
Episode 241 – The rebuild that took nine years to finish

It was a nice apartment, well-lit and spacious, albeit sparsely furnished. A pair of nice, plush leather couches set the scene, arranged in a neat L-shape. 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, as did the bare walls of the rest of the room.

“See, you know what I think this place needs?” Rex began as he stepped into the apartment, looking over the bare walls.

“Personality?” Mark asked as he followed. “Flavour? Some indication that it’s been actually lived in?”

“Well those would help,” He admitted before he headed into the kitchen. “What I was thinking of was a fridge stocked with beer to make the fic go down easier.”

“I’ll pay that,” Jill admitted as she entered with Christina. “Because there’s very little else that’s going to make the fics better.”

“Regretting answering that ad?” Mark asked.

“Maybe.” She shrugged. “Upside is meet new people. Downside is reading the fic.”

“True, but it’s the meeting new people that’s interesting,” Mark countered. “New experiences, see what other people are doing, measure responses to the material... a part of me finds this rather interesting, but another part of me wishes that I wasn’t a part of it.”

“So if you’re so smart, how come you’re here?” Jill challenged.

“I answered an ad.” He smiled back. “I didn’t know what it was going to entail.”

“Guess that makes three of us,” Rex chimed in. “Of course, given that my last job hadn’t worked out so fantastically, I wasn’t gonna be choosey. It seemed like easy money and all.”

“Bad?” Mark asked.

“It’s a story.” He nodded.

“I admit that I didn’t actually get here the same way as the rest of you,” Christina spoke up. “Instead, my agent referred me to this ‘opportunity’ as they put it. I just assumed that it was some sort of PR stunt and went along with it.” She seemed more than a little sheepish. “I probably should have asked for more details, but to be honest I just don’t like dealing with the publicity machine.”

“Understandable.” Jill nodded. “I just long ago gave up caring what people think of me.”

“I can’t say that I’m not jealous,” Christina admitted. “Sometimes I’d like to have that luxury.”

"Good morning all," The Voice began, causing Rex to jump just a little. "It's good to see you all."

"And it's great to see you too, Skeletron," Jill shot back.

"Skeletron?" Christina asked. "I mean, what is that meant to be?" Jill's only reply was a small shrug.

"Anyway, before we begin I do have a favour to ask," The Voice continued. "I was hoping that I could learn a little bit more about you and your backgrounds."

"For the benefit of your recordings, of course." Mark nodded. "And not because you're building complicated profiles of us so that you can determine our weaknesses to specifically target new material at them for future reviews."

"Gods no. Why would you think that?" Jill dryly quipped.

"Can't imagine," Mark smirked back.

"Anyway, if you could?" The Voice asked, a hint of insistence sliding into its tone.

"Well, I guess I'll go first, what with my being the first guy here and all," Rex began. "So my name's Rex Bradntiger but you probably all know that already."

"Hi, Rex." Jill quipped.

"Anyways, I'm a former military mechanic who was assigned to a frontier world," He continued. "I had a great job servicing giant robots for the military which was pretty awesome and all. You get to play with all sorts of fantastic high-tech gear and see stuff that other mechanics can only dream of, and you get to figure out how it ticks. It's something I'm really big on; show me a machine and I want to know how it works and, if there's a problem, what I can do to fix it."

"Nice." Mark nodded. "You like a challenge then."

"That and they gave me a regular ham roll budget," He added. "Which is what's really important."

"And the horrible beanie?" Jill asked.

"Don't be hating on the beanie," He shot back, somewhat indignant. "Just 'cause you don't have one"

"So you said you were a former mechanic," Christina cut in, hoping to redirect the tension. "Can I ask what happened there?"

He shrugged. "So I'd managed to get a rep as the best grease monkey in the whole place, which got me some attention. I was reassigned to a special project which bought with it a whole lot of new responsibilities as well as a massive pay rise and more ham rolls." There was a hint of pride as he continued. "See thing is, I was in a R&D team working on a super-expensive, super-advanced, one-of-a-kind robot prototype."

"And somebody stole it," Mark noted. "It always happens."

"Stole it and got it blown up in a way that it was unrecoverable," Rex agreed. "I mean, we couldn't even get back components from the mess because of all the fail-safes that the military had us add to prevent it

from being stolen in the first place.” He sighed. “So in the end, me and the rest of the team were deemed ‘redundant’ and got the boot as a part of a general house-cleaning.”

“Sorry to hear,” Christina offered. “It can’t have been pleasant.”

“I’ll miss the ham rolls most of all,” He admitted. “They had some good ham.”

“I see what you mean about the last job,” Mark replied.

“So what about you then?” Rex asked him. “How’d you get to be a spook?”

“Would you believe I blundered into it?” Mark asked. He surveyed the others’ skeptical looks and shrugged. “No, seriously. I’ve always had the gift of gab, so I kind of talked my way through high school and bluffed my way through college. By the time I was out of there, I realized I could talk my way into more money than an honest living could ever deliver.”

“And he’s so modest about it too,” Jill sniped.

Mark shrugged again. “Anyways, I’m in the middle of getting to know a mark when suddenly, pow! The men in black suits swarm out of nowhere and it all gets complicated. See, it looks like my mark was meant to lead them to their target, and of course I go and get in the way and veer things way off course. They had me tagged as some kind of handler for this guy and drag me in.”

“So it really blundered into you,” Jill said.

“Either way. Of course, by the time they figure out I’m not an enemy of the state, they know who I really am and have put together a paper trail on my previous scams. Then their boss man gives me a couple of choices: go down hard or turn my amazing powers to the cause of good.”

“Which isn’t really a choice, now is it?” Rex asked.

“Pretty much what I said,” Mark replied. “So nowadays I’m just doing the exact same thing, except it’s in the name of King and Country.”

“So what about your team?” Christina asked.

“Real characters.” Mark waved away the question. “I’ll tell you next time.”

“That just leaves you,” Rex told Christina. “Although we pieced together a lot of it the first time.”

Christina nodded. “It’s not the first time I’ve been mistaken for my sister. She’s famous... Pretty much the whole family are. My parents are former arena mech champions, so it was a given that Anita and I would follow into their footsteps. We went to a private piloting academy and everything.”

Rex let out a low whistle. “You must be loaded.”

Christina flushed with embarrassment. “Anyway, by the time I graduate, I’m already signed to the biggest promotion there is. My older sister had broken all kinds of records and made them a fortune, so they’re looking to me to do the same. I’ve been set up in the singles competition, and been given a team to lead in the team tournaments as well. Added to that, they’ve got me as a PR star, running interviews, photo shoots, guest spots...” She trailed off with a sigh. “Honestly, it gets pretty exhausting.”

"And everyone expects you to live up to your sister's success," Jill said.

Christina nodded slowly. "It's... I'm pretty sure it's impossible, but I'm going to do my best for everyone."

"So what about your team?" Mark asked with a smirk.

Christina caught his look and smiled back. "I'll tell you next time."

"Well, I guess that leaves me," Jill spoke up. "As said, I am an ace fighter pilot. I don't want to sound like I'm bragging or being egotistical or the like, but I came out of my homeworld's last war as the top-scoring ace, or at least, top-scoring of those that survived. Beyond that, let's see..." She glanced off for a moment, as if considering what to say before continuing.

"I joined the air force as soon as I was able to; truth is, I lied about my age to get in but it wasn't like they were exactly checking either," She finally spoke up. "Graduated top of my class at flight school, put into a frontline squadron and into the meat grinder as soon as I was ready. My fifth kill, the one that made me an ace, was a high-profile enemy ace himself."

"Nice," Rex whistled.

"Impressive," Christina agreed. "It can't have been easy."

"It wasn't," Jill noted. "But it set a precedent; my combination of talent, skill, impressive string of victories and my devastating good looks quickly made me a hero and a media darling. And, for a while it was good. Of course, then the war ended, and I was not the most popular person with the ensuing post-war coalition government."

"Political realities set in," Mark noted. "I'm going to assume that things said or done during the war were now seen in a less favourable light."

"Got it in one." She nodded. "However, I clung onto my place by making it clear that I was still useful to them as a PR figurehead rather than being turned into a political martyr. Besides, I just love to fly, you know? And staying a fighter pilot seemed to be the best way to ensure that."

"Agreed there," Christina chimed in. "You don't want to give up something you actually enjoy."

"And thank you all for that," The Voice finally spoke up.

"Well enough with getting all deep and meaningful and crap," Jill snapped back to her more usual abrasive tone. "So are we getting more of the amazing adventures of Krokojam today?"

"There are other characters in the fic," Mark pointed out. "Of course, Krokojam is the best thing about it so it is fair." He took a seat on the couch, the others joining him. The big screen switched on, changing the world to script format.

> Rbotekmaster: I don't own either Robotech or Tekkaman Blade 2

> Tekkaman Paladin: A shame. You could make a movie out of this!

Mark: Yes, I can see this being a cinematic great.

Christina: Coming soon to the direct-to-download shelves.

Rex: Starring Freddie Prinz Jr, Hulk Hogan, and Eliza Dushku's breasts as Natasha. Written, directed and produced by Tommy Weisau.

> Rbotekmaster: Good idea,

Jill: Because all these live-action adaptations are going so well.

> but who would play Dana?

> Tekkaman Paladin: I'm thinking a hair dyed Nicole Deboer.

Rex: So what was I saying about b-movie actors?

> Rbotekmaster: Hell Yes! On with the story!!!

Jill: The voices are going away again.

> The Wandering Star Saga

> Part 4: "Revelations"

Rex: Revelations was the first bit of the Bible I read.

Christina: Any reason?

Rex: I skipped ahead. I had to find out how it ended.

> The Space Knight's war against the evil Radam has just taken a tragic turn.

Jill: This whole fic's tragic.

> During the mission to rescue Dana Sterling, Yumi Francois aka Tekkaman Hiver,

Rex: Aka 'tekagrLOL32'

> was ambushed from behind by the Radam Warlord Krojodan

Jill: How Krokojam there managed to sneak up behind anybody mystifies me.

Christina: He turned his theme music down.

> and was gravely wounded by his lancer when he pierced it through her back.

Rex: Sporked!

> He then flung the wounded girl off his lancer into Vesna's arms, who then fled on

> Chief Aki's orders to take the barely alive Yumi to the Blue Earth ship for

> emergency treatment.

Mark: Just to reiterate the point, Krokojam speared Yumi.

Jill: He did? I must have missed it the first sixteen times.

> Krojodan was ready to charge the remaining Tekkamen, but stopped when he saw Dana,

> dressed in her rose and gold primary armor, hanging onto Tekkaman Sommer's arm.

Christina: They were posing for a Frank Frazetta painting.

Rex: I heard his coffin was carried across a path of skulls by four Italian musclemen with a half-naked

woman draped on the lid and escorted by a tiger.
Christina: It's how he'd want to go.

> Enraged that his plans for her were ruined,

Rex: Krokojam gets enraged when it rains on his picnic.

> he decided to retreat and fight another day.

Mark: Just to reiterate the point, Krokojam is also an idiot.

Jill: Oh, I can live with that.

> The Tekkamen had no time to celebrate their victory however,

Rex: Not even a little bit of light revelry?

> and they raced back to the awaiting starship to be with their fallen comrade.

