

Foreward

This is where it gets complicated...

I set off originally around 1994 to re-write the series of stories I wrote about my Zapbots. I wanted to bring the stories and grammar up to a 'somewhat' professional level. The original ideas I wrote in my younger years were there, but the writing was what a 11-18-year-old was capable of producing at the time.

The stories themselves were more or less an expression of both my science fiction ideas but also my suppressed sexuality. As I began to rewrite them, I realized not only had my life changed but my group of friends as well. I realized certain individuals who had left my life were meaningless to put into my stories. This included Matt H. (or Matt E. as called in the rewritten stories), David, Jeremy etc.... Matt's death was moved up in the series as I wrote *Reality* to bridge the gap of friends from High School to College figuring I would be friends with 'those' people forever.

Life is in a constant state of flux...

I was all the way up to rewriting Robot Trek II around 2000 and stopped due to lack of time and other responsibilities (also a lack of interest.) This left about half the saga incomplete with rewrites.

Come 2013 on plane flights back and forth from California I decided to flex my writing skills again. I had an idea to pick up the plot many years later, so I jumped ahead to what would have been my reality of 2013 and wrote *Rebooted*. This time, the Zapbots were dormant, and it was all about coming out of a deep sleep and catching up with what was going on around them, then. I knew at some point I would want to revisit the old stories and fill in the gaps, but I did not know how I was going to do that. I also knew a lot of my stories were based around the plots of Star Trek movies that I lifted at the time. At that time, I had no idea how I could re-write these and still be interesting. So *Rebooted* was wrote and once again I quietly shelved the idea.

Once again, it's amazing how quickly time flies...

And that brings us up to 2020, with apparently with a lot of time on our hands because Covid I started drawing again. I drew some new sketches and uploaded them to my Zapbots Wiki, a database I've kept on my website for some time. I finally decided with this extra time to finish the Wiki specs just to have something to do. Strangely this only took a few days and then I decided to revisit all the stories that I wrote.

I re-read all the original series, then the re-write stories and realized I now knew what to do to bridge the gap. Yes, the stories are somewhat borrowed from Star Trek, but what if I took it from the standpoint of 'what if the same scenario happened to the Zapbots but turned out differently?'

~~My partner at this current time~~ My partner at this current time honeybun, love of my life, flame of my loin Daniel and myself recently watched the Picard series and I realized it was possible to provide some sort of depth to all the characters I didn't have in the stories before. I could also give myself the ability to explore the sexuality side of the story and finally bring that to fruition. I could go into the characters of the Nonocons and give more of a background into them and their motives. I could also explore the betrayal of various friends and provide more depth to the world that was/is inside of my head.

Thus, here we are back at *Robot Trek III*. Written historically after *Rebooted* but occurring obviously way before in the timeline, I am imaging this would take place around 2000/2001. I am making an attempt to try and complete the saga as much as possible.

And so, we begin yet again...

Anthony S. Anselmo

Robot Trek III

By Anthony S. Anselmo

Chapter 1

I sat down in the chair. It had been a long time since I had done an interview and I wasn't really fond of them. My knowledge of the world had changed since even a few years ago. Every day I find myself becoming more aware that the innocent world... no the universe that I had been told of long ago, was not so innocent at all. Reality itself was not what it seemed and not something I could even count on anymore.

Yet... here I was once again putting myself out there. Trying to do the 'right thing' and being forthright and honest. I would curse myself of the burden I had to bear but I knew damn well that I was the one who had agreed to this.

I sat down in front of a lovely African American woman with curly hair. Skinny as only an exercise enthusiast could be in this age as to provide the perfect presentation. Black dress, completely unnecessary lipstick and just the most unflattering brooch anyone could see. We had tried to get Oprah but even she was nervous interviewing me. So as such, I received a second-rate reporter who would be the individual asking me these questions.

I walked in donning my standard holographic clothing on, hiding the electronic limbs that were my main method of transportation when I did not have my X-O suit on. I sat down on the chair and smiled graciously...

"Mr. Anselmo... shall we begin." asked the female reporter.

"Sure...let's do this." I said.

"Master's Log, Stardate 2000.12.18 I've been traveling back and forth from Earth to Gearatron these last couple of weeks. After our last battle with the Nonocons, Misslemax has been fully repaired (again!) However, the tension of going back and forth is definitely starting to get to me.

"Life has definitely been interesting. My association with my various human friends had caused considerable problems as of late and I've basically had to start distancing myself from them as I needed to focus on more important tasks at hand. Friends in the 'other reality' who were supposed to be good friends of mine here, turned out to be problematic.

"I had lost a great friend not too long ago, Matt Eggbert. He had died without any reason or rhyme. A friend I had become close too during my days before the Zapbots, was taken from me for no good reason. I still to this day can't put logic behind the way the universe works in these matters.

"David another friend of mine who I brought along from high-school days had found religion just after he completed his Headmaster training. This had caused much strife between my fellow Zapbots and myself as while I know his intentions are good, all of our science points against everything he believes. I stationed him in my hometown for security for now until I decide what would be the next step in our relationship.

"Jeremy, a pen-pal friend of my from my youth was continuing his training in the Earth United States Air Force. While he completed his Headmaster training his father put a bug in

his ear telling him he was taking the 'easy way out' and he decided to enlist in the human air force for the time being. We considered him on 'active-standby' if needed.

"Bill a friend of mine from high-school who I became re-acquainted with after my one adventure, was also stationed near the Cleveland area for surveillance. In his spare time, he opened up his own television recording studio and obviously (thanks to me) had the latest and most advanced technology. Advertising has never looked so clean.

"Matt Rogish (or Rogish as not to be confused with the other Matt), another friend of mine (and also Bill's) from high school wanted to start a family and as such bought a home in the country. After a lengthy divorce he needed some time off. We gave this time for him to find his way and to take care of his children.

"Mike B. (or Mikey as we called him) an individual I became great friends within another reality and then in this one, was also dealing with life's great mysteries. He was currently engaged to be married but something happened, and the relationship fell apart. Apparently his 'wife to be' was not too crazy about being second fiddle to a bunch of robots in space. He was stationed in Florida as 'active-standby' as well.

"Then there was Jason, a friendly individual I met while strolling through a shopping mall stopping into a Natural Wonders store. We started a conversation on our love for 'Weird Al' music and after a while I invited him to sign-up for the Zapbot Headmaster training. He was approved and is now helping to coordinate tracking of strange occurrences around the globe.

"Then there was the sad incident with my friend Alan. Someone who was a friend to me in 'another reality' but in this one turned out to be severally disturbed. As we got to know each other I soon realized the grave error I must have made in the other reality. His judgement was completely illogical at times, and I soon found out the religion he was studying drove him mental. He took his designated Headmaster body, stole the Zapbot Matrix of Leadership, and disappeared with Bop's evil twin brother Shock to who knows where. Searches across all our charted planets could not find any trace of the two. We were now at a severe disadvantage, not knowing if the Matrix fell into the wrong hands yet, and at a constant red-alert.

"Then lastly there was Mike Quartz... or basically 'Mike' to keep him different from 'Mikey B.' A lone survivor of a strange incident in Germany he and myself had become really close... too close... The running joke was that we always argued like a 'married couple.' He did not want to become a full Headmaster yet, and in fact just wanted to stay by my side as much as possible. As our friendship became closer, I was beginning to discover more about myself, and this was adding an extra complexity to my whole situation. I was letting my personal life become involved with work and that is never a good recipe in any reality.

"So, in short, my human friends from various backgrounds and acquaintances, who went through a whole lot of training to become Headmasters were stationed on Earth... for no other reason that they just wanted to live their lives as humanly possible. It did not fare well for me with my Zapbots, but I had to respect my friend's decisions. I knew other friends, other humans would come along, and they would fill the role in new Headmaster bodies, it was only a matter of time.

