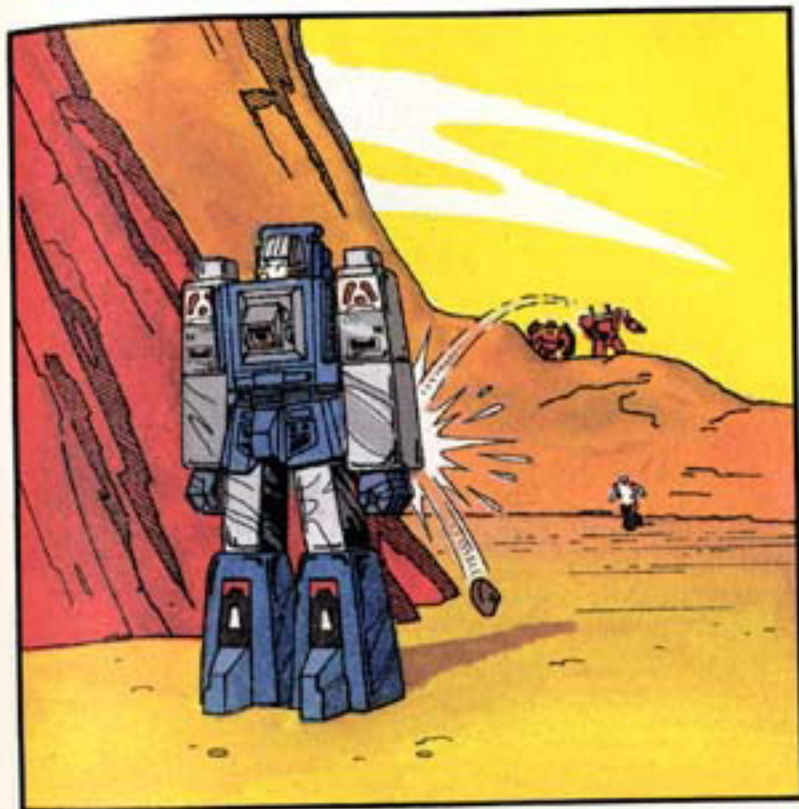


On a mountain overlooking the Decepticon base, Fizzle and Hosehead watched from the cover of the rocks. They quickly spotted Highbrow. He was standing alone, unmoving.

"What's up with him? Why doesn't he move?" said Hosehead.

"There may be guards we can't see from here," said Fizzle. "Let's try to raise him by radio."

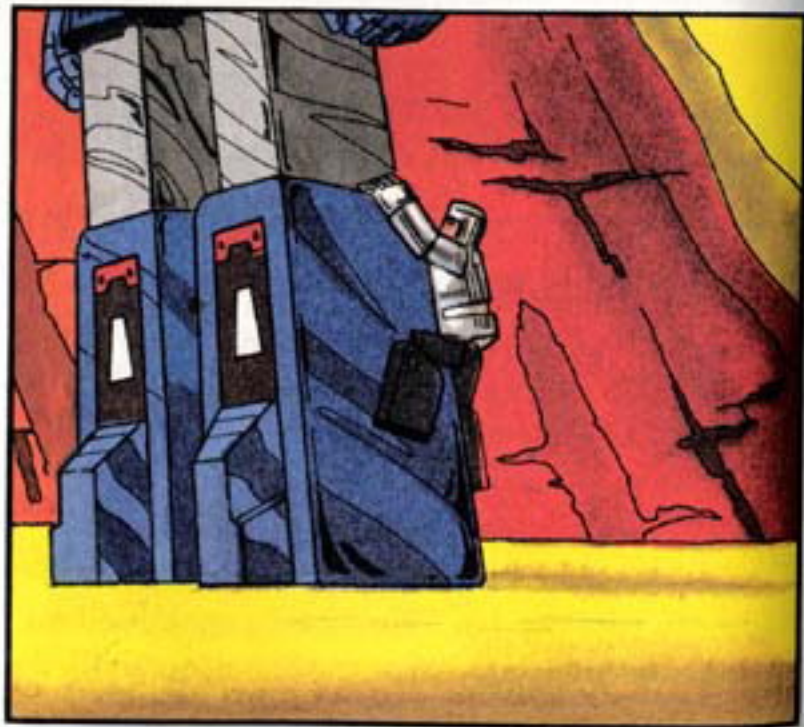
On the scrambled interpersonnel frequency he sent out, "Fizzle to Highbrow! Fizzle to Highbrow! Come in!" But there was no reply.



