
Episode 483 – You jerk

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

“So in short,” Rick commented as he entered. “A robot will always be the best at Homeopathic Medicine, but somebody who took a doctorate in riding a Tyrannosaurus will be better than a robot at it by second level.”

“Rick, that might be the stupidest thing you’ve ever said,” Rebecca replied. “Well done.”

“Don’t look at me, I don’t write the rules.”

“Should I ask what Rick’s on about now?” Tsuneo asked as he and Dan joined them.

“Well to get material for this fic, I was doing a deep dive on the wackiness that is the Palladium Books RPG,” he explained.

“Because you love nonsense Palladium jokes,” Tsuneo noted.

“It was a formative part of my childhood,” Rick noted. “Did you know that Annie LaBelle could potentially be the world’s greatest surgeon?”

“So I have a question about the fic,” Dan spoke up, pointedly ignoring that last statement.

“Besides ‘why does this thing even exist’, You mean?” Rebecca asked.

“Well yeah, because that is a good question.”

“And I have no good answer, but please go on.”

“I was going to ask about what ‘version’ of Robotech this fic is set in,” Dan began. “But then I realised that would result in a three hour lecture from Rick so I thought better of it.”

“Thank you,” Tsuneo simply replied.

“Instead I just gotta say that, well, it doesn’t feel like Robotech to me,” he continued. “And not just because it’s incredibly dull.”

“No, I can follow what you’re saying here,” Tsuneo nodded. “The source material is basically 1980s space opera with a strong emphasis on characters, their relationships and dramas as much as on the battles and space robot wars. And Dire Straights, well, isn’t that.”

“Yeah,” Dan nodded. “And it’s not just all the minutiae and procedures and focus on boring crap that’s killing it. The whole thing feels just, you know, wrong.”

“It’s focusing way too much on ‘real world’ things that don’t fit with the flavour of the source material,” Tsuneo noted. “Like uniform regulations, military procedures, international operational requirements and so on.”

“Plus there’s all that real-world stuff that takes you out of the world,” Dan added. “Like listing TV brands and types of car and crap like that.”

"No I totally get what you mean," Rick nodded. "And the truth is, well, I've been kind of expecting this sort of a thing for a while."

"You have?"

"Oh, I have as well," Rebecca added. "Honestly I'm kind of surprised that we haven't had a fic like this before now."

"I'm curious as to why you would expect one like that," Tsuneo noted.

"Within fanfic there's a very distinct subgenre of what could only be described as right-wing miltech fantasies," Rebecca explained. "Usually it comes out of fandoms which yes, have a heavy emphasis on sci-fi military conflict but where it's not the be-all and end-all of things."

"You know, like where there's a lot of other things going on in the source," Rick explained. "Like the soap opera stuff you were talking about earlier."

"Right," Rebecca said. "And often it follows a pattern. The fandom starts off heavy on female fans or even led by them. However instead the male voices become more prominent and steer things less into talking character and story and more into discussion of weapon calibres, ammunition types and fleet sizes."

"Robotech is a good example," Rick nodded. "As is Macross, along with Star Wars, Star Trek, Gundam and My Little Pony."

"I do recall Tomino saying that it was the female fans that basically saved Gundam," Tsuneo nodded. "But you wouldn't think that to look at the present state of the fandom."

"Exactly," she agreed. "You get a fandom that is more focused on being 'grounded' and 'realistic' and focusing on the technical nuts and bolts or the like while also failing to grasp that the franchise is more than just that."

"Often it comes with a degree of media illiteracy," Rick noted. "People who fail to realise that a show is driven by its narrative and drama and not how powerful any given gun is or how much MDC everything has."

"I can see how that would happen," Tsuneo nodded. "And how it would influence both fandom and fanfic in specific."

"In the case of Robotech, you ended up with a fandom dominated by these types who, it also needs to be said, were horrific gatekeepers to boot. So it did a good job of strangling fandom conversation and, as so often happens, driving out all the female fans."

"And lets be honest, the fact that a lot of these fandoms got big on Usenet during the nineties probably didn't help either," Rick noted. "You know, being filled up with white male proto-STEMlords who liked to turn everything into their Tom Clancy fantasies."

"To be honest, it'd explain a lot about this fic," Tsuneo said.

"Right," Rebecca agreed. "And this sort of thing can blow back into the franchise itself."

"Like Bandai's constant pandering to the One-Year War fanboys and emphasising 'realistic' Gundam designs with lots of guns," Dan noted. "While throwing newer fans under the bus."

"While that's the most extreme example, there are plenty of others," Rebecca noted. "Like how you had a lot of military-themed novels in the old Star Wars Expanded Universe, such as the feverish fantasies that were the Republic Commando series."

"Or Section 31 in Star Trek," Rick noted. "Which has basically metastasised into a full-blown malignant plot tumour."

"And in Robotech?" Tsuneo asked.

"Take a look at the second edition Palladium RPG," Rick noted. "They filled it up with sweaty descriptions of weapon calibres and ammunition types and all that crap which didn't actually add anything. Hell, Palladium bought on one of the fandom's most toxic people to act as a sourcebook consultant, which says a lot."

"Ouch," Tsuneo winced.

"The sad thing is that by the standards of these sorts of fics, Dire Straights is mild," Rebecca admitted. "Incredibly boring but still mild"

"That's a pretty damning statement," Tsuneo admitted. "So what would you say are some of the worst cases of this sort of thing taking over?"

"Off the top of my head, Mass Effect fandom really sticks out, what with insane libertarian BroShep becoming the predominant voice," Rebecca replied.

"I feel that I am better off not knowing more," Tsuneo admitted.

"That's for the best," she finished.

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

"And good morning to you too, Devil Gundam," Rick replied.

"Spicy and relevant," Dan noted. "Good pick."

"Thanks," Rick smiled. "I try."

"So while those two are busy congratulating themselves," Tsuneo spoke up. "I can only assume that today's measure of hurt will be more of Dire Straights."

"That is correct," the Voice replied. "Today we will be reading the next four chapters."

"Do we have to?" Dan asked. "We could watch something more engaging, like paint drying."

"Drying paint would probably have better characters," Rebecca helpfully added.

"Well, I, uh, don't have any drying paint," the Voice admitted. "Sorry."

"Fine," Tsuneo sighed. "Dire Straights it is. But don't expect me to enjoy it"

"Hey, you never can tell," Rick offered. "Something exciting could happen."

"That's a lie and you know it," Rebecca replied as she took her place on the couch.

"This is also true," Rick admitted as he and the others joined her.

"So what do you think will happen?" Tsuneo asked.

"I'm wagering that he and LaBelle talk about office stationary inventory," Dan replied.

"It can't be a bet if we all agree," Rebecca finished as the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format.

> Chapter 9: Jerk Christmas

Dan: With this guy every Christmas is Jerk Christmas

> My family and I stepped out of Christ the King Anglican Church after the Christmas service was
> over. It was a beautiful service,

Rebeca: I mean, the pyrotechnics were a nice touch, but bringing in the Chinese dance troupe was just inspired.

> with a recorded holographic message from the Archbishop of
> Canterbury played inside the church.

Rick: Future Anglicans get a good service, but it's still nothing on midnight mass from the Robot Space Pope

> Outside, there were a lot of clouds in the sky, with holes
> revealing patches of blue. We were all dressed in our best clothes.

Rebecca: Their best quasi-futuristic jumpsuits

> We greeted our fellow flock a merry Christmas, including a few family friends.

Dan: Won't see you for another year!

Rick: Have fun in robot space war!

> "Let's go home," said Mom. "We got to prepare."

> Oooooooooo

Tsuneo: Well that added a lot

> I was in the kitchen, helping Mom prepare the Christmas dinner. Specifically, I was helping with the
> turkey.

Dan: And by that we mean he gorged himself on the raw stuffing

> The kitchen looked pretty much the same as it did when I left Jamaica, with counters, cupboards, a
> sink, an oven and stove, a refrigerator, and a microwave oven.

Rebecca: Thank you for that fic. I would never have been able to live without knowing what their generic kitchen looked like

> I had used the microwave oven to
> defrost the turkey. I wore an apron over my clothes, as well as gloves on my hands.

Tsuneo: Intense turkey cooking action!

Dan: Oooh, nice variation

Tsuneo: Thanks

> Mom was making the jerk spice.

Dan: Since she'd been doing it for decades, Flo-Flo the Terrible here was mansplaining it to her.

> She usually made the jerk spice by hand, using allspice, Scotch
> bonnet peppers, cloves, cinnamon, and other stuff.

Rebecca: Icing sugar, raw coffee, ground concrete, and some cans she found at the back of the cupboard that the label came off of. Other stuff.

> "So how do you get along in the Army?" she asked.

> "Fine," I said. "We rely on each other for our lives."

Rick: They've pulled his arse out of the fire more times than he can count.

> They're great people."

Tsuneo: Really?

Dan: No.

> "I had an uncle who lived in England. He served in the Global Civil War.

Rick: He fought for the Provisional Government against Celtic Thunder. Odds are that T.R. Edwards betrayed him at least once

> That was before that robotech stuff came to Earth."

Dan: During the tenebrous reign of the Spider Kingdom

> I remembered my history. It was a series of wars about thirty years ago, happening all over the
> world.

Rebecca: The global civil war was a civil war that occurred all across the globe. There you go.

> The war sort of subsided after robotechnology arrived in a crash.

Rick: In as far as it ended.

> "Did he tell you about the war?"

> "I read letters he wrote," answered Mom. "He was killed in action.

Tsuneo: Kept writing letters, which was weird.

> We'd better take the turkey outside. Our oven can't jerk the turkey."

Tsuneo: Goodnight everybody.

> And so we did.

Rebecca: One page in and we hit our first 'and so we did.'

Dan: Everybody drink!

Rebecca: Oh, no you don't.

> We took the turkey and the jerk spice to what passed for a backyard- basically a
> small outdoor enclosure behind the house,

Rebecca: Yes, that's what a backyard is

> next to the garage. The enclosure had doors leading to
> the house and the garage, and it had a gate leading to the alley in the back.

Rick: It had a treasure chest in one corner and contained 2d4 Orcs. Roll for initiative

> "Let's get cooking," said Dad, wearing a chef's hat and a white apron. The turkey was placed over
> the jerk pan,

Tsuneo: Excuse me?

Dan: You heard

> and a charcoal fire heated the pan, sending up wafts of smoke. Mom brushed the
> turkey with the jerk spice.

Rebecca: He helped his mum by standing around and swilling beers.

- > I looked around and we were clearly not the only family on the block
- > cooking some type of jerk meat.

Rick: Turns out his whole neighbourhood is full of jerks

- > "Dinner is going to be great," said Paul.
- > Trina was in the yard, carrying Larry.
- > "How are your parents, Trina?" asked Mom.
- > "They're great," she replied. "We had a great dinner."

Dan: Great!

- > I remembered that Trina's mom and stepdad lived in Port Antonio;

Rick: He vaguely remembered that Trina's family existed.

- > she, Paul, and Larry had dinner there on Christmas Eve.

Tsuneo: Thrill as dinner arrangements are recounted

Rebecca: Dire Straights!

- > Larry was holding the toy I gave him just two days ago. "Uncle fight aliens," he said.

Rick: His uncle is Master Chief?

- > Trina smiled.
- > I was thinking. How could a young boy like Larry possibly understand what it means to fight a war?
- > To understand what combat is like.

Rebecca: To rectify this, I vowed to strap him into a Salamander Battloid and throw him at the Robotech Masters.

- > To him, war was a game. I recalled my reunion with my friends, and even they did not understand.

Tsuneo: They were too busy enjoying themselves and getting into the spirit of the season, the ungrateful jerks

- > I hoped that Larry would not have to go through with this.

Rick: Yeah, well good luck to you Larry knowing what comes next

- > The sun had set, leaving the sky a light purple that was turning dark, by the time we had dinner.
- > Coco bread and curry goat was served,

Dan: This dinner is the most interesting part of the fic so far

- > along with the jerk turkey for the main course. Leftover jerk
- > spice was in a bowl if any of us wanted to add extra spice to our turkey.

Rebecca: Just in case your turkey was not enough of a jerk already

- > Dad carved slices from the turkey with this long knife. I eagerly took one of the slices of the meat.

> After eating it, my mouth felt like a volcano.

Dan: So would you say their jerk spice is hotter than lava?

Tsuneo: Get out

> I certainly did not need some additional jerk spice. Dad

> brushed some extra jerk spice on his turkey.

Dan: Dad is a bigger jerk than anyone.

> "Is Morocco a great place?" asked Trina.

Rebecca: Can't you tell from his riveting descriptions of the vibrant, cosmopolitan culture?

> "It is when the enemy is not attacking," I said.

Dan: But since they seem to exist only to mildly inconvenience him, its fine

> "And where else have you been?"

Rick: He's been to paradise, but he's never been to him.

> "I've visited Istanbul and Athens, for one day each," I said, remembering my trips with Melissa.

Tsuneo: Even one day would have given him plenty of time to immerse himself in the local culture

Rebecca: Assuming he didn't spend all that time stewing in his own angst about if Melissa actually liked him

Tsuneo: This is also true

> "I even visited France." I did not mention I was there in combat.

Rick: He blew up some beautiful countryside.

> "The Army is sure a great way to see the world," said Paul, reaching for some coco bread. "Maybe

> they will even send you to the other side of the galaxy."

> "My friend Charlie is on a ship there right now."

Dan: Charlie is exactly on the other side of the galaxy

> "I remember the fellow," said Mom. "His mother mentioned that a few days ago, about Charlie not

> being able to be home for Christmas.

