
Episode 451 – Senior Prom and stuff

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.

“The convention went well,” Rick offered as he and Rebecca entered. “I had a great time on the panel. Fun people to be around and a remarkable amount of actually clever questions. Plus watching the audience pop as we showed off the forthcoming covers was a lot of fun.”

“I’m glad to hear,” she nodded. “It must have been great for you professionally as well.”

“Oh yeah,” Rick agreed. “I spent a lot of time at meet-and-greets and got to network with a bunch of interesting people. Definitely made a good impression and I think that I may have some opportunities ahead of me.”

“Fantastic,” Rebecca beamed. “And how’d things go in Artist Alley?”

Rick simply stood there. “I don’t want to live anymore,” he muttered.

“That good,” Rebecca sighed as she dragged Rick out of the doorway as Dan and Tsuneo entered.

“So we’re doing another Ready Player One fic,” Dan noted as he stopped, leaning on the back of the couch.

“Much to my regret,” Rebecca added.

“Right, so in theory this fic should be wallowing in eighties nostalgia,” he continued, “Given themes of the source material and all of that.”

“Except that it’s based on the movie, which was a lot less about that,” Tsuneo countered. “Really, in many ways it’s more of an adaptation distillation than anything else.”

“And more importantly, it had Battletoads,” Rick added.

“Well yes, I’ll give all of you that,” Dan admitted. “But I had the idea and wanted to go with it anyway.”

“And what was that terrible idea?” Rebecca asked. “Because it is you, so the odds of it being terrible are pretty high.”

“So last time we did one of these we looked at some of our favourite things from the eighties,” Dan noted. “Sort of calibrating our tastes and all that.”

“Well yes,” Tsuneo noted. “And all of yours were from the seventies.

“So I thought it would be interesting to do another round of that, specifically with a focus on the sort of things that people are running around with in this fic,” he explained. “So your favourite eighties anime, spaceship, gun, armour or costume and car”

“Interesting,” Rebecca continued. “And these can be fictional or real.”

“Yeah,” Dan noted. “Think of it as being what you’d use if you were in the OASIS”

“So armour I get, but why the costume?” Rick asked.

“This fic is based on the movie,” Dan explained. “Major characters have unique looks, but background characters wander around in reused assets.”

“So since he’s a lizardman in a spacesuit, does this mean that Tridosk is a more important character than Lynx?” Rick asked.

“…I don’t know how to answer that,” Dan admitted.

“I’m game,” Tsuneo agreed. “But you need to go first.”

“Fine with me,” Dan nodded, recovering from his prior hesitation. “If I’m going to go with an 80’s gun, it has to be the M41A pulse rifle.”

“You mean from Aliens?” Tsuneo asked.

Dan nodded. “And where the prop was reused. And the various knock-offs. And the endless references to it.”

“Right…” Tsuneo said, half to himself.

“I mean, Duke’s figure came with a pulse rifle in 2011…”

“Got it.”

“And I think I saw one in Lightyear…”

“We’re getting bogged down,” Rebecca said diplomatically. “What else have you got?”

“Well my cool 80’s car would be KARR.”

“Yes, it’s a car,” Rick replied.

“That’s what I said, KARR.”

“What car?”

“KARR,” Dan said simply, as if that clarified anything.

“But what car?” Rick asked, clearly exasperated.

“KARR.”

“Before this spirals out of control,” Rebecca interjected, “I think he means KARR, the evil version of KITT from Knight Rider.”

“Oh! Why didn’t you say so?” Rick asked.

“Pointedly ignoring that,” Tsuneo cut in, “Why KARR and not KITT?”

“Because he’s voiced by Peter Cullen,” Dan answered.

“Well I can’t argue with that,” Tsuneo simply replied.

“Okay, so you’re stepping out of your evil 80’s car with your ubiquitous 80’s rifle. What are you wearing?” Rebecca asked.

“I was going to go with 80’s tacticool –“

“If that’s even a thing,” Rebecca snarked back.

“- by kitting out in Solid Snake’s outfit from the original Metal Gear.”

“But that’s a little top-down sprite,” Tsuneo said. “You can’t tell what it looks like.”

“Exactly!” Dan declared. “So I can have as many gun pouches as I like and nobody can say it’s not authentic.”

“I think we’re losing the point here a little,” Tsuneo muttered to himself.

“Anyways. 80’s anime has got to be Armored Trooper Votoms. I always wanted my own custom Scope Doggy Dog.”

“Ouch,” Tsuneo deadpanned.

“And what’s your spaceship of choice then?” Rebecca asked.

“The Super Dimensional Fortress Macross. Reflex cannon, baby!” Dan enthusiastically pumped his fist.

“Can he do that?” Tsuneo asked.

“I make the rules,” Dan replied.

“There you go,” Tsuneo said with a shrug. He turned to Rebecca and said “Well?”

“So to open with the anime, I’m going to go with Super Dimensional Fortress Macross, appropriately enough,” Rebecca began.

“I’m curious as to why,” Tsuneo asked.

“I admit that it’s largely from its cultural impact,” she explained, “Being the first real case of anime imported to North America while keeping its original tone and themes intact. And from there, it really was the gateway for opening up anime and making it a part of mainstream culture.”

“Pretentious,” Dan noted. “And your spaceship?”

“The Red Dwarf from the series of the same name,” she explained, “With Blue Midget and Starbug included as accessories.”

“Odd choice, but why?” Dan asked.

“The three of them represent last-generation practical modelmaking in visual effects,” she offered. “Besides being elaborate creations, all the shots of them were the result of practical effects without any CG work, something that was already seeping into other productions.”

“And your favourite eighties weapon?” Tsuneo asked.

“The Ares Predator,” she noted. “Besides being a franchise flagship weapon, its also got a remarkable amount of world-building packed into it. The weapon was used to establish the Ares brand in-world and its reputation, and then from there create and inform a lot of the character of the parent megacorporation.”

“I should have figured this is what you’d do,” Dan sighed. “So what would you go for on armour?”

“The sneaksuits from Traveller,” Rebecca said. “While an invisibly suit was already an established idea by that point, this was the first attempt to provide a functional explanation for how one would work. And while it’s definitely aged due to the technology of the time of writing, it’d be an important baseline for writers to come.”

“Figures. So what’s your favourite eighties car?”

“The AMC Eagle,” she said. “While almost forgotten, its place in automotive history cannot be understated. Besides being the final AMC vehicle, and thus the end of a linage going back to the turn of the century, it was also a crossover SUV a decade before the market even existed.”

“And it’s big in Japan,” Rick added.

“That too,” she nodded.

Tsuneo spoke up next. “Well, for my list, I’ll start with Zeta Gundam as my favourite 80’s anime.”

“Just because you can’t pick original Gundam, right?” Rick needled him.

“Actually, no. I just think it’s better developed overall, while skewering some of the excesses of the original.”

“No Gundam Hammers, you mean,” Rebecca said.

“That too.”

“So what’s your weapon?”

“I’d go for the Gallant H90 from Invid Invasion. It’s a flexible weapon that scales up from pistol to rifle, with its own unique styling to boot.”

“Not what I expected,” Rick replied.

“Costume wise, I’m going to loop back to Gundam Double Zeta for some stylish Neo-Zeon uniforms.”

“Just without the optional silly helmets?” Rebecca asked.

Tsuneo shrugged, a little sheepishly. “I just always wanted a swooshy cape.”

“And let me guess, you’d choose the White Base for your spaceship,” Rick said.

“Not technically the 80’s, but it’s often counted,” Tsuneo replied. “But no.”

“Alright, the Argama,” Rick replied.

“It’s Zeta equivalent? No,” Tusneo said.

“The Nahel Argama? La Vie En Rose?”

“You’re just searching for 80’s Gundam spaceships, arent’ you?” Tsuneo chided.

“Hold on, I’m still getting results,” Rick said without looking up from his phone.

“Well, you’re wrong,” Tsuneo told him sternly.

“Okay, I’ll bite,” Rebecca asked. “What is it?”

“Galaxy explorer,” Tsuneo said, beaming with pride. “Set number 497.”

“Thought you would have been more of a Blacktron guy,” Rebecca said offhandedly.

Dan rolled his eyes and said “Don’t you two start.”

“Fine, but I bet I know your vehicle,” Rick said, bouncing back. “And to pull it back from a ridiculous Ready Player One line, I’m going to say it’s Kaneda’s bike from Akira.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No, It’s Shogo’s bike from Megazone 23.”

“That’s just because it turns into a robot,” Rebecca deadpanned.

“Nobody said it couldn’t,” Tsuneo said with mock innocence.

“So my favourite eighties anime is probably Transformers Headmasters,” Rick offered.

“Interesting,” Tsuneo noted, “I mean it rarely makes anyone’s favourite lists, so I have to ask why.”

“The Star TV dub,” Rick explained. “Because really, it takes a boring show and makes it into some sort of absurdist masterpiece.”

“I... can’t actually argue with that,” Tsuneo admitted. “So then what’s your favourite spaceship?”

“Fortress Maximus in his spaceship mode,” he replied.

“Because it turns into a gigantic robot,” Dan suggested.

“Well there is that,” he nodded. “But mostly because in the Star TV dub it’s called the Starship Bruce.”

“Two for two on those,” Dan said. “So what’s your favourite eighties weapon?”

“The Crack-Calibre Laser-Blazer Broadsword,” Rick explained. “Because of the name, of course.”

“Three for three on the Transformers,” Tsuneo nodded to Dan. “So does your armour suit follow that?”

“Naw, for that I would pick the Dead Boy Heavy Armour from Rifts,” Rick suggested.

“Because of its iconic place in the setting?” Rebecca asked. “Because I imagine it’s not because you want to be a Robot Skull Nazi”

“Actually it’s because it’s got the most MDC,” he explained.

“That makes a strange amount of sense for the Ready Player One world,” Rebecca nodded. “So your favourite car?”

“The ABX Leprechaun from Interstate 76.”

“A fictional version of a seventies car from a nineties video game?” Dan asked.

“It averages to the eighties,” Rick nodded.

“That... makes no sense at all,” Tsuneo noted. “And yet, it fits perfectly. Also, I hate it.”

“Good morning everyone,” the Voice smashed into the conversation.

“And good morning to you too, Mister Skullhead,” Dan shot back.

“Retro appeal,” Rick nodded. “I like it.”

“It’s Ready Player One fic,” Dan shrugged. “If you don’t wallow in nostalgia then you’re doing it wrong.”

“On the other hand, you didn’t call him ‘Mister Skullhead from the classic nineties cartoon series Animaniacs’,” Rick considered.

“My mistake,” Dan admitted.

“So based on all that, I can only assume that we’re covering the next part of Adventures of Jack,” Tsuneo asked.

“I hope so,” Dan added. “Because if we aren’t, then I’ll feel stupid for the reference.”

“We are, yes,” the Voice confirmed. “We’ll be reading the conclusion of the fic today.”

“An actual conclusion?” Rebecca considered. “That is something I didn’t quite expect.”

“Me either,” Tsuneo agreed. “Not sure if it’s a good thing, mind you.”

“Voice, can we get more fics that actually finish?” Rick asked.

“Well your reviews are used to inform future fic choices,” the Voice replied.

“That’s a no,” Dan simply shot back.

“Speaking of which,” The Voice continued, “When we are done, I’ll be eager to get your reviews of the fic.”

“Can we skip to the reviews now?” Dan asked.

“No.”

“It was worth a shot.”

“You know, I’m not sure how I feel about this fic reaching an actual conclusion,” Tsuneo admitted.

“How so?” Dan asked.

“On one side, we have a fic actually finishing at something that resembles a natural point rather than simply being left hanging forever as usually happens,” he explained. “On the other hand, I have no idea at all where the fic’s supposed to be going from here.”

“Given that we’ve already had the ultimate showdown and effortlessly trashed the major villain, I really have no clue,” Rebecca shrugged as she took her place on the couch.

“Maybe Tridosk turns out to be the actual villain,” Rick suggested as he and the others joined him.

Rebecca simply turned to glare at him as the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format. “Rick, that is the stupidest thing you have ever said, which is no mean feat in and of itself.”

> Chapter Eleven

> GoldDragonZ: I am enjoying writing this story,

Tsuneo: And inflicting it upon us.

> and hope that people will like it, too.

Rebecca: Given that it’s been ten chapters so far, I think we’re well past that point.

> Lynx looked at the contract.

Dan: And handed it off to his lawyer.

> It seemed that if he played the game fairly, and promised to be fair to
> other players, he could get his avatar and everything that he had back.

Tsuneo: I mean, he's been a violent, deliberately destructive griefer and troll so far, but maybe if we ask him nicely he will stop.

> However, that meant he
> could not copy codes, copy items, or change things that were preset in the OASIS.

Rebecca: Lynx had to actually read the terms of service.

> He could no longer hack into the OASIS and make his avatar to be superior to others.

Dan: The sort of behaviour you'd think he'd have been banned for.
Tsuneo: Funny that.

> He would have to level up the normal way;

Rick: By doing start zone quests.

> by purchasing items using coins he won fairly, or use real money that he did not
> really want to spend.

Rebecca: You will buy Microtransactions and you will like it.

> He gritted his teeth as he read over the contract. No doubt, from now on, the
> High Five and their allies will be watching him to make sure that he obeyed.

Rick: And apparently had not been doing it before.

> He signed the contract and scanned it in. He submitted it to Tridosk who had to message Parzival.

Rebecca: Parzival ran it by Aech who got it to Ogden who passed it off to Akira from programming who, in the fullness of time, lost it.

> They had to meet again in that same room they first discussed the contract at.

Dan: That dingy place? You could at least spruce it up a little.

> Vladislav waited for his friend to message him using the internet on his computer.

Rick: If you have an internet, or live near somebody who owns one...

> He waited for a while, and then he received word from Tridosk/Lewis.

Dan: [Lynx] Dear Lynx, you suck, love lizard guy. Hey!

> "Hey Vlad." He said in his message. "Everything is good.

Tsuneo: Demonstrably not true.

> You will have access to the OASIS again in two hours.

Rick: Plus loading time, connection, buffering...

> They must make sure everything is up to date and coincides with our agreement. We
> can now free Princess May."

Rebecca: The moral of this story? Always take hostages, as its a way for you to get everything you

want with no consequences at all

> "Ugh." Vladislav sighed. "I guess we can't help it. Free the bitch."

Dan: Lynx was planning to hold out for more.

> Tridosk entered his chat room, and disappeared. Vladislav would have to think about what his next
> move would be.

Rebecca: Probably pressing accept on the EULA.

> These two hours should be enough time for him to figure something out.

Tsuneo: Two hours later, he was still stuck on the same Wordle puzzle

> Mark was in his computer class when his cell phone vibrated. The teacher was concentrating on his
> screen

Dan: Actually he was stuck on the same Wordle puzzle. Small world.

> and seemed not to hear it go off. Mark checked the phone. The message was from Helen:

> Princess May is free. Lynx is online. That is all that the message said.

Tsuneo: Mark failed to understand the significance of the message, and never used the OASIS again.

> Later that day, during lunch, Mark went to find Amira. He saw that she was sitting with her friends.
> He walked up to the table, and heard the friends laughing at something Tyler had said.

Rebecca: [Tyler] And here he comes now.

> Eyes suddenly fell on him and everyone went silent.

Dan: Mark was beginning to wonder if they didn’t like him.

> "Hey guys." Mark said. "I just need to talk to Amira."

Tsuneo: Deeply involved as they are with Amira, they have no objections whatsoever.

> Amira had been sitting with her back towards him. It was not on purpose, but it was just the way he
> walked up to the table. She turned and he could see that she was frowning.

Rebecca [Amira]: Damn, he found me.

> "Hey Mark, what's wrong?" She asked, getting up from the table.

> "Nothing." He said, although he was quite nervous being in front of her friends.

Dan: He sensed a pummelling coming on.

> "I just have good news. You can use the OASIS again. You are free."

> "I am? That's wonderful." She said, smiling. "We can hang out online now!

Rick: [Amira] Thank god we don’t have to meet in real life any more.
Dan: [Mark] Yeaaah...

> Wait, does that mean you get to be online again?"

Rebecca: Good news, you can go back on the OASIS. Bad news, so can Mark.

> "The promise was that if Lynx came back online, I would too." He said. "I will be allowed to come
> back as well."

Tsuneo: This is the sort of arrangement that only works if everyone involved is very stupid.

> "That's awesome!" She said. "I have a few things I want to share with you!"

Rick: Smash cut to Jack modelling dresses for her.

> "Nice!" Mark said. "But my console is on its way to the OASIS' headquarters to be looked at.

Tsuneo: Yeah, weren't we going to do something with that?
Rebecca: They were, then they didn't.
Rick: Ironically Amira spent more time waiting for her console than she did as Tridosk's hostage.

> I think the programmers there are going to do something so no one can hack into my console again.

Dan: Should we apply that update to every other console?
Rick: Sounds like too much work.

> We might have to give it a few weeks."

Rebecca: Ironically, Lynx is driving the truck carrying the console.

> Amira hugged Mark, smiling. Everything seemed to be turning alright.

Tsuneo: We're talking Neville Chamberlain levels of 'turning out fine'

> Lynx was back in the OASIS. He was racing again with his alien ship from Independence Day. He
> was racing other vehicles that could fly.

Dan: You'd assume so
Rick: He'd feel really stupid if he turned up to a running race in it

> It felt so good for him to be in control of something.

Rebecca: For the first time in his life

> He made sure that for now, he did not do anything to bring down the wrath of the High Five.

Tsuneo: Until they forget about him in five minutes to hang out on the My Two Dads planet.

