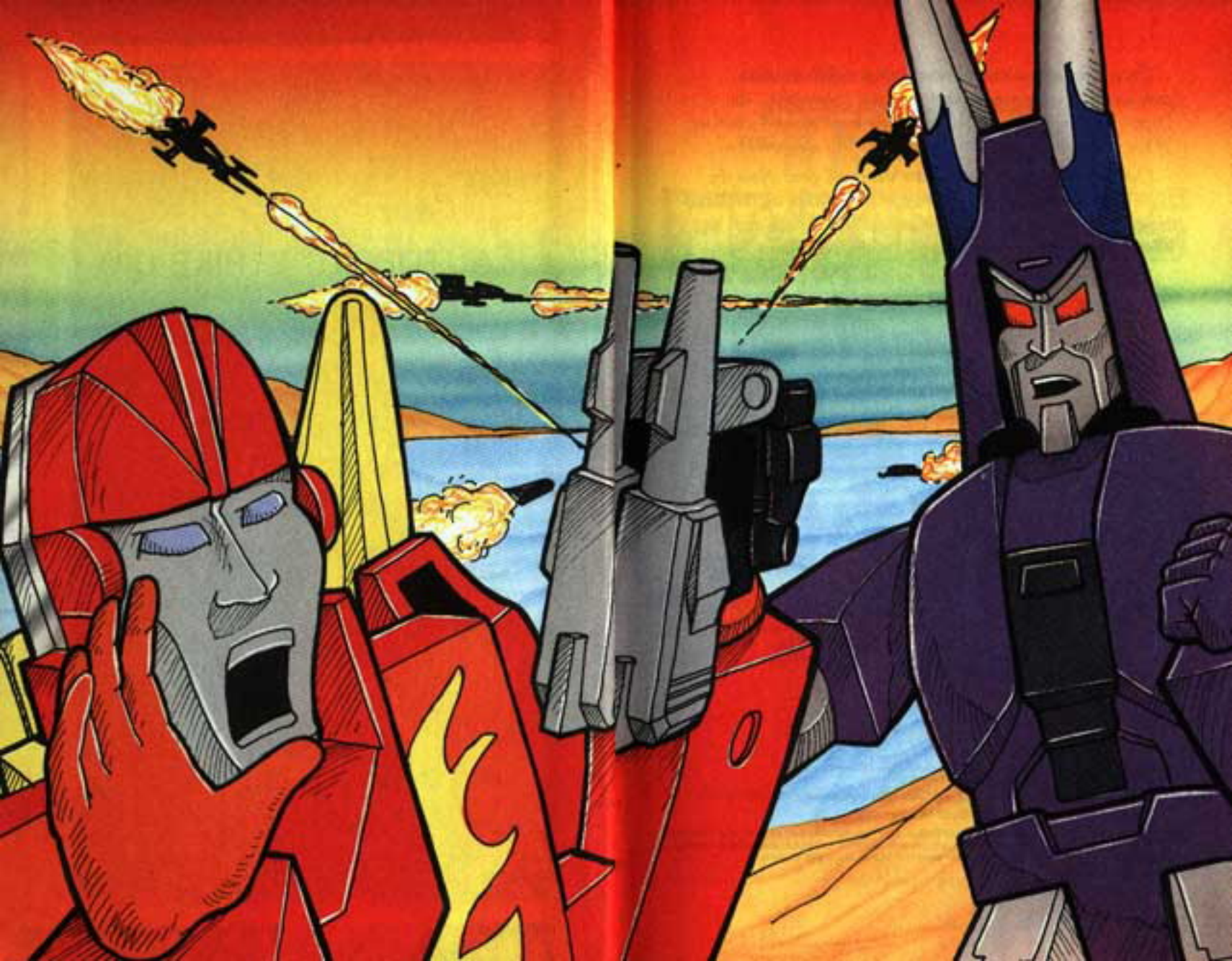


Ladybird

THE TRANSFORMERS™

**AUTOBOTS
STRIKE
OIL**





Once, long ago, a race of robot beings called Autobots were forced to wage war against their evil counterparts, the Decepticons, to bring peace back to their home planet Cybertron. When chance brought both sides to Earth, the war went on.

Over many centuries leaders have come and gone. Now the fight continues in a far flung corner of the galaxy, on the planet Nebulos. Both Autobots and Decepticons have formed new alliances, each with a rival group of native Nebulans.

The Decepticons are determined to destroy the Autobots and reign supreme. Will they succeed?

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THE TRANSFORMERS™



by JOHN GRANT

illustrated by BARRY ROWELL of LEOGRAPHICS

Ladybird Books

In the Autobot base on planet Nebulos, the old warrior Autobot Kup was having a small repair job in the maintenance bay. He stretched out an arm. It made a loud creaking sound. He turned his head to greet Hot Rod who had just entered, and his neck joint squeaked even louder than his arm. "I know I'm not getting any younger," he exclaimed. "But this is ridiculous!"



"You're not the only one getting stiff," said Hot Rod. "We all are. Our store of lubricants is almost all used up."

"But we used to make it as we needed it," said Kup.

"Nebulos is short on the right raw materials," said Hot Rod. "The Nebulans, being small, don't need much. Perhaps they can suggest some way in which we can use what they have. Perhaps we could try something new altogether."



Hot Rod spoke to Kup's Nebulan partner, Recoil. "It's getting serious," he said. "Surely somewhere on the planet there is some substance we can use in our synthetic lubricant plant."

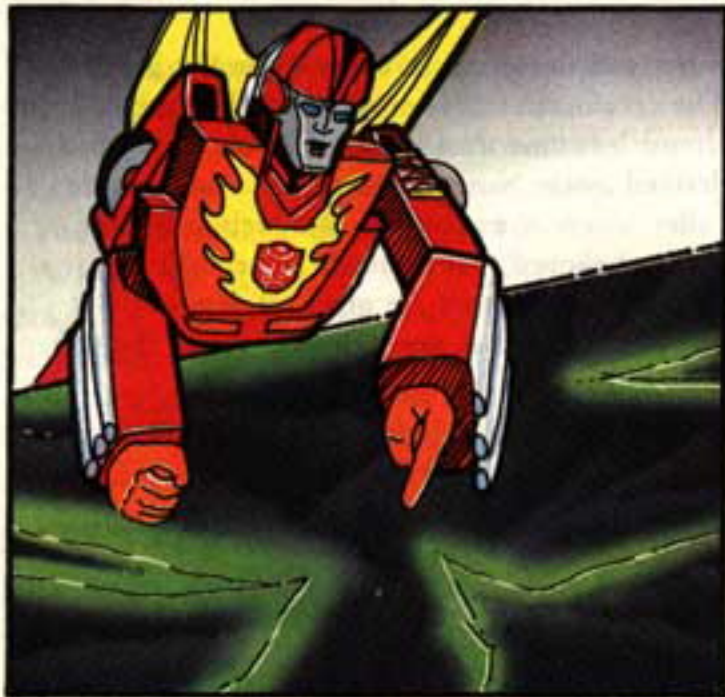
The small Nebulan looked up at Hot Rod.

"When I was young," he said, "the old Nebulans spoke of a great lake of oil. It was more than enough for our needs. It lay among jagged mountains, and stretched as far as the eye could see. Then there was a terrible earthquake. Great areas of Nebulos were totally destroyed. But

worse still, huge cracks appeared in the ground. The cracks ran right across the bed of the lake. In almost less time than it takes to tell, the oil had drained away. Now, there is only a vast barren valley where it used to be. We Nebulans have always believed that somewhere beneath the surface of our planet are great oil deposits. But our technology has never been equal to the task of recovering it."

