

## Foreword

This is a story that I wrote to include my old pen pal Jeremy. When I was younger my friends I grouped into three specific individuals at the time, Matt E, David D. and Jeremy. All of these you met in the Escape story.

Nothing special to say here other than this was not a typical Zapbot adventure, and some dialog inspired by the Godfather movie. Even the original version of this I felt was written extremely well at the time. I'm happy to expand upon this now many years later.

Anthony S. Anselmo

# **Mystery**

By Anthony S. Anselmo

## **Chapter 1**

"Come on give me a fast one!" shouted Spin-Cycle.

"I've already struck out two of your players!" replied U-Turn

"Yeah, all is it is, is luck!" replied Spin-Cycle

It was the annual Mini-cars baseball game. Once a year the Minis would have a baseball game at Gearatron Stadium, attempting to recreate an old fashion Earth tradition. On one of the few bright shiny days of the year the numerous teams would compete for a victory that they would boast about for the forthcoming next year.

I was joined by my human friend Jeremy as we watched the game from behind home base. Jeremy was my old friend from many years ago when I was just a simple Earthling who had a pen pal that I met at my Grandma's house in Florida. This was back in the days before the Internet and the ability to communicate without paying ridiculous charges over the phone lines. Back in those days your pencil and paper was the preferred way to communicate.

U-Turn wound up for the pitch. Throwing the extremely oversized baseball for Zapbot needs, he sent it flying through the air. In order to make the game somewhat fair all technical systems were taken offline and the Zapbots had to run only on their emotions and mobility systems. This gave the game a somewhat random chance as seen when the humans would play it. Otherwise, having robots of equal skill and ability playing Baseball would be extremely boring.

"Strike!" cried Flier as the umpire.

"No way!" replied Spin-Cycle.

"Yes way!" replied Flier.

"Ughh!" cried Spin-Cycle as he turned around and got ready for the next pitch. U-Turn wound up and delivered another towards his direction.

"Strike two!" replied Flier.

"Oh, great Gearatron!" replied Spin-Cycle

From the stands Jeremy and I were enjoying the game in our standard X-O suit modes. Back in the day I got to see him play a game when he was quite young. After his team was defeated, I was the one guy providing him the after-game pep-talk to cheer his mood. As such I wasn't really a fan of the sport, however he made such an impact with the Zapbots that I had to become involved.

"Looks like a ball from here?" said Jeremy.

"Nah, believe me, Flier's good at catching these things!" I replied.

We heard the crack of a ball and saw a white dot fly high into the horizon. Spin-Cycle transformed and flew towards first base. Out in the outfield Poppin ran back and stuck his hand up for the ball. It fell into his glove, and he grabbed it and threw it towards Smokey who received the ball and looked in time to see Spin-Cycle hovering over second base.

"You're out sir," replied Smokey.

"Awww robot!" replied Spin-Cycle rolling back to the dugout.

Up on the loudspeakers came our familiar communications personality providing the play by play.

"And now a totally cool little dude stepping up to bat. Designated hitter and Timetravel's little bro, Speedy!" went Hightone over the speaker.

Speedy came up to the bat and took his stance, slightly bending his knees he grabbed the metal bat and looked at U-Turn intensely. As I was consuming some sort of food, I received a notification from Boaty.

"Man, if I had a dime every-time you beeped me Boaty-" I said out-loud as Jeremy smiled.

"But Master you already are rich. We don't really use money here on Gearatron." replied Boaty over the speaker.

"It's a phrase Boaty... what's up?" I replied somewhat laughing.

'Misslemax is ready to leave for Tockmak 3 whenever the game concludes. Your parents wish to see you when you arrive.'

"How long to Tockmak 3 at Warp 5?"

"About five hours."

"Okay we'll go at Warp 1."

"That should make our E.T.A..."

"Good no problem Boaty, over and out!" I said commenting and telling the communication call to cut short with my mind. I really was not in the mood to deal with my parental units with everything that was going on. The incidents of six months ago still rang in my head and as life went on, I felt I was constantly looking over my shoulder trying to figure out when the next shoe would drop.

"How are you doing?" asked Jeremy.

"What do you mean?" I asked trying now to show my emotions.

"You've seen a bit stressed over the last few months. More so than usual."

I paused before I responded looking at my friend. How could I explain to him all the craziness that ensued my life over the past few years? From the death of some of our beloved Zapbots, to the resurrection of one specific one, the battle to save Earth only to find out that the governments were even more corruptible than I could ever possibly imagine. To the loss of some of my dearest friends. To the rebuilding of an entire civilization, establishing a local government, interacting with several other discovered races across the Universe. I had saved the Universe more times than I could count and yet now after finding possible true love through a bizarre series of circumstances, I had to somewhat cheat to keep this love from being taken away from this very universe I saved.

Still after all these years, close to turning 30 now my life was a constant evolution of stress. If it wasn't for my parents extremely good upbringing, I wouldn't have been able to handle it. I had programmed a special therapy program on the Holoroom to occasionally visit and vent. Unfortunately, the computerized therapist wasn't quite sure that 'creator of an entire civilization of robots and saving the Universe multiple times' was a feasible story to believe. Carry-On had to help me adjust the programming on that one.

After several seconds of thought I just turned to my old friend and went.

"Let's just say I'm fine, but I worry about everyone a lot. Especially my good friends."

"Strike two!" cried Flier. As I heard his voice my attention wandered back to the game. I noticed Speedy was nervous now. It was three balls and two strikes, and I could see Speedy was anxious.

"Uh-Oh, Speedy's getting nervous," replied Jeremy.

"Strike three! You're out!" cried Flier.

Speedy just stood there for a second and threw his bat down. He transformed and rode out of the field.

"And it appears that Speedy has left the game," said Hightone. I swung my head around to the announcer's box and gave Hightone a dirty look hoping Speedy hadn't heard it. He proceeded to silence himself as I stood up.

"Where you going?" Jeremy asked.

"Speedy's the emotional type. I better go talk with him. Just sit tight," I replied.

"All right but hurry we're in the eighth inning." replied Jeremy.

As I walked up to the location where my Shortstop body was sitting and engaged with it, Timetravel came running up to me.

"Let me go talk to him," Timetravel said.

"Ya sure, you know how he is," I replied.

"Yeah, I'll cheer him up. You go back and enjoy the game Master," replied Timetravel.

"Thanks, Timetravel, let me know if you need anything."

Timetravel nodded and headed out to catch his younger brother.

On the flip side of things, I really couldn't complain too much. With great power did come great responsibility. I got a chance to do amazing things and help a lot of people and aliens. It was a tradeoff. Some days we barely made it through alive and other days you could experience the wonders the Universe could offer.

As such I took this opportunity to go spend some time with my good friend Jeremy. I did not know what the future would hold or what would come, so I needed to enjoy the moments of peace when I could.

"I'm a total loser! I'm completely worthless in everything I attempt!" cried Speedy drinking his energy drink.

"Now come on now Speeds, you know you're not. Everyone's got different talent." replied Timetravel trying to cheer up his younger brother.

"Why was I made so weak and puny and incapable of doing anything!"

"Master Anthony gave you the best optic sensors anyone has."

"A lot of good it does when you can't hit the ball."

"Speedy, come on. You are being way too hard on yourself."

The crowd at Bop's bar was busy today as the two Zapbots drowned their issues in an energy drink. Bop was slowly listening at a distance wondering if he should jump into the conversation. He could see that Timetravel had a decent handle of the situation.

"Sometimes I wish I could trade my optics for something else. Agility, strength, something else then just a simple spy." Speedy continued putting his face in his hands.

Timetravel continued to put his hand on Speedy's robotic shoulder and gently pat his younger confidant.

"You're fine the way you are, Trust me. You obviously had a spot to fill because we were one of the first Zapbots ever created by Master Anthony."

Speedy looked up from his hands. He did appreciate his older brother as it helped him keep his spirit. Most of the time Speedy was very positive in nature. A very 'go-lucky' type of robot. It was only when he failed at something that he would tend to get bogged down in the situation having repetitive logic run circles in his processing cortex.

"You will find your place, someday. Until then just try your best, and we can work on that batting technique."

"I don't know... I just don't know. " said Speedy.

"Hey bat-bat-bat-batter SWING!" cried Iron from the dugout.

"If he misses the ball, with the call, they will fall," replied Poppin rhyming.

U-Turn was up again as pitcher and this time Dodge was at bat. The score was tied and what happened next depended on Dodge.

Timetravel came into the arena and sat down next to us two humans in the front row.

"How is he?" I asked.

"He's all right. He went in for a charge, so I think after some rest he'll be fine. You know how he can bounce around sometimes." replied Timetravel.