> No doubt
> they had people watching him all the time. They wanted to know if he was cheating again.

Rebecca: His console was full of all the trojans.

> He needed to gain as much coins as possible to buy the things he would have stolen.

Rick: So he stole coins.
Dan: Wah-wah.

> His ship was faster than any other because of the Easter eggs,

Rebecca: We'll let the malicious hacker back onto the system and let him keep the tools that enabled him. Nothing can go wrong with this.

> but that did not make the race any easier as there
> were twists and turns as they flew through a wormhole of sorts. If he crashed, his vehicle would be

> okay because he had the immortal egg as well.

Rebecca: Lynx piloted his indestructible, extra-fast ship through the course as he griped about all the things he didn't have.

> The only thing would be the abrupt stop would allow
> other people to pass him. But he was good at most games. He was in third place though,

Rick: Lynx strives for adequacy

> as his ship did not have the right capabilities.

Dan: A bad gunter always blames his ship, or something.

> There were several players who had been there long before he
> was on the OASIS. That was why he needed to pay for upgrades.

Rebecca: Lynx has to play the same game as everyone else, and he hates it.

> He could no longer hack the system and give himself everything that he wanted.

Tsuneo: Lynx is beginning to realise that without his numerous unfair advantages, he's only a mediocre player.
Dan: He blames Jack for this.
Tsuneo: Oh, of course.

> He flew and went with the twists and turns. For
> some reason, the player in front of him made a rash turn and crashed. He took their spot in the
> race. The person who came in first and Lynx finished the race. Lynx won 250 000 coins. The winner
> in front got 500 000. Lynx grunted as he left the racetrack.

Dan: Isn't he already grunting?
Rick: I think you mean he's gunting.
Dan: I have no idea what you're talking about.

> He needed to go back to his chatroom
> and find out if there was anyone offering cheap upgrades for items that he had.

Rebecca: He was seeing if anyone was offering off-brand nuclear weapons.

> He needed to be ready to face Jack again…

Tsuneo: Jack who is presumably also immortal.
Dan: This will accomplish a lot, I'm sure.

> Three weeks passed. In that time, Rodney and Mark learned different strikes in martial arts.

Dan: They learned Weak Punch and Strong Punch.

> They did the Circle of Success again,

Rick: Rodney got wedgied so many times.

> with a few different students. Their piano teacher had a concert for
> all the parents to watch and be proud of their children.

Tsuneo: The audience was nothing but forced smiles and glancing at watches.

> Mark and Amira went on several dates after school. Mark was starting to get out of his shell.

Rebecca [Amira]: I've been considering my options for university courses. Ideally I'd like to do a master's degree or go further then that. Obviously this will take a lot of work and years of my life, but it's a commitment not only to my future, but a chance to possibly change the world.
Rick [Mark]: I have a suit of samurai armour from Halo
Rebecca [Amira]: Check, please.

> He had spoken to Nick a few times, but Nick was
> busy and could not book a time to see Mark just yet.

Rebecca: Nick was under investigation for gross breaches of professional conduct.

> That was fine with Mark, he still had his best friends John, Tom and Justin to talk to.

Dan: Who now?
Rick: You know, the guy who dies a lot and they guy they had to get a console for.
Dan: Oh right, gotcha. [Pause] Wait, that's only two of them.
Rick: Isn't it just?

> They seemed to be acting different.

Tsuneo: In as far as they had no personalities to speak of.

> They knew that Mark was successful online, but now he had a girlfriend in real life.

Dan: It took a while for this idea to register

> Of course, anyone could go on the OASIS and talk to other people.

Rebecca: Tom and Justin are just beginning to realise there are other people out there and they don't have to hang around Mark all the time.

> There was a whole section where people could go and spend time with each other.

Rick: But only one place. Otherwise everyone played the OASIS on their own

> Some areas stipulated that you needed to be a certain age to enter as there was
> explicit content with the media that was being used there. You could also have sexual encounters
> on the OASIS.

Rebecca: Mark has been visiting the 'Hairy knuckled Chuck' planet.

> It was built for people who had different tastes.

Dan: Hence the suits with microfiber crotch inlays and several discrete openings

> Now, it seemed that Mark was getting more attention from people in real life, though.

Rick: Speaking of doing it online.

> He had not
> been online for weeks. Instead, he was talking to Amira, and whoever was with her at the time. He
> started also talking to Jessica and Tyler.

Tsuneo: He started talking to Amira's friends and he talked to two of her friends.

> They also offered a seat to him when they were having lunch.

Dan: Having accepted that they basically can't get rid of him.

> Mark would spend half of lunch with his friends, and the other half with Amira.

Rebecca: He measured the time down to the second.

> He did not like just ditching his friends.

Tsuneo: They on the other hand were delighted they could use his stuff without him.

> He wanted them to remain in his life,

Dan: Although he couldn't think why for the life of him.

> although it seemed that things were changing for him and his brother.

Rick: Rodney had so many concussions

> His sister was also doing well designing outfits for people online.

Rebecca: Costumes designed by a ten year old girl would have had massive appeal.
Tsuneo: I'm sure that all the top players would be wearing them

> She was raking in a big amount of coins. She continued to draw and apply it to the OASIS. People
> were happy that she was helping them out.

Dan: Before he knew it, Alexandra had bought out Mark's repair business, turned it into and armour customisation service and kicked him out.

> As for the High Five, they were getting praise from different companies who liked what they were
> doing with the OASIS.

Tsuneo: Their gross mismanagement had given other companies a chance to break into the market. Nice work guys.

> They were changing things, and getting more companies involved. The OASIS was growing.

Rick: It was already being used by every person on Earth, but now more people were using it.

> Wade Watts was hiring small time firms to work for him and their company.

Rebecca: Which is to say he'd been gobbling up small companies and firing their former owners.

> They were programming different things that could be bought or earned in the OASIS. These items
> could be won if you finished certain tasks.

Tsuneo: What an amazing innovation! No video game has ever had anything like that before.

> People could now play or watch sports online. Sports
> fans could buy jerseys and apply the to their avatars while games were going on.

Dan: But only when games were going on. You put a sports jersey on your avatar any other time and you'd be banned for life

> Different clans could sell items for coins to finance different things that they were interested in.

Rebecca: These 'coins' were entirely digital and based on no real value at all, but everyone was convinced that their worth could only go up.

> Helen/Aech had
> opened different garages all over the OASIS where players could fix vehicles of any size.

Tsuneo: Up until this point, people could only repair vehicles in seedy back sheds.

> They could also customize their vehicles as well.

Rick: Soon the OASIS was awash with gaudy stickerbombs.

> And then, in regards to spaceships, the High Five
> opened Shipyards where players could build and customize ships of any size.

Rebecca: Players started requesting the larger Culture vessels, which caused problems.

> They could also fix ships that were broken from participating in races or battle.

Rebecca: Previously, all vehicles were entirely one use and thrown away after each race.

> Also, the High Five received Mark's console and his headset. They had their programmers analyze
> the console.

Rick: Having apparently had it hand-delivered after being couriered by donkey cart

> They scanned everything that Mark and earned and looked at the Easter eggs that had
> been effected by the programming that Lynx had applied to them. They were able to reverse the
> programming and freed Mark's avatar from the constraints they had made.

Dan: Wait, so they didn't understand the restrictions they'd put on him before hand?
Rebecca: Akira from programming is proud of her work.

> The Tensa Zangetsu appeared once more on the OASIS.

Dan: Of course, now that other people could repair things, his entire business model had been completely undercut

> Jack_100292402 was on the bridge sitting in the
> captain's chair. His golden armor was once more in his vault, sealed so that no other player could
> access to it.

Tsuneo: And here we are right back at the start of the fic.
Dan: Has anything really changed since then?
Rebecca: Well, a lot of things happened but it basically boils down to 'Mark got stuff.'

> Realizing that the Tensa Zangetsu and Mark's avatar could be hacked, the
> programmers decided to apply a firewall so no one could get in and take things.

Rick: Makes you wonder why they didn't do this in the first place before all this trouble began
Rebecca: I blame Akira from programming
Rick: I think that's fair

> Jack now had his Easter eggs restored as well. No one could take these things from him ever again.

Tsuneo: In short, they put a lot of things into the game that it probably should have had to start with.

> They also
> activated a special shield for the Tensa Zangetsu. Only people Mark/Jack 100292402 allowed
> would be able to see it now. No one could see it hovering over maps if he chose to use it there.

Rebecca: Sure, let the player with the massive, heavily armed spaceship be completely undetected by everyone else. I see no way this could be abused at all.

> The
> rest of it would be up to him. Helen and the High Five looked at what the programmers did and were
> satisfied with what they had done.

Tsuneo: Were they? Were they really?

> They repackaged Mark's console and headset and sent it back to him.

Rick: Back onto the donkey cart we go.

> Prom was in one week.

Tsuneo: But we're going to wrap up the fic before then, right? Right?

> While playing asshole at lunch,

Rebecca: A game at which Tom excels.

> a girl in their grade went up to Mark, John, Justin in Tom with one of her friends.

> "Hey guys," She said. "Does one of you want to sell your ticket for prom? We would like my
> boyfriend to come. I can pay you back for the ticket."

Tsuneo: [Mark] Wait, when you sell something to someone, they pay you for it? I've been doing it wrong all this time!

> "We already paid for the limo." Justin said.

> "We have plans after prom to get together." John said.

> "No." Tom said. "I want to go to prom."

> "I have a date that I'm going with." Mark said.

> With that, the girls went to another table to ask if someone else would be able to give them a ticket
> to prom.

Dan: Well that was entirely pointless.

> "Hey Mark," Justin said. "Are you coming to our get together after prom, or do you have plans with
> Amira?"

> "I don't know." Mark said. "We haven't spoken about it."

> "David Miranda and Krystle Levesque and her boyfriend Scott are coming." Justin said.

Rick: Oh thank god for that. I couldn't have lived without knowing what David Miranda and Krystle Levesque and her boyfriend Scott were going to do.

> "They are coming with us in the limo and will be at our party."

> "Okay, I will ask Amira what she wants to do." Mark replied.

Rebecca: Why? It's not like she's had any agency in the fic so far.

> Mark put down his cards, and got up. He walked up to Amira's table.

> "Hey Amira." He greeted her, and then spoke to her friends. "Hey guys. Can I talk to Amira?"

Tsuneo: I think you already are.

> "Hey Mark, what's up?" Amira said, smiling.

Dan: [Tyler] Didn’t say you could.
Rebecca: [Mark] Pipe down... um, you, you’re not a real person.

> "What plans do you have after prom?" He asked. "My friends are having a party at one of their
> houses. The limo will take them there."

> "I'm sorry Mark," She replied. "My friends and I already made plans to go to a cabin near the lake."

Rick: We’re going to be a bunch of horny teenagers going up to the isolated cabin by Axe Murder Lake. It’ll be great.

> "Oh, okay." Mark said, and then turned to return to his friends.

Dan: Scenes that could have been an email.

> "Mark." Amira said, getting up from the table. "Come with me. There's more than enough room for
> you to come with me to my friend's cabin."

Rebecca: I’m sure your nonspecific friends are fine with this.

> "We would be spending the night together." Mark said. "Would it be wise? Wouldn't your parents
> object?"

> "We spoke about it." Amira said. "They trust me.

Dan: [Mark] They know how completely incapable I am.

> They know my friends, and I have told them about you."

Rebecca: Presumably they don’t know about his massive rage meltdown several chapters ago.

> "Where are we meeting to go to prom?" Mark asked.

> "We are meeting at Jessica's house." Amira said. "I'll text you the address.

> "Alright cool." Mark said.

Rick: But what about David Miranda and Krystle Levesque and her boyfriend Scott? What are their plans?

> The week passed quickly. Before prom, Mark bought a wrist corsage for Amira. It had pink and
> white flowers on it with several green leaves. He needed a suit,

Tsuneo: So he’s played piano at a concert but doesn’t have a suit for that?
Rick: Nah, he got on stage in a Mambo shirt and jumbo cords.
Tsuneo: Seems fair.

> so for prom, his mother did not go to work that day and took him shopping for a suit.

Tsuneo: Dad offered to take the day off from his work instead, but everyone wisely declined.

> She picked out several which Mark tried on. He liked
> one which was navy blue. The lining inside the blazer was dark green. The blazer was unique as it
> was designed for using a bow tie.

Dan: No other blazer in the world was designed to go with a bow tie

> Mark picked out a red bow tie, and white dress shirt to go with it.
> His mother bought him new dress shoes, which had shoes laces.

Rebecca: Mark was baffled by this radical idea

> Mark made sure everything fit.

Tsuneo: Absolutely not the purpose of clothes shopping at all.

> They left the stores.

Tsuneo: He did? Really? I thought Mark was going to live in the supply closet for the rest of his life.

> Mark had left school at lunch as half of the day was spares and he could leave
> if he had parental permission. His mother had come and gotten him.

Dan: School lunch arrangements! The adventures of Jack!

> He made sure to have a shower. He used a special skin scrub to get rid of acne.

Rick: The sandblasting helped.

> He had been using it for weeks, and it
> seemed to be working, however several scars were still evident. He put on cologne, ironed his pants
> and shirt, and put everything on.

Rebecca: He wasn't going to mix up that order again.

> He decided not to wear his glasses. He only needed glasses to
> see far, like on a chalk board. He could see alright. His mother did his hair using gel.

Dan: And a chainsaw.

> She took a few pictures.

Rick: And pre-emptively sent them to the police, just to be sure.

> His father was there as he had yet to go to work. He fixed Mark's collar.

> "Son," Mr. Patel said, handing him a condom.

Rebecca: I'm glad to see that his father is being responsible. Also, ewww.

> "We want you to do your best.

Dan: [Mr Patel] If you know what I mean.
Rebecca: Seriousy, ew!

> We want you to follow
> the rules. I know you may think that high school is it, and that anything that happens now will last
> forever.

Dan [Mr Patel]: You don't want to make some horrible mistake and screw up both your education and your future prospects and spend the rest of your life driving filthy, disgusting, reeking late night busses populated by dirty hobos, for example.

> You need to know that everything changes as we go through phases in our life.

Rick: [Mr Patel] Like how you'll hit puberty, someday.

> You are almost finished high school now, and you continue making us proud.

Tsuneo: He is impressive in his mediocrity

> If you do decide to have sex,
> please use a condom. We want you to know that having a child right now might bring shame on
> Amira.

Rick: [Mr Patel] And us. Actually, mostly us.

> That, and you might end up working at a low paying job for the rest of your life.

Dan [Mr Patel]: Like driving night-shift busses, for example.

> We want what's best for you and Amira, Mark."

Rebecca: [Mr Patel] Well, for Amira. Just don't screw things up for her.

> "I know." Mark said. "I won't let you down."

> "Here." Mr. Patel said, giving Mark a duffle bag. "It has a towel, sleeping bag, underwear, a new
> toothbrush and other things you will need

Rick: One hundred dollars American, one hundred dollars in gold bullion, a loaded pistol and a frost free fridge. [Ding!]
Rebecca: Not where I thought you were going with that. Nice

> for when you spend the night with Amira

Tsuneo: They've decided their son is completely incapable of managing his own love life, so they're going to do it for him.
Rebecca: Incredibly creepy, and also perfectly fair.

> like jeans and a sweatshirt in case you are doing things outside."

Tsuneo: All the clothes you ever need for going outside.

> "Thanks dad." Mark said, hugging him, and then he turned to his mother, who had tears in her eyes.

Dan: She just knows that she'll never see her son again.

> "Mark, you deserve every happiness, and I hope today goes well for you." She said, and then they
> hugged.

> They took more pictures; Mark with his father, and Mark with his mother.

Rick: Mark in a llama costume...

> His father had to get ready for work.

Dan: And quietly die on the inside

> His mother took him to Jessica's house.

Rick: His mum yells out for him to not forget the condom, and Mark quietly slinks off into the bushes to die.

> Tyler, Jessica, and Amira were already there,

Dan: Their chaperone was Madam Z.
Tsuneo [Madam Z]: You kids better enjoy your youth while it lasts. Next thing you know, everything's gone all saggy, half your family are supervillains and you're spending all your time managing the world's most oil reserves so your granddaughter can get through college. So who wants some stew?

> taking pictures. The limo had yet to arrive. There were other people there that Mark and Amira knew
> from their grade.

Rick: David Miranda and Krystle Levesque and her boyfriend Scott, perchance?

> They were all friends of Amira.

Rebecca: Amira, the popular beautiful girl who was dating the awkward introverted nerd who nobody liked. No, I don't think there's any wish fulfilment there at all.

> Even Alan was there.

Dan: And thank god for that. I couldn't have lived not knowing if Alan was there.

[Pause]

Rick: Who's Alan?
Dan: I have no idea.

> Mark took his duffle bag and walked up to Amira,

Dan: [Amira] What's that for?
Rebecca: [Mark] It's my bug-out bag. It's so when I commit social suicide at prom, I've got everything I need to run off and start a new life in Saskatchewan.
Dan: [Amira] Good plan.

> who was talking with Jessica.

> "You look beautiful." Mark said loud enough for everyone to hear.

Rick: The Megaphone helped.

> She was wearing a purple dress. She was also wearing a purple jacket to match her dress.

Rebecca: I'd ask why she wasn't wearing her favourite colour that she was obsessed with, but that would mean the author paying attention to her character

> Her hair was done up in curls that went down the right side of her face and had been dyed dark red.

Dan: [Mark] Hairstyle_curls_half_updo. Nice.

> She had
> silver hairpins keeping her hair in place. They had small silver leaves attached to them. She was not
> wearing glasses, and had dark green contact lenses on.