"Let's try something more simple," said Hosehead. He picked up a stone and threw it in the direction of Highbrow. They heard clearly the clunk as it hit his metal-work... but he still didn't move.

"They've immobilised him somehow," said Cambo, Hosehead's small Nebulan partner, who had been silent so far. "We'd better mobilise him again!" He went into robot mode and scrambled down the mountain towards Highbrow.

Dodging from rock to rock, the small robot reached Highbrow without being seen. He looked up. There was a strange object fixed to Highbrow's body. That had to be some sort of immobilising device. But it was out of reach. Cambo had a quick look round. There were no Decepticons near. He reached up and took a firm grip of Highbrow's leg and started to climb. Even when he reached a point just below the device, he couldn't see how it was fixed. Probably magnets, he thought. He pulled and tugged. Nothing happened.



On the mountain, the others watched. They saw Cambo climb onto the device, and give a great heave. With a clatter, Cambo and the immobilising device fell to the ground together.

In a moment, Highbrow had grabbed the small Nebulan and was racing to join the others.

Fizzle quickly explained the situation to Highbrow. Then the Autobots set off to find where Optimus Prime was being held. They found the cave quickly.

"Why doesn't he come out?" said Highbrow. "There are no guards."

Hosehead pointed. They could just make out a faint blue shimmer over the cave mouth. "One

step, and he'd be scorched to a crisp," he said.

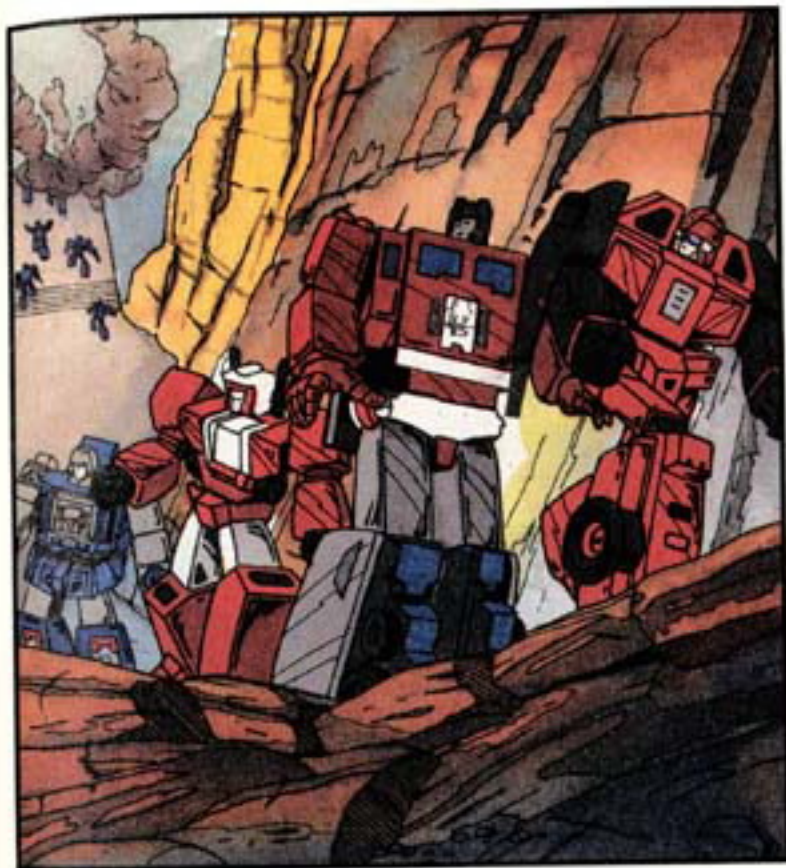
"There must be a place where we can turn off the power," suggested Fizzle.

"We can do it from right here," said Hosehead. "Just give me some space."

The others stood back, and Hosehead transformed to fire-engine mode.



With a whine of pumps, Hosehead sent a stream of water soaring across the intervening space and onto the rock above Optimus Prime's prison. The Autobots watched as the water ran down the rock and poured into the electrical field. For a moment they thought that nothing was going to happen. Then, with an ear-splitting bang and a blinding flash the field short-circuited. Rocks started falling from the cave as Optimus Prime groped his way through the smoke and dust to freedom.



"Up here!" cried Fizzle.

"Well done," said the Autobot leader. "Let's move before the Decepticons recover from their surprise."

"I think they've recovered already," cried Hosehead, transforming to robot mode.

And the Autobots ran as the angry Decepticons streamed out of their base in pursuit.



Only Hosehead and Fizzle were armed. Optimus Prime had surrendered unarmed, and Highbrow had been disarmed when he was caught. The Autobots ducked and dodged among the rocks as the Decepticons fired after them.

