
Episode 487 – Something that might possibly resemble an ending, maybe

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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.

Rebecca and Dan were sitting at a desk, dressed in suits, while Rick was sitting opposite them, wearing a decidedly cheap-looking suit. Above them hung cheap-looking sign reading 'Totally Real Jamaican Government HR department' while Tsuneo iheld a camcorder focused on the three of them.

"Thank you for taking time to meet us, mister…" Dan began. "Insert Name Here."

"I wasn't doing anything, so sure," Rick replied.

"Now Mister whoever, as you know, we represent the Jamaican Government," Rebecca explained. "We are looking for an individual to fulfil a very specific role within our organisation. Obviously, we're going to need somebody with very specific abilities and kills to fulfil this role."

"I think I am a person that can do things," Rick nodded.

"Let's start from the top," Dan offered. "Can you tell us more about yourself? Who you are, what you do and what skills you have."

"Well, I like Jerk Turkey," Rick spoke up. "Oh, and I also was in the army."

Rebecca raised an eyebrow. "What did you do in the army, Mister Whoever?"

"I wore the correct uniform for each day," he began. "And I also identified different types of television, although not all the time. Sometimes I was in charge of loading and unloading hovertanks on to trucks so they could be loaded onto other things. I went to a lot of meetings in conference rooms in different places, including on the moon. Oh, and sometimes I fought alien war robots."

"Very interesting," Dan unconvincingly noted. "What would you say was the most important thing that you did in the military?"

Rick paused in thought for some time. "I delegated counting stationary to Private LaBelle."

"I see," Rebecca nodded. "And can you tell me more about this job?"

"Well, I saw that the stationary needed to be counted," Rick explained. "So I asked LaBelle to do it for me."

"Fascinating," Dan replied with no conviction at all. "And what else did you do in the army?"

"I lived in a Quonset hut," Rick explained. "And sometimes I went to karaoke or went to the O-Club which is where I had lunch. That's what we call dinner in the army."

"Of course," Rebecca noted. "Now as you might be aware, the Jamaican government is a very important organisation that does very important things. Why do you think that you would be suited to a position within our organisation?"

There was a pause. "Well I don't have a job at the moment, so I'm not doing anything," Rick suggested.

“That’s a useful trait,” Dan offered. “What else can you bring to the table?”

Rick paused again, this time for a lot longer. “Well, I know that sometimes it takes a long time to drive to the airport. Oh, and one time I was kidnapped by aliens who gave me space drugs and made me fight for them as a brainwashed zombie slave.”

Dan and Rebecca glanced at each other and then nodded. “Mister Subject Name Here, we have a potential position for you,” Rebecca finally spoke up.

“Oh?” Rick blinked, looking remarkably surprised at this response.

“Mister Entity, we’re willing to offer you a place in our government,” Rebecca explained. “We are in vital need of a flunky who will be a part of a nonsense alien clone conspiracy as a brainwashed zombie slave. Your job will be to take the fall and then likely be killed in the process. Well, assuming that it all goes off as planned, which is very unlikely given the mess that it is.”

Rick nodded. “What will be my main responsibilities?”

“You will sit in an office and stare blankly at the walls,” Dan continued. “You will be trotted out to go to meetings and be followed around by government goons as needed. When you’re no longer useful to our secret alien overlords we will kill you and then dump your body in a shallow grave where it will never be found and then deny all knowledge of your existence.”

There was another awkward pause. “Does it pay well?” Rick asked.

Dan nodded. “No. But we’ll give you a jerk turkey expense.”

“I’ll take it,” Rick finished.

Dan and Rebecca stood, with Dan offering his hand. “Thank you for that, Mister Whoever. We’ll send you the information you need and we’ll hopefully see you soon.”

Rick took his hand and shook it. “You can send it to my email. I need to turn my computer on to use it though. I have a computer and it has internet”

Rebecca smiled. “I can tell you’re the right choice for this role.”

Tsuneo nodded to them. “Great work there everyone,” he beamed. “Once again, I think you all captured the essence of the whole damn fanfic.”

“What can I say?” Rick asked. “it’s amazingly easy to fall into the character of Default Protagonist here. Stupidly easily, actually, given that he has no actual personality whatsoever.”

“I have to say that it felt like a good way to cap off the Dire Straights experience,” Dan considered. “Cover all the key character points and the like. True, that takes only a few seconds, but you know what we mean.”

“It’s kind of amazing when you think about it,” Rebecca nodded. “We’ve actually made it to the end of Dire Straights. Not only is it one of the longest fics we’ve done to date, but it’s also got to be one of the most astonishingly dull and content free to date.”

“Yeah,” Tsuneo agreed. “We joke about all these things, but the reality is that there really was nothing going on at all. Even in the cases of the longest fics we’ve covered there’s always been something there. But this fic? It’s just an empty, yawning void.”

“And yet, we still got so much out of it as demonstrated,” Tsuneo noted. “In a strange way, I think we gained so much from it because there was so little there to go from. We had to fill in the gaps because the writer sure as hell wasn’t going to.”

“Good morning everyone,” the Voice spoke up, crashing into the conversation.

“And speaking of empty, yawning voids, good morning to you too, Voice,” Rebecca replied.

“I think the Voice is a better realised character than anyone in Dire Straights,” Rick spoke up.

“That’s a very, very low bar to clear,” Dan shot back.

“So Voice,” Tsuneo continued. “I can only hope that today will be the last that we will ever see of Dire Straights.”

“It is, yes,” the Voice confirmed. “Today we will be covering the final four chapters.”

“Oh goodie,” Rebecca sighed. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, I’m glad that it’s over. Its more the very fact that we still need to crawl over these last four chapters before we get there first.”

“Hey, let’s not forget that the plot has finally started,” Dan offered.

“Oh yes, that thing,” Rebecca shook his head. “That very regrettable moment when the plot is so damn stupid that you feel that you were better off without it.”

“The true challenge of Dire Straights,” Tsuneo finished. “But the fact that we’re done with it makes me feel a little better.”

“As always once we’re done, I’ll be asking you for your reviews,” the Voice continued.

“Oh, we will have so very much to say,” Rebecca simply stated. “I think we all do.”

“Fantastic,” the Voice beamed. “I can’t wait.”

“Well we could skip the fanfic and go straight to the reviews,” Dan offered.

“No,” the Voice stated.

“Well poo.”

“It was worth a shot,” Rick offered. “Don’t blame you at all.”

“Nothing for it now other than to grin and bear it,” Rebecca admitted as she took her place on the couch. “Because I get the feeling that despite all we’ve gone through so far, the worst is somehow yet to come.”

“Given what we’ve seen so far, I have a feeling you might be right,” Tsuneo agreed as he and the others joined her.

“Look at the upside,” Rick offered. “Maybe it will end on a jerk turkey dinner.”

“You see that as an upside?” Dan asked.

“When you think about the rest of the fic it is,” he finished as the big screen turned on and converted the world over to script format.

> Chapter 25: Trial By Fire
> At least my surroundings were nice enough that I could regret my decision in comfort.

Rebecca: I believe this is how Assad now lives his life

> I was in a small studio apartment. There was a bed in the back, with a wooden dresser and a color
> television.

Rick: Yes, but what type of television was it? We need to know!

> In the front of the room was a small alcove with an electric stove and a refrigerator and a
> small dining table.

Dan: And he calls this comfort?
Rick: It's not a Quonset hut, so he's happy.

> I had been extracted from Jamaica by the Global Military Police and ferried to this United Nations
> Spacy base somewhere in the Caribbean.

Tsuneo: Some place with weak extradition laws and questionable corporate tax regulations.

> The Spacy was nice enough to let me get some groceries from the commissary.

Rebecca: They didn't let him starve to death, so he's happy.

> One of the GMP's investigative aides always accompanied me.

Dan: It made going to the bathroom really awkward

> Major Nova Satori had told me that I should not leave the base.

Rebecca: She threatened to set the dogs on him if he did. Truth was she was just fishing for an excuse

> I was not watching television. Pretty much all the channels had reports on the assassination of two
> members of the Ruling Triumvirate of the Robotech Masters, and I was the prime suspect.

Tsuneo: Their prime suspect, This Guy
Rick: It'd be like if Lozer shot JFK.

> There was speculation that rogue elements of the United Earth Forces had orchestrated the event,

Dan: What about us? Do the readers get to know who was behind it? What their motive was? What the hell is even going on?
Tsuneo: With how this fic usually works, by the next chapter he'll be on base checking the uniform regulations and it will never be mentioned again.

> whisking me away to one of their safehouses.

Rebecca: This is a line of thought that quickly escalates to black helicopters.

> "The United Earth Forces are now operating without a United Nations Security Council," said one of
> the commentators. "Without a United Nations, they are nothing more than outlaws."

> I then saw another channel. Some guy from Syria was on.

> "This is clearly part of a Jewish conspiracy," he said. "First they steal the world's money, and then
> they cause chaos. They are responsible for all the wars in the world."

Tsuneo: To be fair, you interview someone from Syria and you're probably going to get that

> After relaxing in my comfortable room, I heard the door open, and saw Major Satori, clad in her
> Class "A" Army uniform,

Rick: Complete with a cape. Standard uniform.

> standing there.

Rebecca: Wondering how she got boring guy detail.

> Another person entered, and I recognized him as Major Jack Emerson.

Tsuneo: Just in case the scene was not dry enough, here's another bland character to punch it up.

> "Hi, Jack," I said.

Dan: Turns out he does know Jack.

> "Good to see you," the major replied. "I'm glad you're out of danger, for now. Someone is here to
> see you."

Tsuneo: His defence attorney, Madam Z.
Dan [Madam Z]: Yeah, well you got me sweetcakes. Betcha didn't know I studied law on the side while I was managing the world's most oil reserves, did ya? Did it just to make sure that there was no way the kids would try to take it all back from me or the like while I wasn't looking. So anyway, we're gonna do the whole thing, anything you say is in confidence, I will defend you to the best of my abilities and all that jazz. So who wants some stew?

> A black man in his mid fifties walked in, clad in Class "A" Air Force uniform,

Rick: So he also had a cape.
Tsuneo: Makes sense to me

> and I recognized him as Supreme Commander Tom Washington.

> "Hello there," I said.

Rebecca: I'm going to assume he's still lounging on his bed at this point.

> "Good afternoon," said the general. "Everyone at ease. Let us have a seat."

> We all sat down on the dining table.

Dan: Not much... room for the four of us. Could you... just... squish over a little there, and...

> "Brief us on what happened starting when you lost consciousness before you found yourself facing
> the Triumvirate," said Satori.

> And so I did, beginning when I delivered my report to Winthorpe's office.

Tsuneo: Half an hour later, he's still describing Winthorpe's office in excruciating detail.

> "Amazing you pulled it off," said Washington.

Tsuneo: Pulled what off? He ran away and his targets were still killed.

> "I mean, if the battery on that watch had been
> depleted, then we would not have been able to follow you."

Rick: Wait, what watch?
Dan [Washington]: Oh yeah, we've been spying on you for months. You're really dull, you know that?

> "It is unfortunate that the lady in the red dress

Tsuneo: As the world's premiere intelligence organisation, we have no idea who she is.

> had a backup plan in case you didn't follow through on the assassination," said Satori.

Rebecca: Makes sense to me. I wouldn't rely on this guy for anything.

> "Yeah, but think about it, Major," I said. "I imagine that if their plan went as intended, it would have
> ended with the guards killing me after I killed the two ladies."

Rebecca: [Nova] I see no downside.

> "The question is, what do we do now?" asked Jack.

> "The UEF has a general policy of delivering persons in their custody or control to a recognized state
> charging them with murder,"

Rebecca: Hey remember that excruciatingly dull jurisdictional dispute way back in part one?
Tsuneo: Not one bit.
Rebecca: Me either, actually. Let's move on.

> said Washington. "But it may not apply in this case. Intel indicates that
> officials within the Jamaican government were involved.

Rick: The under-secretary for education! I knew it!

> If we turn him over, he may not survive to see trial."

Rebecca: [Nova] Again, no great loss.

> "So I hide out in U.N. territory?" I asked.

Dan: He’s going to live out his live in a U.N. waiting room.

> "I would advise to the Plenipotentiary Council that you be granted asylum."

> "What's that? I heard of it before in the news."

> "After a quorum of the General Assembly failed to meet, several member states formed a
> Plenipotentiary Council to take control of U.N. assets, command the United Earth Forces,
> administer U.N. territories, and conduct negotiations with the Robotech Masters, until such time as a
> quorum of the General Assembly convenes to take over. The Council has the final say of what to do
> with you. Jamaica has a representative on that council. They may defer to the demands of
> Jamaica."

Tsuneo: Thank you for that, chunky block exposition.
Rick: Chunky block exposition is my favourite character in this fic.

> "Sir, if he is turned over, he will get killed before trial," protested Jack.

Rebecca: To be fair, I imagine he could injure himself walking in a straight line

> "I know, and the chairman suspects this as well," said Washington.

Tsuneo: [Washington] But it’s a small price to pay to accomplish... Wait, what did we accomplish with all this?

> "I will speak to the full Council and urge them to grant asylum,

Rick: Arkham Asylum, that is. He’s rooming with Killer Croc.

> and, if they choose not to, to allow me to take whatever measures
> necessary to keep you safe. Something bad is going on,

Dan: Yeah, we're reading it.

> and much more than the life of one war veteran is involved."

Rick: Like, two war veterans. Three maybe.

> I later stood outside on the street. There were many clouds in the air, and puddles from the recent
> Caribbean storm dotted the street. Several small bungalows serving as guest quarters lined the
> street, as did wooden utility poles with streetlights attached to them and wires connecting them.

Rebecca: The stress of the situation is getting to him, but the knowledge that there are utility poles helps to bring him a measure of calm

> "So much has happened," said Jack.

Dan: Not really, no.

> "Yeah," I said, looking at the sky. "We need to be working together to prepare for the Invid, not
> fighting over scraps!"

Rick: Control of perhaps the only source of the most potent energy in existence is ‘scraps’, apparently

> "I know," said Jack, who was looking at the sky. "Every time I look up there, I think of Nina. Those
> few months. The sky is her final resting place in this Universe. She was the best."

Rebecca: Whoever she was.
Tsuneo: I vaguely recall there being a character called Nina.
Rebecca: Maybe? Truth is I stopped keeping track long ago.

> "That's right," I heard General Washington say. I looked and he was standing about twenty feet from
> us. "When she was sixteen, I let her use one of the flight simulators the veritech pilots use for
> training. She said she wanted to do more than just fly crop dusters.

Dan: So she became a novelist. Strange career shift, I know.

> She worked hard to be a
> Thunderbolt pilot. The Air Force was honored to have her as a pilot and officer, and I was honored
> to have her as a daughter."

Rebecca: Informed relationships are the best relationships.

> Oooooooo

> I was beginning to set up a routine during my stay on the base,

Rick: Wake up, do a bunch of stuff and then go back to sleep
Dan: It's a pretty good summary of the fic so far

> eating meals at my quarters or in one of the little restaurants on base,

Rebecca: Say, who’s supporting those restaurants since the UN has no money?

> going jogging, using base amenities.

Tsuneo: I can’t imagine the pressure he’s feeling, knowing that high-level politics are going to determine his fate and he has no control over it whatsoever.
Dan: That’s a Panasonic television.
Tsuneo: Never mind.

> I was always accompanied by a member of Major Satori's team.

Tsuneo: In the advent of an emergency, they had orders to kill him

Dan: Again, I'd just be looking for an excuse.

> It was on a morning jog when Major Satori herself gave me some news.

Rebecca [Satori]: I'm sending you to a place called Belmont...

> "The Council has decided that you must stand trial in Jamaica for murder," she said.

> "Oh," I replied.

Tsuneo: He said with all the affect of being told his afternoon meeting is being pushed back fifteen minutes.

> "Are you going to arrest me?"

> "No, we are not delivering you into Jamaican custody. Supreme Commander Washington made an
> arrangement with Jamaican officials.

Rick: You're being traded for a Shiny Wailord.

> The United Nations will maintain custody of you until and
> unless the court finds you guilty on the charges.

Dan: In which case you're on your own

> You will be brought to Jamaica and back under my team's escort."

> And so I was.