Rick: Being in space is the best excuse I can think of for missing family Christmas

> I think he does flight deck operations."

Rebecca: He's a space janitor

> Trina opened the refrigerator door. "We should get champagne for all of us except Larry."

Dan: Larry only gets the cheap stuff

> "What do I get, Mommy?" asked Larry.

> "Some orange juice."

> "Yay," said the boy.

Tsuneo: My reaction to this fic, really.

> And so Larry got orange juice, while the rest of us drank sparkling champagne.

Rebecca: As previously indicated

> It tasted good, that sweet sharp taste with the tingly feeling from the bubbles.

Dan: The champagne tastes like champagne

> We toasted for a merry Christmas.

Tsuneo: Which was strange, since it was Easter

> I later went up to my room.

Dan: Enough with the breakneck pace. My heart can only take so much excitement.

> My personal computer was still there; I was glad Mom and Dad did not

> sell it. I turned it on and opened an Internet browser.

Rick: He used Netscape Navigator to get check on his Myspace page, and then maybe play some flash games on Newgrounds

> A news article on the browser's home page; it was about Supreme Commander Anatole Leonard

> having Christmas supper with troops deployed on the moon Tirol.

Rebecca: Leonard had flown halfway across the galaxy for a photo op while the world is under siege. Glad to see he has his priorities right.

> I accessed my e-mail.

Tsuneo: Yes fic, we are aware of how all this works. You don't need to explain it to us.

> I smiled when I read an e-mail from Melissa.

Tsuneo: It had a restraining order attached.

> It made me forget about all the stuff I had been through, at least for a while.

Dan: Melissa had forwarded him an email from her friend, the Nigerian Finance Minister

> I later went down and watched this Christmas special with Larry and his parents. It was old, even

> before my time.

Rick: It had been recorded on wax cylinder

> And yet, I enjoyed it

Rick: Especially the part when Chewie's grandfather watched porn

> and I enjoyed how Larry enjoyed it.

Dan: He was easily amused.

> It was a great distraction from my full stomach.

> But then it was finally time for Paul, Trina, and Larry to go.

Tsuneo: Aw, but we're going to miss such wonderfully realised characters as... um... them.

> We all greeted each other merry Christmas one last time.

Rebecca: His parents were counting down the seconds until he left.

> Oooooooo

> "Another toast to you," said Hermes.

Tsuneo: To nonspecific entities!

Dan: Here here!

> We downed another cocktail.

Rebecca: Keep 'em coming.

> I was with my friends at this seafood restaurant where my brother

> works. It looked pretty much the same as I remembered. The restaurant was fairly large,

Rick: It could accommodate all three Gundam fighters in Maryland

Dan: Deep cut

> with wooden tables and carpeted floors. A wooden bar was at the corner,

Rebecca: It was a wood-themed bar

> served by two bartenders, with

> shelves full of bottles in the back. It was a higher class place than the Cantina Loco.

Tsuneo: The carpet was chosen for its looks rather than its stain resistance

> The lighting

> was dim. A man with dreadlocks and dressed in a suit played the piano. The television showed a

> limbo game.

Tsuneo: It's rare that just establishing a scene can put you to sleep. Yet here we are.

> We were celebrating my departure from Jamaica.

Dan: He's leaving? I'd celebrate too

> I had to take a morning flight back to Morocco the next morning.

Tsuneo: He had to take a morning flight in the morning

> I was dressed in casual clothes,

Rick: His class 'A' casual clothes, since it was a Tuesday.

> including a new shirt that I got for Christmas. On my

> plate were a few scraps of rice and peas; I had finished the ackee and saltfish.

> "Come home safe, man," said Randy.

Rebecca: [Randy] Or at least sign me up for your life insurance.

> "Too bad Charlie is missing this," said Fred,

Rick: He's too busy up in Forks looking after his mopey daughter

> drinking a beer.

Dan: I can only imagine they all picked cheap, bottom shelf brands

> "You should plan a reunion when he gets back," I said.

> I then wondered if he would get back.

Rebecca: He also remembered that Charlie owed him a lot of money, and wondered if the two things were related.

> While he was not on Earth, his ship could be on a mission to

> find the home world or supply bases of the aliens with whom we were at war.

Rick: Oh, it's no biggie, he's just out in the farthest reaches of space beyond anything mankind has dreamed of before.

> And I knew that the

> galaxy became a more dangerous place since the First Robotech War ended.

Dan: There were muggings in the bad parts of the Orion Nebula, and people in the Lesser Magellanic Clouds put bars on the windows

> "You might not be there to see Charlie," said Hermes.

> "How is your medical school education going?" I asked.

> "I'm glad for the break," said Fred. "I picked up a few extra shifts. Got to earn me some money to

> pay for the tuition."

Rebecca: He's volunteered for so much experimental surgery

> I nodded. So many of my friends were in the restaurant industry, although some of them, like Fred,

> were doing this until they could pursue professional careers like medicine or law.

Rick: Wait, Jamaica has jobs that aren't in the tourist industry?

Tsuneo: First we're hearing about this.

> A while later, I went to the men's room.

Rebecca: I love this fic because it takes us to such exotic locations.

> I saw Paul in there.

Rick: MJ Watson was out the back pretending to be nice to Peter Parker

> "Enjoying yourself, bro," he said.

> "It's great food. A little expensive, but I earned a lot of bonus pay."

Dan: That and all the time he spends looting after every battle.

> "I admire your decision," said my brother. "Going into the Army, becoming an officer. I mean, I like

> being a waiter, and I make a lot."

Tsuneo: Said nobody ever

> "More than I make."

> "Yeah, but your work has to be fulfilling.

Rebecca: Reading this fic so far, I sincerely doubt that.

> You are defending our world from those aliens.

Rick: Something he's done very little of so far.

> I'd better get back to work. See you later."

> "You too," I said.

Dan: The conversation ended on this

> Ooooooooooooo

> "So much traffic," said Dad.

Rebecca: This is a bigger concern than the alien invasion.

> I could see the long line of cars and their red brake lights on the road leading from the A4 to Norman

> Manley International Airport.

Tsuneo: The author has done more research on Jamaica's roads than he has on the national economy. I'm not sure how I feel about it.

> I took the time to look out to the Caribbean Sea.

Rebecca: He is constantly amazed that the sea is made of water.

> The sky was pink as the sun was rising.

Rick: The sky was the colour of pink lemonade. The home-made stuff, not that store-bought slop.

> The view was always great.

> "It is the 27th," I said. "People are leaving, and some of them are even coming here to celebrate New Years."

Dan: What do you know, the airport gets busy around Christmas time

Tsuneo: I am shocked by this revelation

> "I have to work," said Dad. "People always want to party for New Years' A lot warmer here than most

> places in England or America."

Rick: Anything to add here, Florida Man?

> "Those English and American tourists are what pay for your car and house."

Rebecca: I think your father is aware of where his income derives from.

> The sky grew brighter and brighter as we inched along the road. I once again checked my boarding pass.

Rick: Yep, it was indeed a boarding pass.

> It specified my route,

Rick: And it does indeed do what a boarding pass does.

Tsuneo: This fic comes hard and fast with the shocking revelations. I don't know how we can keep up.

> going to London and then to Tangier. After going through security, I
> would not have much time before I had to board the plane.

Dan: He should do what my mother does and insist on getting to the terminal six hours early just to be sure.

> Dad made the turnoff from the road to the airport terminal.

Tsuneo: Real-time airport traffic action!

> I could see the terminal buildings. The
> sidewalks were crowded with people in all sorts of dress, all carrying bags. Some of them had huge
> trains of luggage. My only luggage was my duffel bag with my Class "A" uniform, a change of
> clothes, and other things.

Rick: A ten foot pole, fifty feet of rope, a tinderbox and bedroll

> We finally reached the British Airways terminal.

Tsuneo: Which I can only assume was located in the farthest reaches of space and time given how long this has dragged on

Rebecca: This is only the first chapter of the day

Tsuneo: Help

> "Take care," Dad said to me.

> "And you too," I replied.

Rick: Such emotion!

> I waded through the sea of people to the British Airways terminal. I went straight for the gate after
> passing through security, which only took half as long as it took to get from the house to the airport.

Dan: Traffic is backed up all the way to his departure gate.

> It was another short wait- about ten minutes, before the gate was opened and I boarded the plane.

Tsuneo: Thrill as a man boards a plane!

> I sat in the center seat, flanked by two strangers.

Dan: I can only assume that one of them is blasting loud music from their headphones and the other keeps elbowing him in the gut

> "Enjoy your Christmas, chap?" asked this brown-haired man in his forties whose accent revealed he
> was from England.

Rick: That and the presence of tea and crumpets

> "Yeah, I have to go back to Tangier. I'm in the U.N. Army."

> "I've friends who are veterans," said the English man.

> Half an hour later the plane took off for London, the engines screaming. I soon fell asleep.

> ----

Dan: That was our shortest chapter yet

Rick: And yet, it still felt like forever

> Chapter 10: Casablanca

Tsuneo: You know, the affairs of a bland designated protagonist doesn't make for one hell of a lot of beans in this mixed-up world

> The shuttle van approached the front gate of Gibraltar Base.

Rick: Past the asteroid mining

Rebecca: You keep bringing that up to the point that it is even making me sentimental for Wings of Gibraltar

Rick: What is this fic doing to us?

> The MP at the guardhouse checked our ID's, and then waved us in.

Rick: Sir, according to this, you are a form of rutabaga.

Dan: That's correct.

[Pause]

Rick: No further questions.

> After three minutes we reached the men's BOQ and I hopped out of the van, duffel bag in tow.

Tsuneo: I don't know about you, but I for one am glad that the fic describes every single mundane action of every waking moment of his life in excruciating detail

Dan: It makes for such a rich and compelling narrative

> It was early in the morning; the sun rose to the east,

Rick: Oh thank god for that. It'd be worried otherwise

> crowned by clouds.

Rebecca: It's going to be a lovely day, light cloud cover and only a small chance of alien invaders.

> I entered, seeing the familiar sights, hearing the familiar sounds, and smelling the familiar smells of
> the men's BOQ.

Rebecca: The sweet combination of cheap aftershave and desperation

> "You'd better get dressed," Lieutenant Michael Meyers said to me. "Remember the whole battalion
> is doing roll call. Class A's are the uniform for the day."

Rick: That means dayglo orange moon boots, right?

> "Yeah, I wouldn't want to be AWOL," I answered.

Dan: He managed to go AWOL in his own room

> I went to my room

Tsuneo: Why do I feel like he has a poster of Leonard in his room?

Rebecca: The character or the author?

Tsuneo: Good question.

> and quickly got into my Class "A" service uniform. One of the things I learned in

> Basic was how to put on Class "A's" in under a minute

Tsuneo: You'd be amazed how many cadets die each year trying to figure out how trousers work

Dan: I'm kinda surprised that this guy wasn't one of them

> while being able to pass inspection.

Rebecca: Meaning that he didn't have his shirt on backwards, for once.

> After that, we all went to the officers' mess.

> I heard Melissa call out my name. I looked and she was dressed in a blue outfit, the type of outfit

> typically worn by Air Force hospital officers.

Rebecca: A description that is at the same time very precise and completely useless

> "How was your Christmas?" she asked.

Dan: He was completely surrounded by jerks

> "I loved it," I said. "I had dinner with my family, and two days before I had a reunion with my friends

> from Jamaica.

Rebecca: And I got bitter about women's autonomy.

> And your Christmas?"

> "It wasn't so bad. We had a miniature Christmas celebration."

Rick: It was held in a dollhouse

> "One of my old childhood friends was on a ship for Christmas," I said.

Rebecca: Guy is a hardcore Zutarran. Yes, still after all these years.

> "I bought this at a boutique near my home."

> I gave her a silver necklace, placing it around her neck. "Merry Christmas."

> "Will you join me for breakfast?"

Tsuneo: Wow, his gift had such an impact on her

> "Sure," I said. "Let me go get some food."

Rebecca: Completely ignoring the obvious brush-off

> And so I did.

Tsuneo: Amazingly enough, they got food at the mess hall.

> I asked her about her miniature Christmas celebration.

Rick: Just a very small Christmas tree, a lonely apartment and more than a little desperation

> "Just a bunch of us girls in the little kitchen we have. Egg nog, cookies, cake."

> "Not very healthy food," I said, taking a strip of bacon.

Tsuneo: Dripping in fat as it was.

> "Now jerk turkey, that is healthy."

Dan: This message brought to you by the poultry farmers of America

> "Jerk turkey?"

Rick: Like a Jive Turkey, but mean about it

> "A Jamaican cuisine using jerk spice. It's really spicy."

Tsuneo: The spicy food is spicy. I did wonder.

> "I can see where you get your personality, Lieutenant."

Dan: Because he... likes turkey?

Rick: Maybe she means that liking turkey is his only personality trait

Dan: That would make sense

> She drank some apple juice from a paper cup.

Rick: Well, there we go folks. We have hit peak Dire Straights. Apple juice from a paper cup. Everything from there is downhill.

> "I really do want to see my family back in Georgia. I will file for a vacation request."

> "When?" I asked.

Dan: Say, maybe if there was a major family holiday, say around the end of the year?

Rebecca: She wants to see her family, but not that much.

> "Sometime in the spring. Georgia is really cold in the winter. We should take leave at the same time
> so we can fly to Georgia and see my family."

> "Only if we fly to Jamaica to see my family afterward," I said.

Rebecca: He's determined to make this as difficult as possible for himself, isn't he?