> Dana was invited to join them by Aki, and she accepted the Chief's offer,

Jill [Aki]: Hey, kid! You wanna lift?

Christina [Dana]: I dunno, my mum told me never to take lifts from strangers.

Jill [Aki]: Well, it's a long way back home from here in Low Earth Orbit.

> riding with her on the back of Pegasus.

Rex: With special effects that will make you long for Ray Harryhausen's awesome stop motion instead.

> * * * *

> They landed in the Blue Earth's cargo bay and were met by Natasha, Goliate and

> Anita.

Jill: Hello!

Rex: Hello!

Christina: Hello!

> Natasha had de-transformed and had time to change into a fresh uniform.

Rex: No need to hurry on our accounts.

> Aki jumped off Pegasus. David offered his armored hand to help Dana down, but

> she said no thanks and hopped off on her own. Pegasus then converted to robot

> mode and returned to its platform.

Jill: Robots aren't allowed in the front half of the ship. Racists.

> Natasha walked up to the Chief, sadness and concern apparent in her expression.

Mark: As well as a hint of discomfort, a shadow of a doubt and a lick of insane glee.

> "What's her condition?" Aki asked Natasha, afraid to know the answer.

Rex: Pretty bad. She's loose and has severe paint wear and joint damage. On the other hand she's

got all her accessories. If you had the card-back, she'd be worth a bit more, but as it is...
Mark: Damn toy collectors.

> Natasha couldn't look the Chief in the eye.

> "She lost her armor as soon as we got in. The medical staff are working on her
> now,"

Rex: Hang on, how many people are there on this ship?

Mark: Usually just the pilots and the Tekkamen.

Rex: So where did the medics come from?

Christina: Ever wondered what was in the first aid kit in your home?

Rex: Well there you go.

> she shook her head slowly, "Hiyato's with her now,

Christina: [Natasha] I mean, he's a mechanic, not a medic, but it's really all we've got.

Rex: [Hiyato] She's lost a couple of cylinders and that's just the start. I may have to rebuild the whole block.

Christina: [Natasha] ...she's doomed.

> but it doesn't look good. All that blood."

Christina: All those dye packets. It's tragic, really.

> She couldn't speak anymore after that. She covered her

> mouth with her hand, trying to stifle the sobs that wouldn't stop coming.

Jill [Natasha]: If she dies, can I have her Hyper-Voltekka?

> David folded Natasha into his arms, and she cried into his metal shoulder.

Christina: This is touching... except he's in armour... which makes it kinda silly.

> He rubbed her back slowly, trying to comfort her.

Jill: [Natasha] You could at least lose the armour.

Mark: [David] Here? In front of everyone? I'd be naked.

Christina: [Dana] No problem.

Jill: [Aki] Don't mind me.

> "Hey, Yumi's going to be okay.

Rex [Flint]: Doc called from HQ! Yumi's going to be A-okay!

> She's a tough girl, don't worry," he said, and

> then felt a metal-gloved hand lightly touch his shoulder. He turned to see

> Dana standing behind him.

Mark: [David] Aaah! The hair! –sorry, yes?

> "I'm sorry about your friend. She got injured because you were trying to save

> me." she began, but Natasha reached out and slapped her hand away.

Rex: I think she'd have better luck trying to slap a truck.

> "Sorry!? That's all you can say is sorry?! One my best friends is lying in
> a infirmary bed right now

Jill [Natasha]: *And* Yumi as well.

Christina: That was cruel.

Jill: You're right. She doesn't have any friends.

Christina: Like you can talk.

> because we had to rescue your sorry ass!"

Rex: Dana's arse is anything but sorry- [Christina hits him with a cushion]

Christina: That was surprisingly effective. I should remember that.

> she

> yelled, her eyes full of anger, and reached back to smack the blonde haired

> woman across the mouth, when David grabbed her arm.

> "Natasha, stop it! It wasn't her fault, things like that happen in war.

Mark: And the fact that Yumi was planning to retire to the country and buy a boat didn't help matters any.

> She couldn't help being abducted by that Radam bastard,

Rex: Although going to a 7-11 in the deep south in the middle of the night and driving back home along a spooky deserted road in a battered sedan didn't hurt her chances.

> and she didn't ask us to rescue her.

Christina: She was perfectly happy where she was. Krokojam was going to take her out for cake.

> We made that decision on our own,

Jill: Actually, those were orders from your boss.

> so lay off, okay?" he asked her firmly.

> A few tense moments passed,

[Rex makes a discrete farting noise]

> then Natasha lowered her arm and her features softened somewhat.

Christina: She'd switched to a new detergent, that old one just wasn't giving her results.

> "Your right. I'm sorry, both of you. I'm just worried, you know? I shouldn't

> have snapped on you like that," she said to the other woman. Then Blade walked up to them.

> "Enough. We need to get back to base immediately," he said,

Mark: [Blade] I mean, we've been holding position here so far because... Um...

> "Everyone revert back and report to the bridge."

Rex [Blade]: I will be remaining here to watch Dana transform. [Pause] In case there's anything wrong with her. Yes.

> The Aki and him walked up to the nearest
> shower alcoves embedded in the hanger walls, and the translucent doors slid
> open to let them enter.

Rex: Future showers!

Christina: Wait, showers in a spaceship?

Rex: Space showers!

> But before Aki went in, she turned to Natasha, who had fully composed herself.

> "Will you show our guest how to turn back to normal?

Mark: In Dana's case, "Normal" is a relative term.

> After you're done, have her come to the bridge," she asked.

Rex: [Blade] You stay here and think about what you've done.

> "Yes Chief," Natasha said, thinking it would be a good time to apologize to
> the girl she had almost bitch-slapped.

Jill: And no, 'that's for hurting my hand' doesn't count.

> Aki nodded, and then David, Blade and her walked into the showers and the
> doors slid shut behind them. There was a shimmer of light, and Dana could
> see an energy field surround their silhouettes, the same color and shape
> as their tekkacrystals, but she didn't know that yet.

Mark: The description in this story is...

Christina: Indescribable?

> Then she could see, through the smoky glass,

Jill [Dana]: Hey, I can see David's equipment.

Rex: Okay, you won the bet on crossover pairing. Happy?

> their armor disappear, and they started to get
> dressed, grabbing clothes from hidden compartments inside.

Christina: Good to see that the Space Knights so value their agents' privacy.

Rex: And the webcams are only there for security and not as a way to raise extra revenue at all.

> She then felt Natasha tap her on the shoulder.

Rex: Yeah, I'd tap that.

> "Your turn. You can use this one over here," she said, directing Dana over
> to one of the compartments farther down the line.

Mark: Then, much to her surprise, a man with a big hat and a long scarf stepped out of it.

> "Lead the way," Dana replied, following the red-haired woman.

Christina: [Jill] Say, for such a small ship, why do you have so many cubicles?

Rex: [Natasha] Because... um... Crew and stuff.

> They reached the shower, and Natasha let Dana in, and then shut the door.

Jill: And then threw in the bucket of crazed ferrets

> Dana looked around, but had no clue about what to do next.

Christina: Much like the fic itself.

> "Umm, this is going to sound completely stupid, but. how do I get this armor

> off me?!" she shouted.

Rex: Hold on, I'll get a crowbar... assuming that nobody's thrown it away in an act of disproportionate retribution, that is.

> Natasha laughed from outside,

Jill: Haha, it's funny because she doesn't know things others take for granted.

> making Dana feel even more humiliated, "Hey,

> stop being such a wise ass and help me out!"

Mark: She will... eventually.

> "Don't worry, it's not that hard. Just image the armor disappearing off of

> you. It's that simple,"

Rex: [Mimes wiping] Armour on, armour off. Armour on, armour-

Christina: Mouth off.

> she said, flipping a strand of red hair out of her face.

Jill: [Natasha] I toss my hair at you. Hah!

Christina: You'd be good at that.

Jill: It's surprisingly effective.

> "Okay, but if this doesn't work I WILL jump out of here and strangle you,"

> Dana replied, making it sound like a joke.

Mark: Ha-ha! Homicide!

Christina: And yet, strangely consistent with the rest of the fic.

> She dropped her arms to her sides and concentrated hard,

[Rex makes a discrete farting noise]

> and tried to image her armor vanishing from around her.

Mark: Now imagine your pain is a white ball of healing light.

> Then she felt it happen. She started to glow a light green,

Christina: Dana, have you been into the U-235 again?

> then a energy field shaped like her future tekkacrystal;

Rex: God damned space wiccans.

> two outstretched wings attached to a elongated diamond, flashed around her

> entire body. With a shimmer of energy, her armor disappeared. She stood

> there naked, except for a gold pendant that she was wearing around her neck.

Christina: Dana's claim that she technically wasn't naked didn't go down well with the jury.

> The gold part was shaped like wings with a inch long green jewel embedded

> in its center.

Mark: Once again, I feel I must ask how long the Radam have been making Tekkacrystals in convenient pendants.

> Dana looked around for something to wear but couldn't find anything.

Rex: So instead she spent the rest of the day swinging around the city wearing a brown paper bag over her head. She beat Doctor Doom while doing it, though.

> "Your name's Natasha right?" she asked,

Jill: [Natasha] Yes, but you may call me 'your majesty.'

> "Could you find me something to wear? It's getting kinda cold in here."

Rex: Yes, yes it is. Saaaaaay...

[Christina hits him with a cushion]

Christina: You know, I could use a couple of these for meetings with the sponsors...

> Natasha chuckled to herself. She was enjoying watching the new woman squirm.

Mark: You are a cruel, vicious and heartless person.

Jill: And surprisingly in character.

> "We're about the same size,

Christina: In as far as they have completely different heights and body shapes, that is.

> and this is the one I usually use," she said,

> indicating the shower, "There's a spare uniform in a compartment in the wall

> to the right of the control panel."

Christina [Dana]: All I can see in here is a box of one dozen starving, crazed weasels. Is it in there?

Jill [Natasha]: Um, yes. Yes it is.

> Dana heard the amusement in the other woman's voice. "I don't really see
> what's so funny," she said as she fiddled with the compartment,

Jill: [Natasha] Well, 'funny' is when I spread this footage around the base.

> "I'm the one
> freezing in here, and for your information I haven't had a decent bath in
> two days.

Jill [Natasha]: Hang on. Let... let me lend you Yumi's. It might... um, fit you better. Yeah.

> wait, here it is."

> She opened the compartment and grabbed the bundle of clothing inside. It
> consisted of

Rex: A fast food mascot's costume,

> a tight sleeveless jacket with a wide collar, short skirt, bracers and boots.

Mark: Along with a spare headset thingy so they won't have to redesign her hair.

> She unfolded the uniform and began to dress, but it
> took several minutes because she was unfamiliar with the outfit

Jill [Dana]: Clothes are hard and stuff.

> and it was
> slightly uncomfortable because she wasn't wearing a bra or panties, but
> eventually to her pleasure she got it on right.

Christina: Let me get this straight. Their standard women's uniform has a miniskirt and they *don't*
provide underwear for the change booths? Who made these decisions?

Rex: Well, Aki doesn't seem to wear any underwear. Maybe she thought she'd set a trend.

Jill: I don't see what the problem is here. I've gone commando in uniform

Christina: You're not helping.

> She didn't mind the skirt, but she noticed that the jacket, which fit her
> snugly, let more of her breasts show than her old Southern Cross uniform.

