
Episode 460 – Gripping medical drama

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.

Dan was seated at a table, wearing a pair of glasses, a labcoat and a lanyard around his neck with the name 'Dr Medford'. Rick and Rebecca were sitting opposite him, both wearing suits. A crude 'VIPER HR department' sign was taped to the wall above them.

"Doctor Medford," Rebecca began. "This is a preliminary Human Resources hearing into the complaints regarding your conduct in the management of your department, including some of your recent projects."

"Of course," Dan nodded. "I've always enjoyed being a part of VIPER, and it's been a privilege to contribute towards our march to world domination."

"You understand that being a Mad Scientist in a comic book evil terrorist organisation is a great responsibility," Rebecca continued. "VIPER is in a constant struggle to stay ahead of various national and international agencies, as well as the ever-present threat of costumed Superheroes."

"Naturally," Dan replied. "It is not a responsibility that I take lightly. As an agent of VIPER, I have worked tirelessly towards furthering our goals."

"Which brings me to the subject of today's interview," Rick explained. "Your Project Dubiel and its recent outcome."

"Ah yes," Dan beamed. "The master plan to create a superior half-man half-rat soldier as a prelude to creating an army of killer catgirls."

"Now this is regarding the recent incident with what you dubbed Prototype 609," Rebecca continued.

"Ah yes, 609. Definitely my masterpiece," Dan confirmed.

"A half-man, half-rat soldier that you spent considerable time training and giving extensive knowledge of VIPER's systems, protocols and operations," Rick surmised. "And then you deliberately allowed it to escape."

"Which was a part of my master plan, yes."

"Whereupon, once 609 reached Millennium City, you placed it under extensive surveillance, including placing bugs in its house, following it on the street and, most notably, passively watching it as it disrupted our operations and killed our agents," Rebecca continued.

"Again, all a part of my plan."

"And what key insights did this surveillance reveal?" Rick asked. "How did it aid our great cause?"

"I found out that there's a girl that he likes," Dan enthusiastically explained.

"And how does this help us?" Rebecca reiterated.

"Well, it made him angry when I bought her up," Dan continued.

"Which brings me to the next point," Rick stated. "You deliberately leaked the existence and location of one of our Canadian research facilities to subject 609."

"Yes. It was a part of my master plan," Dan explained.

"And could you please explain your master plan to us," Rebecca asked. "In plain language terms."

"Well, I deliberately allowed 609 to escape and placed it under surveillance," Dan offered. "Then I lured it back to my lair so that I could destroy it with my prototype Huntresses."

"I see," Rick paused. "And how did this benefit VIPER?"

"It let me test my Huntresses on him."

"And why did that require you to let 609 escape and then lure him back to your base?" Rebecca asked. "Why not keep him in the base and let him be destroyed there?"

"Because it allowed me to gain key insights into 609's performance," Dan explained. "Like how there's a girl that it pined over."

"However, during that time, you also failed to notice his habit of leaving explosives wherever he goes and that he carries a rocket launcher on him at all times," Rick pointed out.

"I had to focus on what was important," Dan admitted. "Which is to say, the girl he was pining over."

"Now related to that," Rebecca spoke up. "We have concerns about the performance of your Huntresses."

"Aren't they magnificent?" Dan beamed.

"In as far as they slip and fall while running on flat surfaces, attack our own men, can be defeated by a regular SWAT team and cannot catch one rat when there is a dozen of them surrounding it," Rick explained.

"Need I remind you, Doctor Medford, that this is a world filled with superhumans that can fly, shoot laser beams from their eyes, throw around tanks and bend the fabric of reality to their will," Rebecca added. "What is the exact benefit that they are bringing to our organisation?"

"They are very good at tracking," Dan offered.

"Even though you were able to continually observe 609 and gain access to his personal living space through entirely conventional means."

"Yes, but one of my Huntresses could have done that too."

"Speaking of," Rick noted. "VIPER is an evil snake-themed terrorist organisation, not cat-themed. Why not create something more on-focus, such as snake girls?"

"I thought that catgirls would be the most appropriate weapon to hunt down and destroy a rat man," Dan explained.

"A rat man that they only had to hunt down because you deliberately allowed it to escape," Rebecca noted.

"Exactly."

"Finally, because of your master plan, Subject 609 was able to destroy your base of operations, kill all of your Huntresses and countless other agents and escape." Rick finished.

"Yes," Dan nodded.

"Doctor Medford, you understand that VIPER has numerous operations underway at all times," Rebecca stated. "Orbital death rays, doomsday devices, building subterranean lairs on every city block, brainwashing robot cowboys and so on. We cannot afford to waste resources on frivolous projects for no clear benefit. Your entire operation has been completely destroyed for no benefit to our cause."

"Not entirely true," Dan countered. "By destroying my project, subject 609 proved its viability."

Rebecca leaned in and whispered to Rick, who nodded in reply before turning to Dan. "Doctor Medford, understand this. You are not just fired," he began. "You are super fired. You are ultra fired. There are no words for how fired you are. If it were up to me, I would travel back in time and fire you on the day you were hired by our organisation. We will ensure that you never find employment in any other cartoon supervillain organisation. By the time we are done, you won't be able to get a job mopping floors at ARGENT"

"Do not bother to clean out your desk, because we have already thrown it to the Ice Zombies," Rebecca continued. "Your access to all our systems has already been terminated, your research deleted and the rest of your team has been liquidated."

"Your efforts has cost this evil organisation millions of Globals, many lives and compromised our efforts at a number of levels," Rick finished. "Before we finish, do you have anything to say in your defence?"

"So I came up with an idea for a dog girl..."

"And scene," Tsuneo finished as he put down his camcorder. "Great work there, everyone."

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

"And good morning to you too, director of Inhuman Resources," Rick shot back.

"I was thinking more posthuman myself," Rebecca offered.

"What about Transhuman?" Rick asked.

"Well, goddamn Transhumanists do ruin everything, so there is that," she admitted.

"You'll work that catchphrase into anything," Dan noted.

"And yet, it's so universally applicable," she countered.

"Before we lose this one into the semantics," Tsuneo glanced up at the ceiling, "What's in today's forbidden tome?"

"Today we will be reviewing the conclusion to Pack Rat – Sins of the Father," The Voice explained.

"Hm, on one side, we actually finish a fic," Tsuneo considered. "On the other side, it's Pack Rat. Hard call."

"Completionism versus personal suffering is always a tricky act to balance," Rebecca agreed. "Especially when it's a fic this aggressively unlikeable."

"As always, I'll be eagerly looking forward to your reviews when we are done," the Voice continued.

"I mean, what can we say about this fic?" Rick shrugged. "It's about a gun-toting incel ratman. Really is there anything more we need to cover?"

"I dunno," Dan considered as he took his place on the couch. "Consider this; we blew off the major plot point in the middle of the fic. Who knows what could happen next?"

"Normally I'd say you're being too generous," Rebecca countered as she and the others joined him. "But then I remember that the last section ended with our hero being rescued from near-death by Bigfoot." On that last comment, the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format.

> Chapter 12

> About two hours later Ken, Sahara, and Sajit were waiting in the hallway not far from the operating room.

Rick: Bad news. We tried to save him but there were... complications

Dan: What happened?

Rick: The buzzer went off and his nose lit up red

> Ken and Sajit were seated on the uncomfortable metal chairs that lined the wall,

Dan: [Sajit] I mean, I've got fur on my butt. How's your scaly hide taking it?

> while Sahara paced back and forth. Her long tail fanned the air agitatedly as she walked.

Tsuneo: Smacking them in the face more than once.

> After a few more

> moments the golden-furred feline form of Haraka padded into view, joining the other three.

Rebecca: He had just 'misplaced' his Junior Mint

> "Haraka has finished talking with the base commander. He seems to be convinced that this was, in fact, a rescue mission rather than an invasion," he said in his thickly accented, velvety voice.

Tsuneo: [Haraka] Haraka's problems with the first person complicates what Haraka just said.

> Haraka was dressed simply, but warmly. His usual leather loincloth had been replaced with a warm looking black jumpsuit with yellow trim.

Dan: He's gearing up for a game of death.

> He was clearly a creature built for speed.

Rick: Wait, the cheetah-man was fast? I did not expect that at all!

> The feline's lean form rippled with taught muscles.

Rebecca: 'What's Haraka got that I don't,' Pack Rat often lamented. Besides, you know, everything.

> His slightly muzzled face bore white and yellow markings, and his

> body was speckled with black like a cheetah. His head sported a short, spiky mane of unkempt hair.

Dan: You just feel that Pack Rat is resenting every part of this

> His weapon of choice, a short, wickedly sharp, sword remained in its usual position, sheathed at his hip.

Rick: He's living his life hoping for a Cheetahmen revival

> Ken and Sajit nodded a quiet acknowledgement but remained seated and still. Sahara was

> intercepted by Haraka in her pacing. He wrapped his arms around the chocolate-skinned chimera

> and held her. She struggled for a split second before leaning against him, burying her face in his

> chest and sobbing quietly.

Rebecca: And remember, Haraka's the bad guy in all this.

> "It will be okay.

Rebecca: No, it will never be okay

> They are seeing to him," Haraka looked down at Sahara and stroked her dark hair.

> "Why'd he go off on this crazy mission without us?

