
Episode 434 – We're riding this crazy train all the way to the end

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

"So when I found him dead in a ditch at a cook-out, I really wasn't that surprised," Dan began as he and Tsuneo entered. "I mean – oh, that's not good."

"What's wrong?" Tsuneo asked.

"Rick's already here," Dan nodded. "And he's setting up a display."

"Hi guys," Rick responded. "How's things?"

"I see what you mean," Tsuneo sighed. "This cannot end well."

"Maybe he's trying to make sense of this fic," Rebecca offered as she joined them. "And has constructed some insane theory complete with a diagram that looks like the result of a deranged paranoid's ramblings."

"Not this time," Rick admitted.

"I guess that's a relief in and of itself," Tsuneo admitted.

"After the last part, I thought that there was something important raised in the fic that we needed to address," Rick began.

"And what's that?" Tsuneo asked with no small degree of wariness.

"International Iron Kong variants," Rick continued. "With the presence of the Baddox in the last chapter, I thought that we needed to discuss the matter more thoroughly as it's a fascinating subject."

"Is it?" Dan asked. "Is it really?"

"So for the sake of establishing a baseline, I should cover the initial Japanese Iron Kong release," Rick launched into his lecture, clearly ignoring Dan's comment. Behind him, the screen displayed a picture of the Zoid in question, a black and red robot gorilla.

"Released in 1983, this version features a maroon coloured structure, black armour, a red canopy and light and green caps," Rick explained. "Unlike many other Zoids, it uses two pairs of AA batteries for power. The first drive the motor, while the second powers the light in the head. However, both battery packs are operated by the same on-off switch. One of its other notable features is a spring-loaded missile launcher."

"And this is important because?" Rebecca asked.

"We're about to get to that," Rick continued. The screen changed to a second picture, this time of an Iron Kong in black and grey. "Gore the Lord Protector was released as a part of the European Zoids line in 1985. This version changes the colours somewhat; the maroon structure is now grey, and the caps are now blue. On top of that, the spring-loaded missile launcher was replaced with an entirely different weapon that is not spring-loaded."

"Fascinating," Tsuneo nodded.

"Really?" Dan asked.

"No."

"At the same time, a different version was released across the Atlantic," Rick noted as the screen changed to depict another Iron Kong, this one being blue. "Baddox was released by Kenner as a part of the Robostrux line in 1985. Here the entire Zoid is recoloured; the maroon replaced with blue and the black with navy, with blue caps and a red canopy and light. Baddox had the same replacement missile launcher found on Gore. In addition, it had a chromed version of a small weapons frame that was first included with the Redhorn and was not on any prior Iron Kong."

"And this is the version that appeared in the fanfic," Rebecca noted.

"It is, yes," Rick nodded.

"So then your point is?"

"I'm not done yet," Rick noted. "I'm going to skip over the Japanese Iron Kong Mk II and Iron Kong Mk II Limited versions as they're not relevant to this discussion."

Tsuneo's comment of "Is anything?" went unheard.

"Instead, I'm going to fast-forward to the nineties." The screen changed to show a rather striking silver and yellow version.

"This version of the Iron Kong was released by Kenner as a part of the Techno-Zoids line in North America in 1994," he explained. "As you can see, it's rather radically recoloured, with silver armour, yellow structure, a red canopy and light and black caps. And while it has the same missile launcher as the Japanese versions, the spring has been removed, effectively neutering it. Most fascinatingly, the battery case for the lights has been changed; it now features a separate power switch that controls the lights independently of the motor."

"That's a quite considerable change," Tsuneo noted. "I have to wonder why."

"Does it really matter?" Dan asked.

"At the same time, a different version was released in the UK and Europe as a part of the Zoids 2 line," Rick continued as the screen changed to another version. "This one was red and black, with chrome gold parts. This model featured red structure and armour that was a mix of black and chrome. However, the quality control of the chroming was highly variable, and it could range from gold to bronze. The eyes and lights were red, while the caps were grey. However, unique among western Iron Kong releases, it retained the fully functional spring-loaded missile launcher from the 1983 Japanese release. Finally, despite being released at the same time as the TechnoZoids version, it had the same battery case as the Japanese variants."

"Well that is a lot of changes," Tsuneo noted. "I'm still not sure if I see the point."

"In 1999 the Iron Kong was re-released in Japan as a part of the relaunched line," Rick noted as the screen changed again, bringing up a dull red and metallic grey version. "Based on the 1983 release, the new version featured a dull red structure, gunmetal grey armour, a green canopy and light and grey caps. Under the hood the motor had been redesigned to improve the walk speed. All the other features were retained, including the spring-loaded missile launcher."

The screen then changed to bring up a near-identical looking version. "Um, Rick?" Tsuneo spoke up. "I'm probably asking for trouble here, but that looks the same as the last one."

"And at first glance, you would be right," Rick agreed. "This version was released by Hasbro in North America in 2002 as a Toys R' Us exclusive."

"Wow, every part of that sentence is incredibly aged," Rebecca whistled.

"Like the Japanese version, it version featured a dull red structure, gunmetal grey armour, a green canopy and light and grey caps, as well as the same improved motor. However, it lacked the spring for the missile launcher. Likewise, it also featured the same variant battery box that's found only on the TechnoZoids version. Most intriguingly, the Zoid also came with a frame of extra weapons that had never been released outside of Japan before, a feature that was not advertised at all on the packaging. This rather eccentric variant would also be the last time the Iron Kong was released outside of a Japanese line"

"And your point is?" Dan asked

"International Zoids variants are weird," Rick finished.

"And how is this relevant to the fic?" Tsuneo continued.

