

The Transformers and Environmental Justice

Chris Wildrick
Associate Professor
School of Art
Syracuse University

With a focus on
Daniel Warren Johnson's 2023
Transformers comic (Image/Skybound
comics)

and
Josh Cooley's 2024
Transformers One
movie (Paramount)

2023 *Transformers* Comic

Debates over Different Groups' Needs

THIS PLACE IS A TREASURE TROVE OF ENERGY AND RAW MATERIALS, UNLIKE OUR OLD HUSK OF A PLANET. THE BATTLE IS HERE. WE MUST HOLD OUR GROUND AGAINST THE CONSTANT USURPING AUTOBOTS.

AND OUR ENEMIES HAVE ONE MASSIVE WEAKNESS.

Cybertron is a “husk”, lacking energy and resources.

Earth is a “treasure trove of energy and raw materials.”

The Decepticons will “take Energon from anywhere they can get it, and happily will do so by force.”

SPIKE, THEY'VE WASTED NO TIME. THE DECEPTICONS ARE ATTACKING YOUR HOME.

WHAT, WHY??

THEY'LL TAKE ENERCON FROM ANYWHERE THEY CAN GET IT, AND HAPPILY WILL DO SO BY FORCE.

The current shared Transformers/GI Joe universe is called the Energon Universe, showing its importance to everyone, not just the Transformers.

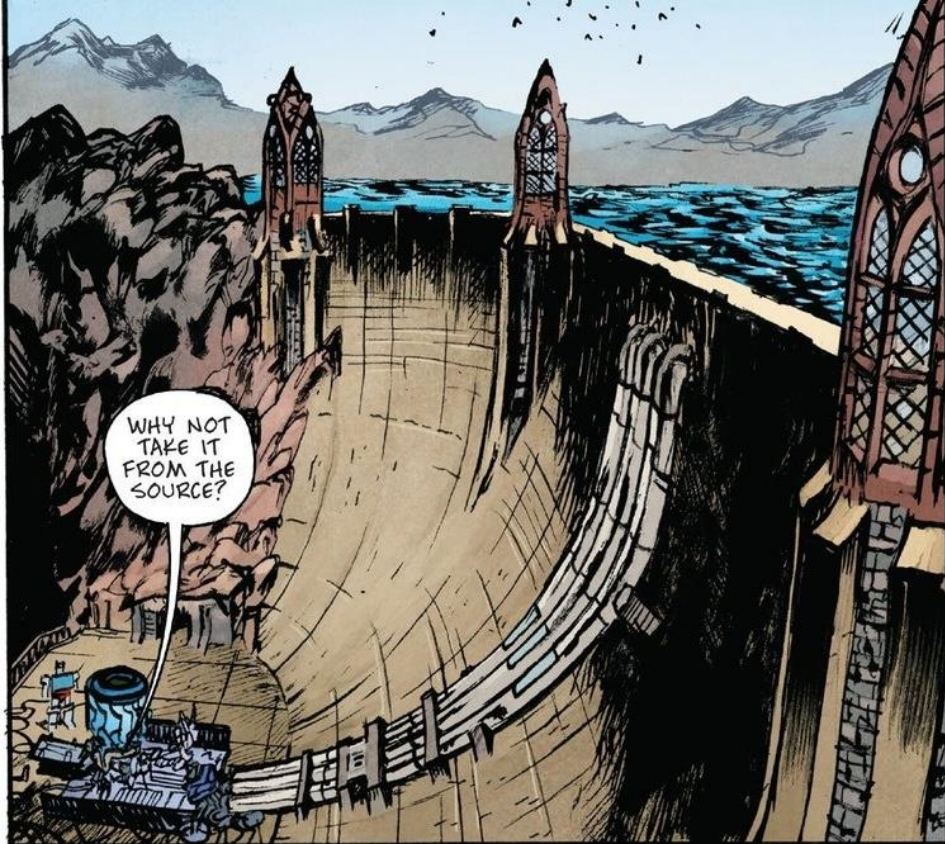
In the GI Joe part of the story, Cobra seeks Energon for its weapons capacity and has the same lack of concern for how it affects others.



Astrotrain, a Decepticon, believes it is sad but inevitable that the powerful (Transformers) will take resources from the weak (humans).

To him, this power dynamic is just the way of things.





In contrast, the Autobots actually get help from humans.

Sparky helps the Autobots build a seemingly clean energy source from a local dam, which will not only help Autobots but will give the local town power for a decade. The relationship—at least at first—is symbiotic.

However, some Autobots do not believe in this utopian human/Transformer relationship.

When Beachcomber, who has come to love Earth's nature, has an opportunity to turn the Transformers back on, he doesn't take it because he knows what they will do to the environment.

He sees ALL Transformers as being a danger to life and the environment.





Elita-One, an Autobot, believes they should use the Decepticons' Energon and prioritize Autobots over humans and the Earth's resources.

