

-----  
Episode 493 – When the world's dumbest and horniest people fight  
-----

It was a nice apartment, well-lit, spacious and well furnished. A pair of nice, plush leather couches set the scene, arranged in a neat L-shape, with a small coffee table between them. What dominated the room, however, was the massive flat-screen against one wall, so big as to loom over all else around it. By comparison, the broad windows with views out over a strangely futuristic metropolis and the other doorways leading away to gods alone knew where seemed like afterthoughts.

“...so is it cancelled yet?” Tsuneo asked Rick as the pair of them entered the apartment.

“Naw. Got to wait until the first season’s gone over its budget and hit the streaming service before they do that,” Rick replied.

Dan entered after them with Rebecca silently following. “But what if it succeeds?” he asked.

Rick blinked in confusion and stared at Dan for a second, before admitting “Sorry, don’t follow.”

“You know,” Dan said with a shrug. “What if the critics like it and it brings in subscribers?”

“I don’t see how that’s relevant,” Rick replied flatly.

You’re right, silly me,” Dan admitted as he wandered through the apartment.

“Something bothering you?” Tsuneo asked, noting the look of concentration on Rebecca’s face.

Rebecca nodded. “Yeah, just something off about that last fic,” she admitted.

“Anything in particular?” Dan asked. “Because there’s plenty to choose from.”

“Well, I just didn’t see the point of – well, most of it, admittedly – but the large cast in particular,” Rebecca said. “I mean... most of them didn’t do anything. They were just there. And I can’t think of a reason why they were in the fic.”

“I mean, I can’t think of a reason for why the fic, but I get you,” Dan shot back.

Rebecca nodded her agreement and pressed on. “Look, obviously you’ve got Harry Potter and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles because, well, that’s the fic. Hermione’s a vital part of the Harry Potter side, along with being a major part of the authour’s wonk. But the rest of them? Why even include them?”

“All I can suggest is because the authour wanted to,” Tsuneo replied.

Rebecca coked an eyebrow at him. “Even if they don’t do anything?” she asked.

Tsuneo nodded. “What we have here is a classic cast herd,” he began.

“Yeah, I heard you mention that a couple of times,” Rick put in. “What exactly does that mean?”

Tsuneo glanced over at Dan before he replied. “Well, it’s something Dan and I came up with to describe the cast of a couple of fics we did with the B Team. It started with Girl on Fire, then repeated itself with the Death Games.”

Rebecca nodded her understanding. “I read those. I think I know what you mean,” she said.

“Why would you do that?” Dan asked, confusion written across his face. Rebecca’s only reply was a slight shrug.

Tsuneo pressed on. "In both those fics, you had the same sort of situation. A large cast of characters that essentially did nothing but follow around the protagonist and deliver randomly assigned lines. In *Girl on Fire*, since it was based on the *Young Justice* cartoon, the cast herd was comprised of both the Justice League and the *Young Justice* team."

"So basically all the world's top superheroes hanging around a small town in Alaska," Dan helpfully added.

"But why?" Rebecca asked. "What's the point?"

Tsuneo gave his own slight shrug. "By my figuring, the point is to include your favourite characters, even if you don't know what to do with them. And I think this applies as much to that *Harry/TMNT* fic. The writer wanted to include these *Harry Potter* cast members even if there was no reason to, or nothing for them to do."

"Yeah, but come on. It's a writing fundamental. Don't include more characters than you need," Rick butted in.

"Nobody ever accused the fics we read of being well thought-out," Rebecca shot back.

Tsuneo nodded his agreement. "But no, he's right. A big part of the cast herd is that they rarely have any purpose, and their presence causes more problems for the writing than it solves."

Rebecca couldn't help but chuckle as she recalled a moment. "There was one part of *Girl on Fire* where both teams were held at bay by a locked door."

"You're kidding," Rick said.

"Sadly, no," Tsuneo replied. "Of course, our recent crossover had similar problems. So much of it could have been solved with magic by our half-dozen wizards. But instead their abilities are conveniently forgotten whenever a problem emerges."

"See, I thought that was just a problem with the whole 'copying episode scripts' thing," Rick put forward.

"That too," Tsuneo admitted. "But similarly, there were times where the whole Justice League was rendered helpless or captured just so they wouldn't interfere with the two characters who actually mattered."

"Madness," Rebecca said, shaking her head.

"Okay, so then the question is, why this cast herd?" Rick asked. "Why'd the authour pick these characters to become background underage wizard ninjas?"

Rebecca chimed in at that point. "See, my guess is that it's more a feeling of obligation than anything else. The authour wanted characters to map to the *Ninja Turtles*, like how Harry was getting half of Leo's lines. So Hermione and Neville were chosen, since Ron is forbidden."

"And Stephen gets thrown in because, since he's just liner notes, he's a handy target to become a possession Sue," Rick added.

Tsuneo nodded his agreement. "We had a similar situation in the *The Death Games*. Since it was a transparent *Hunger Games* knockoff, it had to have a cast of colourful competitors."

"Like *Intelligent on Plants* girl and *Eggs Over Easy* boy," Dan helpfully added.

"Right," Tsuneo agreed. "Except for whatever reason, when it came time to kill each other, they instead sat around and sang *Kumbaya* instead. The writer needed to have competitors, but somehow

couldn't think of a way to have them, well, compete. Instead they all blended into a singular faceless morass."

Rebecca sighed and pinched her nose. "Okay. So we've got a quartet of kid wizards bulking out the cast to match the TMNT. Even if they don't necessarily do anything, I can sort of understand why they were put in." She paused before asking "So why Luna and Padma?"

"Yeah, I got nothing," Dan admitted.

"Best bet?" Rick offered. "They're there because they're named Ravenclaws who can justify the author's choice of house and aren't Cho Chang."

"Because I can't imagine why you wouldn't include Cho Chang in a fic like that," Rebecca dryly added.

"Good morning everyone," the Voice crashed into the conversation.

"And good morning to you too, Robobrain," Dan replied.

"I think you might be onto something there," Rick considered.

"Dude, this is just a throwaway joke we've been doing for ages," Dan shot back. "Why do you care now?"

"While the kids are fighting," Rebecca commented, "What do we have in the pain rack today?"

"Well today's fanfic review is called Guns and Roses," the Voice explained. "It's a Saints Row fic."

"What Saints Row?" Rick asked.

There was a silence. "I don't follow you," the Voice finally spoke up.

"Are we really going to do this for goddamn Saints Row?" Rebecca asked.

"I mean, is it the original series or the 2022 reboot?"

"Um, original series," the Voice managed. "Its set after the end of Saints Row 3."

"Which ending?" Rick asked again.

"I'm sorry, what?" The Voice asked.

"The game has two possible endings," Rick continued. "I need to know which one this is based off of so that I can set my expectations."

"This might be the stupidest you have ever been with one of these," Tsuneo sighed. "I don't know if I should be impressed or horrified."

"It's um, based off the 'save Shaundi, Killbane escapes,' ending", the Voice finally managed.

"With or Without Saints Row IV?"

"Look can we just get on with it?" Rebecca asked as she took her place on the couch. "We've probably spent more energy on this than the author did on the fic."

"Fine," Rick grumbled as he and the others joined her. "But if Shotgun Chimp shows up then don't blame me." With that final thought, the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format.

> Guns & Roses by kazred

- > Chapter 1: amnesia vu
- > Guns & Roses was the first story I posted (and finished) that got way more reads and love that I still
- > can't get over. Because it's still a veteran fic

Rick: This fic fought in the shipping wars

Dan: Never forget

- > that pushed me to keep writing,

Tsuneo: Like an abusive coach

- > this is going through a remaster.

Rebecca: The author is digitally adding some background creatures and upscaling it to 4K

- > I'll try and keep everything as original as possible and make it actually readable;

Rick: Does that mean the original was actually illegible?

Dan: When you consider some of the fics we've had so far...

Rick: True.

- > I'm

- > checking back and I don't know how anybody was able to read dialogue in the same paragraph.

Tsuneo: Long hard years of practice.

Rebecca: Trust us.

- > Y'all never could've told me?

Rebecca: It's only basic grammar

- > DISCLAIMER: The Boss actually has an identity,

Tsuneo: The Boss has always had an identity. It's The Boss.

- > and there are a lot of (OC and canon) characters in this story.

Rick: As well as a llama named Jiffy. Don't ask.

- > Also this is read better in half or 3/4, always hated the full structure.

- > They did it.

Dan: They built a model of the Eiffel Tower out of Belgian waffles

- > It wasn't easy.

Rick: Did they try turning it off and turning it on again?

- > It was never easy, the first strike was Johnny losing his life on the fucking plane that

- > brought them to Steelport.

Rebecca: He choked to death on his in-flight meal

- > The gangs were a given but fighting a Luchador wrestler in a ring,

Dan: I mean, it's the most logical place to fight one.

- > using a game to reach the final boss of the Deckers

Rick: They had to gunt like they had never gunted before

> and crushing the Morningstar frenchie with his own steel ball

Dan: Loren did always brag about the size of his —

Rebecca: Okay.

> were memories the Boss really didn't mind having but felt better off not knowing.

Rebecca: They were memories he liked except he didn't

> That, that

> was the second strike. The third was when some fuckers called STAG thought they could eradicate

> the Saints and even tried killing Shaundi to prove a point.

Dan: Not the worst debate tactic I've seen either

> He tightened his hand when he recalled the relief in Shaundi's smile; it wasn't a smile he was used  
> to seeing.

Tsuneo: Shaundi never smiled ever.

> He told himself he'd try and keep Shaundi safe,

Rick: Everyone else was on their own

> especially since she took Johnny's death

> harder and heavier than everyone else, even more than himself.

Rick: Harder even than Jiffy the llama.

> "I'm sorry..." he muttered to

> himself before reaching for the glass on his office desk and downing the last of the watery martini.

Tsuneo: [Boss] I'm sorry I ever hired this bartender.

> Even after everything that happened, he knew he was witnessing the calm before the storm. He just

> didn't know when the storm would rip everything apart. Rip him apart.

Dan: RIP AND TEAR!

> He moved from his seat when his phone buzzed in his pocket and, paying no mind to the caller id,  
> answered.

Rebecca: Whoops. That's how the Chinese gold farmers get you.

> Before he could greet whoever was calling, something far more sinister reached his ears.

Rick: Do you have time to talk about your car's extended warranty?

> "—coming! It's...everywhere...! How did it—"

Tsuneo: Sentence fragments!

> Out of context, his mind already set the scene and it was an ungodly sight he wished he never  
> delved into

Dan: McRib season. He's a complex guy.