"With Nebulan help," said Hot Rod, "Autobot technology might just do the trick."





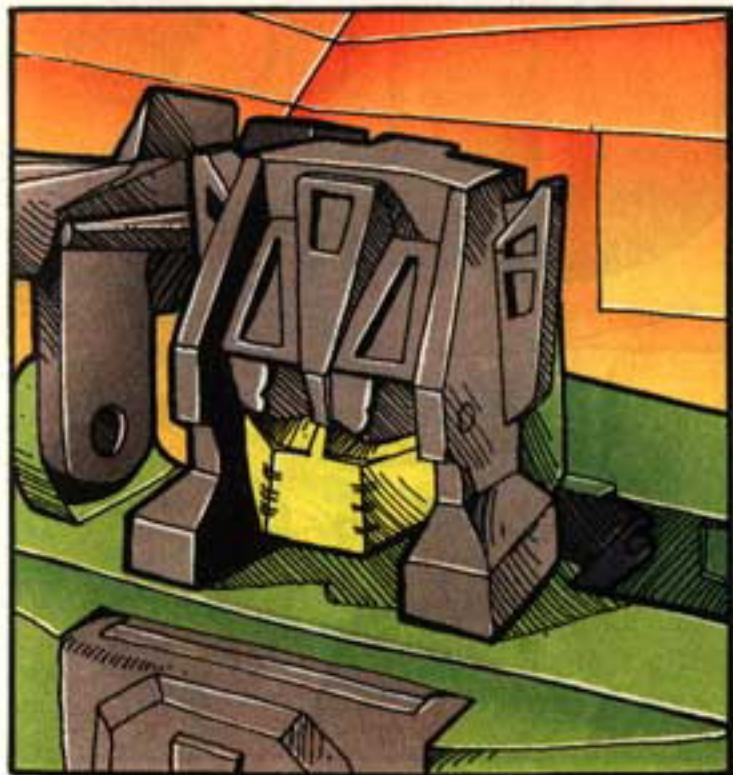
Hot Rod got together with Chromedome and Hardhead, two of the Headmaster Autobots.

"We don't have a lot to go on," he told them. "The whole story of the oil lake may be no more than a Nebulan legend. But our lubricant situation is getting desperate."

On a giant hologram map of part of the planet, Hot Rod pointed to a flat plain surrounded by mountains. "This might just be the bed of an old lake," he said. "Recoil visited the spot long ago and can give you details on how to get there. Any questions?"

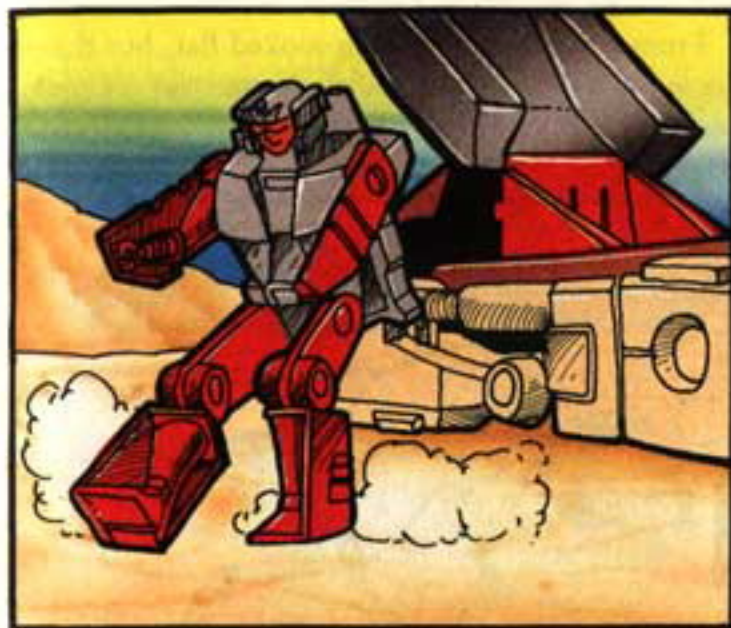
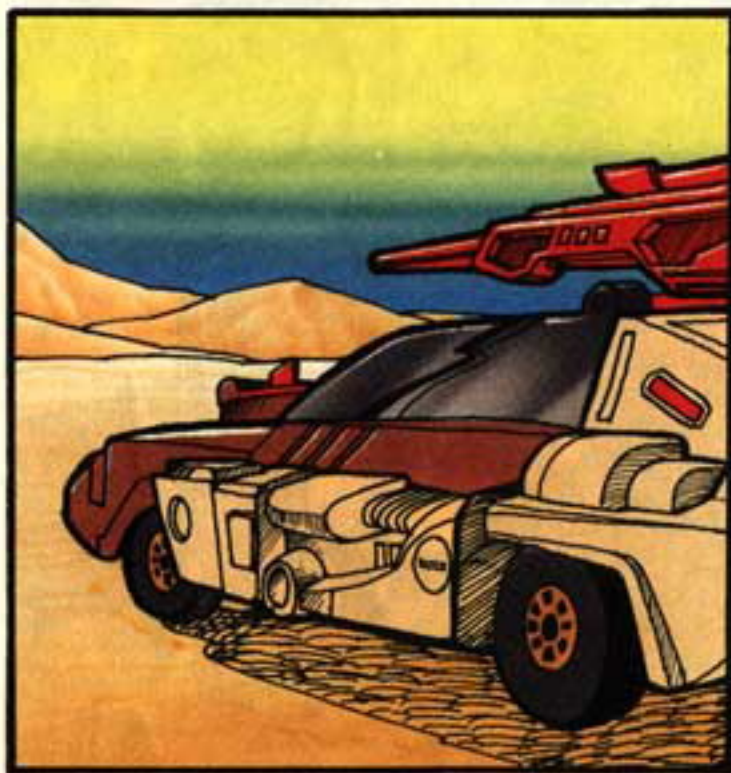
"What about the Decepticons?" asked Hardhead. "They are perhaps as short of lubricant as we are. They might even be out prospecting as well."

"If the Decepticons were reasonable, we could co-operate in our search," said Hot Rod. "But I don't trust them. That's why I'm sending only two of you. You'll attract less attention than a large survey party. Keep your eyes open at all times. And, good luck."



Transformed to vehicle mode, Chromedome and Hardhead set off. Programmed into their navigation systems were the co-ordinates suggested by Recoil for the vanished lake of oil.

After many kilometres they entered a narrow, winding gorge. The gorge led through a range of jagged mountains, and as they came out of the far end they found themselves on the edge of a wide plain. Far away on the other side of the plain were more mountains.



