Transform and Roll Out: The Legacy of Optimus Prime: An Exhibition Guide

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TRANSFORM AND ROLL OUT: THE LEGACY OF OPTIMUS PRIME

An Exhibition Guide
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2 June—3 August 2012
Nelson Poynter Memorial Library
University of South Florida St. Petersburg
Transform and Roll Out:  
The Legacy of Optimus Prime

This exhibit was planned, arranged, and designed to inform and educate the University of South Florida St. Petersburg community and members of the general public.

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With special thanks and appreciation to Regina Casale

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Since 1984, *Transformers* has been an inescapable part of our culture, with its toys, television shows, comic books, movies, video games and more providing a continuous wellspring of captivating stories and memorable characters. Unarguably, of all the many characters that have left their mark on the *Transformers* universe, none is as recognizable, more beloved, or as celebrated as the leader of the heroic Autobots, OPTIMUS PRIME.

Optimus Prime is the embodiment of compassion, honor and courage. He believes that freedom is everyone’s right, and he will fight tirelessly to protect his troops and any and all innocent creatures—to the extent that he would sacrifice his own life if it meant saving another. His wisdom, patience and charisma make him a role model for many of the Autobots under his command who want nothing more than to make him proud. To the people of Earth, as well as beings from other cultures who have encountered him, he is a friend, a champion and a true hero.

Originally relegated to a group of beloved characters from 1980s pop culture, Optimus Prime has managed to maintain a high profile with subsequent generations, and while *Transformers* has been rebooted and rewritten many times over the years, Optimus Prime—who he is, what he stands for and believes in—has remained consistent throughout. Today, he can sit comfortably among an elite group of fictional heroes with household names and long-term relevance, e.g., Superman, Spider-Man, Captain America, Luke Skywalker, etc. With *Transformers* nearing its 30-year anniversary, there is little doubt that Optimus Prime will continue to inspire children and adults for many years to come.
1984-1991: THE HEYDAY OF THE ORIGINAL G1 OPTIMUS PRIME

The first Transformers toys, later referred to as Generation 1 (G1), were sold by Hasbro in 1984 and consisted entirely of toys that had previously been offered in Japan as part of Takara’s Diaclone and Microchange lines; the first Optimus Prime toy was based on the Diaclone Battle Convoy figure from 1983. When the Transformers concept and characters were imported back to Japan, Optimus Prime was renamed Convoy as an homage to his Diaclone roots. As Optimus Prime, this toy has been reissued more times over the years than any other single Transformer.
Diaclone Battle Convoy (1983)

Boxed sample of Transformers (aka Generation 1) Optimus Prime (1984)
In the original *Transformers* animated series (1984-87), Optimus Prime began life as a naïve dock worker named Orion Pax. Nine million years ago, Orion was befriended, then betrayed and nearly destroyed, by Decepticon leader Megatron. After being renamed and rebuilt into a powerful warrior by Alpha Trion, Optimus Prime was granted possession of the fabled Matrix of Leadership. His strength and leadership soon gave new hope to the Autobots, who had been crippled in the war against the Decepticons. Once the war found its way to our world, Prime swore to protect the planet and all its inhabitants from the wrath of the Decepticons, who sought to steal all of Earth’s energy resources.
The U.S. *Transformers* comic book series by Marvel, which debuted in May 1984 and ran concurrently with the animated series, told a very different story—setting the stage for the *Transformers* brand today being peppered with different continuities and multiple takes on the same events. The comic book did not shed much light on Optimus Prime’s past, but the books published by Marvel UK delved more into his back story. Millions of years ago, Prime and Megatron were gladiatorial combat rivals on Cybertron. As Megatron began leading Decepticon assaults across the planet, Prime became a soldier and gradually worked his way up the ranks until the Autobot Council of Elders made him leader.
In 1985, Takara brought the *Transformers* characters and concepts back to Japan, more or less supplanting their *Diaclone* and *Micro-change* incarnations. Much like the U.S., the *Transformers* line flourished in Japan, and over the years there have been a wealth of *Transformers* toys, and even whole product lines, that have never made it to U.S. shores. One of the earliest Japanese-exclusive *Transformers* lines was *Transform Jr.* (originally called *Transform Gōkin*), which was a series of figures recast in a slightly smaller scale. There were two versions of *Transform Jr.* Convoy: one that came with a cardboard version of the trailer, and one that did not.

In 1986, Optimus Prime was killed off in the comic book as well as in the animated feature *Transformers: the Movie*. As far as the film was concerned, it was strictly business: many older characters died in the movie in order to make room for a new cast of characters whose toys were just arriving in stores. However, intense outcry from upset children and angry parents led to his being resurrected in the TV series seven months later.
Prime died from the damage he received in *Transformers: the Movie*... and was blown to bits in Marvel’s *The Transformers* #24

Unlike the cartoon, his resurrection in the comics had been planned from the outset, although it did not occur until 1988. His return coincided with the release of the Powermaster (PM) Optimus Prime toy. An impressive figure in its day, PM Prime featured two different robot modes: a “regular” robot mode made from the cab of his tractor trailer mode, and a larger “Powermaster” robot mode formed by combining the cab with the trailer. Beginning in 2000, a string of Optimus Prime/Convoy toys would borrow this design feature.

*G1 Powermaster Optimus Prime (1988)*
The final run of G1 figures in 1990 focused largely on Action Masters, *Transformers* figures whose weapons and vehicles transformed, while the figures *themselves* did not. Armored Convoy with Optimus Prime was the largest Action Master set released. In popular fiction, this version of Prime made it into the very last issue of the U.S. comic book.
The popularity of *Transformers*, which had peaked with the release of the 1986 film, had begun to taper off more and more with each passing year. Despite the appearance of Optimus Prime, Megatron, and many other early *G1* characters, the ill-received Action Masters were seen as the final nail in the coffin of a dying fad; thus, Hasbro pulled the plug on *Transformers* in the U.S. by the end of 1990. The line continued in other parts of the world, however. In Japan, the 1991 *Return of Convoy* line saw the release of Star Convoy, a gigantic, futuristic new version of *G1* Optimus Prime that, as of 2012, has never been released in the U.S.
In 1993, Hasbro decided to revive the brand in the U.S. as *Transformers: Generation 2* (G2). The line was launched with the re-release of several *G1* toys featuring new colors and weapons, followed by a lineup of new characters. Four different Optimus Prime toys were released during the run of *G2*—the most for any single character in the line. The last of these four figures, Laser Optimus Prime, was released in 1995 to very little fanfare, but went on to become one of the most celebrated *G2* figures in the years that followed: it was reissued in Japan in 2006, and was later homaged in the *Reveal the Shield* line in 2011.
**Generation 2 Optimus Prime (1993)**

**G2 Hero Optimus Prime (1994)**

**G2 Go-bot Optimus Prime (1995)**

Meanwhile, the Marvel *Generation 2* comic book launched in fall 1993, picking up the story where the G1 book left off. This chapter of the Marvel continuity is noticeably darker and grittier than its predecessor; its complex story features an overburdened Optimus Prime dealing with the return of Megatron, a new splinter faction of Decepticons, a series of hauntingly cryptic visions, the loss of innocent lives across the galaxy, and a cloud of all-consuming energy known as the Swarm.

Unfortunately, the G2 line was launched during a time period when the world was not yet ready to embrace *Transformers* again; the comic book was cancelled after 12 issues, and the entire toy line folded by the end of 1995. Unbeknownst to the fans at the time, there were some very exciting things on the horizon for *Transformers*, but it would nevertheless be six years before the world at large was ready to celebrate Optimus Prime again.
In 1996, with G2 having failed to renew interest in *Transformers*, Hasbro decided to rejuvenate the brand by trying something different: *Beast Wars (BW)*, a line of robots that turned into organic-looking animals. Among the many changes made to established brand patterns was Autobot leader Optimus Prime being replaced by Maximal leader Optimus Primal. It was a risky gamble that paid off: *BW* became a runaway success, *Transformers* became relevant again, and Optimus Primal became a hero and a role model to a new generation of children who were experiencing *Transformers* for the first time.
Beast Wars Ultra Class Optimus Primal (1996)

Optimus Primal as seen in the Beast Wars episode “Beast Wars, Part 1” (1996)
However, in spite of its success, *BW* was not universally embraced by older *G1* fans, many of whom deemed it to be sacrilegious to everything they knew and loved. Even though the World Wide Web was in its infancy in 1996, many disgruntled fans were able to come together online to express their outrage; a common complaint among them was that Optimus Prime was “supposed to be a truck, not a gorilla.” Over the next few years, various mutations of these complaints resulted in an early *Transformers* internet meme, “TRUKK NOT MUNKY.”

Despite its radical changes and initial uncertainties about how it related to previous lore, *BW* was ultimately placed in the same continuity as *G1*, and while Optimus Prime and Optimus Primal were established to be two different characters, there was some ambiguity at the launch of the *BW* line. The first *BW* Optimus Primal toy, which turned into a bat, was released in a package that included a biography and a small comic book, both of which implied that *BW* was simply a revamped version of the Autobot/Decepticon war, and that Optimus Primal was an updated version of Optimus Prime. The cartoon series, however, established Prime and Primal as two different individuals, and later *BW* toys reflected the show’s continuity. Since the bat never appeared on the show and his only primary source of fiction implies that he’s *G1* Optimus Prime, the question of who he is in the overall scheme is best left for each individual to answer for themselves.

*Beast Wars* Basic Class
Optimus Primal (1996)
Unlike his namesake, Optimus Primal was not a faction leader or even a warrior. Rather, he was captain of the *Axalon*, a ship that was on a peaceful mission in deep space. When word came from Cybertron of a stolen artifact on board a Predacon ship near the *Axalon*’s location, Optimus Primal pursued it through a temporal portal, where both ships ended up crashing on prehistoric Earth. The conflict that ensued forced him to adapt quickly to military leadership, a job he became very good at. His troops admired and respected him—something he had to earn over time—as did his enemies: by the end of the conflict, three of the Predacons had defected to serve under Optimus Primal.
With *Beast Wars* in full swing, Hasbro decided to release a small line of vehicular Autobots and Decepticons to Kay-Bee toy stores under the banner *Machine Wars (MW)* in 1997. There was no accompanying fiction to this line, but it can be considered an extension of *G1/G2*. *MW* Optimus Prime, one of the line’s larger toys, was actually a repaint of Thunder Clash, a toy that had previously been sold in Europe. Today, Optimus Prime is arguably the most sought after figure from the *MW* line, usually fetching 2-3 times his initial retail price on the aftermarket. (Note that the package art for *MW* Optimus Prime is recycled from that of *G2* Laser Optimus Prime.)
Generation 1 Thunder Clash (1992)

G2 Laser Optimus Prime package art

Machine Wars Optimus Prime package art
The cartoon series for *Beast Machines (BM)*, the sequel to *Beast Wars*, was considerably darker than any *Transformers* show that had come before it. In this chapter of the *Beast* saga, the Maximals return home to find that Cybertron has been overrun by Megatron and his army of Vehicon drones. A guilt-ridden Optimus Primal becomes increasingly obsessed with gleaning wisdom from the Oracle, a wise supercomputer deep within the planet, and also with reformatting the once-“technorganic” Cybertron into a fully-organic world—all of which serves to alienate him from his troops and put them all in danger. It is only after he realizes that the will of the Oracle is to bring about a balance between the organic and the technological that Optimus Primal is able to unite the Maximals and go about fulfilling his true destiny.

