

# BABY NEEDS

Smoko



A F.I.G.E PROJECT ZINE

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# Something to Take the Edge Off by Piper

The roar of flight engines overhead was all the warning Hound got before the road in front of him vanished in a burst of heat and flame.

Debris rained down around him. A larger chunk landed on his hood, leaving a painful dent. Hound swerved out of the worst of the fire, skidding onto an exit. As he dodged craters in the road surface, he hoped that Bluestreak was still behind him. Overhead, Hound heard the Seekers' engines whining as they came around for another pass.

They had to find cover.

"There! On the left!" Bluestreak yelled. Sure enough, there was an opening in the security wall on the side of the road, just big enough for them to slip through.

Hound's maps of this part of Uraya were incomplete, especially with all of the destruction the city had sustained in the last few megacycles of the war. His cartography program didn't know what was on the other side of the hole: it gave equal probability of it being either a shelter, or a long drop that would bring both of their lives to a smashing end. The program unhelpfully offered to analyze the existing data and give Hound an answer in a few cycles.

The wail of the engines getting louder made Hound's decision easy.

Rolling to a stop and transforming, Hound dove through the crack in the wall. He immediately found himself sliding down an embankment littered with rocks and plascrete. Hound scrabbled for any handhold, but the slope only got steeper and he slid even faster.

Before he had time to regret everything, the embankment levelled out and Hound scraped to a stop. A moment later, he heard another body grinding to its own stop a few meters away.

"Ow," Bluestreak groaned quietly.

Hound looked up, half-expecting to see a Seeker standing at the opening and aiming its weapons down at them. But all he could see was a faint light far above them. He couldn't hear engines, either.

Hound activated his headlights and turned to Bluestreak, who was slowly climbing to his pedes. "Are you all right?" Hound asked softly.

"A bit scraped up, but yeah," Bluestreak replied, turning on his own headlights. "Where are we?"

"Not sure, but let's get away from the opening," Hound said. As Bluestreak nodded, Hound looked around them. They seemed to be in a tunnel, probably a maintenance shaft that ran under the city's roadways. The floor of the tunnel was covered in old parts, pieces of the ceiling, and a thick layer of dust.

Hound picked a random direction and started walking.

It was hard to think how things could have gone worse. Their squad had been ambushed by Decepticons in the middle of a large empty square. The city was supposedly under Autobot control, so obviously they had a significant intelligence failure. Since their mission was just to pick up some supplies the Autobots found earlier, they didn't have any tanks with them. Instead, they only had a few gunners for security and a handful of cargo haulers.

In the panic to find cover, the entire squad had scattered (a training failure), and Hound was just now realizing that their commanding officer had never advised the team where the rendezvous point was if they became separated (a leadership failure).

On top of everything, Hound now found himself with Bluestreak in a situation where it was imperative to stay quiet. Hound hadn't worked with Bluestreak in the field yet,

but he knew enough. The gunner had an extremely hard time staying quiet. It was like his wheels and legs and hands were hooked directly to his vocalizer. He would talk non-stop to anyone and everything, even mumbling to himself when he thought he was alone. Hound knew a little of Bluestreak's personal history, just enough to know that his constant talking probably had something to do with the demons running loose in his head.

The last thing they needed was the Decepticons hearing Bluestreak prattling away, exposing their location. If they were going to get out of this alive, Hound had to keep Bluestreak quiet.

"We'll find someplace to rest for a bit, and wait for the 'Cons to clear out," Hound said. "Then we can send up a beacon for extraction."

"Sounds good," Bluestreak replied.

Hound tensed, waiting for Bluestreak to fill in the pause with more words. Instead, Bluestreak fell quiet again.

Well. That was fine.

They trudged on in silence.

Hound's thoughts spun. What should he do now? He usually worked alone, and when he was on a team he was never the leader. Technically, he and Bluestreak were the same rank, but based on how young he suspected Bluestreak was and the gunner's nervous chatter, Hound felt a responsibility to see that they both got out of this.

But he didn't know how many 'Cons were out there. He didn't know what happened to the rest of their team. He didn't know where they were, or where this tunnel was leading. He didn't even know if extraction was possible; for all Hound knew, the 'Cons were on their way to the Autobots' forward base, and there would be no help coming at all.

Hound started exploring the terrifying and depressing idea that their future would consist of being hunted through these tunnels until they were eventually caught and killed. Or worse.