> and grimaced as soon as his mind registered the words. "Jesus fucking Christ, Kinzie, I

> pray to your God that this isn't a buttdial—"

Rebecca: [Kinzie] If it was, it rerouted through five different countries.

Tsuneo: [Boss] That's more like it.

> "And even if it was, you're the last person I'd end up calling."

> "At least we got that out of the way. So, what's up? I mean aside from the awkward sexual fervor."

> He heard Kinzie snort; even though they were almost entirely different people,

Rebecca: They shared a leg. It's complicated.

> it was nice sharing a

> laugh or two. But then the humour died when she answered, "Not to alarm you, Boss but I'm seeing

> multiple unknown vehicles heading your way. Attack choppers too, all coming from the airport."

Tsuneo: [Kinzie] We do have time for puerile humour, though.

Dan: [Boss] Oh, always.

> "How do you know they're coming here?"

Tsuneo: [Kinzie] I mean, it is \*you.\*

Dan: [Boss] No, yeah, fair.

> For all you know they could be one of those Nyte Blayde

> conventions again, God knows they pop up everywhere now."

Dan: They have helicopter gunships. I doubt they're here for a convention

Rick: Yeah, but shippers exist

Dan: This is true.

> "You do realise everyone's still out to kill you, right?"

> "There's more? I thought they'd get bored."

> "Your naivety is adorable." He sighed. "I hacked into their phones, something about the Syndicate."

Dan: [Boss] Any specific syndicate?

Tsuneo: [Kinzie] You know, conglomeration of gangs, used to run Steelport?

Dan: [Boss] Doesn't ring any bells.

> He rolled his eyes as he kicked his legs up onto the desk, leaning back into a more comfortable

> position

Tsuneo: He's remarkably calm about this army coming to kill him

> just as a Saint walked in and dropped a file in front of him,

Rick: Unless otherwise specified, I'm going to assume all the random saints in this fic are wearing mascot costumes.

> "Fuck the Syndicate. They're done for, whoever's coming don't scare me."

Rebecca: They're a giant multinational crime syndicate that has considerable power across the world.

Dan: Details!

> He scarcely looked over the materials inside but the

> pictures inside piqued his interest. It wasn't clear but the massive tattoo of a dragon on her chest

> was enough to conclude they weren't a regular,

Rick: He could tell that they were not a generic NPC, whoever they were

> considering it was Viola that collected the contents of the file.

> "Maybe not, but they're the calvary. You forget that the Syndicate is all over the world, working as a  
> criminal organisation.

Tsuneo: Wait, the criminal organisation are criminals? I didn't see that coming

> Taking out Loren and scaring Killbane out of the city wouldn't be enough to  
> wipe them out for good. And they were here first."

Rick: They called dibsies

> "What are you actually implying, Kinzie?"

Rebecca: [Kinzie] Not implying; actively stating.

> "Why don't you check outside? I don't think Josh marks a helipad at his conventions."

> "Funny." He leisurely swung his legs off the desk and stood in one smooth transition, silently  
> dismissing the Saint with a quick glance and sauntered to the gym when the roar of what sounded  
> like a thousand engines heard in the distance.

Tsuneo: I'd say that's excessive, but by this point he has an advanced laser-armed fighter jet at his disposal.

> His disappointed expression shifted into one of subtle  
> alarm. He continued moving, "You're fucking with me, Kinzie."

Rebecca: Nuh-uh. She warned you and you laughed it off. This is entirely on you.

> "Not even a thank you?"

> "Fuck! Thank you. Back me up."

> "On it."

> Cutting the line, he reached down for his Shepherd

Dan: This is his favourite gun on the Citadel

> on the coffee table and turned to the sound of  
> the elevator doors, four of his lieutenants spilling into the main lobby.

Rick: For want of anything else, I'm going to say that it's Troy, Asha Odekar, Kevin and Jiffy the Llama.

> "Kinzie told us already,"  
> Shaundi flashed her phone as confirmation and Josh and Pierce went their separate ways

Rick: They were worlds apart

> to inform the members that were present in the penthouse.

Tsuneo: [Shaundi] You were the last to know, as always.

> "After Syndicate, you'd think people would learn."

> "Apparently not," Viola stopped beside Shaundi. "Besides, they're in everyone's blacklist."

> "Gotta please the fans somehow," he replied with a smug grin. "Any ideas, Viola?"

Dan: Try not to be killed offscreen.

> "There's a few names, but it all depends on who's decided to come over."

> "Where's Zimos?"

Rick: It's a reasonably common spawn on the streets in most districts

Dan: He meant the pimp

Rick: Sure, there's a low chance of getting a version with tricked out rims and shiny paint

Dan: Do you do this on purpose?

> "In Safeword."

> "And the big guy?"

> "On the way. Why?"

> "I want him downstairs."

Tsuneo: No reason. I just don't like him.

> Josh and Pierce stay in here, Shaundi back me up. Viola, send the message to all nearby Saints,"

Rebecca: Time to send out passenger pigeons

> he cocked his gun. "Seems like whoever's in Steelport was kind enough to bring the fight to us."

Dan: They were kind enough to attack their nonspecific locations with nonspecific forces

> "Okay, okay. Okaaaay. Maybe I'm being a joykill here, maybe I'm just pointing out the obvious but  
> this...this is definitely overkill."

Rick: I mean, he turns into a cassette and everything.

Dan: You're thinking of the Transformers character.

Rick: Right, he's the prototype of the third generation of BATs.

Dan: That's the GI Joe character.

Rick: Sorry, it must be the cyborg who commands BATs.

Dan: That's... also a GI Joe character.

Rick: Gotcha. So it's got to be Chameleon's partner from when she tried to kill Destro.

Dan: No, you're... Actually, that's a GI Joe character too.

Rick: Oh. They really love that name, don't they?

> She smirked as she admired the weapons in hand before glancing over at her brother.

Tsuneo: That's nice. Who are these people and why do we care?

> Realising he wasn't even going to acknowledge her,

Rebecca: That's just so typically him... whoever he is.

> she scowled and instead

> tucked her weapons into their holsters on her thighs. Her eyes barely skimmed the dashboard

> before she moved her weight to the door, admiring the high-rise buildings. So this was Loren

> Square.

Dan: Voted Steelport's most generically brown district three years running



> "When you're up against a gang that managed to take out the Syndicate, you can't be too careful."

Rick: I thought the Syndicate was a worldwide criminal group

Rebecca: It is, except when it isn't

Rick: Thanks! Makes things a lot clearer

> "You're right...but still."

> "You're overthinking, Amber," a voice echoed from her earpiece.

Dan: And we have a name!

> "They took out the Syndicate.

Rebecca: As was mentioned mere seconds ago.

> They

> promised us territory once they got the Saints out, but the Saints are crawling all over and Syndicate

> are no more.

Dan: So then... who do you work for and what's your motivation?

Tsuneo: That's a really good question, one that I suspect we will never have decently answered.

> Killbane, big and almighty Killbane, pussied out and fled the city, Miller's in hiding and

> Loren was crushed to death."

Rick: He was killed while trying to move a fridge

> "Anton's right, sis. If the leader of the Saints is capable of doing that, then there are no holds barred.

> Not for a man like that."

> "A shame," she slumped into her seat. "I heard he's cute."

Rebecca: Yes, I am sure some nonspecific entity is cute

> "Cute? Told you not to bring her, Kieran. It's her first official operation, she's only gonna get

> distracted."

Tsuneo: It sounds like you have a real team of winners here

> "You focus on flying and I'll focus on driving. Specters, you know what we came for:

Rick: Their Mint in Box Giant Vamp [Ding!].

> our POI is none

> other than the leader of the Third Street Saints. Capture only; he'll only find peace in death.

Rebecca: Make things needlessly difficult for ourselves, got it.

> If there's too much heat, we fall back but mark out landmarks.

Dan: Go to the city's top tourist spots and take some photos

> We're on unfamiliar grounds but we don't intend to leave anytime soon, is that clear?"

Tsuneo: So their plan is to blindly charge into unfamiliar territory to take out a superior foe while bringing along an untried and untested agent. These people, whoever they are, clearly are utter morons

> A chorus of agreements resounded behind Amber and Kieran in waves of burgundy vehicles,

Rick: And since they're not specified, I'm going to say that they use Jackrabbits, Aquas and Shoguns

> with Anton leading the aerial assault a few seconds ahead of the ground convoy.

Rebecca: Close enough to get caught in the crossfire.

> Amber gasped in

> astonishment as they turned the corner and saw the entrance to the building covered by purple

> vehicles owned by purple-clad gangsters.

Rick: The Saints always were renowned for their subtlety.

> "You didn't tell me we were gonna raid a fucking penthouse."

Tsuneo: They were expecting to be attacking a budget hotel room at most.

> "The less you knew the better,"

Rebecca: They really are making this as hard on themselves as possible

> Kieran switched gears and slowed down as the convoy behind them

> took defensive positions in front of them, swerving to a halt and pouring out of their cars. "Everyone,

> get—hooooly shit...isn't that one of Loren's clones?"

Rick: Is it?

Tsuneo: I guess so

> "I'm already hyped," Amber grinned as she reequipped herself with her pistols

Rebecca: She already had them, so I guess she put them down and then picked them up again

> as Kieran finally stopped the car,

Dan: Six weeks later

> casually stepping out of the car and putting up one of her arms as the proximity of

> Anton's chopper whipped at loose hair and clothing.

Rebecca: Meanwhile, the saints up in the penthouse are lining up with RPGs...

> "We're not even gonna come to an agreement first?"

Tsuneo: Negotiated settlements don't make for good sandbox crime gameplay

> Kieran frowned, "Tell me: do they look like they're ready to come to an agreement?" Amber looked

> at the purple mass ahead of them,

Rick: They're in a stand-off with Grimace

> looked at Kieran, looked at the purple mass again and squinted

> her eyes at Kieran. "Thought so. Specters, get ready! Anton, call it out!"

Tsuneo: [Anton] Alright! Testing, one two... Is this thing on?

> Anton chuckled low in their ears, lifting the chopper so that it was level with the penthouse. A few

> snipers but nobody special, nobody distinct.

Dan: So the cast of Dire Straights then.

> "Hold." Kieran advanced ahead of Amber, signalling to  
> a few Specters to take their places beside him, iron sights on the Saints ready to defend their place.  
> "Hooooold." Amber wiped her chin with the back of her hand before meeting up with Kieran, albeit  
> more relaxed about a shootout that could possibly kill her.

Rebecca: She was also very dumb

> That was until she saw a new face in the  
> crowd and narrowed her eyes. There was a man she didn't recognise.

Rick: Charles and/or Charles?

> "Now!" Before her vision  
> could focus, the blunt composition of gunfire snapped her out of her trance and she dropped behind  
> a car, cover firing.