There were two Optimus Primal figures released for *Beast Machines*: the first, Deluxe Optimus Primal, is notorious for bearing little resemblance to the character’s animation model, while the second toy, Blast Punch Optimus Primal, had a mold more suited to Primal’s depiction on TV but lacked the correct color scheme. A very large show-accurate toy, Air Attack Optimus Primal, was created and intended for release in *BM*, but when the line didn’t sell as well as expected, the figure was cancelled. In 2002, it was shoehorned into the tail end of the *Robots in Disguise* line as a Toys R Us exclusive.
In 2000, while the U.S. was immersed in *Beast Machines*, Takara skipped that line entirely in favor of a new line called *Car Robots*, which harkened back to the early days of G1 when the line was populated by realistic-looking vehicles. The Autobot leader in this series was Fire Convoy, a huge fire truck that, like G1 Powermaster Optimus Prime, had a “regular” robot mode and a larger “super” mode. At the time of its release, there were no plans to bring *Car Robots* to the U.S.
It was at this time that three G1 reissues, including Convoy, showed up in Japan. This occurred at a time when most of the children who had grown up with G1 were now working adults with money to spend. A G1 renaissance of sorts began to take shape around this time, resulting in a slew of reissues and new toys devoted to older G1 characters. Because of his enduring popularity, G1 Optimus Prime/Convoy has almost always been present whenever any sort of homage to G1 has taken place; thus, he has the honor of being the character with the most toys throughout the brand’s lifespan.
2001-06: OPTIMUS PRIME & TRANSFORMERS RETURN TO THE FOREFRONT OF POPULAR TOY BRANDS—ROBOTS IN DISGUISE, THE UNICRON TRILOGY, UNIVERSE, ALTERNATORS, ROBOT MAS-TERS, MASTERPIECE, BEAST WARS 10th ANNIVERSARY, CLASSICS
After *Beast Machines*, Hasbro planned to unveil *Transtech*, a futuristic sequel to *BM* that would have starred both *G1* and *Beast-*era characters. For unknown reasons, the line was cancelled at the early planning stages, with only various sketches, drawings, and a handful of hardcopy prototype figures having been crafted. Among the materials that have surfaced are several sketches and drawings of what *Transtech* Optimus Prime would have looked like.

[Concept drawings and sketches of *Transtech* Optimus Prime; final design drawing.]

With *Transtech* cancelled, Hasbro needed to bide its time while a new *Transformers* series was designed and engineered; thus, it was decided to import the *Car Robots* line into the U.S. after all, along with an all-new English dub of the cartoon. The toy line debuted in spring 2001 as *Robots in Disguise* (*RiD*), followed by the cartoon in September. Both the toys and the cartoon proved to be huge hits, exceeding expectations to the point that Hasbro ended up repainting toys from previous lines in order to have more *RiD* products on the shelves.
For his *RiD* release, *Car Robots* Fire Convoy was rebranded as Optimus Prime—although this was a completely different Prime than the *G1* incarnation. This Optimus Prime was surrounded by a large group of humorous characters, leaving him to play the no-nonsense straight man in many cases. He was noble and trusting—sometimes to a fault—and, in a bit of a departure from his previous namesakes, he had to contend with family issues: a tense, long-standing rivalry with his brother, Ultra Magnus. *RiD* Prime also had the ability to combine with Ultra Magnus to form a larger new warrior, Omega Prime.
In 2002, Hasbro unveiled *Armada*, which saw the launching of a brand new *Transformers* continuity. The theme of *Armada* was the hunt for the Mini-Cons: miniature Transformers that could connect with and “power up” larger Transformers. The “Leader Class” version of *Armada* Optimus Prime duplicated the regular/super robot modes of the *RiD* version (the *Energon* and *Cybertron* Primes would likewise follow suit). While this version lacked the articulation of the *Beast-*era and *RiD* Optimus toys, a smaller version of *Armada* Prime released in 2003 was considerably more poseable. Like *RiD*, *Armada* was an enormous success that exceeded expectations, and Hasbro was again forced to repaint older figures in order to meet demand.
*Armada* Optimus Prime (super mode) (2002)


Early concept art for *Armada* Optimus Prime

*Armada* Jet Prime— the combination of Optimus Prime and Jetfire
The success of *Robots in Disguise* and *Armada* not only made up for the lukewarm reception to *Beast Machines*—it cemented *Transformers’* place among the most popular established toy brands on the market. Coupled with the 21st century *G1* renaissance (which made its way to U.S. shores in 2002 with an Optimus Prime reissue kicking things off), *Transformers* became an extremely popular multimedia property with almost 20 years of built-in brand name recognition behind it, easily matching (or possibly surpassing) the excitement of its original *G1* heyday. This rejuvenated interest in all things *Transformers* resulted in a plethora of new toy lines, TV shows, comic books, video games, merchandise, conventions, and a series of live-action films. Within *Transformers* fiction, new continuities began to spring up across the various media, and the whole of the *Transformers* canon was fleshed out (and often rewritten and contradicted) with each new entry. It was during the *RiD/Armada* period that Optimus Prime started to make the transition from being a beloved 1980s icon to becoming a hero to people of all ages and generations, one with relevance and long-term staying power, whose name is instantly recognizable to all.

*Transformers: Universe* was a large sub-line that was launched in 2003. The series, which consisted entirely of repainted older figures, was created by Hasbro in response to the overwhelming sales of *RiD* and *Armada*; the line allowed them to keep product on the shelves without having to actually design and engineer new toys. Among the returning characters were *BW Ultra Optimus Primal* and *RiD Optimus Prime*, both of whom were reissued with new color schemes for the *Universe* line. *Universe* had several stories that unfolded in annual Botcon-exclusive comics, as well as in a CD-ROM that was packed with the initial wave of toys. Although the stories don’t entirely mesh with each other, the basic premise involves Unicron kidnapping *Transformers* across multiple dimensions and forcing them to do battle with each other, while Primus assembles his own army to counter Unicron’s forces.
**Universe Optimus Primal (2003)**

**Universe Optimus Prime (2003)**
Alternators, a line of highly-detailed, 1:24 scale models of real licensed vehicles that transformed into robots, launched during the holiday season of 2003 and saw a slow trickle of releases through 2007. The series consisted mainly of homages to characters from Generation 1, and was an instant hit with fans and collectors. Released toward the tail end of the line, the Alternators Optimus Prime toy (sporting a Dodge Ram SRT-10 vehicle mode) was initially designed as a different character entirely, and was made into Prime at the insistence of Takara.
In 2004, Takara launched *Robot Masters (RM)*, a Japanese-exclusive sub-line. The series was in some ways a companion to the U.S. *Universe* line in that it featured a wide range of past characters, although unlike *Universe*, *RM* was divided between repainted figures and all-new molds. The *RM* line featured a story that was told via online manga, as well as comic books and DVD cartoons bundled with certain *RM* figures: Beast Megatron travels across the galaxy to Earth with a group of Decepticons in tow, determined to harvest its supply of solitarium. This causes three heroic leaders across time and space—Convoy, Beast Convoy (Optimus Primal), and Star Saber—to join forces in order to stop him.
To commemorate the 20th anniversary of the *Transformers* brand, Hasbro released a large, heavily-detailed version of *G1* Optimus Prime in 2004; it was reissued in the U.S. in 2006 (with flatter colors and different paint applications) in order to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the original 1986 animated film. Both figures belong to a small assortment of toys known as *Masterpiece*, although neither of the U.S. releases actually *bore* that name (subsequent releases of *G1* characters with similar sizing and detailing *have* received that designation). The robot mode is intended to evoke Prime’s depiction in the *G1* animated series, which had a much more streamlined, simplified look compared with that of his toy counterpart. The figure ended up being a huge success with fans across the world; in Japan, it was reissued and repainted many times between 2004 and 2011.
Energon (2004), the sequel to Armada, brought about a new version of Optimus Prime that turned into a futuristic car carrier. This version of Optimus Prime was very reminiscent of the five-member combiner teams that have populated Transformers since the 1980s: in this case, Prime’s “super” mode is made by combining the cab, the trailer and the four drone vehicles. In fact, the main focus of the entire Energon line was on combination, or “Powerlinxing.” There were two Energon Prime figures, both of which could combine with other Energon Autobots to form new robots.
The next series, *Cybertron*, debuted in 2005. While the combining gimmick was dialed back, Prime could still combine with two of the Autobots, Leobreaker and Wing Saber. The line was much more focused on Cyber Planet Keys, which were small chips that, when inserted into the figures, would unlock weapons and abilities. There were many Prime toys released during *Cybertron*, including an homage to Optimus Primal.
Cybertron Leader Class Optimus Prime (2005)

Cybertron Deluxe Class Optimus Prime (2006) (repainted from Armada Supercon Optimus Prime)

Armada, Energon and Cybertron are collectively referred to as “the Unicron trilogy,” due to the important role that that character plays in each series. These all take place within the same continuity, and while there are numerous inconsistencies when the three animated shows are stacked against each other, Optimus Prime is portrayed as being proficient in hand-to-hand combat and, like other Primes before him, he tends to enlist the aid of human children. Prime’s back story in this continuity is a subject that is largely unexplored, and the glimpses that have been shown do not mesh with each other: in the Energon cartoon, it is revealed that he ascended to leadership of the Autobots 8,000 years ago when Rodimus departed Cybertron, whereas in the Dreamwave Armada comic book he is shown to be leading the Autobots one million years ago.
To commemorate the tenth anniversary of *Beast Wars*, Hasbro released a small reissue line in 2006 which featured two new versions of Optimus Primal. The first was a reissue of the 1996 Ultra Class toy, sporting a new deco and details that better matched his appearance on the animated series, while the second toy was a new, smaller version of the first, featuring several elements that were in line with the then-current *Cybertron* line, such as the presence of a Cyber Planet Key. This was done so that in case the toy never received a *BW* release, it could still be released in *Cybertron*. As it happened, however, it *did* get a *BW* release—but was *still* recolored and released as a “Jungle Planet” form of *Cybertron* Optimus Prime several months later.
In 2006, Hasbro unveiled *Classics*, a line of updated toys for *G1* characters. Among other things, *Classics* offered up two all-new, highly-articulated versions of *G1* Prime. The line was a huge hit, particularly with older *G1* fans, and its success led to several later toy lines focusing on *G1*, including *Reveal the Shield* and the ongoing *Generations* series. Stories involving the *Classics* characters were told in the pages of the *Transformers Collectors’ Club Magazine*; these stories were presented as a continuation of the original Marvel Comics story, which had ended on the promise of peace between Autobots and Decepticons. The beginning of the *Classics* chapter of the story finds Optimus Prime feeling despondent and withdrawn over having no purpose to serve now that the conflict is over. When Megatron re-emerges, Prime is actually *relieved* to be fighting again.
Pepsi Optimus Prime (2007) was sold under the *Classics* banner via Hasbro Toy Shop at various conventions, and was also one of the prizes available in a contest sponsored by Mountain Dew during the marketing blitz for the *Transformers* live action film. It was designed as an homage to a limited-edition 1985 release of *G1* Prime that came with a bonus Pepsi logo sticker for the trailer. Pepsi Optimus Prime had previously been released in Japan in 2005 as Pepsi Convoy, a completely different character who helped quench the thirst of Tokyo citizens whose city had been devastated by a Decepticon attack.
Classics Pepsi Optimus Prime (2007)