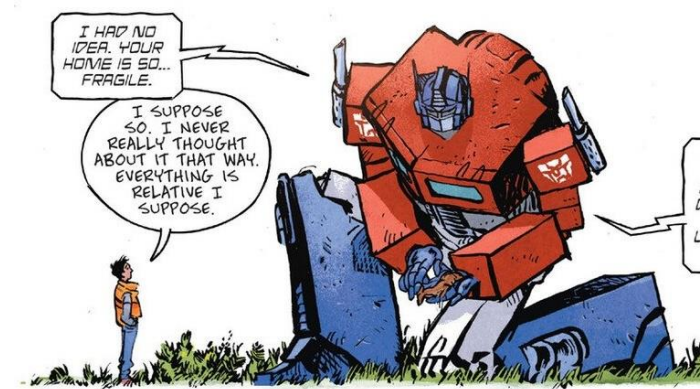
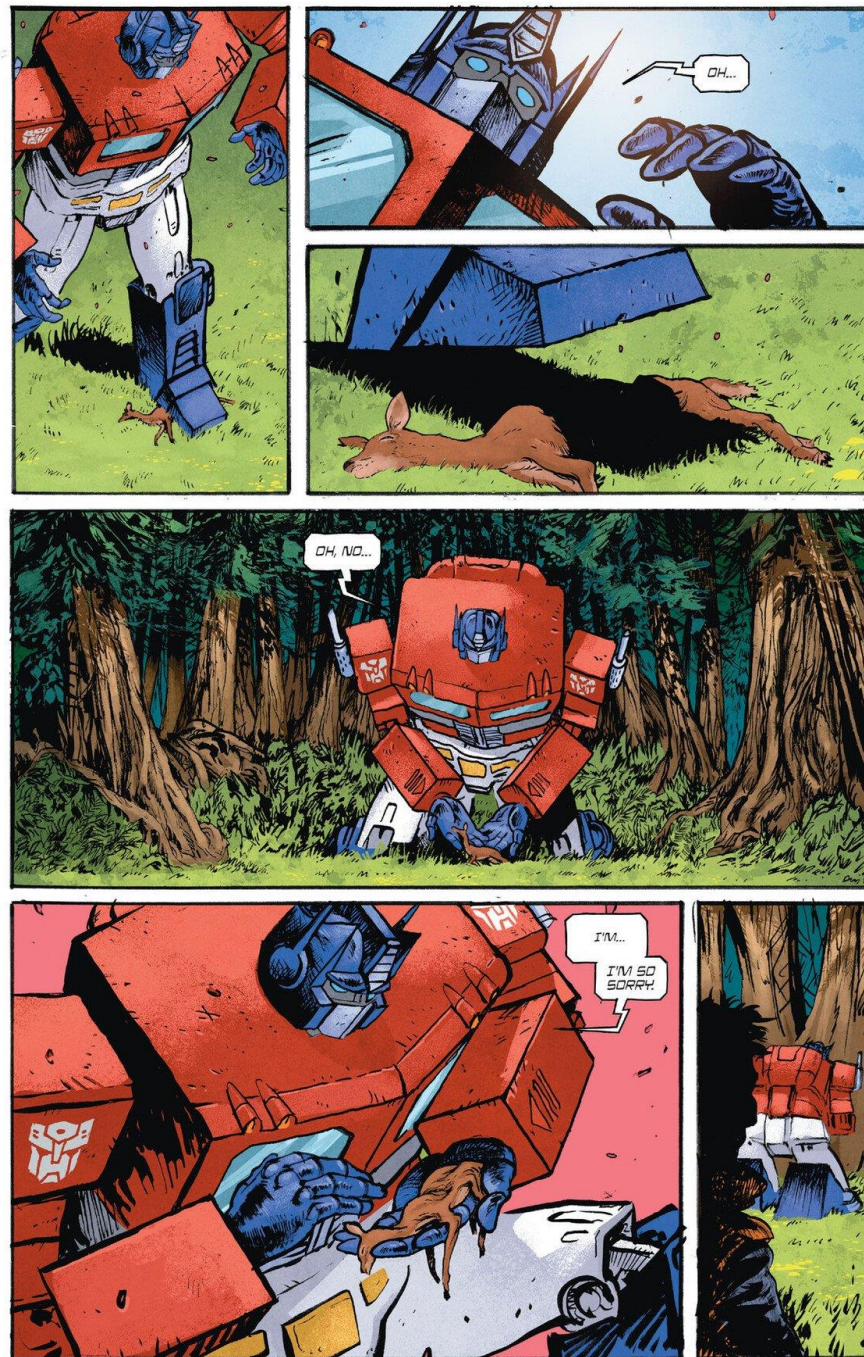
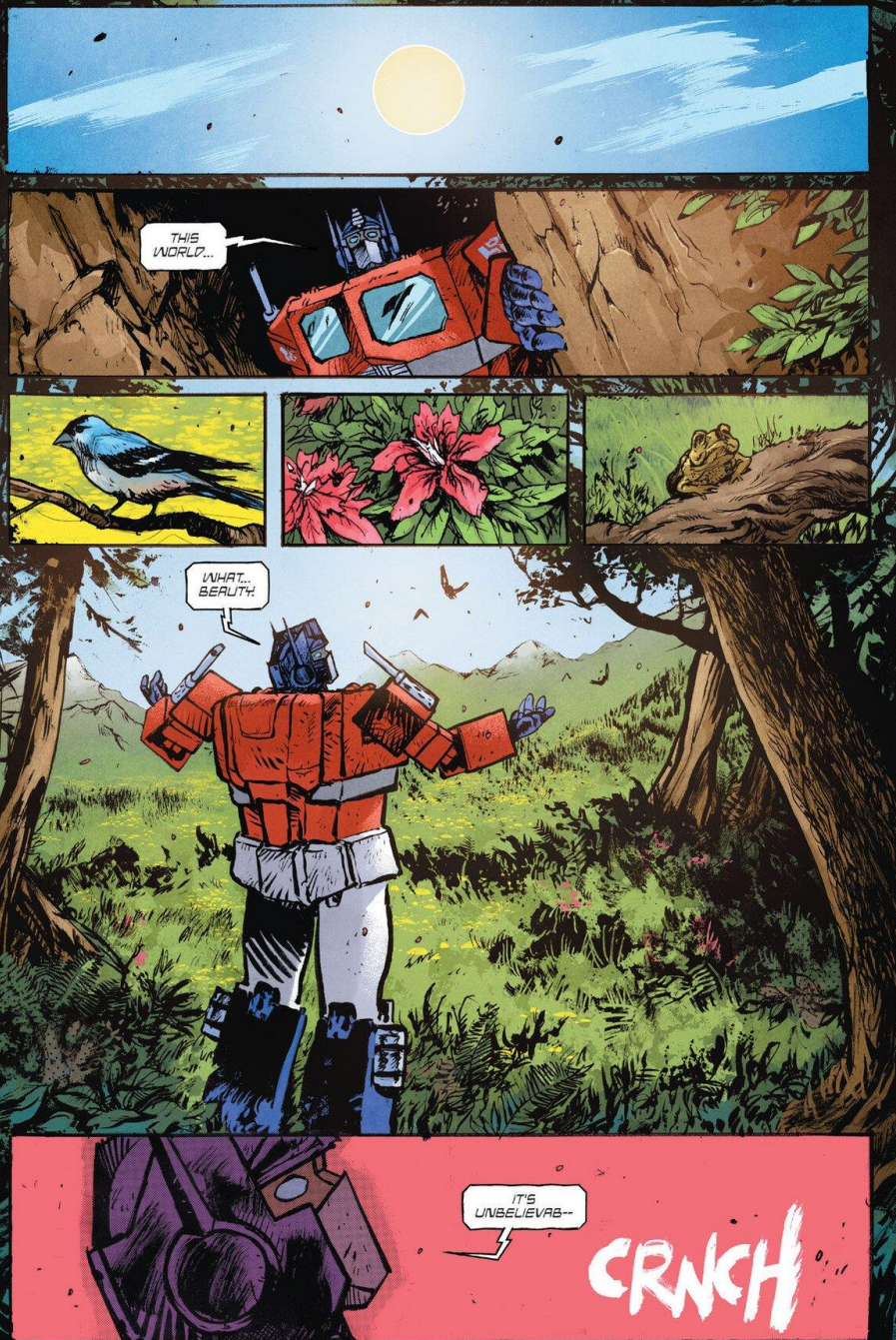


Optimus asks if she's "willing to feed Cybertron with the blood" of Earth, and she says yes, when Cybertron "is dying of thirst."



