

Soundwave felt ill.

Not that he'd let any other Decepticon know. He always wore his facemask for a *reason*- that is, to conceal his feelings, psychological chinks in the communications officer's armor. There were multiple reasons why he felt ill. Firstly, the reconnaissance team he was currently a part of ran out of rations orns ago, so everybody, Soundwave included, was starving. His hunger was accompanied by the standard dizziness and weakness, but this wasn't what was getting to him. Rather, it was worry. Worry for his cassettes. He cared for them all deeply, and they needed to refuel more often than he did. Soundwave worried for their health. They were already lethargic, all riding in his chest compartment to conserve precious energy.

Soundwave shook his head, freeing himself from his worries if only for a minute to see if he had missed anything.

The seeker trine was arguing (presumably about something stupid) as usual. Starscream lived up to his name as he screeched at an annoyed Skywarp while Thundercracker tried to break it up. The Constructicons were fighting over what they thought was half an energon cube (actually a small pink lunchbox- how did *that* get all the way out here?). The Stunticons, idiots that they were, were doing donuts and skidding across the dusty expanse, wasting what little energy they had left.

Nope, Soundwave hadn't missed a thing.

Now he could go back to worrying in peace.

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A detail that had escaped Soundwave's notice: not *all* of the Constructicons were involved in the fight for the lunchbox, long crushed by now. Hook stood far from the fight, cross-legged on the ground as he fiddled with a small handheld device. This new invention of his- a matter disintegration beam that forced the very *molecules* apart, would surely be an invaluable weapon to the Decepticon cause. He grinned as he tightened a tiny bolt, oblivious to the disarray around him.

Meanwhile, Hook's teammates realized that the lunchbox was a) not an energon cube and b) now an aluminum pancake, so they ceased their quarrel and resorted to small talk. Eventually, the conversation turned to Soundwave.

"Does he even feel at *all*?" Mixmaster inquired, staring at the communications officer out of the corner of his optic.

"What do you mean?" Scrapper questioned.

"Emotions, Scrapper! Does he *care* about anything?"

"Well, I think he cares about his cassettes.." Scrapper trailed.

"Don't be ridiculous, Scrapper." Bonecrusher cut in. "They're just pawns, *drones* to Soundwave and nothing more."

The Constructicons *thought* they were out of earshot, but no sound escaped Soundwave's audios. Suddenly, the TIC felt a cassette pop out on its own.

"W-Who you callin' a drone, *punk?*" Rumble snarled, sizing up the Constructicons as best as his starved little frame could. "Boss cares about *us* more than you aft-heads could ever know!"

"That's it-!" Bonecrusher lunged forward, but Scrapper held him back.

Rumble got into a fighting stance, swaying on his pedes. The fight hadn't even started yet the cassette was already seeing stars. He was so much smaller and weaker than Bonecrusher, not to mention he was very low on energy, yet he was *still* willing to defend Soundwave. This made the TIC's spark throb with emotion, unseeable to others. Once more, a cassette popped out without warning, and Frenzy ran to assist his brother.

"Yo Bonehead! You pick a fight with Rumble and you pick a fight with *me!*" The red cassette shouted, ready to punch the bulldozer despite what his weakened frame would imply. "Bad enough that you insulted our boss, too!"

"Let them *go*, Bonecrusher." Scrapper demanded. "They aren't a fair match for you, much less in *this* condition."

Bonecrusher snorted, shooting one last death glare to the twins before skulking off. Before the twins could celebrate, Rumble's knees gave, forcing Frenzy to hold him for support.

"Bro! You alright?"

"Ugh... I don't know a lotta good words Frenzy, which *sucks* 'cause I can't tell you how fragging *hungry* I am!" Rumble groaned, both hands over his hollow belly. "Maaan, my tank is *eating itself!* I don't know *what* I'd do for an energon cube!"

"Stop it dude, you're making *me* hungry!"

"You weren't already?"

"Uh- well, hungry-*er*."

"Not as much as me though. I'm so hungry, I bet I could eat an *entire* turbo-fox!"