> Oooooooo

> "In my opinion, you should take the deal," said my lawyer John Jones.

Rick: Martian Lawyer.

> "A twenty year sentence is better for you than a life sentence."

> "Aide from the fact that I am innocent," I replied,

Dan: Pfft, details

> "I would not survive to serve even a year."

Tsuneo: He seems pretty certain he's going to get lynched.
Rebecca: I mean, he's probably used to that reaction.

> We were heading to the courtroom in Kingston. Jones was dressed in a black robe, and a white wig
> covered his head- lawyers wore that type of outfit when appearing in a courtroom.

Rick: Its one of those weird traditional things they do for no reason, like playing cricket

> I myself was dressed in a suit. Major Satori and her team accompanied me,

Rebecca: Did they have their uniforms or were they in suits?
Rick: As long as they have capes, that's all that matters

> and several Jamaican government agents accompanied them.

Dan: They're like government agents everywhere, except they have really cool shades.

> We all entered the courtroom. The prosecutor was already waiting at his wooden table, clad in wig
> and robe. The judge, clad in that same outfit, went to the bench.

Tsuneo: We're really doing this, aren't we? We're going to go through every step of this courtroom procedure.
Rebecca: You can't say you're surprised at this point
Tsuneo: I'm not. But at least I can hope.

> The flag of Jamaica was erected on a pole behind the bench.

Rick: Could it at least be future space Jamaica?

> The judge read out the charges

Dan: Including one count of Gunting in a No Gunting zone.

> and asked for my plea.

Dan: I plead incompetence.
Rebecca: [Judge] That’s not an option.
Dan: Can I put it in anyway?

> "I plead not guilty," I said.

Rick: Wait, can I get a second opinion?
Dan [Judge]: No takebacks
Rick: Awww...

> "Very well," said the judge. "As I understand, the government made an agreement with the United
> Nations in that the United Nations shall maintain custody of the defendant

Tsuneo: But Jamaica gets visitation rights every second weekend

> until the charges are withdrawn or a verdict is reached."

> "We request that the defendant be remanded to custody."

> "The defendant shall remain in custody according to the terms of the agreement," said the judge.

Dan: We request an end to the repetition in this fic.
Rick: There will be an end to repetition in this fic.

> He banged his wooden gavel.

Tsuneo: And now it’s turned into a legal drama. Okay, a legal story. Okay, a legal petition. Okay, it’s become a deposition to add an Oxford comma to the Jamaican constitution.

> "What is next?" I asked as I was escorted out.

Tsuneo: Next you get shot on the courtroom steps by a sanctioned vigilante.

> "Depositions," replied Jones. "Basically a less formal hearing where witnesses give testimony. It is
> not considered part of the trial, though testimony is considered evidence."

Rebecca: Is this a Fanfic, or an educational short on the court system at work?

> My mom then called out my name. She and Dad stood in the hallway, in their best outfits. Paul and
> Trina were there with their kids.

Dan [Kid]: If you go to prison can I have your stuff?

> "Are you all right?" asked Paul.

Tsuneo: He was brainwashed and put on trial, so yeah, doing fine.

> "We'll be fine," I said. "I'm on the next flight back to base."

> "Take care," said Dad.

> I hugged them all.

Tsuneo: This has been a crude simulation of human interaction

> Oooooooo

> It was about two weeks later that depositions started. I sat in this conference room at the Kingston
> courthouse

Tsuneo: So are they flying him back and forth from the base to Jamaica for each day of the trial?
Dan: I mean, it's not the worst commute ever.

> with the judge, my lawyer, and the prosecutor.

Rick: And a peanut gallery full of clowns, for some reason.

> From what my lawyer said, in a
> deposition both sides would question the witness; it was clearly much less formal that a courtroom
> hearing, as my lawyer wore a suit sans the black robe and wig.

Rick: That's the most important part of the hearing.

> We had deposed several witnesses

Rebecca: They had fled the country into exile

> such as people at the hotel and some of the police inspectors on the site. Mr. Winthorpe was in the
> room.

> "I advise the Prime Minister on national security matters,"

Rick: Like if they're attacked by space robots or the like.

> he testified. "The defendant here was our
> front man for our dealings with the Robotech Masters and the other nations concerning the
> protoculture."

Tsuneo: [Judge] For the love of God, why?
Rebecca: [Winthrope] Truth be told, I have no idea either.

> "Describe what happened at the Montego Grand Hotel," said the prosecutor.

Dan: Well, there was a really good breakfast buffet.

> "We had a formal luncheon with businessmen and government officials," said Winthorpe. "We were
> charting the course for the world."

Tsuneo: [Winthrope] The world didn't get a say in it.

> "Tell us what happened."

Rick [Winthrope]: I had a bland salad and accepted hefty bribes

[Pause]

Rick [Winthrope]: Oh, you mean with the suspect

> "I went to use the restroom near the conference rooms. After I left the men's room, I heard gun
> shots."

Dan: Somebody had really wrecked the can

> He then told the judge that I had run out of the ladies' room with a pistol in my hand,

Dan: Mondays, am I right?

> and that he
> opened the door and saw two of the Robotech Masters' Ruling Triumvirate dead.

Rebecca: Making you wonder why the whole thing wasn't done as a recap to save us some time

> I looked at my lawyer. "I did not see him when I ran out of that restroom," I whispered.

> "I have no more questions at this time," said the prosecutor.

> He then presented a drawing on the wooden conference table.

Rebecca: My three year-old did it. What do you think?

"This is layout of the area where the shooting took place, correct?" asked Jones.

Rick: Actually sir, that's your Dungeons and Dragons map. You've even got a place on it for 2d4 Orcs

> "It looks like it," said Winthorpe. "I don't remember."

> "Which way did the defendant run?" he asked.

> "Towards me. I looked right at his face."

> He was just lying. I knew he was in on this plot.

Rebecca: This is a line of thought that ends with accusing Boxcar Willie of being a lizardman

> "And yet other witnesses had testified that they saw my client running in the other direction, away
> from the men's room."

> "They must be mistaken."

> "Or is it you who are mistaken?"

Dan: They really haven't thought this conspiracy through at all, have they?

> "I saw him with the gun."

Rick: In the library. Isn't that right, Colonel Mustard?

> "I have no more questions at this time," said my lawyer.

Tsuneo: [Jones] I'll be gracious and not pick apart his obvious lies.

> "The witness is excused and is subject to recall," said the judge.

Rebecca: The witness had faulty brakes that could fail in the rain.

> Ooooooo

> "The three of us were at a conference in Montego Bay in Jamaica," said the lady in the red dress,
> the sole survivor of the Ruling Triumvirate.

Dan: She’s so resolutely refused to get a name that she must be the lead in a twenty-eight chapter fanfic.

> "We met with many government and business leaders."

Rebecca: Of course, since they're leaders of a supertech alien civilization, I have to wonder why they were meeting people in a hotel instead of, say, their spaceship.
Tsuneo: It seems to be just a tad risky. Well, that and really, really stupid.

> "And how do you know the defendant?" asked the prosecutor.

Rick: Well, we've read twenty-four chapters of this so far...

> "Our intelligence indicated that he found the Flower of Life within the ruins of Zor's battle fortress,"
> she answered. "He was also one of the captives we had placed in our bioroids during the war.

Tsuneo: ‘I knew him when he was a brainwashed zombie slave’ isn't the compelling argument you think it is
Dan: To be fair, with this guy how would you tell?

> He
> was later part of a diplomatic mission sent by the United Nations to our ship to discuss our plan for
> refining protoculture and preparing for the Invid invasion."

Rebecca: For no apparent reason.

> "Describe what happened to your sisters."

> "We went into the ladies' room near the conference room.

Rebecca: Best part about being a triumvirate is you’ve always got your girls with you.

> As we were checking ourselves in the
> mirror, he went inside and fired shots. It happened so fast."

Dan: [Jones] So then why did he shoot the other two and leave you unharmed?
Rebecca: He’s... really dumb?
Dan: [Jones] Well, that seems fair.

> "And where is the shooter?"

Rick: She's a Wal-Mart excusive under the Night Force subline

> "In this room," she said, pointing to me.

> "And what happened after that?"

> "He ran off. I looked at my sisters.

Dan: I was like, if she’s dead, does she really need that bracelet.

> The paramedics came, but they were already too late. We worked together for so long.

Rebecca: Shared a telepathic bond and everything.

> And now this happened."

Rick: Why did you arrange to have this meeting in a hotel rather than your space ship?
Rebecca: Mostly for the breakfast buffet

> "I have no questions at this time," said the prosecutor.

> "How long was the shooter in the room?" asked Jones.

Dan: Long enough to introduce himself as Gaston Pigeon-Fancier Hampton and give me a good look at his face.

> "Only for a few seconds,"

Dan: Although his fart lingered for some time

> said the lady in the red dress. "But I definitely recognized him."

Rick: Because he was wearing the regulation uniform of the day

> "Everything happened so fast, and you said that you turned towards your sisters."

> "I will not forget his face."

Tsuneo: Whatever the hell he looks like

> "Did you ever use people from Earth in your bioroids against their will?"

Rebecca: It was either that or get them jobs at Amazon Fulfilment Centres. The brainwashed Bioroid slave is probably more humane

> "Yes," answered the lady in the red dress. "It was an action we regret. My personal participation was
> inexcusable."

Tsuneo: [Jones] And is there a reason you haven't been tried for war crimes?
Rebecca: Because I'm pretty.
Tsuneo: [Jones] Well that checks out.

> "Does this brainwashing have any permanent effects?"

Dan: Yes, the subject will be dull, lifeless, have no personality to speak of and go through rote mundane tasks without the slightest of thought
Rick: No further questions

> "Permanent effects?" she asked.

> "My client could still be under a hypnotic suggestion."

> "That can't be possible," she said. "He has not been subject to the treatment in nearly a year."

Rebecca:: He hasn't gotten his booster shots.

> "He was missing for over a month."

> "He can not still be under the influence."

Rebecca: Do we need him to take a breath test?

> "I argue he was. And you used his brainwashing in a plot to assassinate your sisters."

Tsuneo: If that's the argument you're basing your case on then you might want to reconsider your plea

> "Objection," said the prosecutor.

> "Let me rephrase," said Jones. "Did you plot to assassinate your sisters using my client as a pawn?"

> "No, I did not."

Rebecca: I mean, who would? He’s grotesquely incompetent, incapable of basic human interaction and could screw up walking in a straight line.
Tsuneo: [Jones] That all seems reasonable to me.

> "I have no further questions, your Honor."

> Ooooooo

> "State your name for the record," said the judge.

> "Major Dana Sterling, United Nations Army," said the witness,

Rebecca: Getting more for this cameo than the rest of the cast put together.

> who was clad in a Class "A" Army service uniform.

Dan: There was nothing else notable about her at all.

> "Tell this court how long you have been in the United Nations Army."

> "Three year, sir. I was just promoted to major this year.

Rebecca: That's what we call rapid career advancement
Rick: It helps when everyone above you is dead.

> I am currently assigned to the staff of Supreme Commander Tom Washington."

Dan: Her job is to punch anyone who disagrees

> "And you have met the defendant?"

Rebecca: Regrettably

> "Yes, sir."

> "Your witness," the judge said to John Jones.

> "What was your involvement in this particular matter?" asked Jones.

Rebecca: [Dana] It was a slow Saturday and I had nothing to do.

> "Major Jack Emerson, Corporal Bowie Grant,

Dan: Bowie’s still a corporal?
Rick: He’s the Harry Kim of the Southern Cross army.

> Musica, and I arranged a meeting with the defendant
> in Jamaica. We were suspicious of the intentions of the new Ruling Triumvirate of the Robotech
> Masters.

Rebecca: And if you can't trust imperialist transhumanist alien clones, who can you trust?

> We knew that the defendant had been forced to pilot the enemy bioroids, and so Musica
> used this device to find out if he was under the influence."

Rick: What device is that?
Tsuneo: You know, this device
Rick: Can we say that it's the MASS Device?
Tsuneo: Sure, why not?

> "And what happened next?"

Rebecca: [Dana] I ordered a mojito and a bowl of fries.
Rick: [Jones] Fascinating.

> "Musica changed the psychological programming so it would terminate if he was compelled to do
> something violent.

Tsuneo: And why didn't you undo the programming entirely so there would be no risk of his turning on anyone or having any sort of blackout?
Rebecca: Um, a space wizard did it.

> We also fitted him with a hidden transmitter, which he would activate, alerting
> U.N. agents to extract him. We received the signal and the agents extracted him from the hotel in
> Montego Bay."

Rick: [Dana] There was some farting around at check-in first.

> "No further questions."

Rebecca: I wouldn’t either. I'd also close the case at this point, but that's me.

> "Who came up with the idea."

> "Well, it sort of came up with an idea over lunch.

Tsuneo: Hey, how about we turn around that guy's brainwashing to render its harmless but still leave him in a situation where he could be used as a patsy?
Dan: That sounds great! Pass the salad dressing.

> Jack- Major Emerson- was wondering why the
> defendant was chosen to be Jamaica's liaison with the Robotech Masters,

Rick: They chose him because he can identify different models of television. No other reason.

> and why they wanted to
> see them during their initial negotiations with the U.N. over the protoculture matrix."

Tsuneo: [Dana] We could have headed this all off and stopped the killings, but we didn’t.

> "And who authorized this mission?"

> "Supreme Commander Tom Washington," answered Sterling.

Rebecca: Pass the buck all the way up the line

> "And you trust those who planned this mission? How long have you known them?"

> "I have known Jack and Bowie all my life."

Dan: Both Jack and Bowie have been kicked in the shins so many times.

> "Could it be that the United Nations's high command plotted the assassination?"

> "I don't know."

Rebecca: Although when you put it like that, it does sound a little dubious.

> "Could it not be that your friend Musica had actually brainwashed the defendant into killing the
> Ruling Triumvirate of the Robotech Masters?"

Rick: [Dana] You're right, Musica never liked the skank.

> "If so, would that not make the defendant innocent?"

Dan: Is shifting the blame really the best defence?

> "My job is to get to the truth," said the prosecutor.

> ooooooooo

> "With the Robotech Masters, I operated the cosmic harp," said Musica,

Rick: But she was sure to always wear the appropriate safety gear

> sitting in the conference room. "It was an instrument used to control the clones."

Rebecca: She also uses it to make faux-medieval covers of popular songs

> "And were you involved in brainwashing captured Earth people into operating the bioroids?"

> "I had advised the triumvirate who had since took over rulership over the Robotech Masters."

Dan: Not answering the question.
Tsuneo: Can we get them names so we don't need to work around the awkward naming?

> "And do you know how many prisoners were killed while fighting Earth's forces?"

> "At least three hundred, I believe."

> "And the defendant was one of the bioroid pilots?"

Tsuneo: [Musica] I don't know, I'm pretty sure he's some kind of a root vegetable.

> "Yes."

Rebecca: But not one of the ones who died.
Rick: Good to know!

> "When did you suspect that the current ruling triumvirate was up to something?"

Tsuneo: A legal professional said that

> "I had wondered why they invited the defendant to the conference,

Dan: Given how stupid he is.

> instead of his commanding
> officer. The defendant than then appointed by the Jamaican government to represent them in their

> dealings with the protoculture.

Rebecca: Then again, one might wonder why the Jamacian government appointed such a dumbarse to the role in the first place.

> I knew how the clone hypnosis worked, and I wondered if the
> defendant was being used as what you call a pawn."

Dan: [Musica] We of course have a much more refined and elegant term for such people.
Tsuneo: [Prosecutor] And what would that be?
Dan: [Musica] A dumbarse.

> "A pawn."

Dan: You know, one of the little chess men with the big round head.

> "Yes. I fear there are those from both our peoples who wish to use the protoculture for their own
> advantage.

Rick: It's almost like its the basis for the Masters' entire civilization or something

> When I examined the defendant with my equipment, there was a sleeper program
> hidden inside him, and I suspect in the other persons who had been taken captive by the Robotech
> Masters."

Tsuneo: [Prosecutor] And so you alerted the relevant authorities that there could be hundreds of such people who could be manipulated by the Robotech Masters.
Rebecca: [Musica] No, why would I do that?

> "And what did you do?"

> "I placed a hidden command to press a hidden signal on his watch if he were reactivated, and to
> break the hypnosis if he was ordered to do something violent."