"Given the appearance of the Baddox, I thought it was worth discussing in the off-chance that any other international Iron Kong variants appear."

"Do you really think that is going to happen?" Rebecca asked.

"Probably not," Rick shrugged. "But you can never be too sure."

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

"And I never thought I'd actually say this, but good morning to you too, Voice," Rebecca replied. "Thank you for saving us from a lecture on the history of plastic toy apes."

"Actually I hadn't even gotten started on the Japanese variants," Rick noted.

"See what I mean?" She asked.

"I'm just saying that there's a lot of them and-"

"So Zore," Tsuneo continued, deliberately cutting Rick off, "what are we going to be reviewing today?"

"Following on from our current series, I have the last part of Zoids Battle Saga for you today."

"Last part, huh," Tsuneo considered. "I notice that you didn't say 'conclusion' at all, nor anything that suggests the fic ever resolves anything or the like instead of just stopping."

"I didn't say that," the Voice managed.

"And yet, that seems strangely appropriate," Rebecca noted. "Because with how much of an incoherent mess this fic has been so far, really it would be kind of disappointing if it actually resolved anything."

"And given how many subplots we have up in the air right now, that's a lot," Tsuneo noted. "Of course, I wouldn't put it past the fic to throw in a few more at this stage given its previous history."

"Because what we really need right now is even more characters," Dan shook his head. "Given that we already have about six dozen of them mugging for screen time already."

“And as always I’ll be asking for your reviews at the end,” The Voice offered, regaining some control of the situation.

“I know we’ll have a lot to say,” Rebecca replied. “And unlike the fic, it will make some sense.”

“That’s a low bar to clear,” Tsuneo noted.

“It is,” she nodded in agreement.

“Do you think we’ll see more of these Organoids that Stank is meant to be saving?” Rick asked as he took his place on the couch.

“Given that we’ve only seen the one Organoid so far, I somehow doubt it,” Tsuneo replied as he and the others joined him.

“Added to that, given the unfunny shtick that’s been a part of the only one we’ve seen so far, would you really want more?” Rebecca added.

“This is also true,” Rick admitted as the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format.

> Zoids Battle Saga Chapter XIX:

> Results

> In the desolate deserts of Elemia, the sun washed the sands with its powerful rays, as they churned
> and shucked,

Dan: The fic has turned into a commercial for a washing machine.

> endlessly transcending the reaches of time.

Rebecca: Very poetic. So when do we get to the giant robot fights?

> One particular location, in this vacant landscape, was the Zenevas Military Base,

Rick: One has to wonder why they put it out here in the middle of nowhere in the first place.

> which was choked with depression.

Tsuneo: Some mornings the base could barely get out of bed, and struggled to leave its room.

> In its environs, lay the dead carcass of Ferrel Hawkins,

Dan: He was dead and he was dead.

> who was slain by the malignant Lexe.

Rick: Lexe was a jerk.

> All of the Zenevas troops had vacated,

Dan: They simultaneously declared spring break.

> abandoning their posts as their leader had departed from them.

Rebecca: Or at least whoever was left over from Stark and Vald slaughtering them en-masse

> Inside one of the battered medical rooms, lay the injured Stark,

Rick: [Stark] Hey, am I dead or not? It's been kind of unclear on that point.

> whose body was torn from the vicious battle with

> Lexe physically and mentally. Reni, Reni's dad,

Dan: As well as Tom and Tom's Uncle

Tsuneo: You're going to keep doing that until he gets a name, aren't you?

Dan: I may not even stop then

> Vald, and Burge had been treating and dressing his

> wounds as he slowly recovered.

Rebecca: [Reni] You guys are trained in first aid, right?

Dan: [Vald] Well no, but I've got a packet of Peppa Pig Band-Aids.

Rebecca: [Reni] Eh sure, that'll do.

> One day,

Tsuneo: Just how long have they been here?

Rebecca: [Shrugs] Time seems to have little meaning in this fic.

> the concerned Reni came in to his room, with hot towels

> grasped gently in her hands. She walked over to Stark, to apply her salves, when he awoke and

> squirmed a bit and made a grunt.

Dan: This is me, most mornings.

> "Stark?" She uttered. He squirmed a bit, and choked,

> "U-u-u-uz..."

Dan: Yep, totally me.

> "Stark!" Said Reni, running over to him and touching him on the cheek.

Rick: [Stark] Ow, it hurts!

Tsuneo: [Reni] Where?

Rick: [Stark] Everywhere!

> Stark then rose from his slouched posse, and gave a shrill cry, "UZIEEEEEEL!"

Rick: It's an ancient Zoidian word, describing the sound you make when you get your junk caught in your zip

> "Stark, you've got to calm down. Your wounds, they..."

> Subsequently, Stark moved to get out of bed, but was halted by his crippling aches and pains.

Dan: And that's my dad, most mornings too.

> "Urrgh..." he breathed, falling over.

Tsuneo: His plan was to flop and crawl his way out of there.

> "I warned you." Stark looked at her crossly, and she then left the room.

Rebecca: [Reni] Fine, you can convalesce on the floor on your own, then.

> Once outside, underneath
> the scorching sun, she was greeted by Vald and Burge.

Dan: Burge's greeting involved at least three profanities and a spittoon.

> "I take it our boy's awake?" Asked Vald worryingly.

Rebecca: Vald is beginning to realise that he had his moment and that as soon as Stark is up and about he'll be back to a supporting character

> Reni looked at him with an exasperated glare.

> "You could tell?" She said in a vexed tone.

Tsuneo: [Vald] Heard the crash and the agonised screaming.