Dan: He's very, very stupid.

Tsuneo: I can buy that

> I don't understand. We could have helped. We

> could have kept him safe. We..." Sahara faded into more muted sobbing.

Rebecca: [Sajit] We could have murdered VIPER goons together.

Tsuneo: [Sahara] Yeah, not helping.

> "Grrr... I think... he just gave up. Or almost did," Sajit grumbled.

Dan: 'Gave up on what,' she asked, draping herself over the handsome cat-man.

> Sahara looked up from Haraka's chest and turned her head towards the black werewolf.

> "What do you mean Wolfy," she asked, blinking those huge violet eyes of hers.

Rebecca: Did I mention that she has violet eyes, because she has violet eyes

> Sajit took in a deep breath, holding it while he considered his words.

Rick: Then thought better of it and fled to Mexico.

> The other three all waited,

> staring at Sajit expectantly. After a moment Sajit released his held breath and spoke.

Tsuneo: [Sajit] Hold on... lost my train of thought.

> "When I was spirit-walking,

Dan: Sprit-walking is what he calls it when he gets stoned

Rebecca: Sajit has strong 'tribal mysticism as written by a white guy from the suburbs' vibes

> hunting for Packy, I told you I couldn't find him."

> "Yeah," Sahara's tone was skeptical, her eyes narrowed at Sajit.

Rick: [Sahara] Am I going to have to get the rolled-up newspaper, Sajit?

> "That was mostly true. I couldn't tell where he was

Rick: He narrowed it down to one of the three spots in all Canada not filled with hostile mobs

> but I was able to talk to him for a few minutes before I lost him again."

> "Why did you not mention thisss before?" Ken hissed.

Dan: [Sajit] Look, it was his standard miserable whinging. I didn't want to bring everyone down.

> "What he said was... I didn't want to upset anyone," Sajit glanced at Sahara.

> "What'd he say, Sajit?"

Rick [Sajit]: Look, it was a racist rant, okay? Like, really, really racist.

> Sahara's tone was insistent, and she almost never referred to Sajit by his
> real name, preferring the cuter 'wolfy' nickname.

> "He..." Sajit sighed, "said maybe we should just let him go."

Rebecca: [Sajit] To the Rolling Stones concert. They're not going to be around forever.

> "Go? Like... Die?" Sahara's eyes were wide with shock.

Dan: No, go like to the bathroom. Guy has a lot of problems

> "Yeah."

> Sahara was at a loss. She tried to speak but nothing came out. Ken picked it up after a few false
> starts.

Tsuneo: It took Ken a while to figure out the obvious

> "Why did he sssay that, Sssajit?"

Rebecca: Because he's an incel creep who has based his entire life around chasing one unobtainable girl.

Rick: I mean, besides that.

> The shamanic shifter was leaning forward in his chair, resting his head on his hands and his elbows
> on his knees. He shrugged.

Dan: I mean, he had just been exploded so there may have been mitigating factors.

> "Hafta ask him," he replied, keeping most of the conversation he and Pack had shared to himself.

> "Die? Why would Packy wanna die?"

Tsuneo: Why would he not want to come back to his friends the cannibal werewolf and the space lizardman?

> Sahara finally found her voice. Her tail flapped against the floor, showing her frustration.

Dan: Haraka packed away all his fragile vases after she first went to his home.

> He massive brown wings shuddered, shedding a few stray feathers.

Rebecca: Boy I sure hope that nobody in this hospital has any allergies, because they're in for a real rough time

> "I think I understand," Ken muttered.

Dan: [Ken] I wouldn't want to be Pack Rat either.

> Sajit remained still, facing directly ahead, while the other two turned to look at Ken.

> "What do you mean," Haraka asked.

> "Pack and I talk a lot," Ken continued,

Tsuneo: Informed interaction is the best interaction

> "He never sssaid anything like... thisss," he gestured around
> the room, "but I know he feels very alone."

> "Alone? But he has us." Sahara cocked her head quizzically.

Dan: And have any of you looked in the mirror lately?

> "Friendssss are important, yesss," Ken nodded, "But there are other... things... that he doesn't have.

Rebecca: Medford made him without certain... equipment. To make sure the population was controlled.

> Things he doesssn't think he'll ever have."

Rick: Like a mint-in-box giant Vamp [ding].

> "Not a lot of rat-girls scurrying around Millennium City," Sajit mumbled.

Rebecca: Let's not kid ourselves. I'm sure he could find plenty of them in Club Caprice.

> Sahara stepped away from Haraka and stood in front of Ken and looked at him with a questioning
> expression.

Dan: To think, all of Pack Rat's problems could be solved with a good book club.

> "I don't..." Sahara started, but then it sunk in, "Oh..."

Tsuneo: Apparently the way he obviously leered at her at every opportunity never registered

> "Yeah." Ken said flatly.

> "Haraka does not understand.

Dan [Haraka]: The first person, that is. It confuse Haraka lots

> Pack is a warrior, is he not?" the cheetah spoke up.

Rick: Ans he very nearly died to an hero

> "Toughest rat I know," Sajit forced a grin.

Dan: Just how many rats do you actually know? Be honest here.

> "And he acts with honor and bravery, yes?"

Tsuneo: He honourably shoots people in the face

> "Of course he does!" Sahara spun around to face Haraka, "Packy's really brave and helps people
> even though so many are mean to him."

> "Then... he should be desired by the women of the tribe," Haraka said in a very matter of fact tone.
> He shrugged to punctuate the comment.

Tsuneo: Wait, so Haraka understands the second person but not the first.

Dan: Haraka's a complex kind of guy

> He hailed from a much simpler place.

Rebecca: Wow, fic. Just throw in some racism on top of the incel screed why don't you?

> "I wish it were that easssy, Haraka," Ken replied,

Dan: [Ken] But like, have you actually met him?

> "Ratsss have had a bad reputation among humansss for a long time."

> "Haraka got over looking at Pack Rat as large prey.

Dan: There were a lot of whacky incidents where he tried to kill and eat Pack Rat. Good times.

> They should get over seeing him as just a rat,"

Tsuneo: And see him for the miserable loser he actually is.

> Haraka paused, looking at Ken and Sajit, "He is a man, just like any of us."

Rebecca: [Haraka] No offence, Sahara.

> Sahara blinked and moved to sit on a nearby bench. The normally animated chimera was oddly still.

> "What isss it Sssahara," Ken asked. His head spines perked up a little

> "He... didn't think anyone would ever... want him?"

Tsuneo: It's only the single fact he's based his entire personality around.

> Sahara stared at the ugly white and black marbled tile for a moment.

Rick: When she's not fighting crime, Sahara does interior design

Dan: Does she actually fight crime?

Rick: Truth being told, I'm not sure

> "So he... ran off after that stupid scientist and those cats sort of... hoping to die?"

Tsuneo: If you'd read this fic, you would to

> "I'm not sure it was really a conscious decision," Sajit interjected.

Rebecca: Yes, he accidentally embarked on an elaborately planned suicide mission

> "That's stupid!" Sahara shouted suddenly. She smacked her fist into her hand. The outburst caused

> the other three to jump a bit in surprise.

Dan: I'm sure the lightning crackling from her antlers had nothing to do with that.

> Sahara stood and paced angrily. Her wings trembled and her tail swatted at the air abruptly.

Rick: [Ken] Sorry, do you think you could – ow – maybe just calm down – ow – a little bit there? You're getting – ow – Never mind.

> She

> had opened her mouth to say something when a door nearby opened, drawing everyone's attention.

Dan: It's a new car!

> The surgeon who had been tending to Pack Rat entered the hallway. In the scramble earlier

> introductions had been skipped out of necessity.

Tsuneo: It was a choice between proper introductions and saving Pack Rat's life

Dan: Hard call

- > The surgeon had his mask pulled down and took
- > off his little green paper cap revealing a young man of Asian descent, who would have looked
- > handsome if not for the haggard, drawn expression on his face and the copious blood stains on his
- > scrubs.

Rick: [Doctor] Oh, this? Naw, this was just lunch.

Rebecca: [Sajit] What did you have for lunch?

Rick: [Doctor] Best not to ask.

- > The doctor approached the strange looking group cautiously, his eyes eventually settling on Sajit.

Rebecca: All the time wondering how many parasites he must be carrying

- > "You must be Sajit and... company," he said, extending his hand,

Dan: [Doctor] Whoops, sorry. Still slick with the blood of your friend.

- > "I'm Doctor Imohara."

Rick: Usually I just build robots. Really this is out of my area of specialty

- > Sajit took it and shook, mindful of his claws.

- > "Yeah. So what's the news?"

- > The doctor took a deep breath.

- > "Your, um, friend, has more fractures than I could name,

Tsuneo: He's a great doctor, just not much of a veterinarian.

- > and a lot of slow internal bleeding.

Dan [Doctor]: It looks like he was doing fine up until the point that somebody picked him up and ran with him

Rick [Sajit]: Oops

- > I'm amazed his skull isn't paste considering the concussive trauma the rest of him suffered."

- > "Hard headed rat," Ken chuckled under his breath.

- > "How bad is it, really?" Sahara asked quietly.

- > The doctor looked at her and shook his head slowly.

- > "I've done all I can do. He's just lost too much blood.