Rebecca: Again, this seems more complicated than it needs to be
Rick: That's only the start. Just wait till she gets to the part with the donkey and the speedboat.

> "And why did you choose that course of action instead of outright curing him?" asked my lawyer.

> "We needed to see what they were up to," answered Musica.

Tsuneo: And they obviously needed him under their influence to do that.

> "And we were right. The lady in red

Rebecca: She does have a name, you know. Or she should.

> betrayed her sisters."

Tsuneo: Your nonsense plan is retroactively justified. Well done.

> "No further questions."

> "You ask us to trust you, do you not," said the prosecutor.

Dan: Kind of the reason we’re all here, but never mind.

> "I say the truth," replied Musica.

> "You betrayed the Robotech Masters during the war."

Rebecca: [Musica] You’re right. I should have continued to serve an imperialist regime as they wiped out your people.
Dan: No further questions

> "I first left my people to join with this soldier, Bowie Grant. I later reunited with my sisters, and in an
> attempt to escape, one of them was killed. The Ruling Triumvirate abandoned many of the clones.
> They betrayed us, and the sister in red of their successors betrayed her two sisters."

Rebecca: Not actually answering the question, mind you

> "And how do we know you did not program the defendant to kill the two ladies in the Ruling
> Triumvirate?"

Rebecca: [Musica] Well, I did mention that I read his programming on a brain-decoding device, so I suppose I could just show that to the court.
Dan: [Prosecutor] Uhhh... Prosecution reserves the right to panic!

> "You have my word. And even if that is true, would that not make the defendant innocent?"

Tsuneo: Your honour, my client is too stupid to have committed the crime

> oooooooo

> "I would like to summon another witness for deposition," said John Jones. "I call Major Nova Satori."

> Major Satori sat at the wooden table, clad in her arming doublet.

Rebecca: Why is she wearing her armour to the court?
Rick: She's seen the way this case is going

> She was sworn in.

> "State your name for the record," said the judge.

Tsuneo: Which she didn’t do when she was sworn in.

> "Nova Satori."

> "Your citizenship or nationality?"

> "Japan."

Rebecca [Satori]: Y'all.

> "Your witness, counselor."

> "Tell me your rank and post in the United Nations Army," said my lawyer.

Rebecca: [Nova] Trading post. We get new stuff in every month.

> "I am a major and an inspector in the Global Military Police. I investigate crimes connected with the
> United Earth Forces."

Rebecca [Satori]: And occasionally overthrow governments. Truth being told, its kind of a hobby

> "And how did you first meet the defendant?"

> "The Jamaican?

Rebecca: She said in a room full of Jamaicans
Tsuneo: Just give his whole name, already

> Majors Emerson and Sterling, Corporal Grant, and Musica approached me.

Rick: This sounds like the setup for a bit.

> They
> told me it was suspicious that he was given such a prominent position in the Jamaican government,
> with close contact with the Ruling Triumvirate of the Robotech Masters.

Tsuneo: I think any joke we make now would be labouring the point.
Rebecca: This whole chapter is labouring the point.

> After a few meetings, they
> organized a plan to check if he had programming and to alter programming. He agreed, and
> Supreme Commander Washington gave the go-ahead for the mission,

Dan: Which really makes you wonder what his qualifications are to be commander

> which we called Operation Reggae.

Tsuneo: Because none of you have any imagination whatsoever

> He was given a secret signal hidden in a watch, which he was programmed to activate if
> he was reactivated. And in February 22, the signal was activated. My mission was to extract him, to
> get him the hell out of there.

Rebecca: Really selling that professional court deposition there.

> We managed to do so, but not before two sisters of the Ruling Triumvirate were killed."

> "Do you believe the defendant killed them?"

Rebecca: [Nova] I mean, look at him. Does he seem physically capable of that?
Rick: [Jones] Yeah, good point.

> "No. The program was supposed to end if he was told to do something violent. It is my belief that
> there was a backup hitman just in case.

Rick: They kept a spare hitman in the trunk

> Our intel demonstrates that this was a plot for the surviving sister to take control."

Dan: They have a clone on the inside

> "I have no further questions."

> "Your witness," the judge said to the prosecutor.

> "That is an interesting tale," he said. "A grand conspiracy to kill two members of the ruling
> Triumvirate so that one woman could take sole control of the Robotech Masters and the protoculture
> matrix. What is your proof?"

Rebecca: [Nova] You mean apart from the mountains of evidence and witness testimony we've already laid out?
Dan: [Prosecutor] Uhhh... Prosecution is suddenly needed for an urgent case in Fiji.

> "I told you.," answered Satori.

Tsuneo: [Nova] But for the readers' benefit, let's lay it out for a fifth time.

> "The defendant was requested by the Robotech Masters as part of
> the U.N. delegation, despite the fact that he was only a second lieutenant in a Spartas battalion. He
> was then given a high position in the Jamaican government, just below Cabinet level.

Tsuneo: Their entire case hinges on the fact that he's a dumbarse know-nothing elevated beyond his ability
Dan: It's a really strong argument

> And it was confirmed by Musica when we found the hidden program, set to reactivate."

> "Very complicated, Major. Is it not simpler to say that the defendant killed those two ladies in the
> ladies' room?"

> "It is simpler, but it is not the truth."

Dan: Prosecutor seems to have skipped that inconvenient detail.

> "Or is it not possible that Musica had actually placed the mental program causing the defendant to
> kill the two members of the Ruling Triumvirate, and that you were a pawn in a U.E.F. plot to
> assassinate the Ruling Triumvirate? There would be as much evidence for that as that yarn you just
> spun."

Rebecca: [Nova] Except that it makes no sense to kill just two of them if we intended to destabilise the Robotech Masters. The only one who benefits from her being the sole survivor is that survivor herself.
Dan: [Prosecutor] Uhhh... Prosecution pleads the fifth!

> "Musica has earned my trust. The Ruling Triumvirate had not."

Tsuneo: Again, not answering the question
Rebecca: The witnesses are really doing a good job of digging a hole here.

> Ooooooo

> Later, I was walking, with my military police escort, to the parking garage next to the courthouse.

Dan: Right into the gunsights.

> "Things seem to be going well," I said.

Tsuneo: They most certainly are not

> "Let your lawyer worry about it," said Major Satori.

Rebecca [Satori]: I'm out of here.

> We got into a car. The driver put the vehicle and gear and headed for the exit. We soon reached the
> street.

> The vehicle in front of us was consumed by a fireball, and flew into the air.

Rick: Also, aaah, boom.

> -----

> Chapter 26: Adam V Howerton
> It was happening again.

Rick: DickBabs and DickKori shippers fighting

> I could hear gunfire,

Dan: Sounds like one of my family gatherings

> probably coming from the windows of nearby skyscrapers.

Tsuneo: Everybody in Jamaica had a gun and was shooting at him.

> I instinctively took
> cover, and instinct honed from a year serving in combat for the United Nations Army.

Rick: Prior to that he would kind of stand there and let people shoot at him.

> "They have us pinned down," said Major Nova Satori.

Dan: Also, weren't you in a car?

> I briefly wondered who was firing at us. Could it be the Jamaican government?

Rebecca: I mean, so far their only role has been to be stupid evil, so I don't see why not.

> I went out, fired at where I saw the muzzle flashes,

Tsuneo: Sure, give the guy on trial for an assassination a gun. Good plan, everyone.

> and then retreated behind a car.

> I wondered when backup would arrive. I could see and smell smoke from explosions. It was like the
> war all over again.

Rick: Only with less giant space robots

> I could see an aircraft approach. Legs unfolded from it. It was a VF-11 Thunderbolt in guardian
> mode.

Tsuneo: Still having no idea what it was doing there
Dan: In the scene?
Tsuneo: I meant in the fic as a whole, really

> "I'll cover you!" yelled Satori.

Tsuneo: And the Thunderbolt blew him up, the end.

> The canopy of the Thunderbolt opened, and one of its arms reached out to me, the palm of its hand
> open.

Rick: In deference to years of military experience, he did not slap the palm of its hand.

> I got in and the Thunderbolt gently put me in the cockpit. I fastened my seat belt and then the
> veritech lifted up and took off.

Dan: Had to give the appropriate hand signals first.

> Soon we were over the waters of the Caribbean Sea.

Rebecca: Fortunately the action sequence ended before anything exciting happened.

> "We're clear," said the pilot.

> It took a few minutes for me to catch my breath.

Rebecca: The entire world is deeply invested in protecting this bland, whiny schlub

> Ooooooooooo

> The veritech guardian VF-11 Thunderbolt landed at the U.N. Spacy base where I had been
> sequestered. We disembarked, placing our shoed feet on the concrete surface.

Dan: I mean, I think I had shoes on. I was in court. I'm pretty sure I would have worn shoes. Yeah.

> The pilot removed her helmet, revealing herself to be Lieutenant Shelby Porter.

Rick: Of course it's her!

[Pause]

Rick: Who's Shelby Porter?
Tsuneo: I think she was a character from earlier in the fic, but honestly I don't really care any more

> "Thanks," I said.

> "I was on duty," answered Shelby. "Someone else on duty would have done the same."

Dan: Having apparently been the only other soldier to have not deserted for not being paid.

> "But would they have succeeded?"

Rebecca: We can only hope not

> I rested at my guest quarters.

Tsuneo: Obviously he is deeply affected by this attempt on his life.

> Major Satori had a plan in case something like this happened.

Dan: It involved a cyanide pill

> I disguised myself as a Global Military Police agent, while one of them disguised himself as me.

Rebecca: They disguised themselves as a nondescript man

> And Satori's concerns were proven right.

> I turned on the television and watched the news. There were news reports about the attack in
> Kingston. I was reported dead.

Rick: Some random GMP goon died to save this guy
Dan: What a stupid waste of life

> "The trial of a suspected assassin came to an abrupt end…"

> "..shocking the world…"

> "..the Mossad was clearly behind this…"

Rebecca: Fic, please stop driving this point. In fact, please just stop.

> "…our prayers go out to…"

> Major Satori came to visit me.

> "So now what?" I asked.

Rebecca: [Nova] Witness protection. Your name is now Charlemagne Osmocote and you're a grocery bagger from Staten Island.

> "We wait," she said. "Somebody didn't want the truth coming out. Damn it! I wish I had been wrong
> about this."

> "Well, we were prepared in case you were right."

> "And Sergeant Bennett died. Those..those murderers. This wasn't combat! He was a great aide."

> I remembered Sergeant Bennett,

Tsuneo: We don't

> an investigative aide assigned under Satori's command. He looked a little like me,

Rick: They had the same flared unguents and inverted spoons.

> so the major had him dress like me in transit from the base to the courthouse in Kingston.

Rebecca: Informed character is the best character

> And now he was dead, killed because someone wanted to kill me.

Rick: Sergeant Bennett was a father of two and the GMP's all-division yodelling champion.
Dan: Sergeant Bennett was a better character than Rutabaga Salad here.

> I was not a specific target during the war- I was simply in the way of an enemy objective.

Tsuneo: People still wanted to kill him, but for different reasons.

> But in Kingston, I was the objective.

Rick: Your objective is to kill this guy

> "We need to get those bastards," I said. "Make them pay."

> "But how?" asked Major Satori.

Dan: Start with like, a flaming bag of dog poo? I don't know, I'm spitballing here.

> "Whoever wanted to kill me thinks I'm dead," I said. "We could start from there."

> Figuring the next step was harder.

Tsuneo: He put all of his amazing brainpower to the task.
Dan: I think I pulled a neuron.

> "We do have a witness protection program," said Satori.

Dan: They hide you out in a giant robot trailer park outside Neo-Cleveland

> "I remember hearing a story about some
> lady who assigned to RDF Command, back when it was headquartered in the Macross. She was a
> witness to a corruption case involving organized crime or something. I am not sure of the details,
> but after that renegade Zentraedi attack, she was reported dead and we secretly transferred her to

> Glorie Colony."

Rebecca: I vaguely remember these very specific details

> "Interesting," I said.

Tsuneo: Demonstrably not true.

> "So you were sending me off-world?"

Rebecca: [Nova] Well this planet sure as heck don't want you no more.

> "If necessary.

Rick: Or we could announce that he's alive, the attack failed, and they'll be running the rest of the proceedings by remote due to risk of life and limb.

> Somebody wants to cover something up, something that would likely been revealed if
> the case went to trial."

Tsuneo: This is that very rare conspiracy where everyone involved is very, very stupid

> Ooooooooo

> At least the room was warm.

Rick: And he had chicken

> That was much more than I can say about the air outside. It was cold; I had worn a heavy, oversized
> coat when I first came in. Now that almost all of the world believed I was dead,

Rebecca: It didn't effect his social life much.

> the Global Military
> Police put me in a safehouse located at a joint forces test flight center in this place called Astrakhan,

Dan: Isn't that the prison they keep wizards in?

> which was somewhere in Russia.

Rick: The Neo-Siberian Republic of the EBSIS to be precise

> And Russian winters, from what I remembered reading about, were very cold.

Tsuneo: They are? I'd never once heard that before
Rebecca: It's news to us

> It helped the people there win a few wars even.

Dan: Again, he's only just heard this.

> I had been here the past few days.

> At least the heater had not broken down yet.

Rick: Should I get my wah-wah horn?
Tsuneo: Might be a good idea

> I wondered if I was be relocated here.

Rebecca: You're going to love your new life as an ice fisherman

> I lay on the bed. Memories of the war surfaced again. The noises, the smells, the sights.

Rick: How the Flower of Life tastes when you lick it

> I wondered how long these kind of memories would surface.

Tsuneo: He’s having flashbacks to his time in the war, but they’re so boring he slept through them.

> One day, Major Satori came to see me for an appointment.

Rebecca [Satori]: Well, I have to disappear some dissidents at three, but I could fit you in after that.

> I quickly closed the door behind here to keep the heat inside.

Dan: It sure is cold!
Rick: Yes.
Dan: Did I mention it’s cold?
Rick: Yes.
Dan: Because Russia is cold in winter!
Rick: [Sighs]

> "We offer you a post in the witness protection program," said Satori.

Rebecca: [Nova] We’re setting you up as a sanitation worker in Frusland.

> "So I get to live the rest of my life with a new identity," I said.

Rick: With your brothers, Charles and Charles.

> She opened a manila envelope and placed it on the wooden coffee table near the front door to the
> studio apartment. "These are the necessary documents."

Rick: His new character sheet with a change of OCC

> I looked at the documents. It was an American passport and a driver's license of a man named
> Adam V. Howerton,

Rebecca: And we have a name!

[They all cheer wildly]

> who was about twenty-two years old.

Dan: He was twenty-one or twenty-three

> "Adam Howerton was an American who served in the Army," said the Global Military Police
> investigator. "He was killed in combat two years ago. He even looks a little like you."

Rebecca: He’s just as bland and nondescript, but he has a skeezy moustache

> I searched through the documents; there was a DD-528,

Tsuneo: An old fashioned Japanese steam locomotive?

> which was a discharge paper. It was dated a few months ago,

Rebecca: Do they routinely discharge dead servicemen?
Rick: Only when they need it for tax fraud.

> when the UEF laid off hundreds of thousands of servicemen.

Dan: There was a restructuring and an entire division was made redundant

> "You will be relocated to somewhere in America. You should be able to adapt since your native
> language is English.

Rebecca: I'm sure that his Jamaican accent will fit in perfectly in Connecticut

> Alternatively, we can get you a land grant in Glorie Colony; they are looking for new colonists."

Dan: I've heard tell that a better life awaits you in the offworld colonies

> "And what if I refuse?" I asked.

> "If you refuse, you will be returned to Jamaica," replied the major.

Tsuneo: Right back into the firing line.

> "Our protection of you is
> dependent on your cooperation. We can not guarantee that those who tried to kill you back in
> Kingston will not try again."

Rebecca: Since then we've done absolutely nothing to stop them.

> "If you relocate me under this Adam Howerton identity, who else would know?"

> "Only me and the Office of Witness Relocation.

Rick: And Cheryl in accounts

> The GMP commander usually does not demand the details of relocated witnesses,

Dan: He's got way better things to do.

> let alone the High Command."