"Oh, believe me I know... Speedy has always been the bipolar of the group." I replied.

At that moment, again, we heard the crack of the ball, and the white dot flew up in the stratosphere and out of the ballpark.

Dodge's team ran out of the dugout and jumped all over him, screaming and cheering. Within a minute he was being carried above and out of the stadium for the victory game feast. The other team being good sports went out to join them. It was truly a high point in the life of my Zapbots.

I breathed in the fresh Gearatron oxygen and took the moment in for a few. With my recent experiences every day I considered a blessing and when everything was right it did indeed feel good.

## Chapter 2

I proceeded to judge my next move carefully. Touching the queen and pointed to the square that I wanted her to move to. The computer hologram walked to the square, swaying her behind with every step.

Jeremy then picked and moved his piece; it was strange sensation but at that moment I realized the mistake I had made. Thus, the problem when I turned off my computerized brain and just let me know human one do its work.

"Checkmate!" went the computer voice. Jeremy roared back with laughter.

"Ah ha! I beat you buddy, you said I couldn't," Jeremy said.

"I say that to everyone I play with." I replied.

"Yeah right."

"No seriously, I haven't won a game yet."

"You mean every single person you've played with; you've lost to?"

"All my Earth friends, all my Zapbots and fifteen aliens," I replied.

"Ha, that's funny."

"Yeah, I guess it is." I said starting to slouch in the couch.

"What's wrong?" Jeremy asked.

"Oh.... just a bit nervous around my parents. You know me and my Dad." I replied.

"Uh... Actually, I don't."

"Oh... That's right, well watch him, and I when we transport down."

"Why?"

Before I could reply to the typical computer beep was made and Boaty came over the speakers.

"Master, we are approaching Tockmak 3," replied Boaty.

I looked out the window to see the familiar Earth copy planet floating under the vein of Misslemax. Tockmak 3, a new beginning for humans. Established with an off-shore United States government to help colonize the new world. When initially started it was moving off with tremendous pace. Now only a few years later it became bogged down in greedy corporate regulation. As my Zapbots began to investigate the corruptions of Earth's government we also proceeded to do some research on Tockmak 3 and while not initially as bad as Earth, it was another case of massive control by conspiracy groups.

My parents were there for now as I could not find no other place in the universe safer for them. I turned to Jeremy and looked at him as I began my walk out of my apartment.

"Well, here we go."

We reached my parent's home and of course my mother came rushing out to me, proceeding to hug me too tightly that back in the day would cause neck injury. With a replace metallic spinal cord now, this was not an issue.

"Oh, welcome home! My bubba's home," she said.

"Mom," I said pointing at Jeremy.

"Hello Jeremy, how are you, Joe can you believe how much they have grown!" my mom replied.

"Hi Mrs. Anselmo, how are you?" Jeremy asked.

"I'm fine, how's your mother?" my Mom asked.

"Fine. She calls me constantly." Jeremy replied.

"Remind me I have some cookies for you two to take home," my mother continued becoming ever gushing by the second.

"Fine mom," I said, moving to my father and giving him a kiss. Yes, in Italian cultures this is considered appropriate and is no way considered gay.

"What's new?" my Dad asked we walked into my old home and sat down on the couch.

"Ahhh Dad, Didn't the crew I assign to you fix the railroad ties?" I asked.

"Naw, I told them I'd get it done."

"Dad... I wish you have let the crew do the work." I replied. My Dad was a stubborn old individual, determined to get this way and do things his way. It literally was his way or the highway when it came to work. He took too much pride in his efforts which caused consternation between him and my mom from time to time.

"I don't work anymore, what do you expect me to do when I'm retired?" my father replied. As the advent of the technology, we provided them did provide him to remain healthy, it also changed his needs to acquire money or food. The food processor did most of the cooking now, and they had any type of entertainment or transport readily available at hand.

"Is the team cutting the grass and-" I started.

"Your grass is fine, and they took down two trees yesterday." he replied.

"And how is U-Turn working for your transportation." I asked. U-Turn was my assigned mini-bot to my parents. He was developed after my father's love of Chevy suburbans and provided protection for them just in case any enemy decided to come around.

"He's a nice guy, but man he talks too much when I'm driving. Sometimes I just want to listen to the radio."

"And you've given him this feedback, right?" I asked.

"No..." said my father.

"I don't see any problem," said Jeremy whispered in my ear.

"Just wait till we start talking about something," I said.

I looked around the old relic of my childhood home. Moved foundations and all from Earth to Tockmak 3 through a massive process. Old style wood paneling was in the downstairs that provided the warm earth tones to the tan carpet. My parents two dogs kept the family active and busy, as well as additional protection. I rubbed the dog's stomachs as I really missed the companionship of natural animals from time to time. Boaty recently had got a pet dog-bot to keep him company and Flier a snake-bot to up his brother. But even these two fantastic pieces of engineering were not as amazing as a simple organic pet.

"Hi Annie!" said my youngest sister coming down the stairs. I stood up to give her a hearty hug.

"Hey sis! How's school?" I asked.

"Meh, it's alright. So, is it true?"

"Is what true?" I asked.

"Is the Earth being run by Aliens?"

"Not quite, but I'm not at a liberty to disclose." I said awkwardly changing the topic.

"Beth says hi from the Andreamia 4 laboratory," replied Lisa. My other sister Beth was studying marine biology on another Earth establishment as Lisa was finishing up college here.

"Dinner's ready!" my Mom shouted from upstairs.  
"Let me guess Spaghetti," I replied to my Dad.  
"Of course," he answered.

After a two course Spaghetti dinner with meatballs, Italian sausage, Italian bread, salad, and my sister's desserts Jeremy was ready for nap and I was adjusting my food processing unit to properly remove the waste from my systems.

"So, how's life up there?" my father asked.  
"Good, I can't complain," I replied.  
"Any problems up there?" he continued to prod.  
"No, not really.. why?"  
"You staying off those hologram things?"  
"Dad!"

"I tell ya, ever since they opened one of those things, all the kids do is hang around them. Heard they got some X-rated stuff going on with drugs."

"Have you reported this to the police?" I asked.  
"Yeah, it still goes on!" my father responded.  
"Okay well I'll take a look into it."  
"Joe, would you let him eat his dinner?" my mother replied.

My father all of a sudden got upset and got up leaving the room, throwing his plate into the kitchen sink. I was a bit taken back by my dad's disposition. I looked at my mother as I could tell she was about to break down in tears. I turned to Jeremy to ask him for some time alone and he politely excused himself from the table.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"It's not going well," my mother said trying to contain tears. I started to get an earful how my mother and father were not getting along. Going back to my sister's room I had her confirm and sure enough things were on shaky ground. This was all news to me as I had been very distant lately as I did not want to provide my parents with my sorted affairs. If my mother had known how many times, I came close to dying she would have a heart attack.

I walked back into my old bedroom, now turned into a guest room with the only thing remaining that I recognized was my bed. The blue walls had been repainted tan with the shadow of the old splatter paint design being hidden underneath. The cracks in the wall that would emerge every winter were not gone as the foundation itself was completely repaired by the Build Team.

Jeremy walked up and bumped his shoulder into mine.

"I can somewhat see what you mean," he said.

"Yeah, it's always been a dysfunctional family," I said. Growing up in this household I was a closeted young individual who had no friends, fitting the very stereotypical definition of a nerd and dealt with my family constantly fighting more than a typical Simpson's cartoon episode. Even though I had changed, and my family had all the resources in the world they still continued to have their problems. "You know it's weird, part of the reason why I enjoy my life with the Zapbots is that it gave me a chance to get away from my problems," I replied.

"But you got a whole new set of problems..." Jeremy answered.



"Yeah.. there is some growing up I had to do, and really quick I might add. I would like to hope that I still have somewhat of my childhood within me."

"No matter how old we get, we will always be a child in our parent's eyes," Jeremy replied.

"Well, that's very apropos. Where did you hear that?"

"You told me," Jeremy said smiling walking down the stairs.

I chuckled a little and then followed my friend downstairs to play with the dogs outside.

"You sure you can't stay any longer?" asked my Mom.

"Mom I have a meeting with the President of Tockmak tomorrow," I replied.

"I know, say 'hi' to Boaty for me. He's so polite!" my mother responded trying to conceal the awkwardness of the goodbye.

I gave my two parents a kiss and Jeremy and myself got into our larger Headmaster vehicles and flew off into the literal sunset back up to the Misslemax waiting for us in the orbiting space above. The four-hour visit wasn't too bad, but I could tell my parent's marriage was on the rocks, even more so than usual. I offered to give them counseling but my father refused as he was stubborn in his ways. A quick call with U-Turn helped provided more details.