“Oh really? *I* could eat a whole *Sharkticon*.”

The twins continued to squabble over who could eat more until a pair of unified growls silenced the debate. They settled on an eating contest when they got the chance, and returned to Soundwave.

“Hey boss, you ok?” Frenzy called from the tape deck. “You’ve been kinda quiet.”

“Soundwave: is fine. Worry: not necessary.”

“Cmon boss, I bet you’re just as crazy hungry as we are. We can all hear your tank growling like crazy from the tape deck.” Frenzy retorted.

“*Yeah!* It sounds like there’s a mad turbo-fox in there!” Rumble added. “You should really get some fuel in ya boss. We’re not gonna eat until you do.”

A heavy pause.

“If I find any in this dump, I’m givin’ ya first taste.”

“Soundwave: appreciates.”

The semi-sweet moment was interrupted by another loud gurgle from Soundwave’s core, but not his fuel tank..

Frenzy snickered. “And *that’s* why they call him Rumble.”

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Hook smiled as he *finally* finished his prototype, but his victory was short-lived as distant shouts marked the arrival of Autobot forces. Hook smiled even wider. Time to test his invention...

Amidst the smoke and gunfire, Hook singled out some nameless Autobot trooper engaging Soundwave as a target. Ready... Aim...

Fire!

The hapless Autobot was engulfed in a blinding light, that faded to reveal nothing where he once stood. Hook fist pumped. Victory!

Unfortunately, the fight was short-lived, as the Autobots retreated soon after. Hook lamented the loss of more test subjects but hey, what can you do?

“HOOK!”

The medic’s thoughts were broken by the sound of Bonecrusher’s voice.

“Yes?”

“Soundwave wants to know just how the *Pit* you managed to make a *shrink ray!*”

“*Shrink ray?* I’m not sure I follow...”

Bonecrusher sighed. “Just... C’mon, I’ll show ya.”

Hook followed the bulldozer to Scrapper and Soundwave, who was holding something in his hands much like a child would a captured insect. When he arrived, the TIC parted his hands to reveal the Autobot Hook shot earlier- not disintegrated, but *shrunk*, and currently shouting obscenities.

“What is the meaning of this? He was supposed to be destroyed at the *molecular level!*”

“We’ll discuss your mad science later.” Scrapper said. “Right now, we need to figure out what to do with our prisoner. Soundwave’s already established that he has no useful info on him...”

Soundwave unceremoniously dropped the Autobot into an empty energon cube.

“Prisoner: contained.”

“All right, what *now?*” Bonecrusher pondered. Then he had an idea. He sent a comm to Scrapper.

*I know how to prove if Sounders can feel.*

*What? How?*

*Just watch...*

“Hey Soundwave!”

The communications officer turned to face Bonecrusher.

“Do you feel anything? Like, *emotions?*”

“Negative.” That was a lie, of course.

“Ok Sounders, prove it.” Bonecrusher glanced at the energon cube. “You're in need of fuel, so eat our useless little prisoner here.”

*Nobody in the right mind would eat a mech, Autobot or no.*

Scrapper and Hook were shocked, but the wheels in Soundwave's head were turning. He saw that Bonecrusher was trying to get him to crack, which wouldn't work. Then, a memory came to him.

*“We're not gonna eat until you do.”*

Soundwave made his decision. His fuel tank churned in approval. Taking the cube, Soundwave retracted his face mask to the shock of the Constructicons.

*He... Has a face. Soundwave has a face...*

Ignoring the gaping builders, Soundwave put the cube to his lips as if drinking, tilting it to make the prisoner slide on his glossa. He kicked and thrashed as Soundwave's mouth closed around him. Soundwave found his prisoner mouthwatering, causing lubricant to well and liberally wash over his snack. The tiny Autobot panicked harder as he became soaked in drool. This couldn't be happening. He wasn't going to become fuel for the Decepticon TIC. He was *not!*

Soundwave found it difficult to hold the thrashing Autobot in his mouth, so he calmly placed a hand over it to ensure that the little morsel was trapped. He let him squirm, becoming coated in lubricant, until he spent all of his energy. Now, the hopeless prisoner could only twitch in the tight confines of Soundwave's mouth.