G1 Optimus Prime (Canadian promotional version w/Pepsi logo sticker) (1985)
The 2007 live-action film and its sequels, 2009’s *Revenge of the Fallen* and 2011’s *Dark of the Moon*, each became massive worldwide blockbusters, and brought an even greater level of renown and visibility to the thriving *Transformers* brand. The series took a few cues from *G1*, but was largely a unique creation that occupied a brand new continuity. Each film was supplemented with a vast line of toys, including dozens of Optimus Primes.
Movie
Optimus Prime
(Protoform)
(2007)

Movie
Leader Class
Optimus Prime
(2007)

Movie
Legends Class
Optimus Prime
(2007)
Movie Robo-Vision Optimus Prime (2007)

Power Hook Optimus Prime, from the “Fast Action Battlers” assortment of the Movie line (2007)

Revenge of the Fallen Power Armor Optimus Prime (2009)
The Optimus Prime from the films was originally one of Cybertron’s leading scientists, tasked with guarding the powerful AllSpark cube while serving under the protection of his brother-in-arms, Megatron. Optimus’ discovery of his lineage with the Dynasty of Primes caused a rift between he and Megatron, and the latter eventually fell under the corruptive influence of The Fallen. As they began a campaign of destruction, Optimus gathered together a group of Autobots to try to stop them. Eventually he was forced to jettison the powerful All-Spark cube into space in an effort to prevent Megatron from using it for destruction, resulting in the slow death of Cybertron, the abandonment of their world, and a galaxy-wide search for the cube.
Optimus Prime and Megatron have a friendly disagreement in IDW’s *Transformers: Defiance* #1 (2009)

Optimus Prime as seen in the *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* video game (2009)

Optimus Prime on the cover of *Entertainment Weekly*, July 13, 2007
Transformers: Animated, which debuted in between the first live action film and Revenge of the Fallen, saw another new continuity take shape. In this series, Optimus Prime is presented as a young, inexperienced robot who had been kicked out of the Cybertron Elite Guard, reassigned to space bridge repair duty and put in charge of a ragtag group of Autobots. Eager and idealistic, this iteration of Optimus Prime longs to be a hero, and is given the opportunity to shine as one when he and his crew are forced to battle the Decepticons on Earth.
Animated
Cybertron Mode
Optimus Prime (2008)

Animated
“Battle Begins”
Optimus Prime (2008)

Animated
Voyager Class
Optimus Prime (2008)
In mid-2010, Hasbro launched several all-new *Transformers* product lines. The main line was titled simply *Transformers*, and featured two sub-line imprints: *Hunt for the Decepticons*, which focused almost exclusively on the film series continuity, and *Reveal the Shield*, which was heavily grounded in *G1* and featured new toys for many older characters. Both of these sub-lines featured multiple new versions of Optimus Prime (both *G1* and Movie versions). Of note was an all-new Voyager Class mold for Movie Optimus Prime, as well as an homage to *G2* Laser Optimus Prime. There was also a miniature Legends Class figure of *G1* Prime, which was released in Japan (as part of the *Chronicle EZ Collection* series) with a *G2* Autobot symbol instead of the *G1* insignia used in the U.S.

Another sub-line, *Generations*, was launched at around the same time as *Transformers*. Like the preceding *Classics* line, *Generations* focused almost exclusively on new toys for older *G1* characters. In addition, five characters from the *War for Cybertron* videogame were made into figures for this line, including Optimus Prime. *Generations* was put on a brief hiatus, but the line is slated to return in the summer of 2012 with new toys devoted to the upcoming videogame *Fall of Cybertron*; an all-new Cybertronian form for Optimus Prime will be among the first toys available at launch.
The *War for Cybertron* game was the first entry in a new continuity that serves as the foundation for many *Transformers* stories currently taking place across a variety of media. As opposed to being yet another continuity, it is Hasbro’s goal to make this the definitive version of the *Transformers* universe for the foreseeable future. Included under this new umbrella are the aforementioned *War for Cybertron/Fall of Cybertron* videogames, the *Transformers: Prime* franchise, the *Rescue Bots* franchise, two novels, *Exodus* and *Exiles*, and other stories and miscellaneous entries. The new continuity takes a lot of its cues from *G1*, but is technically not a part of that universe. While it has no official title, it is referred to among fans as the Aligned continuity.

Optimus Prime on the *War for Cybertron* video game cover (2010)
The Aligned videogames and novels focus on events that took place in the distant past. Many years ago, Optimus Prime began life as a low-level archivist named Orion Pax. Disillusioned about his lot in life, Orion struck up a friendship with an outspoken gladiator named Megatron. The young, naïve archivist looked up to Megatron, supported his ideals, and placed a great deal of trust in him—all the while ignorant of the atrocities being committed across the planet at the hands of his new mentor and friend. While standing before the High Council of Cybertron, Orion vigorously sought to defend Megatron and the Decepticon cause. His passion and eloquence convinced the council to do something unexpected: they declared him to be worthy of being a “Prime” and anointed him leader of a new group of soldiers called Autobots that were being gathered to counter the violence on Cybertron. This caused a rift between Megatron and Orion—now renamed Optimus Prime—forever pitting them against each other.
The *Transformers: Prime* and *Rescue Bots* portions of the Aligned continuity deals with events taking place in the present day. After Cybertron becomes uninhabitable, the two opposing forces eventually find their way to Earth. Soon after, Optimus Prime forges a trust with the U.S. government, which provides the Autobots sanctuary in exchange for keeping Earth safe from the Decepticons. Prime vows to keep their presence a secret from the general population of Earth, although he does allow the Autobots to form friendships with a select group of people, including three children. The bulk of Optimus’ adventures and encounters are chronicled in *Transformers: Prime*; meanwhile, in *Rescue Bots*, a line and television series aimed at young children, Optimus assigns a group of young Autobots to assist the people of Griffin Rock. While Optimus does not directly supervise them, he still checks in with them from time to time and offers guidance and encouragement whenever necessary.
Rescue Bots
Optimus Prime (2011)

Transformers: Prime
“First Edition” Deluxe Class
Optimus Prime (2011)

Transformers: Prime
Voyager Class
Optimus Prime (2012)
Throughout the *Transformers* brand’s lifespan—particularly in the 21st century—there have been plenty of toys released through a myriad of product lines, only some of which have been touched upon thus far. Many of the items showcased in the above text represent either “main” products lines from over the years (e.g., *Generation 1, Beast Wars, Cybertron*), or notable “sub-lines” (e.g., *Classics, Generations, Universe*). There have been plenty of additional product lines sold in the U.S. and Japan that were a step or two removed from whatever was considered at the time of their release to be of highest priority. These lines sometimes focused on one specific *Transformers* series, on multiple *Transformers* lines, or even other toy brands besides *Transformers*. Naturally, they nearly all pay homage to Optimus Prime and/or Optimus Primal in some way. What follows is a sampling of additional Optimus Prime toys that were made available in product lines that have been produced since 2002, and should not be considered to be a thorough representation of all such products.
The 2002-03 *Heroes of Cybertron (HOC)* line was comprised of small, non-transforming, cartoon-accurate figures of *G1* characters, with a total of five Optimus Prime figures released during the run of the series. *HOC* was actually an import of Takara’s *Super Collection Figure* line, a much more extensive series than what ended up making it to U.S. stores.
MyClone

MyClone (2002-03) was a Japanese-exclusive line of small, “superdeformed”-style figurines. The toys were sold in blindpacked boxes and represented a multitude of Takara properties and other types of figures. In addition to the standard-color robot figurine, a truck mode Optimus Prime and a rare clear robot version were also available.

Smallest Transforming Transformers

Smallest Transforming Transformers was a Japanese line produced from 2003-04 by Takara, featuring fully transforming G1 characters in an extremely small scale (around 1-2 inches long/tall). Like MyClone, the toys were sold in blindpacked boxes. Despite being popular with fans, the series was abruptly cancelled with several new toys waiting in the wings. During its run, three Convoy cab/robot figures and two trailers were made available. This figure is a favorite among manufacturers of knockoff Transformers, who have produced all sorts of unofficial homages and variations. In the U.S., this line is erroneously referred to as World’s Smallest Transformers by fans.
**G1 Spychangers**

In 2004, Kay-Bee toy stores received an exclusive wave of six miniature vehicular “Spychanger” toys, which consisted entirely of previously-released figures that were repainted into G1 characters. The Optimus Prime Spychanger was a very appropriate figure: it was a repaint of the RiD Scourge Spychanger toy, which homaged the larger RiD Scourge... which was a repaint of G2 Laser Optimus Prime!

![G1 Spychanger Optimus Prime (2004)](Photograph Source: TFWiki.net)

**Titanium Series**

*Titanium Series* (2005-present) is a Hasbro multi-property series that consists of figures made of a mix of die-cast metal and plastic. Figures in the series come in two sizes: 3-inch and 6-inch. In 2006, *Transformers* was brought into the line, with the 6" portion of the series consisting of figures that could transform and move around, while the 3” figures did not convert and offered limited articulation. Many past and present *Transformers* lines were mined for inspiration under the *Titanium* banner: characters from *G1, BW, BM, Alternators, RiD, Cybertron*, the 2007 film and the comic series *The War Within* were all seen in *Titanium*. With the exception of *Alternators* and *Cybertron*, the Optimus characters from all of the lines named above appeared in *Titanium*, some in multiple sizes and colors.
Titanium 6” Optimus Prime (RiD) (2006)

Titanium 6” Optimus Prime (War Within) (2006)

Titanium 6” Optimal Optimus (Beast Wars) (2006)

Titanium 3” Optimus Prime (War Within) (2006)

Titanium 3” Optimus Prime (G1) (2006)

Titanium 3” Optimus Primal (Beast Wars) (2006)
**Hybrid Style**

*Hybrid Style* (2005-06) is a Takara series consisting of exactly three figures, all of them being incarnations of Convoy: two versions of *G1* Convoy (regular deco and “Black Version”), and one of *Galaxy Force* (*Cybertron*) Convoy, with the “Black Version” of *G1* Convoy intended as an homage to the original *G2* version of Optimus Prime. Each of the three figures is made of both plastic and die-cast metal parts, and all are intricately detailed and extremely poseable.
Attacktix

Attacktix was a Hasbro gaming property which initially consisted solely of Star Wars figures, but eventually Transformers and Marvel toys were brought into the fold as well. The series is made up of small figures that can be mixed and matched into opposing teams, with the goal being to knock over your opponent's team members with the weapons and abilities of your own team members (e.g., launching missiles, swinging punches, etc). The Transformers portion of the series debuted in 2006 with a variety of figures based on characters from Energon and Cybertron. An assortment of G1 characters was set for release, but Hasbro abruptly cancelled the entire Attacktix line in 2007 (G1 Optimus and Megatron later saw a limited release in discount stores, however).
Robot Heroes

The *Robot Heroes* (RH) line (2007-09) was comprised of small, "super-deformed"-style, non-transforming figures. Multiple Hasbro properties, such as *Star Wars*, *Marvel*, *G.I Joe*, and *Indiana Jones* have all had similarly-styled figures under different names released during the same time. Launched at the onset of the promotional blitz for the 2007 film, *RH* featured a mix of Movie and *G1* characters, with several *BW* and *BM* added to the mix the following year. During its run, many *RH* Optimus figures were released. In addition, a series of eight planned figures was cancelled; this wave was set to include *RiD* Prime and *BM* Optimus Primal.