The doom cycling through Hound's head was interrupted by Bluestreak nudging him with his elbow. "Let's stop here for a bit," Bluestreak said quietly, and gestured at a couple of flat rocks just the right height to sit on. "Seems like you could use a rest."

"I'm all right," Hound said, but he sank down onto the rock anyway. He watched Bluestreak carefully lean his rifle against the rock. "And... you're still doing all right?"

Bluestreak gave Hound a smile. "This sucks, but it could be worse." His smile faded. "But seriously, I could almost hear your processor churning. You'll blow a connection if you don't relax."

Huh.

Bluestreak had barely said a dozen words since they'd fallen into this hole. Rather than running his mouth constantly, Bluestreak had been cool and collected the whole time. Thinking back, Hound remembered Bluestreak had been relatively quiet ever since the squad had left base on the mission. This definitely wasn't the same garrulous bot that Hound knew from their previous brief interactions.

"Relax. All right." Hound cycled his vents, but that did nothing for the frantic pace of his spark's spin. The processing threads that were detailing all the different, horrible ways this situation could end were still churning out awful scenarios, and every sensor felt like it was set to maximum sensitivity. Hound could hear the quaver in his voice as he gave Bluestreak a wan smile. "Easier said than done."

Bluestreak gave Hound a considering look. "I got something that can help, so long as you don't rat me out."

Hound blinked. "What?"



Bluestreak started digging through his subspace pockets. "Try this," he said, pulling out a slim rod. He offered it to Hound. "Just take a little. If you're not used to it, it might just make your anxiety worse."

Tipping the rod to the side in the beams of his headlights, Hound realized it was a cygar filled with a pale purple fluid. The colour and the way it coated the inside of the tube tripped something in Hound's memories. "Is this... some kind of drug?"

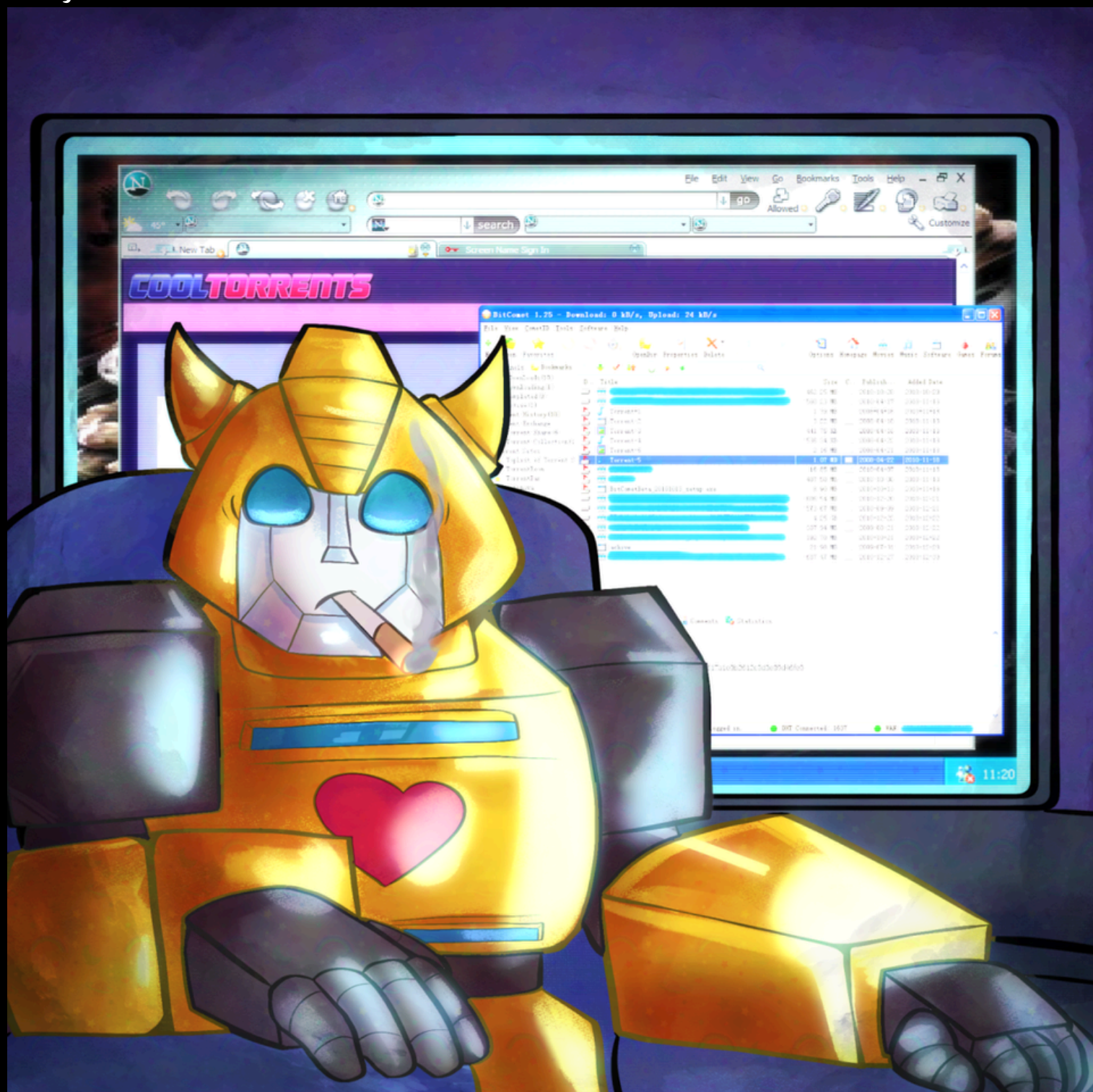
"It's called grunt. It's kind of like crys, but it calms you down instead." Bluestreak plucked the cygar from Hound's fingers and held it to his mouth. He flipped the switch and inhaled, then handed it back to Hound. After holding his ventilations for a few moments, Bluestreak released a puff of sweet-scented smoke. "I use it to keep me calm and focused when I'm in the field."

