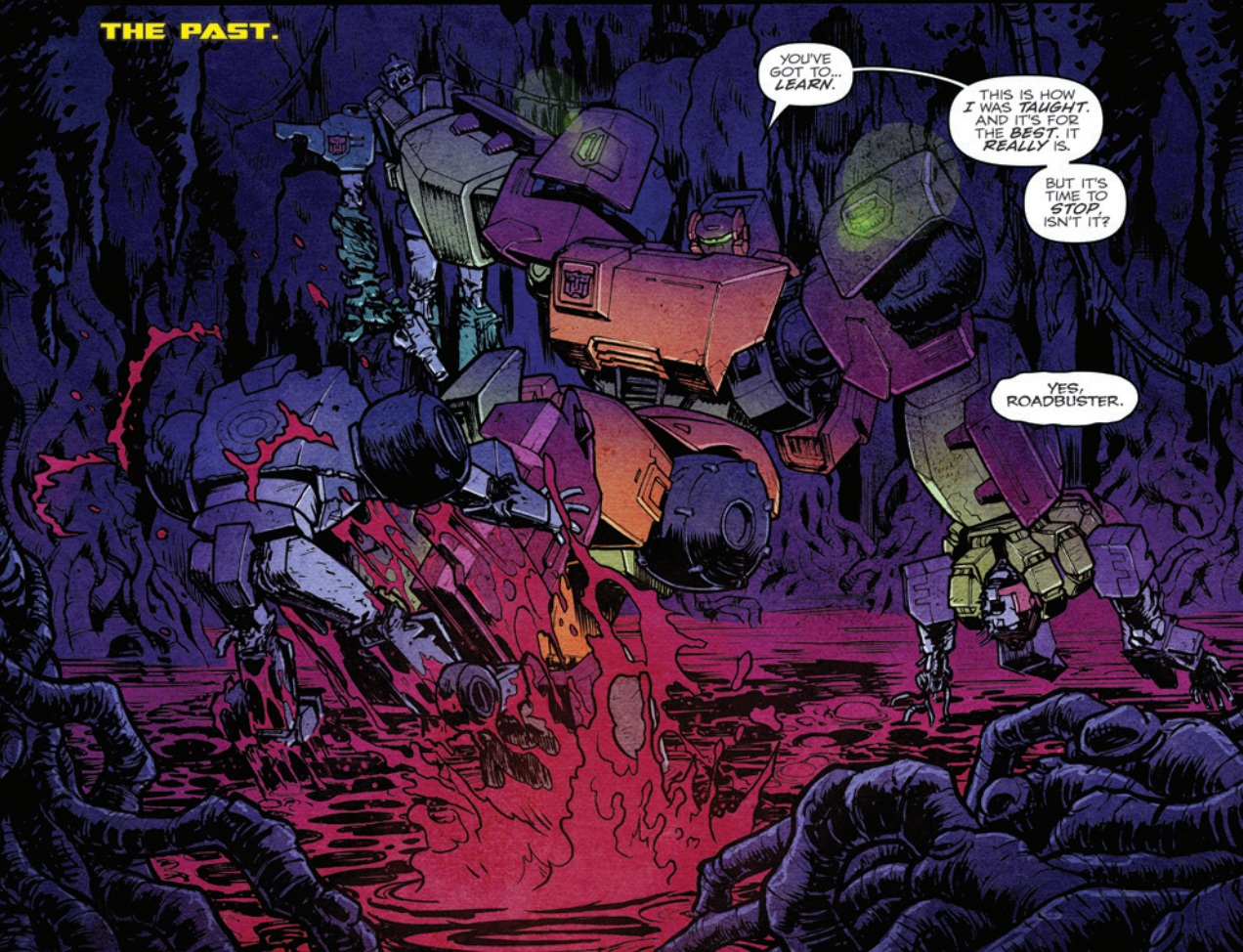


THE PAST.