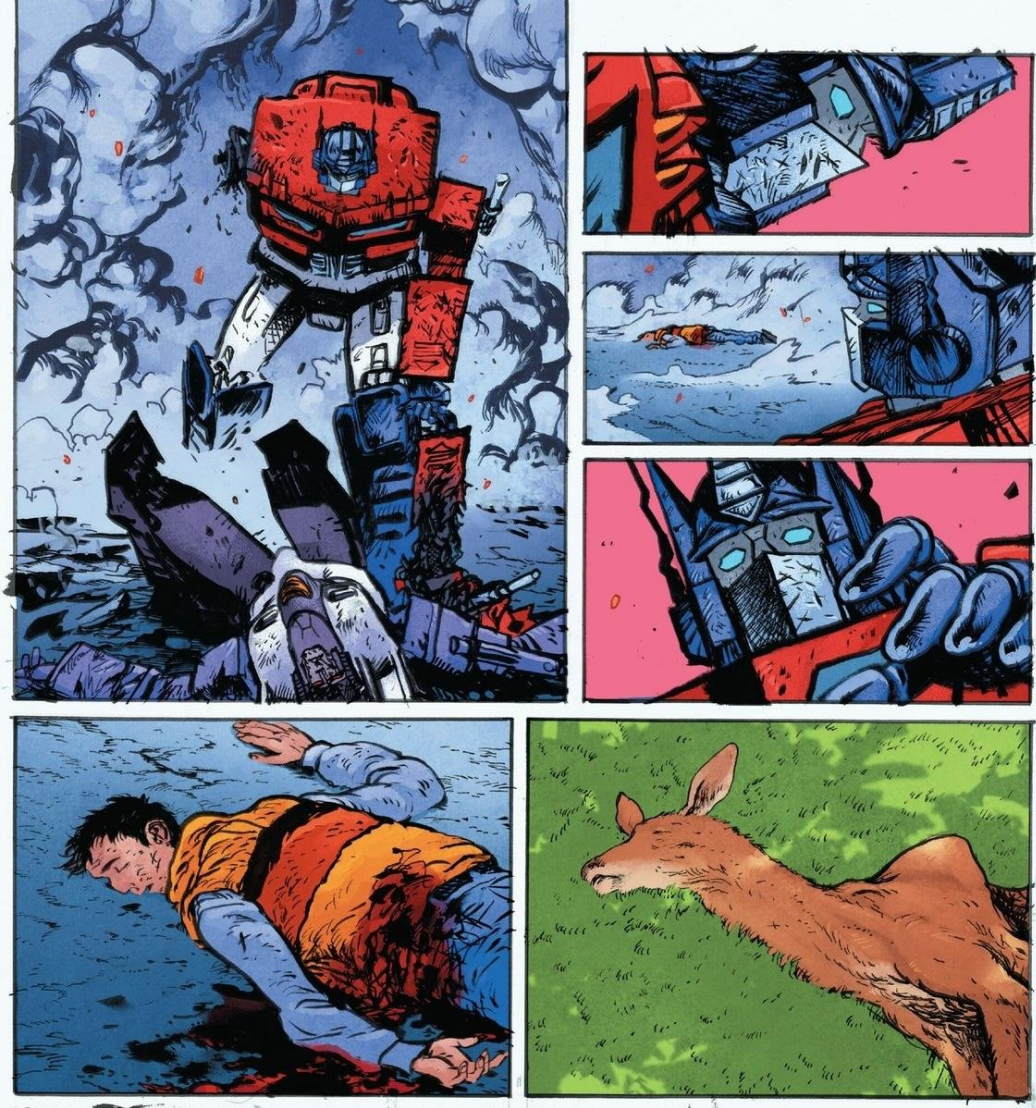
Cyberton has "No Energon. Decepticon rule. Our people are starving and enslaved. And here you are, in your new paradise."

The Value of Life



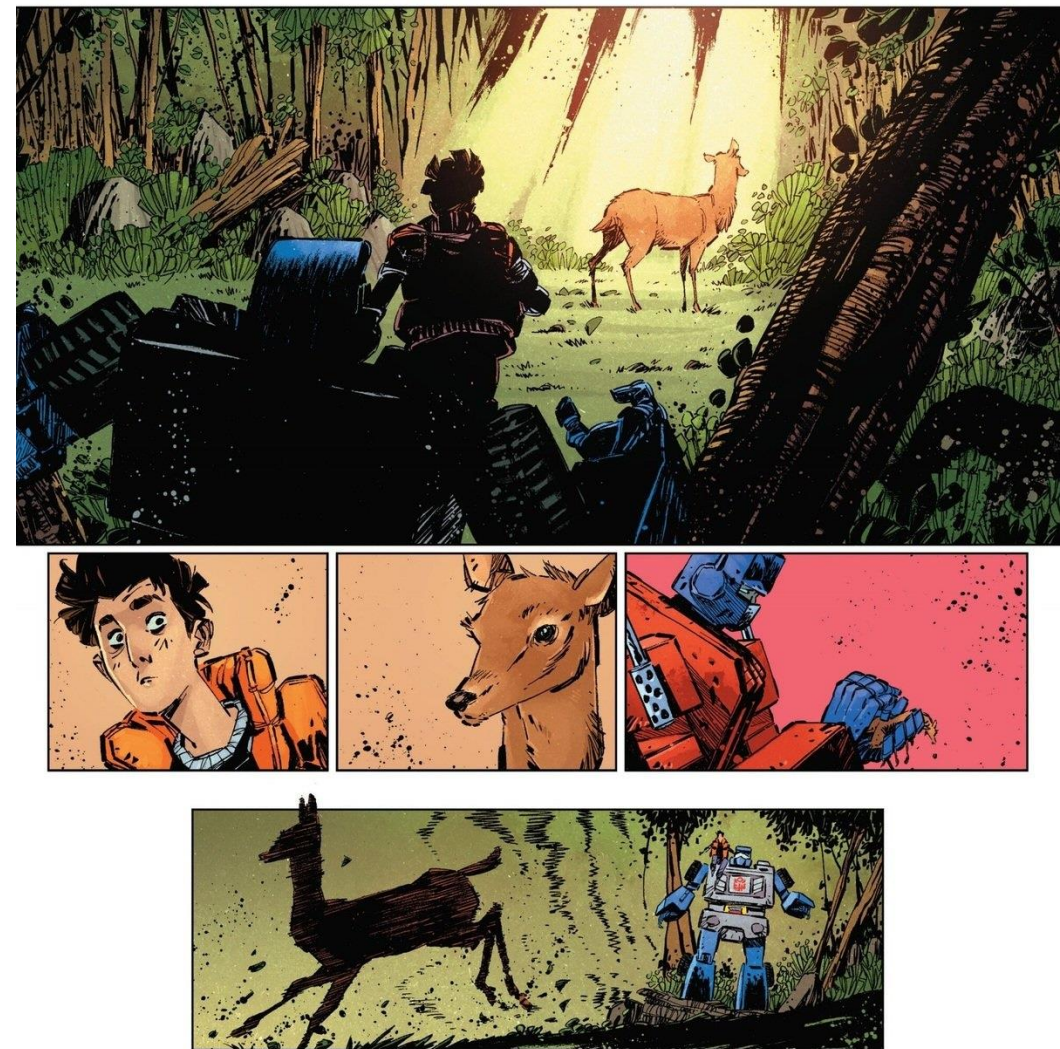
Optimus Prime appreciates the beauty of the Earth, but does not immediately realize how fragile it is. He and the Autobots regularly cause pain and death by their presence.