Rebecca: Every bone in his body was shattered and he had massive internal injuries, but that's the real problem here

- > I'm shocked he lasted this long. Without a transfusion there's just... nothing else we can do."

- > "So? Give him the damned blood!" Sajit snapped.

Rick: [Sajit] I'll give it myself. An infusion of cursed werewolf blood? What could go wrong?

- > The doctor took a step back and gave the werewolf a wary glance.

> "It's not that simple, sir. Its blood type is..."

Dan: It's not just that they need two gallons of rat blood, but he has to be a rare rat blood type.

> "His," Sahara interrupted.

> "What," the doctor blinked.

> "His blood. Packy is not an 'it.'"

Tsuneo: Please ignore all the time the doctor called Pack Rat 'him' earlier

> Sahara glared at the surgeon, hands resting on her hips.

> "He is what we call state 'M'.

Rick: Minnesota to be precise.

> 'M' for mutant.

Dan: So if he's M for Mutant can we go all E for Extinction on him?

> His blood type is unique. It doesn't fit any known human

> blood type. If we gave him human blood there's no telling what would happen.

Rick [Doctor]: Personally, I want to try just to find out

> It would likely kill him, just like giving the wrong type of blood to a human patient."

Tsuneo: The Champions universe is chock to the brim with magicians and super-scientists. Surely there's something else they can do?

Rebecca: Yes, but it's not covered in his health plan.

> "Why are you telling usss thisss if there's nothing you can do?" Ken's normally calm demeanor was
> breaking.

Tsuneo: Ken is really not good at figuring out the obvious, is he?

> His words were a growling hiss and the crest of spines running along his head was raised.

Dan: [Doctor] Oh, will you look at that? I'm late for my next... thing. Gotta run!

> Doctor Imohara sighed and gave the group a sympathetic look.

Tsuneo: [Doctor] We do however have a funeral service on base if you want to go over your options.

> "I thought you might want to see him while there's still time. We've got some serious pain killers in
> him right now and he's conscious..."

Rebecca: Although with all the painkillers he's going to be incoherent as all hell

> Sahara suddenly shoved past Haraka and Sajit to stand in front of the doctor.

> "Use me," she blurted.

Dan: [Doctor] No offence, but you're not my type.

> The others all just stood and stared at Sahara with varying degrees of confusion.

Tsuneo: [Ken] Huh?

Rick: [Haraka] Haraka says what?
Dan: [Sajit] Snausages?

> "My blood I mean. I've been checked over by doctors before and they said my blood was weird,"

Rick: Said the bird-cat-deer-pikachu thing
Tsuneo: Well when you put it like that...

> Sahara was bouncing up and down on the balls of her feet.

> "How does that..." Haraka tried to ask.

Rebecca: Look, he was treated by Bigfoot. We're beyond asking, okay?

> "I don't have a type. Or more like... I'm every type. I'm all mixed up y'know? So I count as like, every
> blood type all at once."

Rebecca: She has no idea how this works, does she?

> Doctor Imohara winced and shook his head.

Rick: And this is why stupid people should not be allowed near operating theatres

> "I couldn't. There's no way to know what the effects would really be.

Dan: Like he could melt or explode or anything, really.

> There's that. And I'm certain
> that transfusing blood from one metahuman to another violates a whole laundry list of medical
> protocols."

Dan: Remember, this is how you end up with She-Hulk

> Sajit rumbled in the doctor's direction, his eyes flaring red. The surgeon held his hands up and went
> silent.

Tsuneo: Seriously, threatening the doctor trying to save your friend's life is not going to help.

> Sajit turned to the winged girl.

> "Sahara, how sure are you that this will help Pack Rat?"

Rebecca: I suspect her second option was to try and cast Cure Light Wounds

> "Umm, like..." Sahara thought out loud, rolling her eyes around as she counted in her head,
> "seventy five percent?"

Rebecca: [Sahara] And I mean, like he's going to die anyway.

> "That's good enough for me," Ken and Sajit said simultaneously.

Tsuneo: Well I'll take the completely uninformed guess of an obvious moron as reason enough.
Rick: She's convinced me

> Haraka walked up behind Sahara and gently laid a hand on her shoulder.

> "Sahara, you're not a very big girl,

Rick: She's of nonspecific size

> and the doctor said Pack has lost a lot of blood. To help him,
> even if it works, may take more than you can afford to lose."

Dan: [Sahara] You mean my shadowless holographic Charizard?

Rebecca: [Haraka] No, that's not what Haraka means.

> Ken and Sajit looked at Haraka, then to Sahara. The chimera turned away from the doctor and gave
> Haraka a questioning frown.

> "You don't want me to try and save Packy?"

> "Haraka did not say that,"

Rick [Haraka]: Buuuuut...

> he gestured defensively, "Just don't want anything bad to happen to you, Sahara."

> Haraka gave Sahara a pleading look. Sahara glared at the cheetah man, her ear frills fluttered.

Dan: Does that mean she's happy or she's about to bite, or what?

> "I can't let him die Haraka," Sahara's tone was defiant.

> She whirled on the doctor, "Doctor Imohara, please let me try. He's a good person."

Dan: No he's not.

Tsuneo: Not even in the slightest

> Sahara had both hands clasped under her chin and stared at the surgeon with those deep violet
> eyes.

Rebecca: Her violet eyes which were the violet eyes that she had which were violet

> "But I... bah!"

> The doctor threw up his hands and gestured for Sahara to follow him.

> "Can't believe I'm doing this.

Rick [Doctor]: I can't believe I'm breaking all my ethical and professional guidelines on the basis of an
uninformed guess by somebody who has absolutely no medical background whatsoever

> Freaking metahumans," the doctor fumed.

Dan: [Doctor] Mum said I should have been an accountant, but no, I had to go and save lives.

> The room pack rat was in looked like something from a television medical drama. An array of alien
> looking medical devices

Rick: In the Champions universe they actually could be alien devices from a crashed UFO.

> beeped and blinked, and a tangle of tubes and wires ran from them to the
> broken figure lying on the gurney.

Dan: Do they actually do anything?

Rebecca: They help the doctor justify his budget.

> Sahara's breath caught in her throat when she saw Pack Rat. A
> hospital gown had been loosely draped over his lower body for modesty's sake,

All: Thank you

- > but still, his
- > bloodied, broken body was hard for her to look at. There was a nurse in the room already, injecting
- > something through an i.v.

Dan: [Doctor] Nurse, nurse! Ixnay on the euthanasia-ay!

- > in Pack's slightly less shredded left arm.

Tsuneo: The one that was still recognisable as a limb

- > She looked up and blinked at Sahara, then shot a questioning look at Dr. Imohara.

Rick [Doctor]: Truth is, I'm as lost as you are

- > "It's fine, Jane. Give us a minute?"

Rebecca: [Nurse] I still get to do the autopsy when we're done here, right?

- > The nurse quirked a brow but quietly gathered her clipboard and wheeled her small cart of medical
- > supplies out of the room.

Rebecca: If you're going to commit malpractice then leave me out of it

- > Pack rat rolled his head over to see who had entered. His eyes widened a little as they settled on
- > Sahara.

Rick: And, realising that it may be the last chance he gets before slipping into the great unknown, uttered for his final time, 'Duuuuh, boobs.'

- > "You're really here. Thought I imagined it earlier."

Dan [Pack Rat]: I thought it was just the drugs. Mmm, drugs

- > Sahara padded over to the wounded ratling and leaned over the rail of the bed. She was clearly
- > fighting back her tears as she looked Pack Rat over.

- > "I'm here Packy."

- > "You s-shouldnt be. Don't want you to see me like this."

- > Dr. Imohara left Pack and Sahara to talk

Tsuneo: [Doctor] I'm getting out of here before I get sued.

- > while he retrieved the needles and tubing he would need to
- > perform a direct blood transfusion from the nearby cabinets.

Tsuneo: I wouldn't so much make sure the room is sterilised after this as I'd burn it and everything inside

- > "Hush now." Sahara stroked the short tuft of brown fur atop Pack's head. He immediately relaxed at
- > her touch.

Rick [Pack Rat]: She touched me. I'm never going to wash my hair again.

Dan [Sajit]: You wouldn't anyway

Rick [Pack Rat]: This is also true

- > "Please... go... not much time left." Pack looked at her Sahara. His solid green orbs betrayed the

> terror he was barely managing to suppress.

Tsuneo: Pack Rat is actively hoping there isn't an afterlife.

> Sahara shook her head, "I'm not leaving you, Pack."

> The surgeon walked up behind Sahara and laid a hand on her shoulder.

> "We're ready miss. We have to hurry," he said softly.

Dan: [Doctor] Before I come to my senses.

> Sahara nodded to the surgeon and moved to sit in the chair next to the bed. The doctor pulled one
> of several tubes over, draping it lightly over Pack Rat,

Rebecca: Gently wrapping it around his neck...

> and applied a thick rubber tourniquet to Sahara's arm.

> What are you doing?" Pack croaked out.

> "Losing my damned medical license most likely," Imohara muttered.

Dan: So doctor Imohara, tell me about your previous job?

Rick [Doctor]: I was a top flight surgeon working for the Canadian Government's special anti-supervillain military force.

Dan: And why did you leave that job?