Tsuneo: Nobody told me there would be shooting in this gang war!

> She was barely through her first clip when the brute launched himself at the first  
> line of cars, bodies and metal crunching and snapping against his strength.

Dan: They were shockingly unprepared for the Saints to fight back.

> "Anton, get rid of the snipers, they're fucking everywhere," Kieran called out as he replaced the  
> magazine in his sub-machine gun and was briefly knocked off balance by his sister,

Tsuneo: Remind me, which one's his sister?

Rebecca: The stupid one.

Tsuneo: Do you have any idea how little that narrows it down?

> who stole a grenade from his belt and quietly apologised for it.

Rick: I owe you one grenade

> Using the brute's arrival as a distraction Amber  
> slid on the hood of a red car, pulled the pin with her teeth

Dan: If you don't pull the pin with your teeth, are you even grenading?

> and tossed the grenade that caught the attention of the ambiguous man.

Tsuneo: The nonspecific entity

> "Amber, look up!" An explosion cracked the sky and she didn't  
> even chance a look as the charred metal that rained down around the fight was incentive enough for  
> her to back up, fast.

Rebecca: Something had fallen on them, I guess

Tsuneo: This is that rarest of scenes where I have no idea what's going on nor do I care

> "Anton," she panted. "I'm going to find their leader."

> "Amber, no—"

> "He's probably still hiding upstairs, I'll find a way in there."

Rick: The lift only goes to two floors. It's not hard.

> "Amber, he's already here." She widened her eyes in genuine surprise as the man unknown

Dan: The man with no description

- > ducked
- > out of cover, his attention on the other Specters as he pulled the trigger in a calculated rhythm.

Rebecca: He timed his killing spree to music

- > As
- > she was the closest to the entrance, she could make a break for it and either get crushed by that big
- > guy or shot to death by the Saints with better awareness.

Dan: There are molluscs with more awareness than her

- > "I need Specters drawing the leader of the Saints towards Amber."
- > "Didn't even check your pockets, did you?"

Rick: You forgot your keys again, didn't you?

- > She furrowed her brows at Kieran's question as she
- > reached into her jacket pockets and felt several metallic disks. "It's a working prototype. You don't
- > have enough for everyone."

Tsuneo: Do you think you should have briefed her on this whatever it is before you slipped it into her pockets and sent her into a firefight?

Rebecca: Being fair, he didn't tell her who she was fighting or where they'd be attacking.

Tsuneo: I suppose it's consistent, if nothing else.

- > "I'll try and share evenly." And she sprinted out of cover half-expected to be stopped by a wall of
- > bullets.

Tsuneo: Her plan was to run into a wall of gunfire

Rebecca: She is really not very smart

- > But no wall of bullets met her

Dan: The gunfight obligingly went around her

- > and she continued running, having to lunge out of the way of
- > the brute's shoulder check and recovered quickly from her overbalance. With a blank mind

Dan: Duuuuuuuuh

- > she reached the purple vehicular fortress and leapt onto one of the cars,

Tsuneo: Being Steelport, it immediately exploded.

- > dipping her hand into her pockets and throwing out the discs;

Rick: [Anton] Uh, those are energy snacks... You know what, never mind.

- > the discs snapped onto the closest firearm and activated with a
- > click and she laughed as the Saints struggled to fire upon their new target.

Rebecca: Her discs stop guns from firing. Don't ask how it works, it just does.

- > The supposed leader of the Saints

Rick: Actually, it was just Ted from accounts.

> threw his gun on the floor and

Tsuneo: Pulled out one of his dozen other guns.

> ran towards Amber, who took it

> upon herself to run away from the gunfire and away from backup.

Tsuneo: Her plan was to run away on her own away from the rest of her team. Brilliant work there.

> She needed him away from his

> HQ, away from the fight, as far as her aching legs and burning lungs could take her.

Rick: Until her stamina meter ran out.

> "You're not

> getting away that easy," she heard him yell from behind her as she took off down the street, pushing

> pedestrians out of the way and pulling pedestrians in his.

Rebecca: This is the sort of move that can only end in them running into a fruit stand

> "You're so stupid,"

Dan: Said the woman who had literally no idea what they were doing a few minutes ago

> she cackled back as she ended up skidding into a nearby alley but the turn

> slowed her down, and the leader speared her onto the ground. Amber grunted as he clambered on

> top of her, trying to turn her onto her back despite her squirming and pushing up against him.

Dan: [Angry] I've been trying! To reach you! About your extended! Warranty!

> She

> snapped an elbow up to make some room but opening her space meant he could coil his own arm

> around her shoulder and force her onto her back, a kick into his abdomen knocking him onto his

> back. With her hair barely holding up in its ponytail,

Rick: She now has a hint of description

Rebecca: With how our fics go I should treasure it

> Amber pulled out her hairtie but hissed as searing heat flushed through her back.

Rebecca: [Amber] I'm in the middle of a life-or-death struggle, but what's important is that I do my hair.

> "Kieran, make sure nobody follows us here!"

> "Keep your eyes on me, sweetheart." Amber let out a sound of confusion but his hands were

> already grabbing her jacket and pulling her onto her feet, and she let out a cry before flinging his

> arms away and aiming for his stomach again. He jumped back and quickly spun on his heels for a

> fierce backfist and she ducked underneath the swing and tackled him back onto the floor. Assuming

> she was going to attempt to choke him, the man threw his arms up but she was faster and grabbed

> one of his wrists, shifted her weight to the side and wrapped her legs around his arm. "Fuck me!" he

> blurted as his muscles were pulled against his will, her knees keeping him trapped in the armbar as

> she arched her hips on his over-extending elbow.

Rick: So I grabbed his leg and he grabbed my oesophagus and I bit off his ear and he chewed off my eyebrows and I took out his appendix and he gave me a colonic irrigation. Yes indeed, you better believe it

> "Already?" she struggled with a smirk. "You haven't even asked me out for dinner tonight."

Dan: Banter! Or something that resembles it!

> He looked around and realised the gun that fell out of one of her holsters and tried to reach for them, "You're...you're not the Syndicate."

Rebecca: It's not on her business card.

> "Oh, we are. We're just not Loren."

Tsuneo: I thought they said the Syndicate was destroyed  
Dan: Details.

> "Why here?"

> "They were here first."

Rick: Was not

Dan: Was too

Rick: Was not

Dan: Was too

Rebecca: And so on and so forth

> "Why me?"

Tsuneo: Because you're the player character

> "Why, hm?" She casually let go and he immediately rolled out and onto his feet,

Rebecca: [Amber] Well, I had you at my mercy but I think I'll let you go and see what happens.

> Amber cocking her head to the side as she was held hostage by her own weapon.

Rebecca: [Amber] Oh no! How could this possibly have gone wrong?

:> Sighing, she staggered onto her feet

> and dusted herself off but not without finally examining the man that put her in this goddamn mess.

Rick: Jiffy the llama strikes again!

> She blinked. He was, he was more than cute. No, he was dripping handsome,

Rebecca: Fic, I'm gonna have to issue you a firm settle down here

> it was something about his eyes, purple but not purple,

Dan: Amber does not understand how colours work.

> mesmerising and searching all the same. Strong features

> framed by his 5'oclock shadow and his dark hair, wavy and messy and charming

Rick: He's so default

> and nope nope

> nope. She couldn't help it, it was just oozing out of him, the way his tee strained against his

> muscles, how his jeans hugged his legs deliciously, even the veins that sprouted underneath his

> skin due to the pressure of her legs from before.

Dan: They're not so much skinny jeans as they're painted on.

> Her thoughts could only be summarised by a few words, "Oh, fuck me."

> He smirked. It sent a pang straight to her core and she bit her bottom lip. Unreal beauty, he can't exist. She was dreaming, yeah, she had to be dreaming. "What happened to dinner?"

Rebecca: So to summarise, she's very dumb and very horny  
Tsuneo: That seems to be about it

> ----

> Chapter 2: subterfuge  
> "—fuck's going on? Amber, what—"

> "—ber, where are you!? We're being pushed back ov—"

> Amber pulled out her earpiece and crushed it underneath her boot-heel,

Tsuneo: I think I'm going to catch second-hand stupid from this person.

> cautiously putting up her  
> arms in surrender; Anton and Kieran's concerned voices were far less important right now. She was  
> standing before Adonis incarnate, she needed all of her senses to be soaked in his presence.

Rebecca: Well she's known him for whole seconds and spent all of that time fighting him, but he's kinda hot so high treason is the only logical move

> But she was still bemused. "You're the leader?"

Tsuneo: Actually, he's just a Generic Homie

> "Why, you're looking for me?"

Dan: [Amber] I mean, didn't you notice the huge pile of armed goons outside your home?

Rick: [Boss] Eh, that's a pretty regular Tuesday for me.

> "I'm doing more than looking..." she mumbled. He moved his iron sight once to check the magazine  
> before snapping it back into the gun. "Look, I honestly wanted to come to an agreement."

Dan: She wanted to trade Pokemon cards

> "Oh, we're far from agreements. The Syndicate didn't send you because I killed Loren,

Tsuneo: They didn't? When did we establish that?

> so why are you here?"

Rebecca: She has no idea. Seriously. Nobody told her anything.

Tsuneo: And I'm beginning to understand why.

> Amber stepped forward once and the Boss kept his distance by stepping back, hitting the brick wall.  
> "Something something, take over the Syndicate, yadda yadda. For the actual answer—"

Rick: Aardvarks. That's the answer.

> "So you're not the leader?"

Dan: Does she have a giant bulging green head? Then no.

> She scoffed, "My brother would kill me then kill himself if I ever took his precious mantle."

Rick: [Boss] Sounds like a win for me.

> The Boss looked her up and down, "Family, huh? Never pegged you as the type."

Rebecca: In the two minutes that he's known her.

> "What would you know about family?"

Rebecca: Ask Russian Female Boss about her family some time

> When you're forced into the life of crime, you have no other

> choice but become a murderer. Only difference is that I kill whoever fucks with my family."

Dan: And let's not mess around here. The Boss would also kill somebody who cut him off at a buffet queue

> "Including Kiki, hm?" Amber visibly stiffened, the familiar name momentarily bringing her into the

> dark abyss in the furthest reaches of her mind and the Boss could see the rage in her eyes, but

> calmly reassured her.

Rebecca: Quick psychotic break... and we're good.

> "I wanted to help Angel kill Killbane but...I also had family to save."

Tsuneo: But only fifty percent of the time at most.

> "That's..." her breathing shook, tears cascading down her cheeks in guilt, anger and sorrow. "That's

> understandable. You wanted to protect your family too, huh?"

> "I always protect my family."

> "Not even two fucking minutes and I'm already falling for a man I'm supposed to capture."