*Robot Heroes* Optimus Prime (*G1*) (2007)

*Robot Heroes* Optimus Prime w/Matrix (*G1*) (2007)
Robot Heroes
Optimus Prime
(Movie) (2007)

Robot Heroes
Optimus Prime
w/blade
(Movie) (2007)

Robot Heroes
Optimus Prime
(Best Buy exclusive)
(2007)
**Mr. Potato Head**

This figure was technically released as part of the 2007 film toy line, but it also belongs in a much more distinct class: *Mr. Potato Head* figures that use various established characters and properties as its basis. Such figures include “Darth Tater” (*Star Wars*), “Spider-Spud” (*Marvel*), and another Transformer, “Bumble Spud.”

![Mr. Potato Head](image1)

**Disney Label**

*Disney Label* (2009-10) is a small Japanese line of *Disney* characters that turn into vehicles. So far, three characters—Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Buzz Lightyear—have been given the *Transformers* treatment. In addition, each of them has had multiple variant releases, including monochrome, Halloween, and Christmas-themed versions. The Mickey Mouse figure, the first release in the series, was a blatant homage to *G1 Optimus Prime*.

![Disney Label](image2)
**Kre-O**

*Kre-O* (2011-present) is a line of building block sets launched in June 2011, and is Hasbro’s answer to established brands such as *Lego* and *Mega Bloks*. The line debuted with 12 *Transformers* sets in a wide variety of sizes and price points; future *Kre-O Transformers* sets are planned, as are some non-*TF* releases, including *Battleship* and *Star Trek*. Most *Kre-O* sets come equipped with one or more "Kreons": small human partners and/or mini-figure versions of popular *Transformers* characters. While the Kreons are based on their *G1* animated models, the larger "main" figure in each set takes its cues from a variety of sources, such as *G1*, the films, and *Animated*. At the time of the line’s launch, there were two Optimus Prime figures, along with two Kreon versions of Prime.
The boxed “Matrix” Kreon Prime was originally intended as a Botcon 2011 exclusive, but it ended up being given away through various other outlets, including San Diego Comic-Con 2011, Hasbro Toy Shop (free with any TF purchase), and also as an attached freebie with copies of issue #240 of the UK comic Doctor Who Adventures. It also showed up by mistake in a few of the large Kre-O Optimus Prime sets in place of the standard, non-Matrix chest version.
Bot Shots

Bot Shots (2012) is a series of small launching figures that instantly spring into robot mode when they crash into something. A small square on their chests indicates their power level, and between two figures that engage in play, one can emerge "victorious." The game series has a “rock/paper/scissors” element to it, and is reminiscent of the late 1980s series Battle Beasts that was distributed by Takara/Hasbro (which, coincidentally, has some connections to TF fiction in Japan).

Bot Shots Optimus Prime (2012)

Bot Shots Optimus Prime w/launcher (2012)
THE VOICE ACTORS BEHIND OPTIMUS PRIME

Since 1984, Transformers fans in the U.S. have been treated to ten different animated television shows and four theatrical films, nearly all of which have devoted plenty of screen time to Optimus Prime (or Optimus Primal). The groundbreaking animation, cutting-edge stories and sharp writing of these shows and films helped shape Optimus’ popularity and his reputation as a hero and a role model... but a large debt is also owed to the talented voice actors who breathed life into the character since the very beginning. As of 2012, only four actors have embodied the role of Optimus Prime, each of whom managed to convey the emotions and attributes that define the character today. Compassion, courage, authority, patience, honor, heroism... the actors gave Optimus all of these qualities and more. In the hearts and minds of fans of all ages, Optimus is real because these four men did an amazing job of making him sound real.

PETER CULLEN

Photograph by Anthony Casale
Peter Cullen provided the voice of Optimus Prime in...

Transformers (1984 TV series)
Transformers: The Movie (1986)
Transformers (2007 film)*
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*
Transformers: War for Cybertron (video game)
Transformers: Prime*
Transformers: Dark of the Moon*
Transformers: Rescue Bots
Transformers: The Ride (Universal Studios theme park attraction)
Transformers: Fall of Cybertron (video game)

*Also voiced Optimus Prime in video games based on these titles

PETER CULLEN was born in 1941 in Montreal. At an early age he discovered a knack for doing voices—a skill his parents encouraged him to explore. He went on to study acting in college, and in 1963 was a member of the first graduating class of the National Theatre School of Canada.

After graduation, Cullen appeared in a number of notable films and shows, including a stint as the narrator of The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour and a recurring role on The Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour. Toward the end of the 1970s, Cullen began to focus on voice work. Before long, he won his first regular animated role: Mighty Man, on the Mighty Man and Yukk segment of The Plastic Man Comedy/Adventure Show.
Throughout the 1980s, Cullen stayed busy doing voice work on many popular shows of the time, including *Scooby-Doo and Scrappy-Doo, The Smurfs, G.I. Joe, Dragon’s Lair, My Little Pony, Voltron, Muppet Babies, Chip n’ Dale’s Rescue Rangers*, and many others. In addition, he provided the voice of the evil car K.A.R.R. on *Knight Rider*—a role he reprised for the 2008-09 revival series. In 1988, he was cast as Eeyore in *The New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*—a character he would ultimately voice across a variety of media for 22 years.

Cullen originated the role of Optimus Prime for the 1984 *Transformers* animated series, and he has often stated that Prime is his favorite among all the characters he has played. When he initially auditioned for the part, he drew inspiration from his brother, Larry, a retired captain in the U.S. Marine Corps who had seen plenty of battle during his time in Vietnam. He saw in his brother a leader and a true hero—and he decided to imbue Optimus Prime with those qualities.

Intense online fan lobbying led to Cullen being cast as Optimus Prime for the 2007 *Transformers* film. Since then, he has stayed very busy voicing Prime in many different projects, including the film’s two sequels, the video games based on the films, and several other *Transformers* games. In 2010, he came full circle and returned to voicing Optimus Prime for television in a new series, *Transformers: Prime*. 
NEIL KAPLAN

Provided the voice of Optimus Prime in...

*Transformers: Robots in Disguise*

NEIL KAPLAN was born in 1967 in Bayonne, New Jersey, and grew up in San Jose. At a young age, his mother exposed him to old radio shows, and as he discovered a talent for doing voices, he took to doing imitations of icons such as James Stewart and James Cagney in school talent shows. He studied drama at the University of Southern California before earning a BFA in Musical Theatre in 1987 at the American Musical & Dramatic Academy in New York City. While finishing his degree, Kaplan got his first voice work job for WCBS-FM doing character voice drop-ins.

After graduating, he moved back to San Jose and started working on a local television show, often playing most of the parts himself. When the show ended, Kaplan moved to L.A., where he landed a small voice role in the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* movie. This led to larger roles on several *Power Rangers* series, as well as on *Digimon*, where he played many different characters, most notably Hawkmon.
In more recent years, Kaplan been very active doing voice work in the video game industry. He has appeared in such games as *Spider-Man 3, Final Fantasy XIII*, and *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. One of his most prominent video game roles was that of Tychus Findlay in 2010’s *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*. He has also taken on numerous other endeavors, including a graphic novel, *I, of the Wolf*, doing volunteer work for the Braille Institute of Los Angeles, and starting a non-profit organization, Audio Theater for Our Troops.

For *Transformers: Robots in Disguise (RiD)*, Kaplan was initially brought in to audition for several smaller roles: Slapper, Gas Skunk, and X-Brawn, but he eventually won the part of Optimus Prime after producers were struck by his X-Brawn performance and thought that it possessed the qualities they were looking for in a leader.

After *RiD*, Kaplan provided the voice of Long Haul, along with several other characters, for the *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* video game in 2009. He was a guest at Botcon 2002, and has attended countless comic book and sci-fi conventions since, where he continues to be celebrated for his work and for his affiliation with the character of Optimus Prime.
GARRY CHALK

Provided the voice of Optimus Primal in...

Transformers: Beast Wars
Transformers: Beast Wars Transmetals (video game)
Transformers: Beast Machines

Provided the voice of Optimus Prime in...

Transformers: Armada
Transformers (2004 video game)
Transformers: Energon
Transformers: Cybertron

Garry Chalk was born in 1952 in Southampton, England, and moved to Vancouver when he was five years old. His first acting experience came in the second grade, when he appeared in a school production of The Shoemaker and the Elf. From there, he sang in a choir and did theatre throughout high school. After that he took on a number of odd jobs, including time spent as a stockbroker, before deciding to go back to school to become a teacher. Not long after, however, he decided to abandon his previous studies and join the theatre department.
After graduation, Chalk was cast in several small on-camera roles in film and television. It was during this time that he got his first voice job, narrating an informational video for a retirement home. His first work in animation was in a 1983 animated TV movie entitled *The Legend of Hiawatha*, in which he voiced the title character, among others.

A steady stream of work has since followed, in which Chalk has divided his time between being on camera and being behind the microphone. As a voice actor, he has lent his voice to well over a thousand episodes of television shows such as *Sonic Underground, G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero, He-Man and the Masters of the Universe, Mega Man, Spider-Man Unlimited, Extreme Dinosaurs* and *Street Fighter*. As an on-camera actor, he has appeared in such films as *Watchmen, Freddy vs. Jason* and *Deck the Halls*. He spent four years as a regular on the Canadian drama *Cold Squad*, and has had recurring roles on many different television shows, including *Stargate SG-1, The Dead Zone, Dark Angel*, and *The Killing*.