Rick [Doctor]: Oh, I was struck off for performing emergency surgery on a furry despite the fact that it violated all my professional and ethical guidelines.

Dan: So why did you take that course of action?

Rick [Doctor]: I acted on the basis of the completely uniformed quack opinion of another furry

Dan: And what qualifications did they have to support their advice?

Rick [Doctor]: They were a former sex worker.

Dan: We have no more questions, thank you for your time

> Sahara flashed the physician a glare and he fell silent again.

Rebecca: [Doctor] No, you're right. Death threats for throwing away everything to save your friend. I deserve that.

> "We're giving you some of my blood, Packy," Sahara said softly, smiling down at Pack.

> "No good. I'm too screwed up to take blood from anyone."

> "Hush. I'm even more mixed up than you are, mister rat,"

Tsuneo: Can we not try to out-wangst each other?

> Sahara scrunched her nose at Pack, "This

> should buy us some time to patch you up -ouch!"

Dan: Or you could blow up or melt down or – hey, whatever happens, it'll be fun!

> Sahara winced as the doctor inserted the large needle into her arm.

Rick: [Doctor] ...gotta be a vein in here somewhere...

> Imohara fiddled with the tubing

> and it rapidly filled with crimson fluid snaking its way up the tube and into Pack Rat's system.

Tsuneo: [Doctor] Well that's a good sign.

Rebecca: [Sahara] Not really, my blood's usually orange.

> "Just keep clenching and releasing your fist, miss," the doctor said as he moved to check the
> monitors hooked up to the injured rodent.

Dan: [Doctor] Just think about how this is going to help him survive, how he's going to make a full recovery, and how once he's out of the woods you can finally smack him around for being an idiot.

> Sahara pumped her fist and watched Pack Rat intently. Her tail fanned the air behind her slowly.

> "Tried..." Pack whispered.

> "Hm?" Sahara blinked.

> "Tried to come back... to you."

Dan: And only you. Sajit and the others can go to hell

> "That's not what I hear," Sahara replied sadly.

> "It's... complicated," Pack sighed.

> "I know Packy. I know."

> Sahara reached out with her free hand and held Pack's. Her tiny hand was just barely big enough to
> close around the larger rat man's fingers.

Rebecca: This constant mentioning of how small she is only serves to add an air of squickness to this all

Tsuneo: Like there wasn't one already

Rebecca: Well, more so

> "We'll talk more after you feel better. Just stay with us Packy."

> Pack closed his eyes. Sahara peered at him with concern and then looked over to the doctor who
> had been quietly watching the readouts.

Dan: [Doctor] Oh no, you people have done enough damage already. Leave me out of this.

> Several of the machines began to beep and buzz alarmingly.

Dan: Wait, that's just Pack Rat's retro arcade ringtone. Never mind

> Sahara nearly came up out of her seat but then remembered the needle in her arm and
> restrained herself.

Rebecca: She had to think about that last part

> "W-what's going on?" she stammered.

> The surgeon didn't answer her right away. He was busy pressing buttons.

Dan [Doctor]: Truth is I have no idea what I'm doing at all

> After a couple tense

> moments he moved from the machines back to the rat man. The rodent was still, eyes closed. The

> doctor forced open one of his eyes and growled as he remembered that Pack had no visible pupils,

> just those bright, solid green orbs.

Rick: The sort of thing you pull out of an ancient altar only to find they're horribly cursed

> "His vitals are spiking, everything just buried the needle" Imohara finally answered.

> "What does that mean? Is that bad?" Sahara's tail flailed frantically behind her.

Dan: [Doctor] It means that it's too late to talk about life insurance.

> "It's all wrong,"

Tsuneo: My three-word review of the fic

> Imohara replied, "He should either be slowly stabilizing if his body is accepting the

> blood, or having an immune response otherwise."

Rebecca: [Sahara] Could it be because my blood is 90% strychnine?

> The doctor was speaking out loud but wasn't looking at Sahara. Instead he was focusing on the

> various medical machines as they spat out streams of paper.

Rebecca: And now he realises that he's out of toner.

> "This is totally different," he muttered while reading over a roll of printouts as it was ejected from a

> nearby monitor, "It's like everything he has is going into overdrive."

Rebecca: [Sahara] That would be the 10% Red Bull.

> Pack Rat's breathing had become rapid and shallow. Sahara fidgeted in her chair and gave the

> doctor a panicked look.

Tsuneo: [Doctor] Don't use the mutant's blood, I said. Anything could happen, I said. But do they listen to the trained medical professional? Nooo.

> Little blue arcs of electricity jumped back and forth between Sahara's antlers.

Tsuneo: You probably should have told him about those before letting her in to the room full of sensitive medical equipment

> "Doctor, what should I do?"

Rick: [Doctor] Oh, you've done enough already.

> Imohara moved to Sahara and quickly stemmed the flow of blood from her arm and removed the
> needle. He pressed several squares of gauze to the needle site and muttered, "Hold this here."

> Jane, the nurse,

Rebecca [Nurse]: I have a name

> jogged back into the room. She took one look at the monitors and then gave

> Imohara a shocked look.

> "I need you to get a Benzopril feed on his main line Jane," the doctor said without looking at her.

Tsuneo: [Nurse] But do we know how that will react with the strange blood you gave him?

Rebecca: [Doctor] Honestly, at this point we can't make it any worse.

> "What happened," the nurse asked as she moved to hook a bag of clear fluid to the pole affixed to

> Pack's gurney and start the medication feed.

Rick: Will that even work for a rat?
Dan: Let's find out

> "A malpractice investigation most likely,"

Rick: Haha, its funny because of his gross breaches of conduct

> the trauma surgeon growled, "He's reacting to the blood transfusion."

> "What blood transfusion? I thought he was state M?"

Rick: For Monkey

> Imohara looked intently at Sahara for a moment.

Dan: [Doctor] Mistakes were made!

> "Her," Jane pointed at Sahara, "You used her?"

> "I know!" Imohara barked.

Tsuneo: Nurse is now strongly considering leaving the room and disavowing all knowledge of what went on here

> The two medical professionals fell silent as they worked to stabilize the trembling rodent. Sahara
> stood nearby, trembling herself and fighting to remain calm.

Dan: And just remember that this is all your fault.

> She held tightly to Pack Rat's hand.

> "Packy... please... I'm sorry... please don't die!"

Tsuneo: This is so gripping
Rick: Really?
Tsuneo: No.

> Tears were streaming down Sahara's eyes. Jane nearly tripped over Sahara's tail, and decided to
> usher her to the side, which was more difficult than one would have thought.

Rebecca [Nurse]: No, fine, stand there and get in the way of everything and risk the patient's life. Not like I care.

> Eventually Sahara
> relented and released Pack Rat's hand and stood to the side while Doctor Imohara and Nurse Jane
> fought to figure out what the reaction meant and how to stop it.

Tsuneo: [Doctor] Maybe if we had the faintest idea what we'd done in the first place.
Rebecca: [Nurse] Oh, no. You're not pinning this one on me, buster.

> Several long, frenzied moments passed but then, as quickly as it began, Pack Rat's tremors
> ceased. The monitors became silent save for the occasional beep or blink. The frantic spray of
> paper readouts slowed to something resembling a sane pace.

Dan: Nothing to do with his condition. The just had a paper feed problem

> The unconscious rodent lay very still. Everyone froze, and all breath was held

Rick: Vaguely wondering if he was going to explode or something

> until the ratling drew in a deep relaxed breath of his own.
> Sahara was practically vibrating as Imohara moved to check Pack over.

> "This... this can't be right..." Imohara muttered

Tsuneo: I mean, a Transformers-Need for Speed crossover? Who even comes up with that?

> as he checked over the newest paper feeds.

Rick: [Doctor] Well according to this, he's some kind of previously undiscovered species of lemur.
[Ding!]

> Jane stood just behind him, looking equally bewildered.

Rebecca: Her main job is to fish for responses

> Sahara held it in for nearly a minute

Dan: Again, duuuuuuuuuuuuhhhhhhhhhhhh

> while the two others read the feeds before she blurted out, "WHAT?! What's wrong?"

Rick: We're reading a super-furry Champions Online fic about an incel ratman. Everything is wrong

> "Nothing." the two medics said in unison.

> "Then why..." Sahara trailed off, giving the doctor a confused look.

> "He's completely stable," Imohara said

Tsuneo: The massive internal injuries he suffered seem to have taken care of themselves

> without looking at Sahara. He tore off a section of printouts and took it to a nearby table.

> "His heart rate is steady. Blood pressure is up. That shouldn't be possible.

Rebecca: His official diagnosis is 'a wizard did it'

> We got less than one full unit of blood in him before the reaction."

Tsuneo: [Doctor] We need to run a lot of tests on you, young lady. Like, a lot.

> "He's coming around, doctor," Jane said. She was leaning over Pack Rat, watching him quizzically.

Dan: And somewhat annoyed she'd lost money on the dead pool.

> Sahara rushed over to the bed and stood opposite Nurse Jane as she worked.

Tsuneo: [Nurse] Could you get your wings out of... And now your tail is... Look, could you just stand back a little, please?

> Pack murmured something incomprehensible and stirred a little. Sahara leaned in closer.

> "What was that, Packy?" she whispered.

> "Looks like... you're stuck with me."

