

## Articulated Dreams - Paul Blake

The armies stood facing each other, across a flat landscape of various hues of browns, swirls of green and pink breaking up the patchwork fields. They had agreed to fight outside the city to protect the innocents. The ancient rules of engagement in place. The terrain flat, offering no advantage to either side. The rules were fair. There is no honour in a victory gained by unfair advantage. This battle, like many others, would be fought with strength, guile and willpower.

The castle loomed over the battlefield. The city beside it. The castle was built out of a mountain, the rock a strange blue-green hue. The castle with its imposing skull, carved into the front. Its open mouth the only entrance. A simple horned helmet atop the skull's head. The castle was the goal of the invaders. Its mythical powers the prize.

The two armies were lined up and stoic in their stillness. The lines of men interspersed with heroes and champions. Three, four times taller than the troops. These would decide the outcome of the battle. The fate of the Sorceress in the castle in the balance.

The home troops stood at attention. Their dark green coloured uniforms ripped and torn. Covered by dirt and blood. Theirs, or their enemies, they did not know. It stiffened the cloth and chilled the heart. Faces rigid with determination. They would do their duty. They would either die this day or be celebrated for eternity. The champions paced between the lines, anxious for the start. To, again, prove their mettle against their foe. This could be the final battle. The end of the war. The invading tan army had been

repelled many times. Each time at great cost to both sides. The general of the assaulting army had been killed in the last battle. Crushed by a passing giant, oblivious to the slaughter going on around them. The loss of their leader, rather than weakening the army's morale, merely increased their resolve. Increased their determination to defeat the hated 'Greens'.

"Soon the power of the Sorceress will be mine," said the newly installed leader of the 'Tans'. "Then I will be free to conquer the universe, and reap my revenge on Hordak," his evil cackle carried across the battlefield. Hordak was his former master, trapped in another dimension. Hordak still living was an open sore in the leader's festering soul.

"When will we begin?" His ginger-furred right-hand Beast Man asked.

"When I tell you to. Beast Brain."

Beast Man's cheeks coloured, he clenched his powerful fists around the butt of his whip but remained silent. *Now is not the time.* He told himself. *Patience.*

"We await your command, Skeletor," Evil-Lyn said. A smirk on her face as she enjoyed her rival's chastisement.

Further down the line of troops, the red-cloaked, demon priest Mumm-Ra was discussing the elevation of Skeletor with Starscream.

"Either of us should be there," he pointed with a bandaged-wrapped arm at Skeletor and his henchmen. "We are both more qualified, and more ruthless."

“I agree. Skeletor has had his chances in the past and failed every time,” Starscream said. “As much as I hated him, Megatron was far more worthy than—” Another cackle came from the centre of the army. “That laugh,” he shuddered.

“It is grating,” Mumm-Ra said, his red eyes gleaming. *Megatron had been a useful pawn. Capturing the castle would have been my chance to rise up. Mumm-Ra, the Ever-Living. I will deal with the hooting skull the same way and anyone else that opposes me.*

“Optimus, do you think we’ll win?” Lion-O asked the robot standing next to him. They were looking across the field at the forces against them.

“With Megatron, it would have been easier to judge. He would have sent their troops straight into battle. No guile. Their new leader is an unknown quantity,” the giant robot replied, his electronic voice sounded reassuring despite his uncertainty. “Prince Adam has had dealings with him before.”

Optimus Prime called across to where Prince Adam was standing, deep in conversation with his mentor Man-At-Arms. Teela, Man-At-Arms’ daughter and the rest of the Royal Guard were in the castle as a final line of defence. Prince Adam came over.

“How can I help Optimus?” he asked.

“What do you know of this Skeletor?”

“He has mystic powers, is cruel and delights in wreaking havoc. He is devious and unpredictable. We will need to be on our guard with him. The ancient accords may not be enough to restrain his deceitfulness. What is our plan?”

“I will send in Grimlock and his Dinobots first, our troops will fire from a distance. Grimlock is spoiling for a fight, and he and his band are a useful distraction. I’m going to hold our four amphibian friends in reserve. Their skills and agility will be essential against a tiring opponent. I’m just worried about the Autobots. Since the Tans took the Energon facility, our supplies have been running low. I’m not sure how long we can maintain our maximum effectiveness. I think it would be best for you Eternians and,” Optimus looked at Lion-O. “you Thundercats to follow the Dinobots. By the power of the Matrix, we will succeed.”

“Soundwave, start the battle cry,” Skeletor told the dark blue and silver robot, as he mounted Pathor, his purple panther companion.