> This was it. This was the next huge step. And yet, I recalled my encounter with Ellie,

Rick: About how she'd slugged him in the gut and took his wallet

> and even

> though I enjoyed Melissa's company, in the back of my mind I was wondering if I was with her to
> make up for Ellie not getting together with me.

Rebecca: And so after a moment's joy he goes back to stewing in his own resentment

Tsuneo: Our hero

> "Come on," Lieutenant Jack Emerson said to me. "The colonel is waiting for us."

Dan [Jack]: Also I am here now

> Oooooooooo

> All of us were dressed in Class "A" service uniforms,

Tsuneo: As earlier indicated

Rick: To be fair, they could have run off and changed into bunny costumes between scenes

> and we all stood at attention in the parade
> ground. We were all organized by troop, and Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera faced us.

Dan: He's a Zentradi, he doesn't celebrate Christmas.

Rick: But he does try to be a good officer so the Robotech Masters will give him a new Battle Pod.

> We saluted him, and he returned our salute.

Rebecca: He then made an obscene gesture, and they smiled politely

> Officers from the headquarters section inspected the other officers,

Rick: The officers were graded, and some were rated as unfit for human consumption

> while sergeants from the

> headquarters inspection inspected the other enlistees. Their eyes were like hawks, inspecting the

> tiniest detail.

Dan: Is this gonna take long? Because I've got absolutely nothing scheduled, and I'm gonna be late for it.

> "Troop and company captains," said Kravshera. "Roll call." He then called them all out by name,

> and all of the troop captains answered, including Jack.

Tsuneo: All of the officers answered and one specific officer answered

> Jack then called for roll call in our troop, starting with Mike, then me, then Executive Sergeant

> Rebekah Avital, then the rest of the enlistees.

Rick: And then some guy called Steve who I think works with the quartermaster's office or something.

> After Jack was done, the colonel asked him who was present.

Dan: He just didn't want to admit that he wasn't paying attention

> "Everyone in my troop is present, sir," he said.

> Once roll call was done, Colonel Kravshera faced us.

> "We are done here," he said.

Rick: Insult Bot out

> "Now all of you maintain operational readiness."

Rebecca: Remain hyper-vigilant at all times! Never relax! Never sleep!

> "Yes, sir!" we all said.

> Oooooooooo

Tsuneo: We're well into our second chapter for the day, and I'm still waiting for a scene that has a purpose.

Rebecca: We're on our third day of this thing and I haven't found one yet.

> My role in maintaining operational readiness was filling out paperwork in the 18th ATAC troop office.

Tsuneo: You get the feeling he really enjoys this part of his job

> Jack was out in the field with Sergeant Avital.

Rick: Frolicking in the field, that is.

> Private First Class Glenn La Belle had been assigned to police the troop office.

Dan: His job was paperclip patrol

> "Here is the list of the office inventory, sir," he said to me, handing me a slip of paper.

Dan; According to this, we're down two ball-point pens. Launch an investigation immediately!

> "And all of the office equipment is in order and working, sir."

Rebecca: Every stapler thoroughly disassembled, cleaned and inspected

> "And how are you doing, Private?" I asked.

> "I sometimes miss living in the BEQ, sir," he said.

Tsuneo: He'd rather live in a shared hut with a bunch of other men than in an apartment with his wife. Clearly his marriage is going well.

> I recalled the camaraderie the men in the BOQ had.

Rebecca: He fondly remembers flicking naked guys in the backside with his towel in the locker room.

> "Report to Sergeant Avital. I am sure she has a suitable duty for you."

Dan [LaBelle]: I thought she was out frolicking in the fields, sir

Rick: Well, um, wait until she gets back then.

[Pause]

Dan [LaBelle]: Any idea how long she'll be, sir?

Rick: No clue.

[Pause]

Dan [LaBelle]: So, um, nice weather we're having

Rick: Yeah, it is.

Dan [LaBelle]: Yeah.

[Pause]

Dan [LaBelle]: You want I should go count the paperclips again?

> "Yes, sir," he said, leaving the office.

> Oooooooooo

> "All right team, there's the hill," said Jack. "Let's change it."

Rebecca: I'll get the clean nappy, you get the talcum powder

> It was only a hill in a programming sense, of course.

Tsuneo: It's hill status had not been verified by the international committee on hill standards

> We were in the hovertank simulators conducting a drill. We were up against another team.

Dan: It was the Mets, so we were feeling pretty good about it.

> Our objective was to capture a hill,

Rick: To make it extra interesting, they didn't say which hill it was.

> which another team was holding.

Dan: But if you hold the hill for more than three seconds then your team takes a penalty

> Colonel Kravshera and his staff were monitoring us.

Tsuneo: Not even trying to hide the disappointment on his face

> The simulators and the equipment were expensive, from what I had heard.

Dan: I wondered if I broke it if they'd take it out of my pocket money.

> It was similar to what I had worked with when I was in hovertank school.

Rebecca: He nearly flunked out of Hovertank school. He had to take remedial Hammer's Slammers classes to make up for it

> It was still cheaper than using the protocluture and ammunition in a live fire exercise,

Dan: With less chance of somebody 'accidentally' calling down an airstrike on him again

> which we had done a couple of times before the war. Fighting the

> enemy bioroids did provide plenty of live fire practice.

Rick: They practiced by taking part in real battles

> "Okay, this is what we got," said Sergeant Avital. "They have the high ground, so they have an
> advantage."

Dan: Anything to add, Obi-Wan Kenobi?

> I did not understand the reason for doing this in real life.

Rick: But this was the battle mode the most players voted for.

> In real life, we would go around them, or at least call for an air strike or an orbital strike.

Rebecca: Or at the very least, ask nicely

> But in this exercise, there were no reinforcements.

Dan: There were no reinforcements, only Zuul

> "Take Ducasse and La Belle and screen for any enemy activity," Jack said to me.

Rick: The unit's two best men. Or their worst! We have no way of knowing

> And so I did,

Tsuneo: Does he really need to confirm what he did every single time?

Rick: You never know, he could go off on a tangent. He could abduct the sergeant and fly him to Johannesburg for all we know.

Tsuneo: Okay, so what are the chances that he doesn't immediately do what he said?

Rick: Pretty much none.

> operating the controls so that the simulated hovertank would move in the simulated world.

Rebecca: And give him simulated motion sickness.

> The simulated world had tall trees,

Tsuneo: Simulated tall trees?

> large enough for us to use as cover.

Rebecca: Pay no attention to us, we are a shrub. A heavily armed, giant robot shrub, but...

> "I don't see any enemy activity," said La Belle.

> "I see something," said Private First Class Philip Ducasse. I looked at the screen and saw two VHT-1's in battloid mode on the hillside.

Rick: How did he miss that?

Dan: You really get the feeling he's not the sharpest tool in the shed.

Rick: Compared to who? The protagonist?

Dan: Well...

> "All right," I said. "Jack, we need some cannon fire..."

> "Look out!" yelled La Belle.

Rick: Well there's your cannon fire.

> The screen went blank, and the message "You Are Dead" appeared.

Rebecca: Well that went better than I expected

Tsuneo: True. I expected them to somehow die during the boot sequence

> I hopped out of the simulator. The room we were in was huge, with simulators and cables.

Rick: And nothing else

> A control room was on the other side of the window.

Dan: Inside which the admins considered screwing with the scenario for laughs

> In case any of us "died", we were told to wait outside until the simulation was finished.

Rebecca: To encourage participation, self-kills were banned from using the coffee machine.

> I went out to the unremarkable lobby, reading some of the magazines on the table.

Rebecca: You get the feeling this happens to him a lot.

> A few minutes later, Jack and the others came out.

> "You need to stop dying like that," Mike said to me.

Dan: Try to die in other ways instead.

> "You're the one who's gonna have to do the performance evaluations for our troop."

Rick: Not if I die too!

> "At least you'll have something to do before you go to the New Year's Party," said Jack.

Tsuneo: That's... good? That he won't be relaxing? I guess?

> I walked back to the troop office. It is a bit chilly outside, being the beginning of winter in this part of the world. I entered the office, noticing the difference in temperature.

Tsuneo: Some jerk insisted on having the thermostat turned all the way up and turning the office into an oven

> I accessed a computer terminal in the office. Sergeant Avital had shown me how to use it,

Rick: Previously he'd spent hours staring in confused horror at the power button.

> to access the battalion's computer database to do things like simulation evaluations.

Dan: He snuck a look at his own record. It was crushing.

> This was not a multiple choice test where I would simply take out an answer book and compare it with the answers on the tests.

Tsuneo: Even then he still somehow managed to get it wrong

> As I heard the audio and looked at a bird's eye view of the simulation,
> I would have to take notes of what we did and how each soldier performed.

Rick: He was going to make sure that dude who died first got a really savage review.

> I knew that the headquarters staff was doing the same to judge the troops as a whole.

Dan: Face it, this is not going to look good on your resume

> I could see the part where I "died".

Rick: Just after he announced he was three days from retirement

> "Watching the game, sir?" asked Sergeant Avital.

> "Yes," I said, even as I scribbled notes about those of us who played the war game. "Still, it's just a game. I mean, those simulations, if you get killed, you just go back to the office. In real life..."

Dan: You get a date from a medic. Wait...

> "Well, Lieutenant, it is better than nothing.

Rebecca: Yes, I'm sure he learned a lot from 'blam, game over' just now.

> And they are cheaper than live exercises. We can't very well blow each other up during training."

Tsuneo: And yet, I get the feeling that he and LaBelle would somehow manage it

> I understood her point. "I wonder if I would be able to actually do that in real life,

Dan: Blow up my squadmates, that is.

> knowing that I or my friends could get killed."

Rebecca: He contemplated the idea for whole seconds before wondering when they would have lunch

> "I still wonder that, sir," said the sergeant, "and I've been in combat more than you."

Rick: And she's got the experience points to prove it

> I looked at the papers beside the keyboard, continuing the evaluations.

Dan: No time for lollygagging, woman! I've got paperwork to do!

> Ooooooooo

> "I have to admit, you are a better dancer than the first time," said Melissa.

Dan: He's only stepped on her foot three times

> "But you have a lot to learn."

Rick: Like complex chemical formulas and calculus

> We were in the O-club.

Tsuneo: The club run by Paptimus Sirocco

> I had earlier picked up Melissa at the women's BOQ,

Dan: The Quonset hut is really feeling left out.

> soon after I finished the training evaluations for my troop.

Rebecca: It took him a while to figure out how to stop spelling 'recommend.'

> The club was currently decorated with a banner reading "Happy New Year", for it was New Year's
> Eve.

Dan: Helvetica Standard really is the kind of guy who needs to point this out.

> The plasma televisions

Rick: Yes, but what model were they? We need to know!

> showed New Year's celebrations in time zones ahead of ours.

Dan: Those guys in Ulan Bataar really know how to party

> All of us were dressed in dressy civilian clothes. I wore
> khaki pants and a collared polo shirt, and Melissa wore a red casual dress.

Rick: Well, one of you was dressed up at least.

> After the song was done, we sat down at a circular table with Jack and Lieutenant Nina Washington,

Rebecca: [Nina] Do we have to sit with them?

> who had come here on leave and was staying at a guest lodge that the base offered to UEF
> servicepersons as hotel lodging.

Rebecca: But did it come with a complimentary breakfast buffet?

> Other officers in the battalion sat at adjacent tables, nursing their
> drinks. Just outside the club were uniformed military police.

Tsuneo: The MPs know what goes on in these parties. They won't get caught out like last year.

> "We get to ring in the New Year before anyone in Jamaica does," I said.

Dan: He'll take his wins where he can

> "I once celebrated New Year's in a club in Monument City, back when I was a butter bar," said Jack.

Tsuneo: Yes, and?

Rick [Jack]: I got nothing, sorry

> "It has a more exciting nightlife than here," said Nina, sipping her drink.

Rebecca: What with it being the world's capitol and all

> "I might have actually been at the same club as Jack, and didn't know it."

Dan: I mean, how could you not notice his stunningly charismatic presence?

> "Yeah, I mean those clubs were so crowded, the colonel could have been there and we wouldn't
> have seen him."

Rebecca: But we would have heard him yelling about how the Malcontents will rise again.

> I smiled. Colonel Kravshera did have a noticeable skin color.

Dan: His skin was indeed a colour

> "I was thinking of taking some paid leave in the summer," said Melissa.

Tsuneo: Didn't we just go over this?

Rick: Could have. Maybe it was the last scene. Maybe it was three years ago. Impossible to tell.

> "Go back to Georgia, and then take a flight to Jamaica to see what it's like?"

Dan: Wait, she actually wants to go with Dingus Frotherington here? What's wrong with her?

> "Have you been to the Caribbean?" asked Nina. "I had a trip to Barbados two summers ago."

> "No, I haven't. The closest I've been is the east coast of Florida.

Rick: She went to the Florida Hell Gardens and fought giant mutant bugs

Dan: How is that any different to regular Florida?

Rick: Well...

> Look, there are my friends."

> "Shall I join you?" I asked.

> Melissa went to another table

Tsuneo: Distinctly not answering him.

> where two ladies were sitting. I had already met one of them before, a

> dark-haired lady named Tam, who worked at the base hospital. The other lady had red hair. Tam

> wore a blue dress, while the red-haired lady wore a green dress.

Rick: This is one of those logic puzzles, right? Like I need to figure out which one is the murderer or something

> "Hello," said Tam.

> "Hi there," I said.

> "I'm Kristin," said the red-haired lady. "I'm a medical officer at the Air Force hospital."

Rebecca: This is the entire extent of her character. Treasure it.

> I introduced myself.

Tsuneo: Lieutenant Designated Protagonist

> "Nice to meet you," I said.