Dan: I mean, you know, we saved your life and all that. But you know what? Go so to hell you ungrateful rodent

> Pack rat opened his eyes and looked up at Sahara sleepily.

Tsuneo: [Pack Rat] Do you mind if we look at my severe concussion next?

> "Please... don't cry..." he croaked.

> Sahara laughed and wiped away the remaining tears as the tension in her broke. She laid her head
> on the rat-man's chest, careful of her antlers.

Dan [Pack Rat]: Ow, ow. That's really uncomfortable. Everything's still sore. Ow.

> Her wings unfurled and folded over the rat, incidentally pushing Jane aside.

Rebecca [Nurse]: Fine, next time I won't help save your lives

> Sahara's tail wagged happily behind her. Jane ushered the doctor a few steps away.

Tsuneo: [Nurse] Watch out for the tail, it's a killer.

> He gave her an annoyed look at first but Jane shook her head at him. Something seemed to
> sink in and the doctor relented, quietly standing aside.

Rick [Doctor]: Let's get out of here before the yiffing begins

> "Don't you ever run off and do something like that again Packy.

Dan: [Pack Rat] I mean, I'm not going to have to blow up my creator again, really.

> You had us all so worried... I... was so scared."

> "I'm sorry," Pack whispered back, "I didn't think... it mattered."

> Sahara rested her forehead against Pack's her piercing violet eyes locked with his.

> "It matters, Packy. You matter. Don't let anyone ever make you think otherwise."

Rebecca: Be positive or I will kill you!

> Pack started to say something, but stopped. He wanted to tell Sahara what he was feeling.

Dan: Sore, mostly.

> He

> wanted to tell her the thought of coming back to her was the only thing that kept him holding on,
> despite his suicidal impulse.

Tsuneo: But preferably not where Ken and Sajit can hear him.

> He wanted to tell her how much it meant to him that she treated him
> like a person and not just some lowly vermin. Being honest with himself... he wanted to kiss her
> right then and there. But that wouldn't be fair. She had done enough. More than enough, really. It
> wouldn't be right for him to lay the hopes of one lonely rat-man on her right now.

Dan [Pack Rat]: Well I've just been given a wonderful and selfless gift by this woman out of the goodness of her own heart that has literally given me a second chance at life. Time to go back to being a resentful, self-loathing sack of crap, I guess.

> Eventually, after several peaceful moments, Sahara rose up and smiled down at Pack.

> "How do you feel?"

> "Better... I don't know how but... definitely better."

Rick [Pack Rat]: Now there's a part of you that will always be inside of me
Rebecca [Sahara]: I'm leaving

> "Damned if I know, and I'm the doctor here," Imohara muttered.

> Pack and Sahara both gave the doctor and nurse a sheepish look.

Rick: Also, wah-wah

> "Can the others come see him?" Sahara asked.

> "Sure. Why not? Not like the rules matter here anymore."

Rick [Doctor]: I'm going to quit now before they fire me and bugger off to a tropical island somewhere.
Preferably one with no extradition treaties

> The surgeon tossed a folder full of papers onto a nearby table and stomped off. Jane scowled at the
> flustered surgeon and gave Sahara an apologetic look

Rebecca [Nurse]: He always gets this way when he trashes his own career.

> and moved to follow him.

> "I'll go tell your friends they can come in," she called over her shoulder.

Dan: And the lizard and the wolf guy too.

> Sahara nodded at the nurse as she exited, but stayed right beside Pack Rat.

> "Thank you," Pack whispered.

> "For what?"

> "For saving me."

Dan: And anything for the two medical staff who did all the work despite their better judgement? No?

> "You're welcome," Sahara giggled,

Tsuneo: No idea how. Just chalk it down to a random deus ex machina and move on.

> "What would the world be without Pack Rat around to keep it in line, eh?"

Tsuneo: What indeed would the world be like without the whining, self-pitying, triggerhappy rat-man?

> Pack didn't answer. He had spent too much time thinking about that question lately as it was.

Rebecca: Don't think you want to try it out and see?

> For

> the moment, at least until the others arrived, he was here alone with Sahara, and that was enough.

Dan [Pack Rat]: This moment's going in the spank bank

> ----

> Chapter 13

> This is the last chapter of my first attempt at a serious fan fiction.

Dan: We apologise for the inconvenience.

> I want to again thank everyone
> who has supported me during this project and helped make it possible with their feedback and
> awesome in-character roleplaying.

Rick: This fic wouldn't have been possible without you all spamming emotes

> I couldn't do it without any of you. Specifically I'd like to again
> thank Sajit (doctordarkspawn), Ken (nulion5545), Haraka (narissis), and Sahara
> (BombermanGOLD)

Tsuneo: I'll let you decide which one of them has the stupider username

Rebecca: If I was narissis, I would feel pretty unhappy after reading this

> for giving their blessings in using their characters in my story.

Rick: Extra special thanks to all the others I met along the way; World's Toughest Mailman, Renegade Box of Questionite, Pinky Pyro, Real Soviet Damage, Club Caprice Bingo Bot and Iron Manx.
All real Champions Online characters

> Hopefully this will not be my last fiction based on Champions Online, and likely not my last Pack Rat
> story.

Dan: Look forward to more exciting Pack Rat stories such as Pack Rat creeps on his PRIMUS contact, Pack Rat goes to the NRA and Pack Rat storms the Capitol Building.

> Much has happened since this chapter in his story started

Rebecca: Some of it involves a restraining order.

> and there's much more to tell.

> If you'd like to learn more about Sahara, check out BombermanGOLD's fanfic for Sahara's Early
> years:

Rick: Better yet, don't

Rebecca: I worry that's going to give Voice Two ideas

> Thanks again, and enjoy the last chapter of Pack Rat - Sins of the Father.

Dan: Sins of the guy who was barely in the fic, I guess

Tsuneo: I guess 'Pack Rat whines for thirteen chapters' wasn't a snappy enough title.

> Pack Rat's recovery turned out to be nothing short of miraculous. On top of surviving wounds that
> should have killed him his shattered bones and internal injuries mended at a mind boggling rate.

Rebecca: Could it have been the magic furry girl's super special blood? Naaaw.

> While heroes with regenerative powers were certainly not unheard of, that sort of thing just wasn't
> part of the ratling soldier's portfolio.

Rick: What are rat powers anyway?

Rebecca: Spreading disease, gnawing into garbage containers, eating your own young and being inexplicably popular with 'edgy' teenage girls

> Pack Rat spent a week at Force Station Steelhead as his bones knitted and his wounds closed.

Dan: Of course, he couldn't get to sleep until they gave him a plush assault rifle to snuggle.

- > Sajit and Ken returned to Millennium City once they felt certain that
- > Pack was on the mend and in good hands.

Rick: Well they're not bigfoots, but I guess they'll do

- > Sahara stayed longer, being unwilling to leave the rat
- > man's side as he healed. Haraka likewise lingered,

Tsuneo: Knowing how important Pack Rat was to Sahara, Haraka selflessly devoted himself to ensuring that Pack Rat's recovery was both swift and comfortable.

Rebecca: Aww, he's such a sweetie.

- > although he seemed to grow less and less comfortable as Sahara doted over the wounded rodent.

Dan: He was becoming ever increasingly convinced that Pack Rat had done all this for attention

- > At the end of the week Pack was ready to
- > return home even though his body still ached from the massive amount of punishment he had been
- > subjected to.

Tsuneo: It turned out that getting exploded was bad for him. Who knew?

- > The medical staff, including the flustered doctor Imohara and nurse Jane, saw the
- > unusual trio off.

Rick [Doctor]: Oh please god, just go already

- > The scene bordered on ridiculous, with Sahara insisting on pushing a protesting rat
- > hybrid in a wheel chair to the VTOL landing pad, with Haraka padding along behind, tail swishing
- > behind him in a less than content fashion.

Dan: He's a cat. Him swishing his tail could mean that he's happy, sad, angry, hungry, about to attack or just about anything else

- > The flight from Steel Head back to UNTIL headquarters in Millennium City was likewise tense. Pack
- > Rat had picked up on Haraka's unease early on, and not wishing to strain their friendship further

Dan: He didn't want to fight over the girl, knowing just how badly he'd lose.

- > had feigned a desire to be alone during the trip. He claimed a need to start on the mountain of
- > paperwork that UNTIL would require after such a momentous operation

Rick: When I think of all the things that I like about the superhero genre, filling in paperwork is right at the top of that list

- > as Pack was returning from,
- > which was technically accurate. In truth the rat man would have been more than happy to curl up
- > against Sahara, wrapped up in the warm embrace of her soft feathered wings and sleep the whole
- > way home,

Tsuneo: Sahara's thoughts on the matter no doubt being irrelevant.

- > but he knew that would be pushing some boundaries.

Rebecca: I mean, you could try handling all this like adults, but I guess we're going back to the resentment again

- > The mission had been, technically, successful in the end.

Dan: Technical victories are the best victories of all.

> The VIPER research lab had been destroyed. The Huntress project had been completely derailed.

Tsuneo: Honestly, VIPER were about to pull his funding anyway.

> The only sticking point was

> Medford. Pack never did get a good look at the shadowy figure gloating down at him from the

> control room, and in the mad scramble that followed he wasn't able to confirm the kill.