"And why didn't you bring this to my attention," I asked U-Turn.

"Your father says, 'Don't talk about family business.'" replied U-Turn.

"Well yes that would be my father."

"I will try my best to keep an eye on them but-" started U-Turn.

"Your job is security U, just stay out of the family politics, trust me." I responded.

"Absolutely Master," replied U-Turn.

Jeremy and I landed in the Fortress Misslemax docking bay and proceeded to unload. I waved him a good night as I headed up to my apartment for a good night of rest. Mike was back on Earth finishing up some stuff with school so I had about a week before I would see him again. In my bedroom as I was wrapping up typical nightly duties of brushing one's teeth, he was conversing with me over the video com.

"So have you told your parents yet?" Mike asked.

"Mom, knows. Dad has a clue, but it's just not talked about."

"Have you told them about me yet?" Mike asked.

"No.. not yet.. Just give me some time will you."

"Look you're going to have to tell them at some point if you want to make this work," Mike replied. I walked over to the computer screen with a sonic toothbrush in my mouth.

"Lookph thisfh takesh a littleth deplomiacyth," I said trying to convey my words. I ran to the bathroom and put the toothbrush down and came back to the screen. "Hi Dad, I want you to meet my boyfriend who is having relations with a half man/half robot being which is me."

"They don't know...?"

"No of course not! My mother would have a heart attack if she knew my arms and legs were robotic. Oh, and guess what Mom the penis is original!" I replied laughing.

"Oh, nice real nice Anthony..."

"Well look I have a big day tomorrow, so I need to get some sleep. I have to argue with the President of Tockmak 3 tomorrow,"

"Alright, well I miss you."

"Miss you too, see you in a few days." I replied and softly kissed the screen as I turned off the call. I crawled into my levitating hologram wave bed and turned off the lights.

The light within the darkroom continued to sparkle as the electrical bolts went back and forth. Two large cylindrical devices sat on a table as the robot worked hastily on with his devices attempting to try and manipulate them. After several hours of tinkering the robot was getting increasingly frustrated and finally, he threw his tool across the room leaving a huge dent in the metal wall.

Just as the door next to the wall opened a robot of similar stature walked in. He stopped for a moment peering at the dent in the wall and the tool on the floor.

"Having some problems, are we?" asked Skyscream.

"Shut up Skyscreamer!" Secretish said as he proceeded to put the Black Matrix back into his chest.

"You spent about two years now trying to get the power harvested from the Zapbot Matrix and no luck. When will you let Lowtone attempt to try something on it?"

"Lowtone already looked at it and I found his conclusion irrelevant!" replied Secretish turning back to the remaining Matrix sitting on the table. "This thing won't work as long as Anthony continues to live as its power source is bound to him."

"Yet you have failed to completely destroy just as Amphotron failed."

"BE SILENT!" yelled Secretish holding out his hand to Skyscream who waved back in fear of his incredible power. "We will have our day with the Zapbots, their race has been infected with these pitiful humans and that will be their undoing in the end. For a superior race of robots cannot be defeated by primitive humans."

Secretish walked past Skyscream as he went through the automated door to the bridge. He had plans already in place for the Zapbots it was only a small time left for them in his computational cortex.

Speedy walked into his living quarters after a long hard walk throughout Misslemax. He used this time to compute various programs into his prefrontal processor trying to figure solutions to life. As usual it only provided him with more questions than answers but at least he felt there was something he could do. He shared his living quarters with Timetravel on the middle decks of Misslemax.

Speedy stopped halfway through the door to their apartment.

"What the hell is that!" cried Speedy walking towards the center of his room.

"What is what?" asked Timetravel waking from the recharge bed.

"That light!"

"What light?"

"The beams of light coming through the floor!"

Timetravel looked upon his brother with confusion. As he looked around, he could not see anything out of the ordinary of their living quarters.

"Are your optic sensors off?" asked Timetravel.

"You don't see it?"

"No. Could it be just because of your visual optics?" asked Timetravel.

Speedy now alarmed that he was seeing this and Timetravel wasn't. Out of the floor shot a large ray of light that glowed in a confined space. He looked around and saw that it had no effect on any of the lights or shadows in the room, as if it existed within a different spectrum of light.

"Alert Botimus!" Speedy replied.

"Another game of Battle Chess?" I asked Jeremy as we walked out of the turbo-lift to my living quarter's garage.

"Sure," Jeremy replied.

My living quarters was a confined space within the top human tower of Misslemax. A tiny tower within a tower you might say. The whole area looked like a giant warehouse with a giant office section remodeled for a living space carved out of the architectural beams. In the garage is where I would sometime tinker with technology or use the outgoing space-dock to leave in my Shortstop or X-O suit flight modes.

We came to the door that lead to the quarters, two beds, two baths, a small living space, office, and kitchen. Just enough to give me enough room to exist and feel at home. It was very much my design and something I always felt proud of.

As the door opened to my living quarters, I felt the rush of air compression pushing us back. It took only a few seconds to realize that some sort of explosion had taken place and Jeremy and myself were flying back in the air. A few seconds later I blacked out.

### Chapter 3

The next thing I saw was the fading in of sickbay two's interior. My computer system came back on and within a few seconds I sat up with fear running through my body. I saw Tiny sitting behind me.

"Tiny, what happened! Where's Jeremy!" I cried.

"Yo!" I heard Jeremy say and turned to see him sitting on a table being examined. I proceeded to jump off the table to run to him, but quickly found out I was missing one leg.

"What happened! What's going on! What exploded!" I started asking millions of questions. Tiny and Click came over to help me off the floor and back onto the table.

"Slow down Master, you'll burn out!" replied Tiny.

"My room! What happened!"

"Anthony, relax, we're okay." replied Jeremy.

"I slowly lowered my head and took a deep breath. Then I simply said

"Okay... start from the beginning."

Experiment walked over to me and gave me the report.

"We are currently at Red Alert with shields up. Some explosions, cause unknown yet, blew apart your living room, main hallway, and kitchen. None of your major valuables were destroyed except your CD collection which we can easily replicate. Boaty is doing that now. Your furniture is also in the process of being replaced." said Experiment.

"Have you started repairs yet?" I asked my mini-Zapbot.

"No, not yet. We are conducting an investigation on what happened. SuperRobot is working with Scan to try and figure out what happened. We didn't find any trace of a bomb or any reason yet why the room would explode!"

"How's Jeremy," I asked.

"Fine, he was only thrown across the room like you were but did not suffer a blackout. You were closer to the door, so you took the brunt of the hit."

Jeremy looked at me from across the room with a 'I could have told you that' look on his face.

"Besides a blackout and your left leg blown to pieces your fine Master," said Click attaching a new left leg as he spoke. Jeremy turned away as instances such as this made him a bit uneasy. I would remind him often to be careful of what he did in battle, as not to become like me with half of your body organic and the half robotic. For the first few years before we refined the technology it felt like I was living in a constant X-O suit. The leg then locked into place on my body as I completed my thought.

"So, it wasn't a bomb then?" I asked.

"No, not from anything we can tell. " replied Experiment.

"You know what I'm going to say next..." I replied.

"Yes, considering that part of the ship is most secure and protected part for a reason, this makes no sense. Family Room's don't implode for no reason," Experiment replied.

"But the only way to cause that would have to be deliberate," I replied.

"Correct, which means however it was done, it's possible someone on Misslemax is a traitor."

"And trying to get to the bottom of this would require us to get a sample of everyone's memory files which I'm not a fan of," I replied. With good reason, asking everyone on the ship for a memory scan was very intrusive. It would be the equivalent of the feeling you get when you found out your mom read your diary.

"Click who hasn't been on Misslemax as of recently?" I asked.

"Tech Team are due for a visit Master,<sup>click</sup>" Click replied.

"Good, put them on the case, I know Scan will have a fit but since they were not present when this happened it's probably the best-case scenario."

With that the impact of the situation was hitting me as I was realizing how violated I felt. My most private space was invaded, against all my best efforts to provide me with a safe space for me to relax and unwind. Now my home was destroyed with no logical reason, and I wasn't sure if I needed to feel sad or angry.

As I walked back to my living space with Jeremy it felt like a ghost was constantly with us. When we reached the floor, I saw the damage that had been done. The door to the apartment was singed off with black marks all around the surrounding wall. Cables and wires laid everywhere, pieces of all sizes from chunks of metal and bits of glass were strewn about. The corner wall of the hall which hid the living room was gone so you could walk right into it. There was a giant hole in the floor which exposed the machinery and turbo shaft underneath and my grand piano which was stored there was destroyed. My kitchen was half intact as the cupboards were blown apart, but the walls still remained.