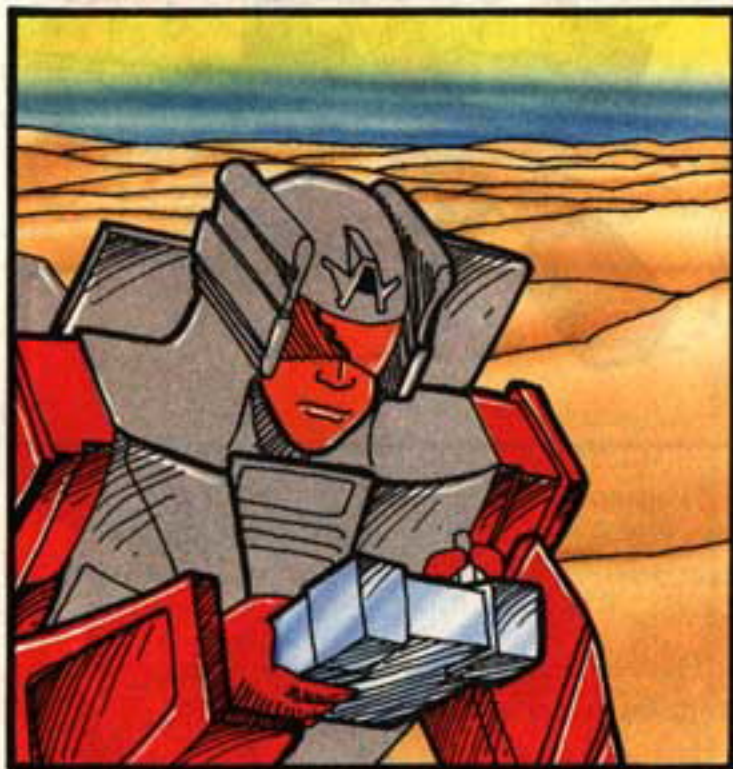
"This could be it!" cried Chromedome. He checked the co-ordinate read-out on his navigation display panel. "Right, there's work to be done."

The Nebulans Stylor and Duros dismounted from the larger robots.

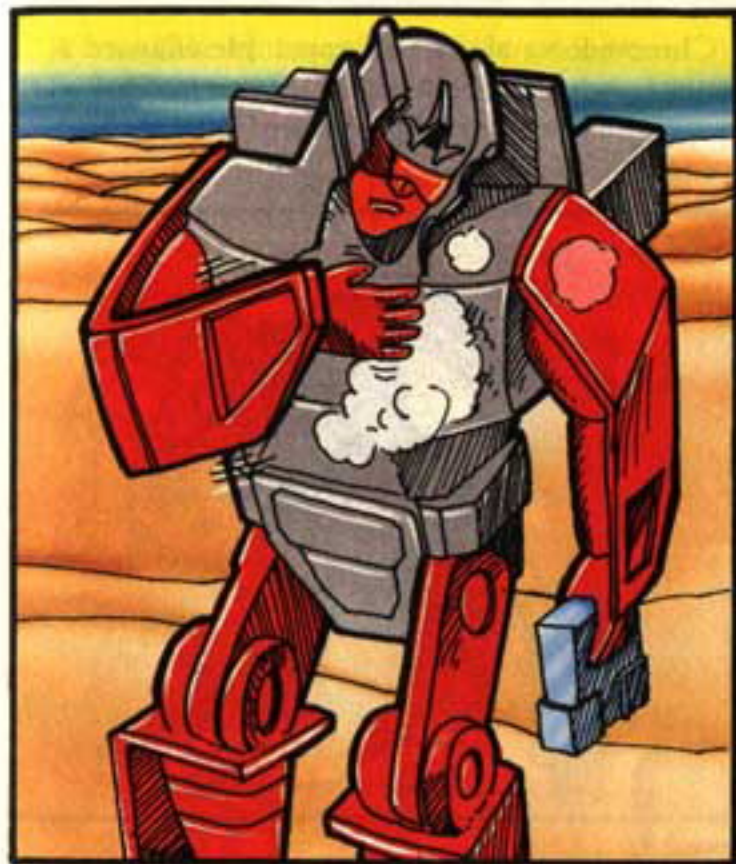
The ground was covered with fine dust. Stylor looked down in disgust as the dust settled on his shining metalwork. He brushed it off as Duros unpacked the portable geo-sensors.

Then the two small robots set off in different directions across the huge plain, in search of the precious oil.

From a distance, the plain looked flat, but there were hollows and small hills and outcrops of rock. Very soon Duros and Stylor lost sight of each other.



Stylor muttered to himself as he trudged across the dusty levels and slipped and scrambled over rocks and boulders. He kept a close watch on the dial of his geo-sensor, but it registered nothing. He carried on a little farther before making a wide circle to rejoin Chromedome and Hardhead.

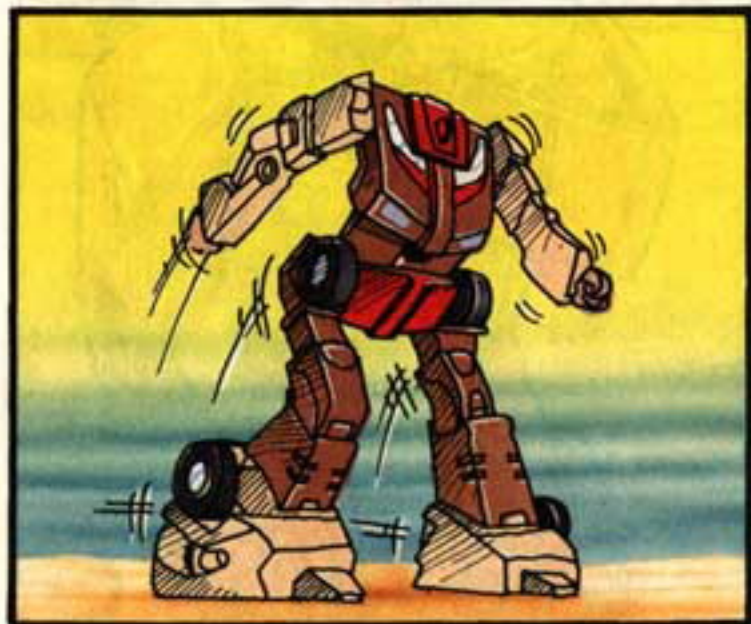


"Well?" said Chromedome.

"Not a thing," grunted Stylor. And he rubbed at some dents and scratches where he had slipped among the rocks.

"Perhaps Duros is having better luck," said Hardhead. He transformed to his robot mode and stood up to get a clearer view across the plain. As he did so his sensors picked up a faint signal.

Chromedome also transformed. He adjusted a control. A light flickered on his console. He swung round, and the light glowed brightly for a moment before fading.

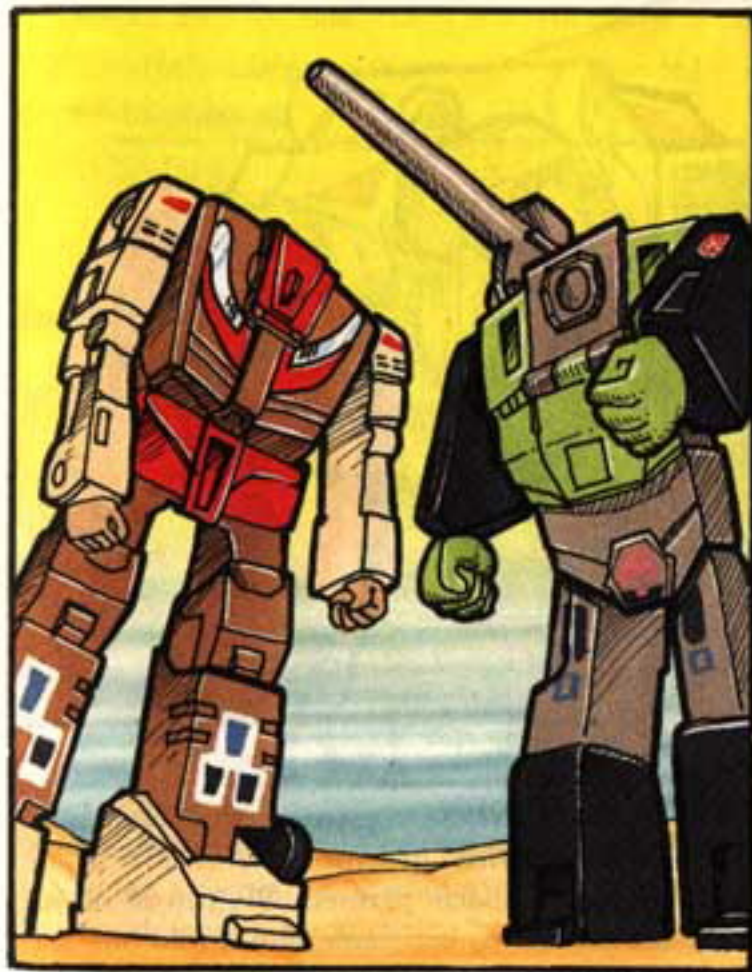


"I'm picking up Decepticons!" he said.