Rebecca: Also, in case it hasn't been established yet, she is really, really stupid.

> With an

> exhale to calm her erratic emotions, Amber quickly wiped her tears away and peered at the Boss

> with a hesitant expression.

Rick: [Boss] Is this going to take long? I've got stuff to do...

> "You haven't shot me. I'm here to dethrone you, why haven't you shot me?"

Dan: Because this is clearly a cutscene

> "You haven't answered my question. Why are you here?"

Tsuneo: Because she's the author's pet OC in a crappy fanfic

> "That depends," she moved so that the gun was pressed against her collarbone. "Taking you out to

> dinner definitely makes top three, though."

Dan: Number two involves a shipment of FBs toys, so take that into consideration.

> It was the shouting from the mouth of the alleyway that

> made her do something equal part incredibly stupid and incredibly intoxicating;

Rick: Play Hungry Hungry Hippos?

> Amber balled his tee

> and balled as much fabric as she could with both hands before yanking him down, and she met his

> lips. The Boss was at a loss for words, literally. This woman that was supposed to swarm in with her



> gangster brethren to kill the Saints had him pinned against the wall, her hands now flat against his  
> chest and sliding up into the tufts of his hair. He wanted to shove her away, do the right thing and  
> end her life

Dan: And remember, this is a guy who thinks nothing of driving on the footpath if it will save him a few seconds

> but her lips must've been laced with some sort of aphrodisiac because he moaned into  
> the kiss and pulled her in closer.

> What was actually happening?

Rebecca: One of the stupidest character arcs we have ever seen.

Rick: And this is only the second chapter.

Rebecca: Well, hell.

> The moment was short-lived as a group yelled incoherent words

Rick: Raggle fraggles!

> and Amber wasted no time pulling  
> the Boss of the wall but not without yelling out in agony and collapsing into him. They both dropped  
> onto the floor and she was cursing and cursing, managing to roll off him and cradle her arm that  
> was pouring out blood and he snapped his head towards the shooters.

Rebecca: The action is incredibly confusing, yet I cannot bring myself to care.

> Specters.

Tsuneo: The people who were shooting at him before shot at him? Who could have thought?

> Fuck. "Take my  
> gun and run!" she screamed, her throat burning raw as he scrambled to his feet and fired at the  
> incoming Specters whilst jogging in the opposite direction but his stomach was twisting.

Dan: Nothing to do with the situation. He just had a dodgy burrito for lunch

> He didn't  
> want to leave her, having her just take a bullet for him to escape and cursed underneath his breath  
> as he finally turned the corner out of the alleyway.

Tsuneo: I can only assume the shooters were standing slack-jawed at the end of the alleyway, doing nothing.

> Amber kicked out at the closest Specter that got into kicking distance, "You fucking shot me, you  
> prick!"

Rick: Yes, that was the intent.

> "I-I'm sorry," the shooter stammered, audibly nervous and regretful for shooting the leader's sister  
> and the other Specters watched him in vicarious embarrassment.

Dan: Dude, you're so busted.

> "I thought he was gonna—"

> "Use your fucking eyes next time!"

Rick: Yeah, we saw you kissing the enemy, so we kinda thought we should plug you too.

> She hissed as she was helped to her feet, glaring lasers at the  
> shooter just as Kieran rushed over to her. "Next time you bring your best in fucking fights like these."  
  
> "They are my best."

Rebecca: God your gang sucks.

> "Then bring better."

Tsuneo: [Kieran] Why, of course! Yes! Obviously! Thank you so much for your input.

> When she was hauled out of the alleyway, she couldn't contain her gasp.  
> Bodies were littered on the tarmac, draped against cars, riddled with bullets and soaking their  
> clothes and hair and weapons with blood.

Tsuneo: I see the blind unprepared frontal assault worked out fantastically for them

> But she didn't have energy to grieve about her fallen comrades,

Dan: Truth being told, she just didn't care

> her mind was hazy with pain and her body slowly going into shock and the words the  
> leader of the Saints said to her.

Rick [Boss]: I like Zabanya

> It confused her but she was intrigued. She should be dead. Instead  
> she had a bullet wedged in her arm and her heart was pounding to an unfamiliar rhythm.

Tsuneo: She should get that looked at. It can't be healthy

> "Where's...where's Anton?"

Rick: Depends, who's Anton?

Rebecca: Do we actually care?

Rick: Well no.

> "Had to abandon his chopper mid-fight, not that you heard or anything."

Dan: [Amber] He had a parachute, right?

Rick: [Kieran] No, but there was an amusing string of coincidences involving a truck full of non-dairy  
creamers, so he's fine.

> "No, I didn't. Busy getting shot at."

> "Funny."

Dan: Not really, no.

> She just about managed to walk towards their car before she stumbled into the car door,  
> the pain becoming increasingly overwhelming and running down the rest of her arm.

Rick: The rest of the Saints had, I don't know, gone home or something.

> Amber had  
> enough strength to let herself in the car and leaned against the window, her hand still tight around  
> her injured arm. Kieran climbed in the car not too long after but didn't start the ignition. Instead he  
> pulled his earpiece out and put it on the dash, "Where's your earpiece?"

Dan: [Amber] You mean I shouldn't have crushed it underfoot? Whoops, tee hee.

> "Destroyed."

> "Couldn't get him?"

> She feigned a smile, "I wanted to come to an agreement."

Tsuneo: That's an interesting way to say 'make out'.

> As much as her snarky comment annoyed him,

Rebecca: And went against the entire purpose of their operation.

> he let out a single chuckle at her persistence.

Dan: Her persistently bad choices, that is.

> The

> rest of the car ride was in silence, the few Specter cars that were salvaged following behind and the

> ominous feeling was so thick, Amber thought she could drown in it. It was bad, they left defeated

> despite them launching an ambush at the unsuspecting gangsters in purple.

Tsuneo: I'm just saying that if you're trying to ambush the other party, don't drive through the city in a massive convoy of themed vehicles escorted by helicopter gunships

Rick: It is a slight giveaway

> It wasn't clicking, they should be cheering, celebrating their first day in Steelport.

Rebecca: Having your OC villains being effortlessly trashed in their first battle is not the best way to build them up

> But she was dozing off in response to the shock to her body, her other hand dropping and glazed in  
> red.

Tsuneo: You want to get someone to look at that, maybe?

> It was back at their temporary HQ

Rick: In a disused former Pizza Hut

> where Amber really woke up, gritting her teeth as the needle

> passed through her skin once again as she chugged down her second energy drink,

Tsuneo: She drank the first one while she was asleep, somehow.

> sounds of a

> loud discussion flooding into the small room she was in. She tilted her head at the woman

> addressing her wounds and narrowed her eyes. She was inhumanly pretty, with her blue eyes, her

> short black hair and her pearly teeth.

Dan: Does Amber get horny for everyone she sees or something?

> "Thank you..."

> "It's the least I can do," she said cheerfully, beaming a smile at Amber before continuing. "I heard it  
> was one of us."

Rebecca: Sadly, friendly fire was their only accomplishment in that attack.

> "Fucking idiot. Apparently he was trying to shoot the leader of the Saints but we were so close

> together."

Rick: Who'd have thought that would end badly?

> "I heard that he was choking you."

Dan: Hey, if you're into that then who am I to judge?

> Amber smirked, "So it would seem." Making another face at the thread being cut, she peered at the  
> door and stood once her stitches were covered. She picked up her jacket halfway exiting but left it  
> behind once she realised the damage couldn't be fixed and almost bumped into Kieran. "Oh. Sorry."

> She tried to scoot past him but he grabbed her arm, "Fizz, you okay?"

> "Nah nah, I'm good."

Rebecca: Apart from the injured arm you're grabbing at

> "What's up? Upset you couldn't get him?"

Tsuneo: [Amber] Uhhh... Define 'get.'

> Amber spun, "That was my first time actually getting shot."

Rebecca: She's trying not to make a hobby of it

> If I knew it hurt so fucking much I wouldn't  
> have made getting the leader of the Saints a priority."

Tsuneo: Amber is surprised to learn that pain hurts

> Kieran huffed, "You get used to it after a while."

Dan: He gets shot all the time

> "Do you?" They shared a small laugh

Rick: Ha, ha, getting shot is funny.

> and began walking towards the mass of people at the far end of the warehouse,

Tsuneo: Scene is established as a warehouse! Thank you and good night!

> every step blasting white noise into the pit of her stomach. She's never felt so uncertain in her life,

Dan: Not even when she had to choose between a Krabby Double Deluxe and a King-Size Ultra Krabby Supreme.

> so troubled. Everything was set for her, conquer with Specters and take over Steelport.

Rick: Oh, is that what they were doing? Somebody should have told her.

> But those eyes, those stupid purple eyes.

Tsuneo: That may not have been purple.

> Oh, and his lips. It looked soft and felt even  
> softer and that piercing tucked underneath his bottom lip...it wasn't fair how something so simple as  
> a face could make her feel so much in a few minutes.

Rick: Stupid sexy Boss

> She didn't even know his name. If he had one.

Rebecca: His name is The Boss.

> "Did Anton come to check in on you?" he asked as they walked down the stairs.

> "Nope, because he forgets he's the oldest. What does he want?"

Rick: Unlimited refills at the ice cream machine

> "Capture only. The Saints' leader is definitely top of the list and whatever Anton does to him...pretty  
> sure the Saints would wish not to fuck with us."

Tsuneo: Yep, you really showed them with that first attack.

> "Mmm hmm."

> Kieran noticed her disconnectedness to the conversation and stepped in front of her, earning a little  
> jump from her as she almost bumped into him. "You're not here."

> "What?"

> "Fizz, you're not here."

Dan: Depends. Where's here and who's Fizz?

Rick: I thought it was obvious

> "So?"

> "You're not happy." He frowned. "You're still upset about Kiki?"

Rick: Kiki Stockhammer, the spokeswoman for Video Toaster?

> Look, I told you that we'll—"

> Amber shoved her brother into the closest wall with her stronger arm, "Don't you dare talk about  
> Kiki. Don't fucking dare. If you two truly cared, we couldn't be following orders from a dead leader.

Tsuneo: Wait, they are?

Rick: Loren left a lot of voicemail messages in his day.

> All you two ever fucking wanted was the Syndicate, all the power it held, the money it sought, the  
> bitches, the drugs, everything!

Dan: And access to the executive bathroom

> It has always been about family, but you two?" She cocked her jaw,  
> "Just another day at the office."

Tsuneo: How dare you bring family into this family-controlled crime syndicate

> "Amber, what the fuck are you saying?"

> "I'm out."

