

“Dark Cybertron” was a good story but it took nine issues, three-fourths of the event, to really pick up. While the first three issues of “Combiner Wars” were already stronger than the average “Dark Cybertron” installment, it’s an even bigger improvement to see things really taking off only half way through. The political maneuvering that has made “Combiner Wars” a fascinating, if occasionally dry, read remains in play this week, however the friction of the various factions finally ignites in a big way. Everything starts to come together this issue, Optimus’ discomfort being thrown back into the role of Prime, the clean-up on Caminus, the return of Mirage and the Protectobots, Prowl’s outrage over the current status quo; they’re all present and important parts of the story. So this is a pretty big story issue, however, I think that the greatest asset we have here is Mairghread Scott’s sense of character. While there’s quite a bit of action and plot progression, Scott does a fantastic job of grounding the story in her characters. Admittedly the justifications she comes up with falter once or twice but even those fade into the story cleanly and soon fade. Chromia really steps up, her actions in the Windblade miniseries getting some long-awaited exploration, and she proves to be the backbone of this issue. Of course, this book isn’t called Transformers: Chromia, and, in that regard I’m still waiting to see something that reflects the actual title. It’s not inaccurate that the issue number, not to mention the subtitle, are a much smaller part of the cover than the text that declares this to be “Combiner Wars part 3”. It even shares the artist of the Transformers title, further muddling its own identity. There’s a definite step towards balance this issue, but I still wonder if it would have made more sense to launch Windblade after the event’s conclusion. Regardless of how accurate or inaccurate the title is, Scott’s writing is top-notch. I love that Ironhide is getting a little bit of the spotlight again and there are some fun bits with the former Decepticons. Scott does a fantastic job of writing the Camiens’ response to Cybertronian politics and the odd place that the Decepticons find themselves in this post-war world. It’s complex without being apologist or arcane. There’s also plenty more tension between Starscream and Optimus Prime. While IDW’s Starscream has run the gamut from backstabber for the greater good to threat worse than Megatron, it’s kind of hard to argue with him here as he fights for the continued power of elected officials. The fact that said officials are named Starscream seems almost secondary, at least to the reader. The sense that Windblade could legitimately work with Starscream returns to great effect. It sounds odd that Scott’s first time writing Prowl should be one of the character’s biggest moments, but it’s great, feeling very true to the character’s long development. Scott writes Prowl (astator) with a real sense of being unhinged, his logic fractured enough to be unsettling but not so absent as to be able to write him off. The biggest moments for Prowl’s character pack a definite punch and seem to set the stage for the event’s finale. To my surprise, when I opened the issue I did not find Sarah Stone’s soft artwork but the industrial aesthetic of Livio Ramondelli. Ramondelli’s pages remain moody as they come, his characters perpetually pierced and surrounded by the dim glow of their planets’ light pollution, eyes and visors gleaming in the dark. His Transformers lean towards the blocky and weathered, but in the appearances, brief as they may be, of bots like Waspinator we see that he can do beautiful things with the spindly and the fluid as well. There are many lovely panels in this issue and it’s hard to overstate the sheer visual power of the time-worn bots and glowing optics, but Ramondelli’s work is plagued by more than a few extra problems this issue. The most obvious is simply that he was clearly rushed working on this issue. It’s no secret that the additional work that had to be done in order to coordinate this event with Hasbro was significant. The evidence of that is plentiful and omnipresent. Unfortunately, while Ramondelli’s work is many things, quick doesn’t seem like one of them. I can’t imagine how much work goes into each of his panels and rushing his art clearly comes with

repercussions. Many characters look more angular than usual, while others break more easily into the shapes that make up their designs. Other faces seem skewed to one side. Many of these problems are minor on first glance but grow increasingly distracting as they're taken in. On the other hand, while it's been a problem in previous *Combiner Wars* issues but here it becomes very clear just how obstructive the high-contrast look can be during battle scenes. Closer observation can usually clarify the action, but it's not at all an instinctual understanding and that hurts the momentum of the scene. Even in some of the brightest scenes the level of contrast makes it nearly impossible to discern what's happening to the combiners, and the sparks and shrapnel don't help at all. To top things off, there are just a number of errors, both in writing and artwork that, while generally inoffensive, don't help a sense of a rushed effort. Not only did someone at IDW accidentally give Ramondelli inaccurate reference material for the Protectobots, the issue was clearly produced before the lineup for the team was finalized, with new member Rook hastily drawn in and utterly ignored in the dialogue and story. All of this doesn't change that the issue is still rather pretty, it just isn't up to Ramondelli's usual standard, something that is especially noticeable for the sheer amount of issues he's illustrated of late. Beautiful as Ramondelli's work is, I think fans appreciate the palette cleanser of a Sarah Stone issue and Ramondelli's work clearly benefits from the support. The post *Transformers: Windblade #2* appeared first on *Weekly Comic Book Review*.

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