"My Zapbots, were my family. Beyond humans I was closer to them than anything. It was weird that robotic beings with half organic brains, would be the ones I developed a kinship with. We had traveled the Universe and discovered numerous new species. You know

those little Aliens with the orb heads and big black eyes? Yep, they existed, and they were friendly, they just knew to keep their distance from humans. Other races similar to what had been seen on TV shows as just fantasy were now contacting the Earth. It is a strange and bizarre time and yet I know something dreadful is coming...."

"So, your X-O suit transforms into the head of..."

"Shortstop, it's a larger body for me to on par with the rest of the team" I said.

"So, what's that like?" the reporter asked.

"Picture being in a Halloween costume and then stepping into one of those old fashion race cars at the old 'putt-putt' place. Except once you slip inside, you grow 50 feet tall, and your skin is really hard and metallic. Once I connect, my human body senses go dormant and while it stores my body in hibernation, my senses are uploaded to the computer to use the giant robot form. I see everything and interact out of the Shortstop body directly, then the same for Misslemax and then for Gearatron."

"Yes, I find the whole concept of a planet transforming unbelievable but, so let me ask you the name Boaty? Why Boaty?" said the reporter obnoxiously.

"Ahem I was only 11 when I..." I started to reply.

"But if you could build these complex robots..."

"I know I know," I interrupted "Even with all those skills I still has some childish thoughts and the first one was a boat. Thus, when he came online, I named him Boaty. He doesn't mind."

"Yes, in fact you had a propensity for let's just say some juvenile names?" she continued.

"Such as..."

"Smart-a-bots.... "

"It's the Technology Team now."

"Build-a-bots...."

"Build Team..."

"Fly-a-."

"Aerial Team, I think you get the point here."

"So, the question is, if you built these giant robots, and yet didn't have the ability to name them?"

"How can we trust you that they won't go crazy and destroy the earth?"

She was silent....

Oh, how I had to answer this one so many times...

I strolled onto the bridge. My team were all at their stations, interfacing with consoles or directly connected. It was up to an individual Zapbot if they wanted to use the more 'human' way of pushing buttons on a console to make things works, or just directly connect via wi-fi to make things work. Either way they were bi-pedal creatures shaped after their creator, so when I was on the bridge in either my X-O suit or Shortstop mode, they were polite enough to act 'human-ish.'

"We've achieved standard orbit around Gearatron Master," said Flier.

"Sounds good," I said sitting down in my commander's chair. My Shortstop body, an extension of my own personality locked in place.

Botimus Prime my second in command strolled onto the bridge and sat down in his command chair next to mine.

"What do you think the council has in mind for us?" he inquired.

"Good question," I said rubbing my robotic chin out of habit. "Knowing them it's probably something big. We still need to figure out where the hell Tri-Star is..."

Boaty, commander and operations officer turned around to greet me and chime in.

"I'm sure we will find it Master, it's only a matter of time before they have to act." he replied.

"I know Boaty, it's just as a human I've very impatient." I said.

"We're aware of this." said Speedy weapons officer chuckling.

"Hush now young one," I replied.

"Master, final instructions being communicated now, " said Hightone my communications officer.

"On screen." I said. Up on the view-screen came our Scientist friends Vebox and Scan.

"Master good to see you again. I'm afraid I have some troubling news." said Vebox.

"Oh?" I asked.

"Two major outposts have been attacked by an unknown force. Our current long-range scans make this out to be a large cloud of some sort slowly sweeping across the Universe."

"We destroyed that giant pain-in-the-chassy Unic-" I started

"Destination?" asked Botimus interrupted as to not speak his name.

"Gearatron." Vebox replied.

"How did I know that?" I said.

"Here's where it gets interesting..." Vebox continued.

"Oh, even more details. "I said being somewhat sarcastic.

"Any object that comes in contact with this cloud has not returned. Probes, ships, etc.... Anything sent to the cloud has strangely disappeared. Our scans indicate a large-power source is located at the heart of this giant cloud."

"Has anyone made an attempt to try and communicate with it?" Botimus inquired.

"Affirmative, however results have been negative so far."

"Approximate time to Gearatron?" I asked.

"We estimate three Gearatron days before the cloud reaches our space."

"That's about four human Earth days Master-" started Boaty.

"I know...." I somewhat snapped. I looked at Botimus and cursed myself for being sarcastic before, and he gave me that 'You did this to yourself' look.

Scan our other scientist came on the viewing screen. "I will be boarding soon with further information Master." he said.

"Okay see you soon Scan. Vebox alert the council we will head out to investigate. Misslemax out." I replied.

The view-screen went dead, and everyone turned around to look at me as we knew there was some doubt to this mission.

"You know we just fixed Misslemax again," said Flier.

"I'm aware buddy, but that's what the ship is here for. Exploration. So, let's get Scan onboard and head out. Boaty estimated time to intercept?"

"23 Earth hours Master at Warp 9.5." replied Boaty. "Do you prefer Gearatron time or Earth time."

"Both come up on my display Boaty, it's no bother." I said to my over polite friend smiling under my robotic faceplate.

"Alright well guys let's try to make history..." I said.

In a few minutes Scan flew into the landing bay of Misslemax. When everyone was secured the various force fields engaged to protect the oxygen for our humans.... well mostly me. Misslemax stirred and rose from the planet's surface, leaving in its shadows it's two cousins behind (Duplaflex and Omega Dupreme.) Slowly rising with thrusters to the spacial plane above the blue metallic planet it engaged its warp drive and with a sudden burst of lightheaded off again into the great unknown.

Chapter 2

Scan went up to the view console and quickly uploaded his information. My Zapbot staff sat around the table in the meeting room to discuss the situation. As the information flashed before our optic sensors there was vast amazement and bewilderment.

"What the heck is this thing?" said Ultra Attack our third in command.

"Do we really know what we are up against?" asked Roberta backup communications officer and Pliers's fiancé.

"Not really. It could be some kind of life form that is unaware that is causing damage to those it encounters." said Boaty answering the question.

"Oh, so you're saying this is its way of saying 'hi' to anything it runs into?" mocked his brother Flier.

"Illogical, we been unable to communicate with it so far, so we are unsure of its intentions." Boaty replied.

"Why does he have to be logical all the time?" Speedy asked. I noted my face in his direction and he calmed down.

"Would you prefer myself to tell you one of my jokes?" Boaty asked.

A collection 'NO' was placed from the table. I internally laughed for the moment realizing the absurdity of the situation. I then got up and began to pace trying to decide. The dimly lit interior of the conference room was built specifically after one of my favorite TV shows. My robotic body reflected in the windows as the stars streaked by.

"We'll investigate as best we can guys. Not much else we can do at this point other than go in with shields up. Scan do you have any else we're unaware of."

The image of Hightone came up on the corner of the screen as he was calling from his bridge station.

"Sorry to interrupt dudes but I have a priority one message from Starbase 69" Hightone stated.

"Send it through." I said.

Up came the image of a very worried human, a scientist of some sort coupled with various people running around in the background.

"MISSILEMAX! MISSILEMAX This is Starbase 59, we are under attack from the giant cloud structure. " screamed the human as he navigated the view screen. We could see that the image was only one-way, and we were not transmitting back.

"Hightone why are we not transmitting back?" Botimus asked Hightone monitoring the communication.

"Jammed at the source! And I'm talking some crazy nasty jamming. Nothing like anything I've-"

"Zapbots, this is Dr. Fradkin Howard of Starbase 59. Our scan indicate that the cloud is incredibly huge and full-on numerous types of cosmic material. Beyond that anything we send into the cloud is immediately destroyed by what appears to be large plasma balls of lighting."