Dan [Medford]: All part of the plan

Rick [Pack Rat]: Oh god damn it!

> Back at UNTIL headquarters in Millennium City the debriefing had been lengthy, as expected. Pack

> had been forced to accept an official reprimand for the lost equipment and unconfirmed status of

> Medford

Rebecca: We all know he has to be alive, simply because he hasn't stolen the polyvoltaic multiturbine and built a death ray on Monster Island.

> and the last of the Huntresses, the one called Katja.

Rick: She has wares if you have coins

> Unofficially, though, Pack's UNTIL liaison commended him for his tenacity.

Dan: Well done on your murder spree

> The uncomfortable part came

Rick: When they discussed his wanton murder of VIPER troops.

> when several UNTIL

> scientists had asked to examine Pack Rat and Sahara to get a better idea of how Sahara's blood

> has affected the rat man and why.

Tsuneo: I mean, the recovery was nothing short of miraculous. The number of lives this could save -

> The ratling's opinion on the matter had been summed up with

> several phrases and gestures not fit for polite company,

Tsuneo: No, no, okay just let people suffer, I guess.

> and after the battle weary commando had

> unleashed some thinly veiled threats at the scientists in question the subject had been, for the

> moment, grudgingly dropped.

Dan: Yes, threaten the people who are trying to help you. Great move.

Rebecca: And yet, he wonders why he's single

> After another few days of taking it easy in the cool quiet confines of his basement apartment the

> brown-furred soldier was feeling like himself again.

Dan: So an isolated paranoid loner?

> Whatever magic was in Sahara's blood had

> turned what should have been months of surgery and possibly years of rehabilitation into a couple

> of weeks bed rest, and impressive feat even within superhuman circles.

Rick: Pfft, like who doesn't have a mutant healing factor these days

- > Pack clutched the cardboard drink carrier nervously and waited for the elevator. He had asked
- > Sahara to meet him for smoothies as a token of thanks for her part in bringing him back alive.

Tsuneo: She gave him her blood, he gave her a smoothie. Seems fair.

- > He
- > swallowed a small lump of guilt, since that was really only part of why he wanted to meet her alone.
- > Several days ago Pack had decided to go for broke and be completely honest with the winged
- > beauty about his feelings,

Dan: [Pack Rat] Sahara, there's something I have to tell you.

Rick: [Sahara] Like, what is it?

Dan: [Pack Rat] There's someone in my life. I've loved her for as long as I've known her, and I've always been afraid of admitting my feelings. But she has someone in her life, and for too long I've been scared of coming between them. Yet now I know I must do something, and I have to tell you how I feel.

Rick: [Sahara] Like, really?

Dan: [Pack Rat] You need to know that I am hopelessly in love –

Rick: [Sahara] Yes!

Dan: [Pack Rat] With Ken's rifle.

[Pause]

Rick: [Sahara] Yeah, me too.

- > even at the risk of pushing her away and possible angering Haraka.

Tsuneo: He immediately considers the worst case scenario. Very healthy mindset.

- > Sahara had chosen the Zeppelin as their meeting spot. The Zeppelin was one of Millennium City's
- > more impressive landmarks.

Rebecca: Sure it's a city full of superheroes, aliens, giant robots and advanced technology, but the blimp is where it's really at

- > It was situated in the heart of Renaissance Center, ostensibly the heart and soul of Millennium City,

Dan: Home of GM's corporate offices and some outdated seventies architecture

- > and was a marvel of engineering. Huge pneumatic tubes connected the
- > massive blimp to the ground-based visitor's center and shot tourists and citizens up hundreds of
- > feet skyward to the observation deck

Tsuneo: Be amazed at the existence of elevators!

- > which hung suspended from the underside of the great balloon.

Dan: It was amongst Millennium City's top 10 targets for supervillains.

- > Computer-controlled thrusters kept the whole structure stable even in the worst winds, and
- > the windows lining the area afforded a spectacular view of the city in all directions.

Rebecca: It seems like they're going to a lot of effort for an observation lounge

- > Pack took a deep
- > breath and stepped into the cylindrical canister and felt his heart pound as he was whisked up the
- > flexible tube to the zeppelin above.

> "Get it together rat. You were less nervous breaking into the VIPER base," Pack chided himself.

Tsuneo: Well I am sure this will be an entirely relaxed and natural conversation

> After a few moments the cylinder eased to a halt, the doors slid open, and Pack stepped out. The
> observation deck was empty of visitors,

Rick: Usually it was full of ERPers who didn't have access to hideouts

> which was not unusual for a Tuesday afternoon.

Dan: Pack-Rat would have suggested an hourly rate hotel.

> The

> tastefully decorated area sported a lot of neutral grays and blues. Benches and tables lined the
> area, and were excellent for comfortable viewing of the city below or for sharing a meal.

Rebecca: They were bolted to the floor, just in case any supervillains wanted to throw them.

> What was

> unusual was the open window to Pack's left. Normally the large panes were kept locked tight to
> prevent accidents (or suicides) but today one was deliberately left standing open, letting a steady
> breeze blow into the area.

Tsuneo: It strikes me that having opening windows on your high-rise observation lounge is not the best idea

> Outside the thick shatterproof glass

Rebecca: Shatterproof glass that can be casually opened

Dan: They're really missing the point here

> a wide ledge ran around the edge of the suspended gondola.

> Several paces away from the open window sat the winged form of Sahara. Her legs dangled from
> the ledge and the breeze blowing past ruffled her brown feathers gently. Pack Rat poked his head
> through the opening, holding his drink carrier up demonstratively.

Dan: I'm surprised security let those in here.

Rick: Because of health code violations?

Dan: No, because they sell their own smoothies at three times the price.

> "Who wants smoothies?" he chimed.

Rebecca: All the while being blasted by the wind chill.

> Sahara jerked slightly in surprise then beamed at the rat. A heart melting smiles spread across her
> angelic features as she waved hello.

Dan: Don't think you're laying it on a bit thick there, fic?

Tsuneo: This is probably how Pack Rat sees her. Which, by the way, is super creepy.

> "Meee!" she chimed back, waving pack rat over with a giggle.

Rebecca: Also, tee-hee.

> Pack eyed the window warily for a moment,

Tsuneo: Their date ended badly when Pack Rat was dragged out for brawling with the window.

> and then stepped through the open glass and onto the

> ledge. The highly trained rat man had a gymnast's sense of balance to match the body, but was
> certainly more comfortable on solid ground.

Dan: I'm not saying anything here, but does anyone else find it a bit conspicuous that the flying chimera decided to have a date on a narrow, high-rise ledge?

Rick: Well when you put it like that...

> Now was no time for hesitation, though,

Tsuneo: Just time for his crippling fear of heights.

> and so he

> swallowed his apprehension and eased over to where Sahara was seated. Pack set the cardboard
> carrier down next to Sahara and eased down to a seated position, letting his own feet dangle over
> the ledge.

Tsuneo: And then he accidentally knocked the smoothies over the ledge

> "Thanks for leaving the window open for me. I doubt I could have climbed up the tube and out onto
> the ledge here,"

Dan [Pack Rat]: I mean, we could have stayed inside and looked out the windows without being perched precariously hundreds of meters above the city, but this is also good

> Pack chuckled as he passed Sahara her drink. Actually he probably -could- have
> made the climb... but it wouldn't have been fun at all.

Dan: He totally could have done that easily and he just didn't want to make everyone else feel bad.

> Sahara took a long sip, savoring the cool sweet beverage before replying.

Rebecca [Sahara]: Oh hey, I hope you didn't put any strawberries in these. They bring me out in hives. Weird mutant physiology and all that.

Rick [Pack Rat]: Uh...

> "I know one of the maintenance guys. Had him leave it open for you."

> Pack sipped at his own drink, less out of thirst than out of nervousness. His tail flopped around
> behind him, betraying his unease.

Rebecca: Triggering Sahara's feline instincts, whereupon she immediately tried to pounce on him and bite it off.

> "What is it you wanted to talk to me about, Packy?" Sahara said around her straw, head cocked her
> head to the side quizzically.

> Pack set his drink back in the carrier and took a deep breath.

Rick [Pack Rat]: I like Zabanya

Rebecca [Sahara]: I'm leaving.

> "How are things with you and Haraka?"

Tsuneo: The first thing you do on a date is ask her about her boyfriend. Real classy move there.

> Sahara blinked those huge violet eyes.

Dan: Weirdly, the least distinctive thing about her.

> "Haraka? Good I guess. Why?"

> "Are things... y'know... serious?"

Dan: [Sahara] Oh yeah! Look at this ring he got me!

Rick: [Pack Rat] 'Scuse me, just going to jump now...

> "Serious? I dunno. Haraka doesn't think he's ready to "claim a mate," Sahara used finger quotes,

Rebecca: Is there any part of Harkara's character that doesn't sound like thinly-veiled racism?

> wiggling her claws in Pack's direction, "But that's okay. It is what it is."

Dan: [Sahara] Of course, the sex is mind-blowing and – wait, climb down from there!

> Sahara paused.

> "Wait... why are you asking, Pack?"

Tsuneo: It took a while for her to register that he was being really creepy.

> The rat man swallowed hard.

> "I've just... been thinking a lot lately. After everything that happened in Canada I mean."