> "No, you're not out. You're never gonna be out—"

> "Fucking, watch me." She tore the chain that hung around her neck

Rebecca: Oh no! Not the chain that has never once been mentioned before!

Tsuneo: The drama is undercut when it has no meaning at all

- > and shoved it against Kieran's
- > chest before storming ahead to the fire exit, tears burning her cheeks as she knew leaving the
- > warehouse would be opposing her family. Blood or adopted,

Rick: Or traded from another team

- > these were people she grew up with, people that taught her how to defend herself.

Dan: People who gave her endless pink bellies.

- > All those years, all those memories.

Rebecca: All those informed character traits.

- > She could hear
- > Kieran's footsteps draw closer and closer until she opened the fire exit and reeled back at him
- > grabbing her shoulder. She deflected his hand and backed off, "You can say whatever you want to
- > Anton.

Rick [Kieran]: Antidisestablishmentarianism

- > I-I'm done, Kieran."

- > "Amber...it doesn't have to be like this."

Tsuneo: Badly written cheap drama? I think we're well past that point.

- > "Then what?"

- > "Just come back inside and we'll talk—"

- > "The second we even agreed to be the Morningstar's calvary was when I realised that you guys
- > didn't fucking care. Even after word got out that Killbane snapped my cousin's neck

Dan: Wouldn't that make her Anton and Kieran's cousin too?

Rick: She doesn't sweat the details

- > and the only fucking thing you did was bury her was when I realised that this never meant shit to you.

Dan: [Kieran] I arranged her funeral. What do you want?

- > To any of you."

Tsuneo: Amber is beginning to realise that the evil criminal empire are not the good guys

- > "And Anton told you to wa—"

- > "Fuck Anton! I am done! I'm done." She sobbed, "I'm sorry, Kieran."

Rebecca: [Amber] I'm sorry I'm turning my back on my family and everything I ever knew, but this guy I was meant to kill is just too hot.

Tsuneo: That's pretty much a perfect summary of the fic so far.

- > Her eyes casted downwards
- > and she suddenly began stripping off her top, leaving her in her black bra as she threw their

> signature Specter undergarment

Rick: They're an evil crime syndicate, but they're very strong on branding

> at her brother before turning away and finding her Torch amongst  
> the steady tide of grey and burgundy vehicles.

Tsuneo: [Amber] Hold on, left my keys in my jacket.

> She didn't look back, she knew if she did it would've  
> meant that she lost. No, this was happening. This was it.

> This was the end.

Tsuneo: Well done completely undercutting any threat your OC villains had in the second chapter.

Rebecca: Truly great work there, fic

> "Pierce, relax, it's not my blood," the Boss insisted

Rick: Besides, he can just take cover for a moment and he's fine

> once again as he exited the elevator with Pierce  
> and Viola scuttling behind him, the few remaining Saints that were on the ground following Shaundi  
> to the other side of the penthouse.

Dan: The post-massacre party is kicking into gear.

> Battered, bruised, bleeding, he wasn't sure why the Specters  
> suddenly retreated since they evidently had the upper hand

Rebecca: As evidenced by the way that they were dying in droves

> but his mind was on other matters. One  
> of those matters was still tight in his grasp, warmed by his body heat.

Rick: His Professor Genki body pillow

> With Pierce so clearly worried about the amount of crimson staining the front of his grey tee,

Dan: Damn, that's going to be hell to get out

> he  
> stripped off the garment with one hand and Viola couldn't contain her sound of surprise as she  
> stared at the new ink all over his back.

Rebecca: Yes, it's a can of Saints Flow. And yes, it's all about those Japanese ads he did.

> He tossed his tee aside once he was in his office and sat on the desk,

Tsuneo: So far, half this fic is about undressing dramatically.

> his arms pressed behind him and a bitter taste in his mouth. "Is it still me?"

> "No, Boss..." Pierce backed off. "No it's not. My bad."

> "I need you, Josh and Oleg back at Saint Tower. I wanna know exactly what we're dealing with."

Tsuneo: Inept, poorly realised OC villains

> "What you want us to do?"

> "Anything. I need names,

Rick: Madam Z, Misspelled Sapphire, Glen LaBelle, Akira from Programming

> places,

Rick: The Marianas trench, behind a Burger King in Ohio, the dark side of the moon

> anything

Rick: A frost-free fridge [Ding!]

Tsuneo: Very well done.

> to get rid of these pricks." He sighed loudly, "Fuck, just

> when I was planning a vacation away from here too."

Rebecca: He was planning to head to Vice-Dale County

> "You. A vacation." Pierce sounded rather surprised by that statement and Viola raised her brows.

> "Viola, you heard that, right?"

Dan: People never go on vacations ever

> "Well, I mean running a daycare 24/7 has its perks but I've saved enough hours for a holiday.

Rick: Sure, being a violent gang leader means long hours, but the benefits are worth it.

> I was thinking Bora Bora or Turkey. I heard the food's great over there."

> "Get outta here, man," Pierce kissed his teeth as the Boss laughed at his own joke,

Tsuneo: There was a joke?

Rebecca: News to me

> Viola waiting for

> Pierce to leave the office before closing the door behind him. There was shuffling behind her and

> she turned to see the Boss reading the documents in the file, a picture in his left hand and his eyes

> burning lasers through the paper.

Rick: And he's already bored. Time to throw himself into traffic.

> "Look hard enough and you'll set fire to your office."

Dan: When you have laser beam eyes, these things will happen

> "But I don't understand," he frowned. "You said the Syndicate had a mole."

Rebecca: [Viola] I did? Oh, yeah, sure I did.

> "After she found out about Kiki...she's been gathering people of her own. Aren't you surprised they

> just got up and left? She might not be their leader but she's enough to make her brothers fall for her

> words."

Dan: Where 'she' is?

Rick: The immortal ruler of a hidden kingdom in Africa

Dan: I thought so.

> "She also got shot protecting me...huh."



> "Doesn't that already say enough? If she didn't say it, she definitely showed it."

Tsuneo: To be fair it could also mean that she's very dumb

Rebecca: Or that the bad guys are terrible shots

Tsuneo: This is also true

> "And you said that this is what she looks like?"

Dan: Until she is given an actual description, I'm going to assume she looks like one of the alien brutes from 'Gangsters in Space.'

> "It's been a long time and she's increasingly popular in the Syndicate.

Rick: She's top of the polls in 'What Gangster' magazine

> Everyone tries to assume her

> identity but I like to think I remember what my cousin looks like."

Dan: Pfft, I barely see my cousins. Admittedly, I prefer it that way

> It took a second for her words to sink in and when it did, he dropped his hands to glare at Viola.

Tsuneo: [Boss] How did any of that make any sense?

> He looked back at the paper, trying

> his best to find the similarities in the fuzzy photo but dropped his hands again when there wasn't a  
> single clue. Viola grinned, "You look lost."

> "...she looks nothing like you."

> "Cousin, remember?"

Rick: Do we need to explain genetics to you?

> "What about their boss?"

> "Her adopted brother."

> "Huh. Well, she's...she's fucking gorgeous if I had to say the least. Not sure what happened to you,

Dan: Bad texturing in the HD remaster

> no offence."

> "None taken, but I'm more shocked at the revelation. You...you can feel emotions?"

Tsuneo: I mean, homicidal rage is an emotion

> The Boss

> deadpanned at Viola, who seemed amused at the current situation, and shifted his position to his

> office chair. "Who would've thought: the big, bad leader of the Saints can actually feel emotion.

> You're making Kinzie look pale in comparison."

Rebecca: I mean, she is. Girl needs to get outside more

> "...you know what, I was gonna disagree with you but Kinzie...you know what, forget it Pretty sure  
> she bugged the place, again again."

> "So what are you gonna do?" The Boss tilted his head and his mulberry gaze ended up on his

> crumpled, bloody tee in the corner of the room, memories of the earlier events muddling his true

> intentions.

Dan: His true intention was to spray buildings with sewage, so take that how you will.

> It was her eyes. They were grey, but the clearest of greys he'd ever seen, the brightest of greys.

Rick: We're talking Sydney housing development grey

> It was strange, she was strange. She was making him feel really, really strange.

Dan: He was starting to feel boss

Tsuneo: What does that even-

Dan: Best not to know

> Then he smiled and looked back at Viola with an answer.

> "Ask her out to dinner."

Rebecca: To summarise, the world's two dumbest, horniest people

Rick: And neither of them have a fake French accent

> ----

> Chapter 3: wings

Rick [Hissed]: Miiiiiike

> I haven't disappeared,

Dan: They just clipped on an invisible polygon and fell through the world

> I've got a few chapters on standby including a new chapter written to fit the

> current storyline. Hoenstly didn't think that G&R would be so much to rewrite

Rick: Given that it was apparently illegible, I wonder what you thought you'd be doing.

> but then again, younger me and her obnoxious writing style forced this upon me.

Rebecca: Screw you, younger me.

> Okay, maybe crying your eyes out while driving aimlessly through the night while listening about

> Tyler the Creator stabbing some guy's throat on the radio

Dan: You miss out one episode of your podcast and this is what happens

> wasn't the prettiest of sights but there she

> was, furiously wiping her tears as music blared out of her Torch.

Rick: With its flaming skull paint job down the right side.

Rebecca: Well that was needlessly obscure

Rick: I try

> At this point Amber just didn't care anymore.

Tsuneo: Her and me both

> The people she thought were her brothers,

Rick: They never told her she was adopted.

> people who she could be transparent with, didn't care and never cared.

Dan: The fact that they kept changing the subject should have been a giveaway

> They promised her retribution for Kiki's death but she knew, oh she  
> fucking knew the moment Killbane took Loren's place and started acting crazy

Tsuneo: I mean, 'started' is kind of a stretch...

> was when Anton and Kieran never cared. They, they never cared.

Rick [Kid]: I don't care!

> Then she remembered his eyes, his violet eyes, how he found solace in protecting his family.  
> Protecting Viola, the few bloodlines that she knew about.

Rebecca: Sure, make this bananas weird.

> It wasn't fair, it wasn't supposed to be like  
> this. How can the leader of the Saints evoke so many emotions in the space of minutes

Rebecca: Because she has the self-control of a screaming toddler?

> and the only emotion she'd get out of her brothers were resentment?

Dan: Because they're the leaders of an evil multinational crime syndicate?

Tsuneo: You may be on to something there

> She emergency braked in the middle of the road and pressed her arms on the steering wheel,

Rebecca: Causing a multi-car pile-up as drivers slammed into the back of her car.

Rick: And then exploded.

Rebecca: Oh, of course.

> shifting her weight forward to get out a throaty, elongated sigh. It just didn't make sense.

Tsuneo: Thank you.