Chalk first became involved with the *Transformers* franchise in 1994, when he lent his voice to commercials for the *Generation 2* toy line as well as promo spots for its cartoon series. Two years later, he was cast in a much more prominent role as the heroic Maximal leader Optimus Primal in *Beast Wars*—a role he also reprised for the follow-up, *Beast Machines*.

Chalk then went on to voice Optimus Prime in the 2002 *Armada* series, as well as its sequels, *Energon* and *Cybertron*. As a result, he holds the distinction of having voiced Optimus Prime/Primal in more television episodes than any other actor.
DAVID KAYE

Provided the voice of Optimus Prime in...

*Transformers: Animated*

*Transformers: Animated—The Game*

David Kaye was born in 1964 in Peterborough, Ontario. His interest in acting began at a very young age, when he would practice doing imitations and voices for friends and family. At the age of 16, Kaye landed a job as a DJ for a local radio station while still in high school. This led to further work in radio, including a stint on CKLG in Vancouver. As a part of their morning show lineup, Kaye had a forum in which to try out his knack for creating goofy voices and characters.

In 1989, Kaye decided to sign up for an acting/modeling course. Upon completion of the course, he ended up landing the role of General Hawk on the DiC Animation series *G.I. Joe*. This proved to be the turning point in Kaye’s career, in which he gradually left radio behind in favor of voice work in animation and film.
Nearly 25 years later, Kaye has become a major name in the entertainment business, and his voice has been heard throughout the world. During that time, he has amassed a résumé that spans animation, radio, video games, television, and film. He has been heard on television networks such as ABC, FOX, Nickelodeon, TBS, and TNT. In addition, he has done extensive voice work for corporate clients, including Pepsi, Doritos, Walmart, Hyundai, McDonalds, Budweiser, and many more.

His involvement with the Transformers franchise began in 1996, when he was cast in Beast Wars as the evil Megatron—a role he reprised for the follow-up, Beast Machines. Kaye was not involved in 2001’s Robots in Disguise, but in 2002 he returned to play a new version of Megatron in Armada, as well as its sequels, Energon and Cybertron.

After Cybertron wrapped, production began on Transformers: Animated. Kaye auditioned with the assumption that he would be considered for Megatron again, but in the end he was cast as Optimus Prime—making him the fourth actor to embody the part, as well as the only actor to voice both Optimus Prime and Megatron as regular roles. In May 2012, he appeared as Hardshell on Transformers: Prime, which makes for a total of seven Transformers shows to feature Kaye’s talents—the most ever for any Transformers voice actor.
Like any popular children’s brand, *Transformers* has seen a plethora of merchandising and licensed products during its lifetime, and Optimus Prime has arguably been the most frequently-represented *Transformers* character for all such products. What follows is a small sampling of Optimus Prime-related merchandise that has been produced since 1984, and should not be considered to be a thorough representation of all such products.
G1 party tablecloth, featuring Optimus Prime artwork

Unique Industries, 1984

*Generation 2 card/puzzle*

This 6”x5” greeting card-type item was packaged with Wal-Mart Kid’s Meals in 1993. It features a 9-piece jigsaw puzzle, an Optimus Prime cover (above left) and additional Optimus Prime artwork on the inside (above right).
**G2 Optimus Prime knockoff model kit**

This Korean model kit forms a *G1/G2* Optimus Prime figure that has gold chrome parts where silver would normally be present, and is slightly smaller than the genuine release. (The photo at above right depicts a painted, assembled model kit, left, standing next to a genuine figure; note that the gold parts have been painted silver.) Despite being an unauthorized item, the box bears the following copyright information: “© 1997 Hasbro International Inc. With Permission of 3D Licensing International. Represented by Toon Town. All rights reserved.”

**Robots in Disguise**

party lights, featuring Optimus Prime and Megatron mini-figures

Brainwave Toys, 2002
Armada Optimus Prime keychain flashlight

Basic Fun, 2003

Armada Optimus Prime spin pop

Cap Candy, 2004

Armada Optimus Prime Mc Donald’s Happy Meal toy

McDonald’s Corporation, 2002

Energon Optimus Prime transforming pen

Stylus, 2004
Cybertron Optimus Prime
spin pop (left)
Cap Candy, 2006

Movie Optimus Prime
gift card (right)
Target, 2007

Cybertron Optimus Prime
Burger King Kid’s Meal toy, 2005

Movie Optimus Prime
Burger King Kid’s Meal toy, 2007
Movie Optimus Prime

This 2007 transforming figure was produced by a company called Bakery Crafts, and was available with the purchase of an Optimus Prime-themed cake or set of cupcakes.

Movie Optimus Prime kid’s birthday card
Carlton Cards, 2007

Starburst “Optimus Lime”-flavored candies
M&M/Mars, 2007

One of several promotional tie-ins that the company sponsored during the release of the first live-action film.
*Microbots Collection Optimus Prime*

From an assortment of *Animated*-themed mini-figures sold in vending machines in Japan in 2010.

*Animated Optimus Prime foil balloon*


*Revenge of the Fallen Optimus Prime M&M’s dispenser*

This machine was available in 2009 only through a Target/M&M promotion. Customers had to buy five specially-marked packages of M&M’s or Snickers at Target and then send in the receipts.
Transformers Gum model kits Kabaya, 2010
From a series of miniature model kits of various Transformers toys. Each model kit comes packaged with a piece of gum—hence the line’s name. Kits for G1 and Henkei (Classics) Voyager Class Optimus Prime were both made available in the same wave.

Movie Optimus Prime luncheon napkins DesignWare, 2011
The 2011 date indicates that it was produced in conjunction with the third film, Dark of the Moon; however, it conspicuously lacks that subtitle.

Transformers: Prime
McDonald’s Happy Meal toy, 2012
OTHER HEROIC LEADERS

Throughout the lifespan of *Transformers*, there have been numerous occasions when the leadership of the Autobots and/or the Maximals was assumed by someone other than Optimus Prime or Optimus Primal. Reasons vary greatly as to why Prime/Primal might have been absent at a given time—he died, he granted temporary leadership to someone else, another character filled the leader role from the outset, etc. Often times, a character assuming command from Optimus had to go through a “breaking in” period and/or felt unqualified to be filling such iconic shoes. This exhibit spotlights several individuals who have risen to this occasion, but it is by no means a complete representation of all those who have commanded the Autobots and Maximals throughout *Transformers* history.
Ultra Magnus

In *Transformers: the Movie* (1986), Optimus Prime named Ultra Magnus as his successor right before he died from the damage he sustained battling Megatron on Earth. Upon assuming leadership, Magnus led a crew of Autobots on a mission to Cybertron’s moons to assist Autobots who were under attack from Unicron. An encounter with the Decepticons detoured the crew to the planet Junkion, where Galvatron managed to corner and subdue Magnus, taking from him the Autobot Matrix of Leadership. After the climactic battle on Cybertron that ended in Unicron’s destruction, Ultra Magnus stepped down as Autobot leader to become second-in-command to the newly christened Rodimus Prime.

*Heroes of Cybertron*

*Ultra Magnus*  
(2003)

*Ultra Magnus* as seen in the *G1* episode  
“Call of Primitives”  
(1986)
Hot Rod/Rodimus Prime

In *Transformers: the Movie*, a dying Optimus Prime named Ultra Magnus as his replacement, but the Matrix of Leadership had other plans. When it ended up in the hands of the impulsive young Autobot Hot Rod, he was upgraded into a new form, Rodimus Prime, and assumed command of the Autobots. Rodimus’ tenure as Autobot leader occurred during a prosperous period of time that saw the Autobots take control of Cybertron, while the Decepticons were relegated to a dead world called Chaar. Despite the support he received from those under his command, Rodimus always doubted his worthiness as the successor to Optimus Prime. On Rodimus’ orders, Sky Lynx sought out a Quintesson and offered him sanctuary during the Hate Plague crisis in exchange for reviving Optimus Prime. The plan worked: Optimus Prime returned to leading the Autobots, and Rodimus went back to being the youthful, adventurous Hot Rod.
Grimlock

In the Marvel G1 comic book, the Autobots promoted Dinobot commander Grimlock to Autobot leader following the death of Optimus Prime. Unfortunately, he soon reveled in the power that came with such authority: he fashioned a crown for himself, designed a torture device to use on disobedient Autobots, and even put the lives of human children at risk in an effort to draw out the “traitor” Blaster. After a Decepticon attack forced Blaster and Grimlock to work together, the latter recognized the merits of a more cooperative approach to leadership. Not long afterwards, however, Optimus Prime returned to life, and Grimlock was forced to step down (he became one of Prime’s high-ranking lieutenants). When Prime died again near the end of the book’s run, he managed to name Grimlock as his successor before he deactivated.

Generation 2 Grimlock (1993)

Grimlock abusing his authority in Marvel’s The Transformers #35 (1987)
In the late 1990s, Takara released two Japanese-exclusive *Beast Wars* lines, each complete with new casts of Maximals and Predacons as well as new animated television shows. In the first series, *Beast Wars II (BWII)*, the Maximals were led by the gentle Lio Convoy, and fought the Predacons for control of the Angolmois energy supply on planet Gaea. *Beast Wars Neo*, a direct sequel to *BWII*, followed a new crew of Maximals led by the antisocial, “one-robot army” Big Convoy, as they sought to retrieve the scattered Angolmois following Lio Convoy’s disappearance. In the U.S., Big Convoy was repainted in 2004 into the Target-exclusive *Universe* Nemesis Prime, while both versions of *Cybertron* Leobreaker were repainted into “Leo Prime,” which was Lio Convoy with a name more in line with U.S. *Transformers* fiction.
Beast Wars Neo Big Convoy (1999)

Big Convoy as seen in IDW’s Beast Wars Sourcebook #1 (2008)
Cheetor

In *Beast Wars*, Cheetor was the Maximals’ resident teenager—an eager, energetic young soldier who looked up to Optimus Primal. The dire circumstances that confronted the Maximals in *Beast Machines*, however, forced Cheetor to do some serious growing up very quickly. At numerous points throughout the *BM* saga, Optimus placed Cheetor in charge of the Maximals, and on one occasion Cheetor actually took command *away* from him. By the end of *Beast Machines*, it was clear that, were anything to happen to Optimus, Cheetor would be the most logical choice to lead the Maximals in his place.
Bumblebee

In nearly every iteration of *Transformers* since the beginning, Bumblebee is presented as the Autobots’ kid brother, the eager young warrior who often forms meaningful relationships with any humans that the Autobots have come into contact with, and this portrayal has remained consistent in more recent incarnations, such as the live-action films, *Animated* and *Transformers: Prime*. IDW comics went against the grain in late 2009 by making Bumblebee the leader of the Autobots after Optimus Prime surrendered to Skywatch following the death of Ironhide. The transition was not an easy one for all parties involved—Bumblebee didn’t ask for the job, and some of the Autobots didn’t take his newfound authority seriously—but like many who have inherited the mantle of leader, he has grown more seasoned and effective with time. One of the current IDW titles, *Robots in Disguise*, follows Bumblebee as he struggles to create a peaceful Cybertron in the wake of the war’s end.
Leader-1

During the heyday of G1, transforming toys were something of a craze, with many companies vying for a share of the market. When it came to Transformers, Hasbro’s biggest competition was Tonka’s GoBots, a line that debuted around the same time as Transformers. The GoBots story centered on the heroic Guardians, led by Leader-1, and the evil Renegades, led by Cy-Kill. Leader-1 was a noble and heroic leader in the same vein as Optimus Prime who possessed the reasoning skills of a detective, and was often commented on his good looks by female Guardians and Renegades. In the early 1990s, GoBots became the intellectual property of Hasbro when they acquired Tonka. As a direct result, an unrelated character named Leader-1 showed up in the Armada line in 2002, and in 2008 the original Leader-1 appeared in an online-exclusive comic from the Transformers Collectors’ Club that featured the GoBots’ universe as one of the many alternate Transformers universes.