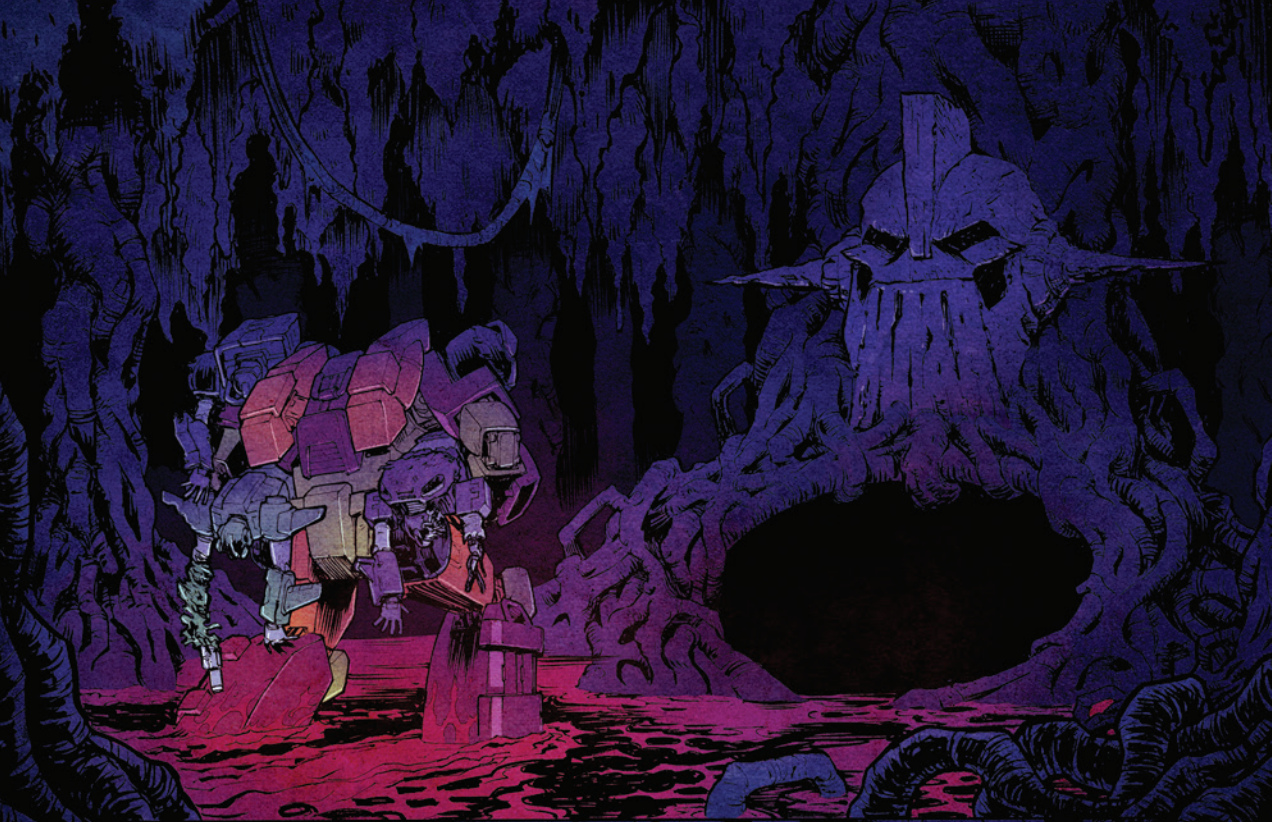




I'M FINISHED HERE, I THINK.

GOOD.

NOW TAKE THEM TO MY ALTAR.



NOW?