The red alert signal sounded in the station's background. We could see everyone scrambling for cover.

"Zapbots we are under attack! I don't know if you can hear or see us, but we are switching to external view."

Up came the image of the cloud from the station's cameras. A huge organic moving cloud slowly reacting through space. It looks like a giant cumulus-like cloud on Earth but with blue and white lining. Giant streaks of lighting flew out and around its outer shell.

"Za...ts... it appears... that any scan we reflect at the... d... is sent back... Our sc..ans... could be considered host...ile." the doctor continues barely getting his message through.

"Hightone boost signal," I stated.

"Already at maximum bandwidth," replied Hightone.

"Zapbots.... this.... it....a...Anc.....Ge...Dev..."

The screen went blank, and transmission had been cut. All that remained was Hightone in the lower third working on trying to restore communications. But we already knew, it was too late.

"Not to scare everyone but the high propensity of the cloud structure combined with the-" started Scan.

"Scan...." I said interrupting.

"We've lost two ships so far. One human and one Zapbot." Scan replied.

"And now Station 59," said Ultra.

"Flier time till we come into contact?" I asked.

"10 Earth hours Master," said Flier.

There was a collective hush from the crew. Finally, Botimus spoke.

"Well in that case I think we need to do this a little early." he said and tapped a button on the table console.

Out of nowhere came holographic banners and confetti and the sound of a human kazoo horn. Pliers came through the back room with a huge energy cake on a plate. I heard a collective 'Happy Birthday!' as my Zapbots all smiled in their various ways.

"But it's not for....oh well yeah I guess this makes sense now." I said realizing the timeliness of the situation.

"We've been planning for a while." said Botimus.

"Awww. Thanks guys..." I said, On the energy plate was a smaller human cake, of which I disengaged with Shortstop body to fly down to the table and stuck my finger in the delicate frosting to consume.

I stayed in my smaller human form for the ceremony as the gifts they gave me obviously had to be human in size. As I sat on the table and opened badly wrapped gifts of items generated from a synthesizer. I appreciated the effort as it was a warm and festive occasion a few weeks early. It broke the seriousness of the situation as we flew at warp speed to intercept this strange entity.

The last gift was from Boaty and when I opened it, I was very impressed. He had actually found an old fashion VHS tape of one of my favorite sci-fi movies I loved as a kid. Granted I had nothing to play it on the entire ship, but I'm sure I could generate an old fashion VHS player if I needed to. This one touched me the most.

As everyone else left I re-engaged with my Shortstop body and carefully picked up the smaller delicate offerings placing them carefully in my storage compartment. As Boaty and I cleaned up the area I picked up the tape and quoted from the movie.

"'It was the best of times it was the worst of times'... any memories that bring to your computational cortex Boaty?"

"Not really, other than Happy Birthday. I did find the movie a little illogical in conclusion." he stated.

"Boaty, just because the story is illogical doesn't mean it's bad." I stated.

"Yet I find it hard to believe then Master." he replied. I just robotically smiled under my face guard.

"Boaty, you've been alive now for several years, and yet, have much to learn."

"Apparently, I have..., however. " and he paused to quote another line from the movie "I have been and shall always be your friend."

"I know," I replied. "However, if we don't find out what this thing is, we may not be friends very much longer."

"So... this Matrix thing." the reporter asked.

"The Matrix of Leadership."

"Yes.... what is it?"

"To be honest I don't know. It's a small device that interfaces with my X-O suit and larger Zapbot body to provide wisdom and as last resort extra firepower. We really can't explain where this comes from. It also seems to possess huge amounts of information of which we had only begun to explore."

"So how do we know that this device, this mythically magic..."

"it's not magic... not really. It's unknown science to use at this point."

"...is not going to turn against us now?" the reporter asked.

I stopped. How did she know and how did this get leaked out? I had to answer honestly.

"Unfortunately, we don't...." I said.

Chapter 3

We sat in my living quarters at the top of Fortress Misslemax. Besides my human friends there were four mini Zapbots outside of the tapes that provided me with companionship. Although I would say at times it was more like employees who worked for me as personal assistants, yet they were my steadfast robot friends.

Click - One of the first created next to Boaty. A happy go-lucky robot who adored me in every-way. Kind of like a younger brother with a verbal lisp in that he would always end his sentences with a clicking sound. Never could figure that out. If I needed something done, he would also be able to get it accomplished and was my personal doctor in times of need for my human body.

SuperRobot - Click's twin and counterpart in helping me with managing my hectic life. Super was excellent in getting in the weeds and determining what needed to be done with sticky political situations. A politics junkie, he would always advise me what to do, or not do when we visited other cultures.

Tiny - Another uppity go getter that you couldn't help but love. Tiny was more like your younger brother who got a job at the auto repair shop. If there was something that needed to be fixed, he would be doing it on the human levels.

Experiment - The tall skinny brother of the four. Rarely spoke but when he did it was profound and precise. He would always calculate any situation with expert precision.

The four of them would be my trusted advisers and confidants whenever we dealt with sticky situations. They knew everything about me and could react to things before I even did.

"So, what do you think?" asked Super.

"For the interview?" I inquired.

"Correct."

I paused.... slowly stirring my tea hoping that I was making the right decision.

"You know I'm sure this is going to go horribly wrong." I replied.

"It sometimes does. ^{click}" responded Click.

"But it would be good press for relations with the Mars colonists." said Tiny.

"*sigh* okay just make sure we can final approval before air." I asked. I put down my teacup and moved to the window. "What else is on the docket?"

"Nothing professional. ^{Click}" said Click.

"What do you mean 'nothing professional.'?" I said raising a human eyebrow this time.

"Um... well it's just... personal." said Super.

"Personal?"

"Mike.... Mike Q." said Tiny

"The rumors are starting to leak out of even our prolific stronghold." said Experiment politely.

I paused. They all knew the situation; you didn't have to have psychic powers to see what was going on. I realized the longer I put this off the longer I was only delaying the inevitable.

"Oh?" I said.

"What do you want us to do? ^{click}" asked Click.

It seemed the whole Universe centered on my life. As if the I was the single point of all reality of time and space. I turned around to look at the window and saw we were dropping out of warp.

"Nothing for now..." I said.

Saved by the warp bell...

Meanwhile, a few larger levels down...and a few minutes earlier...

In the crowded bar on Misslemax regular barhop Speedy was sitting with fellow chums Rup, and Hot Shot. Bop part-time security general, part-time energy bartender continued to polish the energy collection bins (also known as glasses.)

"So... a brother, eh?" asked Speedy inquiring about the last adventure.

"Yep..." replied Bop not wanting to get personal.

"I'm presuming you're not going to tell me about it?" asked Speedy.

"Maybe. one day... all you need to know is that I have a brother, he's corrupted and ..."

"And?" asked Hot Shot joking. Bop gave him that 'you want another or not' look.

"Maybe there is a way of saving him. I don't know yet." replied Bop.

"I don't understand why everyone has to be so secret around here." Speedy replied. Timetravel his older brother walked in and proceeded to sit down at the enormously large table. Bop didn't have to ask what he wanted, he just provided him his favorite.

"I'm sitting here with the two most mysterious Zapbots in the Universe," said Speedy to Timetravel.

"Oh, I know Rup's secret!" said Hot Shot. Rup slammed his hand above his audio speaker and Hot Shot shut up.

"Some things are better not known, it creates... too much... confusion lad." said Rup

"Hrmph, at least I wasn't confused about being nice to Tiremarks and Tiretracks for being..."

"I apologized to them both and we're good!" retorted Rup. "No Zapbot here is perfect."

"Far from it, you would figure with our advance programming we would be." said Timetravel.