Rebecca: Good thing that once again, everyone is bending over backwards to accommodate him
Tsuneo: They're so nice like that

> I sat quietly for a few minutes. This was a big decision. I would be cutting off ties to Jamaica should I
> choose a new identity.

> "Okay, I want Jack to be in on this," I said. "Major Jack Emerson. I trust him."

Rebecca: [Nova] Oh, for the love of... Do you not understand how witness protection works?

> Oooooooo

> Roswell, New Mexico was not as cold as Astrakhan.

Dan: I think that's a given

> But it was still much colder than Kingston.

Tsuneo: What an utterly useless comparison

> The heater in my apartment was running, making a
> sound like a small breeze. The apartment was a studio, with a kitchenette in an alcove.

Rebecca: And a rug that really ties the room together

> I had boxes
> of crackers stacked on top of the General Electric refrigerator, and a two liter plastic bottle of Pepsi
> on the counter.

Dan: That's the most important part of it all

> There was not much news of interest on the TV and Internet.

Rebecca: Suspect in high-profile assassination dies; nobody cares.

> Aside from local news,
> there were one or two blurbs about rebuilding the armed forces in the event of another alien
> invasion.

Tsuneo: Despite that whole thing about the UN forces being bankrupt.
Rick: You mean that major plot point that was never adequately resolved and was promptly forgotten?
Tsuneo: That’s doesn't really narrow it down much

> The doorbell rang.

Dan: What that sound? Oh no!

> I walked across the varnished wooden floor to the door of my apartment, and
> peeked through the peephole. I recognize the face and opened the door.

Rick: After all, who could turn away Mayor McCheese?

> Major Jack Emerson walked inside. Instead of wearing an Army uniform, he was clad in a coat, a
> knit cap, and thick trousers.

Tsuneo: He’s wearing thick winter wear in New Mexico.
Rick: Jack's not very smart

> "Nice place you got here," he said.

> "Yeah," I replied. "The GMP sure knows how to relocate witnesses.

Rebecca: You know, a key part of maintaining the security of a witness relocation program is not to openly associate with people from your old life that could be used a way to track you down
Tsuneo: He is actively making this worse

> How are things going?"

Tsuneo: [Jack] Well I told everyone I was coming to see you, and now there’s these guys following me.

> "As well as could be expected. It would be a lot easier if those crooks didn't steal most of the world's
> money, but we have to play the hand we have."

Rick: So who's paying Jack?
Dan: He busks on a street corner between combat operations

> I remember reading that the UEF High Command had been relocated to the Roswell Fleet Yards.
> Jack was assigned there.

Rebecca: Yes, let’s move him closer to his one friend in the universe.

> "How do you like life in Roswell?"

> "It's cold

Rebecca: As hot sandy deserts often are

> and there isn't much to do here," I said. "My only company is TV and the Internet."

Tsuneo: There, he has no life. He actually said it.

> "Roswell isn't as exciting as Casablanca, Monument City, or even Tangier," said Jack. "The only
> interesting thing is my work, really."

Rick: Jack finds paperwork to be thrilling

> "It just occurred to me," I said. "Colonel Kravshera moved to Arizona. That's not far away."

Rebecca: Sure. While you're at it, why not post selfies all over your social media and tweet about your new identity? You're making it that obvious.

> "It is a long drive, probably a day's worth."

Dan: Effort is hard.

> "Well, you have a choice here, and it's a choice that can affect the rest of your life."

Tsuneo: The choice to go back to Jamaica will affect his life. Mostly by making it very short.

> "I've been making choices like that for three years, Jack."

Tsuneo: No you haven't

> "You can stay in Roswell, and live as Adam Howerton," he said. "Or you can help us expose what
> really happened."

Rebecca: And just remember, people died to get you to this point.

> "I don't know, Jack. I mean, this is how I got into this mess in the first place. And yet, my family and
> friends think I'm dead."

Dan: They're all strangely okay with this

> "I understand. We can do this without you,

Tsuneo: They're basically saying he's redundant to the story.

> but it would be easier if you were involved. But we won't wait forever for an answer from you."

> Ooooooo

> It was a long drive in the Ford Focus.

Rick: Not a Toyota Avalon? I don't even know who you are any more, fic.

> I had driven across Jamaica years ago, and this was even
> more than twice as long, even though I was driving much faster than I usually did in Jamaica.

Dan: It has suddenly occurred to Ruud Dogrooter that the continental US is bigger than Jamaica. I know it seems obvious, but you have to remember who we're dealing with here.

> Aside from a few cities like Albuquerque,

Rick: They could have gotten his secret identity a part-time job at the Sizzler.

> most of the scenery was dry land made of reddish stone, with
> mountains and mesas. It was a desert, yet different from the Sahara in Africa.

Rick: For starters, it wasn't over-run with Triffids

> Most of the drive was on this highway called the 40.

> I had exited and headed north on this two lane road. The land was a little wetter, as it was ranch
> land where sheep and cattle are raised. I recalled reading that most of Jamaica's beef is imported
> from America, since America had lots of land that is useful for grazing and little else.

Rick: The beef import industry!
Dan: Dire Straights!

> I looked at the number on the mailbox.

Rick: Wait, hold on. This is number 32. Lupon's at number 32a. Other side of the continent.

> It matched what Colonel Lupon Kravshera had told me.
> Patches of snow were islands in a sea of green grass.

Rebecca: In the rocky red desert
Tsuneo: Clearly

> In the far distance was a ranch house. I pressed a numeric sequence on a numeric keypad

Dan: Cunning move. I did not see that coming
Rick: Well played, fic.

> and told the people there that I was in.

> "Come on in," said Colonel Kravshera.

> I drove the car inside the ranch, along this damp dirt road, with snow-covered pasture on both sides.
> It took about a minute to reach the ranch house,

Tsuneo: And we get to sit through every second of it.

> which was a large, single-level structure with
> stucco walls. I saw the colonel walk out the front door and step out into the verandah.

Dan: Rifle in hand.
Rebecca: He's flying the Zentradi flag higher than the US flag, isn't he?

> Instead of an Army uniform, he was dressed in blue jeans and a heavy jacket. A broad-brimmed
> Stetson hat covered his head. Aside from that he looked pretty much the same with his lavender
> skin.

Tsuneo: He had apparently expected Lupon to change his skin colour

> "Howdy," he said. "Welcome to the ranch."

> "I am honored, Colonel," I said.

> "I'm only a colonel when I drill with the National Guard.

Rebecca: Somehow, that makes perfect sense.

> Come on in."

> I walked inside the house and the rest of the Kravshera family was inside. They all sat around a
> wooden dining table with this checkered tablecloth on top. I recognized Leslie Kravshera, clad in a
> sweater and jeans, with her black hair tied in braids. Their son and daughter sat on the table, both
> wearing sweaters.

Tsuneo: Did their kids get names?
Rick: Do we care?

> An older man wearing a sweater was with them, with streaks of gray in his black
> hair; I remembered that his name was Johnny, and that he was the colonel's father-in-law, whom I
> had first met in the colonel's quarters at Gibraltar Base.

Dan: Yay racist father-in-law!
Rick: He's my favourite character!

> "How are you doing?" asked Mrs. Kravshera.

> "Great, ma'am," I said. "I'm now living in Roswell."

> "Yeah, Lupon mentioned that. I also read about what happened in Jamaica."

Tsuneo: At this point they might as well be shouting out about his new identity to passing strangers
Rebecca: Meanwhile Nova sighs to herself and signs the death warrant.

> "Yeah, it's like I'm caught in a middle of a storm."

> Corn bread was served, along with this meat stew with sautéed carrots and peppers.

> "What meat is this?" I asked.

> "Venison," replied Johnny. "Lupon hunted deer at the Navajo Hunting Preserve."

Dan: You got a hunting licence?
Rick: [Lupon] Licence?

> "I've hunted all my life," said Kravshera. "It was just that I used to hunt Invid.

Dan: Couldn’t make an Invid stew after though.

> It's different, being out there in the wilderness, with a heavy coat and a rifle and a canteen."

Tsuneo: Yes, wearing a coat is different to piloting a Battle Pod.

> "And with the deer not shooting back," I said.

Rick: Lupon's rather disappointed by that last part

> We all had a good chuckle over that.

Rebecca: [Lupon] You watch your mouth, those deer are killers.

> Still, underneath that chuckle were the memories of the horrors of war. Memories I still have.

Tsuneo: Haha, it's funny that we all have PTSD.

> About half an hour later, the venison stew, corn bread, a pitcher of lemonade and three bottles of

> Tecate were finished. I had stepped outside on the front porch,

Dan: Staggered, more likely.

> my coat keeping me warm.

Rick: Sure is cold here in... Arizona?

> Johnny stepped outside.

> "Figured out what to do?" he asked.

Dan: I was figuring I'd fall asleep on the couch.

> "There are so many things," I said. "It's like I can't see the whole picture."

> "From what I heard, you could live your life as this Adam Howerton. Nobody's looking for you, and
> only a few people know whom you really are.

Rebecca: A number of people that's growing with each passing minute

> And yet, to live as Adam Howerton, you have to
> abandon your old life. All those people you knew since you were a boy, you would have to leave
> them."

Tsuneo: Then again, it's not like you had much of a life to begin with

> "And yet I would have to fight to reclaim my identity."

> "For what are you fighting?"

Dan: That's what we've been wondering for the last twenty-six chapters

> "I…I don't know. During the war, I was fighting to defend the Earth, but this next battle is just a
> squabble over who gets to have the protoculture."

Rick: I mean, that's the basic premise of the series...

> "When I joined the National Guard, it was simply to get a taxpayer-funded trip out of the reservation.

Tsuneo: I have a feeling we should brace ourselves for an incoming rant.

> And then I found myself in a foreign land, carrying an M-16. Initially I thought I was fighting for my
> country, like what the recruiter told me. Then I was fighting just to stay alive.

Rick: And then he was fighting to unlock bonus skins and other rewards.

> "It was different with Lupon. He emerged from the clone tank only to fight.

Dan: Lupon had fantastic job security

> Fighting had been his
> purpose, in itself. Then he came to Earth, found its culture, and had a family. That is what he fought
> for in the war, and that is what he would fight for again."

Rebecca: That and his right to continue to use alien slurs

> I thought back. My old life in Jamaica, my friends.

Dan: My beloved can of spray-on cheese.

> For what will I fight?

Rick: To get XP and loot.

> ------

> Chapter 27: Ides of March
> "So we meet," said the man.

Dan: Hi, I'm Dan. Nice to meet you.

> I sat on a chair facing a steel table.

Rebecca: Despite his best efforts, the steel table will not be his new best friend.

> The man was dressed in this blue tunic, and had purplish-blue
> hair. Standing in the room, in the corner, was Supreme Commander Tom Washington. The man in
> the room was an envoy of the Robotech Masters.

Rick: The clone representative to the United Nations

> The plan was to privately inform the Robotech Masters that I was alive and under the protection of
> the United Earth Forces.

Tsuneo: They are terrible at this witness protection thing
Rebecca: That random GMP guy who died to save his life? Complete waste.

> Washington had invited the Masters to send an envoy to negotiate my delivery into their custody.

Rick: [Nova] Might as well let them in on it too, he’s already told everyone else about the witness protection deal.

> We all met in this interrogation room in the Spacy Police Headquarters in
> the Roswell Fleet Yards. The only light came from an overhead incandescent lamp.

> "We will now take custody of the man who murdered two members of our Ruling Triumvirate," said
> the envoy.

Dan: You know what's the best way to protect a key witness?
Rick: Hand him over to the people trying to kill him?
Dan: Damn right.

> "Not so fast," replied the Supreme Commander. "We did not say that we will turn him over to you.

Rick: We just invited you to poke fun at him and laugh a little.

> We simply informed your lady that we have him under our protection, and we are considering
> turning him over to your custody. I will decide whether to make a deal to turn him over. What do you
> have to offer?"

Rebecca: We have some pocket change and a pack of bubblegum.
Tsuneo: Okay, I'll take that

> "We have been cooperative with your Plenipotentiary Council so far. We still have the protoculture
> matrix, and we still defend it. Turn him over, and we will continue to supply you with the
> protoculture."

Rebecca: We were going to cooperate with you and give you everything you want, but now we're going to withdraw our cooperation until you give us this one useless guy

Tsuneo: Washington is deliberately making this worse for himself

> "You still need us. You can not defeat the Invid by yourselves. They are coming to reclaim the
> protoculture, and that ship will be their first target."

Dan: Do I get a say in this?
Rebecca and Tsuneo: NO!

> "Which is why this issue needs to be resolved the soonest.

Rick: Sadly, we still have another two chapters to go.

> We can not work together if we harbor murderers, especially murderers of heads of state.

Dan: Technically it was only 2/3rds of a head of state.

> Would you cooperate with us, or anyone else,
> who harbored the murderer of the Chairman of your Plenipotentiary Council?"

Rick: [Washington] I dunno, he still owes me fifty bucks...

> "No, we would not."

> "Then why keep him under your protection? Why conceal the fact that he is still alive?"

Tsuneo: I'm beginning to wonder that too

> "We have reliable intel," said Washington, "that rogue elements orchestrated the murders of the two
> ladies

Rick: They were killed by Rogue Troopers. Clearly the Traitor General was behind it all.

> from your Ruling Triumvirate, and that they also orchestrated the attempted murder of this man.

Dan: This man has a name, you know?
Tsuneo: [Envoy] Oh, do you?
Dan: Uh, no. Actually, I don't.

> We initially agreed with the Jamaican government to keep him in custody as they were trying
> him for those murders because of those concerns."

Tsuneo: In case you missed the last few chapters, here they are again.

> "Rogue elements?"

Rick: I'm sorry, I meant rogue elephants. We think rogue elephants trampled and gored your leaders to death

> asked the envoy. "You could be one of these rogue elements, even the mastermind."

Dan: Well when you put it like that, it sounds really dumb

> "But why keep him under our protection. Why not kill him to eliminate a witness?"

Dan: Do I need to be here for this?
Rick: [Washington] Wait, who are you again?

> "Maybe you owe him a favor. Rogue elements do not necessarily break their promises or betray
> their allies."

Rebecca: Because if you can't trust rogue elements then who can you trust?

> "Then help us. Help us find whoever was behind the attack in Kingston. We all want justice here."

> "Justice is when we try him," said the Robotech Masters' envoy. "He will receive a fair trial, be
> permitted an advocate, and call witnesses.

Rick: [Envoy] And *then* fed to the clone recycling vats.

> And the trial shall be open for all you Micronians to see.

Tsuneo: But he will be tried under Robotech Master law, so the jury will be stacked with hostile clones

> Remember that this galaxy is a big place, and there are thousands of worlds where the Robotech
> Masters can start over. I speak with the voice of my lady.

Dan: Is that the lady in the red dress?
Rick: If she ever changes her outfit, their whole society will collapse.

> Either turn him over right now, or we shall leave with the protoculture matrix

Rick: [Envoy] Giving the Invid no reason to come after us whatsoever.

> and you to the mercy of our old enemies, the Invid."

Tsuneo: This has been two idiots negotiating

> "Let me tell you something," I said. "Your lady was the mastermind behind the whole thing. She had
> her sisters killed just to take all the protoculture for herself."

Rebecca: He is actively making this worse

> "How dare you attack our lady!" snapped the envoy.

> "I will go with you just to tell it to her face!"

Dan: Washington groans and reaches for his Pepto Bismol.

> "Listen," said Supreme Commander Washington, "I'm sure we can all work…"

> And then multicolored lights filled the room.

Rebecca: Who set the interrogation room to disco?

> I could hear footsteps of policemen outside running about,

Tsuneo: He could tell they were policemen specifically. He’s an expert in footstep identification

> wondering what is going on.

> "What is this?" asked Washington. "A hyperspace fold? But we're not on a ship."

Dan: So where were they?
Rick: I just assume they were meeting in a crab shack by the beach

> Then the lights disappeared, and suddenly I heard a loud, air raid siren. A few seconds later, I heard
> the familiar sounds of gunfire and explosions.

Tsuneo: And once again, everything exciting is going on without him.

> "What is this?" asked the supreme commander. "You're attacking us?"

> "They've come," said the envoy.

Dan: [Envoy] Well it was nice knowing your species, good luck with the Invid and all, I hear Praxis is nice this time of year. Toodles!