Rebecca: They disagree.

> "So this is the man you're talking about," said Kristin.

Rick: [Kristin] Well, mostly sobbing.

> She looked at me. "You should watch out for Melissa here. She can be wild."

Rebecca: As has been aptly demonstrated so far

> I laughed. "And you have been here how long?" I asked.

> "Three years."

Tsuneo: About as long as we've been reading this fic, really

> "Do you have any plans for the next year?" asked Tam.

Dan: Dunno. I guess we'll see how the alien invasion goes

> "We're thinking of taking paid leave either in late spring or early summer," I said.

Rebecca: [Melissa] Who's this "we," buster?

> "That's a few months from now," said Melissa.

Dan: Having just remember how the calendar works

> "I'm thinking a weekend trip to Casablanca sometime this month."

> "It's winter," said Kristin. "Not great beach weather."

Rebecca: It's also a warm Mediterranean climate on the edge of the largest desert in the world. Just saying.

> "Better than spending the weekend here, not that the O-club is a bad place."

Dan: But it's not the best holiday destination either

> I walked a few feet to join my friends.

Tsuneo: It was an epic journey.

> We all had another round of drinks.

> "I wonder what sort of New Year's celebration they have on that planet you're from," I asked Mike.

Rebecca: Well the planet is actually a moon and so a new year comes either every month or every ten years. After a while you kinda get over it

> "Glorie Colony," said Mike.

Rick: Hey guys, Mike's from Glorie Colony!

Dan: Really? Mike's from Glorie Colony?

Tsuneo: I didn't know Mike was from Glorie Colony.

Rebecca: Maybe if Mike had mentioned he was from Glorie Colony then we'd know he's from Glorie Colony.

> "Basically we go out at night and down a few shots of whiskey.

Rick: And then go out and fight dolphins. Its a weird tradition, I know

> I remember one time when we saw Glorie's two moons shining at the time.

Rick: But they cut that shot.

> It was the sticks back during my formative years. Wooden buildings and sidewalks in the town.

Tsuneo: Sounds like a really crappy way to establish a colony.

> We had to use an outhouse.

Dan: And to get there he had to go uphill in the snow. We get it.

> The only place that has concrete buildings and running water was the military base."

> "You must have moved there when you were what, ten?" I asked.

Rebecca: A new life awaited him in the off-world colonies.

> "Eleven years old," said Mike. "On Earth we did not have much, so my parents decided that there

> would be opportunities on Glorie."

Rick: And one of them became the planet's top lumberjack, so there you go.

> "And what do your parents do?"

> "Scratch dirt and make babies.

Rebecca: What a fulfilling life

> That was the reason the Glorie Colonization Bureau accepted them;

> they were healthy adults of breeding age.

Rebecca: And I'm sure they could have thought of a less creepy way to put it

> Got to have a large population for the colony to be able to feed and clothe itself."

Dan: Native ecosystems won't devastate themselves

> "I thought a large population would be poorer," I said, remembering the overpopulated impoverished

> nations of Earth.

Tsuneo: Didn't something like ninety percent of the population die a decade and a half ago?

Rick: It doesn't really seem to have rated a mention.

> "Well, when nearly every hand is needed to grow food, there aren't that many people left to make

> other things like tools and parts, let alone spacecraft.

Rebecca: They really didn't plan this colony out, did they?

> Things like video games and cell phones are much more common on Earth.

Dan: The essentials of life

Rick: It's really hard to be a streamer on Glorie when there's only three people with working internet

> Plus we have a lot more clubs and restaurants in Tangier alone than in all of Glorie Colony."

Tsuneo: Glorie colony's TripAdvisor section must be really short

> "And you joined the Army because you wanted to visit Earth."

> "Pretty much. Interstellar travel is expensive

Tsuneo: [Mike] I saved up all my pocket money and still couldn't buy a spaceship.

> and the only way of leaving Glorie is to join the UEF."

Rick: He tried digging an escape tunnel off-world. Took him a while to figure out why it wasn't working

> "Of course, they could have stationed you on the base on Glorie Colony," I said.

> "Yeah, we go where the Army sends us," said Mike.

> "How many people live in the colony?" I asked.

Rick: 2d4 times Ten Thousand. There's a fifty percent chance of Micronized Zentraedi.

> "When I left, it was about fifty thousand people, not including the soldiers stationed at the military

> base," said Mike. "The colony is heavily subsidized by the United Earth Government."

Tsuneo: The entire colony is a massive tax write-off

> "They want to make sure humanity survives in case of a war with aliens. Like what we have now."

Dan: Do they, though?

Rick: I see very little evidence.

> Soon the clock approached midnight. We watched the screen as it counted down towards New

> Year's for Morocco.

> "Happy New Year!" we all shouted. I gave Melissa the first kiss of the new year.

Rebecca: And she gave him the first mace of the new year.

> A few other couples, including Jack and Nina, also kissed,

Rebecca: While LaBelle and Ducasse made out in the back

> anticipating a bright future even in these trying times.

Tsuneo: The alien invasion having barely rated a mention

> "Join me for the first dance of the new year," I said.

> "I am filling a little drunk," answered Melissa. "But okay."

Rebecca: And that's the secret to their relationship.

> I took her on the dance floor. I felt so great, like my troubles were deeply buried like a scrap of paper

> in a cluttered room.

Dan: Probably one with something important written on it that he would fret about later.

> Ooooooooo

> "How are you doing?" asked Melissa as I saw her in the bathroom mirror.

Rick: He'd accidentally fallen into the Fallout 4 character creation screen

> "Just shaving," I said, as the razor made a track through the shaving cream. "I heard ladies shave.

Rebecca: He's yet to figure out how women work.

> Maybe I can help you."

Rebecca: I heard you do this thing, so I automatically assume you need me to do this thing.

> Melissa and I decided to take a trip to Casablanca the second weekend after New Year's Day, as we
> both had the weekend off.

Tsuneo: And the alien war robots were not being that much of a bother at the moment

> The weather was cloudy, not like a warm day in Casablanca would have
> in the summer, let alone the warm days in Kingston, Port Antonio, or Montego Bay.

Dan: Not sure why I mentioned those places, but there you go.

> But while the
> beach boardwalk was not crowded, it did provide a quiet atmosphere, which we appreciated.
> Gibraltar Base was never that quiet.

Dan: It took him a while to figure out that the army base was not the quiet and relaxing place he'd hoped it would be.

> We had stayed in a hotel that had been constructed about ten years ago. From the outside, it was a
> glass and steel structure, like a box bent facing away from the Atlantic Ocean. Our room had a king-
> sized bed, a Toshiba plasma television,

Rick: TV brand is established. Normalcy is restored.

> and a desk with padded chairs. A soft carpet covered the floor.

> "I say we have ourselves a nice breakfast," said Melissa. "Just let me put on my makeup."

Rebecca: She said, bluntly ignoring his crack about shaving.

> One of the things I liked about her is that she can put on makeup and jewelry quickly; I presumed
> that it was something she learned in the Air Force.

Rebecca: The Air Force has the best beauticians

> We left the room, walked down the hallway to the elevator, and then pressed the button for the
> lobby.

Tsuneo: Dire Straights!

> After walking through the marble-tiled floor of the lobby, we reached this little café where the
> hotel served breakfast. Menus were printed in Arabic, Spanish, Italian, and of course, English.

Dan: With various subtitle options available

> "I remember a trip my girlfriends and I took to the beach here last summer," said Melissa, sitting at a
> table covered in a green tablecloth.

Rebecca: [Melissa] It was so much better than this.

Tsuneo: I think that's a given.

> "The beaches were a lot more crowded."

Rick: The mayor had refused to close them despite all the shark attacks

> "I don't mind," I said. "We don't have to squeeze our way through a crowd every time we go out."

Rebecca: Other people infuriate him

> A dark-haired waitress took our order. I had some fried eggs and bacon and toast, and Melissa had
> eggs and sausage and some hash browns.

Dan: My, what an exotic breakfast

Rick: I love that he's sampling the local cuisine

> I had ordered tomato juice for a drink, and Melissa ordered orange juice.

Tsuneo: We're really doing this, aren't we?

> The hotel breakfast was superior to what was served in the officers' mess in
> Gibraltar Base, which was why I had to pay more for the hotel breakfast.

Rebecca: And yet he also wonders why he has no friends

> I could taste the fried eggs and bacon,

Tsuneo: In a shocking revelation that will change life as you know it, it turns out that eggs and bacon
tastes like eggs and bacon.

Rick: Only Dire Straights dares to bring you such controversial truths.

> and the tangy taste of the tomato juice, and feel a slight rumbling.

> "Do you feel that?" asked Melissa. "Is that an earthquake?"

> "I don't know," I replied.

Rebecca: [Melissa] Well I hope the Earth is moving for someone, because it didn't for me last night.

> And then I heard this loud, high-pitched horn. It sounded like an air raid siren.

> "I think our little vacation is over," I said.

Tsuneo: The alien invasion is just so inconvenient

> Gulping down the tomato juice, I ran to the elevator. It felt so long for the elevator to open and then
> take me to the floor where our room was.

Dan: In case of emergency, do not use lifts.

> I had to insert the room key three times before the electronic lock released the door.

Rick: He forgot how doors worked

> I turned on the television in our room, which I had set to run in English.

Rebecca: Because I'm sure there would have been no news reports in the lobby.

> "The military has confirmed an ongoing attack in Casablanca," said a Moroccan government official
> whose voice was clearly dubbed. "We have been informed the enemy Bioroids have landed in the
> city.

Tsuneo: The Bioroids are savouring the local cuisine and giving the city positive reviews.

> The Royal Army and Navy are already engaging the enemy, and we have requested backup
> from the United Earth Forces."

Dan: You'd think that they would have called him to inform him of all this by now

> "So it is an enemy attack," said Melissa, who had come with me to the room.

Tsuneo: He's kind of forgotten about her

> "Good thing I came prepared," I said. I recalled that the 17th ATAC troop was on-call this weekend,
> so they would already have scrambled,

Dan: And he hadn't even gotten to steal the little shampoo bottles yet.

> and Colonel Kravshera and the rest of the 6th Battalion
> would catch up with them shortly. I took a suit of MARPAT camouflage from my duffel bag.

Rebecca: He'd considered getting changed and going to the beach instead, but figured this might be a better idea

> "You'd better get suited up," I said even as I started out the door.

> "I'm not a fighter," said Melissa.

> "You're a healer."

Rick: Although she can DPS during downtimes between mechanics

> "I only do physical therapy."

> "There will be wounded. We will need all the help we can get, madam."

Rebecca: He's going to nag her into helping others

Tsuneo: What a lovely couple

> "Thank you for your advice, Lieutenant."

Rebecca: [Melissa] But I haven't been recalled, so I'm hitting the beach.

> I picked up the phone. Not surprisingly, the phone line was down.

Rick: But he had to spend a minute shouting into it to be sure

> Rushing down to the lobby and out the door, we could see smoke coming from every direction.

Tsuneo: There was nothing outside but smoke.

> I

> looked up and saw one of the alien ships, which was probably providing cover fire for the invading
> forces.

Dan: I mean, for all you know it could just be looking for a place to park

> I knew I had to join the local forces, if I could not link up with my battalion.

Tsuneo: I'm sure they'll have a spare hovertank just waiting for him.

> We went down to the parking garage where we had parked our rental car, a red Volkswagen Jetta.

Rick: I like this fic for its imaginative depictions of advanced technology

> Getting into the Jetta, I started the engine and drove the car out of the garage and onto the streets
> of Casablanca.

Dan: He tried to drive through the wall first. That didn't work out so well.

> "Where are we going?" asked Melissa.

Rebecca: He's determined not to miss out on the lunch buffet.

> "We have to contact Gibraltar Base somehow," I said.

Dan: No futuristic personal communicator handy?

Rick: Guy doesn't even have a Nokia brick.

> The streets were mostly empty; most of the
> civilians had pulled over and sought shelter from the bioroids.

Tsuneo: He did spot some looters, so in deference to the urgency of the situation, he pulled over and joined in.

> There were a few military vehicles driving down the streets.

Rick: They're heading for the beach, too.

> There was a roadblock ahead, manned by green-uniformed, lightly-armored soldiers. I immediately
> got out.

> "Can any of you speak English?" I asked.

Rebecca: [Soldier] I can say 'condescending arse' in five different languages.

> One of the soldiers, a young man in his early twenties, approached. "Yes, I speak English."

> "I'm with the U.N. Army," I said. "She's a medic with the U.N. Air Force."

> "We asked for reinforcements."

> "My fellow troops should be arriving soon," I said.

Tsuneo: With absolutely no basis whatsoever.

> "They are the 6th Hovertank Battalion. I need an airlift to join my troops."

> "Let me write it down."

Dan: He took a memo in the middle of the alien attack

> And so he did.

Rick: Ah, the comforting call of 'and so he did' provides relief in these trying times.

> He then talked to another man, who was presumably his superior officer.

Tsuneo: It really doesn't sound like they're making much of a fuss about this.

> I looked

> around, seeing smoke coming from the distance. I wondered if this was happening elsewhere in the
> world. Were the aliens invading Jamaica?

Rick: And if so, would they disrupt the tourist industry that is the backbone of the country's economy?

> It would be night there.

> I heard one of the men yell. I looked up and could see the bioroids riding on their flying sleds, intent
> on destroying everything on the way to their goal.

Dan: Whatever that was.

Rick: Have they considered asking?

> "Take cover!" I yelled.

> And I did.

Rick: The high-speed alternative to 'and so I did,' for emergency use only.