However, Prime cares for those he hurts.



Prime and Spike both see the dead deer as a significant marker of their thinking.

Prime sees the deer as a stand-in for all life, including humanity.

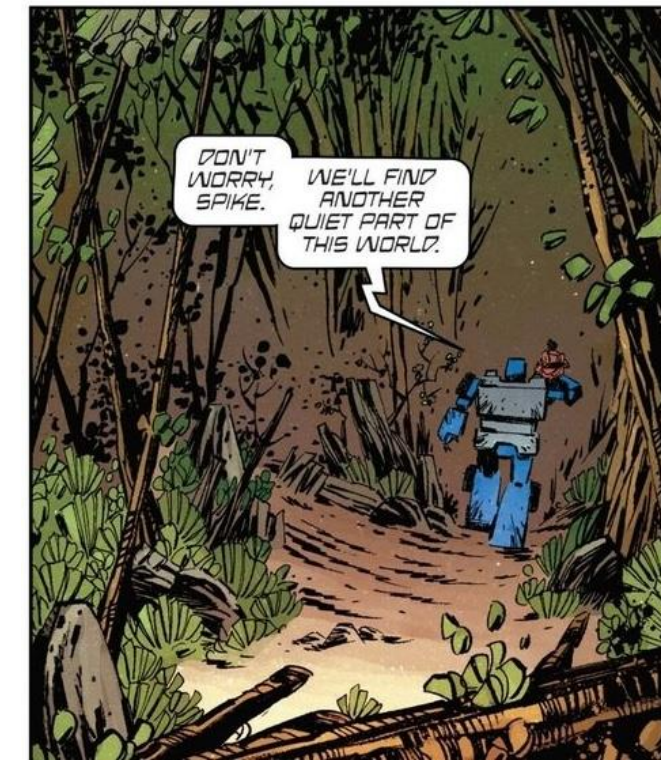
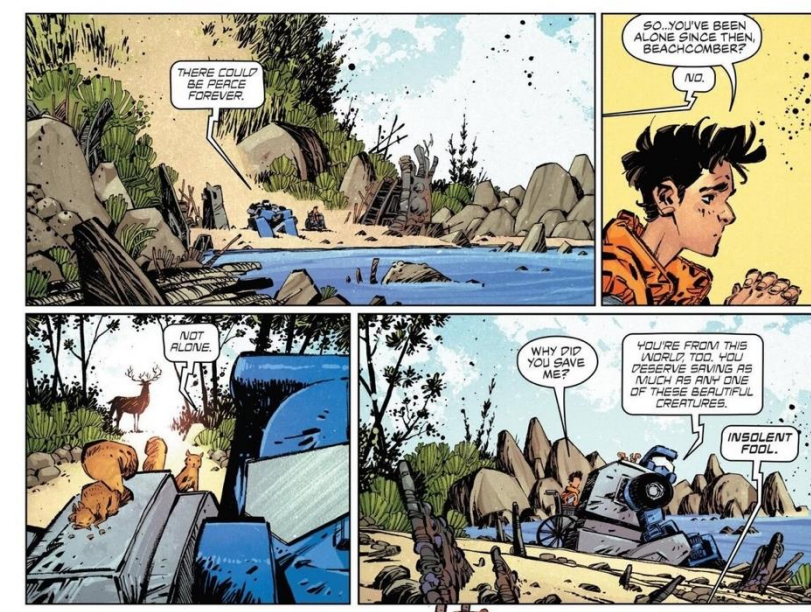


Spike comes to see the danger the Transformers pose to all life whenever they move into a space.

While Optimus feels empathy for vulnerable life, he also believes in the Autobots and their role in maintaining it.