Mark: And remember, it's not sexist, it's futuristic!

> After slipping on the boots and putting on the bracers, she opened the door
> and saw Natasha waiting for her.

Mark: And she was almost finished 'War and Peace,' too.

> Dana didn't notice it, but Natasha's
> eyebrows lifted in surprise when she exited.

Jill: Natasha had never seen somebody ruin an outfit that quickly.

> "Jeez, she's got the body of a model! She puts Yumi to shame," Natasha
> thought, envious of the other woman's curves,

Christina: Hang on, Natasha's envious of Dana's figure? When she's taller, slimmer and, well, bigger?
[She waves her hands in front of her chest to emphasise the point]

Mark: I have two theories.

Christina: Oh? I'm intrigued.

Mark: The first is blatant author favoritism; they like Dana Sterling more than Natasha, and, as such, have to ensure that she's depicted as being better in every way, regardless of how petty it may seem.

Christina: Interesting. So what's the second?

Mark: That the author had recently seen some original Japanese Southern Cross and, as such, their long-held perceptions of Dana had undergone a marked change due to the typical early eighties fanservice.

Christina: Also plausible.

Rex: I have a theory too!

Christina: Which is?

Rex: Natasha was actually looking at Seras Victoria.

Christina: I like your theory.

> "But what's with that hairdo?

Mark: It's a fine hairdo... for a poodle.

> I've never seen a blonde puffball before. never mind.

Christina: Also, the Radam found her floating naked in space and she's got some sort of funky energy thing going on. But still, that hair.

> One thing's for sure;

Rex: Soylent Green is made from people.

> I have to keep David away from her at all costs. He has eyes for me but you
> can never tell what he's thinking."

Jill [David]: Mmm... Dead...

Christina: I should give you the cushion for that but... I like it too.

> She could see Dana walking up to her, still fiddling with her borrowed clothes.

Jill: [Natasha] Quit pulling, you'll stretch it.

Rex: It's pretty stretched already.

> "So how are they? Not too uncomfortable I hope?" Natasha asked.

> "They're fine, a bit tight in places, but I'll get used to it.

Christina [Dana]: The chest is way too tight, and the waist is far too loose.

Jill [Natasha]: Must... kill... you...

> This jacket

> shows more cleavage than I'd like, but I've worn stranger,"

Rex: Like the time she dressed up in a giant hot dog suit to kill a guy.

> Dana replied,

> remembering the dress she bought in Monument City during the earliest days
> of the war.

Mark: You know, in SDC: Southern Cross, Jeanne volunteers her entire squad for an insane, possibly suicidal assault on the bad guy mothership just so she can buy that dress.

Jill: Wow, even I think that's shallow and selfish.

> "Ha hahaha. You sound like an old friend of mine," Natasha began, but was

Mark: -carefully cut off before she could explain.

> interrupted when the ship jolted suddenly, causing both of the women to loose
> their balance and slip to the floor.

Rex: Am I the only one who is seeing all of this as one long porn set-up? And not really minding?

Mark: Didn't call that pairing, did you?

Jill: ...

> "What was that?!" Dana said as she and Natasha got to their feet, only to
> have the ship rock again.

Rex: Causing her to conveniently fall on Natasha, their lips to conveniently touch and all their clothes to conveniently fall off.

Mark: You know, when you put it that way, you're right.

> "We're entering Earth's atmosphere," Natasha declared, and grabbed Dana's
> arm, pulling towards the exit, "Come on, we have to get to the bridge!"

Christina: Because Natasha never, ever misses landing instructions. She finds them so gripping.

> * * * * *

> A couple of corridors and a turbolift ride later,

Rex: Um, how big is this ship, exactly? 'Cause I thought it was just a cockpit and a general passage room.

Mark: It is exactly the same length as any three corridors in the BBC backlots.

> they reached the bridge. The metal door swished open,

Christina: Automatic doors... of the future!

> and everyone inside turned their heads to look at them as they walked in.

Christina [Whispered]: You mean she fell for the 'no underpants in the change room' thing?

Jill [Whispered]: There's one born every minute.

> "We're here Chief," said Natasha, who went to join a young man on the lower
> section, just below the command console.

Rex: And to the left of the Slurpee machine.

> "Alright. Take your station," Aki said, then looked at the other woman,
> "Your name's Dana, right?"

Mark: Given that she's been the subject of every other sentence in the fic so far, you'd assume they wouldn't need to ask by now.

> Strap yourself in,

Rex: And strap it on.

Christina [Narrows eyes]: Don't make me hit you again.

> we're about to hit more turbulence in a minute."

Mark: Weren't they in space?

Rex: Space turbulence!

> Dana thanked her and walked over to the seat attached to the bulkhead

Rex: Slab Bulkhead!

> and

> strapped in, mumbling under her breath about being through worse things than

> a little turbulence.

Christina [Dana]: Mutter grumble blew up a Robototech Master mothership fought hordes of killer clones touched the exposed terminals and had a head trip and all that.

> She saw that Aki's chair and console were elevated above the rest of the

> bridge, and on the lower part Natasha was sitting next to the controls on

> the right

Mark: Hold on guys, the fic's going to talk seating arrangements again.

Jill: Awesome. Don't want to miss a second of this.

> and an extremely handsome man with spiky blonde hair manning the left.

Christina: What Roy Fokker was doing there was anyone's guess.

> The middle console and chair was empty,

Christina: Save for a colourful teddy bear.

> and Dana guessed that David and Natasha's wounded friend sat there.

Mark: Actually, it was saved for David's imaginary friend, Mr. Mason. They just try to humour him.

> Then David swiveled in his chair to look at her.

Rex: So good to see you, Ms Sterling. Now, it is time for you to die. [Mimes pressing a button]

> "Hey. You look great. I'm glad I was able to rescue you mademoiselle," he

> said, holding out his hand.

Jill: Okay, I know I called it, but I think the authour's going a bit out for their way to prove me right.

> Dana blushed and shook his hand, then quickly looked away, but out of the

> corner of her eye she could see and hear Natasha giving David a tongue
> lashing about Yumi being hurt and the only thing being on his mind was girls!

Rex [David]: Wait! I can think my way out of this situation using my four incredibly advanced brains!

Mark [David]: I'm cold.

Jill [David]: I'm tired.

Christina [David]: I'm hungry.

Mark [David]: Where are the babes?

> The rest of the trip passed in silence. The Blue Earth flew over the
> northern Pacific Ocean, past Japan,

Christina: They got stuck in a holding pattern with the God Phoenix and Gamera.

> heading south. They would be back at base in a few minutes.

Christina: No, you fool! That's Crescent Coral! Your base is the other way!

Mark: Two Gatchaman riffs in a row? How extraordinary!

> Dana was deep in thought, trying to decide what to do next.

Jill: That all depends on how close the nearest mall is.

> Here she was, stranded in an unknown dimension,

Mark: A dimension not of sight and not of sound.

Jill: But of crap.

> and she had gained armor she had the ability to transform

Mark: She had a swarm of creepy fetish fans following her around as a result.

> into but didn't know anything about.

Jill: If only there was a paramilitary group utilizing such abilities here around that could help her.

> It reminded her of the superheroes she used to read about in the comic books

> she had as a little girl.

Rex: Her secret Leifield habit was still a source of deep shame.

> Then there was the matter of Krojodan.

Rex [Kojodan]: Yeah! Where am I? Where's my big scene? Am I even in this fic anymore? HELLO?!

Jill: We love you, Krokojam.

Christina: He makes everything better.

> She reached into her borrowed

> jacket and took out her primary crystal and stared at it.

Christina [Dana]: Shiiiiiny...

> She knew, without

> any doubt, no matter what she had to go through, she had to hunt down

> and kill him.

Rex: She swore that she wouldn't rest until she found Krokojam and got her revenge! But first... she needed to buy a pretty new dress.

Mark: So shallow, so stereotypical and yet so perfectly in character too.

> She would make him pay for what he did.

Christina: She was going to litigate!

> How she was going to do it was an entirely different story, however.

Mark: She would egg his place of residence. She would leave bags of burning excrement on his doorstep. She would make joke telephone calls at unusual hours. She would be a young rascal, engaging in all manner of shenanigans.

> "You look stressed. Understandable," someone said from in front of her, breaking her reverie.

Rex: ..staring blankly into space...

> Dana looked up and saw a man dressed in
> black jeans, a Space Knight jacket with the sleeves rolled up, and
> he had slicked back black hair. He also wore sunglasses, and she
> could see a scar running down his left eye behind the brown lenses.

Jill: Oh look, it's... the man.

Christina [Dana]: Well my last boyfriend just blew himself up, so I'm not doing anything tonight.

> Dana shook her head, "Nah. Just thinking about what happened.

Jill: It was incredibly dumb.

Mark: Was that meant to be said as Dana? [Jill shrugs]

> I owe you people my life. I have a lot to get used to, but I'm fine, really!"

All: You're not.

Mark: They never are.

> she smiled at him, "I didn't catch your name. I'm Dana Sterling. Pleased to meet you."

> "The pleasure is mine. I had a name,

Rex [Cobra Commander]: I was once a man... a mannn...

> a long time ago, but people call me D-Boy now," he replied.

> "What does the D stand for?"

Mark [D-Boy]: Dodo.

[Pause]

Mark [D-Boy]: I never said it was a good name!

> "Dangerous"

> "Okay.were you one of the. what's that word again?"

Rex: Rhombus?

> "Tekkaman"

> "That's it. Were you one of the Tekkamen out there?"

Rex: [D-Boy] Naw, I'm just bumming a lift back from the outer colonies.

> "Yes. I was the one in the white armor. They call me Tekkaman Blade."

Mark [D-Boy]: Because I have a blade. And I'm a Tekkaman. Hence the name Tekkaman Blade.

> Suddenly Dana's expression became downcast.

Christina: Sudden onset angst!

> This man had seen his comrade

> seriously wounded, and she was to blame, but not entirely.

Rex: Blame Krokojam. We all do already.

> There was one other being that deserved the most blame.

> "Krojodan, that bastard. What he did was beyond cruel. I've seen some

> horrendous sights, but what he did to your friend tops my list.

Mark: So how about when the Radam turned all your family into Tekkamen and you had to kill them in order to save the planet?

Rex [D-Boy]: Well, besides that.

Christina: And when they bombarded the entire Earth from orbit just to lure you into an obvious trap?

Rex [D-Boy]: And that.

Jill: And when the network yanked your show midway through the run?

Rex [D-Boy]: Yeah...

> He seemed to enjoy that she was in pain,"

Mark [Krokojam]: Well what do you want? I'm Evil! Evil!

> she said, the hatred of the Radam apparent in her eyes.

Rex: Actually, you should probably see someone about that. You got serious Radam in your eyes.

> "Yes, and that's unusual even for a Radam. He seemed almost. human. almost.

Christina: That sounds almost like... foreshadowing... almost...

> Anyway, where are you from?

Jill: [Dana] Well, when two opposing aces love each other very much...

> Do you have any family we should contact?" he asked.

Jill: Only her embarrassing relatives who live in Vegas. She likes to pretend they don't exist.

> Dana averted her eyes at that.

Christina: [Dana] Well, Mum's got about a zillion clones out there, not sure if they count...