> Amber was about to take off into another endless drive through Steelport

Rick: Hoping to rack up miles for achievements or find rare-spawn cars

> when her phone began  
> ringing, the caller's id coming as unknown on her digital dashboard. Anton was confrontational, he'd  
> never call on a private number. Kieran favoured text messages; he was the sort of person that  
> would screen a call just to text back.

Rebecca: And even then, odds were it would be 'lol poo emoji'.

> Her heart fluttered, maybe it was her mystery man whose  
> identity was everything but, aside from his name. Wishful thinking made her answer before the line  
> cut, but she didn't realise how much she'd been crying. "Hello?"

Rick: Hi! We'd like to talk to you about your car's extended warranty.

> "...have you been crying?" She knew exactly who that was and laughed to calm herself down a bit.

Dan: Lozer always makes her feel better. Mostly because she knows she's not him.

> "I sound that bad, huh, V?"

Rick: Look, I got a dead Keanu Reeves in my head. I can't talk.

> "Terrible. What happened?"

Rebecca: [Amber] Well, I got in this multi-car pile-up.

> She sniffed, "I'm not a Specter—"

Tsuneo: The Citadel Council took lone look at her application and rejected it on sight

> "Wait—you did what?"

> "I left. I am a free spirit wandering the earth in search of my hidden destiny,

Rebecca: Viola groans, rolls her eyes and hangs up.

> yes I fucking left and I'm

> crying because I'd come to the realisation that Anton never really gave a shit

Rebecca: It's like she had an entire arc's worth of character development rushed through in a single chapter or something

> and I now I'm stranded

> because I don't have a place here and I probably should've bought a place when I came over

> and—"

Rick: [Amber] Arapice Island is a good neighbourhood, right?

Dan: [Viola] Um, no.

> "Amber, breathe." She took a relaxing breath and sat back in her seat. "Where are you right now?"

Rebecca [Amber]: In my car

[Pause]

Tsuneo: [Viola] Have you always been this stupid?

> "I don't fucking know, you guys left the city in a total mess. I heard Arapice had zombies."

> "That's a long story. Any landmarks?"

Rick: She can see a toilet monster fighting a blow-up doll

Dan: Not helping

> Amber threw a hand up, the car moving at a steady crawl as she looked around for notable places,

> stores, anything. A non-committal groan, "I see a...Nobody Loves Me? How fucking fitting."

Tsuneo: She has the level of wangst that can only be expressed through mall goth apparel

> "Ashwood...you're not far."

> "Far from where? V, where are you taking me?"

> "More like where am I bringing you from?"

Rick: And where's the nearest spawn point?

> "I don't like that my question was answered by a question, you're planning something."

Dan: Just wait until they both figure out this is a wrong number

> "Do you still remember where I live?"

> "There! You did it again."

Rick: [Viola] That's a no, isn't it?

Dan: [Amber] Yeah...

> "Just come to my place. I got cookie dough."

> "Oh shit, on my way."

> It was the long embrace at the door that made Viola miss Amber so much. Her dimpled smile, her scent, her tattoos that seem to be all over her body, her unusual sense of humour.

Rebecca: Informed traits are the best traits.

> It's been years

> since she'd last seen Amber; the Morningstar was more than just looking pretty next to Loren.

Rebecca: Sometimes it was watching Matt sweat as he tried to interact with a real woman

> Then

> it was the slump on the lounge sofa casually eating her way through the tub of cookie dough that made Viola miss her even more.

Dan: [Viola] Aaahhh. Now get out.

> "You really wanted that cookie dough."

> "Steelport makes the best, fight me,"

Rick: It's right up there with their panda burgers.

> she spoke with a mouthful of dough and chocolate chip, but

> sunk into the sofa when all her memories awoke at once. "I didn't wanna leave."

> Viola took her place on a matching armchair, adjusting to a comfortable position before continuing,

> "So then why? You were fine being a Specter, what made you suddenly get up and leave?"

Dan: They moved her to a new office and she didn't like the view.

> "Kiki." Viola paused and Amber set the cookie down beside her. "When Matt told me the news, I...I

> didn't know what to do. Killbane, someone that I looked up to alongside his ex-partner, killed my

> cousin and everyone let him get away with it."

Rebecca: She had no idea that the insane violent psychopath was capable of something like that

> "Why didn't you go after him?"

> "If I knew how to track that fucker down,

Rick: I mean, he was in charge of the Syndicate for months, held public press conferences and appeared as the main event of a live show...

> I promise you I wouldn't be here. Killbane had a contingency plan whether it meant dying or fleeing."

> "So, what, you stayed a Specter to hide cover?"

> "I stayed a Specter because they are still my brothers, V.

Rebecca: That and apparently she was just plain lazy

> Months ago, I wasn't thinking about

> Killbane, I was thinking of trying to keep my family together after the fact. I can't even do that."

Tsuneo: The fact that her foster brothers were obviously evil and didn't care about her didn't seem to rate a mention

> "I defected and I'm still here." Viola stood up and Amber could only stare. "If Anton was after me, > you would've killed him."

> "There's no question about that," Amber chuckled and picked up the cookie dough and carried on > eating, while Viola drifted off into the kitchen. "You know me too well."

> "That and your cues."

> "Hey, I'll have you know I auditioned for Sleeping with Shaundi several times...her dominant energy > is something I aspire to have." Her cousin could only laugh at her comment as she wandered off to > do whatever she was doing and Amber took that time to admire her pad. Viola was always stable, > whether it was with her academic pedestal

Rebecca: Viola strikes me as the type who has a degree and needs to let everyone know it

Dan: So you, basically

> or the Syndicate, Amber knew she'd be well off. The

> place she bought however was small but homey, an open-plan apartment with a dark colour palette

Rick: Meanwhile, the other Saints are living in a massive penthouse apartment. So you know.

> brightened by strategically placed lighting and picture frames of her late sister on the walls.

Tsuneo: That's... a little bit creepy, to be honest.

> She

> smiled sadly up at the pictures as her mind tried to piece Kiki with her laughs, her tears, her

> outbursts of happiness and anger

Dan: How she'd basically parrot her sister's lines

Rick: Truly Kiki was a deep and well-developed character

> and how there wasn't much to piece. She wasn't as close to Kiki,

> but family was family, and nobody fucked with family. Not even her own blood.

Rick: I thought they were her foster brothers

Dan: Eh, details.

> A chime made her jump in her seat and snapped her back to reality,

Rebecca: Not in this fic.

> Viola's phone lit up with the words INSERT NAME HERE

Tsuneo: INSERT NAME HERE is my favourite character in this fic

> and his face on the screen. "...V, your phone's ringing."

Rick: Eh, probably just Reggie with another cyberpsycho sighting

> "Then answer it, you moron."

> "I mean, it's your Boss calling—"

> "So? Answer." Amber stared at the phone vibrating off the coffee table and caught just as it fell off,  
> squashing any butterflies that threatened to make her hurl cookie dough and hours-long energy  
> drinks and her thumb trembled as she tapped the answer button. To even bring it to her ear was  
> another difficult venture but she managed to finally do it.

Rebecca: Somehow she forgot how phones worked.

> "—so I need you back here tomorrow, we got a lot of work to do."

> "Hi." There was no answer and Amber panicked, but kept up her confident persona. "C'mon. Not  
> even a hello back? It was Viola that told me to pick up th—"

> "I'm glad you did." There it was, that velvety voice

Rick: Celebrity voice actor Nolan North?

Dan: Eh, close enough

> he did last time and she fidgeted in her spot. This time there were no distractions, just Amber and him.

Tsuneo: [Viola] I'm still here.

> "Didn't think we'd get to talk again, what, with you helping me get away and you getting shot."

Rebecca: The fact that she's answering Viola's phone doesn't seem to be a concern at all

> Amber chuckled, "Apparently you were choking me and they tried to shoot you."

> "You pinned me against a wall, it could've been anyone's guess." Then he wondered, "Where's  
> Viola?"

Tsuneo: Minimising her lines given her pseudoc celebrity voice actor

> "Somewhere in the kitchen. Why? You need her more than you need me?" Another, what seemed  
> like a, deafening silence. "Lemme start again. What I meant to say was...what you said to me, about  
> family? That's something I need right now. I've always stood by my family but they never stood by  
> me. I realised that with Kiki. Water, blood, it never mattered to me. I'm...I'm done being a Specter.  
> Done with my brothers that so-called mourned my cousin, the same people who relish being in  
> Loren's shoes. Drunk on power while thinking they're above everyone else."

Rick [Boss]: Look, I was just calling to ask if she could pick up some milk for me. If this is a bad time I can call back

> "...forgetting about family."

Rebecca: [Amber] In summary, waah, waah, I'm horny.

> "So you do get me. I never got your name."

> "Don't have one."

> "Amber-Leigh. That's half of my government.

Rebecca: It's a coalition of the Liberal Democrats and the Amber-Leigh parties. Complex arrangement.

> I'd like to think you have one."

Tsuneo: Whatever... that's... meant to mean?

Rick: Remember, this is the re-edited version.

Tsuneo: Help me.

> "...well, I was gonna ask Viola for assistance but since you're now an ex-Specter, you know more  
> about them than anyone else.

Dan: [Boss] So Viola can go hang.

> If you're willing to help me, you're gonna have to change your colours."

Dan: Like Viola obviously did when she went from a grey sweater to a grey sweater

Rick: Hey, she changed the colour of her glasses frames to pink. That's close enough

Dan: I thought that was an error, like how sometimes her and Kiki swapped models and nobody noticed

Rick: This is also true

> "And taking you out to dinner."

> He laughed, "And taking you out to dinner."

> "You got me at 10 tomorrow. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it."

Rick: I'd say this is how he ends up fighting furies on a deathmatch game show, but that actually would make sense

> "Then. I'll be expecting you....Amber-Leigh." She couldn't even utter a goodbye, she panic-ended the  
> call

Rebecca: And then she realised that they never worked out where they would be having dinner

> and flicked the phone from her hand,

Rick: The screeching cat noise is implied.

> slid to the carpet and rolled back and forth like a little kid

> with a ticket to Disneyland. This sort of happiness she's never felt,

Tsuneo: Amber here is very easily excited

> her core was on the verge of

> exploding and her cheeks were red and burning so much from smiling so hard.

Dan: The uh, the hardened killer, folks. I assume. Actually, we know basically nothing about her at this point.

> It was that voice, chocolatey smooth that she'd drink it up if she could.

Rick: She needs a week of cold showers

> So sweet, so velvety, so...fucking hell, Amber

> forgot where she was for a second and stopped rolling and made immediate contact with Viola, who

> was leaned up against the arch leading to the kitchen with such a cocky, snarky smile on her face.

Dan: [Viola] Yeah, you're getting out of my apartment now.

> "So?"