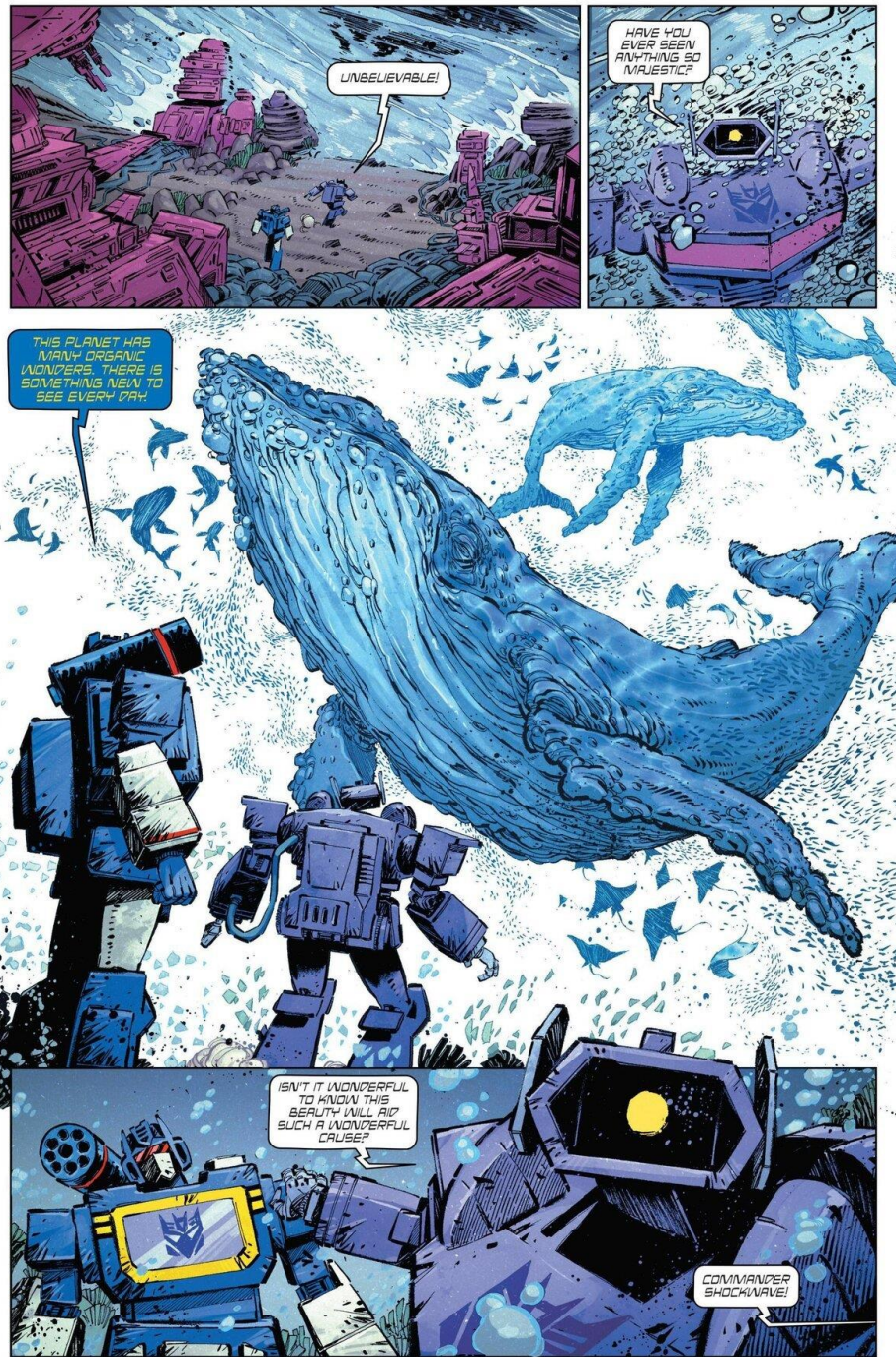
For Beachcomber, the life of Earth is now his whole life and tries to take a path of minimal interference. His hope is to find spaces outside of all Transformer encroachment.

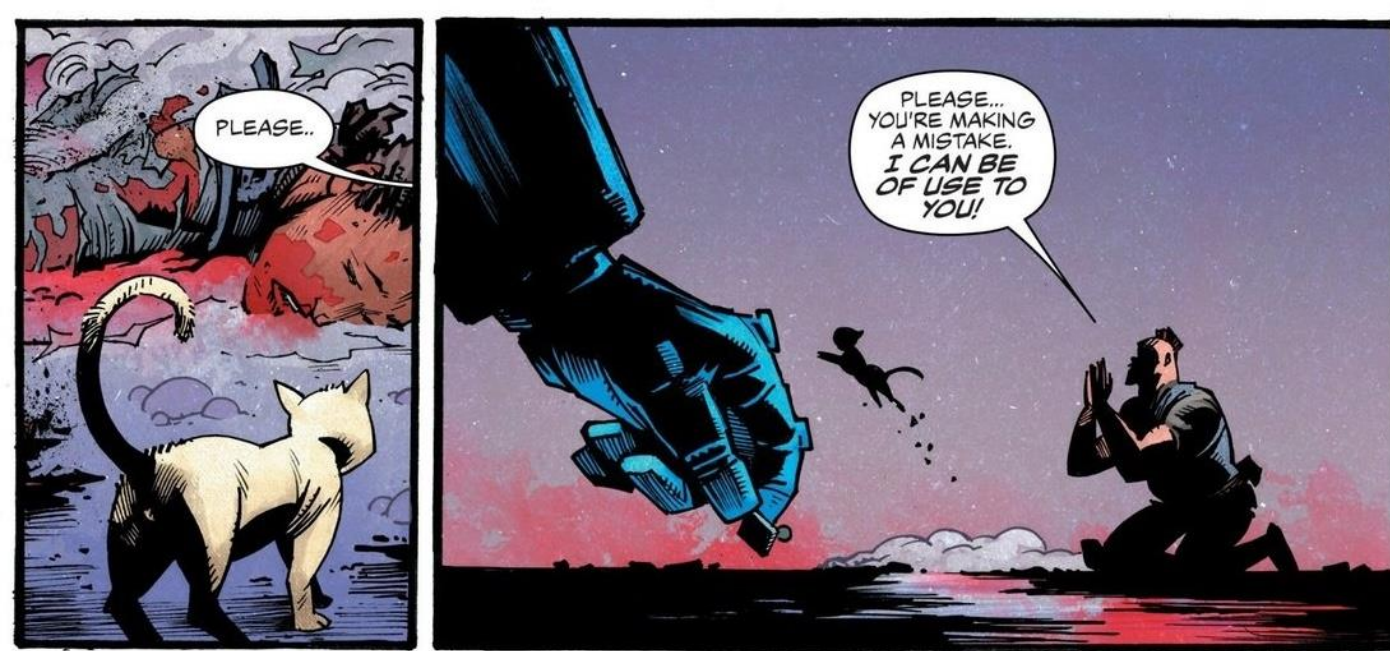
He sees animals as equal to himself, and humans as equivalent to animals.



Even Shockwave and Soundwave see the “majesty” and “wonder” of nature.

But Shockwave is sadistic about its use.