> Several policemen entered, brandishing their M-9 Beretta semiautomatic pistols.

Rebecca: I love these amazing descriptions of fantastic, futuristic weapons.

> "General?" asked one of them.

> "You two, our guests to safety," replied the Supreme Commander.

Rick: [Washington] But make sure they pay their covers first.
Dan: [Policeman] What about the tips?
Rick: [Washington] Dammit man, there's no time!

> "Lieutenant, I need an escort to the nearest command post."

> "Yes, sir," replied the police lieutenant.

> The envoy, two policemen, and I exited the building.

Tsuneo: Wherever that is

> The scene that greeted me was the chaos of a
> battlefield, a sight I had soon all too often. The attackers were these giant mechanical crabs-

Rick: So clearly they're in an accurate recreation of historical Japan
Dan: Quick, hit its weak spot for massive damage

> I could not tell if they were drones or piloted vehicles.

Rick: Better go up to one and ask.

> They were in combat with the base's Space Marine detachment's destroids and veritech
> hovertanks.

Rick: Say, do you think this whole thing could have been an elaborate ruse to keep D. D. Hornswoggle out of the way while they prepared for the Invid invasion?
Rebecca: It's not the worst theory of the crime we've had so far.

> I also noticed some armored infantry, clearly the
> enemy, engaged in combat with the Space Marine infantry.

Dan: Who effortlessly made their Armour Saves

> The remains of combat drones littered the landscape.

> Some Robotech masters soldiers ran up to us.

> "Take him to our ship," said the envoy.

> "Yes, sir," replied the soldier.

> That meant me! They were taking me prisoner.

Rebecca: I'm sure he'd much rather stay here in the war zone.

> We sneaked through the base-turned-battlefield,

Tsuneo: It doesn't exactly seem like he's resisting here

> with the occasional explosion kicking up dirt and
> debris. It was almost like walking through a movie. I could hear screams as some of the Space
> Marines were hit. The smoke was thin and somehow smelled spicy.

Rebecca: It smelled of death and just a faint hint of rosemary

> Two Robotech Masters red
> bioroids covered for us. We somehow made it to the transport shuttle. I looked out the open door,
> and saw the bird's eye view of the attack. There were no clear battle lines.

Rick: It was a very messy alien invasion

> It was like the enemy
> was scattered throughout the base, exchanging fire with the defenders. Another crab-like war
> machine flew towards us, and was promptly destroyed in a hail of fire.

Dan: I'm getting a "last chopper out of Saigon" feel here.

> One of the soldiers strapped me to my seat. They clearly intended to keep my safe.

> Safe for my execution, I thought.

Tsuneo: But he's going to see where they're going with this first.

> A few minutes later, I saw the Robotech Masters capital ship. I had noticed that it sort of resembled
> the old SDF-1 Macross.

Rick: In as far as it looked nothing like it

> The transport ship soon landed in one of the landing bays.

Rebecca: So, are the Invid attacking here, too?
Rick: Sorry?
Rebecca: You know, location of the Protoculture Matrix that they've come to Earth to claim?
Rick: Don't follow?
Rebecca: Instead of hitting a random airbase in New Mexico?
Rick: Oh, that's because the Invid are a part of the coverup on the assassination case. The woman in Red did a deal with Thade to use the base attack as an excuse to take Halifax Potato Skin into their custody.
Rebecca: Not where I thought that was going

> I was hauled through the corridors, escorted by armed guards. I suddenly noticed multicolored lights
> permeating the room; we were going through a hyperspace fold.

Rebecca: Either that or they were trying out their club lighting

> It stopped just as I was led into a cell block and placed in a small cell.

> Over a year ago, I was a prisoner on this ship, and I was a prisoner again.

Rick: He might as well have save himself the bother.

> I wondered what was
> happening back on Earth. Did those alien invaders overrun the whole planet? Did they conquer
> Jamaica?

Dan: Is Jamaica a part of the broad set of ‘whole planet'?

> Were any of the people I knew still alive?

Tsuneo: And would anyone care either way?

> I had a lot of think.

Rick [Deep]: THINK

> Ooooooooo

> Some time later, the guards hauled me out of the cell and marched me through some corridors. The
> ship could be anywhere in the galaxy,

Rick: And yet they somehow ended up with the Greelons.

> I thought.

Tsuneo: I refute that assertion.

> After a few rides in elevators and rail cars,

Tsuneo: Its like all your Mass Effect load screens at once.

> I was
> brought to a conference room whose primary furniture was this long varnished wooden table.

Rebecca: Alien conference rooms apparently look exactly like ours

> Sitting in a chair at the end of the table was the ruler of the Robotech Masters,

Dan: I wonder who appointed her as the new Robotech Master?
Rick: Not the old ones. When you’re ageless immortal clone space wizards, you don’t really need a line of succession.

>the lady with bluish green hair. She was adorned in this red dress.

Rick: Remember, her dress is her only distinctive feature.

> "You wish to execute me in person?" I asked.

> "It would be such a waste," she answered.

Tsuneo: So are the last few chapters of the fic. Your point?

> "We should out our differences aside now that the Invid landed on Earth."

Rebecca: You know, common foe, not get torn apart by flying space crabs, that sort of thing.

> "Our differences? You sent people to kill me back in Kingston.

Dan: Details!

> Why? Were you afraid of the truth coming out?"

> A hologram of Earth appeared above the conference table.

Dan: Why is so much of it blue?

Rebecca: Are you sure we need him?

> "The Invid have established a foothold
> on strategic areas as well as the major Flower of Life farming areas,"

Rick: They're aiming for a stranglehold on global markets and forcing a monopoly

> she said. "The people of your planet have withdrawn to easily-defendable areas.

Tsuneo: Mostly sports bars for the Superbowl.

> I will tell you that this ship is beyond Earth's solar system,

Rick: Sure, that only narrows it down to the rest of the universe.

> and we are protected by some of our cruisers and two motherships.

Dan: I thought this was the last mothership.
Tsuneo: Don't quibble, it will last longer.

> The protoculture matrix is safe."

> "Why did you do it? Why did you have your sisters killed?"

> "Oh, please. You think I am some big bad evil overlord that would reveal her plans to her enemies
> just before she kills them?

Dan: Anything to add there, Ozymandius?

> Do you take me for a fool? I did not get to where I was by being a fool."

Rebecca: Fic, don't try to be self-aware. Better still, just don't.

> "It must have been pretty elaborate, though. I mean, making sure that every one of us you captured
> over a year ago was programmed to do your will, and that we stayed that way even after you
> released us. I also think it is awfully convenient that I was invited to the negotiations over the
> distribution of the protoculture."

Tsuneo: You have to admit that when he puts it like that, the whole idea seems to be just a little silly.
Rebecca: Its almost like the whole plan is overly complicated and makes no sense at all.

> "You keep coming at me with these baseless accusations!

Tsuneo: We've passed the dull trial part of the fic. We're now at the dull escape part.

> The Invid have landed on Earth. If we are to win, we must chase the Regent's forces off the planet!"

Rebecca: You know, she does have a point there

> I heard a ringing sound, and the lady picked up a handset. I assumed it was some sort of telephone.

Rebecca: "That telephone looks like a telephone" is about the level of awareness I expect from Daisy Dewdrop Fluffington.

> "Look like someone has come to greet you," she said. "She will be brought here."

> And she was. She was this dark-haired woman dressed in a flight suit.

> "Marie Crystal," she said.

Rebecca [Marie]: Yeah, this is my pointless cameo.

> "Major, UNAF, Tactical Armored Space Corps. 35-156612."

> "Drop it, Major," she said. "You are no prisoner of war- the Robotech Masters are at peace with the
> United Earth Government."

Rick: [Marie] Oh, so you'll let me go, then?
Rebecca: Uh, well, actually...

> "You took a national of a member state of the United Nations to your ship."

Dan: Oh? Who was that?
Rebecca: [Marie] You, you ponderous dingaling.

> "We rescued him from the Invid. And he is a suspect in the murder of my two sisters."

> "You must have loved your sisters, right?" I asked the lady in red.

Tsuneo: Only when they didn't leave their hair in the brush. I'm like, hello, mine's blue-green, I can tell its yours!

> "We three were one, and you stopped that. But, given the circumstances, we can make an
> arrangement to put that aside."

Rebecca [Marie]: Hey, am I even in this? Like do you need me for any of this?

> "And yet they did not share your vision, did they?" I asked. "You had this vision, a vision of
> recreating the empire of the Robotech Masters, with Earth as its throneworld. A civilization run by
> protoculture, bringing peace, prosperity, and order throughout this Milky Way Galaxy."

Tsuneo: I mean, sure, if you say so. Not that any of this has been indicated so far.

> "Yes, that is what I wanted, and that is what I fought for."

> "Zor did not have this vision.

Dan: How would you know? Have you even spoken with him?

> Neither did the old Ruling Triumvirate, who had started this war.

Rebecca: They just wanted to exterminate your species. Whole different bag.

> And neither did your sisters."

Tsuneo: He said with no basis whatsoever.

> "Yes, they did not have that vision. Others had that vision. Some of the leaders of the nations of
> your world, including Jamaica's prime minister.

Tsuneo: Prime Minster Bob Obvious Fall Guy

> And even the Invid Regent's advisors have had
> second thought about the course he is taking his people."

Rebecca: That's just Tesla. He's his own guy.

> "The Invid?"

> "There is dissent among the ranks of their advisors. They sought retribution against us and the

> Zentraedi, but after we were defeated over your world, some of them have wondered if a different
> course should be set.

Tsuneo: Maybe not complete genocide. You know, save some for zoos.

> There could be peace- between the United Nations, the Robotech Masters,
> and the Invid. A new era of peace, if we all cooperate."

Rick: And if you can't trust in the grandiose dreams of an alien clone, then who can you?

> "And yet your sisters were in the way. They were in the way, so they had to go. They were in the
> way! In the way of your grand vision for the galaxy!

Tsuneo: And it’s certainly not that your plan was ridiculously flawed and would have spelled doom for you all.

> I mean, your vision would have made life better for trillions of people for the next few centuries!"

Rebecca: Peace and prosperity for the next indeterminate time period

> "Yes, yes, it would."

> "Trillions of people over the next thirty generations or so.

Dan: I’m just spitballing.

> Health, wealth, and peace. A new order
> based on protoculture and robotechnology. A new order where no one has to go hungry, or
> homeless. Trillions of people."

> "Yes."

> "So what were two people? What were they? Even if they were your sisters, how could their lives
> have been more important than those trillions who would reap the benefits of this new order?

Dan: It sounds like he's talking himself into it.

> After all, two deaths does not compare to paradise in the grand scheme of things, do they?"

> "How dare you," she said, glaring at me.

Rebecca: I mean, this is kind of coming out of nowhere given that he's spent the last twenty-six chapters being a lifeless lump

> "But I understand. We all have to make sacrifices for the greater good. I saw many people sacrifice
> all for the greater good." Her eyes started to water. "I've attended so many memorial services.

Dan: Like for... LaBelle and... uh... that other guy

> I like to think that they died for a greater good. So many lives lost, so many people left behind."

Dan: They died so we wouldn’t have to submit to the Robotech Masters. Oh, wait.

> She started sobbing. "I still miss them," she cried. "I wish they didn't have to die. But it was for the
> greater good. I had to kill them."

Tsuneo: And nothing bad has ever come from that sort of mindset
Rebecca: Gods no

> "Tell everything."

Rick: Well, obviously publicly selling a plan that promised peace and prosperity to the whole galaxy would never work...

> "I had to make arrangements to make it look like you killed them. When it failed, I had the guards kill
> the others."

> "You had to make it look like someone else did it, so you wouldn't take the fall."

Tsuneo: In retrospect, this was a very stupid plan

> "Yes. I had to do it. I had to make sacrifices for the greatest good."

> "We know the truth," I said. I could not believe it worked. She just spilled the beans, just like that.

Rick: And to think, all it took to undo her master plan was one stupid guy talking for a few minutes
Dan: Well done stupid guy

> "So your plan was to get me to admit killing my sisters," she said, her eyes ceasing to shed tears.
> "You…you have not won anything. What I said will never leave this room."

Tsuneo: So why did she bring him here anyway?
Rick: You know, I can't even come up with a funny answer for that.

> Uh, oh, I thought. I really had not thought this through.

Rebecca: To be fair, does he ever?

> But then I had been playing by ear ever since the Invid invasion interrupted the original plan.

Tsuneo: What was his original plan?
Dan: To leave early for the airport to avoid the worst of the traffic
Tsuneo: Smart move

> "There must be no witnesses," said the lady in red.

Rick: And that's why she hired Jeff Garyn.

> "Kill them."

> "No witnesses, eh?" I asked, only barely noticing the sound of clicks as the weapons were readied.
> "You're all witnesses now. She betrayed and murdered her sisters! What makes you think she won't
> betray you? After all, you're witnesses. You might stand in the way of the greater good."

Dan: Dude, we're brainwashed clone soldiers. Do you think we even care?

> "She will never betray me," said one of the guards.

Rick: Spoken like a true witless minion

> The other guards pointed their weapons at him and the lady in red.

> "What are you doing?" asked the lady. "This is treason!"

> "Our loyalty is to the Robotech Masters, not to you," said one of the guards, who was apparently the
> senior among them. "You betrayed your triumvirate."

> "I will defend my lady!" yelled the guard who was apparently loyal to her.

> "If you wish to spare her life, you will surrender."

Rebecca: Meanwhile, Marie is sitting on a bench with a sandwich from the vending machine, scrolling cat videos on her phone.

> "You…you can't do this! I was supposed to lead the whole galaxy to a new Golden Age! A Golden
> Epoch lasting a million years! You can't do this to me!"

Tsuneo: This is basically villain speech 101

> "We just did," said Major Crystal.

Rebecca [Marie]: By the way, I'm still here

> "You should have learned to handle your emotions."

> "So what now?" I asked.

> "We will contact the ship's command triumvirate," said the guard.

Rebecca: Um, I am the commander of the ship
Dan: Awkward

> And so he did.

Tsuneo: That's right, the whole situation is neatly wrapped up with an "And so he did." I'd like to say I'm surprised, but I'm not sure I'm capable of feelings anymore.

> ooooooooo

> A while later, some Space Marines boarded,

Dan: And immediately wiped the floor with the other player

> dressed in olive-green arming doublets and bearing
> weapons. Major Crystal and I met with them. Another Air Force pilot, a Lieutenant Dennis Brown,

Rick: Dennis Brown appearing in a fic is the most surprising thing so far. Not in this fic, in any fic. Ever.

> had accompanied Crystal and hid somewhere on the ship, broadcasting its location.

> "Colonel Kathleen Taney, UNSM," said the commander of the Marines, a lady with red hair who
> appeared to be in her early forties.

Tsuneo: I mean, you have two perfectly good canon characters right there...

> "We are in charge of the ship," said these three violet-haired men dressed in identical clothing.

Rick: Is it too late to be introducing new characters?
Rebecca: I dispute the term 'character.'

> "We have learned of the betrayal. We will need a new leader to rule over the Robotech Masters."

Dan: I mean, good thing we stopped her from bringing peace to the galaxy, am I right?

> "Here she is," said Colonel Taney.

Dan: It's a new car!

> This lady with bluish green hair stepped from behind the Space Marine escort. She looked like the
> lady in red!

Rick: Wow, it's like she's a clone or something!
Tsuneo: Are you even paying attention?
Rick: Absolutely not

> "I am Octavia," she said. "I was with the old ruling triumvirate."

Rebecca: You weren't, but who cares?

> "We shall recognize your authority as ruler of the Robotech Masters," said the commander of the
> ship. "Provided that you in turn serve the Robotech Masters."

Tsuneo: What are your qualifications for the job?
Rebecca [Octavia]: I'm not the one who died in the last episode
Tsuneo: Good enough for me

> "You will come with us," the Space Marine colonel said to me.

> And so I did.

Rebecca: Leave them to sort out their complicated matters of succession.

> Minutes later, I was sitting in a Space Marine transport shuttle, with Colonel Taney and the other
> Space Marines. I looked out the window and saw this huge, massive red ship, at least a mile long. It
> was the SDF-3 Pioneer,

Rick: Francisco Echardt's arch-enemy

> the flagship of the United Nations's Pioneer Mission, a mission to negotiate with the Robotech
> Masters.