Dan: [Mark] Is that a premium eye colour option?

> She smiled and walked up to Mark, who produced her corsage.

Rick: [Mark] I got this at the cash store. For actual cash. Because it was a real store.

> Her eyes widened. He offered her his hand and she placed her left hand in
> his. He placed the corsage on her wrist, and brought it up to his face and kissed her hand.

> "You look handsome as well." She said, blushing.

Dan: In a 'skinny guy in a cheap suit' way

> "It looks like you're ready for a fun night."

Rebecca: Jessica is trying desperately not to heave.

> "Yeah, my dad and mom want me to be careful and prepared for anything that might happen." Mark
> said.

Rick: That’s why he had a loaded shotgun and some bear traps.

> "My parents felt the same way." Amira said.

Rebecca: Jabbing the stun gun into his ribs.

> Amira's friends and their parents were busy taking pictures.

Tsuneo: Say, did anyone else bring a date to this?

> Mark pulled out his cellphone and
> started taking pictures as well. He took a selfie with only him and Amira. Next, he took a group
> pictures with Amira and all her friends.

Rick: Then he took pictures of Meg and the Colonel Kelly monument.

> He asked one of the parents there to take a picture of him
> and Amira. And then, the limo came.

Dan: Then they took selfies with the limo driver.

> "Hey Mark, you can leave you bag here." Jessica said. "The limo will stop here for everyone to
> gather their stuff. And then, it will take us to the cabin by the lake."

Rebecca: Which lake is that?
Tsuneo: You know, the lake.
Rebecca: Oh, right.

> Mark thanked Jessica and put his bag inside Jessica's home.

Dan: Fic, slow down with this intense action. I can’t keep up with it any longer.

> "You all have fun now," Jessica's mother Mrs. Walsh said, "Enjoy your special day."

Tsuneo: Her exaggerated wink made Amira shudder in revulsion.

> Everyone piled into the limo one at a time. For some reason, Mark and Amira were separated.

Rick: We don’t need the description of everyone’s seating arrangements or who’s next to who.
Rebecca: Yeah, that sort of pointless detail would just bog down the narrative.

> It
> was fine as it was a short drive to the hall that the prom was being held. Everyone was excited.

Tsuneo [Bored]: I’m excited.

> They were just laughing and talking. Mark had closed his eyes, and began just using breathing
> exercises that his piano teacher and martial arts teacher had both taught him.

Dan: So he swept the leg.

> He did not want to get
> sweaty and chose to concentrate on something else other than being in a limo with people he did
> not really know or hang out with,

Rick: So he thought of Halo guns.
Rebecca: He'd be thinking of Halo guns later that night, too.

> although he was getting to know some of them through Amira.

Rebecca: Through her, he'd learned that they were entities that existed in time and space.

> And
> then, the limo pulled up to the hall. The driver got out and opened the back door so that everyone
> could disembark.

Rebecca: This being a prom limo, the back is already full of smuggled booze and discarded penis straws

> Amira and Mark met each other at the entrance to the dance/dining room.

> "I'm going to wait outside to say hi to my friends." Mark said. "You can go without me;

Rebecca: Amira realises where his priorities lie.

> I'll be in in a minute."

> "No, I don't mind waiting with you." She said, taking his hand into hers.

Dan: [Amira] I'll happily abandon my friends for yours.

> "You know, you have beautiful eyes, Mark."

> "Thanks." He said, blushing.

> They waited 15 minutes,

Rebecca [Amira]: I mean, I could have gone in and had a good time, but no. This is fine.

> and then another limo pulled up. Tom, John, Justin, David, Krystle, and Scott

Rick: As well as Zephyr, Isaac, Brick Hactar, Misspelled Saphire, Charles, Charles, Bruno Demonski the Man on Fire whom you cannot stop and Stink.
Dan: Stank.
Rick: Right, Stork.

> all piled out of their limo. They were all dressed up.

Tsuneo: Sadly they were all dressed up as theme park mascots.

> Mark waved to them smiling. Tom, John and Justin walked up to Mark and Amira.

> "You guys look great!" Amira said,

Tsuneo: Through firmly clenched teeth

> trying to make a good impression on Mark's friends.

Dan: While Tom stared at her boobs

> "How was the limo ride?" Mark asked them.

> "There wasn't any booze." Tom frowned.

Dan: Tom was approaching sobriety and he hated it.

> "We asked the limo driver to turn up the music." Justin said. "It was awesome."

Rick: [Mark] Didn't tip?
Dan: [Tom] Oh hell no.

> "Did you guys take any pictures?" Mark asked.

> "My mom took a few pictures." John said.

> "My parents took a few pictures as well." Justin said.

> "My sister took some pictures." Tom said. "My parents were at work."

Dan: In short, they took pictures
Tsuneo: They did indeed.

> They looked at other classmates who were coming. Soon there were too many people outside,

Rebecca: [Amira] Well maybe if we hadn't stood around waiting for so long...

> so Mark, Amira and the rest of Mark's friends

Rebecca: The amorphous mass that constitutes Mark's cast herd.

> decided to go inside and find their seats. Mark sat beside
> Amira, while the rest of his friends sat at a different table.

Rebecca: Banished to the far end of the hall

> Jessica, Tyler, Alan, and a few other of Amira's friends sat with them.

Rick: But where were David Miranda and Krystle Levesque and her boyfriend Scott? I need to know.

> They were all speaking to one another, except Mark, who did not know anyone besides Amira.

Tsuneo: He's only just realised that Amira has a life of her own, and he's not sure how he feels aboutit.

> He laughed when someone said something funny, but he was really feeling on edge.

Dan: He was a loose cannon cop and he wasn't going to take it any more.

> He asked Amira if she wanted something to drink; she said she would like some
> Sprite. He got up from the table and made his way to the bar, which only gave out soda pop to the
> students.

Rebecca: The fruit punch however was more than 50% vodka.

> He got Coca-Cola for himself, and Sprite for Amira.

Dan: Have a refreshing cup of Product Placement.

> He sighed, looking for his friends. Tom was standing, pretending to be a dinosaur,

Rebecca: He was pretending to be a Spinosaurus, so nobody had any clue what he was doing and he had to change every few minutes anyway

> while Justin had his hand to his face, and John was laughing.

Tsuneo: Haha, we do have such supposed fun

> The others at their table were laughing hysterically. He wanted to be in on the fun.

Dan: So he challenged them all to capture the flag.

> He decided that he would make the best of it for Amira's sake.

Rebecca: For her part, Amira was counting down the seconds until this was over.

> He smiled when she looked up to him as he gave her the glass of Sprite with ice.

> "You know, I think this is a good look for you." She said. "I like what you did with your hair."

> "My mom's the one who did it." He replied, abash.

Tsuneo: [Mark] I can't do anything for myself.
Rebecca: [Amira] Yeah, I'm beginning to realise that.

> "I'll ask her what she did and see if I can do it myself from this day forward."

> The night went on.

Tsuneo: Seemingly forever.
Rick: Hey, remember when this fic was about nonsense internet fights?
Tsuneo: I do not, and it frightens me.

> The Chaplain for the school said a prayer before dinner started.

Dan: Oh lord, bless this reheated poultry and side dish.

> For dinner, they
> either had stuffed chicken with vegetables and roasted potato, roast beef with mashed potato and
> corn on the cob, or a vegetable dish including broccoli, carrots, sweet peas, and potato wedges for
> those who were Vegetarians. Amira was a vegetarian,

Dan: Mark immediately dumped her.

> while Mark preferred the roast beef. They
> also had Caesar salad and for desert, a chocolate cake with coffee and chocolate mousse.

Rick: So I know this seems pointless, but I have the feeling that listing all the meals will pay off big time in the third act.

> And
> then the student council took the stand. It was their job to organize the Prom. The president went up
> to the podium.

> "Hello, fellow classmates." She said. "Welcome to Prom.

Rebecca: You've probably been here at least an hour, but welcome anyway.

> I hope everyone enjoyed what they served
> for dinner. We will be starting the music in a few moments

Tsuneo: Now that you're full of food, it's time for dancing.

> but there are a few things that we need to
> address. At your table, there are stacks of papers with small pencils. Please leave your choices for

> Prom King and Queen, Most Likely to Succeed after High School, our grade's Joker,

Rick: I'm voting Jack Napier
Dan: I'm voting Arthur Fleck myself

> and our grade's Einstein.

Rebecca: Every single student nominated themselves.

> One of the student council will be collecting the ballets."

Tsuneo: No, that's fine. You all get out there and enjoy yourselves. Dance, have a laugh, that kind of thing. I'll be over here, counting ballots. All night.

> Everyone started whispering to each other as they filled out the ballets.

Dan: Tom wrote the word 'butt' on his

> They filled out he ballets and then the president took the stage again.

> "We will start with the dancing now,

Rick: It's the national BIM hour. Dancing is required by law.

> and when it is time for dessert, we will announce who won." She said.

Rebecca: Not who won the dancing. It's not that kind of party.

> The Disk Jockey began playing hip hop music.

Tsuneo: Which is sure to be a style that those young kids do listen to.

> Mark got up, and instantly offered Amira his hand.
> She gladly accepted it and they began dancing with each other. Mark did not know how to dance
> professionally,

Rebecca: It's prom, not the international ballroom championships. You'll live.

> but only sought fun ways to dance. Jessica and Tyler were dancing in the same way.

Dan: The same, nonspecific way.

> Alan and a few other students were dancing together, just having fun.

Rick: But what about David Miranda and Krystle Levesque and her boyfriend Scott? How were they dancing?

> Tom, Justin and John made their way over and started dancing with Mark and Amira.

Rebecca: Strangely enough, Amira kept trying to move away.

> For once, there were no boundaries.

Dan: So Tom took his shirt off.

> Everyone accepted each other despite being different.

Rick: So when the jocks pantsed Mark in the middle of the dance floor, it was in an accepting way.

> The played several slow songs, and Mark

> and Amira danced together for the first time, outside the OASIS.

Rebecca: As opposed to all the dancing they've done so far.

> They danced in a circle. The music played for half an hour,

Tsuneo: Please make it stop!
Dan: I can't keep dancing forever!

> and then it stopped when the president took to the podium again.

> "Hello everyone." She said.

Tsuneo: Did you all have fun out there? Because I didn't.

> "Please sit down. We have the tally in. The Joker of our Grade is Kadyn Johns."

> A black youth smiled as people clapped for him. He was well known as one of the funniest
> individuals in their school.

Tsuneo: So funny that he's never been mentioned before now.

> He was always saying something funny, and getting in trouble for it. He
> got to the stage and was given a certificate, which he showed to the group of students with glee.

Dan: Yep, he sure did that thing he did
Rick: This is truly a rewarding end to such an involved character arc

> He
> smiled as he returned to his table with all his friends. Next, was the Grade's Einstein award. Justin
> Rihaz won the award.

Rebecca: It was won by the guy who'd gone most of his life without using the OASIS. Make of this what you will.

> Mark clapped as loud as he could for his friend. Justin bowed and returned to
> his seat with Tom and John.

Tsuneo: They immediately revoked his reward

> The next award was for the person most likely to succeed. It went to a girl named Janet Riverton.

Rebecca: Janet's YouTube channel has over a million subscribers. She's worth more than all their parents combined.

> She went up, and her smile dazzled everyone as she took the certificate.

Dan: You go, Janet!
Rick: We have no idea who you are, but we're deeply invested in your success no less!

> She took her seat with her friends. Finally, it was the choice for this year's prom king and prom
> queen. Prom king went to a jock named Ryan Derouge,

Rebecca: He'd threatened to wedgie people until they voted for him

> while surprisingly, the award went to an
> Indian girl who was heavy set. It seemed that the girl, Saumya Sardana had a crush on Ryan, and it
> seemed that most of the grade agreed;

Tsuneo: Give her the pity vote.

> let her win this day and let her have a good night.

Dan: Lest Ryan pound them into the ground again.

> Mark was pleased. He had not known who to vote for

Rick: So he voted for Grover Cleveland

> and chose at random, or chose people who were in his classes.

Dan: He voted Tom for prom queen. Nearly got it, too.

> He did vote for Justin however. They had dessert and continued dancing the night away.

Rebecca: Yay, more dancing.
Tsuneo: Is there anything else to do at this prom?
Rebecca: Shut up and keep dancing.

> Mark got with his friends and they danced with no bother to anyone who thought they were dancing
> weird.

Dan: Personally, I've seen people on fire who had better moves.

> Mark smiled and laughed with his friends, as Amira was doing the same with her friends.

Rebecca: And yes, they both were having much more fun apart than together.

> The night went on, and soon Mark needed fresh air.

Rick: Mostly due to Tom's non-stop meat farts.
Dan: He strikes me as the type.

> He left the hall and went outside. There was a chill
> to the air. He blew out his breath, and mist came out. He looked up and saw that the moon was
> shining. Tonight could not have gone any better.

Tsuneo: And that's when the fire alarm started.

> Suddenly, he felt a hand touch his shoulder. Amira was there, and she was smiling.

> "I was wondering where you went." She said, and he smiled back at her.

> "I just needed some alone time." He said. "I can't stand to be inside right now, especially with a lot
> of people."

> "Don't worry, prom is almost finished." Amira said.

Tsuneo [Mark]: Yay, I don't have to socialise any more

> "And then, we will go Jessica's lake-side cabin."

Tsuneo [Mark]: Dangit.

> "I can't wait." He said.

> They stood outside for five more minutes, just relishing each other's presence.

Rebecca: [Amira] We really have nothing in common, do we?
Dan: [Mark] We do not.

> And then they decided that it was getting too cold

Dan: Okay, I'm freezing my butt off. Moment's gone.

> so had to go back inside. Right then, the students were back in
> their seats, watching a funny video that the student council had created.

Tsuneo: Their 'funny' video could also be used as blackmail material.

> It went over what some students' experiences were when they first came to the high school.

Dan: Hey look, there's Mark getting a wedgie at the entrance ceremony. And Mark getting pantsed in the middle of basketball practice. And Mark's locker being set of fire.

> It went over crushes, who the best teachers were,

Rick: Who the teacher's best crushes were...

> and it had footage and pictures of the students from different times. Mark
> appeared in a photograph from the talent show when he played the piano.

Tsuneo: Years later, his fellow students would fondly remember him as 'the piano kid'

> Amira was there as well with Jessica and Alan.

Rebecca: Not doing anything, just y'know, there.

> Tom and John were up there, together.

Dan: With their mugshots side-by-side

> Mark and Amira quietly took their seats as the presentation continued. And then, it was over.

Tsuneo: Really? Because it feels like it will never be over.

> The lights came on. The music stopped. There were several teachers there just to supervise.

Rick: But only at the end of the night.
Dan: Mostly they've been having a smoke in the hallway and just generally hoping nobody gets hurt.

> One of
> them took the stand and addressed the students. They needed to remember the time they spent
> with each other.

Rick: Within six months, they had been reduced to 'occasional Facebook updates'.

> This night was a good night for most students, although some did not have enough
> money, or felt no one liked them.

Rebecca: But fortunately nobody that Mark knew,

> It was important for the students to understand that they needed to fight for other people's rights.

Dan: For example, as it was prom night, they should fight for their right to party.

> No one should be bullied. All people should feel welcome.

Rebecca: Which is why Aech had pretended to be a straight white man on the OASIS

> It was a good night and indeed, everyone there felt like they belonged.

Tsuneo: Except for the ones that you had previously mentioned hadn't.

> The night at the hall ended and the
> friends all went home or to continue festivities at another location.

Tsuneo: They all went home or to one nonspecific location

> Mark was laughing with his friends when Amira came over to get him.

Dan: Yep, just got together and already she's getting rid of his mates.

> He said goodnight to his friends.

Rick [Mark]: Night Tom, John and Justin. Night David Miranda and Krystle Levesque and her boyfriend Scott

> and left with Amira,
> Jessica, Alan, and Tyler to go back to Jessica's house and then to the cabin. Mark went to the
> washroom and changed from his suit to a sweatshirt and jeans that his father had packed for him.

Dan: While wishing Dad hadn't also packed his Power Rangers pyjamas.

> Mrs. Walsh

Tsuneo: Previously known as Jessica's mum.

> let Mark hang up his suit on a hangar in the coat closet. He could get it the day after.
> Amira also changed but still had her hair done up. She was wearing a hoody and jeans with
> sneakers on her feet.

Rebecca: As opposed to anywhere else you might wear your sneakers.

> The group of high school students were driven to Jessica's cabin by the lake. Mr. Walsh and a few
> other parents joined them there to supervise.

Dan: Mark tosses the condom, knowing he won't need it after all.

> There were some alcoholic drinks like coolers that the parents allowed the teens to drink.

Tsuneo: These parents are the models of responsibility.

> There were a few students who were smoking cigarettes.

Dan: I can only imagine that between current pricing trends and the collapse of society that cigarettes now cost about a hundred bucks each.

> They
> gathered around a bonfire and sat on wooden benches. Amira and Mark sat beside each other.

Tsuneo: Until one of the adults wedged himself between them

> Mark gazed upon the flames, and put his arm around Amira's waist, bringing her close. She rested
> her head on his shoulder and sighed. There was a chill to the night.

Rick: It took a while for this idea to sink in

> Tyler was doing a hand stand while everyone was laughing at his antics.

Rebecca: Oh Tyler, you sure do those things that you do.

> One of the parents offered Mark a cooler. He declined as
> he did not want anything cold and did not want to get drunk. Amira did the same.

Tsuneo: Amira really has no life of her own, does she?
Rebecca: Well so far in the real world she's been Mark's prop girlfriend while in the OASIS she was used as a hostage to get to Mark. So no, none at all.