I slowly walked around the living room, picking up pieces of various things. Memories came with certain objects as I touched them. A force field held fast the area on the floor so no one would fall. I felt like I had been raped and it made me furious.

"Anthony are you alright," asked Jeremy. I spoke softly at first and then rose to anger.

"My home... the place where I LIVE! MY OWN HOUSE! THE PLACE WHERE I SLEEP, EAT AND DRINK! The place where I play Chess with my friends. The place where I watch or... just...just... my house! This is the MOST PROTECTIVE PART OF THE SHIP!" I yelled.

Jeremy was taken aback from my reaction. I don't think he ever saw me so furious before. I felt naked and even with fights with the Nonocons I never felt this angry. I didn't pick up anything or throw it, cause it would accomplish nothing. I just sat down on the torn sofa and put my face in my hands. Jeremy came over and not knowing what to do just put his arm around my neck for comfort.

"How could this happen? Who would be so low to hit me here?" I said.

"I don't know...Anthony," Jeremy responded.

I got up and started to collect myself a bit, a short apology to Jeremy but of course he understood, he always did.

"I'm sorry.... it'll be alright," I replied.

"Anthony... it's not alright. " Jeremy replied.

I looked at my friend, no it was not alright, but he understood.

"What the gigaflop is the Tech Team doing here?" asked Scan yelling at my Shortstop body on the main bridge as the team was conducting their investigation.

"Scan, they're the only team that wasn't around Misslemax in three months. If this bomb was planted anytime soon, it couldn't have been done by them."

"Master, I calculated the likelihood that anyone on Misslemax would ever attempt to cause you harm in-"

"I know Scan," I said holding up my hand. "I know... but please. Let's just do our due diligence."

"I don't get it; I've been a faithful servant for several years now. I've created 245 different kinds of weapons for Misslemax, I've-"

"Scan, calm down my friend."

"Yes Master..."

"You know I trust you and care about all of you," I replied. "If there was anyone I'd think better for this job, it be you and Vebox. But someone or something on Misslemax attempting to hurt me and I have to take everyone's safety into consideration. You know logically this make sense. Trust me, as soon as this investigation is over it will be back to normal duties for everyone."

"I understand Master, you know my personal feelings between that team," Scan replied.

"I know, just stay out of their way and spend your time on the holorooms or something. Trust me, if you weren't here when it happened, I would've put you in charge."

Vebox walked up to him as put his hand on his shoulder.

"We can finish that program you've been working on for a while now," Vebox replied. "You know that one on the holoroom" he said nudging him in the side.

"Can I at least offer some assistance," asked Scan.

"Just leave the computer work to them for now. They may ponder if you were giving them false information. Not saying you would, but logically they wouldn't be able to use anything you supplied them." I replied.

Vebox grabbed Scan by the arm.

"Come on bro, let's go relax for a bit. You needed a vacation anyhow."

Before Scan could rebut Vebox had him to the door of the turbo-lift. Vebox stuck his head out of the door and pointed in my general direction. "Don't worry I'll keep him busy," he replied.

As I continued to read the information on my tablet, I looked up at Speedy standing in my Shortstop ready room.

"You saw a light?" I asked.

"A bright light coming through the floor. It was right around the time of the explosion." Speedy replied.

"What kind of light?"

"Not any kind that the computer knows about. It was completely off the spectrum. I did a whole analysis, and this was like it wasn't even in our dimension."

Speedy handed me his tablet and I saw the picture of the light as he had sketched. It was wide, tall beam with many vertical lines of many colors. It was about two feet wide and round like a perfect cylinder.

"I want you to send this to the Tech Team as they are conducting the investigation," I replied.

"Already done Master,"

"Speedy, your special sight might be the only clue we have to this issue. I need you to work directly with them," I responded.

"Awww really do I have to?"

"Seriously, why does everyone hold a grudge against the Tech Team?"

"It's hard to explain Master. I'll work with them if you want me to."

"I really want you to, I won't order you...."

"Okay, I will."

"Good report to me immediately if you see any more lights around the ship," I replied.

"10-4" Speedy said walking out of the door to the ready-room. Overload beeped in.

"Master, private message for you from your friends," he responded.

"Punch it through," I replied. Up on the three-dimensional screen came images of all my human friends.

"Anthony, we heard what happened, are you alright?" David D. asked.

"Except my left legs being totally shredded I've never been better," I replied.

"Do you want us to come back," asked M. Rogish.

"No everyone's quarantined till we find out what is going on. I don't need any more complications or you guys being put in danger."

"You really think someone planted a bomb?" asked Bill T.

"No.. I don't think so, it really makes no sense at the moment," I replied.

"Well keep us posted," said Mike Q. giving me that evil look with his eye.

Mikey B. just popped up on the com channel.

"Gump what are you doing now!" he said somewhat trying to lighten the mood.

Overload beeped in that the Tech Team had arrived. I briefly signed off from my group of friends.

"I'll have to catch you guys later. Got some work to do here," I replied.

"Watch out for any more bombs!" laughed Mikey B.

"I will try, Anthony out!"

I walked onto the docking bay as the Tech Team rolled in. Attacker, Road-Dust, Clipper, Flash-Light and Pop-Up all floated into the bay with their aerial forms and transformed into robot mode. Botimus followed me as second in command he was responsible for helping me brief them and Overload was working Security.

"Transporters not working," Attacker joked.

"Greetings gentle-bots, I wish we were meeting on different conditions, I hope you can figure out what is going on here," I said.

"No problem Master, you called the right bots for the job," replied Clipper.

"Overload will show you to your quarters. Also, Speedy has been seeing something with his special vision on the spectrum. I believe you will find it interesting so please work with him on any evidence."

"Has there been any more occurrences since the last report," asked Road-Dust.

"No. Not that I'm aware of. Once again we're just running with the idea that this was intentional simply because we have nothing else to go on at this point." I replied.

"Will do, Overload if you would," replied Attacker.

The five bots walked into the hallways, and I whispered to Botimus.

"If they can't figure this out no one can," I said.

As if fate was playing a cruel joke, Boaty beeped in from the com.

"Master! Another explosion has occurred!" he cried.

"Where is it located?" I said heading for the docking back door.

"Located in the Engine room. No major damage but the main worktable is completely destroyed.

Quickly transforming into vehicle modes, we flew to the turbo-lift for the engine room.



## Chapter 4

The engine room of Misslemax was a collection of numerous hallways and rooms, right next to a giant size warp generator. As we walked off the turbo-lift in robot mode, we reached the engine room and found the main computer table in pieces. The Tech Team was already on it, poking around on the ground and scanning the debris. I came over to Terrain who was working Security in the engine room.

"The darn tooten thing just blew up. Like my girlfriend's mother's cooking!" he replied.

"No one's damaged?" asked Botimus.

"Besides my gears twitching, we're all fine," replied Terrain pointing in the general direction of the floor.

"Master, look over here," said Clipper waving his hand towards my general direction.

I walked over to his computer screen and saw an image displaying the area around the table right before the explosion.

"The shields were temporarily off when the explosion happened," Clipper responded.

"Did anyone issue a turn off of the shields?" I asked looking at Botimus.

"Not that I'm aware of," replied Botimus. "I've been with you the whole time."

"But that's just it Master! Look there is no device code in the computer!" Clipper said pointing to the screen with a large error sign blinking. This of course made no sense as the ship's shields required some sort of authentication code provided from the Zapbot to respond correctly. It was the equivalent of a security key that would be passed along the human's form of communication that was gaining traction at the time known as Bluetooth. Without the key, the shields could not be changed.

"This can't be," I stated peering at the terminal dumbfounded. "The shields just don't turn off by themselves!"

"It appears someone has been tampering with the actual programming of the computer," replied Botimus rubbing his face plate.

"Tech Team, I want a priority one check on the master computer. Check to see if the main programs or subprograms have been altered since our departure from Gearatron."

"Will do Master. Anything else?" asked Attacker.

"Two of you setup outside force field generators. If Misslemax's shields won't stay up, we'll have to use other ones."

"Flash-Light, you and Pop-Up go install the generators. Clipper double check Click's data on Master Anthony's room," replied Attacker.

The whole situation provided a very uneasy feeling in my human stomach. It felt as if Misslemax's security was being chipped away bit by bit, and with it, a part of me was being violated, and not in the way that I appreciated.

"Shortstop to Speedy, have you seen anything?" I said over the com.

"Sorry Master, not a thing. I wasn't in that area of Misslemax when it occurred," Speedy replied.