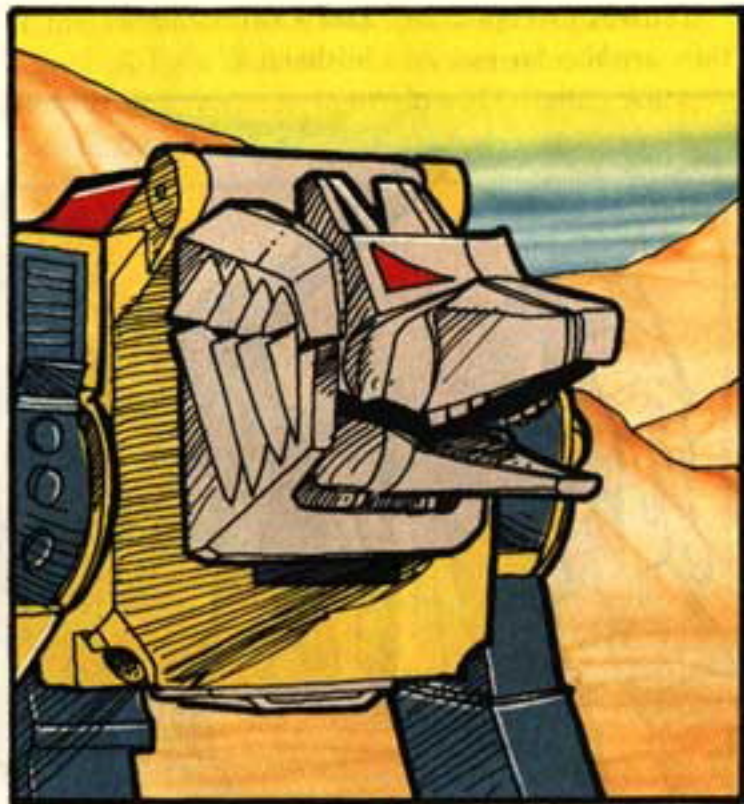
"Same here," said Hardhead.

The two giant robots scanned the distant horizon with their electronic vision. But there was nothing to be seen but kilometre after kilometre of desolate rock. Suddenly, for a moment, light sparkled from some faraway object. There was a hint of movement on a mountain ridge. Then, it was gone.

"If it was Decepticons," said Chromedome, "they are too far away to bother us."



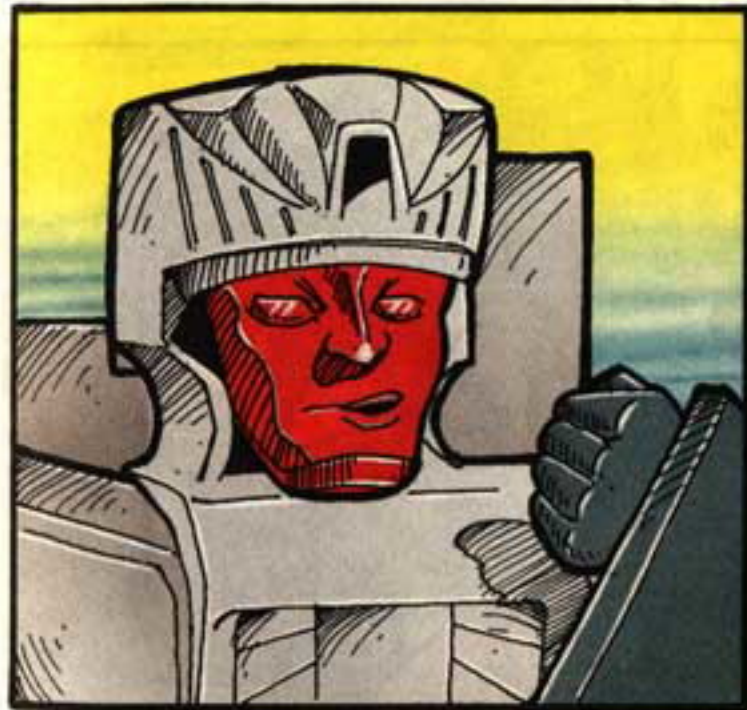
"Pity!" said Hardhead. "I feel like some exercise. Smashing up a few Decepticons would suit me fine!"



High on a mountain, on the edge of the Autobots' sensor range, the Decepticon Weirdwolf watched the activities of Chromedome, Hardhead and their two Nebulan partners. Weirdwolf turned his scent scanner to maximum. But it told him no more than he already knew. A party of Autobots was moving about among the distant rocks. The air shimmered in the heat. It was impossible to guess what they were up to.

Monzo, Weirdwolf's Nebulan trainer, snarled as he perched on a rock for a better view. "Autobots, eh?" he said. "Let's tear 'em apart!"

"I want to know what they're up to," growled Weirdwolf.



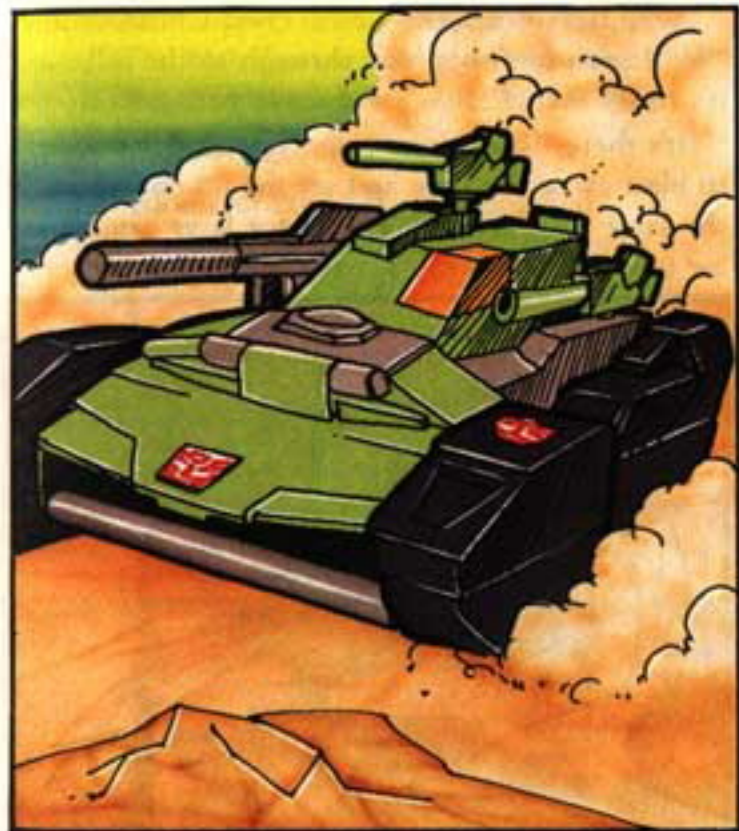
"Having a picnic," suggested Monzo. "Autobots are stupid enough for anything."