Dan: It went swimmingly, as you can tell.

> Obviously, the Masters were not willing to negotiate peacefully.

Tsuneo: Hoopy Froodo is vaguely aware of this point.

> The
> shuttle landed in one of the landing bays, and the door opened. I stepped through this movable
> tunnel connecting the shuttle to a pressurized corridor.

Rick: Airlock action!

> "Welcome aboard, Colonel," a Spacy crewman said to Colonel Taney.

> "Where are we going?" I asked.

Tsuneo: And why does this miscellaneous marine get a name while the fic's supposed villain doesn't?
Dan: She's an overpowered hero unit with her own miniature, obviously.

> "Supreme Commander Washington wishes to speak directly to you," said the colonel. I was
> escorted through some corridors to this railcar. I sat on a seat in the open rail car and it moved
> along the tracks.

Rebecca: As rail cars often do

> Soon, we reached this railcar stop and my Space Marine escort got off the rail car,

Dan: Is it rail car or railcar? Make up your damn mind
Rick: This is like reading a Tek War book only without the nonsense worldbuilding or obvious racism

> walked through some more corridors, rode some lifts, and we reached this conference room.

Tsuneo: Thrill as the most boring man in the universe commutes to a meeting!

> Inside the conference room, Supreme Commander Tom Washington sat at the wooden table.

Rebecca: Which is completely different from the alien's wooden conference table

> Ceiling mounted lights provided lighting.

Rebecca: Again, as they often do

> Major Jack Emerson was with him. Jack stood at attention.

> "I have our guest here, sir," said Colonel Taney.

> "You are dismissed for now," said Washington. "You will give my office a copy of your report."

> "Aye aye, sir."

> I had a seat. A few minutes later, Major Marie Crystal entered and reported.

> "I can't believe this worked," said the Supreme Commander. "This was far from the original plan."

Dan: Wait, this was your plan?
Tsuneo: The sort of plan that only works if everyone involved is very dumb
Dan: So perfect for this fic then
Tsuneo: Sadly, yes

> "Yes, sir," said Crystal. "The Invid invasion kind of tripped up our plan."

Rebecca: The Invid invasion is so inconvenient.

> "Yes, and her admission was broadcast throughout the galaxy," said Jack. "She had a tendency to
> record all meetings."

Tsuneo: Even those with her brainwashed co-conspirators, apparently.

> "Betrayal of one's triumvirate is one of the worst sins among them," said Washington. "Now we must
> deal with the Invid."

Rebecca: Upside, we got her to confess. Downside, we threw away our chance at any peaceful cooperation against our mutual enemy
Tsuneo: It's a moral victory

> Life was like that. People have all sorts of different plans, and they all trip over each other, trying to
> get what they want.

Dan: I avoid that by never having any plans ever.

> But there was always One who always came out ahead whenever dozens of
> plans trip up against each other.

> "Sir," I asked, "what is the situation down on Earth?"

> "Some of Earth's nations have surrendered,

Rick: The Invid have conquered Trucial Abysmia, Santa Prisca, Boudouria and Equatorial Kumbolaland

> others still resist. We have UEF units trapped on the
> surface. One of my concerns is the civilians who would be caught in the crossfire."

Tsuneo: Civilians might be caught in the crossfire of this global alien invasion

> "There is something the former ruler of the Masters said to me," I said.

Dan: Something about her secret pasta sauce recipe

> "She said she had contacts
> with some of the Invid advisors, that she was plotting with them. Is there anything you can tell me
> about them?"

Rick: Well they're kinda like slugs and they've got these little feeler things on their faces...

> "I can say this," said Washington. "We've no contact with the Invid except skirmishes, ever since the
> Tokugawa first fought them fifteen years ago. We stumbled across them when we reached Tirol.
> From what we can tell, they were the original masters of protoculture. When Zor invented the first
> protoculture matrix and the Robotech Masters were founded, they sent the Zentraedi to carpet-
> bomb the Invid home world with some sort of herbicide that killed the Flower of Life, which was the
> raw material for protoculture. Their ruler, the Regent, waged a war against the Robotech Masters
> and the Zentraedi, but the sheer numbers of the Zentraedi forced the Invid to hide. The near total
> destruction of the Zentraedi after the First Robotech War changed the game. They went on the
> offensive, attacking civilizations using protoculture. That is all I can say."

Tsuneo: Here's a huge chunky block of exposition.
Dan: That's all I can say.

> Later, I was resting in the guest quarters on board the ship. The quarters were very simple, with only
> a bed and a desk and a small lamp on the desk.

Rick: But not an actual desk lamp, mind you

> The nearest bathroom was down the hall.

Rebecca: I am sure that this will be important

> "How are you holding up?" asked Jack.

Dan: I'm not holding anything up.
Rick: [Jack] That's... okay, good.

> "Fine," I said. "I'm worried about what's happened to my family."

> "Our intel indicates that there is no Invid presence in Jamaica," he replied. "They concentrated their
> forces on regions where the flower grows, as well as strategic straits and mountain passes."

Tsuneo: So... everywhere that's not Jamaica, basically

> My family was safe.

> For now.

Rick: But how has this scandal affected the Jamaican Prime Minister's chances of re-election? That's what's really important here.

> -----

> Chapter 28: Evacuation

Tsuneo: Wow, this is it. The actual last chapter.
Rick: There may yet be life after Dire Straights.

[Pause]

Rick: Was there life before Dire Straights?
Tsuneo: I... don't know...

> "We must set the next stage for the reclamation of Earth from the Invid," said Supreme Commander
> Tom Washington, clad in MARPAT camouflage.

Rick: The Earth is being overrun by an unstoppable alien force, but what's really important is that he's still following uniform regulations.

> "We must evacuate as many people as we can."

Tsuneo: Please follow fire marshal directions and file in an orderly queue towards the exits
Rebecca: Where is the emergency gathering point for Earth anyway?

> I was inside this large chamber in the SDF-3 Pioneer.

Rick: It's the meat locker. They couldn't find a better assembly point.

> Thousands of soldiers, airmen, crewmen, and Space Marines attended.

Dan: Meanwhile the Tyrranids and Necrons were shoved to the back of the store

> All were wearing covers; this particular chamber was a cover area, where
> servicemen must wear their covers.

Dan: I was wearing a neat Paw Patrol bedspread, while Jack had an Egyptian cotton quilt cover.

> Washington was flanked by Admiral Breetai, commander of the
> Robotech Expeditionary Forces Command; I recognized him due to his tall height and his light blue
> skin and blue hair.

Tsuneo: You know, the little things you notice.

> Other general and flag officers stood on the podium with the Supreme
> Commander. I stood next to Major Jack Emerson.

Rebecca: Jack is trying to quietly shuffle away from him.

> "We do not have room in our extrasolar colonies to evacuate the entire planet's civilian population.
> We can only evacuate a small proportion of civilians.

Rebecca: I'd imagine that transport capacity is also a limiting factor
Tsuneo: Worst part is that they over-booked the evacuation flight

> We have made contact with authorities on the
> ground to organize the evacuation. Each evacuation team has a quota of evacuees, and under no
> circumstances will you evacuate more civilians than your allotted number.

Rick: Imagine reaching your quota just before the evacuees from St. Puppy's Hospital for Adorable Cancer Orphans gets there

> While we can not
> evacuate everyone, even those in places still under human control, we can evacuate enough people
> and assets so that we can maintain are capability to fight the Invid in space. You have your orders.

> Get in gear and get ready for battle."

Rebecca: [Washington] And never mind the Invid blockade, obviously those clam ships aren’t a worry at
all.

> "Yes, sir!" we all exclaimed.

> Minutes later, I walked along a corridor with Jack.

Rebecca: Jack still can’t get rid of him.

> The corridor was busy with military personnel walking about, getting ready to evacuate Earth.

> "Jack, I'm a civilian," I said.

Tsuneo: I don’t know why I was at the briefing.

> "Will I be settled in one of the colonies?"

> "Not unless you are an engineer, doctor, or a married man," said Jack. "Single civilian men are near
> last on the list, just above people over thirty years old."

> "Oh."

Dan: Basically you suck

> "The evacuation priorities are based on the colonization quotas we did in the past twenty years.
> Skilled people first, then married couples of childbearing age, then married couples with at least one
> child under ten, then females between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four, and then children under
> fourteen."

Dan: Street mimes are at the bottom of the priority list

> "I guess I'm out."

Tsuneo: That means they’re going to dump him back on Earth, doesn’t it?

> "As you. As Adam Howerton, you are serving as part of the evacuation mission and you can be
> assigned to an off-Earth base.

Rebecca: Just think, you can find a whole new planet to suck on.

> As for me, I volunteered to be part of the Roswell Evacuation Team. I
> didn't want to spend my time sitting behind a desk."

Tsuneo: I'm sure they appreciate your valuable skills, whatever they are.

> We reached the hangar deck. Through a window, I could see crewmen in space suits working,
> making sure everything was ready.

Dan: He has a sudden compulsion to take inventory and count supplies.

> "Major Emerson," said Lieutenant Shelby Porter, standing at attention. "I will be your pilot."

Rick: Oh. Who cares?

> "Everything okay, Lieutenant?"

Rebecca: No, but we're nearly done with the fic, so I'll take that

> "Yes, sir."

> "All soldiers to their transports," I heard a voice say.

> A few minutes later, Jack returned.

Dan: I just stood there, sucking in air.

> "Our people are ready to go," he said.

> And so we did.

Tsuneo: ‘Let’s end the fic,’ I said. And so we did.
Rebecca: Nope, nothing. Nice try, though.

> Jack and I strapped ourselves in a seat in an Air Force transport shuttle. Some other
> soldiers were with us. Jack picked up a handset.

> "Okay people, this is Major Emerson," he said. "We are all ready to go down to Earth. I will be the
> first one to step off the transport, and I will not step on the transport back to space unless every one
> of my men has done so."

Rick: Cut to Jack standing next to a portaloo, sighing to himself as the shuttle takes off in the background

> I felt the transport shuttle take off. I could not see outside, but I could imagine the fighter escort
> forming a protective screen against the Invid. I could imagine the hull heating up as it entered the
> Earth's atmosphere.

Tsuneo: I could imagine how much more exciting this would be without having to focus on Miffy Lumpermifferton.

> A few minutes later, I felt a thud as the shuttle landed.

Dan: They haven’t switched off the fasten seatbelts sign, but he’s already turned on his phone.

> "Welcome to Roswell Fleet Yards," said Shelby.

> "I stepped out of the shuttle after Jack did. The place looked far different than when I was first here.

Rebecca: It had undergone a public regeneration and beatification program. It even now had a nice walking track

> The buildings were damaged from the battle a few days ago. I noticed that some of the runways
> were closed. Quonset huts were on the ground,

Rick: He cursed the Invid, wanting to know why the Quonset huts were spared.

> providing temporary shelter for the crewmen and Space Marines still here.

Dan: Mostly previous edition miniatures that were in the discount bin

> "Lieutenant, go check on the evacuees," said Jack. "Use your hovertank."

> "Yes, sir," I replied. I had been given a battlefield commission and made Jack's second in command.

Rebecca: I can only assume that was for the lack of any other options.
Rick: Jack tried to field promote a piece of driftwood over him, but it didn’t take.

> From my briefing papers, the evacuees were to assemble at the front gate of Roswell Fleet Yards. I
> drove the VHT-1 Spartas hovertank along the streets of the base to the front gate. I saw a huge
> crowd of people assembled there, with the Spacy police and a Space Marine infantry company
> keeping order. The commander of the Roswell evacuation, a Space Marine major general in
> MARPAT camouflage,

Dan: Rendered in Citadel paints, of course

> supervised the whole scene. Thousands of people were at the gate. A few
> people were escorted inside. Most of them were young women, some as young as their mid teens.
> Others were young married couples, and other couples with young children.

Dan: Meanwhile the Vault-Tec salesman cries to himself

> Anyone looking over thirty who had no children was immediately turned away.

Rebecca: Its like they're enforcing anime demographics

> "Anyone who tries to cross without our permission will be shot!" shouted a Space Marine with a
> bullhorn.

Dan: Then asked politely to leave.

> They were not kidding. There was a sandbag fortification and a temporary blockhouse set up. They
> were ready to gun them all down should there be a mass rush at the gate.

Tsuneo: Historically, threatening to shoot rioters has always ended well

> "Major Emerson," I said into the Spartas's radio, "everything seems to be okay."

Rick: I'm helping!

> "Copy, Lieutenant," he replied.

Dan: Bingle Hampton Washingmachine Jjones is perfectly okay with them training guns on civilians.

> I looked closer. A couple with a teenage son and a little boy and girl were trying to pass through the
> gate.

> "We can't let your son through, sir, ma'am," said the Space Marine colonel sitting at the table. "He's
> too old."

Rebecca: He's still a child!
Rick [Deep]: Goo goo, ga ga

> "We can't leave without our son," said the boy's mother.

> "We do not have room even for everyone who would be eligible," said the colonel.

Tsuneo: Basically, we get to decide if we like you or not.

> "Can I go through?" asked a girl. She was dressed in a coat and wore a knit cap. She appeared to
> be about his age.

Rick: About his nonspecific age

> "You look young enough," said a Space Marine.

Dan: Not even bothering to check ID or the like

> "Then I'll marry him and he can go through," she said.

> "You don't have to do this," said the boy, who clearly knew her.

> "I know a male married to a female under thirty can enter."

> "How will you get married?" asked the colonel. "Any priests around here?"

Tsuneo: He seems remarkably okay with them flaunting the rules like this.
Rebecca: Actual married couples behind them are getting ready to riot.

> "I'm the county clerk," said this lady. "I can marry them. Just sign here."

Rick: I'm just going to assume they're both of the age of legal consent and not even check.

> They signed a paper, and she pronounced them husband and wife. She showed the paper to the
> colonel.

Dan: Somewhere in this queue there's a grifter promising to marry people for money and making a killing

> "You two may pass," said the colonel. "Enjoy the honeymoon."

> "Thank you," said the boy.

> The boy and girl boarded this bus.

> "Get back here," said Jack.

Rick: Realising how badly he'd just been hoodwinked

> "Yes, sir," I replied. I drove the hovertank, following the bus carrying the evacuees to the transport
> ships.

Tsuneo: He's not really contributing here, is he?
Rebecca: Say, about as much as he ever has?
Tsuneo: Good point. Let's move on.

> A few minutes later, the bus and I reached the takeoff area. People were boarding the
> shuttles and some of them were already taking off for space.

> "Everything all right?" asked Jack.

> "Yes, sir," I replied. "There are a lot of people wanting to leave Earth. I guess they're afraid of the
> Invid coming here.

Rebecca: [Jack] Really? Wow! Gee, I'm so glad I've got you here to tell me all this.

> They're already overrun the Midwest.

Rick [Minnesotan]: Oh it's them Invids, you know. They over ran the whole state and all. They're just the worst.
Dan [Minnesotan]: Oh yah.
Rick [Minnesotan]: Looks like it's going to be a cold one tomorrow.

> The U.S. military has its hands full with
> refugees. We already have evacuation centers set up at airports in Kentucky and Oklahoma."

> I noticed a civilian teenage boy standing near Jack. He had short green hair and wore eyeglasses.
> He wore a coat and blue jeans and sneakers.

> "Who is that?" I asked. "One of the evacuees?"

> "No," said Jack. "This is Steven Michael Sterling, Dana's little brother."

Rick: And infamous script artefact. Don’t make eye contact

> I introduced myself.

Dan: [Steven] That’s a stupid name.

> "I promised Dana that I would get Steve out of harm's way, to protect him," said Jack.

> "They won't let him on the transports," I said. "Unless he's married."

Rebecca: In case you missed that last bit here it is again

> "I'm not married, Lieutenant," said Steve.

> "They will only let unmarried males under fourteen years inside, and Steve is fifteen,"

Tsuneo: Any particular logic behind these arbitrary divisions?
Rebecca: Someone doesn’t like teenagers?
Tsuneo: I can get behind that.

> said Jack as another transport shuttle loaded with evacuees took off into the cloud-dotted sky.

Rick: And was eaten by five million Invid scouts.

> "He will come with us, after we fill our quota of evacuees."