> It wasn't the time to let the cat out of the bag just yet.

Mark: Besides, *you* try explaining Aurora Sterling to anyone.

> "That's going to take a lot of explaining. I'd like to talk to your leader

> before I say anything, if that's alright."

Christina: The question is, if she did explain, would they believe it?

Jill: If they can accept the existence of Krokojam, I think they can accept anything.

> "That's acceptable, and just so you know Aki and I created the space knights

> together."

Mark: What about Freeman? Didn't he create the Space Knights?

Rex: Oh, he did, but they "Re-imagined" them.

Mark: Ah.

> "Oh, I get it. You're partners, or maybe more than partners, right?" Dana

> implied, a gleam in her eye.

Rex [D-Boy]: Actually, the Space Knights are registered in her name for tax reasons.

> D-Boy seemed amused,

Mark: [D-Boy] Really? Time and place, kid.

> "That's. another story for another time, and it seems

> we're home," he pointed at the main viewer.

Jill: Well that was a terrible cop-out. And I've seen terrible cop-outs.

> Dana looked out, and could see the Space Knight HQ just over the horizon.

> "Oh, wow." she mumbled. The base was situated on a man made lagoon in the

> middle of the ocean, and had an entire city built around it.

Rex [D-Boy]: You like it? We made it out of coconuts.

Christina: Gilligan's Island: The Next Generation!

> There were many buildings rising hundreds of feet in the air,

Christina [Dana]: High-rises, huh? We have those at home too.

> and the communications antennas rising even higher than that.

Rex: And the local stoners were even higher than that.

> The buildings were steel gray in
> color, and by the looks of it some of them had been repaired recently.

Mark: One of Hiyato's practical jokes had gotten way out of hand.

> She could also see civilians walking on pathways or visiting the local
> beaches,

Christina: But absolutely nowhere else, which really confused her.

> which surprised her.

Jill: Because the local beaches are crap. No surf, little swimming space and lots of medical waste.

> Civilians usually weren't allowed on military bases as far as she knew.

Rex: It's a basic military regulation and all...

Jill: Without Nova to keep her brain switched on, Dana's really, really flakey.

> Then she heard Aki talking into a headset she was wearing.

Mark: To help fund the Space Knights, Aki moonlights as a drive-time announcer.

> "Aki Kisaragi to Space Knight HQ. Honda, do you read me?" she said into
> the small microphone.

> "This is Honda," said a gruff voice from the speaker,

Rex [Honda]: This important? There's a big story that me and Balrog were gonna cover.

Mark: Ooh, nice variation.

> "Go ahead Chief."

> "Honda, we'll be coming in soon. I need a medical team waiting for us in
> the hanger bay when we arrive."

Jill [Aki]: Better have a body bag ready too, just in case.

> There was a slight pause before Honda spoke again.

Christina: Wait, why didn't she report this earlier so he could have a crash cart and team ready earlier?

Rex: Because they hit traffic.

Christina: Traffic? That doesn't explain-

Rex: Space traffic!

> "They're on their way. What happened?" he asked, his voice betraying his
> apprehension.

Mark: They didn't like the cucumber sandwiches.

> Aki didn't want to tell him. Yumi had been his favorite mechanic before
> she became a Tekkaman,

Rex: True, he'd also spent most of that time blind drunk.

> but she couldn't lie to her friend.

Mark: Weekly poker night excluded, of course.

> "Yumi's been injured," was all she said.

> She heard Honda gasp over the speaker.

> "My God. What happened? How bad is it?"

Christina [Aki]: It's nothing to worry about at all.

Jill [Natasha]: Can someone get a mop back here? It's disgusting!

Rex [Honda]: ...I see.

> "I'll tell you in a minute.

Jill: [Aki] You don't need to prep the medics or anything, do you? No? Good.

> We're coming in."

> The Blue Earth descended until it was only a few feet above the ocean.

Christina: You know, I could have sworn that there was a runway around here somewhere.

> It's landing gear locked into place, and it touched down on the airstrip

> with a jolt, and David drove it back into the main hangar bay.

Rex: David can't reverse park to save his life. Look at how far from the kerb he is.

> The Space Knights and Dana disembarked, and were met by Honda,

Mark: -Zangief, Hugo, Birdie, Garuda-

> Dead-End,

Rex: -Dragstrip, Breakdown, Wildrider-

> the cadets

Christina: -Tom Corbett, Commando Cody, Porky Pig-

> and a full medical team.

Jill: -Leonard McCoy, Gregory House, Quincy M.E.-

> Yumi was taken off the ship on a wheeled bed,

Mark: Or, in more commonplace conversation, a stretcher.

> and IV needles protruded from her arm, connected to bags

> hanging off a pole rising from one of the bedposts.

Christina: They kept a four-poster bed with curtains on hand for just such emergencies.

- > She was wearing a
- > breath mask to help her shallow breathing, and she was unconscious and
- > extremely pale.

Jill: In case you missed it the first forty-three times, she got speared through.

- > Hiyato was right by her side, holding her hand.

Rex: And keeping a wary eye open, lest she wake up and cave his head in.

- > They rushed her to the infirmary immediately.

Rex: [Hiyato] Doctor, will she make it?

Mark: Depends. Where's the rest of her?

- > Aki and D-Boy headed to the main control room, and the Chief told Natasha
- > to take Dana to the infirmary as well, to be checked out.

Rex: And that's twenty-three fifty for the Dana.

Jill [Natasha]: Can I put that on my card?

- > She then went back to telling Honda about Yumi's condition,

Mark: Let me put it this way. If she owes you money, you're out of luck.

- > and the man's face became visibly distraught.

Rex: [Honda] Why in God's name didn't you warn me? I could have had a medevac flight waiting to take her to a real hospital!

Christina: [Aki] I didn't want to upset you.

- > Natasha walked Dana to the infirmary, and on the way she introduced her
- > to Dead-End and the cadets.

Christina: Creepy goth, this is freaky space girl. Freaky space girl, this is creepy goth.

- > Dana thought that Jeffrey and Samantha were cool,

Jill: Based on absolutely no evidence whatsoever.

Mark [Monotone]: We are cool because they say we are cool.

- > if inexperienced as soldiers and a bit nervous around the other Tekkamen.

Rex [Jeffery]: Hello! Self-insertions here being ignored!

- > She sensed a kind of kindred spirit in Dead-End,

Mark: That's okay fic, you don't need to characterize them, especially not the new characters. You've got more important things to show. Like seating arrangements.

- > but was put off by his cynisistic attitude.

Rex: Is that even a word?

> They reached the infirmary, but just as they were about to enter Dana
> felt something flash over her,

Christina: A guy in a red suit, running really fast.

Mark: And then there was a continuity reboot.

> a distant memory she could just feel in the back of her mind.

Jill [Dana]: Milk! I meant to get some milk!

> Suddenly, in her mind's eye, she saw herself as a
> little girl, strapped to a table in a hospital gown.

Rex: There was a man with big thighs, and a whole bunch of women in white. And a dog too.

> The room smelled of strange chemicals,

Rex: It smelled of root beer and Mr Pibb.

> and over on a shelf she saw a Flower of Life encased in glass.

Mark: It's the revenge of Doctor X!

> A shadow came over her, and her younger self looked up to see the face of

Rex: The Virgin Mary in a tablecloth!

> Lazlo Zand.

Rex: That would have been my second pick.

> His beady eyes stared into hers with a look she couldn't begin to describe,

Christina: So she settled on 'funny-looking'.

> and she felt the icy hand of terror grip her heart.

Mark: Narration by a visibly stoned Bela Lugosi.

> She started to sweat, going visibly pale,

Rex: And still had more colour than Dead.

> her breathing became
> shallow, and she had to put a hand to her mouth to stifle the scream that
> was about to emerge.

Jill: She didn't want to ruin her tough-girl image... not that she had one to begin with.

> Natasha, Dead-End and the others saw Dana go pale, her eyes dimming,
> her breathing becoming shallow.

Christina: That means she's about to turn into the Hulk, right?

> She looked like she was about to scream, but couldn't.

Rex: She forgot her line.

Mark: Her line is "Aaargh!"

Rex: Still forgot it.

> Samantha decided to take a chance and shook the older woman's shoulder gently.

Mark: News flash! Samantha is younger than Dana!

Jill: With that morsel of info, we almost very nearly might know something about her.

Mark: Amazing.

> Dana blinked, coming out of whatever spell she was under,

Rex: Detect secret doors!

Christina: Silent image!

Rex: Protection from arrows!

Christina: True seeing!

Rex: Ruby ray of reversal!

Christina: Bolts of bedevilment!

Rex: Fierce pride of the beastlands!

Christina: Mordenkainen's faithful hound!

Rex: Nuts to your faithful hound...

> and shook her head, trying to shake off the aftereffects

> of her vision.

Christina [Dana]: Little... flower girl! Makes... no sense!

> "Hey are you okay? You went white as a sheet,"

Mark: That girl needs therapy.

Jill: It's psycho-somatic.

> Natasha said, concerned

> for the blonde haired woman's health. Maybe the tekkaman transformation

> process affected her body worse than they thought.

Rex: Her body looks okay to me. [Christina holds a cushion over him menacingly] What? I was just saying that she looked good. [Raises cushion] I mean in good health! Will you put that thing down?

[Christina hits him]

Jill: Score!

Christina: Had to be done.

Jill: Admit it, that was fun

> Dana looked at them and gave a slight smile, but you could see the

> weakness in her eyes.

Mark: The trite narration was getting to her too.

> "Don't worry, I'm fine. I just had a couple of...bad experiences with
> labs, that's all.

Christina [Dana]: I had this job in a lab, where I worked for a mad scientist and his goofy sidekick... only they hit me on the head and sent me into space and made me watch bad movies...

> Let's just get this over with," she said, trying to put them at ease.

Christina [Samantha]: She scares me.
Rex [Jeffery]: I am filled with fear.

> The group entered the Infirmary, and left Dana with the Chief Medical Officer,

Rex: Doctor Strangepork.

> while the others went to check on Yumi who was resting
> comfortably in her hospital bed.

Mark: Presumably as comfortable as someone can be when they have a huge hole through them.

> She was still unconscious and hooked
> up to a respirator and other equipment, but she looked much more colorful

Jill: More picturesque and scenic

> and was breathing much more soundly.

Mark: Her life was in the skilled hands of Doctor Herbert West.

> The nurse informed them that she
> was scheduled for surgery tomorrow morning.

Jill: Any reason they didn't just rush her straight in?

Mark: They had to run a check on her insurance.

> Dana was put through a number of tests, including a complete body scan
> and DNA test. She passed with flying colors;

Rex: How do you "pass" a DNA test?

Christina: Some of my associates could fail one.

> she was perfectly healthy,

Mark: She takes a long walk every day, is regularly groomed and has been checked for fleas, ticks and stomach worms.

> though she knew that a surprise awaited the person who studied her DNA test results.

Christina: She's half Kryptonian and half Lex Luthor.

> As she was finishing getting dressed, a medical tech.
> accidentally walked in on her.

Rex: Comedy hijinks!

> Startled, she swung around and belted
> him full in the mouth, knocking him back ten feet over a table and into
> a wall.

Rex: Grievous bodily harm hijinks!

> He slumped down to the floor, rubbing his aching skull.