"You're a fine one to call them stupid," said Weirdwolf. "Cyclonus will be interested in what they're up to. Come on. We'll report back to base."

As Weirdwolf and Monzo prepared to return to Decepticon base, Duros was hurrying to rejoin the Autobots. Waving his geo-sensor he shouted, "I've found it! Maximum intensity! Over there!" And he pointed to a low, domed hill which rose above the dusty plain.



The Autobots transformed. Chromedome picked his way carefully through the rocks and boulders. In his tank mode, Hardhead charged over everything in a straight line for the domed hill, churning up a great cloud of dust with his tracks.

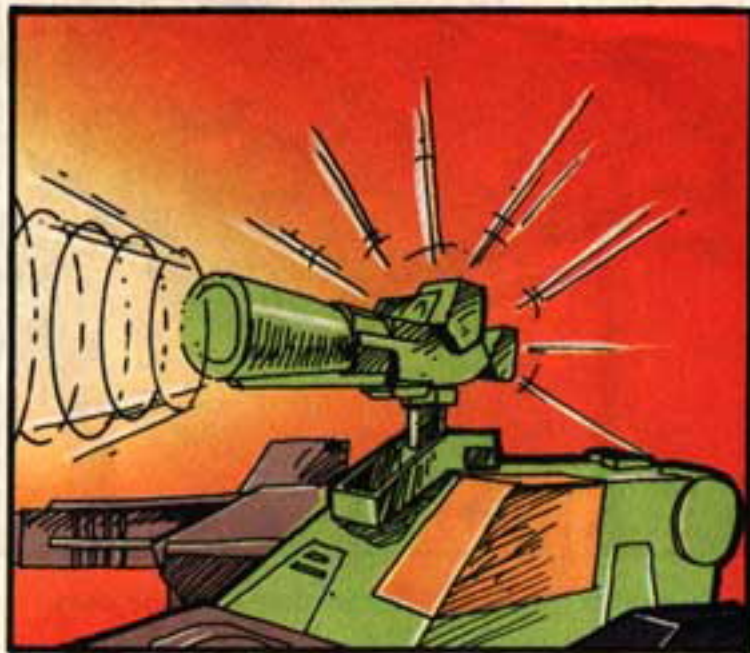


"Careful!" shouted Chromedome, as the dust obscured his view.

But Duros' geo-sensor was by now bleeping and flashing like mad, and Hardhead was too excited to pay attention to Chromedome. He crunched to a halt at the foot of the hill. Chromedome joined him a moment later, coughing and spluttering as he emerged from the dust cloud.

"Well, let's not waste time," cried Chromedome. "We'll soon blast our way through to the oil... if it's really there!"

"It's there," said Hardhead. "But we don't want to blast away the rock and set the oil on fire at the same time. This isn't a job for laser cannon. Switch off audio-sensors, everybody! Here goes!"



Hardhead swivelled his main cannon barrel towards the side of the hill. Then he loosed a stream of sonic shell-fire. The powerful sound energy released by the shells blasted the rock to powder, forming a circular hole in the side of the hill. The hole became deeper and deeper.

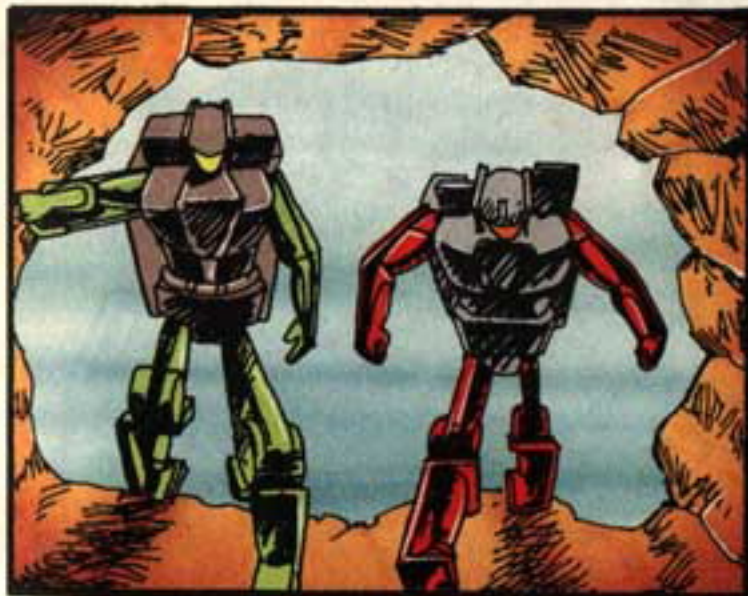
Hardhead stopped firing. "Have a look, Duros," he said. The Nebulan scrambled to the rim of the hole. It stretched like a low tunnel before him.

"Some light would help," he called.

Chromedome drove to the opening and switched on his powerful quartzite headlamps. Far down the tunnel the light gleamed on something shiny. A powerful smell wafted towards the Autobots.

"OIL!" cried Chromedome.

"Let's have a closer look," said Duros. And he and Stylor crept cautiously down the steep slope, ducking their heads under the low rocky roof.



The two small Nebulan robots reached the foot of the tunnel. They were in a vast cavern. The light from Chromedome's headlights shone only a short distance beyond where they stood.

But it was bright enough to see that they were on the shore of a vast, underground lake of oil. It lapped the rock at their feet. It moved slowly with mysterious currents and swirled around the foot of the weird rock pillars that supported the roof of the cavern.

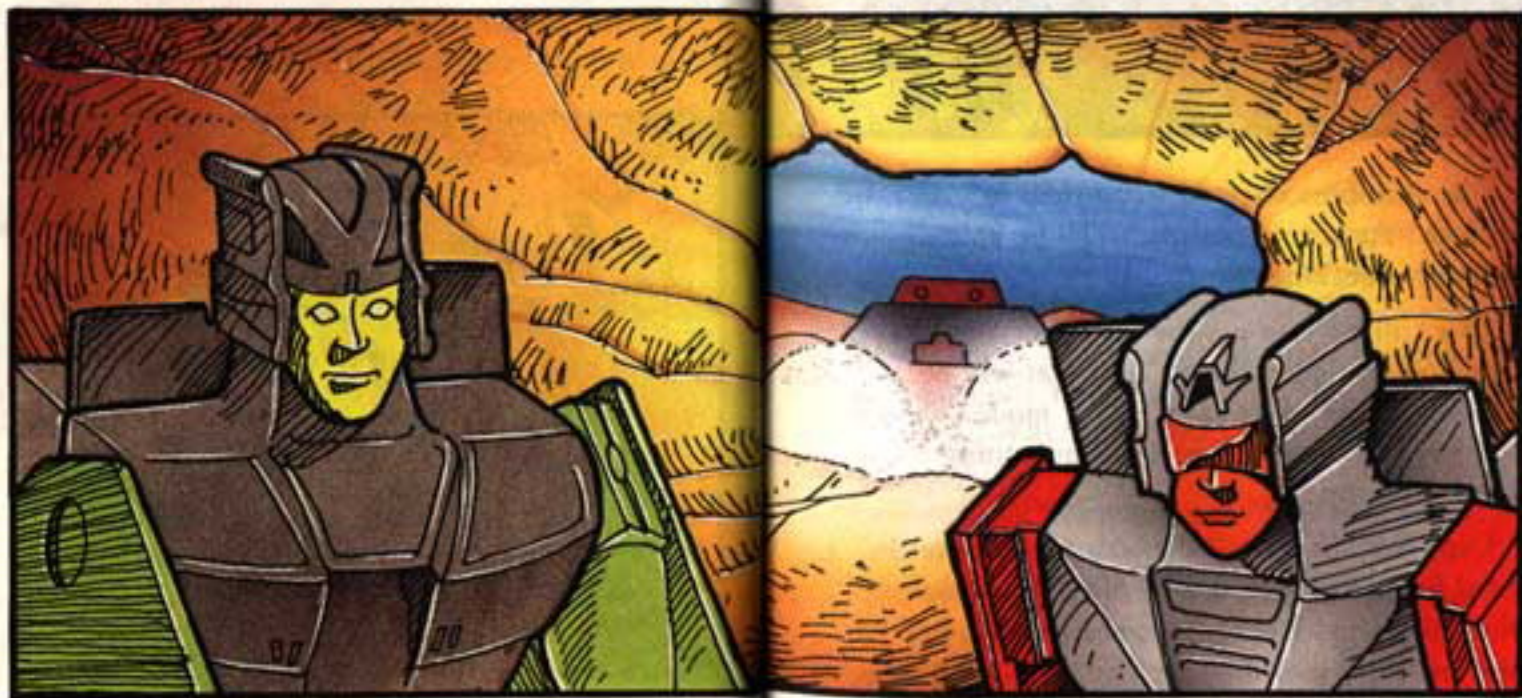
Even at the limit of their electronic vision,