"I've heard someone around here is as perfect as one could be." said Hot Shot.

"Protectors don't count. They don't have organic brains." said Rup.

"Nor do Scan or the Smartabots." said Speedy.

"Tech Team... we call them Tech Team now Speeds," Timetravel correcting him.

"But I've said Smart-A-Bots for many years!" whined Speedy. "I was talking about Boaty. I mean have you even seen him make an error?"

The stars outside came to a standstill and Misslemax dropped out of warp. The crew got to their feet and saw what the rest of the ship saw. A large vaporous cloud, thousands of miles long (or kilometers whatever you prefer) stretching in front of them. It looked like it stretched across the entire Universe with its blue plasma like colors.

Then all of their optic sensors saw as a tiny ship in the distance was moving around the cloud. They all thought the same thing in their heads but only Bop mouthed it.

"Nonocons..."

The red alert sirens sounded, and everyone got up from their chairs and proceeded to their stations.

"Am I boring you Mr. Anselmo" the reporter continued. I realized I was thinking of things. Thinking of robots, humans, and other species I cared about. My mind had started to wander from the boring interview.

"No where were we?" I badly recovered.

"The cloud?" she replied.

"Oh yes...."

We dropped out of warp and came up to the cloud slowly. I was already being lowered down to my Shortstop body from my X-O suit and connecting with it when everyone ran onto the bridge.

"Status?" I asked in my Shortstop voice.

"Nonocon ship 1000 kilometers away from us." said Boaty.

"On the view screen please."

Just as it came up on the view-screen the hailing message came in through Hightone's console. I just waved with my hand to put it on. I knew already who it was. Up on the screen came the interior of a darkened ship, and a lone silver/red body with eyes of red and horns of pure blood. If you were not in a robotic body the sight of this robot moving would freeze you cold.

"So.... Shortstop... we meet again." said Amphotron. The evil leader of the Nonocons pronounced.

"Yep... here we go again Amphotron." I said somewhat sarcastically.

"So, should both our ships just go in, or should I destroy you first?" he prodded. He didn't mention anything about the Matrix. Did that mean he didn't have it yet?

"I doubt coming to some sort of truce wouldn't be possible?" I asked sarcastically.

Flier muted communications and turned to me.

"Master, our weapons are dead." he said.

"What?"

I could see from the view-screen Amphotron as well was conversing with his crew muted as well.

"Could it be?" I asked.

"Is it possible they have some new weapon that renders us dead in the water?" asked Botimus.

"No, it's not that. It's coming from the cloud." Boaty replied. "Something from that cloud is generating a power source to render our energy weapons useless."

"What? How can that be?" replied Botimus.

"Scan, do a *ahem* 'scan' on that and see what you can find." I replied.

"Already done so Master and data is coming back. Cloud measures 100,000 miles in size directionality.

Misslemax began to drift into the cloud along with the Nonocon ship. The giant ominous fog began to absorb us as we ventured slowly into the soft haze. As we moved through the haze, we saw visions of all sorts of colors. Blue, Green, gases of all types with sparks and lighting flickering around the mighty ships. We sat motionless as we watched the incredible light show.

As a flicker appeared in the distance all our screens started to blink.

"Strange object approaching us," said Scan.

"Magnify." I stated.

Up on the screen came the image of giant blue ball. Lights of electrical energy danced around the cylindrical object.

"I'm receiving as strong radiation symbol from the inner depths of the cloud." said Boaty.

"Shields up!" I said. On our screen we could see the blue ball coming closer.

"Master, I'm picking up a scrambled message." said Hightone. He turned his chair around to face me. "Ancient in origin. I don't think we've ever seen anything like-

"Can we decode it..." I asked.

"Already on it." said Scan. "Yes, I believe it's ancient in nature, the complex structure uses several forms of--"

"SCAN! Decode it!" I snapped.

Boaty ran over to his station and interfaced to help him. The two worked on the code as quickly as two supercomputers could.

"One second..." said the giant supercomputer slowly working processing multiple requests a second.

The blue ball was coming closer, and closer to the two floating ships.

"All hands brace for impact." Botimus said.

Without warning the Blue Ball disappeared. I looked around and then turned to Scan and Boaty.

"Guys?"

"I was able to decode the message and reply to the originator on friendly terms." said Scan. "But Shortstop," he said transforming back into robot mode. "It's Ancient Zapbot language."

There was a collective 'what' from around the room.

The two ships came to a stop as we had entered some giant chamber of multiple cells. Around us were giant walls lined with honeycombed architecture that appear to be organic or silk in nature. There seemed to be no way forward except for a small hole in one of the combs that was smaller than either the two ships could fit through.

"Master, we are receiving a message from Gearatron. The cloud is less than an hour away." said Hightone.

I looked at my console, then the view-screen, back at the console. I knew we had to do something.

"Botimus, order the Super Changers to meet us in the docking bay. Ultra you have the con." I said as we got up to go and leave. Speedy turned to me.

"Next steps?" he asked.

"We have less than hour to save our world. That means we're going in." I replied stepping into the turbo-lift.

Botimus, Boaty, Flier, I in Shortstop mode and the Super Changers; Support and Lazer-Ray all flew out the Misslemax's back docking bay into the space void we were contained within; heading for the opening in the large room Misslemax floated in. It felt like we were sitting inside an alien space-dock with walls as tall as your optic sensors could see.

We were halfway towards the opening when out of the corner of our sensors I noticed movement from the Nonocon ship. I knew Amphotron could resist this opportunity either. Four other Nonocons flew out from behind him and headed our way.

"COWARD!" he communicated from afar, his evil voice echoing in the halls of the ship.

"Changers! Keep them busy!" I stated.

"Roger doger!" said Lazer-Ray. The laser fire began to open up and cross between the various robots. Botimus, Boaty, Flier and I flew through the giant hole as quickly as our propulsion systems could carry us.

"We'll keep them at bay, you go check it out. " stated Support transforming into aerial mode for attack. He charged the enemies firing his full arsenal.

As we flew through the hole we came to another giant chamber, except this time, it was all pitch black except for a small platform resting in the center. We saw a large mechanic structure in the middle, combined with this platform. It definitely looked Zapbot, but you could tell it was an older design. In the center shined a lone silver light coming from it. We flew up to the flat structure and landed on our feet, slowly walking up to the center. Our metallic footsteps clacking on the ground we walked on.

In the center was a lone piece of technology. A small circular device that contained many wires coming out of it, interfacing with the ground below. The blue wires emitted a glow as lights as energy emanated through them, coming up from the ground to the device itself. The item pulsed with a slow hum as if it was a computer from my days of my youth just starting up.

"Master!" exclaimed Botimus. "This is an ancient Zapbot device!" he cried.

"Fascinating!" said Boaty. "I wonder if this was sent out years ago and is just now returning to its homing destination?"

"Can you make out what its purpose is?" I asked.

"I'm scanning it now." said Boaty working his pad. We slowly looked at the small device, as the glow from the flat surface below us continued to pulsate with electrical currents.

"It appears that this is a beacon that was sent out millions of years ago, I dare say even before the golden-age of Gearatron." said Boaty.

"So why is it returning to us now." asked Flier.

"It appears its computation matrix is designed for a high recreation output of matter/antimatter." replied Boaty.

"Boaty... " asking him for the English version.

"It... creates... something. I'm not sure what yet Master but"

My sensors picked up that the battle had crossed over into this area, with Laser-Ray and Support firing back at the Nonocon squad, as they were pushing them back from entering the new cavern area. Their efforts however proved to be in vain as they were outnumbered. Our team turned around to help return fire at our oncoming enemies as Boaty and myself tried to analyze the device.

"I'm picking an energy surge, something I've never seen before." said Boaty.