> The fire warmed them up, but Mark had something else in mind.

Dan: The MA5B Individual Combat Weapon System.
Tsuneo: Sorry?
Dan: From Halo: Combat Evolved.
Tsuneo: Silly me.

> He stood up and offered Amira his
> hand. She took it and they started walking down to the water's edge. The moon was full, and the
> stars shone brightly.

Tsuneo: I suppose the leather-clad booster gangs keep to the other side of the lake
Rebecca: They're remarkably polite like that.

> It was a good night for a walk and Mark did not want to miss this chance with Amira.

Rebecca: Oh, he missed that long ago.

> He held her hand affectionately

Dan: It was freezing cold, just like everything else.

> as they walked together.

> "This was a good night." He told her.

Rick: In case you missed the previous narration, here it is again

> "Thanks for everything, Amira."

> "I'm glad you are having a good time." She replied. "I think my friends like you.

Rebecca: [Amira] I mean, I assume. I'm not really sure they have feelings.

> You can feel free to be yourself.

Tsuneo: So Mark stopped feigning politeness and went back to creeping on her from a distance

> You don't have to be so guarded."

> "It's a fault that I have." Mark said. "I have a problem dealing with people, especially women."

> "Why is that?" She asked.

Dan: He doesn't like interactions that can't be resolved by shooting people and taking their loot.

> "I fear that I'm not good enough."

Rebecca: Yep, there you go. Was wondering how long it would be until he turned it into his pity party.

> "I think you are wonderful. I like you very much. You don't have to be better than who you are right

> now.

Tsuneo: [Amira] I mean, you can’t so there’s no point trying.

> You are very sweet and I like you. You don't have to be something you are not. You are very
> determined and strong."

Rick: Really?
Dan: No.

> "Amira…I like you too. You are truly beautiful. You are one of the smartest people I know, and I
> admire you for that.

Tsuneo: He likes her for all those qualities we are assured that she has.

> You will be something great, I am sure about that."

Dan: [Mark] Definitely going to leave me in the dust.
Rick: [Amira] Oh, no doubt.

> "I'm glad I can share this time with you."

> "So am I."

Rebecca [Amira]: Also I am freezing cold and this was a terrible idea.

> They walked and talked about different things.

Rebecca: But they weren’t Mark’s attention seeking, so they don’t matter.

> They looked up and gazed upon the stars.

Dan: [Mark] Yep, they’re stars.

> They then
> returned to Amira's friends. They started playing music, and people started dancing yet again.

Rick: Oh dear god, no more dancing. I still haven’t recovered from the Prom.

> The parents were sitting up on a hill closer to the cabin.

Dan: The Killjoy squad

> They were making sure everyone was having a
> good time and not doing anything that might hurt others.

Tsuneo: So no throwing anyone in the freezing cold lake this time

> The teens were all dancing, making fools of themselves.

Dan: Dancing teenagers making fools of themselves. The most, and possibly only realistic part of this fic.

> For Mark, the only person who mattered right then and there was Amira.

Rick: He refused to socialise with anyone else.

> She danced with him for a while, and then her friends took her away so that they could dance.

Dan: [Tyler] We’ve got to prepare the sacrifice.

Rick: [Mark] Wait, the what now?

> Mark took a seat and watched as the bonfire started going out.

> Tyler, Jessica, Amira and Mark had a room to sleep in. There were two double beds. Mark had his
> bag and took out the sleeping bag, and spread it on the floor.

> "Mark, what are you doing?" Jessica asked.

Rick: [Mark] I'm sleeping on the floor.
Rebecca: [Jessica] No, I mean what are you doing in this room?

> "I think it would be for the best if I slept on the floor." He replied, blushing at the thought of sleeping
> with Amira.

> "Mark, you're too much of a good guy." Jessica said.

Tsuneo: As we need to be constantly told.

> "Amira trusts you to do the right thing.

Dan: You and Kevin

> I trust
> you, and no one is going to do anything to each other while there are other people in the room."

> "What the hell?" Tyler said. "But, why?"

> "It would be just too weird." Jessica said.

Dan [Tyler]: First you say no to the Mudkip costume and then you say no to the goat and now this.
You're really killing the mood here.

> "Being naked with one person is one thing; being naked
> with three other people is just crazy."

Rebecca: And Tyler's natural creep takes over.

> "But that's also part of prom night." Tyler whined. "we could have a shower."

> "You know what, Ty?" Jessica said. "You can go have a cold shower."

> "You're kidding me." He said.

> "I'm sorry, Tyler." Mark said. "I didn't want to ruin your night."

Rick: [Tyler] You're here. That was inevitable.

> "It's okay man." Tyler said, smiling wickedly. "I'm just happy I have a girlfriend that I can do things
> to."

> "Me too." Mark admitted.

Dan [Tyler]: Hey bro, we are so heterosexual, aren't we?
Rick [Mark]: So much.

> Amira finished from the washroom and walked into the room. She was wearing a huge white t shirt

Rebecca: It was a repurposed fumigation tent

> and black shorts. She had taken off her contact lenses and was wearing her glasses. Mark was
> wearing a sweatpants and t-shirt.

Dan: Pace killing description strikes again.
Rebecca: Assuming there was a pace to kill.
Dan: Well, yeah.

> "Hey Amira." Jessica said. "Mark's afraid that you might try something on him, so he wants to sleep
> on the ground."

Rebecca: [Amira] Oh, that will never happen.

> "Mark, is that true?" she frowned.

> "No, I just thought that we weren't at that stage yet in the relationship." Mark tried to explain. "We
> never really spoke about sleeping together like this. I just want to make the right choice."

Tsuneo: And when she slammed the cabin door on him, Amira knew that she'd made the right choice.

> Amira offered him her hands. He stood up and took her hands in his. She pulled him in tightly and
> gave him a bear hug.

Rick: Amira is apparently an old-timey strongman

> He wrapped his arms around her and they stayed like that for a moment. They separated.

> "You can sleep on the bed with me." Amira said. "You are a good guy, Mark. I don't think you will try
> anything."

Dan: Spoken like somebody who has never been near a teenage boy

> "Okay, I'll sleep on the bed with you." He said, smiling sheepishly.

Tsuneo: Meanwhile, Tyler was lying there, stewing in his own resentment

> He excused himself as he took his toothbrush, towel and toothpaste from his bag. He went to the
> bathroom and brushed his teeth and washed his face.

Rick: What, no blow-by-blow account of his night-time routine? It's like I don't know this fic any more.

> He went back into the room and put away his
> belongings in his bag, including the sleeping bag. Amira was in the bed, and she had taken off her
> glasses and was reading a book.

Dan: Aww, it's like they're married already.

> Mark climbed into bed with her. Jessica and Tyler were quietly
> speaking to each other about something.

Dan [Tyler]: So how about if I wear the Mudkip costume and you pretend to be Ash?
Rebecca [Jessica]: I am never speaking to you again.

> Mark went under the covers and felt that the bed had warmed up because of Amira's body heat.

Rick: And then she popped a Dutch Oven just to be sure.

> He
> propped the pillow up so that he could sit up with her. A lamp was on beside the bed. Jessica and
> Tyler were sleeping in a bed closest to the window, while Mark and Amira were sleeping closest to
> the door.

Tsuneo: And this is important because?

> Mark and Amira were quiet for a moment.

Rick: Time for another Dutch Oven?

> "So, what are you reading?" Mark asked.

> "The Catcher and the Rye." Amira said. "It's a good book. I can lend you it if you want to read it."

Rebecca [Amira]: I find that its themes of alienation and its critique of superficiality are especially relevant in the modern era.
Rick [Mark]: I went to a planet in my spaceship and shot people with my Halo guns
Rebecca [Amira]: I'm going to sleep now.

> "Sure." Mark said. "Well, I guess this is where we say good night."

Dan: [Mark] Unless Amira wants to do something else?
Rick: [Amira] Oh gods no. Goodnight.

> Mark kissed Amira on the cheek, fixed his pillow and adjusted his position. He was afraid of doing
> something wrong so he tried nothing else except turn his back to Amira and try to fall asleep.

Dan: Meanwhile Jessica was faking being asleep and Tyler was quietly jerking off.

> A few minutes went by. Then, Amira turned off the lamp and put her book and glasses away. Mark
> felt the bed move as Amira tried to get into a good position. Slowly, she snaked her right arm under
> Mark's arm, and she moved her body closer to his. They started spooning,

Rebecca: If the author's intent is to make this sound heart-warming or wholesome, they're doing a terrible job of it.

> Mark taking hold of her
> hand and bringing it close to his heart. He moved and rolled onto his back, and Amira adjusted her
> body so her right arm and leg draped over Mark's body.

Tsuneo: It's a rare talent that can take a tender and affectionate moment and make it so mechanical and lifeless.

> His right arm was under her head, and she
> sighed with contentment. Tonight, had been a good night, and soon they drifted to sleep, holding
> onto each other.

Dan: And so as another drunk threw up in the back of his bus, Mister Patel quietly sighed to himself and wondered how his son was doing.

> In the weeks to follow, Amira, Mark, and Vladislav could use their avatars and consoles once again.

Tsuneo: And after that delightful prom sequence, I could do with another list of someone's inventory.

> Tridosk had let Princess May go,

Rick: All the time wondering if she'd go with him to the Prom instead.

> the High Five had let Lynx reactivate his account so that he could
> use the OASIS again, and the High Five also sent Jack 100292402 his own console and headset.

Rebecca: His martial arts lessons were immediately forgotten.

> All three players could now log into the OASIS and resume playing. Mark/Jack_100292402 was
> given his ship, the Tensa Zangetsu again.

Dan: And his armour and his X-Wing and his combination assault rifle/shotgun.
Rebecca: Yep.
Dan: And his drones and his Optimus Primal skin and his sniper rifle.
Rebecca: Yes, all of that.
Dan: And his golden dragon armour and missile launcher and Gandalf skin and his...
Rebecca: This is going to take a while.

> His Easter eggs had been fixed so that he could continue
> using them. Amira/Princess May could now go wherever she pleased.

Rick: As thanks for her cooperation and compensation for the trouble she's been through, they gave her 5 coins store credit at the pet parlour.

> If he followed the rules, Vladislav/Lynx was free as well.

Tsuneo: The High Five had told him not to do it again. Little did they know that Lynx had his fingers crossed behind his back.

> Jack invited Princess May to his ship. He showed her everything. He showed her his armory, his
> vehicles, clothing, gear, and other items that he collected throughout the years.

Rick: The OASIS equivalent of talking about your D&D character.

> He then showed her an empty space.

> "What is this room for?" She asked.

Dan: A placeholder for expansion content

> "One day, I had hoped someone special would come along." He said. "I believe you are that special
> someone.

Rebecca: And not for the first time, Amira considered backing away slowly.

> Now, you can store things on my ship.

Rick: [Amira] I mean, I've got my own storage obviously, so I can still get my things if you're offline.

> You also have access to my items as well.

Rebecca: [Amira] Yeeeaaah, I'm good.

> If you
> need to fix things, like vehicles, clothing or anything really, you can use the work benches here on
> my ship. The High Five have opened up places where you could fix things as well."

Tsuneo: Given that she was trying to be the best racer in the OASIS, where did Amira get her car fixed before now?
Dan: That's a very good question, one that I suspect that the author has never considered.

> "Thanks Jack." Princess May said. "Have you ever considered joining a clan?"

> "Officially, no I have not decided to join a clan." Jack_100292402 said. "I usually play with my
> friends that I know in real life.

Rebecca [Amira]: So why don't you and your friends form a clan?

[Pause]

Dan [Mark]: Oh.

> It is only recently that I started playing with other people like the High Five.

Tsuneo: Of course, they're the only ones good enough to play with Mark. [Pause] Say, how many companies does Amira own?

> Who knows, maybe things will change in the future."

> A robot came up to Jack, and gave a crisp salute to the captain.

Rick [Jack]: These robots are my real friends.
Rebecca [Amira]: I have made a terrible mistake.

> "Sir." It said. "Everything that belonged to you before Lynx hacked into your console has been
> accounted for."

> "Excellent." Jack said. "Fire up the engines. Let's go say hi to the High Five."

Dan: [Jack] I'm sure they can interrupt their board meeting to meet my girlfriend.

> He was back. Everything that he had that he did not steal was back in his possession.

Rick: The beat-up Colonial Viper and the pipe pistol weren't a lot, but they were his.

> The High
> Five had even let him continue using the Easter eggs. Lynx, whose name was Vladislav Volkovskis

Rick: Wait, it is? Why didn't the fic tell me this before?

> used the single server in his house to hack into his console.

Rebecca: Well that lasted whole seconds

> He copied mines and grenades, but made sure only 20 were loaded onto his player.

Rick: Good thing he risked his entire account for a few more common expendable items.

> The last thing he needed was someone snooping
> around and saying to the High Five that he was cheating again.

Tsuneo [Parzival]: Have you been illegally duplicating items?
Dan [Lynx]: Not at all.
Tsuneo [Parzival]: Really?
Dan [Lynx]: Cross my heart and hope to die.
Tsuneo [Parzival]: Well okay then. Carry on.

> He made sure he used special
> codes so that no one could use cloud technology and see what he was doing when he was not in
> the OASIS. He made a firewall so no one could hack him.

Rebecca: Sir, Lynx has immediately evaded all of our tracking systems.
Dan: [Parzival] Nuke the furry twerp.

> He tried using tracking software that he designed to track where Jack_100292402 was.

Rick: Just find the biggest black compensator of a ship you can, and he'll be there.

> It seemed that he was still not on the OASIS. That
> was okay, as no one with everything Jack had could stay away forever.

Rebecca: His plan relied on Jack not finding a satisfying life in the real world. So really, it was perfect

> They would meet again eventually. Lynx wasted no time and jacked back into the OASIS.

Rebecca: His hacks were immediately detected and he was banned for life. The end.

> He entered his own chat room,

Dan: Lynx's chat room! Population: two. And Tridosk's not here.

> and saw that the High Five had sent him coordinates in his ship The Star Destroyer from Star Wars,

Rick: The only Star Destroyer in all of Star Wars.

> to go to the ship yards so he could repair his spaceships if anything should happen.

Tsuneo: Even though his ship was indestructible
Rick: It's the thought that counts

> He contacted
> Tridosk who was playing a free for all on a rocky map where it was night time. This map made it
> necessary to use infrared technology to see at night.

Rebecca: And only that. It was a very specific ruleset.

> There were also alien monsters that the
> creators had applied to the map so there were many more enemies out to harm a player. These
> aliens were like the aliens from the movie Signs.

Dan: So everyone was armed with super-soakers.

> They were green usually, and yet they could camouflage with their surroundings.

Tsuneo: Wonderfully redundant for a night-time map.

> Their bodies were not usually creating enough heat to be
> spotted right away. They were different yes, however the right player could usually spot them with
> some skill.

> Tridosk was using a spaz shot gun

Rick: It had an automatic dodge and occasionally vanished from the fic
Dan: Deep cut

> to fight his enemies. His avatar was special as its tongue detected movement in the air,

Tsuneo: Niche skill, but it's finally paying off

> and he could see things that moved. He was skilled using his avatar
> and could discern what was a player, and what was not.

Rebecca: One time he'd lost an hour trying to hit on a background NPC. Never going to make that mistake again

> He used his shotgun and killed his enemies as fast as he could.

Dan: Is that what's a shotgun's for? Thanks fic, I had no idea.

> Sometimes he got hurt,

Tsuneo: He stubbed his toe on the alien battlefield

> but he could always use a bubble shield to spend time
> and heal himself using a health pack. Suddenly, Lynx was there, and flew to Tridosk's location.

Rick: [Tridosk] Do you mind? I'm in the middle of something here.

> "I'm back." Lynx told his friend. "Thank you for your help."

> "No worries." Tridosk said. "I just need you to be my partner. Let's continue this fight."

Dan: Nope, sorry. Came in late. Got to sit at the back and wait for the next round.

> Lynx took to the sky while Tridosk continued battling on the ground. Lynx acted like air support and
> fired missiles at enemies that were trying to sneak up on Tridosk. He saw something in the air flying
> towards him. It was a player in a dragon skin. The dragon roared, and Lynx summoned his massive
> proton cannon.

Dan: Oh, proton cannon. How we missed ye.

> He fired and destroyed the dragon. He felt some satisfaction, because he defeated
> a dragon, but not the dragon that costed him.

Rebecca: And now a fight scene that is like every other fight scene?
Tsuneo: On the other hand, it's not the prom scene
Rebecca: You are right, and I hate it.

> He saw that Tridosk was doing well without his help.
> Lynx continued defeating enemies that appeared on the map. He fired missiles, used mines and
> grenades and other items that he could use.

Dan: He used the items that he used.

> He used laser swords and cut enemies in half. He used
> the mini-gun that was attached to his shoulder. He fired heat seeker missiles that destroyed several
> enemies.

Rick: He lightly elbowed them and gave them Chinese burns

> He missed the feeling of being the best.

Dan: And that his cheats and the item that makes him literally unkillable mean he's the best.

> Finally, Tridosk seemed to be slowing down.

> "Hey Vlad." Tridosk said over a private channel. "I think I'm done playing for today."

> "Yeah," Lynx said. "It was fun while it lasted. Meet me at my chat room."

Rebecca: The empty cage that they'd kept Princess May in was still sitting there. They had considered removing it, but they couldn't think of anything to do with the space.

> With that, they both left he map.

Dan: Yay, random players got killed!
Rick: Hooray, they lost their life's savings!

> GoldDragonZ: How is this story thus far? It's going to end soon as no one really likes reading it.