> "Y'could prolly heyah that from mahles away..." Remarked Burge, scratching his head. Reni looked
> at the building apprehensively.

Dan: [Vald] I dunno, you think one of us should be looking after him?

Rebecca: [Reni] Eh, he'll live.

> "He's been through a lot... I hope he'll be okay..." She said, with her hands in a praying position.

> "Ahh, the guy's pretty resilient... he can take it."

Tsuneo: He's been nearly killed plenty of times. He'll be fine.

> Reni looked at him weirdly, and Burge reverberated,

Dan: Burge vibrated with his own sound.

> "Wal, we've all been through a lot, missy... that gah over there... he sacrificahced his life for us..."
> Said Burge wisely, looking at Ferrel.

Rebecca: Are you going to do anything with his body or let it just lie there and rot?

> Reni looked at him with a curdled brow,

Dan: And if only we knew why, or who he was, or basically anything about him at all.

> when her father walked into the scene.

> "Man, how long do you guys plan on staying around here? I've got a job to do

Rick: And what is it you do anyway?

Tsuneo: I imagine he's a professional nagging parent.

> and I gotta take Reni home to have a loooong talk." Said he commandingly.

> "Didn't we already do that?" Asked Reni laxly.

Tsuneo: And repeatedly?

> "We'll stay here only until our Zoids freshen up

Rebecca: The Zoids went to the bathroom as a group and have been in there forever.

> an' Stark's well enough to pilot his, mister.

Tsuneo: Of course, he has major spinal trauma so we'll be here for most of the year.

> Thahn we'll leave." Replied Burge informatively.

Dan: Thahn and only thahn.

> "Well okay, but I hope it's soon. We shouldn't really be out here, anyway..."

Tsuneo: You massacred dozens of enemy soldiers and reduced their massive base to rubble. I think we're a bit past that point

> "Oh Dad, cut that crap! I already told you why I'm out here

Rebecca: She's in the middle of the desert blowing up imperials to gain the approval of her father who's on a whole different continent. Obviously!

> and I made it really clear!" Said Reni argumentatively, balling her fists.

Rick: She's shopping for new shoes. Blowing up the base was just something she did along the way

> "Yeah, I guess so... smoking Zoid bodies isn't exactly my idea of a good social experience."

Dan: Especially when they do it in a crowded space or cluster around the fire exit.

> Reni groaned and rolled her eyes, and from here the party split up from each other.

> Later at night, Reni went to Stark's room to deliver some cups containing fluidal sustenance,

Rebecca: Or as it known in layman's terms, soup.

> but was surprised to not find him there.

Tsuneo: He's missing Uziel so much that he's holding a pantry raid in the organoid's honour.

> She then hurried out of the room, and went outside, and there examined her surroundings.

Rick: Reni was now in an old point and click adventure game. Time to pixel hunt.

> She caught eye of Stark solemnly sitting atop a large ledge, overlooking the desert and the base.

Tsuneo: It was a scenic view of the burning rubble

Dan: You can almost make out Ferrel's stinking corpse from here

> She rushed to greet him, and climbed to the top. "Nice sky, huh?"

Dan: [Stark] Nope.

Rick: [Reni] Well screw you, then.

> She noted, seating herself next to him.

> "Mm," He mumbled aloofly.

Tsuneo: Stank's best dialogue so far.

> They sat for a few moments, looking up at the sky intimately, then Reni spoke up,

> "So who was that guy that you fought, anyway?"

Rebecca: That's actually a good question, because it's not like the fic has exactly been clear so far.

> And why were you so angry at him?"

> For a few moments, Stark shifted between looking up at the sky and slumping his head down low.

Dan: He's trying to remember his backstory.

> "He... his name is Lexe... He destroyed my village that I lived in... he killed all of my friends... and

> my girlfriend, Salle...

Rebecca: Destroyed beloved peasant village and a dead girlfriend? We're just checklisting the generic tragic past at this point.

> he was leading an Imperial attack..." Stark rose, placed his hands in his

> pockets, and looked up at the sky.

Rick: He's not really looking for anything, just not looking at Reni.

>"I don't know how, but... somehow I'm related to him..."

Dan: They met at a family event and both were trying to figure out the connection.

> he captured me and tried to harvest the M energy in my body...

Dan: I think this is how Mister Sinister works as well.

> and... now he's got Uziel."

Rick: Along with a Weedle

> Reni looked at him curiously but with a touch of empathy, but Stark curdled his brow fiercely and

> clenched his fist tightly and said, "Salle... before she died..."

Rebecca: This is going to be about a refrigerator, isn't it?

> she told me to save all the Organoids.

Tsuneo: Fortunately she had a list of all the Organoids in the world on hand

> I've GOT to hold true to that promise.

Dan: So far he's done a terrible job of it

> And now I've GOT to save Uziel, if anything... anything at all."

Dan: In fact, he's pretty much gone backwards on it.

> "I... I see..." Said Reni, looking on.

> "I've GOT to face him." Said Stark, walking on.

> "Will... will we ever see each other again?"

Rick: She said, realising that she'd be good either way

> "I don't know Reni. I would hope so, but..."

> "Well... good luck then."

Rebecca: [Reni] Because obviously there's no way in hell I'm following a deluded madman like you.

> Stark replied not, closed his eyes, and ambled on.

Dan: The conversation ended on this.

> The next day they all awoke bright and early, and all gathered in the center of the fortress, where
> Ferrel's body still lay.

Dan: Somebody really needs to do something about that. It's really stinking up the place

> "We couldn't find Stark anywhere... Reni, weren't you supposed to be watching him?"