Soundwave opened his chest compartment and called Laserbeak down from his vigil in the air, scouting the Green’s formation. As he neared Laserbeck transformed into his cassette form and flew into the compartment. Soundwave converted into his cassette deck form, and a cacophony of noise blasted out of his speaker. The Tan troops started marching in formation towards the Greens. Behind them followed Mumm-Ra and his minions, Slithe and Monkian. Mumm-Ra raised his arms in the air and incanted “Ancient spirits of evil, transform this decayed form to Mumm-Ra, the Ever-Living!”

Starscream transformed and took to the air in his jet form, while the Constructicons changed into their construction vehicle form and moved towards the enemy. Finally, Skeletor’s minions followed. Beast Man, Mer-Man, Evil-Lynn, Trap Jaw, and Tri-Klops headed into battle. Skeletor released his trademark cackle and spurred Panthor forward.

When Soundwave's signal reached across the battlefield, Optimus Prime called his Autobots to transform. He ordered the Dinobots forward first. Grimlock, the leader of the Dinobots, said to Prime as he passed. "Me, Grimlock, want to munch metal."

The Dinobots moved towards the approaching Tan army in their dinosaur forms. They were followed by the Thundercats, and the Eternians, Man-At-Arms, Ram Man, Man-E-Faces, Mekanek, and Buzz-Off. Prince Adam raised his magic sword and said: "By the Power of Grayskull!" Sparks flew from the sword and lightning flashed across the battlefield. Prince Adam transformed into He-Man. He then called out "I have the power." He pointed his sword at his shaking pet cat Cringer. Cringer changed into the fearsome armoured Battle Cat. He-Man leapt into Battle Cat's saddle and raced to the battle.

Optimus Prime watched his allies head into battle and sadly said: "And so it begins."

He ordered the Green troops to fire upon the advancing army. The sky was filled with bullets and bazooka shells, many hitting their mark on the Tan troops. From the sky Starscream and his four Deception jet subordinates fired lasers into the Green troops causing devastation to the soldiers. A brave few bazooka sporting men fired at the jets before being taken out. Four of the five jets sustained hits and retreated back to their lines. Starscream seeing his wingmen defeated fled behind them. A cheer sounded out among the remaining soldiers.

From behind Optimus Prime came a roar. He turned and saw the Turtle Van speed past him. The four turtles and their master, Splinter, wise-cracking as they went.

“Not yet!” Optimus called. “It’s too soon.”

His cries went unnoticed as the Turtles let loose their battle-cry of “Cowabunga” and fired towards the enemy. As the van approached the Tan soldiers, it skidded to a halt, and the four Turtles jumped out kicking and spinning the men. Splinter followed close behind mopping up any they had missed. As soon as it looked as though they would make a difference to the battle, Soundwave released his mini-cassettes Ravage, Frenzy, and Rumble. They took on the Turtles, and it was soon a battle to the death.

“Simon!”

“Simon!”

“Time to clear up your toys! It’s almost dinner time!”

Simon looked up from the battlefield, in his hands were Rafael and Ravage.

“Mum, I’m not finished yet.” He shouted to his mother in the kitchen.

“It doesn’t matter, you can play again tomorrow.”

“But mum.”

“No buts, clear them up.”

Simon looked down at the epic scene in front of him. The living room carpet was covered in soldiers laying together in heaps. Henchman against heroes. Robots against robots. *Maybe tomorrow I can include the Star Wars toys. The Millenium Falcon will make mincemeat out of the Deception jets, especially that coward Starscream.* He reached for the plastic boxes and started putting away his treasures.

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Simon looked across the front room at his children on the sofa. Their faces reflected in the electronic glow of their tablets.

“Why don’t you go play with your toys?” he asked them.

“Boring,” his eldest, Michael replied.

“Yeah so boring,” James, the younger child added.

*Oh, how little you know. I wish mum and dad hadn’t thrown away my toys when I went to university. It’s not like they took up that much space in the attic. He thought back to that final battle. Of course, it wasn’t the final battle. The war was still ongoing... Rumble banged his fists into the ground knocking the Turtles to the floor. Ravage leapt upon Leonardo, his jaws snapping at the air in front of the turtle’s face. An inadvertent swipe of Grimlock’s tail knocked Ravage away before he could draw blood. Ravage leapt again...*

END

All characters used are the rights of their respective Trademark holders and are used in this story as a homage to the hours of enjoyment I had playing with the toys while growing up and watching the associated cartoons in the 1980s.

Masters of the Universe - Mattel

Thundercats - LJN

Transformers - Hasbro

TMNT - Playmates Toys Inc.

My debut novel A Young Man's Game is available in paperback and ebook at

<http://getbook.at/YoungMansGame>. Please see <http://paulblakeauthor.com/ymg/> for more details and special features.