Tsuneo: So why wait?
Dan: Better yet, why take it this far?

> What do you guys think? Please review!

Rebecca: Guilt tripping readers for reviews is not a good look.

> -----

> Chapter Twelve

> GoldDragonZ: I think this is almost finished.

Rebecca: This is the last chapter, so you tell me.

> Thanks for reading.

> Jack stood alone on the bridge of Tensa Zangetsu.

Tsuneo: The perfect summary of Jack.

> Everything was back to normal, although he
> now had the abilities that were bestowed upon him as he had won the Easter eggs.

Tsuneo: He was normal, save for the fact that he was an immortal digital god.

> He looked
> outside the viewpoint to the rest of the OASIS. There were different maps that he could go to. He
> decided that there was one map he needed to play on.

Rick: Pirates World, complete with a lurking Ice Cream Bunny

> It was a jungle map. People would use the terrain to hide from enemies.

Rebecca: However, the cover mechanics never worked right.

> They would hide behind trees or huge boulders.

Tsuneo: They would use the terrain for cover and they would use parts of the terrain for cover.

> They would use small rivers and lakes to hide and then spring into action.

Dan: On this map it was compulsory to change your avatar to be Schwarzenegger or Jessie Ventura.

> Jack had the ability to apply active camouflage.

Tsuneo: He also has the ability to file a tax return in seven seconds and fold his laundry blindfolded.

> He had to wear a special helmet for his whole body to hide in the jungle.

Rick: His head turned invisible, but the rest of him was normal.

> There was a time limit to
> this ability. He used a drop pod to get down on the map from his ship, and disembarked.

Dan: A dozen campers hit him the moment he stepped outside.

> He activated the active camouflage and took to the trees.

Tsuneo: So Jack’s immortal and is abusing his powers by entering a deathmatch that he cannot lose.
Rick: Yes.
Tsuneo: How’s that any different to what Lynx did?
Rick: Jack’s the good guy
Tsuneo: Of course.

> He saw a few players encounter each other. They began fighting each other.

Dan: Jack was surprised by this, and really not sure what he expected.

> Jack dropped a grenade, which wounded the players as well as surprised them.

Rebecca: They didn’t expect to be exploded.

> He had fixed his sword from Avatar: The Last Airbender.

Dan: But he had to do the pebble dance first.

> He dropped from the trees. He disengaged his active camouflage and began
> fighting the enemies with his sword.

Rebecca: Sure, this indestructible guy will turn invisible to sneak up on you, but he won’t do it to fight you. That would be unfair.

> He threw the sword at one enemy, and it went right through them.

Rick: Someone should tell him that’s not how you use a sword.

> Coins began falling out of the wound.

Tsuneo: That’s a very odd blood type.

> Jack pulled out one Desert Eagle pistol and fired it at
> the other enemy. In the meantime, the other player applied a health pack and collected some of the
> coins that had fallen out of his wound.

Tsuneo: Never mind death penalty, this game has a minor scratch penalty.

> He used Jack's own sword against him. Jack used his black and red Batman Gauntlets

Dan: So not the Kryptonite gloves. Good to know.

> and blocked the black blade. He took out his knife from his left boot and
> started fighting the players.

Tsuneo: So what was he doing before? Having a spirited debate?

> The one with Jack's sword

Rick: Unless you identify him by what Halo armour he’s wearing, I have no idea who he is.

> pulled out a gold rifle and he dropped Jack's sword. Jack somersaulted before the enemy could fire.

Tsuneo: Mostly because he was having a hard time hefting his ridiculously heavy rifle.

> He picked up his sword and slashed the player from the groin to the head,

Rebecca: And to think, Amira likes him for his polite personality.

> spilling coins out of the body. He grabbed the gold weapon and used it to fire at the other enemy.

Dan: In the epic final chapter of the Adventures of Jack, our hero fights nameless squashes!

> The enemy burst into coins. Jack dropped the weapon as it started to disappear, and went back into
> the trees. He moved swiftly through the trees, and used his different senses

Dan: Smell-o-vision!

> as well as a radar that he had created.

Rick: Jack invented radar. That Marconi hack just copied his work

> He found a player dressed in Jedi robes fighting a white gorilla.

Dan: What is it with this fic and gorillas anyway?

> The Jedi was wielding a blue lightsaber.

Rebecca: The gorilla's lightsaber was a neat purple affair.

> The gorilla was using a huge hammer to try and bash in the Jedi's skull.
> The Jedi was nimble and easily dodged the gorilla's attacks.

Dan: The Jedi's used to this. He's been through a lot of ugly conflicts in the Clone Wars.
Rebecca: Don't say it.
Dan: He's trained in Gorilla warfare.

> Jack wasted no time and used his two
> Desert Eagles to fire at the Jedi. The Jedi threw down a bubble shield. Jack kept firing, and took on
> the gorilla. The gorilla charged at Jack, who used a grapnel launcher and propelled up to the
> branches in a tree.

Tsuneo: How does this fic manage to make the brawl between a gorilla, a Jedi and a guy in Halo armour boring?
Dan: It's a rare talent.

> The gorilla roared and began smashing its fists into the tree that Jack was
> perched on. Jack pulled out a specialty item.

Tsuneo: A pack of mint-flavoured dental floss

> It was a tube with a blue crystal inside it.

Dan: Containing the original, pure Gatorade molecule

> He dropped it
> on the ground below. The tube smashed open and the crystal turned to liquid and spread out over
> the ground, turning everything into ice.

Rick: [Jack] Well, time to work on my chainsaw sculptures.

> The gorilla turned into ice as did the Jedi. Jack waited until the effects wore off on the ground.

Rebecca: he sat down with a good book until the thaw set in.

> He dropped down and smashed into the body of the gorilla and
> picked up the coins that were left behind. He did the same to the Jedi.

Tsuneo: It's not that all of these fights are boring, one-sided beatdowns that annoys me. It's that they

are boring, one-sided beatdowns and Jack is still immortal anyway

> Jack took off sprinting. He activated his active camouflage and ran into a clearing. There was a
> woman using a bow and arrow with explosive tips. She was facing a dinosaur of some sort.

Rick: He'd accidentally wandered into the Pixar movies you've forgotten about planet

> Her
> arrows exploded against the skin of the beast. It roared as the player swore. The woman continued
> firing her arrows at the dinosaur as it advanced on her. Jack waited to see what would happen.

Rebecca: Giant dinosaur against girl with bow. Well this seems like a fair fight.

> It seemed that the dinosaur had the upper hand as its skin was like armor.

Tsuneo: Jack called it cheap for constantly ignoring damage.

> The other player continued shooting arrows, until they ran out.

Rick: Sonic arrow, tear gas arrow, boomerang arrow, gotta be something left.

> The dinosaur growled, extending its fingers as it advanced,
> mouth open and watering. Jack leapt into action.

Dan: Pausing only to tip his fedora.

> He disengaged his active camouflage. He stood in
> front of the woman who now seemed to not have any more weapons.

Rebecca: Yeah, not everyone can have their own Super Dimensional Fortress full of weapons, mate.

> He pulled out his black sword
> and his knife from the sheathe on his left boot. He held the sword in his right hand, and held the
> knife upside down in his left hand.

Tsuneo: He then realised that he could have gotten out any one of his six dozen guns instead and felt more than a little stupid

> He pointed the sword at the dinosaur. The dinosaur growled.

Rebecca: And swallowed him hole.

> "Fresh meat." The player said. "Do you think that your sword will be a match to my upgraded
> scales?"

> "We'll see." Jack said, and then he sprang into action.

Dan: The other player has already run off.

> He swung his sword with his right arm as hard as he could. The dinosaur caught it with its hands

Dan: [Jack] Wait, you actually have working hands?
Rick: [Dinosaur] Yeah, what of it?
Dan: [Jack] Oh, I just assumed you were some kind of therapod with undersized arms.
Rick: [Dinosaur] Now that's just a negative stereotype, mate.

> and opened its mouth. Its mouth clamped down on Jack's head. He pulled his head out of the
> helmet and backed away. He pulled out a remote control and pressed a red button. The helmet's
> eyes turned green and the helmet exploded.

Rick: His plan was to let the dinosaur bite his head off
Rebecca: Brilliant

>The dinosaur's head was no more, and the player turned into coins.

Dan: Does Jack always have explosives packed into his helmet?
Tsuneo: Apparently so.
Dan: Huh. [Pause] I have several questions.

> The player he saved use the moment that Jack was preoccupied and pointed a
> pistol at his head. Jack stabbed behind him with the knife, and cut into her side. He spun around
> and smacked the gun from her hand. He grabbed her by the neck and sliced her neck with his knife.
> Coins came out of the wound and her avatar disappeared, losing a life.

> "I didn't want things to go that way." Jack whispered softly.

Dan: Then maybe you shouldn't enter a free-for-all deathmatch

> Killing the woman left a bad taste in Jack's mouth.

Rebecca: He's beginning to realise that women can play OASIS however they want, and he doesn't know how he feels about that.

> He left the map and went back to the Tensa Zangetsu.

Tsuneo: [Jack] Oh, oversized black compensatory spaceship, you're the only one who understands me.

> He opened a vault and put all his coins there. Next, he signed off and turned off the console…

Tsuneo: And began to question his life choices

> The High Five held a meeting with the top programmers.

Rebecca: I can only hope that Akira has finally been shown the door.

> They were tasked with monitoring Tridosk and Lynx behavior on the OASIS.

Tsuneo: Get the lead programmers of your massive corporation to spend their time monitoring two players. Yes, this seems like a good use of your resources.

> So far, they were playing as normal players would.

Dan: They teabagged their opponents and filled chat with racist slurs, just like normal players would.

> They would enter free for all types of games and defeat enemies using a variety of weapons.

Tsuneo: Tridosk's victory with a golden banana was particularly noteworthy.

> Lynx was actively
> purchasing items instead of stealing them. He would see an item and find out where they were
> being sold. He would use actual coins and spend them on the item unless he could not afford them.

Tsuneo: Fic, I think we can figure out how basic commerce works on our own.

> He continued defeating enemies, and it seemed that he was doing things that were legal, although
> people did not have a clue that he was immortal now on the OASIS.

Rebecca: Remember, as a punishment for his prior cheating and kidnapping a player, they'd reinstated all his unfair powers.

> He was still using War Machine as his avatar. It appeared that he liked the character.

Dan: Someone had to.

> They saw that Tridosk was following Lynx around

Dan: Like the proverbial lost puppy.

> and they were participating in similar matches. They just wanted to kill other players online.

Rick: The High Five decided this was totally wholesome and healthy behaviour.

> They did not do anything other than battle other players. The programmers were fixing all the
> damaged maps that Lynx had affected with his nuclear bombs.

Rebecca: Apparently they didn't have backups of the map files.

> Soon, they were all fixed.

Tsuneo: They fixed the maps and they were all fixed.

> Meanwhile, Mark, or Jack_100292402

Rick: Wait, Mark is Jack? Why didn't anyone tell me this eleven chapters ago?

> would look for gear, clothing, and participate in other games besides free for all types of games.

Dan: Meanwhile, Jack did the things he's been doing all fic.

> He would also dance with Princess May from time to time.

Rick: [May] You know, we can meet up in real life as well.
Rebecca: [Jack] I have the OASIS back and I'm never leaving!

> They
> would get together and watch movies online. They would talk to each other in some of the more
> romantic settings. They would touch each other as other couples did.

Tsuneo: In one truly daring moment, they publicly held hands.
Dan: No way

> It seemed that the OASIS was getting back to normal,

Dan: Now that spaceman lizardman and his buddy proton cannon were on the loose.

> although Jack/Mark and Amira/Princess May's lives were changing.

Rebecca: It's not so much that Amira's character is informed. It's more that it's lightly suggested.

> Several weeks passed.

Tsuneo: In real time...
Rick: You okay there, buddy?

> Mark and Amira would get together and study at each other's houses. They
> met each other's parents and siblings.

Rebecca: And maybe Alexandra.

> They refrained from doing anything that might upset their family members.

Tsuneo: Which basically meant that Mark never once opened his mouth

> They studied for finals. Soon, they did their exams and Mark pulled off stellar grades.

All: Of course.
Rebecca: How were Amira's grades?

> He applied for a college that was in the same region as his house.

Rick: Fortunately, there was one at the end of the street.

> Amira, on the other hand chose a university in the main city which was Toronto.

Tsuneo: Don't they live in Toronto anyway?
Dan: The University was whole suburbs away.

> Mark made it onto the honor roll, as did Justin, David, Krystle, Tyler, Jessica and Amira.

Rick: Tom flunked the attendance roll.

> Soon, they had their graduation ceremony; Mrs. Patel had done Mark's hair once again.

Rebecca: This was the single most important part of the entire ceremony

> Nick Harvey was there to support both Amira and Mark.

Dan: He was there to give out manly hugs.
Rick: Shirtless.
Dan: Shirtless manly hugs, of course.

> He
> was with his wife and their son. The school gave Mark two certificates, one was his high school
> diploma, and the other one was to acknowledge that he got on the honor roll.

Rick: The Harpo award for participation

> His parents were overjoyed.

Rebecca [Bored]: Yay

> His siblings and parents took a few pictures of him, Amira, and his friends. John had a
> get together at his house after the ceremony. Mark and Amira went there, and they celebrated by
> playing music, and eating good food.

Tsuneo: This fic is amazing.
Rebecca: Really? I didn't think I'd hear you say that?
Tsuneo: Oh yes. Every time you think it's plumbed the depths of dull mundanity, it manages to become even more insipid and boring.
Rebecca: Now that's more like it.

> John had prepared food especially for Amira because she was Muslim and did not eat meat.

Rick: So his plan to serve ham off the bone had not gone over well.

> Unfortunately, Tom did not graduate as he was missing a few credits.

Dan: It turns out that Gunting 101 was not a real subject

> However, his friends invited him over so that he did not miss out.

Rebecca: They needed someone to feel better than.

> They spent time with each other until the day ended and everyone went home.

Tsuneo: See?
Rebecca: Oh yes. Thrilling.

> Mark's parents were willing to pay for his college however they could not pay
> for him to rent an apartment or live on campus.

Rebecca: They made discrete suggestions about his getting a job of his own, ones that went right over his head

> He would have to take the bus to and from school.
> The school although it was in the same region, was still forty minutes away by car; it was about one
> hour away by bus.

Tsuneo: Thanks fic. If I ever wanted to make a travel map of the fic's locations, that would help immensely.

> Amira on the other hand could afford to live on campus.

Rebecca: If the fic's plan is to emphasise that she's too good for Mark, then it's doing a great job.

> The summer went by,

Tsuneo: Um, fic? Are you actually, you know, doing anything here? I mean, we've had the big showdown, then we had Lynx come back for no reason and all, and it's like... Are we done? Is this it? Just a long slow pre-credits roll of everyone settling into their happy lives? What I'm trying to say is... Where is this actually going?
Rick: Don't worry, I know it doesn't seem like it, but I can tell we're building to a vital point that will bring everything together and cap the entire story.
Tsuneo: And what's that?
Rick: Mark needs to choose a major.

> and Mark and Amira chose to spend most of the time together, mostly in
> person. There were only a few times that they decided to go on the OASIS.

Rick: Deprived of any purpose, his army of robots chose to stage an uprising

> They would dance together, go to Jessica's cabin by the lake,

Dan: They'd fortified the cabin and shot at Jessica's family to keep them away.

> and they would spend time with each other's families as
> well. Amira was a good person, and Mark's parents liked her.

Tsuneo: Conversely, Amira's parents barely tolerated Mark.

> Jack_100292402 was not spending much time on the OASIS anymore.

Dan: As noted just moments ago

> In the real world, Mark hung out with his friends, studied music, practiced piano, went to piano

Tsuneo: He studied piano and he studied piano

> and martial arts lessons,

Rick: He got kicked in the junk a lot.

> and was with Amira; he had little time to use the OASIS as he once did.

Tsuneo: Mark began to realise how shallow his former accomplishments were; how his piles of weapons and robots and his ship meant nothing next to the joy he found in the real world.
Dan: How long did that last?
Tsuneo: Until Amira dumped him for her TA.

> Meanwhile, on the OASIS, many people had won the Easter eggs that the High Five made
> available.

Rebecca: As a result, the whole thing had become an unplayable mess

> Crates were also introduced which had different gear, clothing, accessories, weapons,
> and other downloadable content.

Rick: But they weren't legally considered gambling outside of Europe.

> New maps were created, and old ones were adapted with better graphics.

Dan: Now you could play in 'brown factory', 'brown village', 'brown forest' and 'brown rainbow unicorn sparkle land'

> People were winning the Skulls as well.

Tsuneo: Although nobody could adequately explain why.

> In the real world, the High Five used the money
> that they made to purchase a warehouse worth of servers,

Rebecca: Just a reminder that business decisions with global impact are being made by a bunch of teenagers.

> and several vehicles that they needed to get around with to different buildings.

Rick: Somebody had to buy up all those leftover Segways

> They hired interns who were interested in working on the OASIS.

Rebecca: To teach them what the gaming industry was all about, they underpaid them, forced them to do massive amounts of overtime and then fired them the moment a new game shipped.

> Other people had a dream and the High Five let people's dreams become part of the
> OASIS. The universe was expanding.

Rick: It was now full of knee lightsabers, weaponised eels and Hoojibs

> Lynx was observing what was happening.

Dan: He had spent months just sitting there, staring

> Lynx felt cheated.

Rebecca: People are enjoying themselves! That's not allowed!

> More people were winning than ever
> before making the items he did win useless, except for the immortality.

Rebecca: He had no advantage at all save for the fact that he couldn't be hurt or killed.