Laser fire hit the ground below us, we both turned around and fired back at the oncoming enemies. Everyone continued to miss the oncoming enemies, as well as our team dodging all the incoming blasts of firepower.

We were so preoccupied with the battle we did not see a Nonocon sneak up behind us. Botimus turned around to fire, but it was too late. With a swift movement he grabbed the device, broke it free from its stand and flew over our heads back towards the Nonocon party.

"AFTER THEM!" I yelled engaging my boosters to fly.

Without warning the entire cavern disappeared. The blue clouds all dissipated, and we found ourselves in the vast dark night that is space. The Nonocons continued towards their ship. We gave chase but firepower came back towards our direction from the Nonocon ship. We drew back, heading back for the safety of Misslemax as it too began to fire upon the Nonocons and their ship.

The Nonocons made it back to their ship as we just landed on the Misslemax pad. Then we saw it enter warp and fly away.

"Shortstop here. Track and trace that ship and follow it! Maximum speed," I radioed.

As we entered the halls of Misslemax heading for the bridge we heard and felt the ship enter warp. We walked onto the bridge, backups Pick-Up and Carry-On got up from the front stations so Boaty and Flier could sit down. Botimus sat down and started briefing everyone. I stood there knowing that our situation just got a lot worse.

Chapter 4

"So, you just let them... get away with this thing?" asked the reporter somewhat perplexed yet excited that she maybe got her big story.

"Um... excuse me, have you ever been in a large robot laser fight?" I responded.

She didn't expect that and kept quiet.

"I thought so..." I replied. "You see robots with high computation matrix are quite difficult to hit because they move quickly out of the way. However, the same went for the other team."

"But it didn't get any better did it?" she asked.

"No... sadly..." I replied.

"Master's log supplemental. We are currently in pursuit of the Nonocon ship. No idea yet what this device's purpose is, but we sent a message to Gearatron and Vebox is searching for the lower banks of ancient Gearatron for any indication of its creation. He should be sending back some information shortly. "

The stars flew by as we closed in on the Nonocon craft. Pushing the speeds of Misslemax to its limit, we did everything we could to catch up to the evil bastards. I paced the bridge in Shortstop form itching to my hands around Amphotron's mechanical neck.

"Coming into view now," said Boaty.

Up on the screen came the rear image of the craft.

"Load all weapon banks, raise shields and go to Red Alert." said Botimus.

"Prepare for Radiation protocol if needed." Pliers noted.

Two small dots came out of the back of the ship.

"Missiles incoming!" said Boaty.

The projectiles hit our ship and we bounced around, barely maintaining warp speed.

"Return fire!" I said.

Out from Misslemax rockets flew and hit the Nonocon ship causing an explosion both ships dropped out of warp.

"Master they're hailing us," said Hightone.

"On screen."

Amphotron's gigantic head once again imposed itself upon the view screen. I slowly clenched my robotic fists.

"Shortstop we have improved our weapons greatly since our last battle. Do you wish to surrender now or just be blown into oblivion?" he said with a smirk on his face.

"Return the device Amphotron. I'm not going to be polite about this." I stated.

"So be it." he said. The screen cleared. My human body made a brief sigh.

"Prepare to launch all weapons." I said.

On the Nonocon ship Amphotron was barking his usual orders.

"Well! What is the diagnosis?" he asked Lowtone.

"It appears that this device has a huge power amplification. Something that I have never seen before. It seems it can completely regenerate matter, up to the size of a whole planet."

"So... this means... what!" said Amphotron lowering his vocal register.
"It's obvious Amphotron, this device is meant to completely recreate a planet."
"Oh... so it appears that..."

".. the device is meant to rebuild Gearatron completely," said Scan pointing at the plans Vebox sent over.

We all stood around his view screen as he pointed at the various energy points on the device. On Scan's screen he showed the various diagrams in three dimensions and explained how the energy source was like nothing we had ever seen before.

"So, sort of like a Plan B?" asked Boaty.

"Huh?" I asked.

"Yes, exactly, Master... if the plan to send you the Matrix failed, this device was meant to come back to Gearatron and reconstruct it as a last resort. That's why it was on its way back." replied Scan.

"Fascinating." said Boaty.

"So, you're telling us the Nonocons have a device that powerful enough to recreate a planet at their disposal?" asked Botimus. "That's not reassuring."

The smile of excitement of a scientific discovery left Scan's face and he looked back at the monitor then out the view screen. He transformed back into computer mode to continue his processing.

We all turned around to see a giant glow enveloping the Nonocon ship. From the center a giant light beam shot out and hit Misslemax knocking everyone off their balance. The lights dimmed and the whole ship start moving back in space.

"Fire stabilizing thrusters!" Ultra-Attack yelled.

"Shields and impulse drive are down!" cried Flier regaining his station.

"Incoming! Brace for impact!" yelled Boaty.

The Nonocon ship swung around and hit us with their lasers. Misslemax shook as everyone held onto their chairs. Emergency plates came down upon windows as they started to crack from the stress. I stumbled into my chair attempting to analyze the statistics coming in.

"What do we have left?" I asked.

"Just lasers," replied Flier.

"Fire then at the Nonocon ship!" I cried.

The laser fired at the ship and cut a huge hole in the central side of the ship. The Nonocon ship went dead as the lights went out.

"What the Gear—" said Botimus.

"It appears they exhausted all their energy with that one blast," replied Boaty.

"Probably thought it would destroy us in one shot," replied Botimus.

"Master, the Nonocon ship is retreating." responded Boaty.

"I need some assistance!" cried Plier. Carry-On was stuck underneath a fallen piece of metal. Botimus and I ran over to help lift it off him. At that moment, the main computer exploded, smoke and fire began to engulf the bridge.

"First-Fire and Flash get up here now!" I responded on the call.

"Already here!" First-Fire yelled as him and Flash came onto the bridge. They immediately began putting out the fire and smoke with their hydro-foam and force-fields to rob the fire of its oxygen.

"Pliers, causality report?" I asked.

"Hard to get information with all the noise but I'm working on it." he replied. "We are completely without thrusters. No movement at all."

"Master!" cried Speedy. He pointed towards the turbo-lift. We turn around to see Soar, holding his older brother Spacedust in his arms.

Spacedust's body lay on the medical lab table as Pliers tried feverishly to put him back together at breakneck speed. His wires laid out from his broken face and missing sides, as parts of his metal body has just melted away from the extreme heat.

He turned his head to look at me as we continued to try and save his life and he spoke with what little voice his vocal processor could muster.

"Master, what....'s the.... word?" said Spacedust.

I stopped and carefully stared at his face.

"All hands-on deck!" I said smiling.

With that his last remaining power shut down and his organic brain collapsed.

"FRAQ!" yelled Pliers. He threw his wrench around the room and got up to walk away.

Soar, his younger brother stood there in disbelief. He couldn't believe he lost his only brother. He looked over his brother's body and started to weep.

"I'm sorry Soar," I said.

"He was my big brother Master. He said he would always take care of me." Soar cried. Soar ran out of the room leaving the medical bay quite silent. Pliers stood brooding in the corner.

Botimus and I stood motionless. We had never had a Zapbot die before. Not like this. Not someone we were close to. We all wept for Spacedust, but we also knew that if we didn't get the device back, we'd all might end up like him.

Chapter 5

"So how did you wiggle your way out of this?" asked the reporter.

"I had a backup plan." I stated.

"A backup plan?"

"In any battle, I always work with...." I paused..."with Boaty to come up with several scenarios just in case. The world... space.... universe can be unpredictable. You never know what you going to find sometimes."

"So, with Matrix gone I'm presuming you were at a tactile disadvantage." for once this reporter now seeming desperate to get the scoop, actually showed some emotion and concern.