Hound had heard of the drug, but only from Command in lists of things to avoid (along with syk, interfacing without firewalls, and washrack engex). He stared at Bluestreak. "Do you seriously go into battle underclocked?"

"Yeah? I guess," Bluestreak said with a shrug. "You've seen me off of it, on base. Could you imagine if I was like that in a battle?" He laughed. "I don't think I would have lasted more than a few cycles." Bluestreak pointed at the rod. "But seriously, I only use it when I really need it. That stuff can be bad news if you overindulge." With an encouraging gesture, he added, "Go on. It'll help take the edge off."

Hound looked from Bluestreak to the cygar. He tipped the rod to the side again, watching the purple liquid stream into the next chamber.

Then, with a shrug, he put the end of the cygar in his mouth, flipped the switch, and inhaled.













# Rumble Takes a Pregnancy Test by AdamTheApprentice

Rumble rubs at his helm in annoyance, grumbling softly to himself as he trots down the sidewalk. A processor ache is not something he wants to deal with today. After all, he was supposed to have a nice visit with Soundwave and the other cassettes. His cooling fans click on as a sudden wave of heat nearly knocks him over. Condensation forms on his plating, which is suddenly much hotter than the cool morning air around him. Great. He hopes he's not got a bug in his code somewhere.

The hot flash passes as Rumble trots up to the door of Soundwave's apartment, leaving behind a thin sheen of condensation as the only evidence of it ever happening. He wipes at his damp optical ridge as he steps through the door, smiling as he sees that most of the others are already here. Ravage sits, curled up and so very comfortable, on the couch with Laserbeak perched on his haunches. Buzzsaw chases Frenzy around while Soundwave watches impassively, Frenzy yelling some half hearted apology about eating the last energy candy. Ratbat is the only one not present, but he'd probably be astronomically late and then call it 'fashionable'.

As soon as they lock optics, Frenzy darts over, putting Rumble between himself and Buzzsaw's fury. Rumble raises his arms and grimaces, feeling a bit nauseous as he's shaken by the tussle. Soundwave must notice, because it's now that he intervenes.

"Command: Cease antics. Rumble is not part of your quarrel."

Rumble sighs with relief as Frenzy grumbles and lets go. Buzzsaw sqwacks and joins the other beast cassettes on the couch, hogging all of the space as usual. Of course, Soundwave was prepared for that and had extra chairs for Rumble, Frenzy, and himself.

Usually, the group would play games and just have a nice time being together, but Rumble was having a hard time concentrating. Between the processor ache and some soreness that he didn't really want to think about, he was a bit distracted.