Mark [Tech]: I had nothing to do with any of this. Why did I get beaten up?

> Realizing
> what she had done, Dana got down and helped the man up, apologizing profusely.

Jill: No need to worry. Accidental head trauma is common around here.

> "I'm so sorry! I jump off the handle like that sometimes. Are you alright?"
> she said, hoping she didn't hurt him too badly.

Christina: She merely caved in the back of his skull. Nothing to worry about.

> The tech winced. "Sure, I'm fine," he got to his feet,

Mark: [Doctor] It's not the first time I've been punched out by a patient, and if I have anything to say about it, it won't be the last.

> "That's some punch you got there. Anyway,

Christina: With that random interlude over.

> Doc Samson wants one final blood test.

Rex: He's just checking for Gamma Radiation induced mutations. Just in case.

Jill: After that punch, I don't blame him.

> Your arm please."

Rex: How about the rest of her?

Christina: It's fine where it is.

> "Oh, sure, here ya go," Dana said, rolling up the sleeve of the t-shirt she had been given to wear.

Mark: I never realized she had so many tattoos.

> The tech drew the blood through her forearm with an air syringe that didn't hurt at all.

Jill: Intense routine medical action!

> "Boy, will they be surprised when that result comes back," Dana thought,
> but then saw the tech's eyes perk up.

> "Did you say something?" he asked.

Rex: No, she thought it. Weren't you paying attention?

> "Ummmm...it's nothing, really. I'm fine!" she said, and smiled at him.

All: Not buying it!

> The tech cocked an eyebrow, not entirely convinced.

Mark: [Doctor] I'm the doctor around here and I'll tell you when you're fine.

> He started to leave, but turned around again.

Christina: Quit padding your part, Doctor Extra.

> "Oh, I almost forgot. The Chief asked me to tell you that you've already
> been assigned quarters with the other Tekkamen.

Rex: [Doctor] She'd tell you herself, but... Eh.

> Room number 7 on B level,
> right next to Natasha's place, I think," he said.

Christina: Natasha was just a normal Space Knight until her whacky half-alien neighbor moved in next door and a crazy Alien warlord tried to ravage the planet! That's Natasha's Apartment, coming to an mid-morning filler slot this non-definite season!

> "Thanks. I appreciate the info," Dana replied,

Mark: Gotta keep the plot moving somehow.

> "Do you think I could meet
> with her tomorrow morning? There's something I need to tell her, in private."

Rex: So, what was I saying about a porn set-up?

Christina: I should hit you some more but... its true.

> The tech nodded, "I'll pass along the message, and she wanted me to give you these."

Jill: The fragments of a map leading to the lost mines of Solomon.

> He held out a keycard and a fancy looking watch. He explained that the
> keycard would let her into her quarters,

Rex: Along with the lunch room and gymnasium, but it wouldn't clear her for the ice hockey rink for some reason.

> while the watch had the current
> time and a holographic map of the base in it, which Dana could activate if
> needed.

Mark: While this button activates a GPS display, this one activates a communicator, this one activates a geiger counter and this one activates a homing beacon that can be detected anywhere on Earth or in near space.

Christina [Dana]: What do I do if I want to tell the time?

Mark: Sorry! Had to delete some features to make the budget

> He then left, still rubbing his jaw.

Rex: And then disappeared, never to be seen again.

> She put on the watch and tucked the keycard into her pants pocket,

Jill: But she's not wearing any pants.

Christina: Dana would regret this oversight when she found herself locked out of her room.

> and was

> about to leave the infirmary when she realized she had forgotten one other

> important item. She grabbed her primary crystal off the chair it had been

> resting on

Jill: ...I can see that this will end well.

Mark [D-Boy]: Dana, because you *misplaced* your crystal, the rest of the Space Knights were slaughtered by Krokojam. Do you have anything to say for yourself?

Christina [Dana]: Don't worry, sir. I found it in the end. It was on my coffee table all along.

> and slid it around her neck, letting it rest underneath her shirt.

Rex: Nice and snug and comfortable in there.

> Before she left, she looked over to where Yumi was sleeping.

Mark: Aww, look at her drooling in her sleep.

Jill: Actually, that's her bleeding out from massive internal injuries.

Mark: So adorable.

> Seeing that the others had left already,

Christina: And that the patient with the critical injury was left alone before surgery.

> Dana walked over to her bed. She felt a deep

> sense of guilt for putting her in that situation.

Christina: Yep, totally your fault that you were abducted by a nonsensical warp in space-time and then found and imprisoned by an alien race that you had no idea even existed.

> Putting her hand on top of Yumi's,

Jill: And holding down the pillow...

Mark: Dark much?

> Dana wished her a speedy recovery in Zentraedi

Rex: Or maybe she cleared her throat. It's hard to tell.

> and vowed to exterminate Krojodan with all the power she had.

Christina [Dana]: I will not rest until I avenge your death. But first, this companion romance side-quest.

> She strolled out of the

> infirmary, taking one last look at Yumi before the door slid closed,
> unaware that someone had been observing her with interest.

Rex: Damn government spooks are everywhere.

> Dead-End nodded to himself, there was something strange about this woman,

All: NO!

> and he was going to find out what.

Rex [Dead]: And how she gets her hair to stay up like that.

> * * * * *

> Dana strolled down a corridor, attracting stares from people as she went.

Mark: That's not her, that's Dead obviously trailing her while disguised as a shrubbery.

> "Figures. Word must spread around this base quick," she shrugged,

Mark: Especially surprising, since the word was 'trebuchet.'

> "I guess things don't change no matter what dimension you're in."

Jill: Naw, they're just that starved for entertainment around here.

> She stopped and took a look out the window, and noticed that the tropical
> sun had only begun to dip in the cloudless sky, causing the water below to
> sparkle.

Christina: This is the sort of moment that tourism commercials are made out of.

> Dana looked at her watch and discovered that it was only 3:00 in
> the afternoon, far too early for sleep!

Rex: Sleep is for the weak! [He dozes off]

> She brought up a map of the base,

Mark: This one was marked with all the secret areas and all the power-ups.

> and found a gym a few levels lower. She decided to head over there,
> and when she arrived she found it not being used.

Christina: Given the way the author is going on and their level of subtlety, I'd have thought David would be here, working out in a pair of tiny speedos.

Jill: Say...

> Inside were various mats, weapons, and a few punching bags hanging from
> the ceiling. She decided to take out her frustrations on a few unfortunate
> bags.

[Mark and Rex wince and cross their legs]

> Dimming the lights, she tied up her shirt just above her navel and
> hiked up the legs of her pants just below her knees.

Christina: I thought she was wearing a skirt.
Rex: Well, she tied up the leg of her skirt then.
Christina: Well that makes... no, no it doesn't.

> Dana did a few stretches and then took a deep breath to try and clam herself,

Jill [Dana]: Calm blue ocean, calm blue ocean, calm blue...
Mark [Dead]: I say, excuse me-
Jill [Dana]: What?!? You dare to interrupt me? POW!
Mark [Dead]: What the hell was that for?
Jill [Dana]: I feel much better now.

> and then swiftly executed a hapkido form at full speed, her movements barely a blur.

Jill: Hapkido, aka the first martial art name you pull out of a hat.

> She hit the bags in rapid succession, sending them flying away,

Mark: Careening into each other in a cascading flow of impacts that threatened to shake the whole base down.

> the shock of her blows sending ripples through the leather.

Rex: WA-TAK!
Christina: What was that? [He shrugs]

> The warrior part of her personality came forward,

Rex: I guess that's her Klingon half.
Christina: That's not it.
Rex: Of course, it's that whole Mandalorian thing.
Christina: No, you're wrong again...
Rex: Right, Luxan. I get it.
Christina: You're really missing the point.
Rex: So it's because she's a Sontaran clone then.
Christina: ...forget it.

> her vision narrowing, until the only things she was aware of were the bags and herself.

Mark: When the base caught on fire, she was the last to know

> Then
> they appeared to morph into the appearances of all of her enemies. Leonard,
> the Robotech Masters, Joseph Pietre, and even Lazlo Zand taunted her,

Rex: And Dalmeric Khane, even.
Christina: Hey, what's the difference between that guy and Krokojam anyway? They both stripped her, stuffed her in a tank and tried to turn her into a megaweapon and had the surprise to be shocked when she turned on them.
Rex: Well, one of them was a one-dimensional idiot villain with crappy writing, and the other came from

this fic.

> using her every weakness, every mistake

Jill: And every fashion flip.

> as a weapon. She tried to

> fight back, but every time she hit an apparition it only reappeared,

Christina: It's re-spawn rate is glitched. Leave the instance and reset it and you'll be fine.

> yelling even louder than before. It felt like a red-hot poker was

> being stuck into her brain,

Jill: This is your brain on badfic.

> and she couldn't take anymore!

Rex: [Tommy Wiseau] Noo, you're tearing me apart!

> "Stop, please...leave me alone!"

Rex: Okay. [He stands to leave]

Voice: Sorry, nobody is to leave during a review.

Rex: But she just said-

Jill: Down boy.

Rex: Ah, well... [He sits]

> she screamed as she grabbed the sides of

> her head and dropped to her knees, the pain almost unbearable.

All [Monotone]: Aaah.

> "Why is happening to me!? Why!? Why!?" she sobbed.

Mark: The writer is determined to make this into a wangst fic.

Rex: Yeah, fat chance of that with ol' Krokojam around gooning it up.

Christina: Say, where is our favourite cardboard bad guy anyway? The chapter feels lonely without him.

Jill: We can but hope for more Krokojam goodness.

> It was becoming harder

> to breathe, and Dana thought right then she was going to die.

Mark: Yes, she worked-herself-out to death.

> But then

> another vision appeared before her, and it was the last person she would

> have ever expected.

Rex: Mark Landry? What's he doing here?

> It wore the face of Angelo Dante.

Christina: Koh the face stealer strikes again.

> "Hey Dana, are you gonna let these second rate ghost push you around? Well?"

Mark [Angelo]: Gonna cry, huh? Gonna cry to your space mommy? Now drop and give me fifty!

> he asked, arms crossed in front of him, he was wearing the same scowl he
> always wore.

Jill: He needs to wash that scowl. It's getting really manky.

> "Angelo? Is that really you?! Or am I going even more off the deep end?!"

Rex: Yes.

> Dana shouted, looking at him. She hoped, with all her heart, that this was
> real and not her mind playing tricks on her.

Mark: Nope. You're going nuts. Sorry!

> He crouched down so he could look into her eyes.

> "Sort of. The reason these images can torture you like this is because

Christina: We need some filler to fill up the filler.

> even though you try to act tough all the time, you're scared, scared of
> what lies ahead, aren't you?"

Jill: Yeah, she's just a wussy little girl who needs a big strong man to make her feel safe. Feh.

> Angelo said, putting a hand on her shoulder.

Rex: Now it's touching her? This is some vision.

Mark: Dana gets so many visions that she set up a 3D screen and surround sound system for them.

> Dana never heard him use that tone of voice that gentle before. It was
> completely out of character for him,

Rex: Everything's out of character in this fic. Your point?

> but maybe she didn't know him as well
> as she thought she did. "Scared? Helpless is more like it.

Mark: You miss-spelled 'hopeless'.