> We were clearly at a disadvantage from the enemy approaching the ground.

Tsuneo: Given that they're giant robots with energy weapons and all he has is a uniform.

> I took cover behind a car just before I heard a blast. I peeked and noticed rubble.

> "Are you all right?" I asked Melissa.

> She nodded.

Rebecca: And that's enough of Melissa.

> I looked up and saw fighter jets engaging the enemy spacecraft, and a few of them
> exploding into a fireball.

Rick: The typical fate of a Southern Cross fighter

> For a brief moment I wondered if they were drones,

Tsuneo: Can't you tell from their scintillating personalities?

> or if the drones had all been shot down and the live pilots were now engaging the enemy.

Rick: Given how every single battle ends for Southern Cross aircraft... good luck with that

> Ahead, I could see the bioroids landing on the street.

> There was no argument. We had to retreat.

Dan: It took him a while to figure out that running away from the alien war robots was a good idea.

> And we did. We ran as fast as we could, turning a few corners and passing buildings, barely
noticing

> their features.

Rebecca: When fleeing from the enemy you have to get your priorities straight. Pausing to examine the local architecture is probably not that important

> We then came across civilians running in the opposite direction, and I could see way. There were
> three bioroids on the street, flanked by enemy troops.

> And we ran along with them, fleeing towards safety. I was hoping a helicopter or something could
> pick me up and bring me to my battalion.

Dan: I mean, sure, there's innocent civilians caught up in this alien attack, but its all about you.

> And then our path was blocked. Our only escape was into the buildings.

> We fled into a building that looked like it was a flower shop.

Tsuneo: It was all the flowers on display that clued him in.

> It was now packed with people who were seeking refuge from the invading aliens.

Rick: As well as Tommy Wesieau and a dog

> Many of the people looked at me.

Dan: He'd just farted.

> "Listen up," I said. "We just have to stay low. Reinforcements are on the way."

Rick: Meanwhile, Melissa has fled to a Dippin' Dots down the street.

Dan: If she's going to die, she's going to die with a bowl of ultimate brownie batter.

> Suddenly, the enemy troops busted in and opened fire. They all held their weapons at us.

Tsuneo: They opened fire and they held their guns

> There was no way to win.

Tsuneo: And he died. The end.

Rebecca: Well, it was far too long, but at least it was very dull.

> ----

> Chapter 11: From Up Above to Down Under

> We could be in the other side of the galaxy.

> We were inside this huge room, with only few rugs to sleep on.

Rick: You go on a budget package tour, this is what you'll get

> The only light came from dim light fixtures in a ceiling twenty feet above us.

Rebecca: You know, they're just not getting the most out of their space on this giant alien spaceship.

> We were given regular intervals of food and water, the food being some sort of cracker.

Dan: He immediately asked if it was gluten free

> I could not tell how much time it had been since the battle in Casablanca.

Rick: Dude, it's been five minutes

> I could still remember being marched into the enemy ship.

Tsuneo: Hold on a moment. This feels like a plot development!

Dan: Wait, what?

Rick: It does! It's actually happening!

> I remember the feeling of being

> squeezed against the floor as the ship took off, hearing sounds of explosions from outside the ship,

> until no sound could be heard from outside.

Rebecca: The aliens had soundproofed their ship

Rick: Probably got tired of being woken up by late-night traffic noise

> I then remembered being marched along with the others through these corridors, some of them

> wide, others narrow. The march seemed to take a very long time.

Tsuneo: But at least he was getting his steps in.

> I looked around. I could see air vents, but nothing big enough for us to crawl around.

Dan: There was a good chance that Tom Cruise was in there anyway

> One thing I noticed is that Melissa Sharp was not here with us.

Rick: She had requested a separate abduction.

> Did she escape capture? Was she being held in another room? Or was she dead?

Rebecca: And, if so, could he somehow blame his ex for it?

> "I wonder what is next," said Al Badri.

> She had recognized me,

Tsuneo: By his... because of his, um... since he looks like... Well, you know.

> after all these months. She was a police sergeant in Tangier, and I remember when I first met her,

Dan: It was love at first police brutality.

> when a sergeant from our battalion had been arrested for drunk driving.

Dan: She's doing better than I am. I can barely remember the last chapter

Tsuneo: I'm trying not to remember it myself

Dan: Good plan

> "I was on my way to visit my sister in Tangier," she had said.

Rebecca: Didn't ask!

> "I took cover when the attack started, but then the troops came."

Rebecca: Definitely don't care!

> And one thing I noted about the troops is that they look human. Certainly no group from Earth

> outside the United Earth Government could afford to build a fleet of starships.

Rick: Not even the evil space Soviets

Rebecca: I feel that I'm better off not knowing

Rick: Definitely

- > I remember from
- > history lessons about the First Robotech War that the study of Zentraedi physiology proves a
- > common origin with humanity.

Dan: That and, you know, his commander is one

Tsuneo: I doubt the thought even once crossed his mind

- > I wondered if these people had a similar common origin.

Dan: Hmm...

Rick: What's up?

Dan: I've got an idea for a bit, and I'm not sure if I should call him Pumpernickel Humperdink or Humperdink Pumpernickel.

Rick: It's a tough one.

Rebecca: I'd say go for Pumpernickel Humperdink. The shorter second name makes it snappier.

Dan: Cool. I'll do that.

[Pause]

Rick: Well?

Dan: Well what?

Rick: Aren't you going to do your bit?

Dan: Nah, the moment's gone.

- > And I wondered if they had spies on Earth or even humanity's colonies outside Earth's solar system.

Rebecca: This is a train of thought that leads you to a cabin in the woods and a tinfoil hat

- > There was not much to do, being held here.

Tsuneo: No bog rolls to count.

- > A while later some people arrived. I immediately noticed three old men, all dressed similarly

Rebecca: They're here for the toga party.

- > and all
- > looking alike, as if they were triplets. I also noticed six women with them, all in dressed and looking
- > pretty much alike save for slight differences in hair color.

Rick: Because this is Southern Cross, it could be deliberate, an animation error or down to different tape masters. We may never know!

- > One of the old men asked one of the women a question in their language. Another woman then said
- > something to one of the men. If only I understood them.

Dan: Baggins McShaggins here barely understands his own language.

- > I continued listening for a while.

Tsuneo: He couldn't understand a word of it, and yet it was the most interesting conversation he'd ever had

- > Some of the guards, dressed in body armor and bearing rifles, went into the room. They grabbed
- > two of the prisoners and escorted them away.

Rebecca: Those two won the grand prize and are going on a Fijian cruise.

Tsuneo: So this whole thing is a lottery?

Rebecca: It's a weird system, but it works.

> Then they all left. Some of us were talking, probably asking where the guards took them.

Dan: That was about, like, other people, so I didn't listen.

> I wondered if they were being moved to another ship, or even if
> they will be put to death.

Rick: I wondered if we'd be getting eggs for breakfast.

> I was no closer to understanding our enemy, or figuring out where we were in relation to Earth.

Dan: [Shouting] Space is up!

Rebecca: Thank you, Tom.

> I did get to recognize the people. Most of them had olive skin and dark hair, the type that southern
> Europeans and northern Africans had. There were a few fair-skinned folk with lightly colored hair,
> and two black-skinned people who presumably were descended from Africans living south of the
> Sahara.

Rebecca: This fic manages to make everything sound as awkward as possible. It's a gift

> Almost everyone spoke Arabic; there were only a handful of English speakers.

Dan: His solution was to should loudly at people

> I looked around, almost as if I was expecting for the layout of the room to change, for a door to
> suddenly appear out of nowhere.

> But it did not happen.

Tsuneo: So he kept searching for hidden doors and traps no less

> I kept wondering what I could do, what we could do.

Rick: He tried making a kite out of his underwear, but it didn't help.

> We would not know where on this ship we
> would go. And even if we took over the alien vessel, how would we get back to Earth?

> Unless a Space Marine platoon rescues us,

Dan: It's going to be the Ultrasmurfs, isn't it? It's always the Ultrasmurfs.

> or our captors exchange us for prisoners held on Earth, we would be at their mercy.

Rebecca: Well, nothing left but to pray for divine intervention.

> Oooooooooo

> It was boring.

Tsuneo: The fic said it, not me.

> The lights above us were constant; we had no watches, and there was no way to tell
> how much time there was.

Rick: Everyone's mobile phone had run out of power at once.

- > Some of the people tried to speak broken English with me. Aya- that was
- > Sergeant Al Badri's first name- translated for me. I had learned some details of their lives.

Dan: I didn't care.

- > Most of
- > them were Moroccan natives, while a few of them had immigrated from countries as diverse as
- > Greece, Russia, and Ghana.

- > I wondered what was going on back on Earth.

Tsuneo: And that's enough about his fellow prisoners.

- > Did Jack and the others know I was missing?

Dan: And would they even notice?

- > And what happened to Melissa?

Rebecca: I'm sure he'll find some way to resent her for it no less

- > Or had the enemy already conquered Earth?

Rick: Maybe they'd gotten bored and sodded off back to Tirol.

- > The enemy guards took some of the prisoners away. I knew one of them- a man who worked at a
- > factory in Casablanca, and who was raising a family.

Rick: They'd met once at the same Furry convention

- > Some of the people taken away begged and screamed.

Rebecca: Some of them demanded to see the manager.

- > None of the people that they took ever came back.

- > Were we to be used for slave labor? Or even food?

Dan: I'm getting a real 'To Serve Man' feeling here

- > "I'm wondering how to get out of here," I said.

Tsuneo: Took him a while.

- > "Maybe we can rush the guards when they come to take more prisoners away."

Rebecca: [Aya] Okay, but those guys have guns and body armour. What do you have?

Rick: I've got my underwear kite.

Rebecca: [Aya] Sure, you try that. See how far it gets you.

- > "And then what?" asked Aya. "Even if we break out of this room, where would we go? We're in a
- > spaceship in deep space.

Rick: Actually it's been squatting on a vacant lot in Detroit for three months. Nobody's noticed.

- > And even if we managed to take over this ship before the crew self-
- > destructs it, who would take this thing back to Earth? Or one of our space stations?"

Tsuneo: Being a little bit defeatist here, aren't you?

> I kept thinking. If I remembered correctly from the history of the First Robotech War,

Dan: There was like, this guy, in a plane, then someone was singing, and stuff blew up. It was awesome.

> there had been

> some Earth people who had been captured by the Zentraedi, taken to their headquarters, and they

> all had managed to escape and get back to Earth.

Dan: They'd disguised themselves as old-timey washerwomen

> I briefly wondered if we could do the same thing. Then I remembered the Zentraedi were giants,

Rebecca: The little things you forget

> and the Earth prisoners hid in little nooks and crannies, and maybe even inside a box,

Tsuneo: A dog had obligingly peed on it

> to escape detection. And they were lucky to hitch a ride on an Earth-bound vessel.

Rick: Also one of them had a giant robot

Dan: That too

> But the enemy here was roughly our size. We would not be able to hide

> from the ship's crew so easily.

Rick: So time for plan B. They open a window and lower themselves out with a rope made from their bedsheets

> "I hate this,"

Tsuneo: My review of the fic so far

> I said. "I hate feeling so...so helpless."

> "You shouldn't say that," said Aya.

Rebecca: [Aya] I mean, you are helpless.

Dan: Yeah...

Rebecca: [Aya] And dull, lifeless, miserable...

Dan: Okay.

Rebecca: [Aya] Massively entitled and incapable of empathy...

Dan: Yeah, I get it already.

> But it was true. No matter how much I wished for it to be true, it was a fact that there was nothing I
> could do now.

Tsuneo: It's a rare talent that can make abduction by mysterious alien invaders boring, yet here we are.

> And wishing for a Space Marine rescue

Dan: Well, it's a Space Hulk, so they'll probably be eaten by Genestealers. Sorry, they'll probably
lightly
brush off some Genestealers.

> was as useful as wishing for the enemy to simply release us on Earth.

Tsuneo: And so they were simply released on Earth.

> More and more of us were taken.

Rebecca: They're taking the most fit and capable prisoners, so obviously he'll be last.

> And then one of the guards was looking right at me.

Rick: Wait... is that... Jerry Clone? How are ya?

> They aimed their rifles at me and said something to me.

Tsuneo: He was trying to figure out how to turn subtitles on

> I looked around. There was no way I could

> resist. I knew that the first fist raised in defiance would be met with gunfire.

Dan: Well nothing to do but accept the inevitable probing

> And so I marched along with them. Aya was also going with us, along with this blind man who had to

> be led by hand.

Rick: The aliens need to work on making their space ship more accessible

Dan: I bet they don't have a single wheelchair ramp

> The corridors were brightly lit, as compared to the room in which we were held. I

> noticed a few crewmen walking past us. I wondered what society these people had.

Tsuneo: But I didn't ponder that in any way, shape or form.

> We kept marching and marching, walking through the corridors and riding in some lifts.

Dan: Oh boy, lifts!

Rick: What's so good about lifts?

Dan: I mean, they're not corridors.

Rick: You know what, I'll take that.

> I noticed writing on the walls and some of the doors; it would be as legible to me as Chinese symbols.

Tsuneo: For all he knows, they could have been in Chinese

Rick: Maybe they're inside the Foxcomm factory

Tsuneo: You know, that would explain a lot.

> I wondered if we were going in circles, as all of the corridors looked the same.

Rebecca: And all of them looked suspiciously like BBC backlots

> And then finally, after the longest while, we entered this huge room.

Tsuneo: He wondered if they could have put the cells next to the lab, because all this walking was really inconveniencing him.

> The first thing I noticed were all

> of these tables, with something hanging from the ceiling directly over each table.