When another hot flash sends his cooling fans into over drive, the others take notice.

"Observation: Rumble is unwell. Sick?"

Rumble feels his faceplate flush and kicks his legs a bit. "Not sick. Just hot. And my processor hurts. But I'm definitely not sick."

Frenzy grimaces and scoots away a bit. "Ah, come on, mech. Why'd you show up if you've got a bug? I touched you earlier!"

Soundwave gives Frenzy an admonishing look before standing and motioning for Rumble to follow him. The cassette grumbles but does as he's told. He probably was sick, and Soundwave probably had something for it like he always did.

The two pass into Soundwave's berthroom, and Rumbles crawls up onto the recharge slab while the other mech searches through a cabinet. While he's searching, he speaks.

"Query: symptoms."

"Uh... Processor ache. Nauseous, kinda like my tanks are boiling. Super hot off and on." Rumble pauses to think. "I guess I've been feeling pretty run down, too. Like a full recharge just don't cut it."

Soundwave pauses, and Rumble can tell that he's said something that's got his carrier thinking. Finally, Soundwave turns to him.

"Query: duration and changes in routine before symptoms manifested."

Now that's a question. Rumble honestly wasn't quite sure. He had to manually pull up the memories to figure out how long he's been feeling like this.

"Not too long. Couple lunar cycles at the most. Wasn't that bad at first, but I guess I've been feelin' really warm ever since—"

Rumble cuts off abruptly as a memory comes to mind. The light of Arcee's spark and the rock of her body against his. It was after that.

"Uh... I mean, I don't really wanna go into detail or anything like that, but I guess something... intimate happened between me 'n' Arcee right before."

Soundwave's expression (if it can be called that) softens as he listens. He digs around again before finding and pulling a scanner from the cabinet drawer. Rumble grimaces. It looks like a medical scanner, and he's not looking forward to whatever virus it was going to say he somehow contracted. Arcee wouldn't have gotten him sick, right?

"Instruction: Hold still."

Rumble nods before realizing that nodding isn't holding still. As Soundwave administers the scan, slow and thorough to make sure the beam gets all of him, he does his best not to squirm. He's never been good at medical exams, ever antsy when he has to stay still.

It feels like he's waiting forever for the scanner to run its diagnostic. He fidgets with the edge of the recharge slab, venting out steam instead of just hot air. Soundwave is calm as ever, and for once it doesn't put Rumble at ease. Did Soundwave know something he didn't?

Finally, the device lets out a high pitched tone that signals its diagnostic conclusion. After going over the findings himself, Soundwave turns the device around so that Rumble can see.

"Diagnosis: Carrying."

Rumble hears him. He sees the same result on the screen. Feels the heat of life making him so hot he could set plants on fire. But for the life of him, Rumble can't wrap his head around it.



"I didn't know I could carry..."

"Soundwave: Unaware as well. Surprised when Ravage was conceived."

Rumble nods a bit, looking through the diagnostic information. He makes a face as he scrolls down.

"Hey, tell me I'm reading this right. Does that say two sparks? As in, like, twins?"

Soundwave leans over to see the line of coding before nodding.

"Affirmative. Likelihood: Common. Twins bear twins."

Rumble takes a deep vent, reading over the information again. He was carrying. Twins, no less. He'd not even considered talking to Arcee about the idea of maybe one day in the far future trying to spark life. And yet, here was not one but two sparks made from their love.

The thought absolutely melts him. No, he'd not thought about sparklings before. But, now, with the reality that he's going to create something new with the love of his life, he couldn't think of anything he wanted more.

"Do you think Arcee's gonna be happy about it?"

Soundwave mulls over the question for a moment before he responds. "Observation: Arcee loves Rumble. Rumble's joy will be Arcee's joy."

Rumble smiles softly at the reassurance. Not that he really needs it. Sure, they didn't have a talk, but he can't imagine Arcee as anything but ecstatic. He feels so soft thinking about it. Arcee is the sire of his sparklings. Just the acknowledgment causes his fans to kick on despite the hot flash having already passed.

"Is it okay to tell the others before I tell Arcee? I mean, Laserbeak or Ravage were probably spying so I bet they already know."

Soundwave shakes his head, laughing and helping Rumble off the recharge slab so he doesn't slip. "Affirmative. To both."