Rick: Between being mauled by killer catgirls, getting blown up and freezing to death he had a lot of time for self-reflection

> Sahara set her drink down and adjusted herself to face Pack more directly.

> "What have you been thinking?"

Tsuneo [Pack Rat]: So you know how nobody's ever actually seen bigfoot?

> "I didn't really expect to come back from that mission," Pack scratched the back of his head

Rebecca: [Sahara] Yeah, Ken was hoping to get more in your will.

> "I know." Sahara's tone was slightly disappointed.

Dan: In as far as she's disappointed that he came back.

> "But at the airport, when I left and you asked me to come back... I started to think... there might be
> something worth coming back to."

Tsuneo: [Pack Rat] I mean, I've still got half a tub of Ben & Jerry's in my freezer.

> "I'm glad you decided to hold on, Packy. I was so worried about you. We all were."

Rick [Ken]: I was worried, but I was also more focused on leading a superhero counteroffensive against an alien horde intent on wiping out all human life.

Dan [Saijit]: Yeah, but nobody cares about you, Ken

Rick [Ken]: This is also true

> Sahara reached over and laid her hand atop Pack's. The simple gesture sent an electric jolt of
> excitement up the rat's spine, which he fought to ignore.

Tsuneo: A girl touched him. This is the greatest moment of his life

> "Listen I know you and Haraka are an item," Pack rushed to get his words out before fear and good
> sense silenced him, "But I've been thinking... hoping I suppose... that maybe there could be... that

> we..."

Rebecca: [Pack Rat] What I'm trying to say is, does he like rat guys?

> Pack cursed himself quietly as words failed and he began to stammer. Sahara smirked, and after a moment interjected.

> "Pack, I've not always been part of the hero scene.

Rick: She tried being a hand model, but the claws were a bit of a problem.

> When I first left home I was completely on my own for quite a few years and... I did a lot of things. To get by, y'know?"

Dan: She had her own Twitch stream.

> "I know. You've mentioned it before."

> "What Haraka and I have it... it's mostly just physical. Y'know? Just for fun. He's cool and all but he's not ready for anything serious.

Rebecca [Sahara]: What I'm saying is that we have lots of freaky animal sex

Dan [Pack Rat]: Thanks

Rebecca [Sahara]: I mean, a lot

Dan [Pack Rat]: I get it

Rebecca [Sahara]: And we're basically doing it all the time when you're not around.

Dan [Pack Rat]: Well, I figured that, but...

Rebecca [Sahara]: Hell, we boned before I came here to see you

Dan [Pack Rat]: I'm going back to Canada

> And really I don't know if I'd be good for someone who is looking for more, considering my past." Sahara sighed.

> "Sahara," Pack broke in, "I'm a rat man whose primary skill set consists of filling people full of lead and blowing stuff all to hell. Who am I to judge?"

Rick: Working out interpersonal relationships, shooting people in cold blood... same thing, right?

> Sahara failed to suppress a laugh.

Rebecca: [Sahara] Ha ha, you're right! You are a remorseless killer.

> Her melodic voice sounded a bit like wind chimes to the ratling's keen ears.

Tsuneo: If her laugh sounds like wind chimes then something has gone really, really wrong.

> "Nice guys... don't usually want to date prostitutes, Packy.

Dan: [Pack Rat] Yeah, why should I have to pay?

Rick: [Sahara] So not helping.

> Not in the, ahem, traditional sense anyway."

> Pack winced. Nice guy. Girl code for ugly.

Rebecca: Oh boy. Here we go.

> Sahara must have noticed his reaction because her eyes widened a bit.

> "What? What'd I say?"

> "Nothing. I just... I know Haraka's a lot better looking than me,

Rebecca [Sahara]: And the sex is great

Dan [Pack Rat]: Oh god damn it!

> so you don't have to use the whole 'nice guy' excuse. I get it."

Tsuneo: Oh yes. Pack Rat's definitely a 'nice guy'.

> Pack tried very hard not to let any of the old bitterness he felt show in his tone. He partly

> succeeded.

Rick: Really?

Dan: No.

> Sahara shook her head at Pack emphatically.

> "No, Packy, you don't get it," she shifted a bit closer, "I've been with... ahem... a lot of guys and that

> isn't something that just goes away, y'know? You deserve better than that."

Rebecca: My angsty backstory is worse than your angsty backstory

Rick: Nuh-uh, I am the angstiest

> Pack gave Sahara a look of disbelief.

> "Sahara that was something you did. It's not who you are. You shouldn't feel like you have to settle

> for less because of what you had to do in the past. You deserve better than that."

Tsuneo: And that's why she's not going out with him.

> Sahara scrunched her nose at Pack as he turned her words back around on her. Pack smiled. He

> was relieved to know that the ever-confident bubbly chimer had her own insecurities.

Rebecca: Now he could really neg on her.

> "It really... doesn't matter to you that I used to..."

> "Not if it doesn't matter to you that sometimes I have to shoot people. Like... a lot"

Tsuneo: Being a sex worker, killing people in cold blood. Same thing, right?

> There was a long pause as the two metahumans looked at each other.

> "I dunno... I... need to talk to Haraka," Sahara finally broke the silence.

Rebecca [Sahara]: I mean, maybe he'd be down for a threesome

Dan [Pack Rat]: That's not what I meant...

> Pack sighed.

> "That's fair... wait... does that mean you're considering...?"

Rebecca: [Sahara] I mean, durr. It's obvious I was only ever here to be your shallow love interest.

> Sahara shoved the drink carrier away and shifted up next to Pack Rat. She leaned against him,

> resting her head on his shoulder. Pack drew in a sharp breath and held it. He was unused to such

> simple displays of affection

Tsuneo: He was terrified that he was now covered in cooties

> and was quietly terrified that any movement would break the spell and
> ruin the moment. Sahara could apparently sense the tension in the rat man's body. She shifted
> slightly, and her long dexterous tail curled around and draped over Pack's opposite shoulder.

Dan: Pack Rat stares at the tail as if it's a viper ready to strike.

> "Relax Packy. We'll figure this out."

> "You... you don't have to..."

> Sahara pressed one delicately clawed finger to Pack's lips, then handed him his smoothie.

> "Hush, mister Rat. You don't need to try and give me an out. I know what I'm doing."

Rick: [Pack Rat] Well that's good, because I don't have a clue.

> Pack swallowed the lump in his throat and sipped his drink. Sahara followed suit, taking a long pull
> on the straw and snuggling up against the ratling at her side.

> After several quiet moments Pack mustered up the courage to speak again.

> "I'm not sure how to... y'know... begin this," Pack mused.

Rick: How about a cold opening with you gunning down bad guys in a warehouse?

> "Me neither," Sahara said quietly.

> "Maybe... a date?"

> "A date..." Sahara giggled, "Never been on an actual date."

> "I find that hard to believe"

> "S'true. I don't really count any of... before," she shrugged.

Tsuneo: What about her and Hakara?

Rebecca: They skipped the whole dating thing and just went straight to the sex.

Tsuneo: And Pack Rat's resentment builds just a little bit more.

> "Yeah."

> "Still need to talk to Haraka."

> "Think he'll be angry," Pack asked.

Rick [Hakara]: What Pack Rat have that Hakara not?

Rebecca [Sahara]: For starters, he can use the first person

> "Probably a little hurt, but... not angry I don't think."

Tsuneo: That would require him to be a character, or something.

> Pack nodded, and paused a moment before speaking again.

> "Is it awful of me that there's a little rat in the back of my head cheering about victory over the feline
> oppressors?"

Dan: [Sahara] I'm a quarter cat, you arse.

> Sahara descended into a fit of giggle and clung to Pack Rat.

> "This is nice," she eventually sighed.

Rebecca [Sahara]: Okay, off for more freaky boning with Hakara.

Dan [Pack Rat]: God damn it.

> "Yeah," Pack said, closing his eyes, "It is."

Rebecca: Pack Rat would continue his career of fighting crime by casually murdering everyone who looked at him the wrong way, all the while continuing to stew in his own resentment. Eventually his player moved on from Champions Online, leaving him in the hell of abandoned MMO characters.

Dan: Saijit would also continue to fight crime by eating bad guys and collecting their skulls. However, after an incident with a cartoon mailman, he was declared a public menace and had to be put down.

Rick: Sahara married Haraka and produced a litter of unholy abominations against man and God. The pair of them moved out to the suburbs where they now spend their days fighting the home owners association.

Tsuneo: After the spectacular and complete failure of his plan, Doctor Medford moved on to more sensible and achievable goals. He is currently working on a plan to smuggle drugs across the border based around Evil Knievel.

Rebecca: Deprived of any purpose in life, the huntresses would eventually find work as 'hostesses' in Club Caprice, where they are paid by the half-hour

Rick: And finally Ken continued to be an entity that existed in space and time.

On that final comment, the big screen turned off, reverting the world back into prose format. "And that was the final sequence of alphanumeric characters that comprised Pack Rat – Sins of the Father," Tsuneo considered. "A fic that was full of surprises, none of which were pleasant."

"I have to agree there," Rebecca nodded. "On the upside, I did not see a lot of what happened coming. On the downside, those twists were, for the most part, entirely unwanted."