Dan: Jack's plan was to declare him carry-on luggage

> "But wouldn't you get in trouble?" I asked. "Even get court-martialed?"

> "It's okay," replied the major. "I grew up with him, my dad took care of him and Dana when their
> parents set off on that Pioneer mission."

Tsuneo: And what's a little nepotism when the world's ending?

> Another busload of evacuees arrived; I wondered if they would be the last from here.

> "Take cover!" someone yelled.

> I took cover near my Spartas and heard explosions.

> "We have to protect the evacuees!" yelled Jack.

Dan: Why? What did they ever do for me?

> I switched the hovertank to battloid mode.

Dan: That’s the walky-shooty mode!
Rick: [Jack] We’re all going to die.

> I knew the Invid would come, and I would be fighting them.

> "All units," said a voice. "We protect the evacuees at all costs.

Rebecca [Jack]: Yeah, I know. I just said that.

> No one is to retreat until all evacuees are safe."

Dan: When you say no-one...

> "I copy," I said. For about a minute, shells rained down upon us.

Rick: Mortar scouts? Who let them in?

> A few vehicles were destroyed.
> Above, there was a battle in the air, as fighters took on the Invids' flying machines, which had that
> crab-like appearance.

> Then some other Invid war machines- skimming just above the ground- went in for the attack. I fired
> from a covered position, downing one of the alien machines.

Rick: Well done. Only a zillion more to go.

> "Good shot," said Jack. "But keep your guard up."

> "There's more of them," someone said.

> The next few minutes were like snapshots. Fire, find cover, fire again. The wreckage of war
> machines littered the landscape, with their smoke rising into the air. Occasionally, death would rain
> from above.

Rick: Tomorrow with be cloudy with a chance of death raining from above.

> After our combat dance with the Invid, I heard an order.

Tsuneo: I guess the battle's over, or something.
Rebecca: I vote for 'or something.'

> "All Army and Air Force units attached to SDF-3 are to retreat," said a voice. "I repeat, all Army and
> Air Force units attached to SDF-3 are to retreat.

Rick: Navy guys are on their own.

> Space Marine units are to cover their retreat."

Dan: Don't worry, you'll get a new overpowered Codex soon.

> "that's us," said Jack.

Dan: But I'm a civilian!
Rick: [Jack] You're right, you get to stay.
Dan: Yay! [Pause] Wait...

> "The rest of you get into the shuttle. There's someone I have to pick up."

> "I'm with you," I said.

> "Well, if I'm going against orders, so can you."

> "Steve Sterling!" I yelled. "Where are you?"

> "Did he board one of the evacuation shuttles?" asked Jack. "He could have slipped in when the
> Invid attacked."

> "I'm not sure," I said.

> "I see him," replied Jack.

Tsuneo: Somewhere in this empty endless void

> "Steve, hop in."

Rebecca: Well that was an effortless resolution to an entirely tension-free situation

> We headed for the nearest transport shuttle. As it turned out, it was the same transport shuttle that
> brought us here.

Dan: Well isn't that convenient?

> I hoped Shelby kept the engine running.

> We got off our hovertanks. Steven climbed in first, and then I did. I pulled Jack inside and we shut
> the door.

> "Shelby!" yelled Jack. "Get us off the planet now!"

Rebecca: [Shelby] Really? Because I thought I'd hang around here a bit longer.

> "Yes, sir," she replied. She pushed a lever and the shuttle rose into the air.

Dan: The 'go up' lever.

> I then felt the shuttle
> accelerate as I was strapped into my seat. Here we went. In a few minutes, we would be arriving in
> the Pioneer.

> Suddenyl, something rocked the ship.

> "What happened?" I asked.

> "We're hit!" yelled Shelby. "I can't gain altitude. We have to eject!"

> Transport shuttles had ejection pods. We all went to the back, making sure Steve went in first.

Rick: Steve is now the most important character in this fic

> I went in, followed by Shelby, followed by Jack.

> "Here it goes," said Jack, opening a panel and pressing a red button.

> I felt weightless as the escape pod went into free fall. I took a pice of lint from my pocket,

Dan: That piece of lint is now my favourite character

> tossed it,
> and noticed it traveled in a straight line until it hit the wall of the escape pod; it did not arc down.

Rebecca: He's very bored by this life and death struggle

> Then I felt weight. The pod's parachute deployed, slowing our descent. After a few minutes, I heard
> a splash. I figured we landed in an ocean, lake, river, or someone's swimming pool.

Tsuneo: Admittedly, the last part would be quite amusing.

> Shelby looked through this round window at the door. "Looks like water to the horizon," she said.

> "Judging from our flight path, we must be somewhere in the Caribbean Sea."

> "Is anyone coming for us?" asked Steve.

Rick: Steve took one look at Abernathy Pequod and just gave up all hope.

> "The pod sends out a distress signal," replied Shelby. "A rescue team should get here."

Rebecca: Wasn't the entire world under attack from an unstoppable alien invasion?
Dan: Eh, details

> A few hours later, there was still no rescue team. The only thing happening of note is that Jack had
> a cut on his cheek from the battle; I stitched it up.

> "Another Purple Heart for you, mon," I had said in my Jamaican accent.

Tsuneo: Which he has never had up until this point

> "What do we do now?" asked Steve. "I mean, what if these Invid, what if they defeated everyone?"

Rick: I mean, that's what happened in Robotech, so we can pretty much rule it out here.

> "Well, we dehydrate to death," said Jack.

Dan: Not helping there, Jack

> "Surely you can think of something better," I said.

Rebecca: [Jack] Russian Roulette?

> I peeked out the window. It was dark. The interior of the pod was dim, with only a few LED's lighting
> the pod.

Rick: Try as he might, he could not identify their brand.

> "We're still sending a distress signal," said Shelby. "the battery is supposed to last for maybe eight
> hours. If nobody gets here by the time the distress signal stops, nobody is coming for us at all."

Tsuneo: Against all odds, they were picked up by a Viking longboat seven hours later and saved.

> "I suppose we can't just paddle this thing," I said. "If we head due north, we should hit the coast of
> the Gulf."

> "Not before we dehydrate to death," said Jack.

Dan: Again, not helping.

> I figured this was a good way to end.

Tsuneo: It is not in the slightest

> I had fought honorably, even made a difference in the world.

Rebecca: No you hadn't!

> There was not much to do but sleep. I was so tired. I could let go of life itself.

Rick: Time for you to go snooze.
Dan: SNOOZE

> I was dreaming. There were images of war and peace. My family. My life in Jamaica. My battles with
> the Robotech Masters. My battle with the Invid.

Rick: That was only five minutes ago

> All the people I met, whose lives I touched.

Rebecca: Like, um, that guy

> People in wet suits, shining lights on me.

Dan: I have that dream too.
Rick: ...you okay there, man?

> I woke up and realized that I was awake.

> "Who are you?" I asked.

> "We're here to rescue you," said one of the men in wet suits.

Tsuneo: This one’s underweight, we’ll have to throw him back.

> Jack, Shelby, Steve, and I stepped into this motorized raft. I heard the engine roar as it sped.

Dan: Goodbye, sweet escape pod. You were not much, but you were our home.

> I could see the silhouette of a frigate. I was glad the Ocean Patrol came to our rescue.

> As we got close enough to the ship, I noticed that it was not a United Nations Ocean Patrol ship.

> The flag flying from the mast had a yellow X shape,

Dan: They were being rescued by the X-Men

> with green triangles at the top and bottom and
> black triangles on the left and right. It was the flag of Jamaica. The ship was of the Jamaica
> Defence Force Coast Guard.

Rick: Is this an appropriate juncture for the wah-wah horn?
Tsuneo: Sure, why not?

> Ropes were dropped from the main deck, and the raft was reeled in, like a fish on a hook. We all
> stepped down into the deck.

> "Show our guests to the guest quarters," said someone.

> "Aye aye, sir," replied a sailor.

> Ooooo

> The next morning, we woke up on the ship's guest quarters. I looked around, noting the metal
> bulkheads. The only light was from an incandescent lamp overhead.

> "Where are we?" asked Steve.

> "On a Jamaican ship," I said.

Rebecca: Well that doesn’t help in the slightest.

> A sailor arrived. "We have breakfast in the wardroom."

> We were escorted down the hall to a ward room. It was a small room with a refrigerator and some
> cups and a coffee pot.

Tsuneo: No chairs or tables, but who cares?

> There was cereal available.

Tsuneo: But no milk
Dan: Damn you!

> A black man in khakis stepped in; he was a commander in the Coast Guard.

> "Commander Thompson," he said. "Jamaica Defence Force Coast Guard, captain of the McGillvery.

Rick: Which is weird, because this is the S.S. McGuffin

> "Major Emerson, U.N. Army," replied Jack. "Is there anything you can say about the situation?"

Rebecca: [Thompson] We're boned.
Tsuneo: [Jack] Care to be more specific?
Rebecca: [Thompson] We're boned, sir.

> "We were on patrol and we got your distress signal," said the ship's captain.

Dan: [Thompson] I was going to move on, but the first mate thought you might have loot on you.

> "I take it you were survivors of the Invid offensive in America?"

> "Yes, sir."

Dan: It was very offensive.

[Pause]

Rick: [Thompson] Wait, was that meant to be a joke?
Dan: I don't know.

> "We've orders to steam back to Kingston with you three. There are no Invid in Jamaica. In fact, the
> government declared its neutrality, and was informed the Invid would respect our neutrality."

Rebecca: I'm sure that the race of parasitic alien space slugs will honour that deal

> "Really?" I asked.

> "That Flower of Life isn't growing in Jamaica. Listen, we have some games and a library to keep you
> entertained as we head back to port. Just don't cause any trouble.

Tsuneo [Jack]: So what else is going on in the world? Are we winning? Did the evacuation work out? How far have the Invid spread?
Rick [Thompson]: We have Monopoly and Trivial Pursuit. No further questions.

> The brig is not a fun place."

Dan: Can't be worse than the guest quarters!
Rebecca: He was immediately thrown in the brig.

> "We won't cause any trouble," said Jack.

> Oooooo

> Not much was done in the next two days;

Rick: Jack wouldn't let me play 'Kwyjibo' on a triple word score.

> I did get to know some of the sailors, some of who
> actually took part in naval battles against the Robotech Masters.

Tsuneo: The Robotech Masters, famous for their sea-going vessels.

> I finally saw the shore of Jamaica
> as I stood on the deck. I could make out the skyline of Kingston.

Dan: But how's the traffic to the airport? We must know these things.

> And then the ship reached the Coast Guard base in Kingston.

Rebecca: Which will happen when you are approaching Kingston.

> "What will you do now, Captain?" asked Jack.

> "We will resupply and resume our patrol," he said. "Give some of my men shore leave."

Tsuneo: He's largely indifferent to the alien invasion

> I stepped down the gangway and onto the pier. I looked at the buildings. The Jamaican flag flew on
> a flagpole.

Rick: As often happens in Jamaica

> I noticed men in suits approach me.

> "You come with us," they said. They meant it.

Rebecca: Oh no, he's being inexplicably important again, isn't he?

> And so I went with them.

Dan: Effortless surrender is the best option.

> Ooooooo

> I was driven to this building and escorted to this bare room with only a table, a chair, and an
> overhead lamp. I was made to wait for hours.

Rick: So what are Jack and the others doing?
Tsuneo: Not contributing to the narrative
Rick: I mean, that's a given...

> I was still a suspect in a murder. Somehow they learned that I was alive. I wondered what would
> happen to me. Will they resume the trial? Will I remain in custody as the trial continued?

Rebecca: Please no more courtroom procedures. I can't take any more.

> The door opened and this black man in a suit entered the room. I recognized him as my old boss,
> Mr. Winthorpe.

> "No kind words for me, mon?" he asked. "We worked so well together."

Tsuneo: Insofar as he was a perfect patsy.

> "You were plotting with that lady

Dan: That bizarrely nameless major villain.

> to kill her sisters," I said.

> "There was a plot, yes," he said.

Tsuneo: I sincerely doubt that

> "You were replaced with a decoy. The decoy killed those ladies.
> During the trial, they sent a team to capture you, and you were reported dead. But thanks to our
> intelligence service, we found the plotters, and a special forces team eliminated them and rescued
> you."

Tsuneo: That rare twist that makes a stupid plot even stupider. Well done.

> "What?"

> "Because you are innocent, the prime minister pardoned you. You no longer face charges for
> murder."

> "That..that does not make sense," I said.

Rebecca: The fic said it, not me.

> "It is the official story," said Winthorpe. "Of course, if you contradict it, we might find that you were
> involved in the plot after all."

> "But…"

Tsuneo: Yes, for once I agree with Ethel the Aardvark.

> "All of that is in the past. We have a new future to look forward to, my friend.

Rick: [Winthorpe] I for one welcome our new alien overlords. I'd like to remind them as a trusted public figure, I can be helpful in rounding up others to toil in their protoculture farms.

> We are at peace with the Invid.

Tsuneo: The phrase 'peace in our time' comes to mind

> They have no designs against Jamaica. Go, go meet your family, start your life. I am
> afraid, though, that your job has been eliminated.

Rick: They replaced him with an automated AI assistant. Then they hired a dozen people to help support it.

> We need not negotiate with the other nations about the protoculture."

Dan: [Winthrope] Since, um, we have none anymore.

> I looked and saw that smug smile on his face. And yet, what could I do? Who would believe me if I
> accused Winthorpe, let alone his superiors, of plotting the murders of the two sisters of the Ruling
> Triumvirate.

Tsuneo: Who would believe something that obviously stupid?
Rebecca: Well he did
Tsuneo: Fair point

> Oooooooo

> I later reunited with my parents and my brother Paul and sister-in-law Trina and my nephew Larry
> and my new baby niece.

Dan: She doesn't get a name

> It was such a happy occasion. To them, I had come back from the dead.

Rick: And this time he wasn't a flesh-eating zombie
Dan: This time

> I
> took in the familiar surroundings of my family home, noting the couches and chairs and the kitchen
> counter and the refrigerator and stove.

Rebecca: He's happy with their mundane blandness

> We all ate a meal of jerk chicken and other Jamaican favorites.

Tsuneo: But they don’t get mentioned because they’re not jerk cooking.

> But even without that, I was so glad to be home.

> Oooooooo

> A few weeks later, I was back in the Kingston seaport. A transport submarine was docked, tied to
the
> concrete pier by ropes. Beyond the pier was the wide expanse of the Caribbean Sea.

Dan: Oglethorpe Obnoticus has just discovered that piers lead to the water.

> Birds circled
> overhead. It was a warm day, and I wore a short-sleeve button-down shirt and shorts and sandals. A
> light breeze blew through my hair.

Rick: He has hair. That's actual description!

> Jack stood before me, dressed in Army Class "C" service uniforms. He had the silver oak leaves of
> a lieutenant colonel.

Rebecca: This. We're really going to end on this, aren't we?

> "So you really want to leave Jamaica?" I asked. "I mean, there is no war here, and you would miss
> my mom's jerk cooking."

Dan: Fight against alien subjugation or have jerk turkey. Hard call.

> "We were given orders to link up with surviving UEF units in the event we were stranded on Earth,"
> said Jack.

Rick: [Jack] Not sure why I waited this long, but oh well.

> "The Invid are gaining ground. We have to stop them and I have to be a part of it."

> "All the fight has left me. I have to let others do the fighting now."

Tsuneo: And so we end the story with our hero shirking his responsibility

> "As will I someday, but not today."

> "I…I hope you are alive when you're done fighting."

Rebecca: Not because Jack's his friend, but because he doesn't want to pay to travel for the funeral.

> "I wish you well," said Shelby, dressed in the Air Force Class "C", who was now an Air Force major.

Dan: Since there was nobody left alive, she promoted herself.

> "Are you fighting the Invid?" I asked Steve.

Rick: [Steve] Dude, I'm fifteen. What do you expect from me?

> "Not now," he said. "I will stick with Jack; he's like a big brother to me."

Dan: A big brother who's dragging an underage non-combatant into a war, so take that how you will

> "Here," I said, giving him a red, gold, and green rastacap.

> "Thank you."

Rick: [Steve] I can clean up oil stains with this.
Dan: No, wait, that's not...

> "I'm the senior officer here, so I should be the first inside the sub," said Jack. "Take care."