Duros and Stylor could see no end to the lake.

They hurried back to the surface and described what they had seen.

"This will be a major operation," said Chromedome. "It will take planning and preparation. Until we are ready, let's make sure that the Decepticons don't discover our secret."

"You're right," said Hardhead. And he fired a shot at the rock above the entrance to the tunnel, so that it collapsed over the opening, hiding it from view.

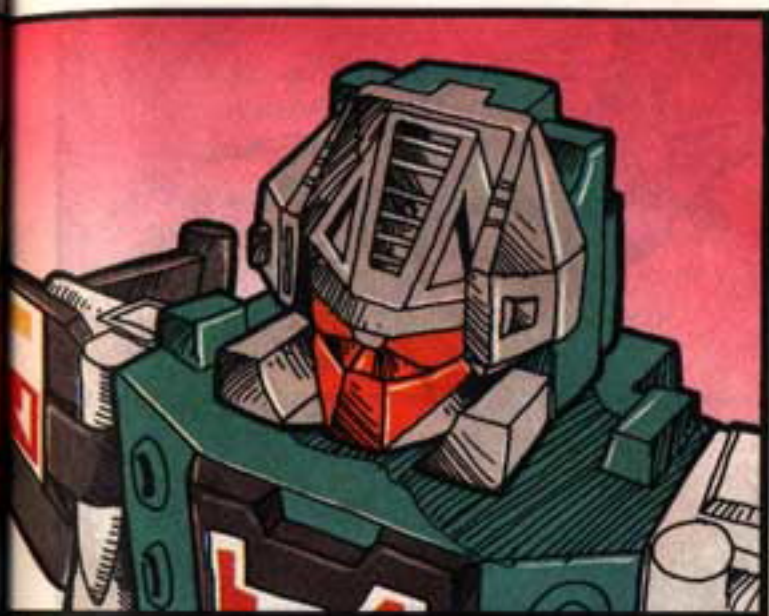




The Autobots cheered when they heard of the oil lake. "At last!" cried Kup. "I'll be able to move without squeaking like a rusty hinge!"

"We still have to get the oil back to our base," Hot Rod reminded them. "And that will be difficult. None of us has a tanker mode. The oil will have to be moved in small quantities, a few drums at a time."

"No! No! That's not the way to set about it," cried Brainstorm excitedly. "No! Not vehicles! Not oil drums! Pipes! Pipes and pumps! Build a pipeline right into the base!"

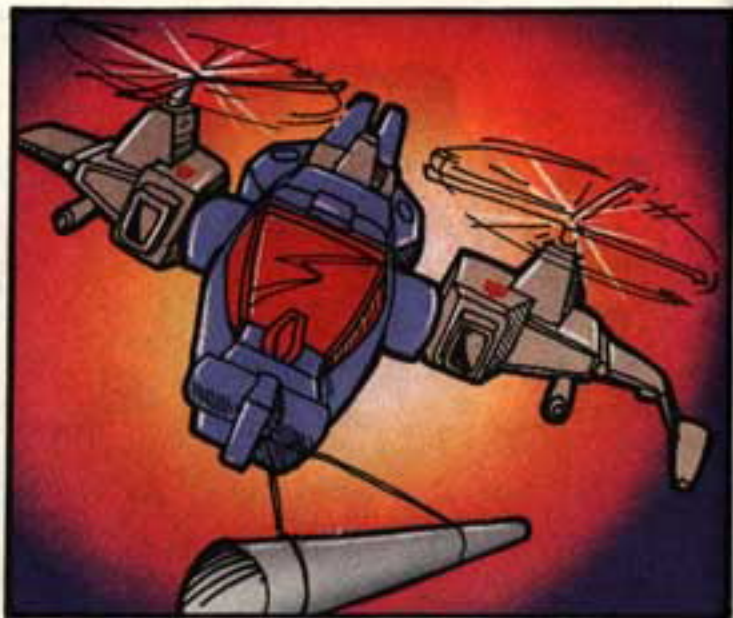


"Of course," said Hot Rod. "Since it's your idea, Brainstorm, you can survey the best route for a pipeline. The rest of us will start our preparations right away for the construction part."

Transforming, Brainstorm went into immediate vertical take-off. Then he paused, a few metres off the ground. "Where did you say this oil lake actually was?"

"I didn't," said Chromedome, "but here are the co-ordinates."

Next moment, Brainstorm was streaking away across the planet, his thermographic scanners already seeking the best route for the pipeline.



In less than a week the Autobots were ready to start laying the pipeline. Sections of pipe were made at the base, and one dark night the work started. Under cover of darkness, Brainstorm and Highbrow flew low, each with a section of pipe slung below, to the tunnel in the domed hill. The smaller Nebulans joined the sections together.

Soon, a continuous pipe reached from the oil lake to a powerful pump close to the surface. Then the pipe was buried in a trench as it gradually reached closer to Autobot base. Before daybreak, the night's work was camouflaged to deceive prying eyes.

The Decepticons were sure that the Autobots were up to something. But so carefully was the work carried out that the Decepticons had no idea what it might be.

Apeface wanted to rush in and destroy whatever it was. Cyclonus, however, suggested that it might be cleverer to wait and do some real damage to the Autobot project once it was complete.



At last the project *was* complete. The pipeline stretched from the underground cavern to Autobot base. And there was nothing to show where it ran... except at one place. There was a deep ravine which ran right across the line of the pipe. Recoil thought that it was probably the remains of one of the cracks which had drained the oil lake long, long ago. Here, for a few metres, the pipe came into the open and bridged the gap on a slender metal trestle. Back at base, the Autobots had built massive storage tanks.



The Autobots gathered to watch as Hot Rod turned the control that opened the valves. The needles on the gauges swung steadily round as the oil flowed along the pipe and into the tanks.

The Autobots would never need to fear a shortage of lubricant again.



Now that the Autobots were no longer at work, Cyclonus led a reconnaissance flight of himself, and the two Targetmasters, Slugslinger and Misfire, out over the plain. They saw nothing of the pipeline, but Slugslinger was sure he spotted signs of recent Autobot activity close by a deep ravine.