> She grinned hard, "I got a date with your boss."

Tsuneo: Just so you know, this is a guy who considers hot dogs to be cuisine

> -----

> Chapter 4: déjà vu

> Amber's heart wanted to slam out of her chest when her and Viola rolled up to the entrance of the penthouse,

Dan: Had they mopped up all the blood and dead bodies yet?

> the scenery playing a familiar scene in her head.

Rebecca: [Amber] Remember when I shot at you guys? That was swell.

> She looked down at herself, made a

> noise of disapproval and sunk her head in her hands. Her outfit was alright, a tight-fitting co-ord

> consisting of cargo pants and a crop top that revealed half of the green dragon that snaked around her chest;

Rebecca: The sort of look that will make people pretend they don't know you

> the dread that ran down her spine made note of the oversized shirt in the backseat. She

> also thought it'd be cute to cut her hair, she wasn't sure who possessed her to do it because now

> she was missing her previous length.

Dan: So she changed her mind about her haircut the moment it was too late to back out.

> The wavy bob was cute though but her hair. Years sacrificed just to impress him.

Tsuneo: Cutting her hair has had more emotional impact than leaving her foster family. It says a lot about this fic

> At least she was less susceptible to someone dragging her hair in a fight. "What

> am I actually doing here?"

Rebecca: Something we've been wondering since the start of the fic.

> "I think you're panicking more about the Boss than becoming a recruit. Why are you so worried?"

Tsuneo: Because he's a dangerous psychopath who could shoot you on site for attacking his gang?

> "You didn't hear?" She leaned back, "I may or may not have kissed him." Viola's shock was delayed.

> "You did what?"

Rebecca: [Amber] We kissed in a dark box with a vial of corrosive gas hooked up to a Geiger Counter, so I can't tell if it happened or not.

> "It just sorta happened. It was amazing."

> "You kissed him."

> "...I did? Did I fuck up?"

Tsuneo: Let me count the ways.

> "No, He's just...nobody's ever seen him in a relationship, but I'm pretty sure he's pansexual or never sexual."

Rick: The boss is canonically whatever. It's just that everyone else is Playersexual

> Amber smirked, "Pan? Nice to know he plays for all teams."

Dan: He's been awful with the Browns and the Mets.

> "And what's that supposed to mean?"

> "Means that I know for a fact that I'm one of those teams."

Rebecca: She's in the category of 'all of the above'

Dan: I don't know; I mean, she's not Cid and he is a canon love interest...

> Viola snorted as Amber climbed out of the car and opened the back door to grab the garment,

> "Please keep your corny ass outside." The ex-Specter only put up her middle finger at the driver as

> she walked towards the entrance, turning on her heels to blow a quick kiss at Viola

Tsuneo: Viola's response is her best 'I don't know you' look

> before nudging open the glass door with her back.

Rick: Doors are hard, man.

> Strolling through the lobby, she half-shrugged on the baggy shirt

> and pressed the button to call the elevator and furrowed her brows when she heard it ding.

Dan: She is confused by elevators

> She

> averted her eyes elsewhere as a few Saints walked out engaged in what seemed like an interesting

> conversation

Rick: Rhubarb rhubarb looped NPC dialogue rhubarb

> and scuttled in the elevator, pressed the top button and sighed heavily once the doors closed.

Dan: Bum-bum-bee-dum-bum-dee-dum.

> It was happening all too fucking fast,

Tsuneo: Yes.

Rick: Yes.

Rebecca: Absolutely.

Dan: No question.

> she literally left her brothers yesterday and now she's about to become a Saint.

Rick: If she passes the rigorous initiation.

Tsuneo: The Saints have an initiation?

Rick: Depends on the boss' mood. Hopefully he doesn't make her do Insurance Fraud.

> It made her dizzy with excitement, with worry, with confusion, her back meeting the

> wall and her head rolling back.

Tsuneo: Her tongue lolling out, her eyes rolling back, foam forming at her lips and her neck rotating 180 degrees.

> Maybe it was just to meet the man she kissed and wondered if

> becoming a Saint was just icing on the cake.

Rick: Mmm, cake

> No, she tightened her fist; she was being honest when she told him that family meant everything to her,

Tsuneo: Which is why she betrayed and left them for a guy she'd kissed once.

> and for the Boss to put his family first, it was...it was comforting.

Dan: Just don't ask about the time he got the entire Earth blown up as a part of his vengeance trip

> Then her face darkened as she drifted to her conversation with Kieran, the genuine surprise on his face when she declared her leave from the gang, from the Syndicate.

Rebecca: It took Kieran a moment to realise she was capable of independent thought.

> Money and fame could only  
> provide so much until the money you had and fame you so desired wasn't enough and you wanted  
> more.

Tsuneo: I mean, he could try running for president

Rebecca: The depiction of the Saints White House is both funnier and more alarming in retrospect

> How much was gonna be enough for them? She combed her bangs back, she hoped that she  
> wouldn't regret this decisive move.

Rick: This is a really long elevator ride.

> The elevator chimed and she flattened her clothes and fixed her  
> hair just before the doors slid open. She was taken aback.

Rebecca: They'd left the attack helicopter in the living room again, hadn't they?

> His hair was damp from a recent shower,

Tsuneo: If you're visiting the Boss in his penthouse, there's probably an even chance that he'd be wearing an expensive tailored suit or nothing at all.

> his black tee paired with well-fitted jeans defining more than his strong legs.

Dan: He had amazing ankles too

> Now that she was closer and the adrenaline wasn't keeping her alive

Tsuneo: She dropped dead on the spot. The end.

> she could  
> see the black ink that stopped, or started, at his neck and the other strokes detailing the bones on  
> the back of his left hand.

Rebecca: He does indeed have bones in his arm

> He quickly checked his watch before taking a sip of the hot beverage nestled in his hand,

Dan: He just can't start the day without his steaming hot cup of vindaloo sauce.

> "You're early. And you cut your hair."

> "Do you like it? It was a last-minute decision but—"

> He cut her off, "No, no, it's...it suits you. In a good way.

Rebecca: He said having only known her for whole minutes so far

> You're starting a new chapter."

Rick: And she didn't even need to go to a cosmetic surgeon for it too

> "And finished the last one yesterday," Amber shrugged. "Are you sure it's alright for me to even be  
> here?

Dan: Nope.

Tsuneo: Nuh-uh.

Rick: Definitely not.

Rebecca: No way.

> I appreciate your offer but anybody else would call me an ass-kisser or a mole."

> "Wasn't that what you were? A mole?"

> "You could say that I had a few backdoors if shit hit the fan

Dan: That sentence has a lot of interesting connotations

> but yes, running plans within plans is a

> surefire way to blur lines. When you work in a multi-organisation, you only have your back.

Rick: So very true

Dan: Agreed

[Pause]

Rick: What's a multi-organisation?

Dan: I have no idea

> I left the

> Syndicate because I haven't found closure. I'm hoping that you, the Leader of the Third Street

> Saints, can do a better job than my brothers."

Rebecca: Her brothers he's never met and has no experience with beyond knowing that they exist

> "Oh, I can do more," he stepped forward, his towering height making Amber tilt her head back to  
> maintain eye contact. He smelled good, really good, coffee and fresh ironing.

Tsuneo: He smells like spray starch.

> "But our dinner has to wait. Everyone's waiting for you upstairs; you're my star performer."

Dan: The birthday clown had to cancel at the last second, so you'll have to do

> "Really? Now? I was hoping for a heart to heart."

> "You know, a lot of people are out to kill me not fuck me,

Dan: [Boss] And not nearly enough are both, sadly.

> but I can give you that much. Right now, we need you."

Rick: [Amber] You do?

Rebecca: [Boss] Oh yeah. The john's backed up something fierce.

> She made a face as if she was thinking about leaving or staying and he gently  
> nudged her shoulder. "I'll give you my name."

Rick: Amber-Liegh Sollyarku Asakura Foo-Foo Cuddlypoops, the third.

> "I'll hold you to that,"

Dan: [Boss] It's "the Boss."

[Pause]

Rebecca: [Amber] Somehow, I expected more.

> she smiled and walked past him to take the stairs to the upper level of the  
> penthouse, relaxing her posture and clicking the stiffness out of her neck when the swarm of purple  
> was so overwhelming to look at, that she actually wobbled backwards and into the arms of the  
> Boss.

Rebecca: A swoon? Really?

> Thanking him with a few taps on his shoulder, she weaved through the ocean and stood in  
> what she presumed was the centre

Dan: She measured the distance to all the walls to be sure

> and cleared her throat. "Now, I understand that me being here is warranting a death wish.

Rick: So she got her creepy metal mask to be sure.

> Standing in this very penthouse is bordering on suicidal."

Rebecca: But Pierce manages it on a daily basis.

> "Why is this bitch even here?" cooed a voice somewhere and Amber watched as a buxom brunette  
> parted the crowd with a man following closely behind her like a lost puppy.

Rebecca: I guess Shaundi is now the most unbearably beautiful person she's ever seen. [Pause] No?

> "I know your face. You  
> were there trying to raid the Saints yesterday, you and your little fucktard friends."

Rick: [Amber] Does it help that we were really bad at it?

> Before Amber could reply the Boss stepped forward, "Shaundi, calm down. She's purple now."

Dan: [Boss] Well, she will be when we dump the bucket of paint on her.

Rick: [Amber] What was that?

Dan: [Boss] Nothing, nothing.

> Shaundi faked a laugh, cocking her hips to one side, "Purple. How does that prove anything? She  
> could be plotting your death and you have her in this fucking place?"

Dan: No, she's got a point there

> "Someone plotting to kill me wouldn't take a bullet for me.

Rebecca: That was an accident! It wasn't like she jumped in front of the shot or the like

> And if she wanted to kill me, she could've  
> done it the second we were alone." Shaundi hesitated but backed off, an annoyed look on her face.

> "I get it, yesterday the Specters were planning to take over and now one of their lieutenants change  
> teams. You wanna know my name? Amber-Leigh DeFizz,

Dan: Rick?

Rick: Yeah?

Dan: I think this version is dumber than your one

Rick: I know and I am impressed.

> second cousin of the DeWynter sisters."

Rebecca: And heir to the throne of Essex

Tsuneo: It is that level of stupid

> The ambience of the Saints surrounding her cooled just a bit, even Shaundi backed off.

Rick: [Shaundi] Oh wow, she's got a name.

> "Now,  
> knowing that Killbane is still out there pisses me off because the Saints were more willing to kill the  
> man that killed Kiki more than my own fucking blood.

Dan: I thought she was adopted?

Rebecca: She was adopted by blood relatives, I guess.

> If that's not loyalty, I don't know what is."