"Keep your sensors peeled buddy," Botimus replied.

"10-4, Speedy out."

The tension was rising aboard the mighty ship.

A short while later, back in my human form I found myself crashing in Jeremy's quarters for another game of 3-D Holographic Battle Chess. As I looked around the room Jeremy had a flair for various Earth fighter jets, so his walls were decorated with various photos from his various test flights.

He took pride in his Headmaster body, waxing it every Sunday even though he didn't need to. He was one of the most determined individuals I knew and part of that was his parent's upbringing.

"Thanks for taking me in!" I said.

"Ummm, it's your spaceship, like I wouldn't" he replied.

"I know, I'm just being polite. I'm not so sure this is a good idea anyhow, due to the fact that your room might become the next place to explode."

"I hope not, I hate to clean it up. Times like this that Matrix thing would come in handy."

"Yeah, I know, but the Matrix isn't a toy that I can just use whenever I want. It's one of those last resort types of situations," I replied.

"Hmmm, oh by the way, Checkmate," Jeremy replied laughing.

"Again? Really?" I said.

"I have a feeling either you're letting me win or you will never win a game," he replied.

"I dunno, sometimes I ponder if there are some games I just can't win." I said smirking.

The piano on Jeremy's room began to vibrate. We jumped up from our chairs stepping back from the musical instrument and activating our X-O suits. We activated our shields and slowly walked up to the shaking item. Then it stopped moving. I scanned for any sign of bomb components and could find none.

"Anthony to bridge, what was the condition of shields a minute ago?" I asked. Up on my visor came a communications line and Botimus's image from the bridge.

"Master, for some reason our shields were down for about thirty seconds," replied Botimus over the com.

"What about the external generators I ordered?"

"Almost ready, we're activating them now."

Speedy came into the conversation as his image came into view as well.

"Master! I saw the light again!" Speedy cried.

"Have you talked with..."

"I'm on my way now!" replied Speedy as I could see him leaving his chair and running for the turbo-lift.

"Tell them to take you as first priority Speeds, my orders," I replied.

"Gotcha, Speedy out!"

Jeremy looked at me and we both were as confused as ever. Clipper buzzed in on the com.

"Master, results of calculations of Zapbot brain scans have been negative. Either nobody did it or someone is altering memories," replied Clipper.

"I didn't order the crew to provide that?" I asked.

"Everyone volunteered," Clipper replied.

"So, if that's the case then, it's not anyone on the ship. It has to be some external outside force," I said replied.

"Anyhow, please come to the engineering room, we found something interesting."

Jeremy and I left his quarters to rejoin our Headmaster bodies to meet the crew on the engineering deck.

Clipper handed me a piece of metal from the explosion. It was a star octagonal shape and looked like a circuit board. It contained a hole in the center about was about a foot thick.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Your bomb, we found pieces of it in your apartment as well." Flashlight replied.

"I don't recall seeing this during construction on Misslemax," I answered moving the strange object in the light.

"No, and you wouldn't as this is not included in any recent diagram or record within our computers."

"How it get here?"

"That's what we are trying to ascertain now. Also, its functionality and cause for destruction," replied Pop-Up.

"Okay let's start a ship-wide scan for these devices, I'll go report to Botimus," I said walking out of the room with Twirl. Speedy rolled into the room and transformed into robot mode.

"Ah Speedy, come here and let me have a look," said Pop-Up. Pop-Up ran his scanning save over Speedy. His face did all sort of expressions as he did this.

"Master Anthony installed your optic sensors, right?" Pop-Up asked.

"Yes. You have access to the diagrams." said Speedy sending him the data over the wi-fi link.

Road-Dust came up to Speedy and gave him a hard pat on the back.

"So little Speeds is seeing thing eh" Road-Dust said somewhat mockingly.

"Maybe he'll start seeing fairies next!" laughed Clipper.

"Hey knock it off! We've got work to do," replied Attacker. The remaining Tech Team immediately turned off their audio outputs.

"I've received your files; I'll give these a look and let you know." said Road-Dust to Speedy.

"Fine," said Speedy. As he transformed back into vehicle mode, he drove off from the scene somewhat humiliated.

"WHAT!" I cried sitting in my Shortstop ready room with Botimus and hearing the news from Speedy.

"It was embarrassing Master," Speedy said.

I opened the com link to the Tech Team.

"Shortstop to Tech Team." I said.

"Yes Master, Attacker here." Attacker replied.

"I want all unnecessary and demeaning comments stopped. Is that understood?"

There was a long pause and then Attacker spoke up.

"Yes Master, there will be no more problems."

"Good, Shortstop out." I said turning off the channel. I turned my direction back to Speedy.

"You want me to remove your sight?" I asked him.

"I hate it! I get mocked for it!" Speedy cried.

"Speedy, do you know why I gave your special sight?" I asked.

Speedy lowered his head and gave a reply as if he was a young child being disciplined by his parent.

"Because I'm a spy and it is a form of protection."

"Correct!"

"But I'm hardly a spy anymore and I don't need it right now. I just want to be like everyone else!"

"Yes, but right now you are the only key that may help us solve this mystery. Tell you what. As soon as this is solved, if you want, I will have Pliers put in some normal filters. But for now, I request you leave it until we figure out what is going on."

Speedy picked his head up a bit and looked directly at me with the companion nod that a young adult has for their parents.

"All right, fair enough."

Speedy walked out of the room and Twirl (Jeremy) walked up to me.

"Poor guy..." Twirl said.

"Yeah..." I said as I was about to go on some tangent when my energy replicator at the other end of the room light on fire. The fire suppression system immediately kicked on encasing it in a force field depriving it of oxygen.

When the fire subsided, Botimus walked over to the burnt unit. On the panel was the same device found at the other incidents. The same one the Tech Team had showed us.

## Chapter 5

We sat in the Zapbot conference room completely packed with my bridge staff and the Tech Team. As the glow of Tockmak 3's moon hung around in orbit, we saw the images of the various debris being show on the larger display screen.

In the room Botimus was sitting with Boaty, Flier, Hightone and Scan was sitting as far away from the Tech team as he could make it. Twirl was standing in the back corner watching the situation unfold. The Tech Team stood around the giant view-screen that we used to collaborate on information.

"So, what's our situation boys?" I asked.

"Well, we've traced the device back through Zapbot logs. We found a slight trace of it in a log of a deceased Zapbot." replied Attacker.

"A deceased Zapbot?"

"Yes, and this is where it gets interesting," replied Attacker and he slowly tilted his head towards the direction the windows. "Shortwing." Attacker said.

"Shortwing?!" I said.

"Yes Shortwing." Attacker confirmed.

"Who the hell is Shortwing?" asked Twirl.

A quietness came over the room and I slowly turned towards Twirl as he did not join the crew till after the incident.

"Shortwing was the only Zapbot to commit suicide," I replied.

"Oh... my god," replied Twirl.

During the period between my death and reincarnation the Zapbots had started to create new Zapbots with the goal of repopulating their race. From the historical records I recalled after I was brought back (and subsequently had some time to actually read the info) Shortwing was the new brother of Speedy and Timetravel and apparently had committed suicide due to some unknown stress he was dealing with. We found out later he had same-sex gender preferences and trying to alter his programming drove him mad.

"Upon inspection of Speedy's schematics, the design is similar to the shape of Speedy's optic sensor," Pop-Up continued.

"Is that why he is seeing the lights?" Botimus asked.

"Yes, the bomb used a neuron carbon light wave frequency. Similar to Speedy's sensors and undetectable by anyone, except of course Speedy," replied Flashlight.

"Speedy, you spent more time with Shortwing, more than any other Zapbot." replied Botimus.

"But why would Shortwing plant... wait how would he even plant them on Misslemax-B. He's deceased!" replied Scan. A short pause as he realized his tact error. "No offense guys," he said turning to Speedy and Timetravel.

"I can answer that!" replied Clipper. "Shortwing worked on the initial plans for Misslemax and basically put these into the schematics. Thus, when Misslemax was rebuilt, they still used the old guidelines unaware of the actual function of the device."

"So, you're saying we are sitting on a stockpile of bombs that could go off at any time!" I cried.

"There could be thousands of them around Misslemax," replied Botimus.

"The problem is something has to set them off. The shields going down I believe are a diversion or somehow tied into the power needed to set these off. Something is intentionally having these set off," replied Pop-Up.

"And now that we know that no living Zapbot is to blame, we can conduct a ship-wide search to have these removed," replied Clipper.

"How long will that take?" asked Botimus.

"If we work quickly, about twelve hours, if we move slow..." Flashlight started, but was interrupted by a beep from the speakers.