> Here I am, the woman who led the 15th to victory,

Christina: Her leadership of the under-12s Girls Tee-ball team was inspiring.

> and when Krojodan speared Yumi

All: Yay Krokojam!

Jill: Although it's just a reference to him and not an appearance.

Mark: True, but...

All: Yay Krokojam!

> I couldn't lift a finger to help! Not one!"

Mark: Don't beat yourself up, Dana. The plot was stopping you anyway.

> she yelled, berating

> herself for her display of weakness, wiping a tear from her eye.

Christina: Are we through with making sure the capable female lead is a spineless crybaby? Because I have places to be.

> Angelo chuckled and helped Dana to her feet.

Rex: Anyone watching would see her just staggering around with a punching bag.

> She noticed that the images

> that had been tormenting her had disappeared.

Mark: Somebody had tripped over the cord to the projector.

Jill: This is where we find out that it's all been Old Man Toomley all along trying to scare people away.

> "Dana, you were in no position to help even if you wanted to, ma'am,"

Mark: As we said, the plot.

> he said, "You are the toughest person I know,

Rex: The Bear Grylls of the blonde puffball set.

> but these circumstances

> have thrown you completely through a loop. You just need to become stronger."

Christina: Just in case you'd missed it, she's useless.

> Dana dried her tears and smiled at her friend and former XO.

> "Thanks Angie, you're a great guy, you know that?" she said sheepishly.

Jill: [Dana] You're the best NCO a girl could ask for.

> "Thanks. Looks like my time's up, so go and rest.

Rex: This is the come down from your bad trip.

> You'll feel better in the

> morning," he said, and enfolded her in a tight hug,

Jill: And maybe get a little bit of butt-grab in there too.

> Dana letting her headrest on his chest, enjoying the rhythm of his breathing

Christina: You fool! You're hugging Darth Vader!

> and the warm of his body.

Mark: All this from a hallucinogenic trip out? Man, I've been missing out.

> She looked into his eyes and nodded, and suddenly he was gone,

Jill: And that she'd been dry-humping the pommel horse all along.

> leaving her alone in the chilly room.

Rex: Dana locked herself in the freezer again.

> She then realized the destruction she had wrought to the poor punching bags.

Mark: It's not quite Dresden or Coventry, but it rates up there.

> Two were leaking sand, one was broken off the chain,

Christina: Dana has the fist of death.

> and the last was halfway across the room in two pieces.

Rex: Captain America sighs and strings up another bag.

> Dripping sweat, Dana laughed to herself and headed to her quarters.

Jill: Homicidal rage is funny.

> * * * * *

> The door to Dana's quarters slid open, and she was astonished by what she saw.

Mark: The entire room was decorated with Louis XIV furniture and matching fittings.

> The whole place had been completely refurbished already,

Christina: The Space Knights keep a special team of combat decorators on call for just such an occasion.

> with a bed,

> carpeting, and a desk with a flat screen computer on it, and there were

> several paintings on the wall.

Jill [Aki]: Oh this? It belonged to the last person who was here. We just haven't moved it out yet.

Christina [Dana]: Really? Why would you need to move it.

Jill [Aki]: They... had... an... horrible death. Yeah.

> A glass door opened outward to a balcony

> overlooking the tropical sea.

Rex: You think the view is great now? Just wait till the next typhoon blows through.

> The door itself was covered with curtains.

Mark: Curtains? Wow, this place has everything.

> Dana checked the drawers of the dresser and the closet, and discovered
> to her delight that clothes, including bra and panties

Jill: Wait, the Space Knights are providing someone with underwear? Something's not right here.

> (how they knew her dress size she could only guess at),

Mark: D-Boy watches everybody while they sleep.

> had been made for her already and fit her perfectly.

Christina: The first clothes she tried on fit? Never mind the rest, now you're being unrealistic.

> She selected the best sleeping clothes,

Rex: Full plate armour.

> and went into the bathroom and undressed.

> AN: You fanboys can stop drooling now. ;)

Christina: I'd like to know why the authour mentions it now, when we've had plenty of fanservice so far.
Heck, Dana spent most of the first half of the fic naked.

Rex: Sorry, what were you saying? [Wipes chin on his hand]

Christina: Never mind.

> She took a hot shower, letting the water wash away the sweat, grime,

Rex: Alien space slime.

> and the residual fear from her experience,

Jill: Guess she really is washing away her fears.

> letting it go down the drain.

Mark: You need a good exfoliating scrub to wash the fear away.

> After

> she had dried off, she put on a loose shirt and shorts and undid the covers

> of her bed.

Christina: Intense getting into bed action!

> Stretching out on the feather-soft mattress, she pulled up

> the covers and drifted off to sleep.

Jill: I'm feeling a bit like that myself.

Mark: Got to agree here. Right now I could go for any sort of action in this fic, Krokojam or not.

Rex: Hey Jill... personal question I know, but do you sleep naked?

Jill [Shrugging]: Yeah, what of it?

Rex: Nothing. But if ya wanna take a nap, then go ahead [Christina hits him with a cushion]

> * * * * *

> Early the next morning, Aki went to check on Yumi,

Jill: Still impaled.

> and headed off to the infirmary, getting in her daily jog while she was at it.

Christina: I'm surprised that the author didn't note how much she 'bounced' as she did given their track record so far.

Rex: Yeah, author! What gives?

Christina: ...do you like being pummeled with cushions or something?

> She got to

> the door, and was about to enter when she spied Hiyato through the

> door's plate glass window.

Mark: In the process or reenacting a 'touching' moment from 'End of Evangelion'.

> He was stretched out on a cot right next

> to Yumi's bed, asleep, one of his hands intertwined with hers.

Rex: Wary in case she woke up and tried to kill him again.

> Aki

> smiled lightly, and decided to let the young pilot rest a little while

> longer.

Jill: And why not? Their organization seems pretty relaxed so far. And by relaxed, I mean comatose.

> "Chief! There you are! I've been looking everywhere for you!" said a

> gruff voice from behind.

Mark: Michael Ironside in a surprising cameo appearance.

Christina: In which he's going to play a military officer, no doubt.

Rex: I think it's a law or something.

> Aki turned to see Doctor Samson running up to

> her, completely out of breath.

Rex [Samson]: Hulk had another bad therapy session and is on the rampage again.

> "You look pale," she observed,

Mark: [Samson] I'm on a tropical lagoon base and I can't get enough sun. What's wrong with me?

> moving a strand of dark blue hair out of her face,

Mark: This is nitpicky, but in Tekkaman Blade II, Aki's hair is green.

Rex: You're right. It was nickpicky.

> "What's wrong?"

> The good doctor paused to catch his breath, then said,

Rex: [Samson] Nothing. Just wanted to watch you run.

> "We just
> finished the blood work on Ms. Sterling, and... well, see for yourself!"

Jill: She's on every performance-enhancing drug known to man.

> He handed her a piece of paper.

Christina: [Aki] You found this in her bloodstream?

Rex: [Samson] No, not the paper!

> Aki took it from him and scanned its
> contents. What she read made her gasp in astonishment.

Christina [Aki]: Two hearts? What the hell?

> "Are you sure about this?" she asked, indicating something on the page.

Mark: Yes, she's a dude.

> "Absolutely," he said, convinced of his findings,

Mark: [Samson] Her heart pumps Johnnie Walker Double Black.

> "What are you going to do now?"

Jill: Find some way to stall the plot even further?

Christina: Seems to be working so far.

> She lowered her voice to a whisper; "First, you're for the time being
> under orders not to show that to anyone else, understood?"

Jill: Save it for when the divorce proceedings begin.

> I need to have a talk with our guest."

Rex: It's time to settle... The decorator's bill!

> She handed him his document back, then quickly headed for Dana's quarters.

> * * * * *

> Dana was sound asleep in her bed, some drool running down her lip,

Christina: Really? Really fic? Do we need this?

> when a beam of sunlight woke her up.

Rex: Aaah! Orbital ion cannons!

> She cursed and rubbed the sand out of her eyes and wiped the drool off her chin,

Mark: I love the subtle grace and feeling of class that this fic brings to us.

> and was seriously considering
> killing the person who opened the curtains,

Mark: What, they didn't tell her she'd be getting a wacky roommate?

> until she saw that the person was Aki.

Jill: Then she stepped it down to just grievous bodily harm.

> "How long did you think we were going to let you sleep in?

Christina: Long enough so that she could run to work while tripping over things and trying to do a dozen things at once in a forced attempt at comedy?

Mark: About that much, yes.

>Today's a big
> day," she said, pulling out the chair from the desk and sitting down.

Mark: Thus is the sort of talk you have with someone just before you fire them.

Jill: Usually not in their bedroom.

> Rather than being angry with the Chief for waking her so abruptly, Dana
> was rather glad she did.

Rex: So. Porn set-up.

Jill: Pretty much.

> "Well, I wanted to sleep for most of the day, but then I had this
> disturbing dream. I was married to David and had seven kids!"

Mark: Fic discussion! Weak attempt at a Macross 7 reference or way to drive home the crossover pairing?

Jill: Could it be both?

Mark: Well, I guess. Huh. That had less zing then I thought it would be.

> Dana said in mock horror, and sat up, throwing off the covers to her feet,

Christina: Remembered she was naked and died of embarrassment.

> "So why 'yawn!' are you here so early?"

Christina: Efficiency. Aki likes to get administrative matters covered first thing in the morning so that she's free to fight aliens in the afternoon and still clock off at five.

> Aki laughed so hard that she almost gagged.

Rex: And then she began choking for real, which really ruined the mood.

> David with kids, which would be a sight,

Christina: Especially during the paternity hearings.

> but she quickly went silent again.

Mark: [Aki] Enough forced levity, time for forced drama.

> "Dana, we got your blood tests back,

Rex: You failed and are at risk of flunking the whole course.

> you're not human, are you? At least not completely"

Mark: You got her. She's actually half Bionoid.

> she said in a neutral tone, silently hoping that

> she wouldn't have to use the two shot pistol she had hidden in the

> back of her uniform.

Christina: Why only two shots?

Jill: First is for Dana. Second is for her so she doesn't have to write the mess up.

> Dana sighed. She knew this would happen,

Rex: Every date she goes on, somebody asks her about her parents and then it gets awkward.

> but didn't expect this confrontation so soon.

Mark: She'd conducted an elaborate plan to sneak into the doctor's office and then switch his reports to make her seem normal and then cover her tracks. And then she slept in and blew the chance.

Jill: Planning is not her strong point.

> "I'm not going to lie to you.

Christina [Dana]: The butler did it.

> I'm half Zentraedi," she replied bluntly.

Rex: And if you were back home, that would mean something.

> She searched Aki's features for any sign of malice,

Rex: Or at least Sue Storm acting funny.

> but didn't find anything.

> She guessed that the woman was good at hiding her emotions.

> "Zentraedi," Aki whispered, trying out the word,

Mark: She didn't like it, so she exchanged it for store credit.

> "I've never heard of any other aliens besides the Radam.

Rex: And the Venomoids.

> So that makes you half human I presume?"

Christina [Dana]: Well, funny story about that...

> Dana nodded as she got out of bed and began messing with the covers,

Jill: Aki wasn't sure why she was making them into a pup tent, but let her continue.

> "Yep. My father is human, my mother is Zentraedi.