Rebecca: She had an awkward conversation in which he vomited out his backstory. Isn't that enough for you?

> Said Vald, clutching the air loosely while he squinted his eyes.

Tsuneo: Burge backed away slowly from this man trying to grab the air around him.

> Reni looked around profoundly, while biting her nails.

> "I... I guess he left last night." She said gently, "to find his destiny."

Dan: And by that we mean he went out to get some cigarettes.

> She said mysteriously, closing her eyes in resolve. They all looked at her in befuddlement,

Rick: She said he was gone. What part of that is so hard to figure out?

> and, changing the subject adroitly, Burge said,

> "Well, ah I finished th' Zoids last naht... I guess we're off then..."

Dan: Literally no point in hanging around here.

> "Do you think we helped Stark at all? I just don't feel very useful..." Commented Reni.

Rebecca: A good summary of her contribution to the fic so far.

> Burge smiled at her contentedly.

> "We just have ta have faith, Reni. I'm sure he appreciates us." He said.

Dan: Really?

Tsuneo: Not really, no.

> "I guess so..."

> Vald turned around and put his hands on his hips, saying, "so where to next? Are we gonna leave
> this dump or what?"

Tsuneo: What exactly as your plan from here anyway?

Rebecca: Keep filling up space until the fic stops, I guess

> "You're such a louse!" Cried Reni.

> "Guess that's me!" Said Vald, turning around and giving a thumbs up.

Rick: [Vald] Ha ha. I truly am awful.

> Reni growled with a touch of friendliness in her eyes. Burge stared at them bleakly.

Tsuneo: [Burge] Seriously, this is what I'm left with?

> "Well if you really must know, I wanted to see my father again...

Dan: Possibly hit him up for some money along the way.

> have another talk with him... I

> never really knew too much about him, or why he wanted Organoids."

Rebecca: I don't know. Why would you want a McGuffin that can make a Zoid super-powerful?

Tsuneo: It's a mystery

> Said Reni, staring at her feet.

> "You're not going without me, young lady!" Promptly added Reni's dad, angrily.

Dan: He's got to chaperone her to all the zoid fights and make sure she's in her tent by 10.

> "Dude, I don't even know what your name is! How pathetic is that?" Said Vald, pointing at Reni's

> dad.

Tsuneo: You never even bothered asking.

> "Garson Holoman!" Replied Reni's dad, energetically.

> "Oh so that means that Reni is also Holoman! That means she's hollow!"

Dan: Was that a funny?

Rick: At least a shallow simulation of one.

> "You're outta line, you twit!" Said Reni, pouting amidst Vald's laughter, "but... I'd like it if you could

> come too..." Vald nodded his head sternly.

> "I understand." He established, firmly.

Dan: [Vald] It's not like I've got anything else to do. Literally, I mean that. My whole life's work was a bust.

> "Thank you..."

> "And what about you, Burge? Comin' along too?" Inquired Vald.

> "Ahh, ah'm sure I'll find sum'm to do. Some new job, mebbe.

Rick: Some place where his old-timey Prospector skills will be better employed

> Tell Tundra I quit this one, anyways." Said Burge, relaxed.

Dan: Standing out here, alone, in the middle of the desert... Something will come along.

> "Well okay..." Shrugged Reni, walking to the hanger bay for her Zoid.

Rick: [Reni] I'd say I'll miss you, but...

> So from there on, the four disembarked from one another, heading off on each of their respective
> journeys...

Rebecca: It's like the Fellowship of the Ring going their separate ways. Only, you know, much stupider.

> Back in Gale Port, the Badox stood erectly

Rebecca: Everyone couldn't help but stare at the giant erection

> over the ruined walls and structures of the base. Within
> its remaining walls, were Zephyr, Colonel Harris, and Peterson

Dan: And nobody else.

Rick: Given how poorly they handled the last battle, I'd say that's accurate.

> had snugly made themselves at home within the rec hall, feeding themselves on various foods.

Tsuneo: Not the least of which was Madam Z's stew.

Dan [Madam Z]: I got the catering gig for the Tundra Armada. What can I say? Puts some money in my pocket for a rainy day. Besides, the most oil reserves aren't gonna last forever. So who wants some stew?

> They had already discussed the preceding events up to this moment,

Tsuneo: And for once, we were spared the recap

> including Harris's journey there. Harris rose and circled behind
> Peterson, and stood back-to-back to him, as Peterson promptly cocked an eyebrow.

Rick: Well this isn't weird or awkward at all

> "Peterson," he started, "I've decided to promote you to a Lieutenant.

Tsuneo: Best not to consider the current chain of command, given the shambles they're in.

> From here on out, you will replace Galileo in this military base.

Dan: Even though you're just a teenage boy

Rebecca: This is anime. He's in the prime of his career. By the time he hits sixteen, he's over the hill.

> His incompetence in a crisis situation will be dealt with."

Dan: And in related matters, his pants will be cleaned thoroughly.

> Peterson rose, swiveled around, and straightened out.

> "Thank you SIR!" Harris turned around and looked at him sharply.

> "Please, Lieutenant, by all means, at ease." Said Harris emphatically.

> "Understood, sir. Any more orders?"

Rick: And how uncomfortably do you want to deliver them?

> "No, that will be fine. Finish your food.

Dan: That's premium refried hash there, don't let it go to waste.

> That's all I ask of you now. You deserve the rest."

Rick: Find a patch of rubble to lay down on.

> Without further ado, Peterson sat back down and continued on his food. Harris then looked to

> Zephyr, gave a salute, and asked quite formally, "General MA'AM! What are your further orders?"