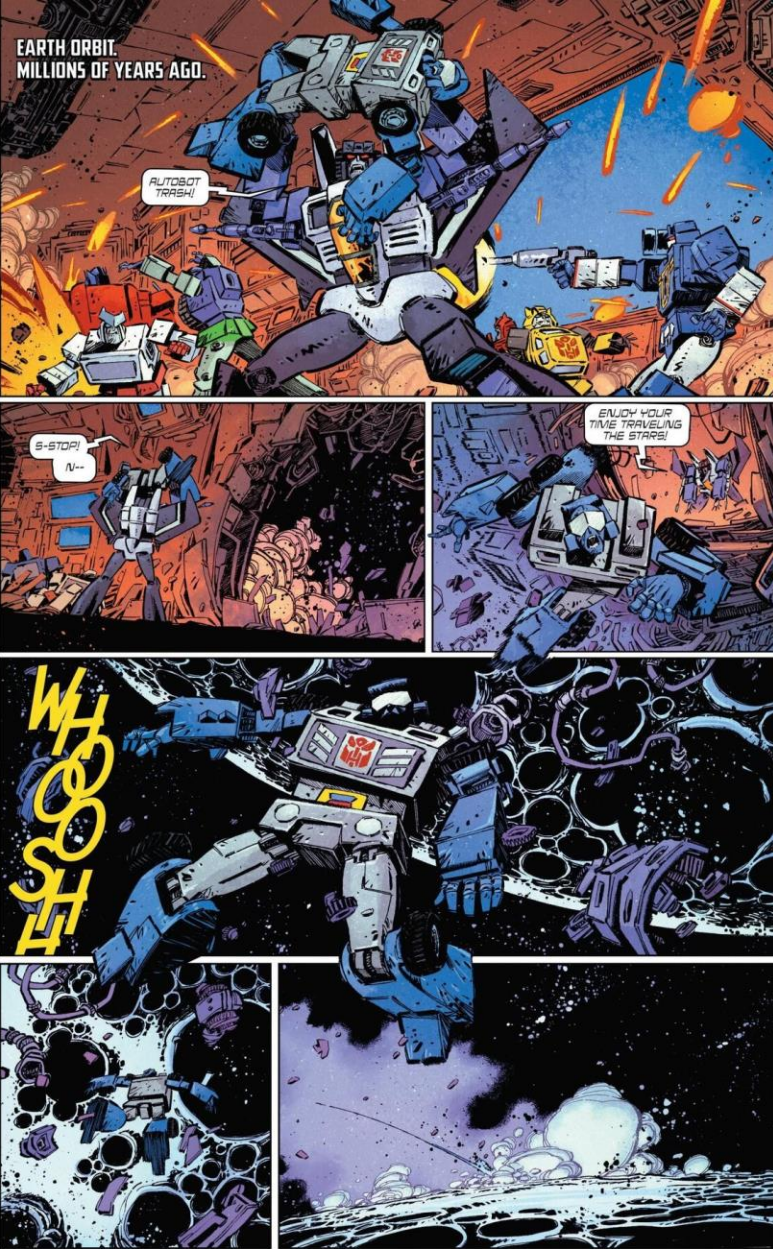


Some Decepticons end up with a degree of empathy for some life forms as well:

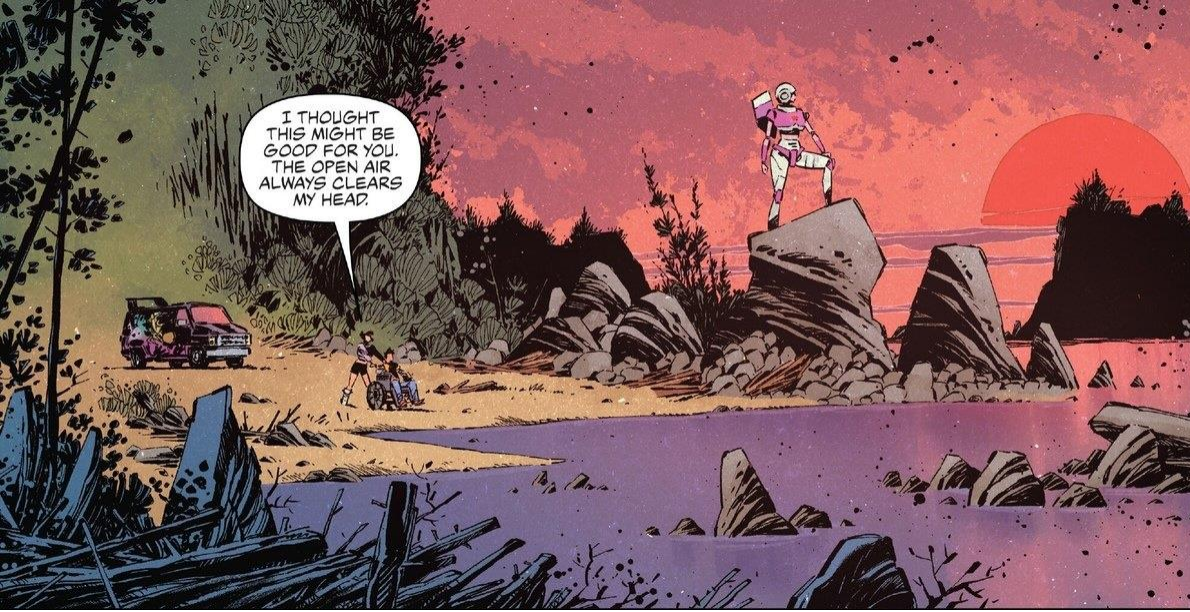
Starscream adopts a cat and Thundercracker starts to let humans escape.