"Yes... Sadly we did not have our usual Plan B. in this scenario. No deux ex machina in this case."

"So... what did you do?"

"We have partial power back," said Scan. Pliers working feverishly with him to try and rebuild some sort of weapons and mobility for Misslemax. Scan would work on the computer code while Pliers pulled wires, mounted metal, and fused circuit boards together. Boaty and Flier were helping to meld the broken pieces of the bridge back together.

"Master dude, Gearatron has responded and requested that we do whatever is possible to bring that device back for study." Hightone communicated with a frown on his robotic face. I turned around slowly and directed my Shortstop body head in his direction.

"Reply and tell them I will do nothing to put anyone else in any danger." I said, nodding in the direction of Botimus and Ultra, who nodded back in agreement.

"Master," said Boaty. "I would advise that next time you confront Amphotron you play to his weakness."

"You mean his temperament?" I asked.

"Precisely, the one thing we've learned that he continued to hold resentment as his Achilles' heel."

"Boaty, you may have just given us our trump card." I said.

Moving under partial power we moved in the direction of the disabled Nonocon ship. We were able to basically duck-tape the ship back together and reroute some of the warp core energy back to the mainframe to help provide some sort of life support and mobility.

Misslemax was always a weird vibe. At one point it could be my body. At other points it was a starship, a giant floating city that carried my team and humans out to the stretches of the universe. Although lately we hadn't had many humans on board during war time. I could not risk losing one human life. Except the one that had a special purpose.

"If they're half as bad as we are, then they're still out here." replied Boaty.

"I know old friend. Let's see if we can find them first." I said. Knowing my arch enemy was close by. I could feel it in my sensors. My human body was sweating inside of my robotic head.

"Just keep scanning in the general vicinity." Ultra replied.

"Master!" pointed Speedy at the view-screen as the tiny blip came into view.

"Hail them!" I said. Hightone sent out the call and once again Amphotron answered.

"The last time we blew you out of the sky and still... still... you give chase!" cried Amphotron.

"Amphotron. Only.... a.... coward runs away from a battle." I stated knowing this would get under his titanium skin. I could tell his circuits were overclocking. His face turned from a smile into a hideous frown.

"PREPARE TO BE OBLITERATED YOU GERM!" he screamed! His screen went dead.

"Go to Red Alert." I said.

"Master, we only have minimal shields." cried Pliers.

"Make them hold guys!" I replied.

Meanwhile...

A foul stench held in the air. Unlike Zapbot vessels, a Nonocon ship went for a darker more muted color pallet. Dark reds, browns and grays lined the wall of the gigantic starship. A thin white stripe lined the floor of the walkway to indicate where you should walk. Walking outside of the line was considered disrespectful because you did not maintain discipline. Dust and oil lined the walls as the Nonocons were not known for their cleanliness.

No human levels on this ship. A waste of space for a species who wanted to destroy ever other species in the galaxy. Nonocons were simplistic and determined in their lives and their goals. Destruction, conquest, and victory.

Stemming all the way back from their old primitive Junkicon days, the Nonocons did not waste time with words. They let their processors do the talking. An evil offspring of the ancient Zapbots they too, had organic brains that provided them with emotions. But they attempted to subdue those emotions as much as possible.

Skydust ran down the hallway bringing supplies to the repair drones. Letting bits of dust on the floor he did not notice at all the shadows that were lingering the far corners of the hallway when he passed.

"We're getting close." cried Support as he looked at his scanners.

"Keep alert," replied Lazer-Ray. "We were told to stay alive."

"Not an easy thing to do inside of a space battle." replied Support sarcastically.

Slowly the two Super Changers moved through the Nonocon ship. After the laser had cut open the ship, they managed to find a way to sneak onto it just before the ship fled the first battle. An emergency tactic that I sent them to follow the Nonocons as a last resort.

"I'm picking up a large power signature coming from that room," replied Support pointing at the door. They slowly snuck up and it opened with a typical swoosh.

There in the room laid the Ancient Device, hooked up to various wires and gadgets, connected to the main computer. Some discoloration on the device now, which showed that whatever they tried do, did some damage to it. The crude connection to the Nonocon's device was put together as a human child usually did a pinewood derby car. It was a surprise with the power of the device it didn't destroy the ship.

"How do we get this out of here?" replied Support.

"Like this!" cried Lazer-Ray hastily reaching in and grabbing the object, ripping it from its connections. Sirens rang throughout the ship and the lights turned an ominous red. They transformed into their vehicle modes and rammed their way out of the room heading down the hallway back towards the broken hole of the ship, being held together with an emergency force field.

A few Nonocon droids came around the corner and before they completed "STOP!" they rammed them with their bodies sending the Nonocons flying into the air. The Nonocons fell flat against the floor, transformed into aerial mode and giving chase.

Out of the hole of the Nonocon ship came the Super Changers and transformed into spaceship modes. They flew with their speed as fast as they could from the Nonocon ship in the direction of Misslemax. The Ancient device in tow.

Two giant beams from the spacecraft came from the underside, hitting them and knocking them both out. They transformed into robot mode and slowly began to drift in space. The Ancient Device flew from Lazer-Ray's hands....

"NO!" he screamed....

A tractor beam grabbed ahold of device and began to tow it back to the ship. The Nonocon ship began to recharge for another blast with the potential to destroying the two Zapbots. It fired and the energy blast was met with the onslaught of a giant hand, grabbing the two Super Changers, and protecting them.

In space stood Misslemax now in robot mode with me in control. I grabbed my fellow Zapbots and carefully put them into my docking bay as various Zapbots ran up to assist them. The Nonocon ship redirected its fire towards me, and I blocked the firepower with my giant robotic arm. The blast burnt through my giant robot arm as a bird would claw his owner causing minor damage.

I slowly raised my fist and brought it down upon the already cracked Nonocon ship. In space you can hear nothing, but I saw the ship break in two as I had struck a massive blow to the main frame that was holding it together. Nonocons bodies flew lifeless out into space, and the pieces of the ship started to float as well.

With very little energy to spare, I transformed Misslemax back into spaceship mode and returned to the bridge. I did not have enough energy to fight in robot mode if we wanted to get back home. From all perspectives, we had won the battle. The siren rang through the ship as Misslemax went back into Spaceship/City mode. It was always an amazing feat of engineering to create a city that didn't crush its inhabitants when it became a giant robot.

"Status...?" I inquired walking back onto the bridge.

"Their ship is completely disabled. We're scanning for lifeforms now." replied Boaty.

Finally. I breathed a sigh of relief as it was another hard-fought battle. We were emotionally and energy exhausted as I sat down in my chair again. I stared out the view-screen seeing the lifeless body of the Nonocon ship floating in space.

"Any survivors?" I inquired.

"Scans, show low energy lifeforms. It appears if they are alive, they're disabled." replied Boaty.

"Master," replied Scan in a cautious tone. "I'm reading something funny coming from the ship."

"What do you mean 'funny'?" asked Ultra.

Up on the com from the engine room Pliers came up on the screen. In the background you could see smoke and haze around the engine room crew, as it was obvious something was up.

"Master, the mains are down. I had to take them offline. Radiation leak-" he said and quickly fell over. Repairs his brother had already passed out as well.

"Backup medical team to engine room," cried Botimus.

On the broken Nonocon ship, Amphotron limped with his broken body down the hall. Sparks flew everywhere as the atmospheric controls barely held the hallway together. Lights flickered on and off, and Amphotron with a damaged body dragged his core Nonocons to a special room he designed.

In the room was a large circular gate which was glowing. Running on its own emergency power the device was Amphotron's Emergency escape route. Victory would not be his today, but the battle was far from over.