Mark: [Dana] And my uncle's a Cylon. Family get-togethers are confusing.

> I'm the first of

> my kind, but I just found out that I have a sister,

Rex: And maybe a brother. Continuity is ambiguous about that.

> but I haven't seen her yet."

Jill: Only if you don't count trip-outs, that is.

> "Interesting. So which system do they come from?"

Mark: Somewhere beyond Kree space, near Krypton.

> Aki asked, getting up from her chair and sitting back down on the edge of the bed.

Jill: She was fascinated by the awnings on Dana's tent, and wanted a closer look.

> But Dana shook her head sadly, "You won't find them anywhere in this
> galaxy,"

Rex: Maybe in a galaxy far, far away...

> she said, staring at the sheets, knowing what she would say

> next would shock the older woman to her core.

Christina [Dana]: Snape kills Dumbledore.

Kill [Aki]: No!

> The Chief cocked an eyebrow, "Why's that? Wait, let me guess, the

> Radam exterminated them, right?"

Rex: No, it's just that they moved out to the suburbs.

> Dana's head shot up and she stared right into Aki's eyes.

> "No! That's not it! The reason you won't find them is because... they

> don't exist in this universe!"

Jill: [Dana] I mean they could, but you haven't met them yet... They could have been wiped out by the Radam in this world, I guess... Really, I didn't think that one through.

> she practically shouted, and the Chief's

> eyes widened and she put a hand to her mouth to conceal her surprise.

Mark: And this is the point that Aki starts smiling and nodding while discretely calling security.

> She felt her heart skip a beat, and she leapt off the bed.

Jill [Aki]: I can't believe she went with such a stupid story. It sounds like a bad fanfic or something.

> "W...wha...what!? What did you say!?"

Christina: Weren't you paying attention? You're supposed to be the one in charge of this secret supertech organisation.

> Aki almost shouted in her astonishment, and Dana stopped making the bed and sat down.

Jill: She'd set up a nice lounge in her tent for the pair of them.

> "I'd better explain, so you should get some breakfast if you haven't
> already," she said, a bit of her old confidence creeping into her
> voice. She did just that,

Rex: What, get breakfast?

> starting with the First Robotech War and going on from there,

Mark: The Malcontent Uprisings, Cyberpirates... couple of filler novels and some RPG modules...

> with Aki asking questions every so often.

Jill [Aki]: So what happened to Minmei's cousin Jason anyway?

> Dana talked about the Rain of Death,

Christina: And the rain of fish

> the launch of the SDF-3,

Rex: The return-to-port of the SDF-3 and the relaunch of the SDF-3 with the bathrooms installed.

> the coming of the Robotech Masters and the Second Robotech War and finally

Mark: Twenty years of abortive sequel attempts.

> her disappearance off the bridge of the Homeward Bound and her capture
> by Krojodan.

Rex: And her rescue by the Space Knights, her journey back to Earth, her medical exam and her telling Aki all about it.

> Dana finished and glanced at the clock,

Jill: [Dana] Yep, looks like enough flashback padding for this chapter.

> her story had taken more than an hour.

Christina: And that's without the footnotes.

> Aki slumped back down onto the bed, feeling faint.

Mark: Block exposition has that effect on people. Just be thankful that we didn't get the retelling of her retelling.

> "My God...incredible. If what you're telling me is true,"

Rex: Let's just pretend it all is, okay? This chapter's kind of stopped dead already.

> she muttered, putting a hand to her temples.

Christina: [Aki] Mother said I should have been a musician but no, I had to go fight in a space war.

> She had woken up with a headache and it was only getting worse.

Jill: Now you know how we feel, Aki.

> "It is, trust me. I've been through too much crap in my life to start lying now,"

Jill: I don't know about that. Often when you've got that much crap going on, you just go with whatever's convenient. Hell, it's what I do.

Christina: No comment.

> Dana said, understanding Aki's position. For all

> the Chief knew Dana was some sort of Radam spy.

Rex: Mark, you're the expert on these things. What sort of infiltration plan involves letting a zillion of your dudes get killed?

Mark: A really, really dumb one.

> Dana knew that she would act in the same manner.

Jill: So, Zor Prime anyone?

> "You said you disappeared from your home dimension and reappeared here.

> What exactly happened?"

Christina: Didn't she just explain all that?

Mark: Recapping! For when you want to make a long and dull fic even longer and duller.

> the Chief asked as she headed for the bathroom

> and a bottle of Aspirin.

Rex: After you with that, Aki.

> Dana got up and finished making the bed,

Jill: She had put in a side table for the lounge. It worked well.

> talking as she worked.

Mark: She can exposit and do housecleaning duties at the same time. Genius!

> "I was on the bridge of my ship, the Homeward Bound.

Mark: Admittedly, it was only technically her ship.

> We were in mid-fold..." she started to say, but the Chief interrupted her.

Jill: [Aki] Sorry, I'm gonna need at least two drinks in me to buy this.

> "Fold? I never heard of the term. What is it?" she asked.

Christina: Hold on guys, there's still more exposition to come.

> "That's how we get from star to star.

Rex: Usually, I just hitchhike, but whatever works for you guys.

> Anyway, the fold was almost done

> when my friends and I were tossed around like toys when a hyperspace

> shock wave hit us.

Jill: Blah blah technobabble blah blah?

Mark: Technobabble exposition blah blah.

> I felt an intense pain right after and blacked out.

Rex: She woke up the next morning with a hangover and an embarrassing tattoo.

> The next thing I know I'm strapped to a living wall inside the Radam

> ship completely naked with Krojodan eyeing me up!"

Christina: And thus the fic loops itself.

> Dana shuddered at the last sentence.

> "Hmmm. That explains something.

Jill [Aki]: The lipstick stains I found on D-Boy's collar. Now about the lipstick stains I found elsewhere...

Mark: That stripper again?

Jill: She hopes it's the same stripper.

> About a week ago a group of Radam ships

> tried to bring down the moon with a black hole generator.

Christina: Don't they want the Earth intact so they can enslave its people?

Jill: Smashing the Moon into it will help with that.

Christina: Uhhh, no...

Jill: You're right, of course not. That would be about the worst thing they could do. Silly me.

> It backfired badly and destroyed both of the vessels,

Mark: And you responded to this threat by doing nothing but watching the ship, taking naughty shared showers and showing around the new guys. Brilliant work there, guys.

> but it generated a hyperspace ripple.

Christina: But how did that affect her in a parallel dimension?

Rex: Because... um... Hyperspace and stuff.

> Perhaps those events are related," Aki deduced.

Mark: Technobabble did it. That's all you need.

> "It's too much of a coincidence for them not to be,"

Jill: At this point, the fic's pretty much passed into 'sure, let's go with that.'

> Dana said, and she

> went into the bathroom and splashed water on her face.

Christina: You know what's more exciting than block exposition? How about block exposition punctuated with day-to-day minutia?

Rex: Dana! Makes! Waffles!

> She towed off and went back to the other room.

Mark: Just in time for Aki to introduce her to the concerned doctor with the hypodermic syringe.

> Aki went up to her and put a hand on Dana's shoulder.

Rex: Well, it's not the oddest porn setup I've seen, but it does rank up there.

> "Don't worry, we'll find a way to get you home. I'm sure it can be done,"

> Aki said reassuringly.

Rex: We'll do... science stuff. With science. Yeah. That'll work.

> Dana nodded in appreciation.

Christina [Dana]: I have absolutely no basis to accept your reassurance and yet I will go with it anyway.

> "Thanks. I got a lot of people waiting for me on Tirol.

Mark: Including more than a few people she owes money too.

> They probably think I'm dead..."

Rex: Because there's no such thing as 'missing in action.'

> she said, looking away, letting the sentence trail off, a sad look in her eyes.

Jill: Hey you know what? This chapter was letting the angst content slip, and we can't have that.

> "What are you going to do now?" Aki asked, but had a decent idea of what

> the younger woman was going to say already.

Rex: Because Aki was also looking for form a garage band.

> Call it a commander's hunch.

> Dana showed Aki her primary crystal.

Jill: She wanted to know how much she could get for it.

> "I want to join you. I can't beat Krojodan the way I am now.

Mark: Cue training montage; Dana speaking with Aki, drinking raw eggs, punching sides of beef, running on the beach, doing movements and forms in slow motion and finally bowing before Aki as she heads to the championship.

> I want to go all the way

Rex: To eleven.

> and become a full tekkaman

Jill: [Dana] Like my father before me.

> like you and Blade," she declared,

> "Besides, I'll lose my mind if I just sit around and do nothing.

Mark: She's worried about losing her mind if she doesn't become a Tekkaman? She doesn't know much about this whole deal, does she?

> I'm a soldier after all. It's what I do."

Christina: That and needlepoint.

> Aki smiled warmly. She expected this and had prepared for it.

Jill: She'd already signed Dana up for two seasons and a book tour.

> "I thought you would. Check out your closet," she said, pointing across the room.

Rex: It is, in fact, a magical gateway to another world of talking animals and fantastic creatures. Also, it reeks of mothballs.

> Dana walked over to the closet, and when she opened it her jaw dropped
> to the floor.

Rex: See? Talking animals. And mothballs.

> Inside were three brand new Space Knight uniforms in her
> size, and were colored the same as her armor.

Jill: When did Aki sneak all those in there? Were they there overnight on the assumption that Dana would make this choice, and Dana just never noticed when she checked the place out? Or did Aki sneak them in there when Dana was washing, and had them waiting outside for the opportunity?

Mark: Ever considered that you're thinking way too much about the fic?

Jill: Damn it, if I don't get my Krokojam fix, then I get testy.

> A rose jacket with a gold color and a short skirt the same color as the jacket.

Christina: Does she get an option for pants?

Rex: First rule of the Space Knights: Never pants, ever.

Christina: Seems like an odd rule.

Rex: Freeman wrote it into his charter. That and the one that if anyone ever drops something, only a female staff member is allowed to pick it up.

> She turned back to Aki, who held out her hand.

Rex: Brofist!

> "Welcome to the team, Tekkaman Valkerye," the Chief said.

Christina [Dana]: Can I be Tekkaman Spartas instead?

> Dana shook Aki's hand, and then the Chief had a sudden thought.

> "Do you want me to tell the others, or do you want to do it?" she asked.

Jill: [Aki] I mean, I am the commander and it's my responsibility... This is my organization, after all.

> Dana laughed, "No, I'll tell them.

Jill: [Dana] Screw procedure.

Mark: They already did.

Jill: [Dana] Well... Screw it some more!

> Just have a medical team standing by.

> I'm positive that Hiyato will faint! The guy has thin blood or something."

[They all laugh weakly]

> Aki snickered at that, then left Dana so she could get dressed,

Christina: So... she has been prancing around naked then?

> mentioning that her that her training would begin in a couple days.

Rex: They're very casual here, aren't they?

Christina: The only things they take seriously are practical jokes.

> Dana showered and dried her hair,

Christina: Three hours later...

> and put on her new uniform and boots. She stepped outside

> onto the balcony, letting the warm morning breeze finish off the last drops

> of water in her hair.

Rex: Then got hit by the monsoonal rains.

> "So this is what Zor meant about trials," she thought,

Jill: What, is getting dressed that hard for you?

Christina: She gets an achievement unlock for doing it.

