

Those of you who frequent the site might already be aware that I adored Transformers: Windblade. The miniseries was bold, fun, smart, fresh, and frankly beautiful. For me, it was effectively Transformers' answer to Ms. Marvel, and I say that with all the respect in the world and a full understanding of their differences. So when I heard that one of my favorite comics of last year was returning as an ongoing series, I was rightfully excited. And now it's finally here. Windblade #1 opens with a pretty great set-up. Swindle has used Metroplex's Space Bridge to transport the combiner Menasor to Windblade's home planet of Caminus and is looting the dying world. With the gestalt process perfected, the Camiens have no defense against the behemoth transformer and Cybertron seemingly lacks the forces to help them. It's a strong set up that puts us right in the action almost immediately without sacrificing character development, world-building, or levity. Writer Mairghread Scott could have easily dedicated much more of the issue to depicting Menasor's rampage, however it's much more interesting to see how she uses it almost as a backdrop for the events of the issue. The destruction feels realer than it might in a lot of comics, Scott works in the Camiens' plight gently but frequently enough for you to kind of worry if they can come back from this with their limited resources and wonder what effect that might have on Camien-Cybertronian relations. It's also interesting to see Swindle's plight, which receives a nice mix of humor and gravitas. It's inevitable that we see at least a few pages of struggle with Menasor. While the high bar of the last series' fight scenes leaves this one feeling a little mindless by comparison, it gives Sarah Stone a chance to show us some striking artwork and, by the time it ends, you'll probably at least a little bit pumped. Appropriate for the first issue to actually take us to Caminus, a lot of details about the Camien society are revealed this month. During the miniseries we learned that Camiens moved against ranged weapons, seeing them as wasteful. At the time it seemed like an interesting bit of their philosophy, but with this issue both the practicality and the severity of their beliefs are driven home quite strongly. I will admit that despite mentions of energy famine and many interesting symbolic beliefs being a part of Windblade's character for a long while now and mentions that Windblade is not the quintessential representative of her culture, it at times strains credulity to think that none of the Camien ambassadors ever mentioned any of this. Basically, everything we knew about Camien society gets turned up to eleven this issue, often with intriguing results. It's also very interesting to see many of Cybertron's current issues reflected in Caminus, most notably the tension between church and state that Prime and Starscream were brewing in this month's The Transformers. Windblade tries to present this as a natural and positive part of Camien life, however, I think Scott does a wonderful job of expressing the weird, in-between state the City-Speaker finds herself in. Being of Caminus and Cybertron was a powerful moral victory in the Windblade miniseries, but I get the sense that the consequences of that choice will loom large over this ongoing, literally in the case of the Mistress of Flame. Complexities like this also give me hope that the broader elements of Camien culture will prove deeper and more human as we get to know more about them. Though the characters sound like themselves, the dialogue is very intense. Scott is great at writing simple, dramatic suspense but there's no time for it in the midst of this crisis. When Optimus Prime starts screaming, you know things are serious. Speaking of Prime, this marks Scott's first opportunity to write for the classic character in IDW continuity, if I'm not mistaken. While it would have been nice to get more of a baseline, a more traditional Optimus, there's enough of the classic cadence and character to feel comfortable with the big guy. I especially like how respectful he is on the final pages, the words are full of reverence but just stiff enough to imply that he's effectively guessing what to say. I could also go on forever about the questions raised

by Starscream or the combiner's dialogue this month, but, needless to say, it's good. It's still a little unclear how the Gestalt personalities function, which is an understandable but unfortunate failing of the issue, but there's little denying that they're fun to read. I'm also very glad to see the Badgeless, one of the most interesting and tantalizing elements introduced by the Windblade miniseries, brought back into play. While it's been a long wait, the sudden reappearance is actually kind of cool, reminding you that if Starscream's government doesn't want you knowing something, you won't until it's too late. But while the Badgeless and the myriad elements of Caminus introduced this issue hint towards bigger adventures for Windblade in the near future, this issue doesn't feel so much like Transformers: Windblade #1 as a second issue of a Combiner Wars miniseries. There's not a lot of time spent introducing Windblade or the rest of the cast and mentions of the previous mini are left hanging, as if readers are assumed to have read it, not to mention The Transformers #39. In fact, a good chunk of the Windblade cast don't put in an appearance this month. The Maccadam's crew are missing in action; Metroplex remains a setting rather than a character; and even Starscream's right hand man, Rattrap, is nowhere to be seen. It was probably wise to use "Combiner Wars" to help support the launch of Windblade and this is an excellent chapter of the crossover. However, as a first issue, this isn't doing all it needs to do. More Windblade means, at least for now, more Sarah Stone Transformers art and that's a fine, fine thing. An equal and opposite response to Livio Ramondelli's hyperrealism over in The Transformers, Stone remains a patron saint of energy, color, and expressiveness. Clearly the new designs excite Stone as they tend to be among her finest work this issue. That naturally means characters like Lightbright and Afterburner, but I include the new combiner designs as well. Stone is really good at making the combiners look natural without ignoring the individuality of their components. It's also hard to match Stone when it comes to turning mood up to eleven. Starscream's smugness, and subsequent fury, on the final pages are excellent examples, as is Swindle's panic and the beautiful religious imagery that permeates the last fourth of the book. There's also a great page that technically isn't a splash of Menasor, but might as well be that really sells the scale of the conflict and Superior's final panel is both visually impressive and narratively arresting. Overall it's another gorgeous issue. However, there are sections of the book that seem to be colored in a much flatter style. It's possible that Stone felt that this suited those panels better, but it seems a little like time was a consideration on this issue. Compared to the best of this issue or the beauty of the original miniseries, many pages lack the complexity of lighting and depth their brethren possess. There are also a couple of places where Stone omits some connective tissue. Going from the Aerialbots being in their hanger to flying over Caminus to combined into Superior in four panels is quick, a fact that's driven home by the complete absence of any visual representation of their connection. Is it necessary? Not really, but it would have been nice, and once you encounter a couple more of these moments you start to notice them. Still, Stone's storytelling is strong and generally keeps everything moving crisply and legibly. The only place where I was actually confused by the story was the panel of Superior's strategy against Menasor, which I misinterpreted until a few panels later when we're given a wide shot of the scene. Some Notes: I'm sorry this review took a while to hit the site, but I was in Seattle for Emerald City Comic Con, talking to Mairghread Scott, herself about the new series. Scott was, as ever, super gracious and gave us a really interesting interview that answered a lot of the questions that this issue left hanging. I should have it up in a few days, so check back for some great insight into this issue. In a move that I have to wonder if Hasbro played a part in, Optimus Prime towers over Starscream and Windblade this issue. Logically the idea of Optimus, a truck, looking down at

two fighter jets is ridiculous, but it does make a certain degree of sense as it puts Prime at a toy-accurate Voyager scale while Starscream and Windblade are relatively the size of their deluxe-size figures. Now I'm imagining Superior as a Bro. I'm kind of ok with that... (Spoilers) It's a little unclear what Starscream's plan is exactly. The obvious explanation is a false flag operation with the intent to paint Menasor as a rogue agent taken down by Starscream's pet project, Superior. However, it definitely seems like Menasor's Cybertronian origin leads him to be considered Starscream's responsibility by the Forgefire Parliament. Nonetheless, when we catch up with Starscream on Caminus, he seems to have the Parliament eating out of his hands, so perhaps I'm just underestimating the old Screamer charm. The post Transformers: Windblade #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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