They ran into a narrow crevice in the mountains.

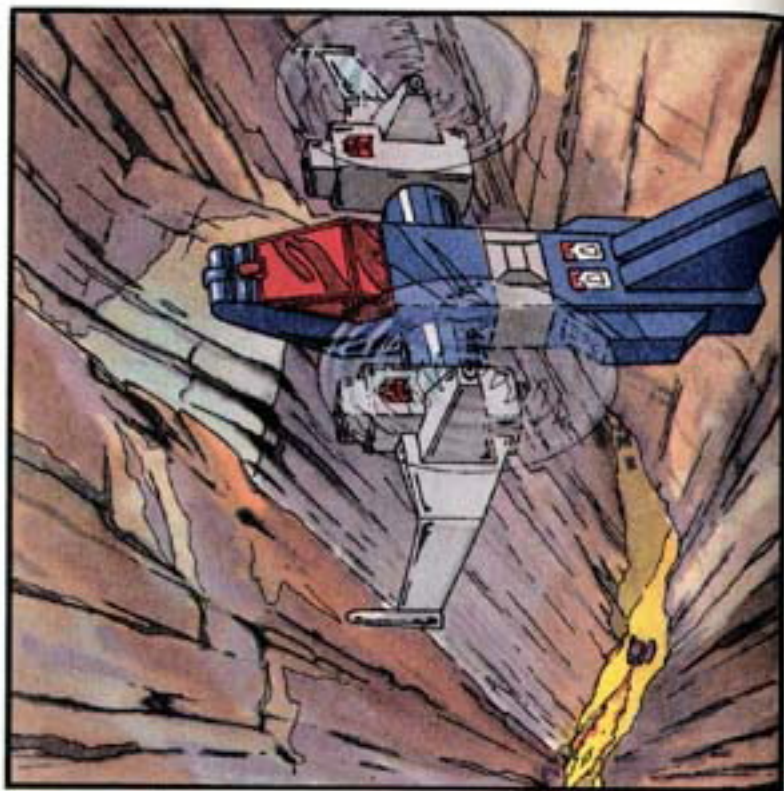
"I'll hold them off!" cried Fizzle. He transformed to buggy mode and backed up



towards the approaching Decepticons. As they came in range, Fizzle sent out a blast of fire from his flame-throwing exhaust. Scorched, and blinded by the smoke, the Decepticons drew back.

Fizzle roared off after the Autobots, but stopped from time to time to give the Decepticons another hot reception.

"Two can play at that game," raged Scorponok. "Where's Cindersaur?"



Highbrow transformed to his helicopter mode and soared up above the crevice. He signalled to the Autobots, "The Decepticons are holding back. They're up to something. Look out! They're sending in Cindersaur!"

Even as he spoke, there was a roar, and smoke and flames shot over the Autobots' heads as the fire-dragon Decepticon tried to get their range.

Crouched behind rocks, they felt the heat scorch their paintwork.

"If he gets any closer, we're done for," said Optimus Prime. "But if we break cover we'll be sitting targets."

"Scorponok is fighting fire with fire," said Fizzle.

"Then, we'll fight fire with water!" cried Hosehead, transforming once more to fire-engine mode.



Cindersaur was waiting, poised, when Hosehead suddenly emerged from behind the rocks. The fire-dragon opened his jaws wide and red flame billowed out. But at the same moment, Hosehead sent a powerful jet of water into the middle of the flame. The flame flickered, then burst out again. This time the water shot between Cindersaur's open jaws, and steam and smoke billowed around him. But the flame poured out yet again. Hosehead's windscreen was black and his red



paint blistered, but he stood his ground. His water supply was dangerously low.

Scorponok rushed up to Cindersaur. "Stop playing games!" he shouted. "Melt him down!"

When Cindersaur opened his jaws once again, Hosehead was ready. Water jetted hard into the heart of the flame. The Decepticons were hidden by the smoke and steam. Then the water ran out! But just at that same moment, Cindersaur's fiery breath gave a last flicker and died.



Out from the cloud of smoke and steam came a loud hissing from Cindersaur, and bangs, crashes, and cries of rage as the Decepticons fell over each other trying to feel their way through in pursuit of the Autobots.

The Autobots didn't wait. While Highbrow hovered overhead, the others hurried on until they reached the mountain road. Optimus Prime transformed to his truck-trailer mode, and Fizzle and Hosehead rolled aboard. Then they headed back to Autobot base, while a cloud of steam behind them showed where the Decepticons were still struggling to take up the chase.