Rebecca: Something. Bizarre alien device and he calls it something.

Rick: Generic family kitchen gets a description, but this is just something.

> The guards pointed rifles out me and pointed to one of the tables. I guess I had to lie down.

> And so I did.

Dan: They're going to "and so I did" him to death.

> My arms and legs were somehow restrained,

Rick: Just somehow. It's not a plasma television so he's not interested.

> and I could see a bright light above me, though for some reason, it did not hurt my eyes.

Rick: It probably comes from all his experience staring at the sun

> I then started feeling this buzz, I wondered if it was some sort of invisible field, or if they were
> drugging me. Everything, sight, sound, even smell, became blurry.

Tsuneo: I'm not sure how a smell can be blurry

Rebecca: And yet, this guy can manage it

> I was seeing images, and kept hearing sounds. The sounds coalesced into a phrase.

Rick: For some reason, that phrase was 'Fingal didn't dopple'

> "We are the Robotech Masters, and you shall fight for us," I heard.

Dan: Duh, okay.

> I kept seeing more sights and heard more sounds. I saw images of Jamaica and my friends and
> family there, images of Jack and the others, images of Melissa, random scenes,

Tsuneo: This whole fic is images of random scenes. Not actual scenes, just images of them.

> scenes of space battles with huge spaceships, flashes of light, and explosions,

Rick: It's like a koala bear crapped a rainbow in my brain.

> more battle scenes in forests, deserts

> and plains, with huge war machines duking it out amid explosions.

Rebecca: He was having a flashback to a far more interesting fics

> And then these sights, sounds, and smells seemed to melt together, like the ingredients of a sauce
> being combined.

Rick: And now he was hungry

> It was if I could somehow smell space and hear light itself,

Dan: He was tripping major balls.

> felt myself falling down, up, and sideways, and past, present, and future were all condensed.

Rebecca: He got a good compression rate, since its all basically the same.

> I could not tell how long I was in that state.

Dan: I didn't know if I was up past my bedtime.

> But then everything slowly became clearer and clearer. It seemed to take the longest time.

> I could see darkness above me and feel something soft below me.

Rebecca: Wait, he'd just locked himself in the linen closet again

> I could smell something akin to burning brimstone.

Dan: His long-suppressed jerk turkey fart

> I moved my hands and felt some hard surfaces nearby. I felt myself breathe; the
> air was somewhat warm. The only light came from glowing dots above me.

Rick: How many lights were there, Picard?

> I felt disoriented as I stumbled around. My hands felt something with the consistency of dirt.

Tsuneo: It took him a while to confirm that the dirt was indeed dirt

> I looked
> at my hands and they were concealed in these gloves. I looked around and saw the enemy bioroids
> around us.

> I wondered what was going on.

Tsuneo: An overly long, excruciatingly dull fic

> I then heard voices and footsteps. I could look and see soldiers in sandy camouflage; many of them
> bore flashlights.

Rebecca: Some of them had pool noodles, and he didn't know why.

> Were they the enemy? What was going on?

Rick: And did he have pants on? That latter part had tripped him up in past

> "Everyone drop your weapons and put your hands up!" yelled one of them, in accented English.

Tsuneo: Well, that ended. I kind of hoped it was going somewhere, but I should know better by now.

> I soon boarded this truck with all these other people.

Rebecca: He didn't remember signing up for this package tour.

> Aya Al Badri was among us. We were all dressed in these alien flight suits.

Dan: That's when he remembered that they were going to Comicon

> For the longest time I felt the truck rumble along. I felt too energized to feel sleepy.

Tsuneo: Instead he felt bored, and kind of gassy.

> "All right you people!" yelled a soldier. "Get off."

> And we did. As I looked up, I noticed that the sky was getting lighter.

Dan: He has never seen that happen before.

> We were all herded into this
> giant building. The interior was dimly lit, I could tell that it was a Quonset hut.

Rebecca: One of only two structures that exist in this world, apparently

> "I wonder where we are," I said.

> "Somewhere on Earth, I think," said Aya.

Rick: Well that really helps

> For almost an hour, the only people inside were two soldiers bearing rifles. Then some more
> soldiers entered.

> "I am Major Lane with the Australian Army," said one of the soldiers.

> Australia? We were in Australia?

Dan: I can only assume that one of them has already been killed by a spider

> "You are all prisoners of war," he said. "As long as you comply with surrender, we will not hurt you.

Tsuneo: He said, holding a telephone book.

> If you violate the terms of the surrender, we will kill you. We will provide you with food, water, and
> latrines."

Tsuneo: Typical Australian hospitality, really

> "I am Lonarco," said one of the people with us. "I am with the Robotech Masters and I wish to defect
> to your world."

> "Robotech Masters?" asked Major Lane.

> "Yers," replied Lonarco. "I had studied this language that you call English.

Dan: He's already picked up a funny regional accent

> Do you speak for your rulers?"

> "Yes, I do."

> "I want to defect to your rulers. I will submit to their rule."

Rebecca: He then had a look at their rulers and changed his mind.

> "Wait, sir," I said.

> "What is it?" asked the Australian major.

> I told him who I was.

Tsuneo: By carefully and deliberately avoiding identifying himself.

> "I'm with the United Nations Army. I was captured in an attack in Casablanca
> and forced to fight for the enemy."

Rebecca: He didn't think to say this earlier

Rick: It only just occurred to him

> "Wait there," said Major Lane.

Tsuneo: [Lane] I've got an actual defector on my ticket. You're way down the line.

> And so I did. Soon some soldiers came and set up tables to serve us breakfast. I did not feel very
> hungry, but I had some of the food- toast and bacon and eggs- and orange juice.

Tsuneo: They've just been captured, brainwashed and forced to fight for the alien invaders, but the breakfast is the most important thing here

> After a while, Major Lane came back. "You will come with us," he said.

> And so I did. I looked around the Australian base. It looked very much like an Army base, with
> functional buildings and lampposts.

Dan: It was the lampposts that he noticed the most

> The air felt a little warm. I saw a column of soldiers march
> along. Australia's flag flew from a flagpole, revealing red, white, and blue.

Rebecca: Even in the future, Australia still hasn't figured out a new flag

> We went inside this building, passing a lobby with couches and desks, and into this conference
> room with chairs and a wooden meeting table An MP stood guard.

Rebecca: Given the brutal lack of imagination in this fic, I'm assuming the MP is not wearing a baroque inspired armour suit with a knife holster in its shield.

> A woman with sandy brown hair entered the room. She was clad in a U.N. Army uniform.

> "Lieutenant Lana LeGault with the Global Military Police," she said.

> I introduced myself.

Dan: Hi, I am point of view protagonist

> "You understand, Lieutenant, that you are required to tell the truth," she said.

Tsuneo: No matter how dull it may be

> "Yes, madam," I replied.

> "Explain why you were piloting an enemy bioroid," said the lieutenant.

Rick: It was a loaner while his other robot was in the shop

> "Madam, I was captured during my leave in Casablanca," I said.

Rebecca: In case you missed it, have the chapter all over again.

> "We were taken to this enemy space vessel. We were held captive there for I don't know how long.

Tsuneo: It felt like a long time.

> They took us one by one.

> When they took me, I was placed on a table and I think I was drugged or something.

Dan: Or maybe he just ate some bad leftover turkey

> I only remember flashes from then until I found myself in Australia."

Tsuneo: As is often the case

> "Did you come into contact with the enemy prior to this?"

> "No, madam."

> "did you defect to the enemy?"

Rebecca: Did the enemy make you read out a prepared statement denouncing the United States government?

> "No!" I protested, getting up. "They drugged me. The others will verify. Melissa."

> "Who?"

Tsuneo: A pretty good summary of Melissa's character

> "Melissa Sharp. She was my companion during my trip to Casablanca.

Rebecca: Melissa denies any knowledge of such events.

> If she's still alive she can verify that I was captured."

> "Tell me more, Lieutenant," said Lieutenant LeGault. "Did you ever violate orders or regulations?"

Rick: No, I did my duty as an alien space robot pilot

Rebecca: Not helping

> "No, madam,"

> "Did you ever go AWOL?"

> "No, madam. I did my duty as an officer."

> "Why did you not try to escape, Lieutenant?"

Dan: They asked him not too, and they were really polite about it

> "I had no opportunity. I was on an enemy ship with armed troops. All of us were outnumbered.

Rick: They had guns, and they were really mean.

> And

> we had no way of navigating the ship, let alone using its weapons to defend us from other enemy
> ships. And Lieutenant, there is something I should add. I remember that they claimed to be the
> Robotech Masters."

> "Robotech Masters? I will make a note of that."

Rick: I mean, they've know that for months now, but...

> She turned around. "Where are you going, madam?"

> "I have other business, Lieutenant."

Rick: And yet it's not his worst brush-off yet

> Ooooooooooooo

> "What happened?" I asked Aya as she was returned. I had been led back here after Lieutenant
> LeGault interrogated me, and the MP's took Aya away for interrogation.

Rebecca: [Aya] Put me in for a spa treatment, deep tissue massage, mani pedi, the whole works. You?

Dan: Uh... Same.

> "I told them I was from Morocco," she said. "We were captured in the attack."

> "All we can do is wait," I said. "You know, when I went on that trip to Casablanca, I was with my girlfriend Melissa."

Rebecca: Melissa refutes that claim.

> "Did she survive?"

> "I don't know. She wasn't held prisoner with us."

Rebecca: He hasn't spared her a second thought until now

> I thought back to that morning. There was so much
> confusion as we tried to get away from the Robotech Masters. Did she hide somewhere safe?

Dan: Fortunately, Melissa was very good at hide-and-seek

> We continued to stay in the Quonset hut, and the Australians continued to feed and water us.

Rick: As well as trim them every now and then and give them some mulch for good measure

> They
> even provided camp showers and latrines just outside. Day soon faded into night, and the locals
> gave us cots in which to sleep. I could barely sleep, wondering if Melissa was still alive.

Dan: And if there was some way to blame his ex for this as well.

> The room was then lit with flashlights, and a female voice called my name.

Rick: They're herding him into the shearing shed. Because, y'know, Australia.

> "You are being taken into U.N. custody," Lieutenant LeGault said to me.

> And so I was.

Tsuneo: Nothing to do with the whole brainwashed and forced to pilot a Bioroid thing. You just have a lot of unpaid parking fines

> ----

> Chapter 12: Return to Tangier

Rick: It's like Return to Macross, only a lot less interesting

> I felt the C-130 Hercules transport plane land, the landing gears transferring the rumbling to the
> fuselage of the jet. A squad of MP's guarded me. Lieutenant Lana Le Gault was with them.

Tsuneo: The MP was with the squad of MPs.

> A few minutes after the plane stopped, I was led in chains into a waiting ambulance. Several police
> cars also were parked on the taxiway. The ambulance transported me to a hospital.

Rick: Was it the air force hospital in Seville? I need to know this.

> Inside the hospital, the doctors and nurses did all sorts of tests, from drawing blood and taking

> blood pressure to doing brain scans.

Rebecca: He somehow came up negative on the last one

> "You feeling okay," asked LeGault.

> "Yeah," I said.

Rebecca: [LeGault] Let me fix that.

> "Your chain of command will decide if you are court-martialed for treason."

> "Treason?" I asked.

> "You were piloting the enemy bioroids, Lieutenant."

Dan: He'd forgotten already

> I stayed in this hospital room, which, like most hospital rooms that I have seen,

Rebecca: Shocking revelation! Hospital rooms look like hospital rooms! Only Dire Straights dares to speak such harsh truths!

> looked sterile.

Tsuneo: You'd kind of hope so.

> I supposed it was better than staying in a Quonset hut or a stockade cell.

Rick: This man's hatred of Quonset huts is boundless.

> As I lay down on the bed, I

> wondered what happened. How long was I with the enemy? How many of my people had I killed?

Dan: Did the Robotech Masters have lampposts in their bases, and if so, what were they like?

> And not just while piloting the enemy bioroid, but while fighting them. Were most of the bioroids

> piloted by captured Earth natives?

Rebecca: Or were some piloted by introduced pest species?

> Meals were served in the hospital room; the MP's refused to let me leave.

Tsuneo: At least, not until he did up the back of his hospital gown.

> The meal was beef in this slightly spicy sauce, served with greens and a plastic cup filled with water.

Tsuneo: I've wondered if this is meant to be his recounting of events, and, if so, who the hell is he telling the story too

Rick: Clearly its somebody who needs to know the details of every meal he eats

Tsuneo: Clearly.

> Soon after my meal was done, I was transferred. After a short ride in a police car,

Dan: And no, they wouldn't let me play with the sirens.

> I was transferred to a holding cell in the

> basement of the Global Military Police field office. It was a plain holding cell; someone scribbled

> "GMP Sucks" on the concrete wall.

Rebecca: My, such crushing wit

> "I get a phone call, right?" I asked LeGault.

Dan: I have never heard someone laugh so loud.

> And so I made a phone call to my parents from a pay phone just outside the holding cell. I managed
> to get their answering machine.

Tsuneo: This is a very dated kind of a future

> I told them that I was all right, for now. Well, there was not much to
> do in a holding cell in a police station.

Rick: He asked if he could get a box of paper clips, just so he could count them.

> I remember, from regulations, that they would have to contact
> my commanding officer, who would be Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera.

Rick: He eventually got the point over by describing his commander as 'the purple guy'

> Or was it? Was he still alive? What had happened on Earth since I was gone? How long was I
> gone?

Dan: Dude, it's been fifteen minutes tops.