Tsuneo: Actually it was more to do with him holding the reins on Steelport than anything else.

Dan: Yeah, but she doesn't need to know that.

> "So what do you know?" Shaundi asked.

Rebecca: Staggeringly little.

> "Many things. I know they're packing military-grade hardware. I'm talking discs that stick to guns and  
> disrupt their firing mechanisms,

Dan: A high-tech system that is less effective than just shooting people.

> a working prototype at that. Sniper rifles with AI software that does all the work for you.

Rick: Actual real live aimbots.

> Portable railguns. EMPS that can disrupt an entire district. It's crazy shit. They have it, we need it."

Tsuneo: Barely used any of it, but who cares?

> "What about buildings?"

Tsuneo: They're man-made structures that contain housing, businesses, industry or are used for other purposes, but that's not important right now.

> "They're probably overwriting some of the Syndicate deeds into their name

Dan: [Boss] The ones we took the deeds and paid for?

Rebecca: [Amber] Yeah, I don't know how it's meant to work either.

> so probably half of the properties owned by the Saints city-wide will now go back to red.

Rick: The city's being taken over by communists?

- > Operations are being set up
- > across Steelport, in familiar Syndicate territory and more of them will be flying over from around the
- > world."

> "Any hotspots?" another voice called out and she nodded in response.

Rick: Thank you, Jiffy the Llama.

- > "If it's purple, it's hot. Considering we tried to hit your place of mass residence first means that
- > they're out to take whatever they can to mark their stay.

Dan: The entire crime syndicate to crash in one sleazy motel

> It's deja vu all over again, huh?"

Tsuneo: So what are their gang cars and signature lieutenants?

> "What's their game?"

Rebecca: Being secondary to Amber's personal drama, I guess.

> Amber smirked, "What isn't? Killing Loren didn't change anything.

Dan: [Boss] Still was fun, though.

- > You really wanna destroy the
- > Syndicate? You take out the gangs that are affiliated with the Syndicate. Starting with the Specters."

Rick: And then moving on to the Road Hogs and Caesar's Weasels

- > "But you're going after your own brothers," that same voice spoke and her eyes rested on a white-
- > suited man with a light brown driver's cap. By the billboards plastered all over Steelport, she could
- > hazard a guess and say that he was Pierce Washington: the face of the Saints,

Tsuneo: And general-purpose flunky

> in the media anyway. "Aren't you gonna regret it later?"

Dan: The only thing Amber regrets is her "No regrets" tattoo.

> "Family have each other's backs. When Kiki was killed, who went after her besides you guys?

Rebecca: Truth is nobody really liked her.

- > They
- > wanted security in the Syndicate, the Saints wanted Killbane's head just for existing in Steelport.
- > Now as that stands, whose side would you be on?"

Dan: [Amber] The side of bacon-flavoured ice cream.

Rick: [Pierce] Okay, let's try that again.

- > Pierce opened his mouth as if he wanted to
- > answer her question but he stopped midway and retreated back to his initial spot;

Tsuneo: That terrible moment when the author thinks their character is smart when they clearly are not

> Amber clasped  
> her hands together. "I'll give you a heads start: Loren Square, Bridgeport, Salander and Cabano  
> Place are the main points for their operations, once they set those up they'll multiply all around the  
> city.

Tsuneo: Specters are like a sort of virus.

> Seems like we're up for a game of cat and mouse."

Rebecca: How so?

Rick: In as far as one of the teams... um... is Professor Genki?

> "You heard the lady," the Boss continued, stepping beside her and taking charge. "I want Saints  
> around those areas. Shaundi and Josh, I want you two at Loren Square, make them wish they  
> never set foot in Steelport."

Dan: A pretty fair reaction to being in Steelport

> "Seriously, Boss?" was all Shaundi could say as the man never took his eyes off her once. "I'd  
> rather go with this Amber chick than Birk.

Rebecca: Wow, sick burn on both of them.

> Making him a Saint has already fucked with my sleep patterns

Rick: Look, you joined his yoga group. This is entirely on you.

> and now you wanna send us out alone?"

Tsuneo: The army of nameless Saints NPCs is just assumed

> "The less people, the better, my delicate flower," the man replied in a soft-spoken voice and  
> Shaundi rolled her eyes. She knew that protesting wouldn't change the Boss' mind; he was the Boss  
> for many reasons and one of them was his

Rebecca: -love of Regency era fiction. True facts, look it up

> indirect assertiveness.

Rick: And inability to listen to subordinates.

> Sometimes his unflappable  
> attitude was enough to make one do anything. She glared at Birk before pointing a finger at him.

> "Do anything stupid

Rick: Like a Nyte Blade reboot on Netflix

Dan: You know it would happen

> and I'll swear to God I'll shoot you." Grabbing his jacket, Shaundi shoved her  
> way through the crowd with Birk barely keeping up behind her and Amber watched as the Boss  
> continued issuing orders, sending Saints to different locations on the map

Rick: Troy, Kevin, you handle Shivington. Peirce, Lin, you'll be in charge of Hellpointe. Dex, Jenny,  
you'll take El Dorado. And Viola? I need you to go get me a drink.

> and bolstering up numbers in hotspots.

Dan: Hotspots are where the Helldivers land, right?

Tsuneo: Sure, why not?



> It was a major turn on, his way with words, his commanding presence. It was  
> overpowering. It was suffocating.

Rick: No, that was the full can on Ax body spray he used each morning.

> Oh, it was enticing. It was crazy how many tones there were to his  
> voice, from sweet and chocolatey to powerful and booming.

Rebecca: Once more, fic, settle down

> Oh she had to go, she skipped down  
> the stairs and almost buckled on the last step, but overbalanced and slid across the marble flooring.

Rebecca: And smacked right into the attack helicopter.

> It was too much, the world was spinning, her head was getting hazy, too many thoughts, too many  
> emotions, but why of all times did it have to happen now?

Dan: Of all times to forget how walking works

> Amber hissed as the thumping in her ears grew in volume and intensity, wanting to push the hands  
> that grabbed for her away but they were strong, casually sweeping her off the floor and into their  
> arms. She couldn't tell who it was

Rick: Jiffy the Llama to the rescue!

> as she shut her eyes to ward away the dizziness but their scent  
> was enough. She tried for a smile but tensed as the sensation overload was too much and instead  
> rested her head on his shoulder, "Anemia. The worst condition to have given my occupation."

Rebecca: So to summarise, she's super hot, she's related to a canon character, she has backstory  
wangst and she has a medical condition that will likely never impair her beyond providing some cheap  
drama. It's like she's trying to checklist traits or something

> "Well, you were shot yesterday.

Tsuneo: [Amber] Oh yeah, forgot about that.

> Guess that dinner's gonna have to wait."

> "What? I mean we can do something else, my dizziness won't last the whole day."

Dan: Five minutes later, she was taking cover behind a parked car, shooting an assault rifle at her  
Former colleagues and realising the boss was really bad at taking hints.

> "Then what do you have in mind?"

> She smiled up at him, "Well..."

Rick: Hungry Hungry Hippos it is

On that final comment, the big screen turned off and converted the world back to prose format. "And  
that was the first lump of what I guess could be called Guns and Roses," Tsuneo considered. "A fic  
with a lot of the former and none of the latter."

"I'm kind of impressed by the Spectres," Rebecca commented.

"You are?" Dan asked.

"Oh yes," she nodded. "In as far as any threat they represented was immediately crushed in the opening chapter without them scoring any sort of victory whatsoever," she noted. "Not only that, but they were all but dismissed after that. If the author was intending to build them up as a big deal then they utterly failed to do it."

"I have to agree there," Rick nodded. "It doesn't help that all we know about them came through block exposition rather than actually demonstrating anything about them."

"I mean, when you look at it, their main function is to be a means to deliver Amber to the fic," Dan added.

"And I kind of have to wonder what she's doing there," Tsuneo considered. "Not from a narrative perspective, of course. She's the lead character and is there to make kissy faces with the boss."

"I'm guessing you mean what she was meant to do in the attack," Dan commented. "Because she seemed kinda clueless."

"You're right," he nodded. "She clearly is important to them, having some nebulously defined connection to their leadership. However, she was also left to basically wander cluelessly around during the fight and should have been dead by all rights."

"The main reason for her being there was to facilitate her defection," Rebecca suggested. "Which is real cart before the horse level stuff."

"So I can only assume that the rest of the fic is going to be about these two horny idiots making out while the Specters vaguely exist," Dan added.

"Thrilling," Tsuneo sighed. "Hey Voice, how much more of this fic is there before it is inevitably abandoned?"

"There are two more parts to it," the Voice replied, coming out of nowhere.

"Well at least it's short," he admitted. "I'll take that."

"But we're done here for today, right?" Rick asked.

"We are, yes," the Voice confirmed. "We'll be covering part two next time."

"Sounds riveting," Dan added. "I can hardly wait."

"So Rebecca, I have to ask," Tsuneo added. "Why the hell would you read Girl on Fire and the The Death Games?"

She gave a simple shrug in reply. "A combination of things, really. Partially it was curiosity as to what you had been covering, and how they handled their large casts and such. And yes, it was also just a desire to see what they were like and how they compared to other fics that we did."

"I can see that," Tsuneo nodded. "So what were your thoughts?"

She paused for a moment and then nodded. "I think I prefer Storm Force."

----

Author's notes:

In many ways, the Spectres embody the two worst traits possible in creating your own OC villain group for an established franchise. First, everything about them is out and infodumped. It's stated, rather than demonstrated. They inform us of who they are and what they do through block exposition rather than letting it develop in any even slightly natural way in the fic proper. This extends to the characters who are entirely informed rather than actually being allowed to develop as people.

The second is, of course, the fact that they aren't even really presented as a threat. They get effortlessly trashed in their first engagement, lose one of their ranking members to defection straight up and then kind of fade into being background noise while our leads are generally dumb and horny for each other. In short, they're off to a bad start and will be making up for lost ground (badly) for the rest of the fic.

Next time, more stupid horny people being stupid and horny

Saints Row is copyright Volition/Deep Silver

Guns & Roses written by kazred

Rebecca Bartley and Rick R. Mortis created by Rick R. (natch)  
Tsuneo Tateao and Dan created by Zogster

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Dumb and horny assassins? Email us at [elmerstudios00 \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:elmerstudios00@gmail.com) and register your Jeff.

The Elmer Studios Blog  
<http://elmerstudios.blogspot.com.au>  
Elmer Studios MSTings, commentary, random thoughts and other stuff

Elmer Studios!  
<http://www.heavens-feel.com/elmer/>  
All of Elmer Studios' MSTings, random DELTA Invasion Episode Generator and other stuff in one spot

-----

> "You do realise everyone's still out to kill you, right?"