GoBots Leader-1
(1983)

Leader-1 as seen in the Challenge of the GoBots animated series
The notion of Optimus being cloned or controlled by his enemies is a concept that has been used at various points throughout *Transformers* fiction, but it has only been since the late 1990s that “evil Optimus Prime” figures have appeared in stores. Many of these toys have a very distinct color scheme—black with teal accents and red windows—and are almost always named Nemesis Prime or Scourge. This portion of the exhibit represents most of the figures that have been released in the U.S., but it should be noted that Japan has a far more prolific selection of such toys—although some of them have been released in very limited numbers.
Black Lio Convoy

In the *Beast Wars II* episode “The Black Lio Convoy,” Tasmania Kid brought to Lio Convoy a strange new device he discovered. Unbeknownst to the Maximals, it possessed the ability to make dark clones of individuals and objects, and had been left by the Predacons for the Maximals to find; thus, when Tasmania Kid unwittingly turned the device on Lio Convoy, the evil Black Lio Convoy was born. This twisted new clone managed to wreak havoc on the Maximals, even going as far as to clone almost all of them. Unfortunately, Black Lio Convoy forgot about Diver, who managed to subdue the clones, which gave Lio Convoy the opportunity to destroy the device—along with his evil twin.

The Black Lio Convoy toy, a repainted version of the original Lio Convoy, was released in Japan in 1998 as a Toys R Us exclusive.
**Scourge**

In the *RiD* cartoon episode “The Decepticons,” Megatron stole six Autobot protoforms with the intent of turning them into his minions. After scanning a series of military vehicles for use on the first five, he turned his scanner on a tanker truck for the last protoform... but then Optimus Prime jumped in the way and ended up being scanned as well. The result was Scourge, a ruthless warrior that possessed many of Prime’s skills but none of his compassion. Scourge appointed himself leader of the newly-created team of six—now known as the Decepticons—and became Megatron’s right-hand man.

There were three toys made for Scourge during the run of *RiD*:
- a miniature “Spychanger” version of the first toy (2002)
Robots in Disguise
Scourge
(2002)

Robots in Disguise
Scourge
(Spychanger)
(2002)

Robots in Disguise
Scourge
(Destructicon)
(2003)
In an uncharted dimension, Megazarak killed Optimus Prime and left his remains near the Rust Sea. Unicron later discovered this Optimus Prime and created a dark, tormented version of him: Nemesis Prime. In the “Unicron Trilogy” continuity, Nemesis Prime and Ramjet embarked on a mission to destroy Primus, but were eventually defeated by RiD Optimus Prime and Ultra Magnus. The Nemesis Prime toy was released as a Target exclusive, and was a repaint of *Beast Wars Neo* Big Convoy.

*Nemesis Prime as seen in “Balancing Act Pt. 5,” in the pages of the Transformers Collectors’ Club issue #6*
This Nemesis Prime, hailing from the G1 universe, was a creation of the Decepticon tyrant Straxus, who took a lowly robot and put him through an excruciating rebuilding and reconditioning process. The result was Nemesis Prime, a brutal warrior who poses a threat to Autobots and Decepticons alike. The toy for this Nemesis Prime was a repaint of *Classics* Optimus Prime, and was sold via San Diego Comic-Con and the Hasbro Toy Shop website.
Shattered Glass Optimus Prime

In 2008, Fun Publications, the company that runs the Transformers Collectors’ Club and organizes Botcon, introduced a new continuity called *Shattered Glass (SG)*, which focuses on the heroic Decepticons and the evil Autobots. The Optimus Prime presented in this universe is a former librarian who embraced a lust for power and has since become a brutal tyrant, laying waste to the Decepticons... as well as the occasional Autobot.

There are two different *SG* Optimus Prime toys: the first was a repaint of *Classics* Optimus Prime, and was available as part of the Botcon 2008 box set. The second figure was a repaint of *Reveal the Shield* Optimus Prime, and was sold in a two-pack (with Kick-Over) at Botcon 2012.
Shattered Glass Optimus Prime (2008)

Shattered Glass Optimus Prime (2012)
Appendix 1: Earlier Exhibition

The exhibit outlined in this catalog was the second created by the author that traced the history of the Transformers. The first, *Transcending the Toybox: A Visual History of the Transformers* appeared in the Poynter Library between 15 April and 19 May 2011. The images in this section capture the layout and design of the spring 2011 exhibit.
THE TRANSFORMERS: AN ABBREVIATED TIMELINE

1980
- Toy manufacturer Takara introduces a line of boy’s toys in Japan called Diaclone, which consists mainly of alien-looking robots that turn into futuristic vehicles.

1981
- Takara introduces the New Microman toy line, made up of toys very similar in look and feel to the Diaclone toys.

1982
- Facing competition from more realistic-looking converting robots in toylines such as Macross and Gundam, Takara decides to introduce transformable cars, military aircraft, construction vehicles and more into the Diaclone line.

1983
- Takara introduces Microchange, a sub-line of New Microman which features robots that turn into everyday objects, e.g., microcassettes, cassette players, handguns, etc., that are in a 1:1 scale with the actual objects they represent.
- Diaclone and Microchange toys are put on display at the 1983 Tokyo Toy Show. Representatives from American toy company Hasbro attended the show and, seeing potential for these figures in the U.S., struck a deal with Takara to import the toys to the U.S., with the deal allowing for Hasbro to unite them all under a new banner: The Transformers.

1984
- The Transformers (later referred to as Generation 1; see 1993 entry) debuts in the U.S. The toy packages told a story about a centuries-old war between the heroic Autobots, led by Optimus Prime, and the evil Decepticons, led by Megatron. These two factions hailed from the planet Cybertron, and, having brought their war to our planet, assumed Earth-based alternate forms for disguise purposes. The toyline was an instant hit with children.
- Marvel Comics publishes The Transformers, a four-issue limited series. The book was spearheaded by a writer named Bob Budiansky, who also came up with most of the back story as well as the characters’ names and bios for Hasbro.
- The Transformers animated television series makes its debut.

1985
- The second wave of Transformers toys hits the shelves, and is more than double the size of the first.
- Due to fan demand, the Transformers comic book is expanded into a regular monthly title.
- Takara decides to cancel Diaclone and Microchange in favor of the Transformers concept; it premieres as Fight! Super Robot Lifeform Transformers.
1986

- *Transformers: The Movie*, a full-length animated feature, is released to theaters. The film was panned by the critics and only took in around $6 million; however, it remains to this day a significant chapter within *Transformers* lore.
- With most of the Takara molds having been used, the first figures designed with input from Hasbro are released. This resulted in a transitioning away from using die-cast metal and rubber tires, with both replaced by plastic.
- The Japanese lineup for 1986 is titled *Transformers 2010*—essentially a copy of the U.S. products and cartoon.

1987

- The fourth wave of toys is released in the U.S. A considerably greater emphasis was placed on figures and sub-groups with “gimmicks”, the most prominent of these being the Headmasters and Targetmasters—figures whose heads or weapons transformed into miniature humanoid figures called Nebulons.
- Premiere of “The Rebirth”, a three-part episode of the U.S. animated series tasked with introducing nearly the entire 1987 toy lineup. This lone episode would constitute season four of the series, and would be its last original episode.
- Debut of the 1987 Japanese line, *The Headmasters*. Unlike the U.S., its animated series consisted of an entire season’s worth of episodes that ignored and took the place of “The Rebirth”. This set off a deviation in the directions taken by Takara and Hasbro; 1988-1992 would see the release of many *Transformers* toys never sold in the West, along with several Japanese-only stories and animated television shows.

1988

- The fifth wave of toys is released in the U.S. Powermasters, figures whose Nebulon partners turned into engines that would unlock the toy’s ability to transform, were introduced alongside the Pretenders—figures that were housed inside human or organic-looking “shells”.
- The Japanese series for the year is entitled *Super-God Masterforce*.

1989

- The sixth wave of U.S. toys consists of two sub-lines: Pretenders and the new, miniature-sized Micromasters.
- Bob Budiansky decides to leave the Marvel comic book due to creative burnout. Simon Furman, a writer on the Marvel UK *Transformers* book, took over the title for him. Furman, a huge fan of the material, has since written many *Transformers* comic books, on and off (whenever work was available), for various publishers.
1990
• In the U.S., the series again consists of two sub-lines: Micromasters and the new Action Masters—figures whose weapons transform, but the figures themselves do not. The Action Masters met with harsh disapproval at the time of their release (although they have since found respect among collectors). With its popularity having tapered off considerably since 1987, Hasbro opted to finally pull the plug on The Transformers in the U.S. by the end of 1990.
• Zone, the next Japanese series, debuts. It had only one lone animated episode produced (which went straight to video), with most of its fiction told through manga and magazines.
• Classics, a series of reissues of 1984-87 toys in new packaging, debuts in Europe, New Zealand, and Australia.

1991
• The Marvel comic book series is canceled in July; its final issue is #80.
• The seventh Japanese series, Return of Convoy, debuts. Like Zone, there was no accompanying TV series.
• A second wave of Classics reissues appears in Europe, et al, along with a lineup of exclusive new toys.

1992
• The final chapter of the original series in Japan, Operation: Combination, debuts.
• The European markets continue to receive exclusive products and reissued older figures.

1993
• More toys appear in the European markets, sporting new Autobot and Decepticon insignias. Because these insignias would later appear in the Generation 2 line, this wave of product is often referred to by fans as “Generation 1.5”.
• Hasbro decides to re-launch The Transformers in the U.S. with the release of the Generation 2 (G2) line. (As a result, everything that came before was retroactively branded Generation 1 (G1)—a name which has since been used by Hasbro and Takara in conjunction with official products.) The first wave of G2 consisted mainly of G1 toys with new color schemes and some new accessories, augmented by 12 of the 1993 European figures.
• A Generation 2 Marvel comic book launches in the fall, with Simon Furman again at the helm; it lasts 12 issues.
• A G2 cartoon premieres in the fall, consisting of G1 episodes with obtrusive CGI sprinkled throughout.