"I mean, look at that last part," Dan nodded. "I really did not see this fic dovetailing into 'medical drama' as a likely outcome. And yet, here we are."

"And even then the fic had to continue with the self-indigent whining," Rick noted. "Here's this pair of medical professionals basically putting their careers on the line to save Pack Rat's life. And does he or anyone else show the slightest hint of gratitude?"

"Of course not," Tsuneo agreed. "Instead it dovetails into all humans continuing to be bastards while Pack Rat and pals berate them for simply being there."

"He really is an ungrateful little snot, isn't he?" Rebecca offered.

"Entirely," Dan nodded. "I mean, every interaction is loaded like that. He can't be thankful at all; instead he needs to whine, complain, put himself down and act like he's the victim in all things."

"Now I'm wondering if that's why Bigfoot abandoned him in the woods," Rick considered, "Just so they wouldn't have to listen to him."

"It makes sense," Tsuneo admitted, and then pauses. "Yes, Bigfoot abandoning the rat-man it rescued in the woods because it didn't want to talk to him makes perfect sense. What is wrong with this fic?"

"Everything?" Rebecca suggested.

"Besides that, I mean," he sighed.

"So I can see you're all very much engaged with the fic," the Voice cut in to the conversation.

"In as far as we hate it, sure," Dan replied.

"Excellent," the Voice beamed. "In that case, I'd love to hear your reviews."

"So I'll start in the place we usually start, and that's with the lead character," Rebecca spoke up. "Pack Rat continues a long tradition of aggressively unlikeable OCs, but even then he manages to put a new spin on it. The core of his character is that he's miserable, that nobody likes him and that the whole world seems to be against him. While he blames it on 'people are mean and hate rats', when you look at it, Pack Rat himself needs to shoulder a lot of the blame."

"Let's be blunt here," she continued. "Pack Rat is a surly, disagreeable shut in who spends all his time locked in his basement, playing with his guns and building bombs. His interactions with the rest of the world consist of him being overly aggressive and argumentative for the sake of him, and then being shocked that people don't like him. Instead, he claims that everyone is biased against him, then goes out of his way to give them reasons not to like him to confirm his claim."

"On top of that, Pack Rat is basically an incel creep," she added. "He hits all the check marks. He's single, lonely, and claims that the whole world is against him, without showing any self-awareness that he is the source of all his own problems. There's a girl he likes, but he won't say a word to her because he thinks she'll reject him, and then stew in his own bitterness while leering at her. Of course, he blames all his problems on the 'Staceys' who want to date 'Chad' catboys instead of giving 'nice guys' like him a chance, and yes, he even uses the phrase 'nice guy'. However, he ends up being rewarded for his behaviour with a date with his fantasy girlfriend anyway."

"Since he's the lead, Pack Rat is obviously going to take the lion's share of the airtime," Dan began. "Nothing wrong with that, perfectly natural for what's essentially a solo story. Only, of course he needs supporting characters. The problem is that in this fic, they're all supporting and hardly characters at all."

"Pack Rat is surrounded by his buddies, Sajit, shallow love interest and that lizard guy, I guess. Sajit is the only one of them that gets any real characterisation beyond a most basic role. Naturally, it's all awful as he casually talks about cannibalism and dehumanising their opponents. But that's okay, it's all in the name of supporting Pack Rat, constantly propping him up and telling him that he's not a useless hateable whining little creep and that his life has value despite all evidence to the contrary. Sajit's there not to be Sajit, but to be Pack Rat's confidence who makes a lot of off-colour comments."

"Sahara's much worse given her prominent role in the fic. Her personality never goes beyond 'bubbly,' save for when she has to wallow in her own angst just to drag herself down to Pack Rat's level. Worse still, she's deliberately kept out of the action of the fic. She's the last one to show up at his apartment, and she does nothing to aid in his rescue. Her magic blood saving him is pure plot contrivance, quickly brushed over and forgotten so she can be the object of his desire once more. And of course, the moment Pack Rat sums up the courage to approach her, she's all over him. Sahara is his motivation and reward, not her own person."

"And Ken."

"I loved Ken," Rebecca admitted.

Dan nodded his agreement. "Me too. Mostly because Ken has absolutely nothing to do with the fic. His backstory is hilarious, but it's also completely irrelevant. Really, he just stands around and agrees with Sajit in propping up Pack Rat. The shouting police chief has more personality than Ken, and that's just because he's such an unironic stereotype that it becomes hilarious. Plus of course there's Haraka who only exists to be Pack Rat's perceived rival, and could have been left off-screen for all he did. Actually, that might have been best, given how the character turned out. Yikes."

"Story-wise, the fic is actually very shallow," Tsuneo said. "It's only really got one major event, and it takes ages even getting to that. And once that's done, it takes forever reaching a conclusion. Most of the fic is just padding, dragging the whole thing out."

"Pack Rat takes forever to pack for his mission, just so his wooden props have a chance to tell him how much they love him for no real reason. Once that's done he has to spend hours fluffing around Steel Head just so the fic can drive home how much humans hate him. The fic's really only got one

point here – furries good, humans bad – but it has to hammer it home over and over again. We get it, move on.

“The infiltration dawdles with whole chapters dedicated to what can only be termed as random encounters throughout. Pack Rat’s combat chops have already been established, so it feels redundant to have him fighting VIPER goons for the sake of fighting. There’s little progress in him shooting the patrol outside the base or brawling in the closed room inside it. The fight with the Huntress is important, but otherwise things could have definitely been sped up.

“And afterwards it drags just as much. It’s telling that Pack Rat has to go through two mystical life-saving procedures before the fic can actually go anywhere. Really, the faffing around with Bigfoot seems like so much wasted time. The fic has its story to tell, but it takes forever doing it and so much of it is redundant. There’s a tighter, leaner, better-paced version of this fic out there somewhere which is at least more tolerable for being far less of a drag. It’s probably got less of Pack Rat whining, which is also a bonus.”

“So here’s the thing about Doctor Medford, the Huntresses and VIPER as a whole,” Rick noted. “They never once pose any sort of threat to Pack Rat. I mean, yes, you could point out that at least for the VIPER goons that it’s a genre convention; they’re nameless henchmen and exist to be taken out by the heroes. However, it goes well beyond that.”

“The Huntresses are supposedly the ultimate predators or something like that,” he explained. “But really, they’re pretty useless. They can’t catch Pack Rat when they have him surrounded, they fall over when running after him in what amounts to a comedic pratfall and they end up killing a bunch of VIPER goons for no real reason other than to let Pack Rat do a bit. Likewise, for all his supposed omnipotence and having manipulated the situation, Doctor Medford ends up being taken out effortlessly while the Huntresses simply stand there, staring. If Medford had been studying Pack Rat so closely, why was he unprepared for him pulling out the weapons he always uses?”

“Now yes, Pack Rat gets blown up and nearly dies,” Rick noted. “But here’s the thing. He’s blown up by an explosion he triggered from the bombs that he laid around the VIPER base. His near death is self-inflicted, and not the result of VIPER’s actions. Even then, the VIPER base is still destroyed, the Huntresses are still wiped out and Medford is still supposedly dead. And if he hadn’t blown himself up, Pack Rat wouldn’t have been even remotely challenged otherwise.” He nodded to Rebecca. “Much like his love life, all of Pack Rat’s injuries are the result of his own stupidity and actions, rather than those of other people.”

“So there you have it, Voice,” Tsuneo concluded. “The fic is terrible, the characters are terrible and I feel terrible for having read it.”

“Thank you all for that,” the Voice replied. “As always, your feedback is appreciated and helps to select future reviews.”

“I sincerely doubt that,” Rebecca sighed. “Still, we’re done with this heap, right?”

“We are, yes,” the Voice confirmed. “Until next time when we will have a new one to discuss.”

“Thrilling,” Rebecca finished.

“I think we can safely say that we got nothing from that fic,” Tsuneo considered. “Which is interesting in its own way, given that it was something new to us.”

“Incel ratman, cannibal werewolf, bigfoot medical...” Rebecca counted off on her fingers. “You might be right there.”

“There was Doctor Medford,” Rick suggested. “Who was the latest in a long line of completely ineffectual villains that we can call back to if that helps.”

“So here’s a question,” Dan asked. “Who would you rather have working for you? Doctor Medford or Akira from Programming?”

"I worked with Akira from programming," Rick replied sternly. "I was friends with Akira from Programming. And you, sir, are no Akira from programming."

Author's notes:

I know that we get strangely attached to background and supporting characters in these things. Your John Barrens, Brick Hactars, Madam Zs or Misspelled Saphires and the like. For me, Ken represented a new twist on that old favourite. He has an incredibly involved backstory that sounds completely ridiculous when you attempt to summarise it, which is also entirely irrelevant to the fic. He's also both far more likeable than the other characters while, at the same time, he could be entirely written out of the fic without making any difference whatsoever. He is fascinating because it's clear that there's a lot more to his character, but none of it matters at all.

On the other hand, Doctor Medford is that rare case where the villain is entirely irrelevant to the story.

Next time, another stupid crossover

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Pack Rat – Sins of the Father written by modus669

Rebecca Bartley and Rick R. Mortis created by Rick R. (natch)
Tsuneo Tateo and Dan created by Zogster

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> "Is it awful of me that there's a little rat in the back of my head cheering about victory over the feline
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