The Value of Beauty



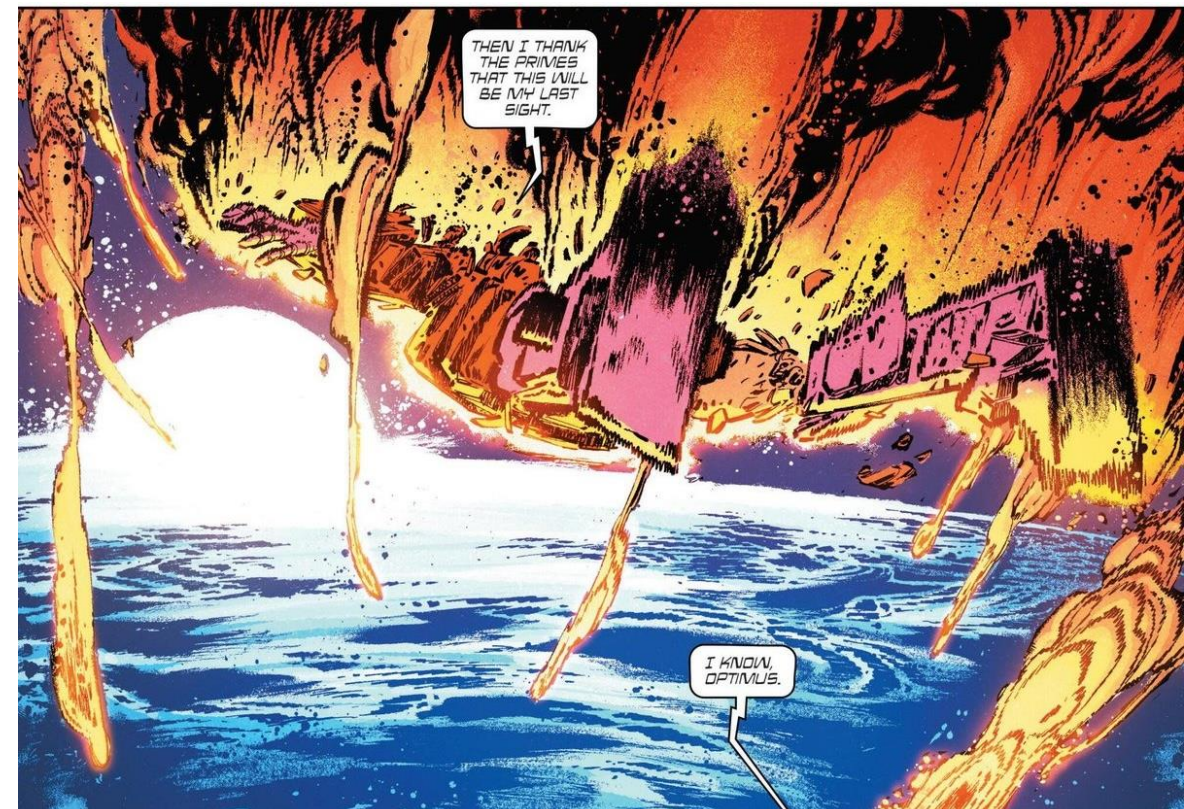
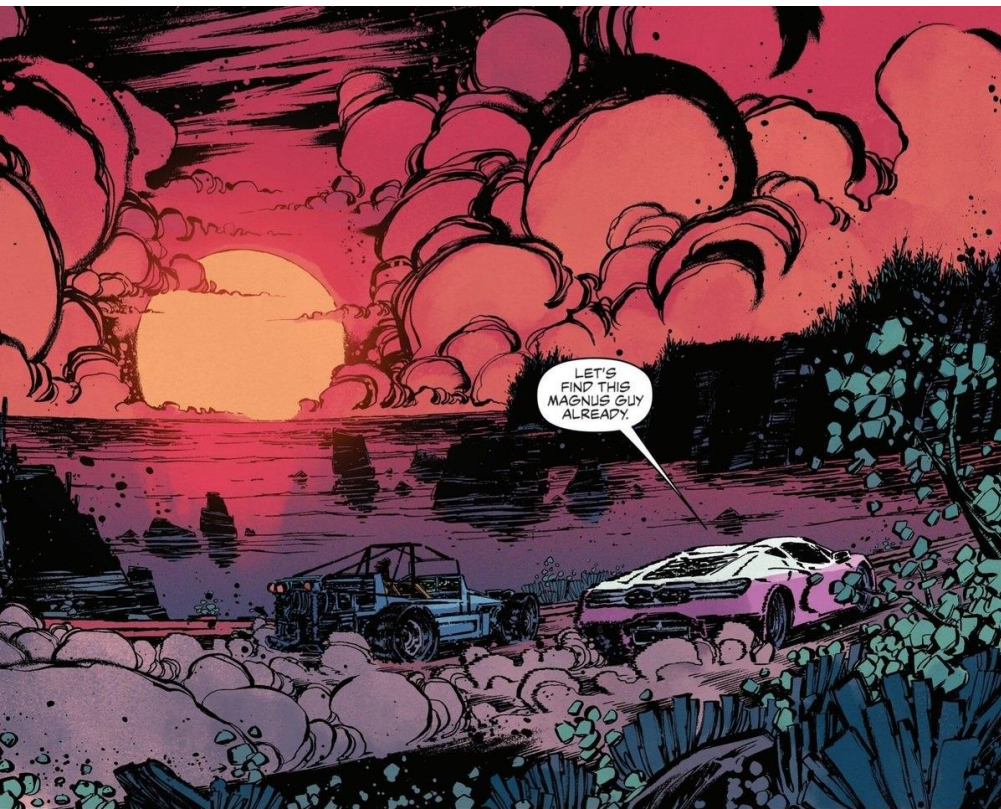
Beachcomber is stranded on the moon for millions of years but learns to see its beauty.



The Earth's value is often shown and described as being anchored in its beauty and the transformative nature of that beauty.

Optimus can see beauty in the world even while burning up in re-entry.

There is less concern for the despoiling of the environment in the sense of pollution's health effects.



I KNOW, OPTIMUS.



Surfing is regularly shown as a way of being one with nature.



2024 *Transformers One* Movie

Energon Is Life

Cybertron was formed out of
the body and life of Primus.





*Cybertron's natural
power source, Energon,
flowed in abundance,*



*sustaining life
across the planet.*

The Matrix was a source of flowing Energon—that is, Primus's life force—all over Cybertron until it was lost.



*until the Matrix
of Leadership was lost,*



*causing Energon
to no longer flow.*



Sentinel Prime tricks the masses of Cybertron into thinking they need to mine for Energon now that it is no longer flowing naturally.

He tells them that the surface is desolate and without energy.





It's unstable!
We got to go, we got to move!

Mining for Energon is
unnatural and can lead
to upheavals within the
planet.



The Surface of Cybertron



The surface of Cybertron is as beautiful as Earth is in the *Transformers* comic.





It's beautiful.

The Transformers who go to the surface are visibly stunned and full of wonder at the sight.

Quintessons and Organic Matter



However, a wide variety of organic matter, including some seemingly techno-organic life, has infested the environment.

It seems unnatural and “weird” to the Transformers.





This organic matter
covers everything.





Some of it is beautiful but some feels like dilapidation and decay.

The organic matter in particular infests and decays the Transformers' old cities, returning them to "nature"—except nature is not natural here.





This organic matter comes from the Quintessons, who have secretly taken over Cybertron.

The Quintessons are notably more organic in form than the Transformers. They have some metal but also crab-like shells and tentacles.

Their ships look similar to horseshoe crabs—even their technology looks organic.

The relationship with nature is more complex here than in other Transformer series. It comes from the Quintessons, so it is “wrong,” and it is ruinous and decaying to the Transformers’ built environment, but it is also beautiful.