> letting her
> former lover's words roll through her head, trying to grasp their meaning,

Mark: She would have to do stuff that would challenge her in some way. Simple, really.

> hoping to find some sort of strength from them.

Jill: Then realized how generic and inane they were, and laughed them off.

> She closed her eyes and
> took a cleansing breath, letting the fresh air blow away her doubts for
> the moment.

Rex: And then she let one rip.

> She knew what she had to do;

Christina: Write and direct a tribute to her favourite Alfred Hitchcock film with added heavy-handed environmental messages.

> now she only needed to see it through.

Rex: Unless the fanfic was abandoned, that is.

Mark: Because that never ever happens.

Rex: Gods no.

> She looked up into the clear blue sky.

> "Mom, dad, sis, and especially you Angie, please wait for me,"

Jill: Oh that's right Dana. Just because you got sucked into a weird space thingy you have to make it all about yourself.

> she
> thought, trying to send her thoughts to her friends and family, even if
> they were in a different dimension.

Christina: Using the powers of magic space telepathy.

Jill: Sure, why not? It's no dumber than anything else in this fic.

> "I don't know when I'll be back,

Rex: It all depends on if the show is renewed for another season, and that's not looking good.

Mark: Great. Every forum I go to is going to be full of enraged fanboys decrying the show's cancelation as a crime, demanding the deaths of the executives and planning nonsense online petitions.

> but I have made some new friends here,

Jill: She has? So far all she's done is have a rather forced conversation with Aki and maybe drooled over David a little.

> and I'm damned well sure that they'll give me a hand.

Christina: And she'll make them help her, no matter what they want.

> For the first time, I feel truly happy.

Mark: Stuck in an alien world where you were forcibly turned into a strange creature and run the risk of going mad and killing everyone.

> I can start clean here,

Jill: [Dana] I didn't have to save the galaxy back home anyway.

> and not have to worry about what people think of me...

Rex: It's a long way to go to avoid a credit check when applying for a new phone, but hey. If it works for you then go for it.

> heh, look at me, getting all sappy.

Rex: Sappier than a maple tree forest.

> This isn't like me at all.

Christina: Usually you run off and get into a fight and end up in prison.

> The trip to this weird dimension must've fried my brains!"

Mark: That's a long way to go to excuse out-of-character, fic, and you know it.

> Dana stood there for a few minutes more,

Rex: Is the camera still on? Are we meant to be rolling? Wait we are? Okay...

> then decided to visit Yumi and the others.

Mark: But not Jeffery and Samantha. Nobody cares about them.

> Better to tell them about her history now rather than later.

All: Block exposition!

> To be continued....

> * * * * *

> Part 5: "The Homeward Bound Returns" Coming soon!

Mark: In which the Homeward Bound is bound for home.

> A thank you to all my reviewers also in the next chapter!

"And our fic ends as it begins," Mark concluded as the screen turned off, restoring the world to its usual prose format. "Which is to say, with an awkward lump of text that stops any momentum it might have had dead and leaves you feeling kind of awkward instead."

"I want to know where Krokojam was," Rex pointed out. "I mean, there was nothing of him in this chapter beyond a few quick name drops. I feel ripped off."

"It's tempting to say that Krokojam was the best part of it," Jill agreed. "Although, whether that's any quality of his own or casting aspersions on everything else is debatable."

"I'd take his goonish behaviour over the rest of the fic any day," Christina added. "For, if nothing else, it was fun."

"Speaking of which," The Voice cut in. "Could I get your reviews now?"

"Well, I'm gonna start off and talk about the best thing in this fic," Rex began. "Which is Krokojam, and yes, I mean that seriously. See, the writer tried to build the dude up as this horrible, terrible threat, but instead he came off as a doofy shouty clod who was ticking off entries on a cheesy villainy checklist. Gloat, laugh, explain your plan to the hostage, leave her alone and guarded by only two incompetent underlings and make sure to kill a minion for no real reason. If they were trying for ominous, they failed at it and yet succeeded in so many other ways."

"How so?" Mark asked.

"Well let's be honest, this fic is dull and dry," Rex continued. "It's boring, long-winded and drags on through some forced and out-of-character wangst. And then in the middle of it we get this cartoony bad guy who chews up scenery and is genuinely enjoyable for it. He's impossible to take seriously, and thus becomes awesome for it."

"Funny you should talk about characters," Jill continued. "Because that's what was on my mind as well, and not in a good way. Putting Krokojam aside, there was a distinct pattern to the depictions of the characters. The writer clearly has favourite characters, and doesn't try to hide it; in fact, you could argue that they're rubbing our noses in it. Dana is a good example. It's not just that the narration has to talk about how hot she is at every turn, but the characters have to as well in the most banal ways. The best example is that scene where Natasha ogles her boobs and is in awe of how big they are."

"Blunt," Christina noted.

"It's true, though," Jill nodded. "David gets a similar treatment. He gets talked up about how handsome he is at every chance, and about how good he is in a fight and he gets to kill more bad guys than everyone else and so on. And by comparison we have Yumi who is treated as basically being a useless, clumsy idiot who stood around and let herself get speared by ol' Krokojam there."

"I notice that you didn't mention Jeffrey and Samantha there," Mark pointed out.

"Who?" Rex asked with a chuckle.

"Exactly," Jill said by way of answer.

"Fair enough. Problem was," Mark began, leaning forward to address the others, "That their spectacular lack of presence was just one of the many problems with the story's structure. They're introduced with a flash of background - they did this thing in this time, and that's it - but are basically never used again. Instead the fic focuses on Dana almost to the exclusion of anyone else. You could ask why they're even in the story, except that Jeffrey shares his Tekkaman name with the author's handle."

"Beyond that, it's got some severe pacing problems. The author spends a lot of time on minutiae and

procedure - their launch order, their seating arrangements and so on - that could be better spent working with the characters or the action, beyond the one-note scenes most of them got. I can understand wanting to show such details in an original work, but given that this is fan fiction after all, it's certainly acceptable to lean on the source material for those arrangements. By simply describing what's already routine in the show, it comes off as a text equivalent of stock footage."

As Mark took his place, Christina cleared her throat and spoke up. "Actually, I thought the matter of tone was a major problem for the piece. The author establishes early on, both with Dana's musing and the vision of Zor, that this is intended to be a more sorrowful piece."

"Wangstful piece, you mean," Jill interrupted.

"Yes, rather. In addition to that, her capture is clearly played for horror; at least, until Krokojam shows up. Whether intentional or not, he turns the scene into a parody of itself. This is immediately followed up with the hangar practical joke, complete with near-lethal retribution. From then on, the mood swings back and forth from angst to slapstick, often veering sharply from one to the other in the same scene. With neither tone really suiting either of the fic's sources, it makes the whole work pretty hard to follow and connect to."

"And thank you all for that," The Voice finished. "Your comments and reviews have been noted."

"So what then?" Rex asked as he stood. "Same time next week?"

"I'll let you know when we have another review," The Voice replied.

"See, now I'm in two minds about that," Jill continued. "A part of me is thinking 'hey, it's work and it's nice to be wanted', while another part of me is thinking 'but do I really want more badfic'?"

"It's not as bad as some of the PR stunts I've done," Christina admitted. "And the relative privacy is actually quite... nice. Although I'm sure that there are plenty of bad fanfics to come that will have me eating those words."

"Either way, I'm glad to be done, and I'm glad that the Wandering Star Saga seems to have been abandoned like so many other fanfics," Mark noted. "The only upside to badfic is that a lot of it is left hanging before it can get any worse – and you know it will get worse."

The screen paused on him a moment, before a caption flashed up below. "Mark Grayson – Rejected." A second later, it returned to life.

"If it means no more Krokojam ever, I'm willing to make that sacrifice to have no more of that fic," Jill agreed. "Let's get out of here."

The screen paused on her as well, as similar caption coming up. "Jill Vader – Rejected."

"I like it. More beer and nachos?" Rex asked. "Because they fix a lot." Again it paused, with a third caption coming up "Rex Bradntiger – Rejected."

"It's the little things that you appreciate," Christina finished with a smile, before the image broke up into a mess of pixels.

The interior of Tharonja's could be politely described as 'colourful'. It could also be described what would

happen if a tiki party, a bad fantasy movie and every cliché you could think of about Mesoamerican culture collided and then exploded. Giant plastic stoneheads, tiki masks and the odd winged serpent adorned its walls in among the cheesy skull décor and the fake plastic plants, reaching a level of kitsch that seemed to transcend badness and become strangely fascinating.

Rebecca had managed to find a quiet corner in among the riot of colour, remaining relatively unobserved and unobtrusive as she watched her fellows. Rick, Dan and Tsuneo were, in turn, watching the movie play on her notebook computer.

"This is fascinating," Tsuneo managed. "I had no idea about any of this."

"Neither did I," Rebecca admitted. "And given the way this came to me, I suspect that the Voice doesn't want us to know either."

"It's like a lost pilot," Rick commented. "The 'Cage' to our 'Where No Man Has Gone Before', only unlikely to be dissected for stock footage at a later date."

"Same apartment, same Voice, same sort of badfic," Dan agreed. "Only with different people. And that Jill is scorchingly hot"

"Hopeless." Rebecca shook her head. "However, it does raise a lot of questions."

"Agreed," Tsuneo pondered. "I'd like to know why they all were rejected, for starters, and then why did the Voice go with an entirely new cast afterwards."

"Yeah... They're different to us, but not so much as to be incompatible with the format," Rick observed. "Jill's nastier than you are Rebecca, but that's not going to be too much of a problem to overcome."

"Rex is more or less like you." Tsuneo glanced at his friend. "No offence."

"None taken." Rick shrugged. "But they're like we are, but just not us. It's like the us of Earth-2 or the like."

"Which means that there has to be some bigger reason why they were all rejected," Rebecca concluded. "Something that was wrong that went beyond an idiot, an emotional train-wreck, a smart-arse and a shockingly nice girl being strangely contrary to plan."

"If they were rejected, then we should have been too," Tsuneo finished. "I think we need to look into this further."

"I think there's one big thing we're all missing," Dan spoke up, the others turning to him. "And that's the real question this thing you found raises, Rebecca."

"Which is?" She asked with the slightest hint of apprehension.

"Who would win in a fight between Krokojam there and Shrapnel?"

Author's notes:

And so we finish 'Wandering Star Saga', the fic that put an end to the original Elmer Studios back in 2004.

Looking back at it, it's easy to see why. With jobs and responsibilities and little time to riff in, the sheer dragging dryness of the second half here was very discouraging. The time to do the first draft got longer, and longer and eventually reached a silent 'can't be arsed' stage.

That and, of course, no Krokojam to make it all better.

Ironically, if we'd been Micro-Chunking like we do today, then we probably would have breezed through it and managed to get to Episode 240 (and beyond!) the long way round.

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Wandering Star Saga written by Tekkaman Paladin and Robotekmaster

Jill Vader and Rex Branditger created by Rick R.
Christina McCade and Mark Grayson created by Zogster

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Krokojam on toast? Email us at [elmerstudios00 \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:elmerstudios00@gmail.com) and register your Jeff.

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All of Elmer Studios' MSTings, random DELTA Invasion Episode Generator and other stuff in one spot

> Dana looked around, but had no clue about what to do next.