Rebecca: [Zephyr] Quit ruining my lunch, for starters.

> Zephyr sighed contemptuously, and said somberly,

> "I still feel like I should be taking the orders from you, Colonel..."

Rebecca: So what exactly has Harris done besides being falsely accused and shown up with a giant robot gorilla that he pulled out of his arse?

> She walked over to a window, which was shattered on the ground underneath her feet.

Dan: [Zephyr] Yeah, that window is us right now.

> She then grasped her upper arm with her

> hand and continued, "I've failed the Armada... I feel like I'm losing my esteem as a General..."

Dan: Oh, that went long ago.

> "If I may be so bold, ma'am, is losing one battle really that bad?" Said Harris, following her.

Rick: [Zephyr] I mean, it stings a bit.

> "Not just one battle, Colonel," she said deeply, "but three. The last two battles we were in—one I

> failed miserably on and the next, well, we won, but I barely participated.

Tsuneo: She did still get a participation trophy, however

> People look up to me. What am I supposed to do?"

Rebecca: Shed this dead weight and strike out on your own?

> Harris placed his hand on her shoulder tenderly and understandingly and said,

> "You still have my respect, Zephyr.

Dan: It doesn't count for anything, but hey.

> I think it's all in your head," he turned around and placed his

> hands on his hips, looking about himself stoutly.

Tsuneo: All this destruction and devastation? Just your imagination.

> "Besides," he said, "I've heard reports that those

> battles were both against Devas, General. Devas. It would be lucky if a whole army of ours could
> take one of them on."

Rick: Because of the, um, things that Devas do. You know, stuff and things.

> "Hm." Breathed Zephyr shortly, looking down. But just then, a soldier rushed in and looked about in
> amazement.

> "Colonel Harris!" He exclaimed, looking at him incredulously.

Dan: [Harris] Where, where? [Pause] Oh, that's me.

> "Yes? Speak, man." Said Harris, turning to him with his fearsome glance.

> "We've just heard tell of the Admiral's death!" Shouted the soldier, panicky. All were aroused with
> this,

Rebecca: Many cold showers were needed.

> as their pupils dilated and retracted.

Tsuneo: Everyone did this at once.

> A terrible gloom and fear came over the room,

Rick: Didn't they notice he's been missing? Like say, when he was meant to be leading the battle?

Rebecca: I mean, given that his killer had time to head to another continent, track down a rogue Deva
or something and die futilely, I can only imagine his corpse has been waiting undiscovered and
stinking up his quarters for day.

> but intertwined with a feeling of relief and success.

Dan: Well our leader's dead, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

> Meanwhile, at the Military Base where Thaemos was being kept,

Rick: You know, that place.

> the place was tainted with fear and anxiety.

Rebecca: They were anticipating the next round of staff cuts.

> Within the main communications bay, toiled Thaemos at the control for the Sleeper Zoids

Dan: As well as the regular passenger Zoids and the dining Zoids.

> outside Seymour City. As he did, he heard a loud ruckus outside the room, as some soldiers from
> within the base

Rick: The base where Thaemos was being kept

> yelled frantically, "come out with your hands up, Thaemos! We know you're in there!

> You can't hide anymore!

> "Oh? What have we here? Some visitors?" Said Thaemos with a serpentine smile, licking his lips.

Dan: [Thaemos] I should lay out some tea and biscuits!

> "Alright, we're coming in!"

Rick: [Soldier] If that's okay with you.

> The troops advanced, blowing the door open with some explosives. They
> meant to make it sound like he was surrounded by a legion of troops, but alas, a mere five soldiers
> gamboled into the room,

Tsuneo: Jumping and prancing about to hopefully confuse the heck out of Thaemos.

> peering around with their guns aiming anxiously. The air was cold, as their
> breaths were seen in the form of gaseous clouds;

Tsuneo: Apparently the base was in the arctic and had no internal heating

> the room was shadowy and dark, and anything could be seen as something it's not.

Rick: Things could be seen, except that they couldn't.

> Finally, one trooper fired his firearms at a room by an enervated
> impulse. "Stand down!" Said the higher official,

Dan: As your superior, going off on a bender is my responsibility.

> witnessing that one of his troops had already been
> downed by the shots, "Oh good job! Now we're down to fo-" Suddenly, a knife slit the man's throat,
> courtesy of Thaemos's acute aiming techniques.

Tsuneo: A move that only he could have made. Nobody else in the world was capable of that.

> "You're first," gloated Thaemos, with a cackle in his voice.

Dan: Second, if you count the own goal.

> The soldiers cried and jostled about in confusion,

Rebecca: Highly trained military machine. Precision and discipline, right here folks.

> as one fired his sub-machine gun at the wall in front of him, as the other subsequently
> tossed a grenade in front of him, totaling the room.

Dan: Sure, throw a grenade in a packed room full of your own men. Nothing can go wrong with this.

> The troops waved their hands to circumvent the
> prevailing smoke, only to find fiery, smoking remains.

Tsuneo: Something in the smoke was smoking? Heaven forbid!

> But there were no traces of human flesh. A
> shadow then swooped down behind them, and slit another trooper in the upper vertebrae with a jack
> knife.

Rebecca: Thaemos is the sort of villain who only succeeds because everyone he fights is very dumb.

Rick: So pretty faithful to the Zoids anime

Rebecca: There's a lot of that

> "Behind you." Snickered Thaemos, licking his blade.

Dan: Ow. Cut my tongue. That was so stupid of me.

- > The other two soldiers quickly turned around,
- > but before they could react, Thaemos quickly chopped them in the neck and then armed himself
- > with a pistol; firing on both of them.