"Master, another bomb has gone off!" replied Overload over the com.

"Where?!" I said desperately.

"In the main computer core!" replied Overload.

You never saw a team of robots move more quickly than we did, as we exited the conference room heading down towards the main computer core.

We walked into the large computer core that ran Fortress Misslemax. It was a large room with large blue cylinders that stood for the processors and storage space for the master computer. A large piece of the core had been blown out of one of the cylinders and a force field was holding it currently together.

"Is it stable?" I asked Pliers walking into the room. Repairs were working on damaged supercomputer.

"The damn thing just blew apart!" Pliers replied trying to fix the core with his tools.

"I know that! How is it?" I replied asking again.

"We have 50% damage to files," Repairs continued punching his tablet. "The ship would be falling out of orbit if we were any closer to the planet."

"Can you fix it?" I asked.

"Maybe, if the core breaks down this whole ship could go to pieces!"

"Do the best you can Pliers." Botimus said.

"Like I do any less?" he said continuing to work and talk at the same time. "I would advise everyone evacuate Misslemax till I get this fixed."

I looked at Botimus and turned on the all ship hail.

"This is Shortstop. Attention all Zapbots, Evacuate the ship. This is not a drill. Evacuate the ship." My voice rang out of the speakers and into the communications channels of every Zapbot's head. Then in a series of movements, all the Zapbots ran down to the nearest loading dock and transformed into vehicle mode, leaving the ship, and floating off into the vastness of space, heading for landing somewhat on Tockmak 3's surface. My immediate crew and the Tech Team stayed with me as we continued to watch Pliers work.

"Scan you and Vebox go to the bridge and keep a lock on the computer core. You will have to provide backup resources for the computer until Pliers can divert power elsewhere."

"Master-" Pliers started.

"Twirl, I want you leave now!" I said turning to my Headmaster friend.

"But!" Twirl responded.

"NOW!" I yelled.

But before he could Speedy came stumbling in with a detached arm and a hole in his side.

"What happened!" I said running up to him.

"Speedy was near the computer core when it exploded." Pliers said running over to him.

"It's breaking up, I can't hold her Master!" Repairs said.

"He's here!" said Speedy.

"Who?" I asked.

"Sho... Sho.. Shortwing," Speedy replied.

"???"

"I need some help here!" cried Repairs. I gave Speedy to Pliers and he took him up to sickbay. The Tech Team immediately came over and started helping Repairs with the core.

"We have a massive buildup of energy in our core. I'm trying to eject it, but something is jamming it!" interfacing with the screen furiously.

I brought up the schematics on my screen. Smoke began to fill the room and I could see one of Shortwing's pieces was stopping the core from ejecting. In order to get the core to eject I would have to manually remove the piece.

"Everyone take cover. Repairs on my mark drop the containment field around the core!" I ordered.

"But Master," replied Botimus.

"Take cover! That's an order!"

They all ran behind doorways and tables. I walked up to the core field and saw gas was filling the core.

"NOW!" I yelled.

Repairs pushed his panel and the shield collapsed. Smoke and a furious gust of wind filled the engine room. Everyone held on and I slowly stepped forward towards the core forcing my way against the gravity and smoke. I punched my hand through the floor and grabbed the octagonal piece. I pulled with all my might, but it wouldn't budge. I put both hands down and pulled and my Zapbot machinery was tearing from the strain.

The Botimus slowly came around the corner and crawled his way towards me. He put both of his hands down into the floor and grabbed the piece as well. The smoke was now entering our robotic bodies and my human body inside my headmaster head was starting to cough.

"On my mark! 1! 2! 3!!" I yelled. We both pulled and Botimus lost his grip. He flew back towards the wall, and I turned around to see him getting up and slowing moving back towards me again fighting the immense gravity from the winds. Twirl attempting to move too and couldn't get close enough. He transformed into his helicopter mode and tried to fly towards us but was just hovering in the air.

I looked back and saw Botimus and Twirl both trying to get to me. I looked down at the piece holding the ejection system closed and finally with all desperation just said.

"Oh goddammit!"

I shot a low energy ray at Botimus and Twirl knocking them backwards and then with my right hand fired a full blast at the piece, thusly causing it to explode and shattering it into millions of fragments. I flew back up against the wall just to see the warp core swoop out the

shaft and into space. Within the two seconds it left and flew out the protective force fields jumped into place closing the gap and reestablishing gravity and human atmospheric conditions. Then the hatch for the ejection channel closed. Then we heard outside a large rumble as we knew that the core had exploded.

After a minute of resting, I finally spoke...

"Status?" I asked.

"We're all okay, environment systems are back online." replied Pliers.

"Look cried Speedy!" pointing just behind our heads.

Turning around we saw the most obscure thing we ever saw. Humans would call it a ghost, but regardless it was a glowing version of Shortwing, hanging above our heads.



## Chapter 6

Slowly and somewhat faintly floating above our heads was the image of Shortwing. His body was translucent against the background of the damaged Misslemax engine room.

"Shortwing?" I said. I had only ever seen pictures of him, as I was dead myself when he was around. As we all stood there the floating robotic image was silent.

"What and how?" asked Botimus.

"SILENCE!" yelled the image. Botimus ran up to the image and held his rifle at it. I gently pulled it down as I would imagine it wouldn't do much in this type of situation.

I slowly turned to Speedy.

"Did you know about this?" I asked.

"Not until now!" Speedy replied.

"YOU SEE! Because of what happened. I cannot join the Matrix! It will not allow me to join with the cosmos. Because of this you all should die!" replied Shortwing shouting high above.

The Tech Team, Scan and Boaty all came forward and started scanning the area as this was something out of the reach of our standard logic.

"Shortwing, if this is really you, then maybe we can help you." I said.

"YOU are the one that is going to need help! For thanks to the one who brought me back I found the devices I created for Misslemax. They were originally going to be used to improve the shields but with a simple reverse pulse they work as bomb quite nicely. I was on Misslemax all this time! Watching you! Until the one brought me back."

"The one..." I said pausing. "Shortwing why?!"

"BECAUSE! You all left me to die! To rot and rust away. Nobody even cared about me!"

"That's not true!" shouted Speedy holding his damaged arm. The anguish and pain were clearly visible in his face. "I always spent time with you. The real Shortwing would never hurt anyone!"

"Brother, you will never understand. My dear Speedy, leave now while you still have the chance, and I can spare your life."

"If you hurt them, you hurt me too!" Speedy stated.

"Master, he's not being picked up on my external scans," said Clipper.

"Nothing here either," said Scan himself.

"Ditto," said Boaty.

Flier came over on the com speakers.

"Master, a Nonocon ship is moving within range."

"He is coming now..." replied Shortwing. In a second, I knew exactly who was approaching.

"Secretish. Secretish did this to you!" I cried at the floating ghost.

"He gave me NEW LIFE!" yelled Shortwing.

"Shortwing stop this! There is no reason to hurt us!" cried Speedy.

"Your time is growing short..." replied Shortwing. He started to fade away and within a few seconds he was gone.

"Master?" said Botimus.

"Status?" I said turning to Repairs and Pliers.

"Nothing but life support," replied Repairs.

"Let us take care of it Master," replied Attacker.

"Can you handle it?" I asked. As I finished my sentence something hit the ship and rocked Misslemax. I nodded and the Tech Team left and ran to the nearest docking bay. The rest of us went up to the bridge.

"Everyone at their stations. Botimus radio Tockmack 3. Flier see if we can do anything to get the weapons back online. Scan I need either shields or a transformation. Twirl I thought I told you to evacuate?"

"Like I would leave you at a moment like this," Twirl said.

"Lord..." I said shaking my head.

I sat down in my Captain chair and brought up on the view-screen the Nonocon ship. Once again it's pointy lines shined in the glow of the nearby sun. My Tech Team came out of the docking bay and began to fire at the ship. Transforming into their vehicle modes the ship tried to return fire, but it was too slow for the quick moving space vehicles.

"Keep it up guys, stall for time." I said over the communication channel to the team.

"Master I'm receiving a communication from the ship," replied Hightone.

"On screen, like I don't know who it is."

Up on the screen came the dark ominous Nonocon, with red eyes, a pointy scaly figure and dark clouds swarming around him.

"Secretish! You are responsible for this!" I cried.

"Hahaha, silly human! You think you could have stopped my conquest of this Universe! What a pathetic mind you have."

"Master I can have shields up in-" started Scan, but before he could finish his sentence, I saw something move out from the Nonocon ship on my lower station screen. It was a large cylinder disc that floated out of ship's larger docking bay. The disc began to transform, sprouting arms and legs.