> That night as I slept, I dreamed of combat. I felt as if I were actually the enemy bioroid, blasting
> Earth ships and troops both on Earth and in space.

Rebecca: He almost felt guilty about his murder boner.

> A while later, Lieutenant Le Gault arrived with some uniformed investigative aides.

Rick: What she really needs here is a quirky detective

> "The Second Division has ordered you to be remanded into custody pending review,"

Tsuneo: Sadly the reviews are not going to be for another four episodes.

> she said as
> one of the aides unlocked the cell door. "We have a plane waiting for you on the tarmac."

> And so I was transferred. I was hustled out to the back into a waiting Toyota Avalon police car, and
> then driven to the tarmac of the air base where a Lockheed C-130 Hercules awaited.

Rick: Hercules transports! Toyota Avalons! The wonders of Robotechnology!

> I was strapped in by the MP's, and I noticed there were boxes full of cargo.

Rick: And that's when he realised he was sharing the flight with Megaforce

> "We're expecting a long trip," said Le Gault.

Tsuneo: [LeGault] The boxes are full of board games. I warn you, I'm a demon at Settlers of Catan.

> And it was. I spent hours on that plane. I knew that the Air Force had faster aircraft, but I guess
> transport of a prisoner only rates a C-130.

Tsuneo: Prisoners don't get to fly first class.

- > There were at least two stops, where I had to wait at a
- > Military Airlift Command terminal, under guard with only some crackers to eat and water to drink.

Dan: Should I tell them that the Robotech Masters had better crackers?

- > After what seemed like a day, I was placed in a paddy wagon.

Rick: He was still on the plane. It was a weird arrangement.

- > There were no windows, so I could
- > not see outside. Finally, after so much time spent on planes, waiting in terminals, and riding in a
- > paddy wagon, I reached my destination.

Tsuneo: They couldn't have just flown him there?

Rick: The DoorDash driver had to make other stops along the way.

- > I scanned my surroundings when the investigative aides took me out of the wagon. From the
- > landmarks, I recognized that I was back in Gibraltar Base.

Dan: Like the rest of the fic, he'd just gone in a big circle

- > I was taken to a building, through a door marked "Prisoner Processing"; I knew this was the base's
- > stockade.

Rebecca: He just generally referred to it as 'the prisoner place'

- > I found myself in a room with a desk.

Tsuneo: He wondered where the chairs had gone.

- > An Army MP stood guard. I looked at the calendar,
- > and I noticed it was March, about two months after I had been captured.

Dan: Nobody had bothered to tell him this. Truth was they just wanted to see the look on his face when he found out

- > Another MP arrived, a first lieutenant.

- > Lieutenant Le Gault signed a piece of paper.

Rick: Dog owner's licence. Nothing to do with him.

- > "So Second Division is remanding custody to us," said the military police lieutenant.

Rebecca: As mentioned above

- > "Yes," said Le Gault. "He's in your hands now.

Rebecca [Le Gault]: I never want to see him again

- > Now to get to my guest quarters."

Dan: She said just to rub it in to him that he was ending up in a cell

- > "Follow me, sir," said a sergeant.

- > And so I did. He escorted me through hallways and into this hallway

Tsuneo: He went through a hallway into a hallway

> with cells on both side.

> "This is where you are sleeping, sir," said the sergeant.

Rebecca: [Sergeant] You're a prisoner, but you're also an officer. I don't know if I should salute you or punch you in the gut.

> "Shower facility is down the hall. Lights out

> is after supper. If you cause trouble, you go to the maximum security section."

Rick: He considered shanking himself to save someone else the bother

> "I will keep that in mind, Sergeant," I replied.

> I sat down in the cell. There was not much to it, just a bunk and concrete walls.

Tsuneo: I have to wonder what he expected.

> I noticed another prisoner sitting in the cell across from me.

> "I'd salute you, sir," he said, "but prisoners aren't allowed to salute. I advise you keep to yourself."

Rick: It was the nicest conversation he'd ever had

> The stockade was for short-term confinement and confinement for prisoners awaiting trial, like I

> was.

Tsuneo: This chapter is nothing but descriptions of different rooms.

Rebecca: And yet, it's not our duller chapter so far.

Tsuneo: Sadly not.

> I knew elsewhere on base there was a disciplinary barracks for long-term confinement, falling

> under the authority of the Army's Provost Marshal General.

Rebecca: Clear delineation of jurisdictional boundaries is exactly what I want out of my Robotech fanfic

> I wondered if I would end up there. It would be just a short drive.

Rick: He wouldn't want to be inconvenienced in his incarceration.

> But I knew of other disciplinary barracks with much greater security

> measures, like one located deep underground somewhere in Russia.

Dan: That's where Amanda Waller keeps the Suicide Squad between missions

> Ooooooooo

> The next day, I had my first breakfast.

Tsuneo: He had never had breakfast before.

> All of us prisoners were dressed in these bright orange

> jumpsuits. Breakfast is similar to what is served when Army units camp out in the field.

Dan: And without any context, I will just assume they had lobster thermidor aux crevettes

> I knew that

> some of the inmates serving confinement for court-martial or nonjudicial punishment worked in the

> stockade's kitchen.

Dan: They took turns spitting in the soup

- > It was also the one place where male and female inmates work together; the
- > male and female inmates had their own separate cell blocks, exercise yards, and messes, and the
- > male and female messes had a common kitchen.

Tsuneo: You know, this isn't the direction I expected the fic to go in. I mean, it's still excruciatingly dull, but it's doing such in a completely new way.

- > Some MP's approached the man who slept in the cell across from me.
- > "Okay, Neil," said the military police sergeant. "Time for your work release."
- > I somewhat envied Neil.

Rick: Until he remembered that he had to share his house with Rik and Vyvyan

- > Prisoners serving sentences and nonjudicial punishment often got work
- > release where they served with their unit during the work day, only coming back here for supper.

Dan: He fights in the alien invasion on day release

- > Work release, of course, was unavailable for those who are merely confined pending court-martial,
- > and there is not much to do to amuse myself in a stockade.

Rebecca: So how long before he starts calling his pillow 'Melissa' and dry-humping it?

Dan: I think that's a given at this point

- > I had wondered what was going on in division headquarters.

Dan: Did Private LaBelle need help shuffling the boxes around?

- > Would they drag their feet deciding whether or not I should be court-martialed?

Tsuneo: Or would they move at the scintillating pace of everything else in this fic?

- > And I wondered about legal representation. While the
- > Army will not assign me an attorney unless they convened a court-martial, I could hire a civilian
- > attorney at my expense.

- > But even with my combat bonus pay, would I be able to afford a top-notch civilian attorney?

Rick: I'm sure Lionel Hutz is available

- > "Excuse me, sir," a military police sergeant said to me, "someone wishes to see you. You will come
- > with us."

Dan: Is it a conjugal visit?

Rebecca: [MP] No, and stop asking that!

- > And so I did. They escorted me through hallways into a visitors' room. The room was not much, just
- > a room with some chairs divided by a glass partition.

Rick: Top Cat was in the booth next to him. This is a rough joint.

- > This was not the room that would be used for inmates meeting with their attorneys.

Tsuneo: Is it possible,

> Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera sat on the other side of the partition.

Dan: I can only hope he was pretending to be Melissa

> "I will be asking a few questions, Micronian," said the colonel. "Why were you flying the enemy
> bioroid?"

Dan: He's going to claim he was taking it for a drunken joyride

> "I was captured, sir," I replied. "They drugged me and a few of the other prisoners."

> "You were drugged?"

Dan: They had space drugs

Rick: The best type

> "Yes, sir."

Rebecca: [Kravshera] Sweet. Can you hook me up?

> "Is there anyone who can vouch for that?"

> "One of the civilian prisoners, Aya Al Badri,"

Rebecca: Who was also drugged

Tsuneo: Not helping

> I answered. "She was from Morocco. Colonel, we
> managed to somehow break free from their control in Australia.

Tsuneo: It was this really amazing sequence... Edge of your seat stuff. You should have seen it.

> One of them claimed to be a defector from the enemy.

Rebecca: I'm just going to assume we'll never hear anything about this again.

> And there was something else, sir. The enemy claimed to be the Robotech Masters."

> "Robotech Masters?"

> "Yes, sir."

Rick: You know, the advanced alien culture who created your race as their slave soldiers and
programmed you to obey without question?

Dan [Lupon]: Not ringing any bells

> "Where were you captured?"

> "Casablanca,"

Dan: At a Rick's Cafe theme restaurant

> I said. "I was on a weekend trip with my girlfriend, Melissa Sharp.

Rebecca: Melissa would prefer to be excluded from these reports.

> She was a therapist at the hospital here.

Rick: [Kravshera] Not going to lie, I actually forgot both of you existed.

> It was the morning after that the enemy attacked."

> "And where did the enemy take you?"

> "To one of their ships."

> "Anything you can say about it?"

Rick: It didn't have any windows

Dan [Lupon]: Are you always this stupid?

Rick: Yes sir.

> "Not much, sir. It was...well, a ship.

Rebecca: It looked like a series of generic hallways

> They had us in this huge room. I could see huge corridors and hallways,

Rebecca: There you go

Tsuneo: That was the top thing he noticed

> and there was this room where we were forced to lie down and where they drugged us,

> probably some sort of medical room. I saw the enemy; they looked human."

Dan: Except for their hair. It was way too fabulous.

> "And you say you were drugged into operating the bioroids."

> "Yes, sir."

> "And you were not offered any reward for defecting to their side."

Rebecca: You kind of get the feeling he should be conducting this interrogation in a more formal setting.

> "No, sir."

Dan: Now he's feeling stupid for not asking

> "And there was no way to escape."

> "No, sir.

Dan: I would have died trying.

Rick: [Kravshera] I see no downside.

> We would not have been able to take the ship back home even if we could take over before

> the crew set the self-destruct sequence."

> "And you know the ship had a self-destruct sequence?"

> "No, sir. But it seemed reasonable that the ship would have a self-destruct in case they lost control

> of the ship to an enemy."

Rick: Besides, it's required to have one by sci-fi spaceship law

> "That is all for now, Lieutenant," said Colonel Kravshera.

Dan: Did you bring me a toy?

> "What will happen?"

> "This matter is being handled above my pay grade."

Dan [Lupon]: And the truth is that I just don't like you

> The colonel left the visiting room.

> "All right, Lieutenant," said an MP. "Time for you to head back to the inmate area."

Rebecca: [MP] Bubba the Love Troll has been waiting for you.

> Ooooooooo

> Life inside the stockade was pretty much uneventful.

Rebecca: He must be used to that by now.

> I suspected that the MP's took some pleasure in ordering me around,

Rick: They didn't even have to ask nicely

> as I was an officer and this would be one of the few situations where an
> enlistee has authority over an officer.

Tsuneo: He might have regretted all the times he made cadets clean his boots if he had even a shred of self-awareness.

> No one else from the battalion had come to visit me.

Rebecca: He was beginning to realise just how deeply unpopular he was

> One

> moment I was dreading is someone coming to see me and identifying himself as my defense
> counsel; it would mean that the division had convened a court-martial for me.

Tsuneo: He'd much rather rot in here for all eternity.

> For what would I be tried? Desertion? Misbehavior as a prisoner? Or even treason?

Dan: Operating a Bioroid while under the influence?

> And how long could the Army hold me here without trial?

Rebecca: Or would he be disappeared to a GMP black site?

> The 2nd Division command had already remanded me into the custody of the
> military police of this base.

Tsuneo: He is the proverbial buck that has been passed.

> I suppose I was still getting paid for just being in the stockade,

Dan: Hell, I'd take that deal if I could

> it would take an order of nonjudicial punishment or a sentence by a court-martial to forfeit pay.

Rebecca: But does he get back pay as a Bioroid pilot?

> It was some time later, as I was eating dinner, that the MP's approached me, including the stockade

> officer.

Dan: Time to kiss his kneecaps goodbye.

> For a moment I wondered if I would be meeting with my defense counsel for my court-martial
> for treason.

Rick: And he was at least hoping that he'd get a quirky lawyer

> "You are being released by order of the second division," said the military police officer. "You are to
> return to active duty. Report to the 6th ATAC Battalion office."

> And so I did.

Tsuneo: Well that was an entirely unsatisfying solution to an uninteresting situation

Rebecca: I feel lucky

> They took me back to the prisoner processing room where I had to sign some forms,
> and then they gave me the outfit that I had been wearing when I was taken into custody.

Dan: It was beginning to smell

> Leaving the stockade, I took a long walk through the streets of the base.

Rick: He made sure to check out the lamp posts. Yeah. Lamp posts matter.

> I eventually reached the 6th Battalion office, which looked pretty much the same as before.

> Entering the lobby, the front desk receptionist looked at me.

> "And you are?" she asked, noting that I was out of uniform.

Tsuneo: If they gave him back the clothes he was wearing, then he's walking around the base dressed
as an enemy pilot.

> I told her who I was.

Rick: Lieutenant Designated Protagonist

> "I was released from the stockade and I have to report to Colonel Kravshera," I said.

> "Come on in."

Rebecca: I believe you unconditionally, obvious lunatic in a Bioroid pilot suit.

> I walked upstairs to the floor where the colonel's office was, passing a few uniformed soldiers. I
> went inside the main office of the battalion. It looked pretty much the same as it did the last time I
> was here, with cubicles where the battalion's office staff work at their stations.

Tsuneo: The cubicles were what he noticed

> Colonel Kravshera entered the office, dressed in his MARPAT camouflage. I saluted.

> "Lieutenant," he said, returning the salute.

> I reported for duty, and handed him a copy of the release form.