Cyclonus signalled back to Decepticon base, "Apeface! Snapdragon! Get out here right away. I think there's work for you."

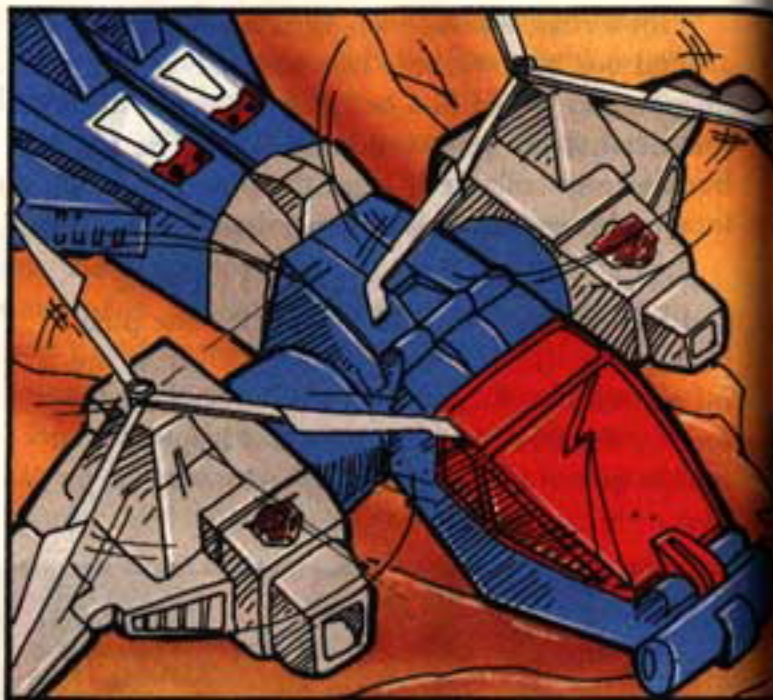
Cyclonus, Slugslinger and Misfire circled above the ravine. Soon they heard the roar of jets, and Apeface and Snapdragon came sweeping down to join them. Cyclonus pointed out the ravine, and watched as Apeface and Snapdragon set down near it and transformed to their monster modes.

Snapdragon prowled along the edge of the ravine while Apeface slithered to the bottom. It was only a matter of moments before they spotted the pipe and its supporting trestle.

With a roar, Apeface wrapped his mighty arms around one of the trestle legs and heaved. Snapdragon joined him and began ripping through the metal struts with teeth and claws. The trestle buckled and collapsed... but the pipe was still intact, although it sagged dangerously.

Apeface reached up. He gripped the pipe and hauled down with all his might. The pipe split across, and Apeface just leapt clear as the oil poured out. Snapdragon was bowled off his feet by the flow, but stood up and laughed crazily as the black liquid dripped from every part of him.





The break in the oil pipe was quickly discovered by the Autobots. One look at the pressure gauges told them that something was wrong.

Kup said, "I'll see what's amiss. It may be a simple malfunction at the pump. I've enough tools and spares to repair practically anything."

"I'll go on ahead," said Highbrow. He transformed to his helicopter mode and rose into the air. As Kup transformed and followed after him on the ground, Hot Rod called after him,



"Watch out for Decepticons! This may be the result of their handiwork!"

Over his radio, Kup heard Highbrow.

"I have optimum video perception... ducting discontinuity ninety degrees vertical."

"Eh?" said Kup.

"I can clearly see a break in the pipe directly below," replied Highbrow.

"I'm coming as quickly as I can," said Kup. "Signal base to shut down the pump."

In Kup's experienced hands the cutting, straightening and welding of the wrecked oil pipe was quickly finished. "The pipe needs more protection," he said to Highbrow. "Stand clear."

Recoil, Kup's Nebulan partner, transformed to his old-fashioned musket laser mode. With a few quick bursts Kup brought the sides of the ravine down in a shower of stones and gravel. The pipe was completely buried and out of sight.

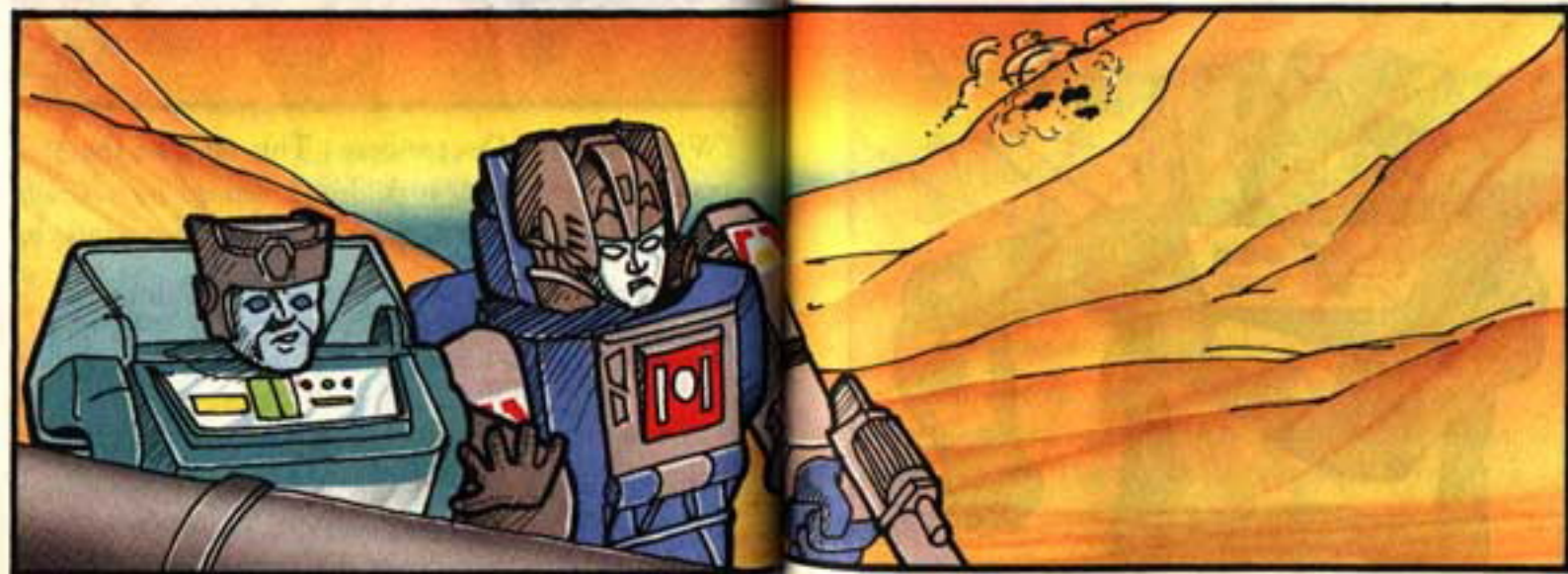
The two Autobots had just turned away from the ravine when Highbrow held up his hand. "What's that?" he said. "My audio sensors have picked up something..."

But before he could utter another word there was a roar of engines, and shots flew around the Autobots. In a cloud of dust, a Decepticon fighting patrol was approaching on the far side of the ravine.

Kup and Highbrow dived for cover and returned the fire. "How many are there?" asked Kup.

"My infra-red sensors say three... but there are at least another two coming up fast. May I suggest a maximum velocity retrogression?" said Highbrow.

"You mean retreat as fast as we can? You're right! Let's move!"