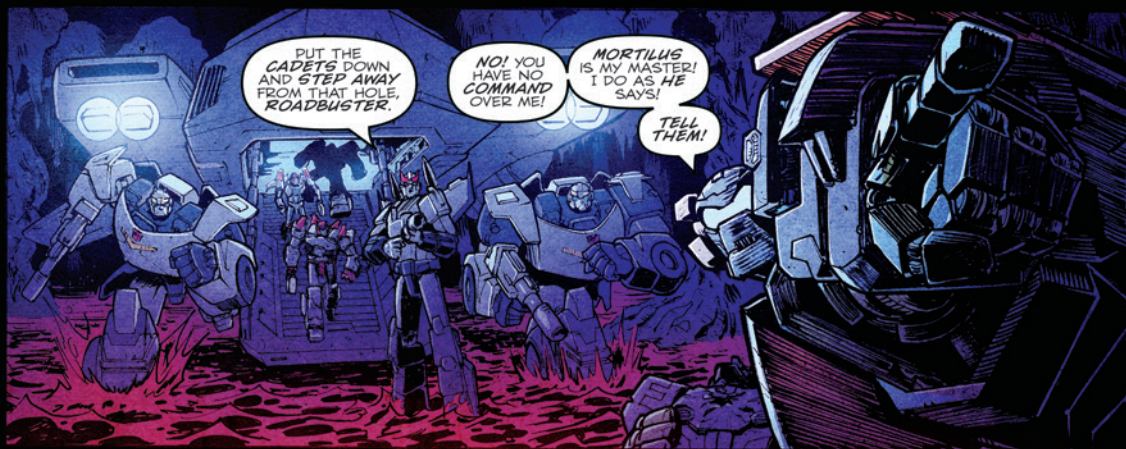
YES.

PLACE THEM IN THE HOLE.

WITH THE REST.



HALT!

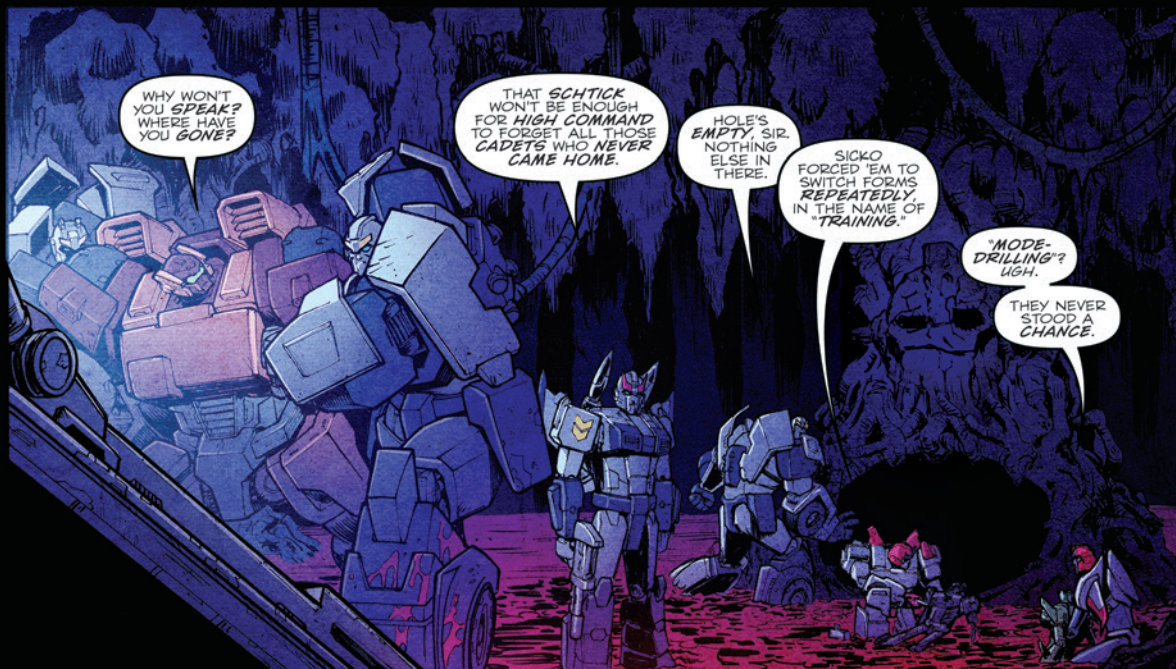


PUT THE CADETS DOWN AND STEP AWAY FROM THAT HOLE, ROADBUSTER.

NO! YOU HAVE NO COMMAND OVER ME!

MORTILUS IS MY MASTER! I DO AS HE SAYS!

TELL THEM!



WHY WON'T YOU SPEAK? WHERE HAVE YOU GONE?