> Only Jack/Mark, Art3mis/Samantha and Lynx/Vladislav had it.

Tsuneo: Tridosk feels lonelier than ever.

> No one else knew about that. Lynx searched for Jack's ship, the Tensa Zangetsu.

Rick: Wait, that's the name of Jack's ship? Why didn't anyone tell me before?

> He had programmed a tracking code to be placed on the ship so
> that he knew when it was uploaded from Jack/Mark's console.

Rebecca: The top programmers set to monitor Lynx for cheating of course completely ignored this.

> Unfortunately for Lynx, the High Five
> had made sure that he could not track Jack's ship's whereabouts anymore.

Tsuneo: They'd only extended this courtesy to Jack. Everyone else was on their own.

> They had been thorough
> when they undid the hacking that Lynx had performed on Jack. The only thing he could do was see
> when Jack logged on as players often chose to find each other to hang out or play against each
> other.

Rebecca: Jack used the OASIS to do things that people did on the OASIS

> It was legal for him to do this, but it looked like he as having bad luck. He tried finding
> Princess May, but could not find her either.

Rick: Since he'd been involved in her kidnapping, they naturally made no further effort to protect her from him.

> They were offline. Perhaps Lynx had scared them off.

Dan: Perhaps Lynx just needed a new hobby.

> There was no way that he knew what they were doing in their personal lives as they never let him
> know about it.

Tsuneo: So he just did what any normal person would do and stalked them on Facebook

> He was their enemy of course. Princess May/ Amira never even played with Lynx to begin with.

> And then, something came to Lynx's mind.

Rick [Lynx]: Why was that a Need for Speed crossover anyway?

> Just like the High Five, other players could organize
> announcements when they wanted to do something.

Tsuneo: He harnessed the unholy power of bulletin boards!

> So, he did it. He organized a meeting between all players.

Rebecca: He invited every single OASIS player in the world.

> He messaged those at the OASIS headquarters what he wanted to say.

Tsuneo: The laughter continued for hours.

> A few days
> later, after he requested time to talk to all players, he was given access to a channel so that he
> could talk to everyone.

Tsuneo: They were perfectly fine with letting him do this given his past history and interactions.

> "Hello," He said. "No doubt, most of you know me as Lynx,

Dan: I have no idea who you are. Now what do you want?

> and I did have a bounty on my head.

Dan: Can I still collect?
Tsuneo: [Lynx] No.
Dan: Awww.

> I am now offering you something.

Rick: If it isn't a lifetime supply of cheese whizz, they're not interested.

> I want to play against the best of the best in a spaceship battle. No
> holds barred. All types of spaceships, airplanes, or any flying vehicle can be used.

Rick: But I thought this was a spaceship battle.
Rebecca: For very broad definitions of 'spaceship', I suppose.

> They must have
> weapons attached to them. This is not a race. For one hour, we will face each other. You will be
> allowed to respawn every time you die. The event will take place Saturday at 6:30 pm Eastern
> Standard Time."

Dan [Lynx]: By the way, I am immortal and you can't actually beat me, so really there's no point in anyone entering

> Hundreds of players acknowledged that they heard what Lynx had announced.

Tsuneo: He put out an announcement to every player in the OASIS, literally billions worldwide. Mere hundreds even acknowledged it.

> Word got to Mark
> through his friends about the space battle. No doubt Lynx and Tridosk would be there.

Tsuneo: Yes, Lynx was going to be at the event that Lynx was hosting

> Righteous anger pulsed through Mark's veins.

Rick: [Mark] How dare he act with the overt approval of the game's management!

> He played the piano and did martial arts to calm himself down,

Dan: He played angry piano!
Tsuneo: [Mark] Take that, piano concerto number 3!

> however it was not working. He needed to face his enemies as they were mocking him.

Dan: Dude, they didn't even mention you by name. Settle down.

> They
> kidnapped Amira for Lynx, who had been attacking everyone since the beginning so that he could

> get access to the OASIS again. Mark waited and logged into the OASIS at 6:00 pm on the Saturday
> in question.

Rick: Server queues were backed up for an hour.

> He fired up the Tensa Zangetsu. Tom, Justin, and John were with him as well.

Rebecca: Rodney and Alexandra persistently failed to exist.

> They
> decided upon a strategy to try. They would be their own clan. Amira and her friends chose to watch,

Rebecca: No chance that Amira could take any active part in the story.

> although Tyler and Alan were going to participate as well.

Rick: Krystle had better things to do.

> The High Five decided to sit this out and watch as well.

Dan: From their poolside seats, cocktails in hand.

> The ship Jack would be piloting his Black and Yellow X-wing. Tom would be piloting
> a Colonial Viper from Battlestar Galactica with a snake painting all over its side.

Rick: Original or reboot? These things matter.

> John/Gadanza would be piloting a red and gold F41 Broadsword from the Halo franchise.

Tsuneo: Glad we snuck that one in. I was starting to go into withdrawal.

> And Justin/Arathorn
> would be piloting a blue and black Jedi Starfighter/eta-2 Actis-class Interceptor from Star Wars:
> Revenge of the Sith.

> The Tensa Zangetsu would hang back, only engaging if enemies got too close.

Dan: Does having your huge spaceship here count as cheating?
Rebecca: Let’s be honest here. Jack’s only slightly less awful about it then Lynx.

> The Mac cannons were powered up to 100%.

Rick: He’d had his thumb on the button for ages.

> The missiles were primed and ready to be fired. Every turret was online
> as well. Every hangar was closed so no one could come into the ship.

Tsuneo: Good thing he won’t have to launch anything from them, like say the ships they’re piloting.

> Lastly, the deflector shields
> were up to maximum as well. Jack entered his ship, as did his three friends.

Dan: Jack was worried he was the Shemp of the group.

> Gadanza explained the game to Arathorn, who had a little bit of practice with battling ships.

Rebecca: He’d dabbled in Zutarra and Harmonie

> The friends got into their ships.
> Mark typed commands into his console and the hangar doors opened to allow the four ships to

> leave.

Tsuneo: It took a while for the idea of ‘open hangar doors’ to occur to him

> "How should we do this?" Arathorn asked the other three comrades.

Dan: [Jack] Well, we sit in the cockpits and we fly...

> "Should we break off into pairs?"

> "For now, we should look and see what everyone else is doing." Jack said.

Tsuneo: [Tom] You have no idea, do you?
Rick: [Jack] I do not.

> "We should have as one unit. I will take the lead, and Arathorn, you take the rear.

Dan: [Jack] Make sure when they sneak up on us that you get hit first.

> Open up your shields to maximum, and I will do the same."

Rebecca: Do they need to be reminded to have their shields fully powered?
Tsuneo: It’s Jack’s friends, so I’ll say yes.

> They made the formation: Jack was in front, Gadanza and Tom were side by side, and Arathorn
> brought up the rear.

Rebecca: This is the closest that Justin has ever come to contributing to the fic. Treasure it.

> Their shields were up and their weapons were primed and ready.

> "If you guys lose ammunition,

Tsuneo: Through such radical actions as firing your weapons.

> please go back to the Tensa Zangetsu to get more." Jack said. "There
> should be more than enough."

Dan: [Jack] Just load up as much as you like, and it’ll be automatically deducted from your accounts.
Rick: [Tom] Wait, what? Dude, we’re your friends! We’re doing this for you.
Dan: [Jack] And that’s why I’m waiving the service fee.

> "What's our target?" Gadanza asked.

> "Everyone else is fair game,

Tsuneo: Tom immediately shot John in the back.

> but I want to find Tridosk." Jack said.

Rick: Shouldn’t be too hard, given his distinctive ship.
Dan: Because only one person in the fic can use any given kind of aircraft?
Rick: No, because nobody else would want to.

> "He kidnapped Amira's avatar
> and held her hostage. I want to make that guy pay for what he's done.

Rebecca: How Amira feels about this doesn’t even rate a mention

> I'm going to take his coins away from him."

Dan [Tridosk]: Joke's on you. I don't have any.

> The four friends flew for a little bit, and then more and more players appeared on the map, piloting
> different vehicles that could fly.

Rick: Full respect for the guy who brought an autogyro to a space battle.

> A clan was piloting the police hovercrafts from The Fifth Element.
> Five hundred players emerged out of hyperspace. They were the Star Wars clans. Mark knew about
> them because he had beaten them to gain access to the X-wing that he was now piloting.

Tsuneo: Does this mean he is the only person in the OASIS who has an X-Wing?

> Some
> were copiloting ships, and there were even several Millennium Falcons. There were ships from the
> different Star Wars video games, movies, comics, and novels.

Dan: I'm not impressed until you have something from the Droids cartoon.

> There were droid Starfighters. There
> were bombers. There were much more than Jack had ever known.

Rick: Captain Nym and Miranda Doni were wiping the floor with everyone.

> And then, something incredible
> happened; the flagship of the Star Wars universe, the ship that had belonged to Supreme Leader
> Snoke, in Star Wars Episode 8 arrived. There were hundreds of players in the ship, making sure the
> shields were up and weapons were being primed.

Tsuneo: I cannot think of anything less exciting than playing a video game to sit around as random crewmember forty-seven on someone else's ship
Rebecca: And yet, Star Citizen exists

> They took positions at the different turrets that
> were there. Several Star Destroyers arrived as well. It was a massive fleet. Jack looked at his radar.
> There were several other players online as well.

Tsuneo: There were hundreds of players and several more players.

> There were literally thousands of people playing now.

Rick: Remind me, how many people worldwide play the OASIS?

> This would be the biggest battle ever to happen on the OASIS. There were no Easter eggs,
> just bragging rights.

Dan [Jack]: Everyone here's playing for the simple fun of it. So time to use my invincibility to take them all out without any risk.

> "Jack to The Tensa Zangetsu." Jack communicated with his ship. "Advance on the flagship's
> position. When in range, fire all missiles,

Dan: [Ship] Oh really, is that how it works, meatbag? I had no idea.

> and follow up with the two Mac cannons. When that is done, launch all Robot Interceptors."

Tsuneo: Nothing makes for an exciting battle more than letting your army of robots do the fighting for you

> The ship lurched forward, and with the advanced speed in its engines thanks to Jack's Easter egg, it
> made its way to the massive fleet.

Rick: Ahah, yes! Ten chapters later and the second Easter Egg finally comes into play.
Dan: Does it, though?

> "Jack," Tom said. "What are we doing?"

Rick: Tom's just waiting to let his nuclear-based cannons rip.

> "I'm just having a bit of fun before Lynx and Tridosk get here." Jack said.

Rebecca: Is it fun for the people being killed by the indestructible spaceship?
Tsuneo: I doubt that Jack has even considered it

> "Should we join the Interceptors as they take on that massive bastard?" Gadanza asked.

> "No, let the Tensa Zangetsu do its work." Jack said,

Dan: Jack trusts his ship more than he trusts his friends.
Rebecca: His friends include Tom.
Dan: Fair.

> and then he noticed something.

> Another Star Destroyer had arrived. This time it arrived from the opposite direction that the Star
> Wars fleet had arrived in.

Rick: Do I need to draw a map?

> "They are here." Jack said. "Form up on me."

> They took off towards the Star Destroyer.

Rebecca: Normally this is not a good plan.
Tsuneo: And when he and the Star Destroyer are both indestructible?
Rebecca: That means he's just sending his friends to die.

> Only two enemies emerged. One was a spaceship from
> Independence Day, which was piloted by Lynx, and the other enemy was the TIE Interceptor, being
> piloted by Tridosk.

Rick: I wonder if they ever considered swapping ships just to mess with people?

> Guys, take on Tridosk." Jack told them. "He's the enemy in the TIE Interceptor, and I will take on the
> other person, Lynx."

Dan: I will fight Lynx who is not Tridosk and you will fight Tridosk who is not Lynx

> Jack looked up and saw that his friends had agreed as they broke formation. This time, Arathorn
> was in front, while the other two were slightly behind him, but to the sides. They all started firing
> their primary weapons at Tridosk when they got in range.

Rick: Bagels away!

> Mark's X-wing was too fast,

Rebecca: A humblebrag if ever I heard one.

> so Lynx could not help his friend as Jack took him on.

Tsuneo: Also there were three other guys shooting at him.
Rick: Minor details.

> Their ships collided. Thanks to the Easter eggs, nothing
> happened, they just bounced off each other.

Rebecca: Proving that their invincibility is not only unfair, but also kind of silly.

> Lynx opened the hatch to his ship. He came out and aimed a revolver at Jack's ship. He fired it.

Dan: This plan only works if you're Christopher Walken

> The bullet melted as soon as it touched Jack's shield.
> Lynx could hardly believe what just happened. His special coding that took away Jack's abilities did
> not work this time.

Rebecca: Could it be that the High Five undid all his hacks when they handed back his account just like they said they would?
Tsuneo: You may be onto something there

> Jack pressed a red button on his dashboard and something shot out from the
> Tensa Zangetsu. Jack opened his hatch and got out of his ship, which turned into a miniature
> version of itself. Jack put his ship in a compartment inside his utility belt.

Tsuneo: Lynx, for his part, just kind of sat there and let him.

> The gold streak flew forward, and Jack once again transformed into his Gold Dragon State.

Dan: So why didn't he wear that to begin with, or just have it in his monstrously oversized inventory?
Rick: He had the choice between doing something practical and something incredibly stupid, and he chose the latter without a moment's hesitation

> This time, he had a jetpack
> on his back, and could now wield his broad sword with both hands as it now had a long hilt and
> guard.

Tsuneo: The way the author says it, you'd think this was some radical design nobody thought of before

> It had golden letters all along the blade as well. The form that Jack had taken no longer had
> a cape. It seemed that this suit of armor had been made to fly in space.

Rick: Pfft, Batman doesn't need special armour to breathe in space

> "Vlad!" Tridosk/Lewis yelled. "I'm being hounded by these guys. They won't stop. I need your help."

> "I'll be there in a second." Lynx said,

Tsuneo: No. He will not.

> and then he turned to Jack. "Call off your guys. I may not be
> able to hurt you, but they will pay with their online lives unless you don't stop them now."

Rick: Dude, you're the one who brought him to the space battle. What did you think would happen?

> "Fine." Jack said as he opened a channel to his three friends. "Guys, leave Tridosk alone. Fight
> other players."

Dan: Jack, being the hero that he is, immediately capitulates.

> While all of that was going on, more and more players were coming to do battle. It seemed that the
> Star Wars fleet was the hugest, while a few Star Trek ships arrived.

Rebecca: And the most literal nerd fight ever broke out.

> There were some ships from
> Battlestar Galactica, Firefly, and a few from several different Anime shows arrived as well. Gundam
> Wing machines arrived

Rick: But just Gundam Wing?
Dan: Yes.
Rick: But what about other Gundam shows?
Dan: Just Gundam Wing.
Rick: Oh.

[Pause]

Rick [Kale]: I like Zabanya.
Dan: Oh god damn it.

> and the battle started getting intense as bombs, lasers, bullets, and missiles
> were fired at the different players.

Dan: But only those weapons. Railguns, plasma cannons, proton torpedoes, all banned.

> Jack's friends stayed together and took out several players. They
> started attacking bigger ships using their missiles, lasers and bullets.

Rebecca: And in Tom's case, general offensiveness.

> As for the Tensa Zangetsu, it
> had taken a run at the massive ship called the Supremacy, which was Snoke's ship in Star Wars
> Episode Eight: The Last Jedi.

Tsuneo: Well, the fic is a good match for the narration for Ready Player One, in as far as it needs to constantly remind you of already established facts

> It had fired all its missiles, and started firing using lasers to attack it.
> So far, the Supremacy's shield was holding. The Tensa Zangetsu still had its Mac Rounds.

Dan: It would use them, but it'd feel stupid if it missed and had to spend another five minutes charging.

> The
> Tensa Zangetsu was a smaller vessel than the Supremacy. To put it in scope, The Tensa Zangetsu
> could probably hold three Star Destroyers in its hold, minus the vaults, weapons and vehicles that
> Jack had in there.

Rebecca: Well that was an utterly meaningless comparison. Thanks fic.

> The robots that Jack employed were now outfitted with weapons in case hackers
> somehow got in.

Tsuneo: His robots had 'accidentally' shot Tom three times already.

> Jack's Sentinel program was online as well to make sure hackers stayed out.

Rick: While those top programmers monitoring Lynx... Were apparently taking the day off.

> Jack was not fooling around.

> Jack looked at Lynx as he put away his ship in the same manner that Jack had done.

Tsuneo: Leaving them both kinda floating aimlessly in space.

> He pulled out Tridosk's axe, Spawn's Agony.

Dan: Tridosk’s Spawn’s Agony

> "This will not be like last time." Lynx said. "This time, I used a special code on Tridosk's axe.

Rick: [Tridosk] Could you have like, used your own sword or something?
Tsuneo: [Lynx] Not now, lizard guy.

> It now has the power to do what you did to me last time,

Dan: Whatever that was. Say, did we ever sort out what exactly happened then?

> but I will still be able to use the OASIS as I see fit."

Rebecca: Your account is now full of masses of spaghetti code. Well done.

> "I don't know if the High Five took away the power I had to defeat you last time." Jack said.

Rick: Well he hasn’t merged with his ship again, so I’m guessing they have.

> "I am not alone in this fight. Someone will defeat you, whether it be me or someone else."

Tsuneo: Someone will defeat you from the broad list of everyone

> "I doubt that." Lynx said, and then he launched himself forward using his repulsors on his boots.

> He brought the axe up and slammed it down as hard as he could. Jack used his sword and swung it
> upwards. Their weapons slammed into each other, creating sparks. Jack and Lynx used both arms
> when swinging.