Slowly and steadily, he threw the limp bodies of his comrades into the gate. A glowing stargate that took them to their secret emergency location. Technology that they kept from everyone. Skyscream, Skydust, Lowtone, Creator and others were all thrown into the ominous void that transported their bodies elsewhere.

The battle droids on the ship were broken due to the main computer being out. But they were as the pathetic humans say, 'a dime a dozen.' The last remaining mini tapes flew into the gate, leaving only Amphotron.

With his body badly damaged he walked over to the Ancient Zapbot device. Only someone from days long ago would know what to do with this type of device. Only he would be the one to trigger its buildup of high energy. Only HE would be the one to destroy the Zapbots.

"Oh no... no you won't beat me..." he said dripping oil pressing the screen and pulling the levers. "Not this time Shortstop...you worthless piece of flesh."

With a swift flick of his wrist, he clicked the final button on the device, sending it into final sequence. He then jumped into the gate just before it lost power and shut down.

"What is it Scan?" I asked looking over his metallic shoulder watching the strange view-screen.

"An energy buildup.... I've never seen anything like this before." Scan said, going back and forth between Computer mode and robot mode.

At that moment, I had a weird feeling.

"Scan, compare with Vebox's findings. Cross correlate with the ancient Zapbot text he sent over." I said.

"Brilliant Master!" Scan punched the screen and once again his expression went from glee to terror. He softly whispered 'Oh no.'

"What?" I asked.

"It's a detonation sequence," Boaty replied.

"FLIER GET US OUT OF HERE NOW!" I screamed.

"Warp is still offline!" he replied.

"FASTEST SPEED! Go down to the engine room and help Pliers!" I turned towards Flier who was already heading for the turbo-lift down to the engine room. "We got five minutes or we're all dead!" I yelled to him.

"On my way!" he yelled. Pick-Up took over on his station.

Flier flew down the turbo shaft arriving on the engine room deck. He waded through the smoke and gas to get to the central core room. The crystal core was engulfed in an emergency force field. Its blue light shone brightly holding in an array of complex gases.

"Radiation leak! Stay—" say Pliers as he fell into Flier's arms. Flier radioed upstairs.

"Master mains are offline!" he said over the intercom.

"WE NEED WARP NOW!" I yelled.

I looked around the room of the badly damaged bridge of Misslemax and I had no hope. I realized that Amphotron may have just won this time. No Matrix, no magic card up my sleeve. Under impulse power we had no way of getting out of range of a device with that much power in time. My mind raced for possible answers....

While that happened, I was completely unaware that Boaty got up from his chair and went down to the engine room. He walked into a mess of smoke and fog as Fliers tried to find a way to repair the mains. Boaty started walking right towards the main computer core, closed off in a force field. Flier saw him coming up and stopped him.

"Oh no... you can't go in there. The radiation would kill even you brother," he replied.

"You are correct, what's Pliers status?" Boaty asked.

"Well, he's okay but..." Flier fell to the floor as his brother hit him with his little-known knock-out ray.

"I'm sorry Brother... forgive me but time is of the essence." He pressed his hand to his brother's head generating a soft glow of light.

"Remember my brother." he said. Within seconds a lifetime of battles fought side by side was passed.

Boaty then entered the force field chamber. The onslaught of radiation hit his circuits. He turned off his emotions, but the radiation effected his mobility. He had to overclock everything in his circuits just to move and even then, it still hurt like hell.

Pliers regained consciousness and slowly stammered up as he saw in horror Boaty stuck in a force field he could not take down.

"BOATY! GET OUT OF THERE!" he screamed straining his vocal processor.

Flier regained as well, and he saw in horror his brother attempting to save the ship.

"Time to my mark?" I asked.

"One minute, thirty seconds." replied Speedy.

I sent a message to the crew indicating if they had any unfinished business to do it now. I began to surrender to the inevitable. Misslemax flew slowly away from the wreckage of the space battle. There was nothing we could do at this point. No shield could save us, no magic power could protect us. The battle had destroyed everything we had to get away from this explosion in enough time.

Inside my human body tears started to fall.

"BOATY!" Flier screamed straining his vocal circuits. Boaty worked feverishly adjusting the power crystals. The bright light of the radiation penetrating his metallic body and melting him in various places. All his computational power running at full speed and then he made the final adjustment.

"Master! The mains! They're back online!" cried Scan in complete astonishment.

"JESUS CHRIST! Warp out now!" I yelled.

Pick-Up hit the code and Misslemax flew out of space with a bright flash of light. In the rear a giant explosion occurred behind us, pulling in the mass around it. The cosmic dust began to collect and metallic fragments began to reconstruct themselves and a ball began to form.

Misslemax flew out at accelerated speed as the stars flew behind it. The Nonocon ship wreckage began to evolve in the explosion and soon a body began to form. Then it grew, transforming into bits and parts, growing in both size and mass. In a minute it was a mile wide, then two minutes 10, tripling its size forming the likes of a giant robotic sphere. But this wasn't a sphere, it was a planet.

Meanwhile in the engine room of Misslemax, an old friend slumped to the ground exhausted. His circuits went into standby mode because he had to know how it all ended.

We reached orbit far enough away from the new planet. I looked out the cracked view-screen and couldn't believe it. What appeared to be a Zapbot like planet stood before us, floating in space. A large metallic body filled with drops, crevasses, tunnels, and power emanated from it. The ancient device had finished what it started to do, it rebuilt a home for robotic like beings and it was a sight to behold.

"Can you believe it," cried Botimus from his chair.

"A new world! A new... Gearatron!" Ultra-Attack said.

As we were breathing a sigh of relief of finally being safe my intercom lit up. On my internal view-screen came Flier.

"Master, think you better get down here.... hurry." said Flier said in a somber voice.

I realized Boaty's empty chair, and all of a sudden it hit me.

I flew out of my chair running as fast as my Shortstop body could carry me. Flying down the turbo-lift at top speed. What was only a few seconds was eternity as I felt the loss already reaching into my human soul. I held back tears as I knew I had to be strong. I reached the engine room flying on my boosters until Flier and Pliers both stopped me. My body crashed up against them as they prevented me from going into the force field.

"NO!"

"You can't go in! It will kill you!" cried Pliers.

"If I don't, he'll die!" I cried.

"Master.... he's already dead." replied Fliers. I cut off my boosters and landed on my Shortstop feet. I could see the pain in both Flier and Pliers's faces.

I ran up to the shield. I raised my fist to smash it, but it was met with a large thud. I screamed at the top of my audio outputs.

"BOATY!"

The name... the name that had been so simple... Something I gave my first creation was lying as a pile of half melted metal in the corner. He slowly began to move and inched his way over to where I was. His face completely misconfigured with a small resemblance of what he was.

I separated from my Shortstop body and went down to the ground in my human form. I pressed my hand up against his large hand as he looked at me from the floor.

His communication was all out except his audio processor.

"Ship? Safe?" he asked.

"Yes... Boaty you saved us all. You saved us!"

"Good..." he muttered. He was holding on I could tell. "Do not grieve Master, it's your birthday..." he said. My face had tears running down it. I was doing everything I could to hold it together trying not to cry.

"Boaty.... please..." I said through the tears.

"I have and shall always be... your friend..... Anthony..."

With that my best Zapbot friend, my robotic child shutdown. His yellow eyes going out and his body fell to the floor. I fell to my knees screaming so loud I'm sure Amphotron heard it from across the Universe.

Chapter 6

The reporter sat stunned... This was not how she expected this interview to go. She expected that she would be pulling all the dirt to slander my name across the Universe. But what was supposed to be a hard-hitting interview turned into a revealing character piece, and she found herself at a loss for words.

"My gawd," she said almost holding back the tears herself. "What did you do..."