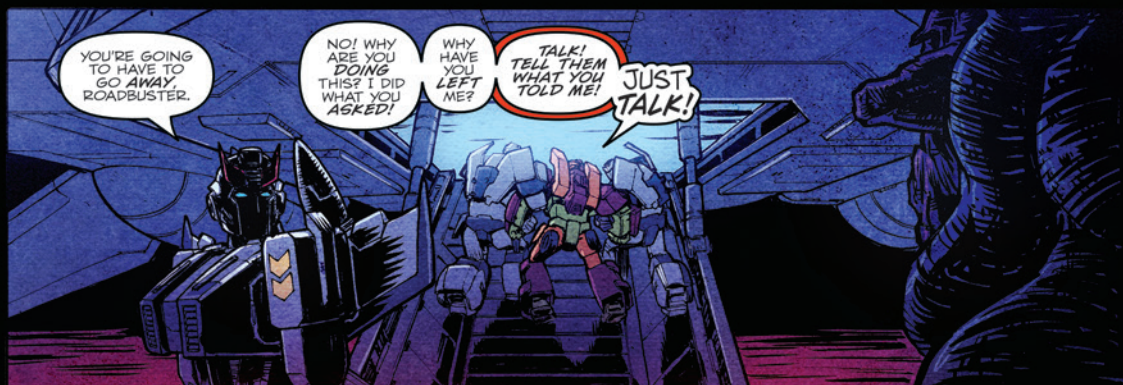
THAT SCHTICK WON'T BE ENOUGH FOR HIGH COMMAND TO FORGET ALL THOSE CADETS WHO NEVER CAME HOME.

HOLE'S EMPTY, SIR. NOTHING ELSE IN THERE.

SICKO FORCED 'EM TO SWITCH FORMS REPEATEDLY, IN THE NAME OF "TRAINING."

"MODE-DRILLING"? UGH.

THEY NEVER STOOD A CHANCE.



YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GO AWAY, ROADBUSTER.

NO! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS? I DID WHAT YOU ASKED!

WHY HAVE YOU LEFT ME?

TALK! TELL THEM WHAT YOU TOLD ME!

JUST TALK!



I WANT YOU TO TALK TO ME AGAIN...

THOUGHT WE'D CLEARED THE TOWN...

I THINK HE MIGHT BE RIGHT...

CHOWN

EXTRACTION PROCESS HALTED

AREN'T YOU PRIVILEGED TO SEE IMPETUS AT WORK, PROWL?

ITS FORERUNNER-- THE AEQUITAS COMPUTER--MERELY DETERMINED GUILT...

...THIS MODEL FORCIBLY EXTRACTS IT.



ALL THAT JUICY SHAME LEAKING ALL OVER THE PLACE--SPRINGER'S IMPOTENCE AT POVA; ARCEE'S BLOODLUST; THE WHOLE ROADBUSTER AFFAIR.

JUST THINK OF WHAT YOU COULD USE IT FOR...

YOUR VOICE... MORTILUS... YOU'RE THE VOICE... HOW DID YOU DO THAT? HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO TALK TO ME? I USED TO HEAR YOU ALL THE TIME...



BECAUSE I WAS WITH YOU; ALL THE TIME.

THIS BODY REDUCED TO ITS TINIEST SIZE, MY MOUTH PRESSED TO YOUR WILLING EAR; URGING YOU TO GATHER STILL-LIVING SPARKS FOR ME TO TEST MY CHIMERAACON PROCESS.

YOU PLAYED YOUR PART IN MY RESTORATION, ROADBUSTER, EVEN IF HALF THE TIME THOSE SPARKS WERE COLD AND EMPTY ONCE YOU'D FINISHED WITH THEM.



HE THOUGHT HE'D GONE MAD. WE ALL DID... NONE OF US REALLY BELIEVED HIM.

I NEEDED YOU; I... MISSED YOU. WHERE DID YOU GO...?

THE DAY THE VOICES STOPPED FOR YOU, ROADBUSTER...



"...WAS THE DAY THEY STARTED FOR ME."

LITTLE CHAP'S STILL ALIVE.

TAKE HIM IN, MAKE SURE HE'S OKAY...



...POOR COGGER'S BEEN THROUGH ENOUGH.

"HUBCAP?!"