1994
• The second wave of G2 product is released in the U.S. Aside from two re-colored sub-groups from 1986, the rest of the year’s offerings were devoted to new toys. Some of these new figures featured ball-and-socket joints in the limbs, which turned out to be a major advancement in the designing of future Transformers.
• Two brothers, Jon and Karl Hartman, organize a small Transformers fan gathering called Botcon in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Packaged samples of Breakdown, a figure intended for a G2 release (but ultimately cancelled), were donated by Hasbro to give away as souvenirs. This small event has grown larger and more prestigious with each passing year; today, it is a nearly week-long convention, featuring many guests, events, and exclusive figures.

1995
• A small third wave of G2 toys is released with little fanfare and no new fiction to back it up. At this point, with G2 failing to reignite an interest in Transformers, Hasbro decided that something drastic had to be done about the brand: either cancel it a second time, or try going in a new direction in the hope of reinvigorating the concept of shape-shifting toys.
• Takara decides to bring Transformers back to Japan. Titled simply G-2, the series featured only the U.S. G2 figures that had a good degree of poseability. Much like in the U.S., it did not catch fire and was swiftly cancelled.

1996
• Hasbro unveils Beast Wars (BW), a complete reboot of the Transformers brand consisting entirely of transforming animals. The line made several drastic departures from G1: the factions were changed to Maximals and Predacons, and the leaders of the two groups were Megatron and Optimus Primal. A full range of poseability—something that was explored in G2—was now the standard on all figures. Despite criticisms from some G1 fans that considered its changes blasphemous, BW proved to be a success, completely revitalizing the Transformers brand and paving the way for everything that has since followed.
• A Beast Wars animated series debuts, and is one of the first television shows to be fully-rendered in CGI. The series was a huge hit, wrapping in May 1999 with a finale penned by Simon Furman.

1997
• The second wave of Beast Wars toys is released.
• Machine Wars (MW), a wave of 12 vehicular toys, is released exclusively to Kay-Bee stores as part of a test on Hasbro’s part to see if there is still an interest in vehicular Transformers. Unfortunately, the series had no accompanying fiction, was released with little fanfare, and was put on clearance almost immediately upon its arrival.
• Beast Wars debuts in Japan as Super Lifeform Transformers Beast Wars.
• A Beast Wars video game is released for the Sony PlayStation, and is the first ever Transformers video game created for a U.S. game console.

1998
• The newest Beast Wars toys are dominated by two new sub-groups: Transmetals, toys that feature a fusion of metal and organic parts to their beast forms, and Fuzors, figures that are a fusion of two different beasts.
• Instead of copying the U.S. releases, Takara unveils **Beast Wars II**—a completely different line. Save for leaders Lio Convoy and Galvatron, the series consisted largely of repainted older toys and was backed by a 2-D animated show.

**1999**

• The year’s *Beast Wars* toy lineup is dominated by “Transmetal 2” figures. While some additional toys would appear after 1999, this is the last year that *Beast Wars* would be the face of the *Transformers* brand in the U.S.

• *Animorphs*, a Hasbro line of figures based on the books by K.A. Applegate, debuts. The figures were marketed under the *Transformers* banner and sold alongside *Beast Wars*, but otherwise had no ties to the *Transformers* universe.

• The first season of *Beast Machines*, a direct sequel to the *Beast Wars* series, makes its debut in September, several months ahead of the impending toyline. The CGI series, utilizing many of the same characters and voice actors from *Beast Wars*, went in a much darker direction than its predecessor, and spent a great deal of time dealing with subjects such as loss, faith, evolution, and spirituality. Its finale aired in May 2000.

• *Beast Wars Neo*, a semi-sequel to *Beast Wars II*, debuts in Japan; the line features more original toy molds and another 2-D animated show. 1999 also saw the release of *Beast Wars Metals*, a Japanese release of the U.S. toys from 1998, along with dubs of seasons 2 and 3 of the U.S. animated series.

**2000**

• The *Beast Machines* (*BM*) toyline debuts. Unlike the real-world animals in *BW*, *BM* featured a combination of futuristic vehicles and very alien-like interpretations of familiar Earth creatures.

• A *Beast Wars: Transmetals* video game is released in the U.S. for multiple game platforms.

• *Car Robots*, a new toyline of mostly vehicular-based Transformers, premieres in Japan. The line featured the return of the Autobot and Decepticon factions with original 1980s insignias (which have since stayed with the brand), and was made from a mix of old and new molds. At the time, there were no plans to bring the series to the U.S.

• Three *G1* reissues in 1980s-style packaging—Convoy, Ultra Magnus, and Hot Rodimus—show up in Japan, along with limited recolored versions of Convoy and Ultra Magnus. This occurred at a time when most of the children who had grown up with *G1* were now working adults with money to spend. A *G1* renaissance of sorts began to take shape around this time, resulting in a slew of reissues, homages, new products, and new toylines.

• Takara releases a series of blindpacked figurines called *Super Collection Figure* (SCF). (“Blindpacked” refers to figures sold in identical-looking boxes, with no windows, no cutouts, or anything that might let the buyer see what is inside.) The figures were cartoon-accurate representations of *G1* characters (and later, *Micron Legend* characters), with each one being around 3” tall, non-transformable, and with very limited poseability. The line wrapped in 2003.
2001

- The second and final wave of *Beast Machines* toys is released.
- *Transtech*, Hasbro’s proposed sequel to *Beast Machines*, is cancelled at the planning stages for reasons still unknown. In order to bide their time while planning their next move, Hasbro decided to import the *Car Robots* series to the U.S. as *Robots In Disguise* (*RID*).
- Dreamwave, an independent comic book publisher, wins a bidding war for the publishing rights to *The Transformers*.
- Four *G1* figures are re-released to mass retail in Japan, while more than twenty limited-edition figures are made available online, at conventions, as store exclusives, etc. Like the previous year’s Convoy and Ultra Magnus, some of these new limited-edition figures were older toys with brand new color schemes. Two of these recolored figures were made available exclusively through e-Hobby, an online affiliate of Takara. Due to the success of the reissues and the renewed interest in *G1*, e-Hobby began (and continues) to offer a wide variety of highly sought-after *G1* toys in exclusive color schemes, some of which are marketed as completely new characters within the *G1* universe. A few of these new characters, e.g., Sunstorm, actually went on to find popularity within newer *G1* fiction.

2002

- Due to the success of the *RID* line, Hasbro expands the series with repainted figures from *G2*, *MW*, and the *Beast* era.
- In the fall, Hasbro launches *Armada* (*Micron Legend* in Japan), the new “main” *Transformers* toyline, and the first line jointly developed by Hasbro and Takara. The series was the first full reboot of *The Transformers* in the U.S. from a story standpoint: while *BW/WM* were placed within the *G1* universe, and *RID* contained a few loose connections to *G1*, *Armada* was set within a completely new continuity. The line is noted for introducing Mini-Cons—mini-figures that could attach to and “power up” larger figures—which proved to be immensely popular and have shown up in subsequent toylines. On the other hand, *Armada* is also noted for having toys with very limited poseability.
- Hasbro releases *Heroes of Cybertron* (*HOC*), a U.S. release of the Takara *SCF* line. Unlike *SCF*, the *HOC* figures were not blindpacked. The series ended in 2003, with its last two waves released only to chain drug stores (and, curiously, Disney World). To date, *SCF* is the only line of blindpacked Japanese Transformers to see a U.S. release.
- Dreamwave publishes *Transformers: Generation 1, Vol. 1*, a six-issue limited series. The book was an unprecedented success, with four of the six issues topping Diamond Comic Distributors' sales charts—a feat achieved by no other *Transformers* comic title before or since. Its success spawned a second mini-series, followed by a monthly series. Soon after the initial *G1* title got underway, an *Armada* monthly series debuted, with Simon Furman taking over as writer beginning with issue #6. Later that year, Furman wrote another Dreamwave mini-series called *The War Within*, set in the distant past of *G1*. The latter title was a huge success, spawning two subsequent chapters.
• The Armada cartoon premieres; it airs until December 2003.
• Takara debuts Transformers Collection, a new line of G1 reissues in all-new packaging. The toys sold well, and the series lasted until 2006. Additional “uncollected” reissues in 1980s-style packaging also appeared during this time.
• Hasbro unveils the Commemorative Series, a Toys R Us-exclusive line of G1 reissues. Unlike the Takara reissues, the U.S. releases featured several conspicuous cosmetic and mold changes from the original releases, some of which had to be made to conform to newer U.S. safety standards. The series would end in earnest after 2004, with several additional figures showing up in subsequent years.

2003
• Armada remains the flagship Transformers series throughout the year. With sales exceeding expectations, several BW toys were recolored and released to help “pad out” the back end of the line.
• MyClone, a Takara line of blindpacked collectibles, introduces several waves of Transformers figurines. These lasted throughout the first half of 2003.
• Hasbro launches a new sub-line, Universe, a series consisting entirely of repainted pre-existing molds. The line was created in an effort to help meet the increasing demand for new product, and ran until 2005 (although a few figures trickled out as late as 2008). Its sparse fiction was told largely through a series of convention-exclusive comics.
• Takara releases a line of small, blindpacked figures called Smallest Transforming Transformers, which consists of fully transformable, micro-sized G1 characters. Three waves of figures were released through 2004.
• Behind-the-scenes disputes involving the Hartman brothers cause the Botcon name to be temporarily unusable. As a result, the 2003 and 2004 conventions were renamed the Official Transformers Collectors Convention (OTFCC).
• The first wave of Alternators, a new sub-series, ships in time for Christmas. Alternators consisted of robots that turned into highly-detailed 1:24 scale versions of real-world vehicles. While Takara’s version of the line, Binaltech, featured a mix of plastic and die-cast metal, Alternators were made entirely of plastic (for cost-cutting purposes). The line ended in earnest in 2006, with several store/convention exclusives showing up the following year.

2004
• Energon (Superlink in Japan), the next flagship series, launches at the beginning of the year. The main gimmick in Energon was “Powerlinxing”—the ability of two figures to combine into one new, larger robot. The toys featured more poseability than was seen in Armada toys. Hoping to be able to meet demand, Hasbro shipped the toys in far greater numbers, causing the exact opposite problem: “shelfwarmer” figures that clogged store shelves for months.
• The Energon cartoon series also makes its debut in January. Unlike previous cartoons, Energon was a blend of hand-drawn and CGI artwork. The series concluded in June 2005.
Following Armada #18, Dreamwave publishes Energon #19; it continues as Energon until issue #30 in January 2005.

Takara debuts a new sub-line, Robot Masters (RM). The series was a composite of both well-known and more obscure characters and both new and old molds—all spanning most of the previous lines, including a few Japanese-only titles such as Victory and Beast Wars II. The line concluded in 2005.

A video game based on Armada, titled simply Transformers, is released for the PlayStation 2 in the U.S. and Europe, and is the first Transformers video game with a significant amount of fanfare and promotion behind it. The game was generally well-received, and in fact went on to become one of the best-selling games of 2004.