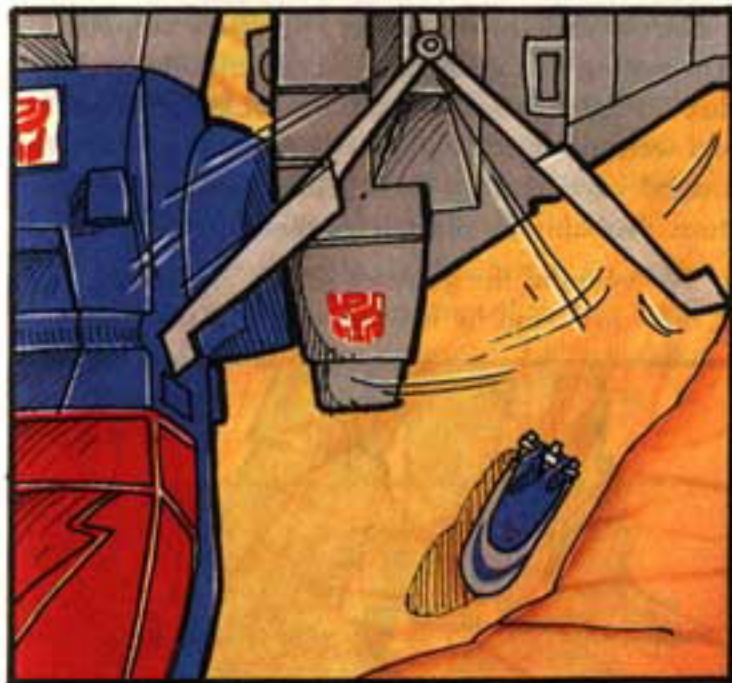
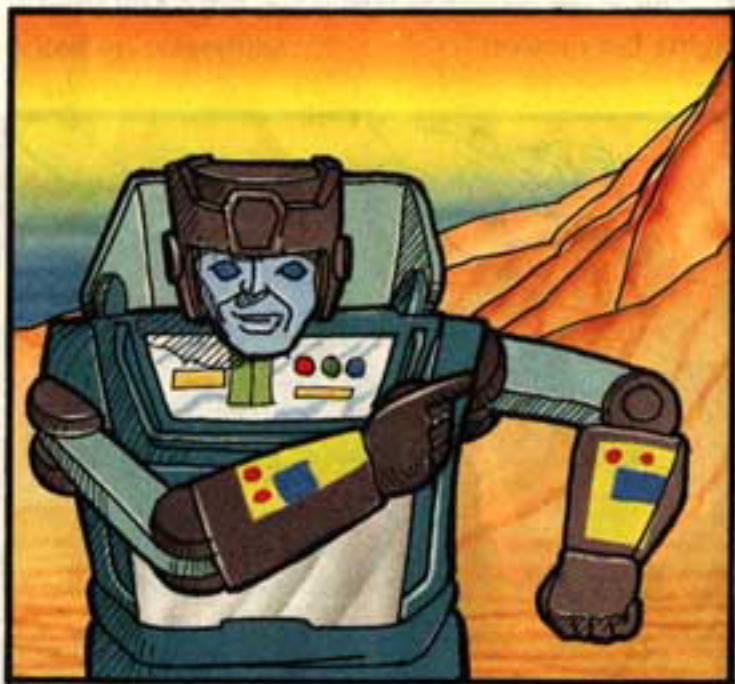


Ducking and weaving, keeping under cover, the Autobots scrambled along. They came to the foot of a small mountain and rested in a shallow gully. There was no sign of the Decepticons.

"We've given them the slip," said Kup.

"Yes," said Highbrow. "We were lucky. None of them was a flier, and the ravine would take them some time to cross."

"Let's not hang around," said Kup. "Up you go and see what the situation is."



Highbrow transformed and lifted off. He hovered below the top of the mountain and signalled to the ground. "The only one I can see clearly is Scourge. The others have taken cover among the rocks."

"Is there no way out?" asked Kup.

"If we stay in cover and keep the mountain between them and us, we should be able to sneak around them. But it means crossing a stretch of open desert," said Highbrow.

"Let's go," said Kup.

On the edge of the desert Highbrow stopped. "I'm getting an exponential increase in magnetic flux on my sensor," he said. He looked at Kup and went on quickly, "There's something magnetic around here, and it's been getting stronger all the time. Probably an old buried meteorite."

"Never mind the geology lesson," said Kup. "Come on!" And he led the way into the desert.



After a short distance he said, "I know I'm getting old... but this is ridiculous. I can hardly walk."

"Me neither," said Highbrow. His feet and legs were thickly coated with dust. He bent to brush it off, and the dust stuck to his hands. He tried again. "The dust is magnetic!" he cried. "We must get out before we are completely weighed down!"

"Keep to the rocks," cried Kup, struggling to a rocky outcrop which showed above the dust. Before he could reach it a powerful force threw him with a loud clang against a jagged boulder... and he stuck fast. "The whole place is magnetic!" he shouted. "Stay clear, Highbrow!"

"I'll get help!" called back Highbrow. Fighting the magnetic field which threatened to jam his electronics, Highbrow transformed. Laboriously, weighed down by the clinging magnetic dust, he rose into the air.



As he headed back to Autobot base, Highbrow muttered to himself. "Polarised magnetic flux... destabilise ion transfer... reverse input-output poles. It's worth a try." He landed and transformed. Removing his chest-plate, he reached inside and disconnected and connected part of his wiring. "Here goes!" he said as he made the last connection. There was a bright flash... and the magnetic dust came loose and blew away on the breeze. Highbrow shook his head and blinked. "Wow!" he said with a grimace. "I'm glad I don't have to do *that* every day!"



Airborne once more, he suddenly caught sight of a familiar figure far below. It was Crosshairs, on solitary patrol. He landed beside Crosshairs and poured out his story. On the edge of the desert at a safe distance from the magnetic dust, they stopped. Kup was still trapped against the rock.



"You're not the only one with a scientific education," said Crosshairs. "A magnetic field can be neutralised by high impact. Watch!" He took swift aim with his grenade launcher. There was a loud bang as the missile hit the rock beside Kup, who stumbled forward as he came free. Highbrow swooped over and lifted Kup to safety, clear of the deadly dust.

"There's nothing for it now," said Kup. "We'll have to out-run, out-fight, or out-wit the Decepticons if we are to get back to base."

With Highbrow hovering overhead as scout, the Autobots cautiously picked their way among the rocks and pinnacles that lay in their path, and hid them from the Decepticons.

But without warning, there came a triumphal shout. The Decepticons had spotted the Autobots, and were in pursuit once again.

Now the ground had gullies everywhere. Kup led the way into one of the deeper ones, which provided cover from the Decepticon fire. But the Decepticons followed, hard on the heels of the Autobots as they followed the winding course of the gully.

Suddenly Highbrow swooped down. "Get round the next corner and take cover on the sides of the gully. You'll see why!"



Stopping the Decepticons for a moment with a concentrated burst of fire, the Autobots raced for the corner. Highbrow had seen that it was the same gully into which the oil from the sabotaged pipe had spilled. The rocky floor was a glistening, slippery expanse.

As the Autobots watched, Scourge raced around the corner. With a horrible screech, he skidded and crashed into the rock wall. The others piled into him. With a clatter of rending and buckled metal, they sprawled in a heap. Scourge transformed... but lost his footing on the slippery rock and crashed on top of the others.

"Sorting themselves out from that lot should keep them out of trouble for a time," said Kup, as the Autobots headed back to base. "And they have all the oil they can use for the moment."