Tsuneo: [Thaemos] Not really sure why I did that since you were already dying... Really didn't need to intimidate you either. Sorry, guess I just got caught up in my own idiom.

- > "Heh, heh, heh. I guess that's it for this place," Thaemos peered around, "how pathetic.

Rebecca: [Thaemos] Not sure why I was hanging around, but hey.

- > All I have next to deal with is the whole city of Seymour. No problem at all. Heh, heh, heh, heh..."

Dan: Thaemos is Shadow the Hedgehog levels of edgy here.

- > The city of Seymour was a grand place indeed: one of the most technologically supreme cities in
- > the world.

Rebecca: They had a thriving IT sector, completely unaffordable housing and streets clogged with abandoned rental bikes.

- > It was nestled in the mountainous terrain of the Northern Continent peninsula.

Rick: The Northern Continent peninsula of Northern Continent Peninsula

- > It was also
- > one of the only Zoid Clan Cities still standing; but the only reason for this was because it was an
- > Armada protectorate.

Rebecca: And given the competence displayed by the Armada thus far, I imagine it was raided twice weekly.

[Pause]

Rick: By the Armada?

Rebecca: Oh, of course.

- > Therefore, technology was far surpassing of other cities: it had flying cars,

Dan: And jetpacks for everybody

- > tall buildings,

Tsuneo: Because no other civilisation could build tall buildings

- > and a titanium alloy wall in a dome shape all around the perimeter,

Rick: But can't we get beyond titanium dome?

- > followed by a thick army of the most advanced Zoids, with all the most advanced weaponry.

Dan: And this is why the Armada fields only basic flyers.

- > This was only the
- > beginning of Seymour City though; it also had a dark side: underneath its entrails, lay a slummy,
- > low-down part of it where hobos and ingrates lived;

Dan: The section of town reserved for relatives that you didn't like but had to be nice to anyway
> banished from the city forever.

Rick: Shane Warne felt right at home here.

> This was where the prison was,
> and word had gotten out the Thaemos had escaped and had conquered the entire dungeon,

Tsuneo: He'd carefully mapped it out on grid paper and gotten all the loot

> which caused fear to induce. The city's defense forces failed to locate the missing convict.

Dan: He'd escaped disguised as a washerwoman.

> It would soon be the night of his reckoning.

> On that night, the marshal of the forces in Seymour city and the mayor gathered South Gate with a
> rag-tag group of Zoids.

Rebecca: What happened to their advanced Zoids with advanced weaponry?

Rick: There were budget cutbacks.

> It was so because the main bulk of the defenses lied in the Sleeper Zoids outside the city.

Tsuneo: I'm getting a strong feeling of 'advanced does not mean intelligent' here.

> Soon, one of the marshal's troops approached him with a comlink in his hand.
> "Marshal! This Thaemos has contacted us via comlink! He wished to talk to you!"

Dan: [Marshall] Tell him I'm busy. No, I just stepped out. No, wait, I'm in the shower and can't be disturbed.

> "Very well," said the Marshal, "put him through." The mayor walked up to the communicator, as his
> fluffy mustache brushed against his lips

Tsuneo: The fic lets us know when people have moustaches. Not that it ever tells us anything about their appearances otherwise

> and his belly flopped and tossed.

Rick: His belly had anime breast physics.

> The soldier then handed
> the marshal the comlink, and Thaemos's voice came through, and it was like nails across the chalk
> board,

Dan: [Marshall] Whoah, looks like we've got some feedback here.

Rick: [Thaemos] No, that's what I usually sound like.

Dan: [Marshall] Oh. I'm so sorry.

> "Marshal Thomas!

Tsuneo: [Thomas] Colonel Theamos.

Dan: [Thaemos] Thomas.

Tsuneo: [Thomas] Thaemos.

Dan: [Thaemos] Thomas.

Rick: That's not going to get confusing at all.

> I've heard of you. From reports, you sounded like quite a competent marshal."

Tsuneo: His sources say that he's entirely adequate at his job

> "I see. Where do you get your information?"

Rebecca: Mostly through his Linkedin profile

> "I have... sources... heh, heh. And as such, I believe you'll be smart enough to accept my
> proposition."

Rick: It's an offer to buy the legacy rights to the IPC/Fleetway comic characters created before January first, 1970, as well as those for twenty-eight characters created for Buster.

Rebecca: Rick, not only is that an incredibly niche joke, but it's also now very out of date

Rick: I try.

> "Which is?"

> "Okay, then. I can see you're fascinated."

Dan: [Marshall] No, it's just a slow evening and it's this or NCIS.

> "Don't try my patience."

> "Heh, heh. Very entertaining.

Dan: Not sure what he's talking about, but it's certainly not the fic.

> Anyway, I will explain your predicament. Now there are qualms of

> Sleeper Zoids outside your doorstep.

Tsuneo: Qualms in a quantitative sense, of course.

Rebecca: Of course.

> I have activated them,

Rick: Don't ask how, it just happened.

> and they are poised to attack the city."

> "What? It'll never work! Our city's defense is top-notch!"

Dan: [Mayor] Uh, they are the city's defence.

Rick: [Thomas] Oh. Oh yeah.

> Ahh, but you remember how advanced their arsenal is?! You won't hold a candle to that kind of
> magnitude! Heh, heh, heh."

Tsuneo: Their defence is top-notch, except that it isn't.

> "Nrrrgh..."

> "Very well then. I can see you're tongue tied.

Rebecca: Just overwhelmed by how stupid this situation is.

> Now on to my proposition. Unless you give me the
> recently delivered draftees that were captured by the Tundra Armada, I'll destroy the city!"