Rick: As well as a signed note from his mother

> "My apologies for being out of uniform, sir," I said. "I had been gone for two months."

Dan: Also aliens reprogrammed him, but that doesn't seem to be an issue.

> "Emerson will take care of the details," said the colonel.

> I looked and saw Jack Emerson in his MARPAT camouflage.

Tsuneo: Jack had crept into the scene while we weren't looking.

> He looked pretty much the same as before, with his short-cropped dark hair.

Dan: His only character trait

> One thing I noticed were the brass oak leaves on his collar; he was an Army major.

> "Major Emerson," I said. "I am reporting back for duty."

> "I should tell you that I am now the XO here," said Jack. "There have been a few changes since I
> have gone.

Rick: The price of gas went up, another MCU film came out and the whole planet is now ruled by damn dirty apes

> Come into my office."

> And so I did. We went in what used to be Major Yoon's office.

Dan: Major Yoon. He was, um, you know...

Rick: He was that guy, right?

Dan: Yeah, you know, that guy...

Rick: He did that thing, remember?

Dan: Oh yeah, that thing that Major Yoon did.

Rick Yeah, good old Major Yoon.

[Pause]

Dan: [Whispered] Didn't he die?

Rick: [Whispered] I have no idea.

> It had a desk and three chairs as well as a bookcase and a file cabinet.

Tsuneo: And several empty whiskey bottles scattered across the floor.

> "At ease," said Jack, sitting down. "I have heard what had happened. The colonel forbade us from
> visiting you in the stockade.

Rebecca: But what he really means is that nobody cared

> You were still under investigation for a possible court-martial."

> "And yet the division commander decided to release me," I said.

Rick: They needed to free up a place

> "From what I have heard, the Robotech Masters were using prisoners in their bioroids," said the
> major. "It is believed that the bioroids use a mental control system."

Dan: But you have to think in Russian

> "Yeah, there were other people from Earth who were captured in Australia besides me," I said.

Rebecca: They even returned Harold Holt.

> "So you believe that the enemy is indeed the Robotech Masters?"

> "That is what RDFCOM intelligence has deduced.

Dan: Cool. [Pause] Who are the Robotech Masters?

> Why they are here, I don't know. They're not attacking the Zentraedi Nation,

Rick: But they are invading the Earth Kingdom

> and they haven't attacked our colonies, or even our base on Tirol."

> Then I asked him one question that I had wanted answered since my capture.

Dan: Is Canadian bacon actual bacon?

> "Is Melissa Sharp still alive?" I asked.

> "Yes, she is," said Jack. "She contacted me about you being missing after the attack in
> Casablanca."

Tsuneo: They considered looking for him, but then realised they couldn't be bothered

> I breathed a sigh of relief. I wanted to see her.

Dan: She was my squeezey toy.

> "Where were you guys?"

> "We received the order to scramble and support the Moroccans after the attack started," said Jack.
> "But we were pinned down by the enemy bioroids on the outskirts of the city.

Tsuneo: The truth was that they really weren't trying that hard

> Then the enemy
> retreated. I guess what they wanted was prisoners, and they retreated as soon as they had
> prisoners.

Rebecca: [Jack] They wanted to return you, but we insisted they take you with them.

> If only we could have broken through their defense."

Dan: The Bioroids have a great defensive line-up this season

> "I'm here now," I said.

Rick: Not helping

> "Listen, I will have you take the rest of the week off.

Tsuneo: [Jack] Oh, and of course you'll have to undergo an extensive psychological assessment to determine your suitability to return to active duty and any long-term effects of your imprisonment and brainwashing.

Dan: Really?

Tsuneo: [Jack] Nah, of course not, don't be silly.

> You will report back to duty on Monday, or if we go into full tactical alert.

Rick: Or if LaBelle calls in sick again.

> Get yourself new uniforms, Lieutenant. I'll have you assigned to your old
> room. And by the way, on Saturday I'm inviting you to a barbecue at my new house."

Rebecca: But you are still technically a prisoner,

> "A new house?" I asked.

> "I'm a major now, so I get a new housing assignment. My own private, two-bedroom house, the
> typical assignment for a major with no dependents."

Tsuneo: So why does he have two bedrooms?

Rick: That's a really good question

> "See you at the barbecue, Jack."

Dan: I got captured by aliens. But your house is the really interesting thing

> I went out to the main office. I came across Rebekah Avital, looking much the same as before. I
> noticed that she was a master sergeant now.

Rebecca: Her goal was to collect all the non-commissioned ranks

> "Congratulations on your new position, Master Sergeant," I said.

> "Thank you, Lieutenant," she replied.

Tsuneo: [Avital] You filthy traitor scum.

> "Anything new happen since I was gone?"

> "There were a few transfers in, a few transfers out," she replied. "Corporal Glenn La Belle was killed
> in combat three weeks ago."

Rick: Not LaBelle!

Dan: He was my favourite character!

[Pause]

Rick: Mine too, actually

Dan: Not sure what that says, really

> I remembered him; he was in the 18th ATAC troop. "He was married, right?" I asked.

Tsuneo: Our protagonist trying to decide if he resented LaBelle's happiness or not

> "Yes, sir. His widow moved back to her family after the funeral."

> I remembered the guy. He fought with us, and helped around the office.

Rick: He will always be known as the paperclip counting guy

> "I will see you later, Master Sergeant," I said.

Rebecca: [Flat] Oh yeah. Wow. He's really torn up about losing his friend.

> Ooooooooo

> I had gone to the base's uniform store to purchase two spare uniforms – a Class "A" service uniform
> and before stashing it in my quarters.

Tsuneo: So he was on holiday when he was abducted, right?

Rick: Right.

Tsuneo: And presumably he didn't take his uniforms on holiday with him, right?

Rick: I could check earlier in the fic, but I can't be bothered so I'm just going to agree.

Tsuneo: But he comes back after a two month absence to the same quarters he had before.

Rick: I hope someone watered his flowers.

Tsuneo: So am I to assume then that someone went through his otherwise undisturbed quarters and made off with two of his uniforms?

Rick: Despite the many holes in this case, I'm going to say that's the only possible conclusion.

> My quarters looked like the typical bachelor's quarters for
> junior officers- a single bedroom with an attached bathroom.

Rick: And a secret door containing the Bat-poles

> I was grateful that the BOQ had not been bombed in my absence.

Rebecca: I mean, sure he was kidnapped and brainwashed by aliens, but can you imagine if he had to sleep in a Quonset hut?

> There was one question burning.

Rick: Why was Shade Knight's rock band so vital to saving the world?

> Putting on my Class "A" uniform, I went to the base's medical center. It looked pretty much the same
> as before,

Tsuneo: Okay, can we assume at this point that everything looked the same unless otherwise specified?

Rick: The real point of the alien abduction was to let him describe things again.

> aside from a fresh coat of new paint. I entered the door nearest to where Melissa would work.

Rebecca: He remembered her by what door she was nearest too.

> The lobby had a reception desk, with chairs and tables. Magazines sat on the tables. The walls
> were decorated with posters, some of them recruitment posters for the Air Force Medical Corps,
and
> other color-illustrated posters with information on physical therapy.

Dan: And warning about the dangers of stepping on cracks and breaking your mother's back

> A man in his early twenties and dressed in a light blue outfit manned the reception desk.

Rick: Why he was wearing a Vault Suit was another matter

> "Is there a Lieutenant Melissa Sharp here?" I asked.

> "Let me check, sir," replied the man, whose rank insignia showed he was an airman first class.

Tsuneo: [Dry] Oh yes, this is exactly what I signed up for.

> "There is no Lieutenant Sharp here, sir."

Rick: Well do you have any bearclaws?

Dan: No, we're out of bearclaws.

Rick: Well do you have any cinnamon rolls?

Dan: No, we're out of cinnamon rolls.

Rick: In that case what do you have?

Dan: All I have is this box of one dozen starving crazed Hellcat inorganics

Rick: Okay, I'll take that.

> "I know she worked here three months ago."

> "Three months ago, Lieutenant?" asked the airman.

Rebecca: [Airman] I can barely remember where I was last week.

> "If there was a Lieutenant Sharp here, she

> could be in the local personnel files." He typed in a few letters.

Rebecca: [Airman] Not sure why I'm helping some Bioroid pilot stalk one of our officers, but whatever.

> "According to the personnel file, she was transferred to Tirol Base a month ago."

> "Tirol Base?" I asked.

Tsuneo: Yes, the base on Tirol. Do I need to spell it out to you?

> "Yeah. The military set up a base on this world.

Rebecca: [Airman] It's got a Dippin' Dots and everything.

> They say the Robotech Masters used to rule that

> world. Well, if you're looking for her, you'd have to go there. It could be rather expensive to book a

> flight to the new colony the government set up there."

Rebecca: That is the most elaborate dumping a guy I have ever seen. Well done, Melissa

> "Thank you, Airman," I said.

Tsuneo: No reaction, no emotion, no affect...

> I left the medical center, walking along the road. Melissa was gone, not even on Earth anymore. I

> looked up at the blue sky, wondering if I was looking in the direction of Tirol, wherever that was.

Dan: And so Zumbo Pumbo goes on to blame women for Leonard's hair loss.

On that final comment, the big screen turned off, reverting the world back to prose format. "Well that was the next four series of indecipherable stone carvings that constitute Dire Straights," Tsuneo considered. "A fic that went out of its way to make the idea of alien abduction boring."

"The thing that strikes me about this last portion is that Bumbles Mugglewump has actually begun to develop a personality," Rebecca noted. "And that personality is entirely loathsome and aggressively unlikable."

"No, I have to agree there," Rick nodded. "Because he seemed to spend the entire Christmas break chapter stewing in his own resentment while trying to make everyone else feel miserable as well."

"It's not enough that he's unhappy for no real reason," Dan agreed. "But he has to make everyone else unhappy too."

"Like he can't stand the idea that somebody might be enjoying themselves," Tsuneo noted. "So he has to bring everyone else down to his level."

"Likewise, look at his interactions with Melissa," Rebecca noted. "He spends all his time fretting over the idea of if she actually likes him without once trying to actually enjoy himself. At no point does he

ever ask her how she feels, of course, but he instead decides that he's going to assume the worst and pre-emptively resent her for it anyway."

"That the entire relationship was developed offscreen also says a lot about the fic's priorities, really," Tsuneo added. "It also means that we don't get to see how Melissa feels about any of this, of course."

"I really have to wonder if we're actually meant to like this guy," Rick spoke up. "Because it's not like the fic has given us any reason to like him, and his few personality traits so far completely awful."

"I'm not sure, honestly," Rebeca admitted. "And I'm not sure if the fic has the self-awareness and literary needed to pull such a thing off."

"You know what else got me?" Dan asked. "As said, the fic managed to make the entire alien abduction thing boring. Not only did it have even the entire fic be a dull lead-up, but it then brushed it off if in a moment"

"Well there's something else that got me," Rick noted. "And I think this is one of those cases where I have to actually invoke the world versus the fic so far."

"What's that?" Tsuneo asked.

"So the whole alien abduction thing is 'they gave me drugs and made me do it'," he noted. "Except in the few descriptions of the whole people being turned into unwilling Bioroid pilots thing there's a words like 'lobotomy' and 'mind wipe' being used."

"So... in short, our alleged protagonist got out of it more or less scott-free," Dan noted.

"Yeah," Rick nodded.

"Huh," he paused. "On the other hand, if he was lobotomised, would you notice?"

"Well I can see that you're really engaging with the fic," The Voice interjected.

"In as far as you can get engaged with nothing," Rebecca replied. "I suppose so."

"That's great to hear," the Voice beamed. "And I know that you will be all looking forward to next time when we cover the next four chapters."

"Thrilling," Tsuneo sighed. "I can't wait."

"Fantastic," the Voice beamed.

"But we are done, right?" Dan asked. "Please say that we are done."

"We are, yes," the Voice confirmed. "And I'll be looking forward to seeing you all next time."

"We don't," Dan finished with a sigh.

"You know we're still not even halfway through this," Rebecca considered. "I mean, yes, this last section had something that might be generously considered to be a plot twist, but it basically blew it off straight away and went straight back to the pointless minutiae."

"Tell you what though, I was struggling with this fic before," Dan admitted. "But now that LaBelle's dead? I'm not sure if there's anything I care about left in the fic, even entirely ironically."

"No I actually follow what you're saying," Rebecca nodded. "His general ineptitude and being in entirely over his head was strangely endearing. It also meant that he was the closest that anyone in this fic came to having a personality."

"I have to agree there," Tsuneo considered. "Because after him, I think the next closest thing we have is Lupon being generally racist."

"That's pretty dire," Rick noted.

"That's this fic," Tsuneo finished.

Author's notes:

With every fic we cover I do try to find something to like, no matter what. True, sometimes it's a stretch, but we usually manage to find it somehow. With this fic, it's been a stretch to find anything at all. The closest thing we've found so far is giving silly names to the protagonist to make up for his ever-increasingly awkward to write around lack of a name. Either that or LaBelle simply because he's such a non-entity who seems to exist as the butt of the narrative. And yet he's so much more engaging and likeable than the actual protagonist. And now he's dead. Sorry.

Will the whole abducted by aliens arc ever go anywhere? Well you'd be surprised. But don't hold your breath either.

Next time, more of the same

Robotech copyright Harmony Gold

Dire Straits written by Michael2

Rebecca Bartley and Rick R. Mortis created by Rick R. (natch)
Tsuneo Tateo and Dan created by Zogster

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Space robots? Email us at [elmerstudios00 \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:elmerstudios00@gmail.com) and register your Jeff.

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> Our oven can't jerk the turkey.