"An Eaton robot!" Boaty replied.

When the disc had fully transformed into its robot mode it flayed around its arms like a giant snake and began to fire its weapons at the Tech team.

I looked back up at the view screen still containing the image of Secretish.

"What do you want now!" I replied to the evil Nonocon. The thought of this evil Nonocon bringing back a Zapbot from the dead to hurt us tore my senses up inside. I also knew that as long as he had the Black Matrix I would very much outgunned.

"Actual I have a proposal for you."

"A proposal?"

"Yes. I will spare your ship and crew if you surrender your human self to me."

I paused for a moment and pondered the reasoning for this. I communicated discreetly with my Zapbots. We spoke to each other on our secret com channels.

"He's up to something," I said to the immediate crew.

"Master, it's possible he cannot use the Matrix of Leadership without you," replied Boaty.

"If so, that means he needs my physical presence to join in with his," I replied.

*"Master, if you can get the Matrix back maybe there is a way to save Shortwing!"* said Speedy. I looked at my poor Zapbot with sadness in both our optic sensors.

*"Master, remember that Secretish has an extremely big ego concerning himself. I estimate that you could easily defeat him if he does not have Black Matrix."* said Boaty.

*"Interesting...."*

I walked up to the view-screen and did something I never did before. I prodded a Nonocon.

*"I'll surrender myself, but how do I have your word that you will leave this area when I do?"*

*"Oh, I've given you no word of course... You simply have no other choice."* Secretish responded.

I looked at the other screen and the Tech Team had the Eaton robot busy for the time being.

*"Okay I will meet you on Tockmak 3's moon in five minutes."* I said.

*"Don't be late..."* said the evil voice as the communications went out and the view-screen reverted to the outside battle.

*"Master you can't be..."* Botimus started.

*"Hold up... call it a hunch. I sense the Matrix nearby."* I said walking to the turbo-lift. *"Botimus you are in charge till I get back. If I don't return by the time, you get Misslemax somewhat working, do what you can to destroy that moon."* I replied.

*"MASTER!"* cried Speedy.

*"Speedy... I want you to focus on a way to lure Shortwing into the situation. You and Timetravel have the largest connection with him, but you can only see his results. I need you to figure this out for me buddy."*

Speedy nodded as Pliers was finishing reattaching his arm to the smaller Zapbot. I walked out of the room into the turbo-lift and flew down to the docking bay to fly to the moon below. I flew past the outside space battle as the Tech Team held the ship and Eaton at bay.

I landed on the Moon in my Shortstop mode and gently walked on the carved creators. Tockmak 3 was very similar to Earth in that it had a large moon that orbited the planet. It had a secondary moon, but it was so small you really couldn't do much with it.

I looked up and saw the space battle above my head. Then coming like a bat out of hell a dark ship flew down towards the moon and transformed into a robot mode, landing gently on the ground. Looking at Secretish he carried the Matrix of Leadership, and this was the first time I had seen the device in a very long time.

*"So, you can't figure out how to use it?"* I said.

*"Oh no I figured out that I either need you to control or you need to be destroyed. Either way that is going to happen here now."* Secretish said.

*"Sure, destroy me with unlimited firepower, seems like a fair fight. A fight only an incompetent being could accomplish."*

Secretish stopped walking towards me and his eyes glowed red. We started to circle each other.

*"You are just delaying the inevitable!"* cried Secretish.

"Oh, then why don't you show me how much of the better being you really are? Although I would dare say you couldn't dare fight me without your Black Matrix!"

"Nonsense, even without this I could easily destroy you with my superior ability and firepower. You are a flesh germ inside of a Zapbot body, I am a fully realized robot."

"Oh, really prove it. Look tell you what. " I stopped walked and held out my arms to my sides. "If you really want to destroy me, go ahead, use your Matrix and destroy me. I won't even give up a fight, but if you strike me down, it would be without any honor because you can't do anything with that Black Matrix you carry."

Secretish eyes glowed bright red and his smoke emitted heavily as I could tell I was getting under his circuits.

"You human fool! I will prove to you who is superior!" he said with his voice cracking.

And then Secretish opened his chest compartment and grabbed his Black Matrix. It looked exactly like my Matrix of Leadership but instead of white glowing crystals it contained blackness in the center. A purplish swirl of darkness surrounded the items.

He carefully set both Matrixes on the ground. He had taken my bait.

"Fine Shortstop, you want to see how powerful I am, I'll show you!"

The mighty roar was not heard in space as space had no sound. As the Tech Team was dodging both the Nonocon ship firing on them and also the giant Nonocon robot fighting.

"We're not getting any advantage with our current strategy," replied Flash-Light.

"Agreed, it's time we brought out the heavy artillery," replied Attacker.

"Yes!" responded Clipper.

"Let's go!" said Pop-Up.

"Combine!" replied Road-Dust

The Tech Team flew together and within seconds they began their special transformation. They slowly started to merge into their Gestalt mode. Within a few moments now in space stood a larger Zapbot called Circuitbreaker. The combined fire and mental power of the Tech Team.

Eaton swung its arm at Circuitbreaker. Circuitbreaker moved out of the way of the slow moving Nonocon and fired his laser at the arm. The arm recoiled back into the robot and regenerated, and thus another arm emerged.

"Data, Conclusion: Design has been upgraded." replied Circuitbreaker talking mostly to himself but also sending back info Misslemax.

Eaton swung his head at the combiner and fired his eye lasers. The laser hit Circuitbreaker dead on, pushing him back in space.

"Data. Hit from opposition robot. Data. Damage acquired. Conclusion: Return fire!" replied Circuitbreaker again. The firepower hit Eaton and struck a mighty hole in his side. As the robot began to regenerate, it grabbed Circuitbreaker with its arms and two mighty robots began to wrestle in space. As they fell down into the Tockmak atmosphere their bodies started to generate heat.

They crash landed in a desert on the planet surface below. Circuitbreaker recovered and flew back regaining his stance. The Eaton robot recoiled from the creator they had created and fired his arms extending to surround Circuitbreaker. He started to generate an electrical charge that hit Circuitbreaker pulling him to his knees.

On the moon I was dodging Secretish's laser blasts as I was attempting to determine a tactical advantage. As I would move from rock to rock, hiding behind the rubble on the moon, he would fly up and attempt to fire again at me. I would roll out of the way or run quickly to the next location, each time Secretish attempting to land a hit with me I would dodge with precision, avoiding the clash.

"Stop and fight you miserable fool!" he cried. As he finished his sentence my laser blast hit the robot as he fell back into the space and crashed on the moon surface. I realized that when he would get consternated, he would lose focus, precision, and firepower.

As he attempted to regain himself, I provided a barrage of weapon fire in his general direction. Several shots made contact, hitting him dead on, knocking him back one by one, weakening his shields.

Leaping up I continued my barrage of weapons pointed at his general direction. Secretish knew he was losing ground. He quickly leapt out of the way and transformed into jet mode heading for the one thing that could give him the upper hand.

The Black Matrix.

I anticipated this, so I flew straight for the two matrixes as well. Our two bodies collided impacting the ground right below where the two cylindrical objects laid, launching them into the air. In a split second of mass ambiguity, we reached for both matrixes as they fell from the air into our hands, and placed them within our core bodies, firing upon each other and meeting with our giant matrix laser shot midair, locked in combat.

The Matrix had returned to me.

Circuitbreaker was maintaining himself as the Eaton robot's arms wrapped around him, hugging him to the point of attempting to force him fall apart. As the servos strained Circuitbreaker calmly calculated his next move.

"Data: Massive strain from robotic arms. Data: Causing issue with defensive relays. Conclusion: Separate and rejoin."

With that Circuitbreaker separated back into five individual Zapbots and escaped the grip of the snake like arms. As the arms recoiled, they flew back out and recombined back into Circuitbreaker mode, and once recombined they fired a large pulse ray at Eaton knocking it back into the ground with a hole within its stomach.

Eaton fell back noticing the large hole in his side, he began to retransform back into a ship and flew back towards the main Nonocon ship. Circuitbreaker continued firing at him causing massive damage to his sides until he was able to find safety within the confines of the Nonocon ship docking back.

With that effort completed the mighty Combiner began his attack on the Nonocon ship, specifically taking out each of the canons and laser arrays as he whipped around the ship's upper and bottom halves.

"That technological piece of garbage is destroying our ship!" replied SkyDust from the Nonocon ship bridge.

"You idiots! Fire all weapons on him!" cried Skyscream.

"We can't! He's too close to the ship!"

"The Zapbot has disabled all our external weapons," replied Lowtone.