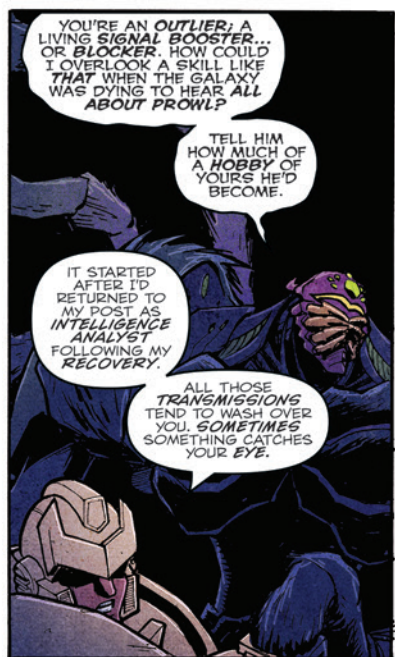


YOU WERE ONE OF MY CADETS? I DON'T REMEMBER YOU.

NO ONE DOES. YOU BARELY REMEMBER I LIVE ON THE SAME SPACE STATION AS YOU.

I'M THE SORT OF 'BOT PEOPLE DON'T REMEMBER. DON'T NOTICE.

OH, I NOTICED YOU, BOY. I KNEW YOU COULD... DO THINGS FOR ME.



YOU'RE AN OUTLIER; A LIVING SIGNAL BOOSTER... OR BLOCKER. HOW COULD I OVERLOOK A SKILL LIKE THAT WHEN THE GALAXY WAS DYING TO HEAR ALL ABOUT PROWL?

TELL HIM HOW MUCH OF A HOBBY OF YOURS HE'D BECOME.

IT STARTED AFTER I'D RETURNED TO MY POST AS INTELLIGENCE ANALYST FOLLOWING MY RECOVERY.

ALL THOSE TRANSMISSIONS TEND TO WASH OVER YOU. SOMETIMES SOMETHING CATCHES YOUR EYE.



IT HIT ME HARD: ROADBLOCKER—RELEASED AFTER COMPLETING MINIMUM REHAB. ON YOUR ORDERS. AS A PERSONAL FAVOR. TO IMPACTOR.

WERE THE LIVES HE RUINED—ENDED—WORTH SO LITTLE?

WHO OWES SOMEONE LIKE IMPACTOR A FAVOR THAT BIG?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE DRILLED BY HIM? AND I MEAN "KNOW" PROWL NOT "SKIM-READ A DATATRACK."



THIS IS THE SORT OF DATA THE SPECIMEN THROWS UP FROM TIME TO TIME, PROWL. THE PRECISE MOMENT OF RADICALIZATION. THE SECOND A NEW MONSTER IS BORN.

IT WOULD FIT YOUR NARRATIVE MORE COMFORTABLY TO THINK I HAD COERCED HIM INTO THESE ACTS, PROWL. BUT WHAT REALLY MADE HUBCAP BETRAY THE AUTOBOTS... WAS YOU.

SOON HUBCAP WAS DOING MY WORK FOR ME. UNCOVERING ALL SORTS OF MURKINESS FOR ME TO DROWN YOU IN.



IT'S ME YOU WANT TO HURT... TO BRING DOWN, HUBCAP. AND... I GET IT. BUT WHY DO IT FOR HIM? WHAT'S HE OFFERING YOU?

DIGNITY. STRENGTH. UPGRADES. TARANTULAS IS DESIGNING ME A CUSTOM BODY.

I WON'T BE A FORGETTABLE NOBODY WITH AN INVISIBLE POWER-SET ANY MORE. I'LL BE STRONG.

I SEE.

YOU HAVEN'T RECEIVED THESE AUGMENTATIONS YET THEN, HUBCAP?



DON'T UNDERMINE ME—DON'T DIMINISH ME. I WON'T HAVE IT. I WAS FORGED SCARED, PROWL. I'M SCARED NOW. BUT WHAT YOU DO—EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU—IS WRONG.

AND IT TAKES BRAVE PEOPLE—PEOPLE LIKE ME AND VERITY—TO LET THE WORLD KNOW WHAT YOU REALLY ARE.

STOP IT!