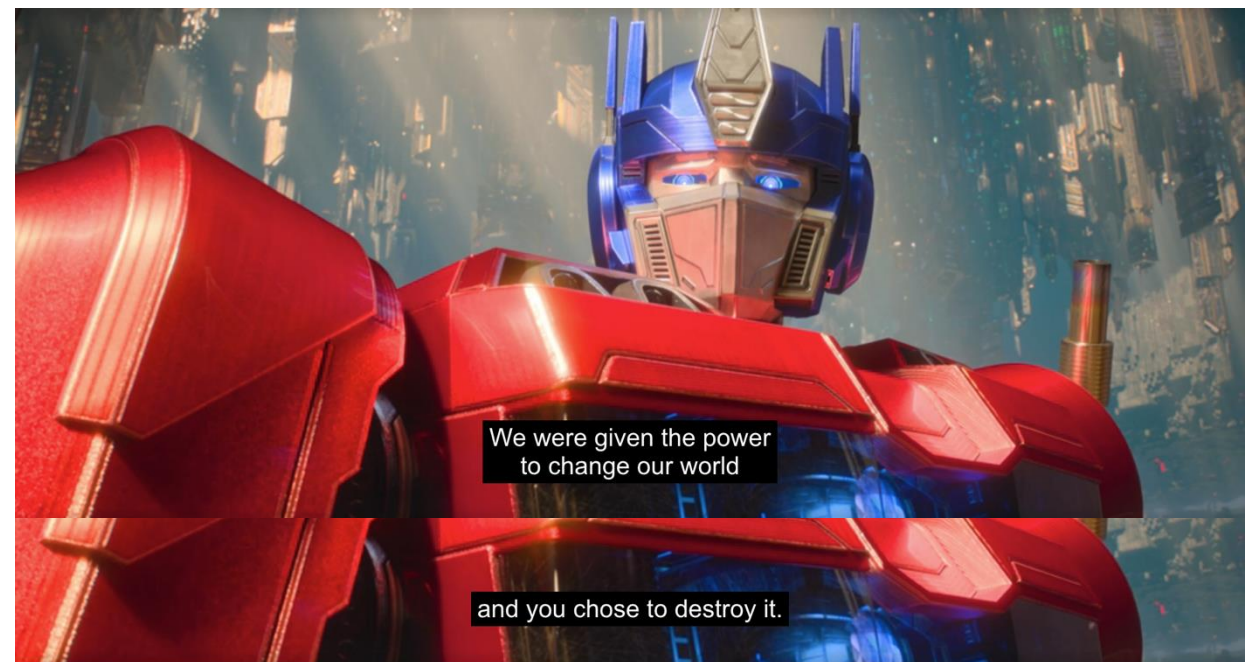
The Transformation of the Planet



The movie uses the multiple variations on the phrase “you can change your world.”

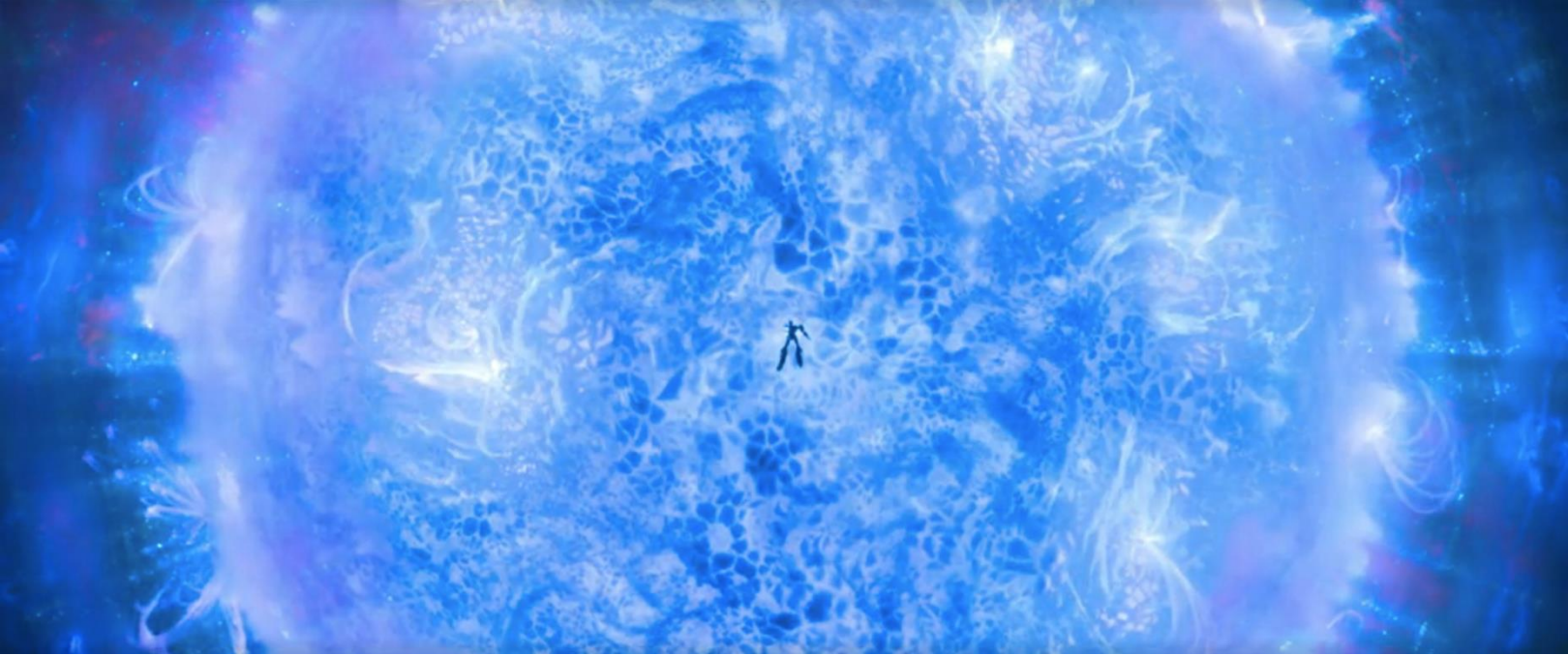
Alpha Trion says the Transformers originally all had cogs, which allow them to transform their shape but also to change (transform) their world.





Four other uses of the phrase. The Transformers can transform the world through their “spark.”

This refers to their ability to end the autocratic rule of Sentinel Prime, but also to transform the environment, in particular the flushness of Energon.



Optimus is killed and is brought to the core of Cybertron.

There, the source of Energon gives him the Matrix, and restores his life and body.





[all cheering]

With the Matrix restored, Energon once again flows on the surface.





Energon completely revivifies and restores the environment.

However, will the Transformers embrace the organic nature on the surface?

Will the organic life have a symbiotic relationship with the now-flowing Energon?