Rebecca: He's going to take their hostages hostage.

> "This is madness! I can just trace this signal back to you and end this whole thing!

Tsuneo: Hey Thermos, not to sound like a nag, but you are aware that you're inside the city you're threatening, right?

> Give yourself up! You obviously haven't thought this through properly."

Dan: The fic's planning in a nutshell.

> "Ah, but only I know the secret code to turn off the Zoids. I've hacked into all of the systems."

Rebecca: He's saying that to sound smart. In fact the secret code was on a post-it note attached to the console

Tsuneo: Given the rest of this fic so far, I can easily believe that

> "Are you really willing to go all the way? You realize that I can kill you if you don't turn off the Zoids!"

> "Heh, heh, heh, heh..."

> "Why are you laughing?!"

> "I don't think you realize how far I'll go for this. I'd willingly give my life for this cause.

Tsuneo: [Thomas] And what cause is that?

Dan: [Thaemos] Beats me, I'll come up with something.

> Besides, if I die, well... you don't want to die, do you?"

Dan [Thomas]: I'll kill you if you don't turn off the Zoids.

Rick [Thaemos]: Aha, but if you can kill me, you can turn the Zoids off

Dan [Thomas]: Damn, he's got us there.

> The marshal looked ponderously at the turf for a while. "Very well. Where will we meet?"

> "The business tower at fourth quadrant.

Rebecca: There's a darling little cafe on street level.

> Be there in an hour. Thaemos out." The comlink turned off, and the mayor pouted woefully,

> "What's to become of my city?

Rebecca: It's kind of hard to care, given that we were only introduced to it a few pages ago.

> Is it a bomb threat? Oh, please don't tell me it's a bomb threat."

Dan: [Thomas] No, just some madman threatening to destroy us with our own Zoid army.

Rick: [Mayor] Oh thank goodness.

> Thomas remained silent for a few moments, and then said with lament,

> "No. Don't worry, we'll have this cleared up, mayor."

Dan: Our plan is to give the unhinged terrorist exactly what he wants. Nothing can go wrong with this.

> Soon, the hour passed, and sure enough, the shuttle arrived with the boys from Tempa in it.

Rebecca: The boys from Tempa sounds like a Broadway musical.

> Thaemos was standing alone on the top of the business tower, smiling intently at the approaching
> ship. It landed on the helipad, with its tiny legs extending from its bottom side. Out came Thomas,
> along with the mayor, who gamboled vigorously.

Rick: He blew the city's public works budget at the roulette table

Tsuneo: I don't think that's what the fic meant.

Rick: So what did it mean then?

Tsuneo: ...I'll get back to you on that.

> Thomas approached Thaemos, but Thaemos permeated him,

Tsuneo: Soaked through his every fiber.

> and stood worshipping his trade-in.

Tsuneo: ...I have no idea what that's meant to mean.

Dan: Oh, I just gave up trying long ago.

Rick: Good plan.

> He walked into it, with an indifferent

> countenance. "I see. You've done well. Till we meet again!"

Rebecca: Thaemos has both the smug self-assurance and acute stupidity of a teenage atheist on Reddit.

> "Wait!" Cried the marshal, forming a staid expression on his face, "your part of the deal."

> "Oh right," said Thaemos shortly, "here." He then pressed a switch,

Dan: [Thomas] That's the musical horn, you oik.

Rick: [Thaemos] Wrong switch.

> disarming all of the Zoids in the vicinity outside the wall.

Tsuneo: So they shot him. The end.

> "I can see you held out your part of the deal." Thomas was silent.

> "Farewell." So the ship's thrusters frivolously,

Rebecca: He's getting away, but it's no big deal.

> and then departed from the city, drifting across the nighttime sky.

> "Shouldn't we fire on them?!" Interrogated the mayor, waving his arms. Thomas was motionless.

Tsuneo: [Sighs] The moment's past.

> "No," he said, "that would harm the draftees." The mayor looked at him considerably, and Thomas

> continued confusedly, "still though," he walked about,

Rebecca: [Thomas] Just surrendered them to an obvious madman, ho hum.

> "I wonder what it is with these draftees? What makes them so special?"

Dan: Try asking John Barren

> Tundra had just ordered for them to stay here until further orders.

Rebecca: [Thomas] We set them up at a B&B, got them jobs at a day market, everything.

> Who does this Thaemos guy really work for?"

Rick: At this point, I'm not sure if even Thaemos could answer that.

> In a few hours, Thomas's question would be answered. On the main bay of the shuttle, sat
> Thaemos briskly, operating controls on the computer screen. "Main screen turn on." He said
> seriously,

Dan: Okay, now the fic's doing it on purpose.

> and static rustled on the screen when Kasults's face appeared with a pompous grin.

> "Thaemos," he said, "I trust your mission is complete?"

> "Yes," replied Thaemos, proudly, "I've infiltrated the rebels' base

Tsuneo: He said from the distant shuttle.

> and discovered quite a bit.

> Apparently, those rebels are planning a final attack on the Imperial capital...

Rebecca: Things might have changed a bit since then.

> some sort of secret weapon. I was able to gain the trust of Tundra himself

Tsuneo: Which is why he immediately betrayed him for no real gain.

> and learned that he was seeking an Organoid

> called Ogre, so that he could put him in his Gojulas. I don't know the details, but he's pretty
> powerful."

> "Good!" Exclaimed Kasults, "and the draftees? I trust you're delivering them as we speak?"

Rick: Thaemos' new job is school bus driver

> "Yes," started Thaemos, unsatisfied, looking behind himself,

Dan: [Theamos] Did I leave the door open?