"ARRRRGGGGHHHHH" yelled Skyscream as he shook his fist at the view-screen.

With a mighty hit of his hand, Skyscream slammed his fist down upon the console causing the Nonocon ship to turn around from its current orbit and begin to prepare to jump to warp. Circuitbreaker noticing the sudden movement engaged his rocket boosters began to back away and his presumption was correct that the Nonocons were fleeing. Within a few seconds, the Nonocon ship burst away in a bright light, heading into hyperspace, and leaving the combiner the victor and very proud of his accomplishment.

We stood locked in an endless blast of firepower for several minutes. Each of us occasionally giving or taking some here or there. Yet we made no headway as the two Matrixes continued to clash on the moon's surface. Two robotic warriors fighting a constant blast of dark and white light heading towards each other, meeting in midair and stopping.

"Give up Shortstop, your pathetic attempt to try and stop me will never work. I will always be the evil you can never defeat." said Secretish barely able to spit out the words due to his excursion.

"No, that's not going to happen Secretish." I replied as for once I was very assured of myself.

"Ohhh really...."

With a strange ability that was very much out of left field my Matrix firepower began to grow. I walked forward pushing Secretish back, as his face turned from confidence to amazement, then wonder, then fright.

"You see my human ability does more than you'll ever understand. It gives me feelings, determination, and willpower. This compliments what the Matrix provides me and makes me much more than just a Zapbot." I cried back to the dark robot foe in front of me.

I continued to move forward as the white light began to overcome the purplish black light firing in the night. I continued to step forward, as Secretish got to his knees as he his face was now completely shocked at what was happening.

"I'm much more to you than meets the optic sensor!" I said.

With that my hands grabbed Secretish's hand completely stopping the flow of his Matrix, encapsulating him within a large glow surrounding his body.

"NOOOOOO! It's not possible!" Secretish cried.

"By the power of the Matrix I send you back to your Universe NEVER to return here again!" I cried firing all my Matrix power at the evil demon.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!" he cried out in the highest treble voice once could ever hear.

With that a large glow Secretish illuminated the darkness of space in cascade of white, and then blinding my optic sensors, the light faded, and he was gone.

I slowly came to a rest realizing I had finally done what I needed to do. I tapped my chest feeling the power of the Matrix inside of me, but I also knew that my own self-will was the thing that made the Matrix work. It was for this reason why it chose me.

Looking up I saw the Nonocon ship warp out of orbit and Circuitbreaker return to the ship. I engaged my own booster rockets and headed back to home.

## Chapter 7

"Are you ready?" I asked Speedy.

"I am Master..." he replied.

We stood within the engineering room that was still in shambles. Speedy, Timetravel and myself waited as I knew what would happen next. Botimus and the rest of the crew just behind us watching and waiting.

As the last device was being removed from the walls and crushed within the hands of each Zapbot, I knew that our ghostly friend was going to reappear.

And as the bright light began to fill the engineering room, illuminating the walls where the ambient lights had been destroyed, I noticed something different. Where there had been yellow or purplish glow before, this was all white.

There in this white light stood Shortwing. This time smiling and seeming more at peace now than before.

"Speedy... Timetravel... my brothers... I am so sorry." Shortwing said.

We looked at each other and of course the logic started to make sense. Something Secretish had done had made him act this way.

"Secretish... he's gone now..." Speedy said.

"Yes... and his control over me has left..." Shortwing said just hovering in space.

"Brother..." cried Speedy. Shortwing turned his direction towards me.

"I plead for your forgiveness Master Anthony."

"You have it," I replied.

"Then you know what you must do."

I nodded and raised my hand and raised my hand. From within my core the Matrix sent out a ray of light towards the ghostly Zapbot encasing him. As it did, I knew it was releasing him from the purgatory he had been contained in, letting him become one.

"Goodbye my brothers... I wish you well." Shortwing said as his image faded until he was no longer there, and Matrix light was gone.

Speedy lowered his head and slowly turned towards me.

"You released him?" Timetravel asked.

"I believe so. All I can tell you is the Matrix set him free."

"He's at peace now, I can sense it." replied Speedy.

I placed my hand on my little Zapbot's arm. He had grown so much since the very first days when I built them. It had been a long journey for him and his brother to get to this point. But hopefully we had put this chapter to a rest.

With a heavy heart we all left the engine room to have a memorial for Shortwing as we never really had one previously. It felt fitting to remember a comrade that meant so much for the team and never really got a chance to be who he wanted to be.

*"Personal Log. Repairs and removal of all the devices are completed for Misslemax. No more incidents have occurred, and everything seems to be back to normal. If you can call any of this normal."*

*"Shortwing's ghost appears to be gone, and my Zapbots although in mourning are relieved that their brother is out of pain."*

*"Repairs... the actual work, not the Zapbot, are almost done for the ship. We are waiting for the arrival of our warp core from Gearatron on Duplaflex so we can proceed back to Earth. I'm not quite sure yet what is next here as it seems the two greatest enemies of mine have been destroyed. I know however that letting my guard down is not an option."*

"So peaceful, once again," I said looking out the windows of my living quarters at Tockmak 3 hovering below. Looking back at the chess board I saw that I had made another mistake. I could see Jeremy was going to checkmate me in two moves.

"I'm sort of glad I was here to see this all happen," Jeremy replied.

"Why?" I asked.

"It was the first time we ever spent just you and me, on a so-called adventure. It was nice not have the other guys around, felt like old times. You know, you or I could go any minute. I want to make sure we spend some time together."

I grabbed my tea and he his water and we clinked glasses to 'old-friends.' The com system beeped in with the Tech Team on the line. I pressed the button on the newly refurbished table and their images came up on the holographic view-screen on the opposite wall.

"Master, just wanted to let you know we're heading out," replied Attacker.

"Yep, there's gold in those mines!" replied Flash-Light attempting to make a joke.

"Where is your destination guys?" I asked.

"Starbase 4.5. We hear they have a nasty virus fouling up their computer systems. We're hoping to take it out." replied Clipper.

"Well good luck, and fine job you guys did this time." I said.

"Thank you Master, we'll see you around," replied Road-Dust. The line went dead but another message came in, and I pressed to receive this one as well.

"Master, care for a game of baseball?" asked Speedy.

"Heading to the holeroom my friend?" I asked.

"Yep, Carry-On programmed a huge replicate of an old fashion Earth stadium. We're anxious to try it out."

"I'll join in a bit, I have some stuff I have to finish up first," I replied.

"Okay Master, and Master.. thank you."

"Okay for what?" I asked confused.

"For saving him."

"You know I'd do the same for any of you," I replied.

"I know, but it doesn't get said enough."

Speedy gave me a thumbs up and the com went dead. I got up after Jeremy began his final move to checkmate me. He made his move and got up from the chess table not needing to gloat.

"Well, you're off for Earth, eh?" I asked.

"Yeah, Duplaflex is dropping me off. Continue to stay low...?" Jeremy asked.

"Unfortunately for now yes. I'm not quite sure where this will all lead." I responded.

"Okay, well keep me posted."

"Of course."

A warm hug to my old pen-pal as he left the room, and I began to get dressed for my small excursion.



"Where's Mom and Lisa?" I asked my father.

"They went to the mall. They'll be back soon. Coffee?" he asked.

"Yes please."

"You out why there was bombs on ship?" he asked.

"Um... yeah" I replied.

"Well?"

I realized that any news would always scare my father of my death. I was also the only one who knew that there was something big impending soon. It was difficult but I had a long conversation with my Dad telling him everything that I knew and everything that I had been through. He politely sat there listening.

"So, what do you think..." I asked.

"Well, you're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't. But I would say you've done as much as you can do or could do."

"I don't want you to worry," I replied.

"I won't. You're an adult now. You know what to do."

My mother and sister came in through the garage back from shopping.

"Oh, didn't realize you'd be here, what you been doing all this time?" my mom asked.

"Watching TV," I replied as Bonanza played in the background.

"Like Father like Son," Lisa said mocking me.

I blushed at the ridiculous of it all some days.

The End

## Epilogue

I was not happy about the sound system, or even the color. But at least it wasn't the other option of hideous pink. The car was a bright white Chevy Cobalt, but my Malibu's engine had basically fallen apart after driving it for two years back and forth from Mansfield. My credit in the tank, I was getting the car with my dad as a co-borrower. My life sucked. The car had nothing fancy, nothing special. It was just a car to get me from point A to point B.

As I drove the car home it did feel weird. I had no idea why this car felt different it just did. Even though it was not a great car I felt like it would take care of me.

I put in my cassette adapter for my iPod and drove back to Columbus. At least I had a new car.