"First Spacedust, then Boaty... we did something we never had to do before..." I replied.

On the surface of New Gearatron we viewed the robotic casket. We finished a ceremony for Spacedust but now we were onto Boaty. This one was hurting me most of all. I realized no matter what I did, I couldn't save them all. I couldn't even save him. In my Shortstop form I watched as my best friend for over ten years was lowered into the ground. A hole Pliers and Repairs had carved out for our friend as we began what I would consider a loosely put together ceremony as our emotion sensors were all on.

"We have gathered here today, to honor the dead. A Zapbot which everyone knew... a brave courageous Zapbot. A Zapbot who always put himself first, as he did today." I said solemnly.

I paused as looked around. Everyone was motionless.

"But in the mist of his death here born is a new world. A world of which he helped create and a world which he died for. Because of these acts he will always be remembered."

I paused for another second, which seemed like forever.

"Boaty, will always have a place in our computational drives. A place that even I can't describe. A place which is to me is more than anything we can ever understand."

Another pause. Flier was silent.

"For my friend I can say this... he was more than just a creation. He was my..."

I almost lost it...

"he was my friend..... and I will forever love him. Farewell..."

Hightone played the bagpipes as Boaty's casket was lowered into the ground and the metal sheet was slid over locking him in place. It was the equivalent of burying a human body. With that we all slowly walked back to Misslemax in robot mode, not saying a word.

Mike Quartz ran up to me as he leapt out of Timetravel entering the docking bay. We had stopped off at Tockmak 3 on our way back to 'old' Gearatron and Mike met me there from a passing human ship.

He grabbed me and held me in a hug I swear almost broke my Zapbot replacement parts. I could tell he too had been crying. He slowly pulled away as Timetravel transformed slowly and went to the Zapbot elevator to head back to the bridge.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied. We began to walk to the human elevator. Click and Super left us alone.

"First Matt, Spacedust and now Boaty... it seems like death is around us." I said.

"Anthony. I want to apologize..." he said stopping me as we rode the elevator.

"No.... Mike.... it's okay..." I said.

"No, it's not okay..."

"No..." I looked into his eyes. And we both knew what we meant to say to each other.

In my living quarters at the top of Misslemax we finally let go of our inhibitions, our secrets and embraced our passions. For all the pain and torture, I had endured I had kept everyone at arm's length, never allowing anyone to be close to me—at least physically.

Boaty's death for its myriad impacts was the catalyst that I needed to let all my hidden desires go. Boaty was every trusting companion and my wise mentor. He guided me through this new frontier of a Zapbot universe.

Mike in kind was my guide to my human self. When I had suffered, he had suffered. He may not have ever been aware of it—but he was my rock.

Slipping from my holographic robe, I led Mike over to the bed. Sitting, I nodded beside me, and he sat. Our eyes met. After what seemed like several seconds, we mutually smiled at each other. He hadn't run from my room.

As we lay down on the holo-bed, Mike pulled me into his embrace. My breath was surprisingly unlabored. I had let go of all my hang ups and seized the moment.

After a few moments of spooning, I turned to face Mike. His smile remained. I found my own grin to be goofy and wide upon my face. I forced myself to frown if only to lessen my broad smile. It didn't take long for my face to beam once more.

As our breathing became synchronized, I sensed that Mike was waiting for me to make the next move. Again, he hadn't bolted from my room—he wanted this as much as I did. But I knew that I had to take the lead here.

I leaned in toward his mouth and he closed his eyes as our lips made contact. Soft, simple, and sweet, we kissed on the hovering bed for several seconds.

I gasped. "HE WAS STILL HERE!"

Mike opened his eyes as I drew back my head.

Without hesitation I leaned in once more and we both closed our eyes as we began to make out.

Although exhausted by the day's events I found a surge of energy pulse through my body. Wrapping my arms around Mike I brought our two bodies into close contact.

As Mike buried his face into my chest, he released a small sigh. I took this opportunity to whisper into his ear, "I hope you're still here in the morning."

With that said, I slowly removed his clothes. He didn't resist.

When morning rose on Tockmak 3 our bodies lay intertwined, and asleep on the holographic bed, enjoying a much-needed rest.

The bar was quiet, other than Bop pouring various drinks here and there. My Zapbots didn't know how to react. The noise of the various crews including the Build Team outside repairing Misslemax went about. No talk today about secret pasts. Even Speedy was silent as no one knew exactly what to say.

A few would mumble something to occasionally break the silence. No one felt like talking, and then I strolled in as Shortstop and sat down to the bar with my friends. Botimus was the first to speak.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"I think I will be," I replied.

Bop handed me a special energy drink the replenished both my bodies. Flier finally spoke.

"Why did it have to be him?" he asked.

"Because" I replied, "sometimes the Universe just works that way." I said.

Flier who had lost his brother could not get over this. A part of him was in constant pain now and his computational processor was numb. Soar sat next to him feeling the same pain of losing someone so close.

"Well at least we know Amphotron is finally gone," replied Speedy.

"I hope so," I replied. "But nevertheless, we will carry on."

"What?" piped up Carry-On.

"No just speaking..." I said.

"Oh..." he replied figuring out the misplacement of words.

"To Boaty, Spacedust, and all those we lost! Shall their names never be forgotten!" I replied.

"TO BOATY!" everyone cried and clinked their glasses.

I had scanned the reporter's pad with my optic sensors. She was not going to ask me about a girlfriend now. It seemed that question was inappropriate. She tried to hide a tear that ran down her face as she rose to her feet.

"Well...Thank you for sharing this story with me today.... Anthony." The camera person stopped recording and they both quietly exited the room.

I took my cup and went back to my study as Click and Super provided them an escort out back to their Tockmak news stations. I sat down in my chair and pulled up my computer console. I opened my log and for once I just typed in my log without verbally saying them. Like I use to do in the old days.

Using the holographic keyboard, I clicked away finishing my report.

"Personal Log Stardate 2000.12.21 - Today on my actual birthday I began life anew. I begin what I consider the next phase of my life. I've lost a great companion and my heart will always ache for him. But I must move on. I must find a way to turn his death into reason for life. For if I don't then he will have died in vain.

"If the Universe has a plan, then maybe this is meant to be. I've heard from a famous man that we don't know the road we're on till we look back on it. That may be but.... I don't want to know the road I'm on anymore. All I know is I need to find my way, whatever that way is has to be honest, truthful and I need to be me. I can no longer hide in the shadows of a secret.

"For today I will always remember not only the day I was born but the day my friend will be reborn in an idea that will carry me forward for the rest of my life.

"New Gearatron will serve for this inspiration for new LIFE. And if that is case, I shall go back there from time to time to visit my friend. For he will ever be a part of me and I him. Until the day when I am gone again, or we all are one..."

Epilogue

Amphotron came through the star-gate and landed on the barren terrain of the planet. Up to him walked a dark Nonocon, colored all black to him. A smile of pleasure ran across his face because of the loss of the battle. Amphotron saw him in disgust.

"So... defeated him I see," said Secretish.

"You can wipe that smug look off your face!" cried Amphotron.

"Ha, all in good time Amphotron," cried Secretish.

"Well, did you succeed?" he asked.

"We're still trying to figure out how to work the darn thing." he replied. He turned in the general direction and saw Tri-Star still tinkering with the Matrix. Trying to get it to do something. Inside Tri-stars head sat the body of my friend Alan.

"DAMMIT! why won't it open!" he said.

"No matter, soon we will understand its full power and the Zapbots will be destroyed. Then the Universe will be mine!" cried Amphotron.

"Ours...." corrected Secretish...

"Yes.... sure... ours..." replied Amphotron hiding his evil grin.

To Be Continued...