Rick: They tried using their feet to swing their weapons, but that didn’t work out so well.

> Jack suddenly got an idea.

Dan: [Jack] What if I let the computer fly my X-Wing? Then I wouldn’t have to do anything.

> He knew how to fight people in the real world. The same
> techniques he learned could be used in this instance.

Tsuneo: Nothing prepares you for a fantasy swordfight in space more than strip mall Karate lessons

> He thrust his sword forward, right to the
> midsection of Lynx, who blocked with the axe. Jack let Lynx move his sword, and did not fight it. He
> followed up by roundhouse kicking Lynx's side.

Dan: Wait, don’t tell me the excruciating Karate lesson sequence is actually going to be a part of the fic’s resolution?
Rebecca: I will die first.

> Jack opened his right palm and slammed it into
> Lynx's face. Lynx fell back, and Jack pressed the advantage. He fought with different techniques
> that he had learned.

Tsuneo: All the weeks spent getting kicked by the other students was going to finally pay off.

> Lynx was not skilled in martial arts so did not know how to counter it.

Rick: He’s mashing the block button as hard as he can.

> Lynx brought out his proton cannon

Dan: And so at the last gasp right before the end, the true hero of the fic, proton cannon makes its triumphant return.

> and fired a huge purple beam at Jack.

Rebecca: Jack realised that his basic self-defence training didn’t help much against laser beams.

> The armor on Jack's left arm
> transformed into a shield, and it blocked the beam from doing any damage.

Rick: [Jack] Just assume I can do this.

> Jack sheathed his
> sword on his back and whispered a spell into the palm of his right hand. He flung a blue ball of
> energy at Lynx when he was done firing his weapon.

Rick: [Jack] Oh, and this too, by the way.

> The ball of energy collided with the proton cannon.

> "No!" Lynx screamed as his proton cannon disintegrated into nothing.

Tsuneo: And so Jack wins because he has more random crap in his inventory.
Rick: I think that’s the true message of this fic.

> He tried different commands to try and bring it back. It would not come back no matter how hard he
> tried.

> "You asshole!" Lynx screamed,

Dan: [Lynx] That proton cannon was my best friend!
Rick: [Tridosk] Aw, man...

> and then fired up his missile launcher and minigun.

> He fired every weapon he had at Jack, who stood his ground.

Dan: Every weapon?
Rick: Yep, even his Wumpa Fruit bazooka, his farting unicorn cannon and his spasm gun.
Dan: Every weapon he had?
Rebecca: Five hundred different Halo guns, a mind-control octopus launcher and a Sheepinator.
Dan: Every single weapon?
Tsuneo: It took a while.

> Jack's left fist transformed into a
> cannon. The dragon's mouth opened and he fired at Lynx with a blue beam. Lynx was slammed and
> fell back.

Rebecca: Turns out shooting the invulnerable guy is kinda pointless after all.

> He pulled out his special revolver. He had not made any duplicate bullets and only had
> four left. He fired one. It went right through Jack;

Tsuneo: Having previously established that his revolver doesn't work, Lynx is surprised to find that his revolver doesn't work.

> however, it was not really Jack. Jack had foreseen
> the event happening, so as soon as Lynx prepared to fire, he activated active camouflage and left
> an afterimage of himself instead.

Tsuneo: Jack's plan relies on Lynx being very stupid.
Dan: So it worked perfectly.
Tsuneo: Pretty much

> "What?" Lynx said is disbelief.

> A hand in the shape of a leopard's paw

Rick: The Leopard of Lime Street strikes again!

> slammed into Lynx's fist and he let go of the revolver. Jack
> appeared and grabbed the weapon. Without hesitating, he pointed it at Lynx's head and fired.

Tsuneo: Jack was immediately banned for using a hacked weapon.

> He
> fired until the gun was empty, and then he destroyed it by crushing it. Lynx was no longer immortal,

Dan: Killed by his own nonsense plot device. The irony.

> had limited ammunition and his vehicles reduced their speed.

Tsuneo: [Lynx] Do what you have to. Take my immortality, take all my ammunition, but for all that's decent leave me with the minor speed boost that I've never used!

> Lynx tried flying away. Jack fired his
> cannon once more and it blew off Lynx's legs. Coins erupted form Lynx, which Jack gladly
> absorbed. He flew towards Lynx and sliced up his body into smaller pieces. These pieces
> disappeared, leaving behind coins.

Rebecca: There you have it, folks. Jack is a psycho.

> Jack looked at Lynx's Star Destroyer and flew to it. He opened
> his inventory and produced a nuclear bomb.

Dan: By the way, I had this.

> He flew into the main hangar and saw no one there to stop him.

Tsuneo: What, Lynx doesn't even have defence robots like Jack does?
Rick: Well, I've got two theories why he doesn't.
Tsuneo: It's way too late in the story for this, but I'll take anything to distract me from the epic showdown, so fire.
Rick: The first is that they're not really defence robots. They, the drone fighters, and in fact a lot of the way Jack plays the OASIS grew out of his repair business. He automated a lot of it, then realised he could expand that to combat applications. So it's not so much that it's a unique feature, as just a conclusion other players haven't really arrived at.
Tsuneo: Seems reasonable, but also implies a level of deduction I don't think he's capable of.
Rick: Which brings me to my second theory, that literally nobody else cares and spends all their coins on more farting unicorn guns.
Tsuneo: Now that I can believe.

> He walked into middle of the ship and dropped off the nuclear bomb. He bored through
> the ship and left it with a gaping hole. He pressed a button on a detonator.

Rick: Filling the room with streamers and confetti
Dan: Keep so much crap in your inventory and things like this will happen.

> The bomb exploded and
> it destroyed Lynx's ship. Next, Jack looked and found Tridosk, who was using his TIE Interceptor to
> fight against other players.

Tsuneo: Has anybody told Tridosk that he's not actually indestructible?

> Jack flew using a golden jet pack. He aimed his left arm, and it turned
> into the cannon once again. This time, a missile flew out of it. It locked onto Tridosk's signal and
> flew after him. He tried his best to make it crash into other players, but it was a smart missile.

Dan: The missile has an MBA and was valedictorian of its year.

> Jack
> flew after him as well. He used active camouflage so that his enemy would not see him coming.

Rebecca: [Tridosk] I'm having the time of my life here. Glad I got away from all that negativity and infighting. Now it's just going to be Tridosk, playing the game for me, just how it's meant to be.

> "This is for Amira!" Jack screamed.

> His sword slammed into the wing of the ship.

Rick: The smart missile was incensed at being upstaged and departed in protest.
Dan: Wow, that is a really smart missile.

> He left a miniature nuclear bomb in the ship where he had cut and flew away.

Tsuneo: He seems to have a lot of those
Rick: Fasnacht was good to him.
Tsuneo: I have no context for that and yet I will not ask.

> The ship exploded,

Rebecca: [Tridosk] I regret being a minion!

> leaving nothing but pieces and coins of the enemy.

Rick: Poor Tridosk. He lived a warrior ans died to an lizard guy in a spacesuit or something.

> Jack flew to the Tensa Zangetsu, which was still doing battle with The Supremacy.

Dan: Tom, Gadanza and Arathorn were, I don't know, having a toga party or something.

> He put his Gold
> Dragon armor away in his vault and went to the bridge. His ship's shields were still up.

> "Interceptors, Tom, Gadanza, Arathorn, stop attacking the Supremacy." He ordered his robotic
> minions and friends. "All hands, brace yourselves. Fire both Mac Cannons on my mark."

> Jack allowed several minutes to go by for his robots and friends to get out of the way.

Rebecca: The robots were his first priority

> "Mark!" He yelled into his headset.

Rick: Yes, that's your name. We know.

> The ship shuddered as the two Mac rounds were fired. The first one brought down the shields and
> did a little bit of damage. The second round pierced the armor of the massive ship. Jack fired all
> missiles and lasers as soon as he could at the holes caused by his Mac cannons.

Dan: I mean, forget the piano practice, this is what the fic does best.
Rebecca: Really terrible fight scenes?
Dan: You know it.

> "Reload!" Jack yelled to the robots in his ship to power up the Mac cannons with more rounds.

Tsuneo: Five minutes later...

> "All
> interceptors, attack the wound with whatever torpedoes you have left. All others without torpedoes,
> return to the ship to be reloaded."

Tsuneo: Jack's army of robots make his friends redundant
Rebecca: The entire fic makes his friends redundant, especially the scenes about his friends
Tsuneo: This is also true

> Jack then had an idea. He went down to the vault and took out his Gold Dragon armor.

Dan: He got the armour he was already wearing
Rick: Genius

> He went to
> the nearest exit and flew out of his ship. He stood on top of it with his boots using magnets to stick
> on the hull. He brought his hands together and the transformed into one massive cannon. Even his
> jet pack came together with his arms.

Tsuneo: Look, don't ask, it just does this.

> He looked to his Heads Up Display and saw that his armor
> would need to recharge shortly as he only had 35% left inside it. Yes, he had unlimited power when
> his weapons were concerned, but his jetpacks and shield absorbed most of the energy.

Rick: He only had limited amounts of unlimited power

> He prepared to fire and waited.

Tsuneo: Folks, the fic.

> "What do you want us to do, Jack?" Arathorn asked. "We're ready to go into battle."

Dan: [Jack] Wait, you guys are still there? Honestly forgot about you.

> "I have one last thing to try." Jack said. "Just wait for it, and then you can do what you have
> planned."

> Jack ordered his interceptors to fall back once more. He then fired with everything in his arsenal on
> board his ship and in his Gold Dragon armor. The armor depowered and Jack could no longer
> remain in it. He used a grapnel hook and pulled himself into his ship.

Tsuneo: It was a really long grapnel hook.

> He put his armor away to charge, and plugged it into the nuclear core of the ship.

Dan: Thrill as Jack fusses about with his device chargers!

> He gave his friends and interceptors
> permission to do their best in defeating this behemoth.

Rick [Jack]: You have my permission to make an effort

> Several of its turrets were still online. Jack
> ordered his robots to continue to monitor the radars.

Rebecca: And then he got taken out by Soyuz Granny

> No doubt, Lynx and Tridosk were still out there somewhere, plotting their next move…

> Vladislav tore off his headset. He could not believe it. He had been beaten once again.

Dan: Zephyr simply puts a comforting hand on his shoulder and offers a nod of support.

> He grabbed
> his headset and started slamming it on the concrete wall that made up his basement. He kept
> slamming it again and again, and sparks started to fly as the circuitry fried. He dashed it onto the
> floor.

Tsuneo: I see that Lynx is the subtle and restrained type of villain

> "Stupid lagging, piece of shit!" He swore as he eyed his console.

Dan: Lynx would go on to blame his team and the lousy map for his loss.

> He tore out away from his server and pushed everything down. He started stomping his foot down
> on it and broke it.

Tsuneo: But being fair, who hasn't wanted to do this once in a while?
Rebecca: This is the best part of my job.

> He took one of his keyboards and destroyed it by using it as a club against the
> other machinery in his basement.

Dan: Yeah, take that hot water service!

> Lynx was no more.

Rick: He was taken out with a shotgun by Keely and McBride.

> From this day forward, he would no longer go onto the OASIS. There was nothing there for him.

Rebecca: Save for his Jane Austen book club.

> His greatest foe had defeated him without using hacking.

Tsuneo: Given that he uses Lynx's hacked revolver to do it, I don't think that counts.

> He may have used devious means,

Rebecca: He hadn't cheated except that he had.

> but Vlad had plans to use those means as well. He tore out his hair, and just had a meltdown.

Dan: And *then* he was permabanned for continuing to use hacks that he explicitly agreed not to.

> He wanted to be the one. He wanted to be more
> important. Now, he was nothing. He was beaten by someone who was beneath him. Suddenly, his
> cellphone started ringing. It was Lewis.

Rick [Tridosk]: Hoo boy. I hope the boss likes the surprise birthday party I've planned for him.

> Vladislav decided to ignore the call. There was no way he could talk to someone at that moment.

Dan: Tridosk had wanted to come over with comedy movies and ice cream, but no, this is good too.

> Jack decided that with the destruction of Lynx, Tridosk, and the Supremacy,

Tsuneo: He'd overcome his two greatest enemies but, most importantly, he'd defeated some nameless guys who we'd never seen before and had nothing to do with anything
Rebecca: And that's what really counts.

> he had won a very big
> victory. He decided to pull out, and let other players go at it, including his friends.

Rick: They're not important to him.

> He sighed as he
> watched from a distance. Other players would assume that he had used all his weapons, power,
> and ammunition.

Rebecca: He thought about how much more firepower he had in reserve and adjusted his micro-fibre crotch inlay.

> They did not know him and his ship were invincible and the ammunition was unlimited.

Dan: When you put it like that, he comes off as a total arse.

> His friends were winning. They died a few times,

Rick: They were winning except that they kept dying.

> but respawned on board the Tensa
> Zangetsu. Jack's friends used The Tensa Zangetsu as their own mechanic shop to fix their ships as
> well.

Dan: Jack charged them for their repairs, even though they'd just zeroed out. He said they could repay him with winnings in the battle, so they went out there and died again. By the time it was done, they were each in debt to him for months.

> The robots examined the ships each time they needed their ships to be fixed. So far, there was
> no trace of Lynx or Tridosk again. They could come back, like how other players came back. It
> looked like they had taken this defeat bitterly. It looked like everyone was having fun.

Rebecca: This word was unknown to Jack.

> Several
> neutral ships came in to fix ships that had broken down as well. Jack looked to the horizon

Tsuneo: The horizon in space
Rick: You're really killing the moment here

> and sighed. His enemies were destroyed. His love had been avenged.

Rebecca [Amira]: Am I even still in this?

> The future seemed to have greater things.

Tsuneo: Like guns from the next Halo game.

> Five months passed.

Rebecca: Lynx got a new console and second account, and was back to exploiting the game within a week.

> Mark started College, and maintained good grades. He continued doing martial arts

Dan: Hoping that one day Sensei Alverdo would teach him the secrets of Dim Mak.

> and chose to only practice piano songs he wanted to play.

Rebecca: Sadly, he could not get any work when his repertoire was only Chopsticks.

> His mom got a raise in pay. His father was close to retiring.

Tsuneo: There were only so many long nights alone with only his thoughts and vomiting drunks that he could take

> Amira would call Mark every night.

Dan: Mostly to check that he was still breathing.

> Mark would speak to her, and sometimes they would find each other online on the OASIS.

Tsuneo: Truth being told, they didn't try that hard.

> Mark chose not to join the High Five, because he believed that they would be too powerful.

[They all cough loudly]

> He continued to help people on the OASIS fix things, but he was not online all that much anymore.

Rebecca: Really, just leave your system on and let the ship do its thing. Nobody would notice the difference.

> He needed to study. He decided that he would get into computers and become a technician.

Rick: Gregarious Games had a sudden need for developers when an entire department was dragged out into the street and shot.

> He remained in contact with his friends Tom Calcio, John Matthews, and Justin Rihaz.

Dan: They pledged to stay together for the rest of their lives. Within six months they'd fallen to 'occasionally check each other's Facebook updates'.

> On the weekend, Amira would come home.

Rick: Mark's parents would beg for her to take him with her.

> Mark would see her Saturday nights, and they would have a date night each week.

Rebecca: Possibly even on Saturday

> They enjoyed spending time together
> and they would complain about school, tell each other about new friends,

Rick: But what about David Miranda and Krystle Levesque and her boyfriend Scott?

> and just have a nice time with each other.

Rebecca: [Amira] I do so like the nonspecific fun we have.
Tsuneo: [Mark] Oh yes. Us doing those totally us things that we totally do is great.

> Mark was changing. He was no longer quiet. The martial arts were giving him more
> confidence.

Dan: Soon he learned to assert himself by kicking people

> He was finding new friends, and even joined the Campus Church Group which met
> every Wednesday during the day.

Rebecca: Mostly so he could get out of art classes.

> He never saw Lynx again.

Dan: Except whenever he ordered an Amazon package.

> Tridosk was on the OASIS sometimes, but Mark/Jack decided to leave him alone.

Rick [Tridosk]: Just over here doing lizard guy stuff. Don't mind me.

> His new friends found out about the Tensa Zangetsu and were in awe of the size of it

Tsuneo: Because at the end of the day, the most important thing about him is his spaceship

> and all that Jack owned.

Dan: He needs new people to prop him up since he lost track of Tom, whatshisface and the other guy.

> He let them borrow certain things. He never let them see that he had the Easter eggs yet, though.

> As for his brother,

Tsuneo: Well, nobody cares. Good night.

> he went into Grade Eleven, and was taking University Ranked classes. His sister
> went into Grade six. He had made his parents proud

Rick [Flat]: We are proud

> and continued to strive to make himself better. He was jogging every day except Sundays.

Dan: He tried jogging through Sunday mass, but the church kindly asked him to stop.

> He was doing pushups and practiced martial arts.

Tsuneo: And absolutely no other form of exercise whatsoever.

> He was feeling better about himself. He started to speak to people more,

Rick: He talked non-stop about all his favourite Halo guns.

> and was likeable, unlike what people thought about him in high school.

Tsuneo: And unlike anything that was demonstrated in the fic.

> He had changed for the better, and Amira was glad for him.

Rebecca [Forced]: I'm so happy.

> Mark would occasionally speak to Nick Harvey sometimes, and often would seek advice from
> the older man.

Dan [Nick]: And above all else, never take unsolicited advice from a non-practicing individual acting outside of any professional therapeutic relationship

> No one should be able to tell him what to do.

Tsuneo: And here comes the manifesto

> It was all in Mark's hands.