Rick [Jack]: Also I call shotgun!

> We shook hands, and Lieutenant Colonel Jack Emerson walked towards the gangway connecting
> the pier to the sub.

> "Take care, Shelby," I said to her, kissing her on the cheek.

Rebecca: And she slaps him right off the pier. The end.

> "I won't give up," she replied.

> Steve waved at me before going to the sub.

> I turned and saw Barbara.

Rick: Who's she again?
Rebecca: At this point I don't know, nor do I care.

> "It was a great party you and Hermes and the others threw for them," I said. "We may never see
> them again."

Dan: Wait, there was a party and we missed it?
Rebecca: Don't worry. I'm sure it consisted entirely of Hoopty-Doo McFloo nursing a Jamaican drink that's
Jamaican and resenting Barbara for being happy without him. [Pause] Whoever she is.

> "Not as great as your homecoming party. It was like you coming back from the dead. Still, they were
> great people. I hope to see them again."

Dan: Really?
Tsuneo: No.

> "Listen, Barbara, would you like to join me for a joint right now?" I asked.

> "Yes," she said. "Let's do it. We shouldn't take life for granted."

> And so we left the port together.

Tsuneo: After spending an eternity of doing nothing, our hero decided to simply not bother interacting with anyone ever again. Eventually he died in a horrible yet hilarious jerk turkey accident.
Rebecca: After moving on with her life and forgetting all about whats-his-name, Melissa married well, had
three beautiful kids and won a Nobel Prize for discovering a cure for Lurgi.
Dan: Having never actually achieved anything on his own, Jack spent the rest of his career playing off the
name and reputation of his far more famous and capable father. He ended up making direct to video action movies with Cynthia Rothrock.
Rick: Mike hadn't actually gone AWOL; he had just accidentally locked himself in the supply closet. He eventually emerged and built a black market stationary empire, taking advantage of the void created by
LaBelle's death.
Tsuneo: After many years of tension, Lupon Kravshera and his father-in-law eventually bonded over a shared love of casually dropping racial slurs. They would go on to ruin every thanksgiving dinner for years
to come.
Dan: After getting a questionable degree, Rebekah Atival now teaches self-defence courses online to would-be tough guys.
Rick: Shelby Porter was fired from her job after it was found that she was padding out her resume with stock footage from Iron Eagle. She now flies a cargo plane full of rubber dog poop out of Neo-Hong
Kong.
Rebecca: Acting Supreme Commander Washington was forced to testify over his role in the assassination and subsequent cover-up. He went on record as saying ‘a wizard did it' fourty-three times.
Rick: Steve Sterling was canonicaly declared to be a script error and erased from history.
Dan: And thus ends the ballad of Freddie Hopkins Pumpernickel Smith-Smythe-Smith, the least interesting amalgamation of protoplasm that ever was. Goodnight everyone!

On that final comment, the big screen turned off, reverting the world back to prose format. “And that…” Tsuneo began. “Actually, I have no idea what the hell that actually was.”

“Dire Straights?” Rick asked.

“I guess?” he shrugged. “Because I really have no idea what was going on with that last chunk.”

“It’s a classic,” Rebecca considered. “The sort of plot that really makes no sense at all and requires everyone to be a complete moron in order to work. And this was a really good example of the kind.”

“Definitely,” Tsuneo agreed. “On one side, you have everyone around Chump McLumpher being aware of the plot and basically letting it go ahead with it for no reason at all beyond ‘maybe we’ll see where he’s going with this’. And as a result, the plot goes ahead anyway resulting in numerous deaths between the assassination and everything that comes after that.”

“Plus when you consider that he went into witness protection only to then blow it straight away by blabbing to everyone around him anyway,” Rick commented. “At that point he’s basically advertising himself to anyone hunting after him.”

“But then it all comes undone when our protagonist goes ‘no you’ to the villain,” Dan replied. “As if she had apparently never once considered it.”

“The fact that she wasn’t named only made it even more needlessly confusing,” Rick added. “Nameless protagonist and nameless villain does not make for compelling stories, nor does it make for clear and concise narration by any means.”

“The fact that he was unnamed throughout the fic was a definite choice on the part of the author,” Tsuneo continued. “As in, it was a terrible one. As you said, it was needlessly confusing and lead to a lot of awkward writing around that deliberate omission. Giving him a name would have made the entire fic so much easier to read from day one.”

“And even after we get to the end of the plot, the stupid fic keeps going,” Rebecca considered. “Because we then get the incredibly slow and remarkably dry Invid invasion that seemed to be more of an afterthought than anything else.”

“It almost feels like the author had no idea how to end the fic and opted for ‘Invid happens, everybody dies’ or something,” Rick suggested.

“I’m reminded of Delta Invasion with its strange need to make up some sort of imaginary chapter count,” Rebecca offered. “Like Dire Straights felt the need to have a quota of chapters to fulfil but had no idea what to do with it.”

“And so we end up with a fic that is three-quarters filler and one quarter incredibly dumb plot,” Tsuneo concluded. “Which is really at terrible place for a fic to be in.”

“I can tell you’ve already put in a lot of thought into this story,” the Voice crashed into the conversation.

“After suffering through twenty-eight chapters we’ve had little else to think about,” Dan stated.

“Fantastic,” the Voice beamed. “Because I’d be fascinated to hear your thoughts on the fic as a whole.”

Tsuneo was the first to speak up. “I’m going to go out on a limb and say this fic doesn’t have a protagonist. At best, it has a point-of-view character who things happen around. He doesn’t actually do anything to move the plot forward himself, just respond to orders and follow other people. I know that’s reasonable for army procedure, but that doesn’t make for an interesting story and even less for an interesting character.

“The thing is that the story almost goes out of its way to make our lead uninteresting. It deliberately avoids giving him a name or description, even awkwardly steering clear of such when raised in the text. For all the time we’ve spent with him, we know remarkably little about him as a person. He’s from theme park Jamaica and likes jerk cooking, but that’s about it. He rarely expresses an opinion or displays a personality trait.

“Of course, when he does do that it’s immediately awful. He takes several opportunities to be bitter and resentful about women for no reason. Melissa leaves him when they’re a galaxy apart and haven’t spoken in weeks, and he refuses to accept her point of view. Worse yet is when his childhood friend tells him she’s getting married, he can’t accept that she can be happy without him despite the fact that they never had a relationship.

“So in short, we spent 28 chapters following a nameless, faceless imitation of a character whose only trait was resentment and had no likeable qualities whatsoever. And I honestly don’t understand why.”

“As much as an empty void as our alleged lead is, the rest of the cast are no better,” Rebecca continued. “As a whole it's less that they are flat and lifeless as they are completely empty shells that are defined entirely by their names and a handful of traits that are entirely informed and never demonstrated. They lack individual voices and characters, and everything we know about them instead comes from their out and telling the reader things that would be better handled by developing it organically as a part of the story.”

“We never see LaBelle's wife. We never see Jack demonstrate his supposed musical skills beyond being told that he has them. We never see Melissa and our alleged protagonist's relationship devleop, only to be assured that it's there. We never see Mike or Atival do anything that warrants their being a part of the cast. Lupon talks a lot about his being a Zentraedi but beyond dropping a few slurs and

some exposition, it doesn't actually make any difference. And for all we joked about him Lupon's racist father in law genuinely got more development and backstory than anyone else in the cast."

"Finally I have to bring up those times when canon Robotech characters appeared in the story," she added. "They usually served no purpose at all, and yet the fic felt a constant need to tie its story to them as if it was seeking some form of validation; Jack being Rolf Emerson's son being the best example, as it added nothing at all to his character. Marie's appearance is probably the worst of these as it could be removed with no impact at all. Instead, all these guest spots served to do was to remind us that there were more interesting characters that we could be reading about instead."

"What about LaBelle?" Rick asked. "There's a case where the connection to a canon character wasn't explicit, but was still there."

"True," Rebecca admitted. "The key difference is that the fic didn't try to force the connection."

"Fair."

"Which leads us to the plot," Dan began. "Hold on a second, no it doesn't. Because the plot doesn't actually happen until the final stretch. We're like, 22 chapters in before anything changes, and even then it takes a while to get to the assassination and all. There's only like, one or two chapters that are relevant before that, just setting up his brainwashing so it can totally fail to pay off.

"The rest? Nothing. Boring. Lifeless. Dull. Repetitive. Just going through procedure over and over. Meetings and parades and accounting and dinner dates and more meetings and more parades and more accounting and visting Lupon and a battle that's over too quickly so they can move the hovertanks and have another meeting. There's seemingly no purpose to any of it; it doesn't establish the story or the action in any way that can't be skipped and summarised.

"And then when the action happens, every effort i made to ensure it's as uninteresting as possible. Battles are witnessed more than they're participated in, described in brief matter-of-fact terms as if they're annoyances to be brushed aside to get back to the next change of uniform. They don't provide thrills and they rarely advance the plot, so it's a wonder as to why they're even inluded.

"There's no reason for this. There's no reason for any of this. The fic could easily be cut down to a third of its length without losing anything of value. Mostly because there was nothing of value for so much of the fic. I don't know why anyone wrote this; I don't understand why anyone would read it."

"So here's the thing about this fic," Rick spoke up. "It's not a Robotech fanfic. I mean, yes, it calls itself one, and it has a lot of trappings of it, but when you actually look at it, this doesn't actually feel like a Robotech fanfic. Everything is off about it; its tone, its language, its pacing and so on. It doesn't try to capture the eighties mecha action feel of the original series, the pulp space opera overtones of the novels or even the action-adventure or war story tone of the comics."

"What we instead go was an incredibly slow, incredibly dry and incredibly dull story that was focused on pointless minutiae and procedure over everything else. At the same time, it almost seemed to reject the themes and tones of the material it was adapting from. There was no action, no adventure, no mystery or the like. Instead it was just a bland, dry and dull recital of boring people doing boring things that could have been anything really. The Robotech stuff was more set dressing than it was core to the narrative."

"As Rebecca noted, this fic is a part of that genre of Tom Clancy-esque Republican miltech fantasies that attempts to inject 'realism' into whatever it touches and has the effect of instead turning into a bland soup of military procedure and tech fetishisim," He concluded. "And sadly, this fic is the end product of that mindset, one that would rather have bland functionality over actually interesting if not entirely realistic drama and spectacle. This is not Robotech fanfic. This is fanfic of the blandest and driest extremes of fandom."

"So there you have it, Voice," Tsuneo finished. "Everything about this fic was bad at every single level. It was dry, dull, longer than it needed to be, had a protagonist that was bland most of the time and

actively unlikeable the rest and a plot that, when it finally arrived, was so incredibly stupid that it made you wish it hadn't."

"I think that this is one of those fics where we really can't find anything good to say about it," Rick added. "Everything we got from it was inadvertent, something we liked in spite of the fic, not because of it."

"And most importantly, I think this is one of those fics that doesn't actually feel like the source material it was based on," Rebecca noted. "This wasn't Robotech; this was an incredibly dull entry-level Tom Clancy clone in a vaguely Robotech wrapper."

"Thank you all for that," the Voice finished. "As always your reviews and thoughts are greatly appreciated."

"And ignored as always," Tsuneo added.

"But we are done, right?" Dan asked. "Please tell me we are done."

"We are, yes," the Voice confirmed. "And I will see you all next time."

"I know that whatever it is, it will have one thing going for it," Rick nodded. "And that is that it's not Dire Straights."

"Not being Dire Straights is a huge benefit," Rebecca agreed. "Whatever fics we read from here on out will have the advantage that they are not Dire Straights."

"I admit I struggled with the review," Dan. "How the hell do you encapsulate something like Dire Straights?"

"I was asking myself the same thing," Rick admitted. "Which is why I got somebody to do it for me."

"And by that he means us," Natasha Isavia spoke up from the back of the room where she and her band had set up themselves on a makeshift stage.

"Not that we read the fic," Lynne Street James added. "Or even looked at it."

"But I think we got more out of it that way," Trabe Stillwater finished.

"You definitely did," Tsuneo admitted.

"Anyway, here we are with no real effort anyway and just doing whatever comes to mind," Natasha continued. "I'm Natasha Isavia, this is Lynne Street James-"

"I wouldn't wipe my ass with MARPAT," Lynne spoke up.

"-And this is Trabe Stillwater-"

"A jerk turkey killed my parents," Trabe added.

"And we are Lupon's Father In Law with 'Space Drugs for Nothing'"

With apologies to 'Money for Nothing' by Dire Straits

I want my, I want my VHT
I want my, I want my VHT
I want my, I want my VHT
I want my, I want my VHT

Hah, now look at them clones, that's the way you do it
You sit and polish up the VHT
That ain't fanfic, that's the way you write it
Turkey for nothing and your jerk for free
That ain't fanfic, that's the way you write it
Lemme tell ya, them clones ain't dumb
Maybe get a flower on your burial mound
Maybe get a flower on your clone

We got to load up these hovertanks
Luzenwaltz deliveries
We got to move this stapler draw
We got to move these plasma TVs

See the purple clone with the wife and kids?
Yeah buddy, that's his own skin
That purple clone's got his own house
That purple clone's got his own slurs
See upcoming parade
Make sure you're in your MARPAT
And not your Class As

We got to load up these hovertanks
Luzenwaltz deliveries
We got to move this stapler draw
We got to move these plasma TVs

Hover mover, huh

We got to load up these hovertanks
Luzenwaltz deliveries
We got to move this stapler draw
We got to move these plasma TVs
Look-ee here, look at it

I shoulda learned to jerk the turkey
I shoulda learned Lebanese fusion
Look at my ex-girlfriend, she's happy without me
Man, that makes me mad
And now they've stolen all the world's money
And I'm waiting on my money order
Oh, being a zombie slave, that's the way you do it
Get your space drugs for nothing, get your flowers for free

We got to load up these hovertanks
Luzenwaltz deliveries
We got to move this stapler draw
We got to move these plasma TVs

Listen here, now, that ain't workin', that's the way you do it
You sit and polish up the VHT
That ain't fanfic, that's the way you write it
Space drugs for nothing, get your flowers for free

Space drugs for nothing
Flowers for free
Get your space drugs for nothing
And your flowers for free
Oh, heh, space drugs for nothing
and your flowers for free

Get your space drugs for nothing
And the flowers for free
(Space Drugs for nothing) Ooh, space drugs for nothing
And the flowers for free
Get your space drugs for nothing
Get your flowers for free
Ow, get your space drugs for nothing (Yeah)
And the flowers for free
Get your space drugs for nothing (What's that?)
And the flowers for free (Look at that, look at that)
Get your space drugs for nothing (I want my, I want my)
(Bozos) And the flowers for free (I want my VHT)
Space drugs for nothing (I want my, I want my)
And the flowers for free (I want my VHT)
Get your space dugs for nothing (I want my, I want my)
And the flowers for free (I want my VHT)
Ah, get your space drugs for nothing (I want my, I want my)
And the flowers for free (I want my VHT)
Easy, easy, get your space drugs for nothing (I want my, I want my)
Easy, easy, and the flowers for free (I want my VHT)
Easy, easy, get your space drugs for nothing (I want my, I want my)
And the flowers for free (I want my VHT)
That ain't fanfic

Space drugs for nothing, flowers for free
Space drugs for nothing, flowers for free

Author's notes:

And we are done. Overall, Dire Straights may not have been the longest fic we've ever done, but it certainly felt like it. The simple fact that it was so earth-shatteringly dull made it feel longer than it actually was in many ways. On the other hand, it was actually remarkably fast and easy to get through, with the riffs easily flowing as we worked our way through it. However, there's also only so much of it that we can take, and I do feel that we reached our limit on the enjoyment value we could have gotten out of it.

Dire Straights is a part of a larger fanfic universe all written by the same author, being Its somewhere in the middle of the series. They all feature different nameless protagonists and all of them have the same incredibly dry and dull writing, shallow characters and lack of story. Will we do any of them? Probably not. We don't hate ourselves that much.

Next time, the crossover is the title

Robotech copyright Harmony Gold

Dire Straits written by Michael2

Rebecca Bartley and Rick R. Mortis created by Rick R. (natch)
Tsuneo Tateo and Dan created by Zogster

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Space robots? Email us at elmerstudios00 (at) gmail.com and register your Jeff.

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> I had a lot of think.