Hasbro releases a large, partially die-cast figure called 20th Anniversary Optimus Prime, intended to commemorate the brand’s anniversary. While the figure was a standalone toy that was not intended as a part of any series, the Takara version was the first in a line of figures called Masterpiece, which consists of similarly-styled and -sized versions of G1 characters, with three of those figures having since been released by Hasbro as store exclusives.

Beast Wars Returns, the Japanese version of Beast Machines, makes its debut in Japan. The line was given a very low-key release, with the toys all being Toys R Us exclusives and the animated series airing only on a satellite station.

2005

Dreamwave Productions declares bankruptcy in January, leaving many titles unfinished. Four months later, the comic book publishing rights to The Transformers went to another small company, IDW Publishing, which has amassed a wide selection of Transformers titles in that time, including the first U.S. Beast Wars comics, titles that expand upon the live-action films, and a wealth of material devoted to their rebooted G1 continuity. Simon Furman has been a significant contributor, and Bob Budiansky was hired to write an all-new comic adaptation of the 1986 animated film.

Hasbro debuts Cybertron (Galaxy Force in Japan), the next flagship series, and final chapter of the continuity established by Armada. The toys marked a return to figures with sleeker designs and a wide range of poseability. Its marketing gimmick centered on Cyber Planet Keys—small plastic chips that unlocked weapons or hidden features on a given toy, and also allowed access to exclusive online content via alpha-numeric codes printed on them.

The Cybertron cartoon debuts, featuring the same blend of 2-D and 3-D art as last seen in Energon. The series wrapped in October 2006.

The Transformers convention rights and official fan club rights are granted to an organization called Fun Publications, which results in the return of the Botcon name and of the launch of the Transformers Collectors Club (TFCC). Among other perks such as newsletters, exclusive comics, Botcon discounts, etc., an annual membership to the TFCC includes a free exclusive toy, plus the ability to purchase additional limited-run exclusives.
2006

- A new sub-line called **Star Wars Transformers** hits the shelves, consisting of **Star Wars** vehicles that convert into characters from that universe. The line proved successful, and was eventually rebranded as **Transformers Crossovers** in 2009 to include transforming Marvel Comics characters. As of April 2011, the series is still in production.
- Hasbro releases a small line of figures commemorating **Beast Wars’ 10th anniversary**. The line consisted of eight cartoon-accurate reissues, along with all-new toys of Optimus Primal and Megatron.
- In April, Takara merges with rival company Tomy; the new company is called Takara-Tomy.
- TakaraTomy releases **Hybrid Style** Convoy, a small-scale, partially die-cast version of G1 Optimus Prime; an e-Hobby-exclusive “Black Version” soon follows.
- The line of **Revoltech** action figures by Japanese company Kaiyodo is expanded to include **Transformers**. The line consisted of non-converting action figures with a great degree of poseability. Five **Transformers** figures were released between 2006 and 2008.
- The June 29 premiere of **Pirates of the Carribean: Dead Man’s Chest** features the first teaser trailer for the upcoming **Transformers** live-action film.
- Hasbro releases the **Classics** sub-line as a means of keeping new product on the shelf during the window of time between the end of **Cybertron** and the beginning of the movie toyline. **Classics** featured all-new, highly poseable renditions of G1 characters. The line was a big hit with fans, and the molds have been reused many times since.
- **Titanium Series**, a line of partially die-cast figures previously devoted to **Star Wars**, expands its lineup to include **Transformers**. The **Titanium** line covered a lot of ground, paying homage to characters from **G1, BW, BM, RID, Alternators, Cybertron**, the 2007 film, and even the **War Within** comic book series. It lasted for a year, with a few exclusives being released after 2007.

2007

- The toyline to the **Transformers film** is released a month ahead of the film itself. The line was by far the largest seen since **G1** (well over 150 figures), including several sublines, multiple versions of each character in the film, and a wealth of toys for characters not actually in the film. Stores vastly underestimated the demand for the film’s toys, resulting in empty shelves for much of the summer. The marketing blitz for the film—by far the largest campaign ever affiliated with the **Transformers** brand—began at around this time, with hundreds of products bearing the film’s logo, characters, imagery, etc. Many big name companies, e.g., Pepsi, Chevrolet, Burger King, M&M/Mars, etc., were signed on as promotional sponsors.
- **Transformers** opens on July 3. The film was directed by Michael Bay and starred Shia LaBeouf, Megan Fox, Jon Voight, and John Turturro. Peter Cullen, who had provided the voice of Optimus Prime in the 1980s cartoon, reprised the role in the film after **G1** fans lobbied online for him to be cast. Despite mixed reviews, the film proved to be a tremendous financial success, grossing roughly $709 million worldwide.
• TakaraTomy unveils *Encore*, the newest line of *G1* reissues. While several *Encore* figures had already been reissued in Japan and/or the U.S. in recent years, others were being reissued for the very first time ever. The *Encore* series ended in late November 2009.

• *Animated*, the cartoon for the next major line in the *Transformers* brand, debuts several months ahead of the toyline. The series was a self-contained continuity, albeit with many references to *G1, BW*, and the recent film. In fact, several *G1* voice actors returned for *Animated*, with most playing updated versions of their original characters. The series featured 2-D art that rendered the characters in a very lean, organic-looking, cartoon-like manner (the character models and toys were co-designed by Cartoon Network). The series was very well received; it wrapped in May 2009.

**2008**

• TakaraTomy debuts *Henkei! Henkei! Transformers*, their version of the *Classics* line. The toys were noted for having chromed parts, as well as for sporting color schemes more in line with the *G1* cartoon. The line ended in 2009.

• The *Animated* toyline debuts in the U.S. in June, featuring toys with aesthetics very similar to the animation models from the television series. The line lasted throughout 2009, with a handful of toys showing up after that.

• A new sub-line called *Universe* debuts. (It had no ties to the previous line of the same name, and is often referred to as “*Universe 2.0*” by fans.) Unlike the previous *Universe* series, this line consisted of both repainted figures and brand new molds. While the series paid homage to several past lines, its main focus was *G1*; the line picked up where *Classics* left off, featuring a variety all-new toys for *G1* characters. The line ran until the end of 2009.

**2009**

• The toyline and the marketing blitz for the second film, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen (ROTF)*, get off to a start in May. The scope of both are in step with those of the first film, with the only difference being that retailers, having learned their lesson with the first film’s toy appeal, ordered much heavier this time around.

• *Revenge of the Fallen* opens in the U.S. on June 24. The film was lambasted by the critics, and ended up later “winning” three Golden Raspberry Awards: Worst Picture, Worst Director, and Worst Screenplay. Michael Bay, Shia LaBeouf, and the film’s writers all went on to blame the weakness of the script on the 2007-08 Writer’s Guild of America strike. Despite the critical reception, *ROTF* outgrossed the first film, taking in over $836 million worldwide.

• *Disney Label*, a TakaraTomy line of transformable Disney characters, debuts with a Mickey Mouse figure that turns into a *G1* Optimus Prime-like truck; Buzz Lightyear and Donald Duck figures have since joined the roster. There is currently no talk of bringing the series to the U.S.
2010-11

- Hasbro starts to lay the foundation for a new Transformers continuity—a composite of all previous lore, with the intention of being the main continuity for the next decade. As of spring 2011, it has no official name to speak of, but has been referred to within the fandom as the Aligned continuity.
- TakaraTomy releases the Animated line in Japan in spring 2010; the television series soon follows.
- The ROTF toyline evolves into Hunt For the Decepticons (HFTD), a promotional tie-in with a website devoted to several new story chapters. The line concluded at the end of 2010.
- A new Transformers videogame, War For Cybertron, is released in June 2010. Less than a week later, a tie-in novel, Exodus, hit the shelves. Both the game and the book are set in the distant past of the new Aligned continuity.
- The Generations sub-line debuts in the summer of 2010. In the same vein as Classics and “Universe 2.0”, the line features a new roster of toys for older G1 characters, as well as toys from the War For Cybertron game. As of April 2011, Hasbro is preparing to ship the final Generations figures to stores before the toyline for the third film debuts.
- Power Core Combiners (PCC), another sub-line, also makes a summer 2010 debut. The series is gimmick-driven, featuring a line-up of smaller figures with a multitude of combining abilities.
- A new animated series, Transformers: Prime, premieres in November 2010. The CGI series was initially promoted as a standalone entity with no toyline to support; however, prototypes of Prime figures have since surfaced online and are currently slated for an October 2011 release. The series takes place on present-day Earth, and is set within the Aligned continuity. As of April 2011, it is currently airing its first season, with two more having been outlined.
- Hunt For the Decepticons evolves into Reveal the Shield, a sub-line with a greater G1 emphasis. The RTS line is still in production as of April 2011, though it will be wrapping before the arrival of the first wave of toys for the third film.
- On Christmas Day, 2010, TakaraTomy unveils the Transformers: United toyline. The series is essentially a continuation of Henkei, being comprised mainly of all of the G1 figures from the RTS and Generations lines.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANTHONY CASALE was born in New Jersey. At a young age, he began finding numerous artistic outlets in which to express himself, including drawing, acting and writing. After moving to Florida as a teenager, he continued to explore live theatre and writing in high school, and subsequently performed in many local theatres throughout Hillsborough and Hernando counties. He eventually earned a B.A. in Theatre from the University of South Florida (USF), helped co-founded Hat Trick Theatre Productions in Tampa, and went on to act in and direct numerous plays for the company. He also performed in commercials and corporate training videos for many well-known businesses, including The Melting Pot, Beall’s Outlet, Reeves Import Motorcars, and the Home Shopping Network.

His pursuit of a Master’s in Library and Information Science (LIS) was inspired partly by his detail-oriented nature, and partly by his desire to blend his passion for the arts into another field; he sees LIS as a potential means in which to immerse himself in the educational and informational aspects of the artists of yesterday and today. To that end, he hopes to one day work for a library that is focused on the arts, such as the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences or the Louis B. Mayer Library of the American Film Institute.

Since beginning his LIS studies in 2010, Anthony has been a volunteer at the Oldsmar Public Library, where he has, among other things, handled most aspects of weeding and deleting items from many of the library’s collections, including general fiction. Since 2011, he has spent a great deal of time working on a variety of projects at USF System libraries in Special Collections (at both USF Tampa and USF St. Petersburg), including the arranging of the personal papers of former USF St. Petersburg Dean H. William Heller, creating records for the John T. Dizer collection of children’s literature and cleaning up metadata for Hampton Dunn Collection of Florida Postcards at USF Tampa Library.

In 2011, he found several ways to combine his artistic endeavors with his LIS studies. Having been a rabid collector of Transformers action figures since 1984, Anthony mounted an exhibit at USF St. Petersburg that offered up a brief summary of the brand’s worldwide impact; its success led to a more in-depth exhibit in 2012 that focused solely on the character of Optimus Prime. He also returned to the USF Theatre department, where his work on a conference room cluttered with random books and media resulted in what is now an organized, functional department library.
The author speaking to Peter Cullen at Botcon 2010

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