Dan: Mark went to college as an honours student. His thesis was simply a list of weapons from Halo.
Rebecca: After saying that she would stay in touch, Amira promptly 'lost' Mark's contact details the first day she was at university.
Tsuneo: Forgotten about by the rest of her family, Alexandra turned feral and joined a band of underground fashion designers.
Dan: Nick was banned from ever practicing for his gross breaches of professional conduct, not the least of which was seeing clients while not wearing a shirt.
Rick: Having met the people who run the OASIS, Justin swore to never ever use it again. He now lives in an off-the-grid commune.
Rebecca: Lynx and Tridosk went on to start a slightly successful 'Eastern European Guy and Lizardman open stolen packages' channel on YouTube.
Dan: And Tom moved to Japan where he fought alien invadors and became a rock star. Damn straight.

> He just needed to be smart about how he treated life in general.

Rick: If he learned to care for others, to respect others, he'll learn how to care for, to respect our country

> GoldDragonZ: Thanks so much for reading this story. It was dear to me as it had to do with how my
> life could have been.

Rebecca: And right there at the end the fic goes to full super creep mode. Nice.

> I wish I had a mentor like Nick.

Rebecca: Trust me, you do not.

> I wish I had a group of friends like Tom, John, and Justin.

Tsuneo: I thought they were based on your friends
Dan: That's a telling moment.

> Above all, I wish I had a girl like Amira who believed she could help me and wanted to
> see me do better.

Rick: Plz send girlfriend

> I wish there was someone there that I could rely on.

Dan: Mark needs someone who can truly understand his life.
Rick: [Kale] I like Zabanya.
Tsuneo: [Mark] I like Halo: Combat evolved.

[Pause]

Tsuneo: [Mark] Will you be my girlfirend?

> If you want me to continue
> the story, please tell me. If you think it was garbage, please tell me that as well. Have a good one
> guys!

“And on that final creepy note, we conclude the Adventures of Jack,” Tsuneo commented as the big screen turned off, reverting the world back to prose format. “A fic that had no direction and firmly stuck to it.”

“I know we discussed the possibility of if the fic had been pre-planned versus the author making it up as they went along,” Rebecca offered. “I can say now that I have no clue of how this fic was written, and I’m not sure I really want to know.”

“Agreed there,” Dan nodded. “Because the more I think about it, the stranger the fic’s change of direction midway through becomes.”

“Yeah,” Rick added. “After five chapters of Jack the invincible Internet God, we swap to Mark the desperate and needy guy in his quest for girlfriend.”

“It was one of those moments where you can’t decide which was worse,” Tsuneo considered. “Because as much of a god-awful power trip as the OASIS stuff was, complete with lists of halo guns and other stupidity, it’s going up against his creeping on Amira.”

“Oh yes,” Rebecca considered. “Because when people are going looking for Ready Player One fic, they really want stories about piano lessons, strip mall Karate dojos and the Canadian educational curriculum.”

“I mean, some of that could have worked,” Dan suggested, “But as something that was interspersed with the OASIS stuff, not spending huge blocks of the fic on it.”

“Which flips back to the idea that the author was making the fic up as they went along,” Rebecca shrugged.

“You know what went nowhere?” Dan offered. “The whole ‘get Justin onto the OASIS’ subplot.”

“That was entirely pointless,” Tsuneo agreed. “Justin really didn’t amount to anything at all in this fic after that moment. Then again, he didn’t have anything going for him beforehand either.”

“There is a lot of that,” Rick continued. “Really, all the cast who aren’t Mark, Lynx and Amira don’t have much going on in their lives at all. They’re one-note characters with just names and occasionally what Halo guns they use, and that’s it.”

“I think Tom’s the best defined of them, and that’s mostly because he keeps dying,” Dan said. “Hell, maybe he didn’t even die that much and I just made it up to give him something.”

“And John was such a non-entity that he could have been removed from the fic entirely and it’d make no difference at all,” Tsuneo considered. “Plus we also have the myriad of minor characters who are little more than namedrops.”

“Like David Miranda and Krystle Levesque and her boyfriend Scott,” Rick noted.

“There is one other trait that is common throughout all the supporting cast, and that is that their roles are very strictly gendered,” Rebecca pointed out.

“How so?” Dan asked.

“What little we know about Alexandra and Krystal amounts to their OASIS habits,” Rebecca noted. “Both of them are into ‘girly’ things like dresses, makeup, art and so on. Neither of them are gamers as such, or use the OASIS for anything else. And while Amira aspires to be a racer, every description of her OASIS presence is focused on dancing or how amazing her self-designed dress is.”

“When you put it like that...” Tsuneo considered. “I see what you mean. Mark, John, Tom, Rodney and even Lynx and Tridosk are all about gaming and playing ‘manly’ games like deathmatch shooters or violent death races.”

“And note that the one race Amira is actually seen in is explicitly described as being a ‘no weapons one’,” Rebecca added.

“They don’t ask Alexandra if she wants to go to Karate lessons,” Rick considered.

“I think the fic forgets Alexandra exists,” Dan countered. “I certainly did.”

“So this is going to be a controversial statement given that we’re talking about a group of characters who vary between wretchedly shallow and aggressively unlikeable, but I think the fic made really bad use of the High Five,” Rick spoke up.

“No, I can see what you’re getting at,” Tsuneo admitted. “The fic brings them into the story from the start through Artemis, but really doesn’t explore the full implications of their presence in its narrative. Given that they are the five wealthiest and most powerful people on the planet and literally own the OASIS, they seem rather disconnected from everything going on.”

“Right,” Dan nodded. “They have broad-ranging and far reaching powers, but the fic never considers how they would be used. Instead, for the most part, they’re just treated as average chumps.”

“For all we joked about Artemis just banning Lynx, it needs to be said that it was an option available to her,” Rebecca added, “One that she openly threatened him with. And there’s no good reason at all why she didn’t actually use that option, especially after Lynx escalated the situation to such an insane degree.”

“On the other hand, you look at how Wade ran the OASIS in Ready Player Two and wonder if that’s a good thing,” Rick countered.

“This is also true.”

“I can see that you’ve got a lot to talk about,” the Voice interjected.

“Twelve chapters gave us a lot to consider,” Dan shot back. “Mostly about how much it hurt us.”

“Well that’s fantastic,” the Voice beamed. “So with that being said, I’d love to hear your reviews.”

“So we’ll start with Mark-slash-Jack, since he’s the protagonist and in the title of the fic,” Rick began, “And boy do I have a lot to say about him. He’s pretty awful across the board, but it’s interesting in that awfulness unfolds in different ways.”

“On one side you have Jack, the internet murder god,” Rick continued. “He’s the best at everything, has a gun for every occasion and has an amazing ability to pull out new powers as the situation demands. The Gold Dragon armour is the most blatant example of this; it comes out of nowhere, has never been mentioned before and exists solely he can beat Lynx. Not that he needs it, mind you; Jack is written as a non-stop boring invincible hero who never is even remotely challenged during the course of the fic. And let’s not forget, he enters PvP battles knowing that he is invincible and that the other players cannot harm him; in essence, he’s greifing them, but the fic never calls him on this.”

“On the other side, we have Mark,” Rick noted. “Despite the fact that he’s living a comfortable upper middle class life, goes to a well to do private school, has a bevvy of friends and a family who unconditionally support him in all that he does and is an internet murder god, he acts like his life is a horrible pit of misery and suffering. His interactions with Amira amount to him creeping on her and

emotionally manipulating her in a horrible display of textbook nice guy-ness, with his constantly crying about how unworthy he is whenever she talks to him being but the most obvious example."

"In short, both sides of the character are horrible," Rick concluded.

"I want to talk about Amira, since a huge chunk of the fic's narrative is focused on her. I'd imagine that she's got as much 'airtime' as Lynx by the time the fic was done," Rebecca spoke up. "But for all that, she has no actual character of her own, nor does she have any actual agency in the story. Instead, she exists solely as a prop to Mark."

"When she's introduced, we know one thing about her," she explained. "She likes Mark, and that's it. There's no explanation at all for what it is she likes about him, however. Instead, she's entirely devoted to him for no reason at all, and the entirety of her existence is about becoming his girlfriend. Her interactions with him amount to constantly reassuring him that he is amazing after he acts pathetic and weeps about how miserable his upper middle class honour student internet god existence is." She nodded to Rick. "She doesn't seem to want anything out of the relationship other than simply letting Mark cry at her. It's certainly not like the fic gives us any clues either"

"Her actual interaction with what passes for the main plot only manages to double down on it," Rebecca noted. "Amira's avatar is kidnapped and used as a hostage to get Lynx back online. This is framed entirely in the effects that this has on Mark and his life, and how Amira feels about the whole matter is barely touched on. Again, she's a plot token for Mark's story, but not actually a human in her own right."

"Oh, and it needs to be said that we never see her racing on the OASIS as a racer beyond the one time she's kidnapped. So what amounts to her single character trait is simply an informed attribute." She sighed. "Amira isn't a character. She's just the last gold trophy Mark needs for the Platinum achievement."

Dan nodded and took over from there. "Of course, our other major character, and possibly the one who shapes the fic the most is Lynx. He's our designated villain, and I've got to say designated for a couple of reasons. The first is that everyone in the fic seems to go out of their way to enable him as much as possible, and the second is that when it boils right down to it, he's actually really bad at it."

"The first part can't be understated. Lynx, by all rights, should have been stopped by chapter three or so. By then he's already clearly cheated and has admitted as much to one of the game's owners and administrators. I know we did a lot about 'just ban him already,' but you have to remember that they actually threatened him with that in the first place. Then when his cheating gets out of control, they start making excuses why they can't just ban him, and really weak ones at that. But he's not subtle about his cheating at all; even on 'probation' in the last section he's still blatantly cheating and nobody does anything about it."

"And that's good. Because Lynx is actually kinda dumb. His methods are brute force, his hacking only shows up that he's a mediocre player without it and he's constantly drawing attention to his misdeeds. It's not just that he knows he's indestructible, but he acts like he's immune to the possibility of repercussions for his actions. He's constantly provoking people with his obviously illegal behaviour, and it's only because they refuse to take promised action that he gets away with it."

"Finally, we've got to look at his spot as a character. Really, his personality is threadbare, wanting to be some poorly-defined 'best' at the game through hacking it. It's not really a matter of personal development or even achievement, just wanting to be acknowledged as far as I can tell without making the actual effort for it. And he targets Jack because... well, I don't know. Jack convinced people to help him, whereas Artemis threatened him and is one of the game's controllers. You'd think she'd be his target instead, but that wouldn't make the whole thing about Jack. In the end, Lynx boils down to a big dumb roadblock for Jack to effortlessly wail on, to prove that somehow by relying on far too may guns and cheap powers, Jack is somehow better than him."

"Characters, or what passes for them aside, I really need to talk about the story," Tsuneo began. "Or what's meant to be the story. What the story tried to be. I don't know." He paused, frustrated. "That's the problem, really."

“It starts out with this Easter Egg race. Okay, it’s copying the movie there, didn’t really have a start or actual clues, no worries... And suddenly that’s done right at the start of the fic. It doesn’t really seem to know what to do for a bit there, so it wanders off on separate directions. Half into Mark’s incredibly dull life with incredibly dull girlfriend and half into some guy’s revenge for something, I don’t really know what. And the worst part is that these both spring fully formed out of nowhere.”

“See, we don’t have any setup for Amira in the first portion of the fic; no mention of this girl Jack likes or even that he’s looking for a girlfriend. Likewise while Lynx is vaguely the antagonist of the Easter Egg race, he’s treated more as a fellow player that needs to learn a lesson about friendship or something. The result is that the two plots don’t so much intertwine as compete with each other. Add to this the bizarre obsession with charting the course of Mark’s everyday life, and you have jarring shifts between piano lessons and in-game mass slaughter. And until the very end, when Amira is kidnapped after the epic conclusion, they don’t even intersect.”

“It really does feel like the authour had no idea what to do after finishing the Easter Egg chase. So much is thrown in with little meaning or relevance. The whole section with Akira, hilarious as it was, accomplishes nothing. Neither does the long droning on about eggs and skulls modifying gameplay, since they never actually come into play. And while Amira is eventually relevant, so much of their relationship is redundant, especially the horribly drawn-out prom sequence. Honestly, it feels more like they’re throwing ideas at the wall, trying to fill out space until something finally sticks. It’s no way to write, especially if this is the result.”

“So overall, the fic was an utter mess,” Tsuneo concluded. “Bad story, terrible characters, an unwanted change of direction, massive holes in its own internal logic and a decidedly creepy undertone to it all."

“But on the other hand, it gave us Akira from programming,” Rick noted. “So we can’t entirely hate it.”

“This is also true,” Tsuneo admitted.

“Thank you for all of that,” the Voice finished. “As always, I appreciate the reviews, and they are vital to the selection of future fics.”

“And we’ll go with that,” Rebecca sighed. “But we’re done with this mess.”

“We are, yes,” the Voice confirmed. “Thank you all, and I’ll see you next time.”

“Well we made it to the end of a fic for the first time in ages,” Tsuneo commented.

“Actually, Robotech the New Age was complete,” Rick noted.

“That barely counts, and you know it,” Tsuneo shot back. “But as I was saying, it’s that strange moment where we can actually feel like we got something done, and the story comes to something that passes for a conclusion.”

“No, I get you,” Rebecca nodded. “Actually seeing a fic go somewhere instead of stopping dead is a rare treat. Even if it was super creepy like this one was.”

“Yeah,” Dan admitted. “Especially after one as long as this. Hell, this was probably the longest fic we’ve read since Mad Dog Squad, and that one simply stopped dead in space.”

“There was Zoids Battle Saga,” Rick suggested.

“I’m not sure that was an actual fic,” Tsuneo countered. “More of somebody vomiting words onto a page.”

“Well regardless, it feels like we should do something to celebrate that,” Dan shrugged.

“Well it’s a good thing we’re here,” Natasha Isavia interrupted. She and her band were set up on a makeshift stage behind the couch.

“Huh,” Rebecca blinked. “When did you get here?”

“During the fic,” Lynne Street James commented. “Mostly we were setting up during the prom sequence. Had a lot of time too.”

“We hitched a lift with some goods and services in an electric vehicle,” Trabe Stillwater helpfully added.

“I assume Rick filled you in on the fic then,” Tsuneo asked.

“He did,” Natasha nodded. “And I zoned out. But then I went ahead and threw something together anyway, so it more or less works.”

“Makes sense to me,” Tsuneo nodded. “I don’t want to think about the fic either, and I read it.”

“Well now you can just sit back and enjoy the show,” Natasha grinned as she took her place on the stage. “I’m Natasha Isavia. This is Lynne Street James-“

“My OASIS username is MetalQueen70,” Lynne called out. “Because MetalQueen69 was taken.”

“And this is Trabe Stillwater-“

“My OASIS name is spelled with a ‘Y’,” Trabe added.

“And we are the Vonnegut Headspace Crew with ‘Gunt to Paradise’.”

With apologies to Run to Paradise by the Choir Boys

Jack, you have a pile of Halo guns
You abuse your powers for fun
And you gunt to paradise

Amira, you’re just a prop girlfriend
You’re stuck with Mark until the end
You gunt to paradise

Tom, you’re just kinda there
You die basically everywhere
But you gunt to paradise

And Lynx, you should have been banned long ago
You got your eggs and are good to go
When I gunt to paradise

That's right, you had your fantasy life
You had robots and spaceships and nuclear bombs
But yet you feel hollow inside
In the crotch inlay
(In the crotch inlay)
In the crotch inlay

You creep on Amira (In the crotch inlay)
You creep on Amira
Don’t tell me, she has no life
(In the crotch inlay)

You have your Halo guns (In the crotch inlay)
You have your Halo guns
You did it, gunt to paradise

Real world, why'd I let it bother me
Why'd I let it bother me
'Cause I gunt in paradise
Gunt in paradise
Gunt in paradise
Gunt in paradise

Akira says it's gonna be alright
She’s got her skulls and eggs
So she can trash the world (that's right)
Her plan is really dumb (really dumb)
But we think it’s okay
(We think it’s okay)
We think it’s okay

You creep on Amira (In the crotch inlay)
You creep on Amira
You live in gunter paradise
(In the crotch inlay)

You creep on Amira (In the crotch inlay)
You creep on Amira
You live in gunter paradise

You creep on Amira
You creep on Amira
You live in gunter paradise

You don't need Tridosk (He’s still here)
You don't want Tridosk
Don't tell me, this is still going
You don't want Tridosk...

Author’s notes:

The Adventures of Jack is a real treat of a fic. It’s goofy, it’s logic falls apart under the slightest scrutiny, it’s original characters are enjoyably bad and it gives us a lot to work with in terms of terrible ideas and running gags. And while yes, it does get more than a little creepy in places, it never really crosses the line into being really uncomfortable or awful like so many other fics do. And I’m sure that it will contribute to our ‘lore’ going forward, with lists of Halo guns or Akira from programming finding places in future riffs.

Our biggest lost opportunity with the fic was the character of Tom. Between his name and his personality, we were all set up for a pile of Delta Invasion jokes, but instead he barely appeared after the first couple of chapters. On the other hand, we found plenty of other things to latch onto. Like Tridosk. He’s a fun goon, and by far and away the most strangely likeable character in the fic.

Next time, an incredibly period crossover from an old favourite author

Ready Player one copyright Random House and Warner Brothers

Ready Player One: The adventures of Jack written by GoldDragonZ

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

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Even more guns? Email us at elmerstudios00 (at) gmail.com and register your Jeff.

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> He opened his inventory and produced a nuclear bomb.