Rumble chuckles and the two go back to the cassettes. Ratbat arrived while the two were occupied, looking quite chastened by the fact that he didn't get the attention he wanted from arriving late. Ravage, Laserbeak, and Buzzsaw have moved to make room for Rumble on the couch, giving him a more comfortable seat.

The attention is nice. His family congratulates him in their own ways, jokes and teasing and promises of hurting his sparkmate if she doesn't feel as joyful as he does. It's exciting. Soundwave is already planning a small party. Even Ratbat, the attention hog, sounds genuine when he talks about how excited he is to have nibblings to spoil.

The party can't last forever, though. Rumble is the first to leave, the anticipation of telling Arcee the good news far too great for him to wait any longer. As he hurries down the sidewalk back towards their apartment, he sends her a message.

[Need to talk. I have GREAT news!]



@REYDELCASTILLO0-LEMONERZEST.NEOCITIES.ORG







# Caught Red-Handed by daikyojin

Bright headlights from a dark police cruiser shone in the darkest of alleys in downtown Chicago, the Decepticon in search of something — or, in this case, someone — that popped up on his radar while on patrol. An Autobot signal caused him to change his path. He could always hunt humans later.

Something about the signal was different, however. His readings indicated it was B-127, the scout that was a pain in his aft more times than he could count. The ping wasn't fully there, fully coherent, but he could tell that the bot wasn't offlined. There was something amiss, and he was determined to get to the bottom of it.

He treaded through the streets quietly, his sirens and flashing lights turned off to not draw too much attention to himself. If Bumblebee could sense his presence, he didn't make himself known. Not yet.

No humans were around, which was odd considering Bumblebee's amicable relationships with them. The Autobot was alone, vulnerable. Barricade could offline him for good if he could perfect his approach.

He traversed another block before a large shape entered his vision. "B-127," Barricade snarled as he smoothly shifted into his bot mode, his kibble retracting and brass knuckles popping out on his servos. "All alone, are you? It wouldn't be your first mistake."

Bumblebee didn't acknowledge him, didn't even blink in his direction. Barricade stepped closer, clenching his hands into fists. That was when a smell hit him, something he should have caught before in his blood-lust.

High-grade energon. It reeked. There were empty cubes surrounding Bumblebee, and there was a glowing one still in one of his hands. The Autobot tilted his head back before pouring it into his intake in one swig.

"Disgusting," Barricade growled, stopping a safe few feet away from his enemy. "Have you no shame?"

Rather than searching the human radio frequencies to make a quick quip in response, a few slurred beeps and chirps left Bumblebee's shattered vocalizer. His head finally turned, their optics meeting, Bumblebee's gaze challenging.

As much as Barricade wanted to put Bumblebee in his place, not even he wanted to pick a fight with a bot drunk off high-grade. He glanced at the cubes again and decided that if it were him, only one serving or two would be more than enough. Bumblebee had consumed enough to fuel the handful of Megatron's trusted generals and then some. And he was still going.

The energon cube he was working on clanged onto the ground as he stood up at a speed Barricade didn't think was capable. It was as if he wasn't under the influence at all; a frightening thought, considering what high-grade was capable of depending on the bot.

"Hey." For the first time in Bumblebee's presence — unless ordered to retreat from Megatron — Barricade was backing down. "Watch it, Autobot. I have no interest fighting with a drunkard."

Bumblebee made an offended chirp and stepped closer, raising his fists in a fighting stance. Barricade had to dodge a few playful, taunting punches, even when they came nowhere near him.

This was ridiculous. "I don't want your filthy high-grade! I don't even want to know how you acquired so much of it." Barricade raised his open palms up and took another step back. "I'd rather continue this...conversation...when you're sober."

For some reason, Bumblebee lowered his servos down and tilted his head like a sad sparkling. Was he really worried that Barricade wanted in on his stash?

