

After two strong issues setting up “Combiner Wars”, the newly retitled Transformers turn their attention back to Earth with the beginning of the “Days of Deception” arc. Perhaps its inevitable that this issue should be somewhat transitional, as it reintroduces us to the players and positions them for the arc ahead, but in its best moments you don’t really notice it. The structure of the story is particularly solid this month. Barber manages to present a number of hooks while positioning everyone for the next few issues. While this is a clear success, some scenes are definitely stronger than others. Cosmos’ recon operation left me relatively nonplussed compared to Optimus’ conversation with Alpha Trion or Galvatron’s scheming and the opening scene read much better the first time, with the excitement of suspense driving it forward. Most sequences tend to end strongly, but they sometimes lose steam in the middle. Still, there is some especially good character work. All of the major players feel particularly alive this month. Galvatron is all the richer for the context we received last month, Alpha Trion remains one of Barber’s strongest voices, and Prowl feels much more nuanced than in previous issues. Though he’s soon to be off to star in Transformers: Punishment, Optimus Prime gets a particularly good showing. It’s nice to see that Prime is finally getting fed up with Prowl’s grandstanding, but it’s all the more interesting once you realize that his frustration is likely a reflection of his own misgivings about keeping secrets from his crew. John Barber has always played up Optimus’ discomfort in the role of Prime, even in his Movie-verse work. In fact, I think it could be said that the crucial distinction between Optimus and Megatron is that Optimus was never able to accept that he was someone special, where Megatron forced himself to become a figurehead for the greater good. Optimus doesn’t really want to be a general, he was to be a father to his men. But, like it or not, Alpha Trion represents a lineage of Primes that Optimus can’t write off as corrupt. Likewise, this issue really shows how frustrated Prowl is becoming with Optimus’ willfully ineffective leadership. The question in both camps really seems to be whether command falls to those willing to uphold the ideology of the faction or to those willing to lead. Galvatron is clearly becoming another of Barber’s favorite bots. If his importance to the story doesn’t tip you off, you can tell by how much snappier and more layered his dialogue is than most of the cast. Particularly in his interactions with Soundwave, you can really feel the divide between what Galvatron needs to say and what Galvatron wants to say. I also have to say that Galvatron’s unique brand of atheism continues to be rather fun. These themes make for an interesting read, but they admittedly remain in the background for now, pushed aside by the demands of the plot. Admittedly, it is quite a plot. A Cybertronian based Operating System is being released by a tech giant called Onyx, but a renegade Spike Witwicky demands that the populace start asking questions about the Cybertronians and those permitted to work with their technology. I’m personally not that impressed with Garrison Blackrock, but Spike’s return is actually pretty interesting. Truly one of the most seductive tropes of recent years is the mundane conspiracy, that mystery that only the brightest will even notice exists. While Spike doesn’t really tell us anything we don’t already know, Barber shows how interesting it can be to have him creeping around the edges of the EDF’s masquerade. He also ties in a little more of the Furman-era IDW by reintroducing Jimmy Pink, of all people! The visuals are courtesy of the series’ main artist, Andrew Griffith. Griffith’s art doesn’t necessarily grab you the way the dramatic styles of recent issues might, but he ‘s bringing his A-game to this one. Perhaps it’s just the slack that two months of guest artists will naturally bring, but Griffith’s work feels noticeably stronger than when last we saw it . Particularly in the first half of the issue, Griffith's knack for blocking is on good display. There’s a cinematic quality to his compositions that allows Griffith to really comment on the action. Thankfully, Griffith walks the line between clarity and cliché with

significant grace, and even the simplest tricks can feel thoughtful under his pen. The operation above Bikini Atoll looks especially lovely. Griffith knows just how to present Cosmos. All his moves look great and there's a particular attention paid to the effects of gravity on him that made the scene come alive a bit. Griffith and Josh Perez pare down the extraneous detail and give the sequence a very purposeful look. Perez is on the top of his game this month. The colors are vibrant without becoming excessive and the bots' finishes gleam realistically throughout. Best of all are the eyes; you can really see the spark behind their optics. The scene aboard the Nemesis feels a little more claustrophobic and it feels like Griffith was sometimes straining to do his best with a largely discussion based issue, but Griffith's efforts help give the impression that Transformers has recovered some energy in this new arc. It's also worth mentioning that none of this is probably the most improved element of Griffith's work. That distinction probably falls to the human characters. It's a good issue for humans to look strong. Griffith's humans still aren't up to the same level as his Transformers. Faces can look overly angular, there's minor anatomical weirdness from time to time, and there's often a grit to their look that doesn't mesh with the slick look of the Transformers. Nonetheless there's significant improvement from previous issues. The humans all carry a natural weight and emotion with them and the problems Griffith does have are all exceptions rather than a part of his style. Indeed, there's a sense of what each human is thinking in how they hold themselves, which is a nice trick for a series that's still getting used to having them around again. A Thought: In our recent interview with him, John Barber spoke quite a bit about what's going on with Prowl. This issue we get a peak behind the curtain. I asked if this was a reaction to no one noticing that he was under someone else's control, but it seems like Prowl may still not be entirely himself. "Get out of my head," he growls angrily after engaging in another of his trademark table flips. The question now is who's in his head? Bombshell? The Constructicons? Or maybe it's Prowl, himself. The post Transformers #35 – Review appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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