Assured that the prisoner would no longer struggle, Soundwave tilted his head back and began to swallow. The now-slippery prisoner was easily pushed into the TIC's waiting throat. When he struggled, the lack of friction only pushed him closer to his doom. The prisoner fought valiantly to wriggle free, but Soundwave's esophageal mechanisms were just too strong. Eventually, the prisoner's head and shoulders were worked into the pulsating throat, though the lower legs still stuck out of Soundwave's mouth. The predator tossed the cube aside and swallowed again, bringing the prisoner into his waist and pinning his arms. There was no hope for him now.

The Constructicons watched as a bulge formed in their comrade's throat, sliding down with every gulp. The pedes were pulled in, and the mouth was shut behind them. Two more hard gulps was all it took for the prisoner to be sent down completely. The bulge disappeared at the base of Soundwave's neck. After a few moments, Soundwave spoke.

“Sustenance: acquired.”

The prisoner dropped into the gurgling fuel tank, smaller than the norm to accommodate the tape deck. The tank “ceiling” was too low to allow the prisoner to stand, forcing him to curl up in a fetal position. It was dark and hot, the walls slick with tingling solvent. The walls contracted around him, splashing burning solvent. The prisoner cringed in pain and began to furiously beat at the walls, to no avail. Soundwave would never admit it, but he enjoyed the feeling of his meal’s struggles. He enjoyed the whole experience, in fact- the prisoner’s piteous begging, the struggling as his esophagus pushed the morsel down into his painfully empty fuel tank, the *immensely* satisfying feeling when the prisoner dropped right into the pit of his tank, not to mention the current writhing...

“Whoa, boss. Did you really...?”

“Yes, Rumble, you nincompoop. He did.” Came the stuffy voice of Buzzsaw.

“I can hear him, bro. He’s swearing so much it’d make the Constructicons blush.” Frenzy remarked.

A sudden *growl*. Screams of pain.

“Personally, I only like Autobots for their melting point.” Laserbeak stated. “From the sounds of it, it appears that our little prisoner is going to melt quite nicely~”

“Like the *Pit* I am!” Came a muffled reply. “There’s no way I’m gonna let myself be digested in here!”

Ravage scoffed. “It’s a little late to do *that* now, don’t you think?”

“Yes, I agree!” Ratbat chirped. “So be a good little snack and *give up*.”

“N-never...”

It appeared that Soundwave’s powerful gut was finally starting to get the better of its prisoner.

“It vil be a lot easier for you in the long run if you just keep your head in the solvent now...”

“NO!”

All of a sudden, Soundwave’s tank churned, knocking the prisoner into the scalding solvent, eliciting a cry of pain.

Frenzy cackled like a hyena. “See? You really should just call it quits!”

“Perhaps you were once a great warrior, but now you are nothing but a mouthful of fuel, destined to be dissolved and broken into the most basic components. Fret not, for you shall receive the posthumous honor of being part of our master.”

“Whoa there Buzzsaw. No need to get all poetic on our afts.”

“Silence, Rumble.”

Silence indeed reigned over the cassettes as their master began to move, listening to the sounds of digestion.

...

Long story short, the reconnaissance team met with another on the way back to base who were happy to share their rations. Thus ended Soundwave's worries for now. He distributed energon equally among his ravenous (but grateful) cassettes, smiling behind his visor as they all dug in.

“And that's why they call him Frenzy.” Rumble quipped, watching his twin messily tear into his energon cube.

Soundwave partook as well- the prisoner had long since died, and most of his liquified remains had been sucked into the rest of the TIC's efficient digestive tract. There would be nothing left of the tiny Autobot but a surplus of minerals and self-repair nanites in Soundwave's body. This, of course, meant that the communications officer was hungry again, so he heeded the cries of his empty stomach and filled it to the brim with energon. All in all, both courses made for a satisfying meal.

Satisfying enough, that Soundwave's bliss blinded him to the fact that Hook's shrink ray was nowhere to be found...