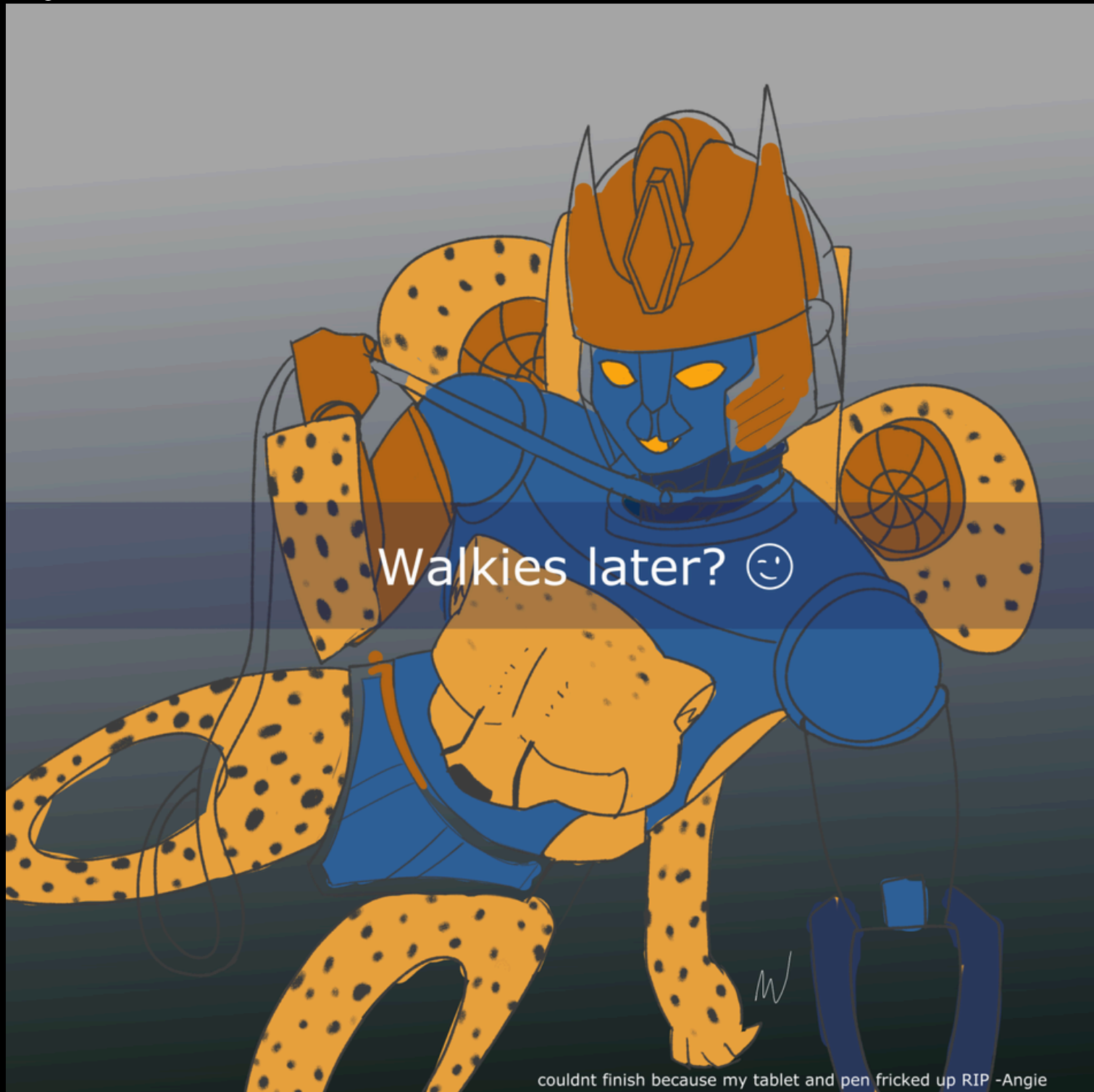
"Keep it," the Decepticon waved a hand dismissively, nodding his head at the stack of energon cubes still remaining. "It's all yours. You'll see no further interference from me."

Cautiously, Bumblebee narrowed his optics and lowered himself back to the ground he had been sitting on. So he really was worried about having his energon taken away. How greedy, Barricade thought. The Autobots acted all high and mighty, yet their strongest soldiers were out in the human cities getting drunk off their afts.

Barricade nodded awkwardly. "I'll leave you to it. Just don't count on me being so merciful next time we meet."

He swiftly turned back into his alt mode and hit the gas, not wanting to linger around any longer. Barricade could see Bumblebee chugging yet another cube from his rear-view and knew he had made the right choice in fleeing. He was sure the other Decepticons could understand his hesitation.





couldnt finish because my tablet and pen fricked up RIP -Angie





BlueberryGore