> "but I still don't see the point of a small qualm of men. What help will they be?"

Rebecca: Kasults is planning to form a band so hoping that at least a couple of them can actually sing.

Tsuneo: Drafting civilians, forcing them into service and then kidnapping them sounds about on par for a K-Pop group

> "You'll see. Heh, heh, heh, heh... Oh, and deliver them to Delpoi near Mt. Garugaru

Rebecca: Gesundheit.

> in the small lab near Gandar Valley.

Dan: Thirteen levels below the surface of the Earth.

> There are... things... going on there that I'm interested in."

> "Well okay..."

> "You've done well, Thaemos. Kasults out."

Rebecca: [Kasults] You've blown your cover and lost us our inside man to deliver some random civilians that we could have gotten anywhere. Just as planned.

Tsuneo: This fic is just a contest to see who is dumbest, isn't it?

> The communications were severed, and Zartols's face disappeared from the monitor.

Rick: But what about Kasults?

Dan: Wait, is Kasults actually Zartols? Are they the same person?

Rick: Well who's Zartols then?

Dan: I don't know, and it scares me.

> Thaemos turned back around, snorted through his nose and gave a slight snarl.

> "Whatta weird guy." He sneered, straightening his jacket.

Tsuneo: Ha ha, it's ironic because he's a remorseless killer.

> Meanwhile, Gale Port, Zephyr, Peterson, and Harris were attempting the cope with the panic that

> ensued in thoroughfare of the base due to Tundra's death.

Rebecca: Also trying to get a volunteer to muck out his quarters.

> They gathered in the main operations

> bay, boringly tapping their fingers waiting for someone to say something.

Tsuneo: They were panicked, but in a bored sort of a way.

> Finally, after enormous amounts of finger-twiddling, Harris spoke up,

Tsuneo: Leadership, folks.

> "well, I've received insight on Tundra's recent death..."

Dan: Apparently he died of it.

Rick: Thank you for that.

> it'll be held on a brig near one of the Andar islands,

Rick: That's where they're... holding... his death? I think?

> where Tundra had first started his enterprise."

Dan: Got investors for his rebellion, formed an LCL, the works.

> They were deadening silent for a few moments, when Zephyr said,

> "I can't believe this! Tundra dead? I mean I know he was cruel, but this is too much!

Rebecca: Quickly excuse his toxic excesses and we're good.

> He was the greatest leader of the Tundra Armada!

Dan: He was its only leader!

Rick: Details.

> He was the founder of the Tundra Armada!"

> "I know Zephyr... I know..."

Dan: [Zephyr] I mean, we're going to have to rename it at least.

> "He also split up the Tundra Armada." Stated Peterson, informatively.

Rebecca: He split it into two smaller Armadas for tax purposes.

> "Good point." Added Zephyr, pointing her finger. Harris was going to say something, but before he
> got a chance, Zephyr rose and said resolutely, "And as such, I propose we regroup... and we'll start
> with Marcus. He could still be stranded out on Delpoi... alone..." she stalled, "I have to go help
> him..."

Tsuneo: And maybe tie together some of this fic's dozen or so loose threads.

> "But general! With all due respect, that's madness! Tundra sent his troops out there to have him
> killed!

Tsuneo: Yeah, can we rethink that greatest leader bit?

> Also, it's infested with Imperial troops and treacherous bandits! They'll eat him alive!"

Rick: Figuratively or literally?

Dan: Why not both?

> "... ..I know. I still want to go and see if I get any positives.

Tsuneo: I want to go out on a fool's errand chasing across an entire continent after a guy who's probably already dead.

> I'll be back for the funeral with Marcus in tow.

Rebecca: What if some of his other men are still alive?

Dan: Well they're on their own

> Just give me the coordinates." Replied Zephyr, storming out of the room.

Rick: [Harris] Wait, I was going to give you the coordinates aaand she's gone.

> So it was

> decided then; Zephyr and the two split up from there. Zephyr's hopes were set on finding Marcus,
> as a deeper feeling for him than respect beat in her heart.

Tsuneo: Wait, that was just indigestion. Never mind.

> -----

> Zoids Battle Saga Chapter XX:

> Iron Kong

> In the northwestern side of Europa, lied the base in the possession of Autumost.

Dan: Yay, Automoose! I missed him.

Rebecca: Any reason?

Dan: He had the silliest name.

> He sat in his quarters, guzzling down on choice foods and swigging iced chai rigorously.

Rick: Swigging chai tea sounds almost counterproductive

> As he binged on his savory food thoroughly,

Rebecca: We know he likes to eat, which is probably the closest to an actual personality trait that he will ever get

> a soldier came in, saluted, and said in monotone speech:

Dan: [Flat] They ain't paying me to be excited, sir.

> "sir! We've been notified of Axon's defeat in Gale Port."

Rick: [Soldier] It was some kind of monkey business, sir.

Dan: [Autumost] That was awful, soldier. And quit padding your part.

> He looked at him curiously, trying to catch his eyes, "any orders?"

Rebecca: [Autumost] Yeah, top up my wine and get me more breadsticks.

> Autumost plucked a hunk of meat from his delectable chicken drumstick into his fangs,

Tsuneo: Automoose is the sort of person that you hate to be stuck behind at the buffet

> and churned it into his throat. He laughed heartily, and responded,

Dan: [Soldier] Yeah, do I really have to be here for this?

> "Heh, heh, heh, heh..." he bit another hunk, brandishing his teeth,

Tsuneo: [Soldier] Sir, you've got something in your, uh... You know what, never mind.

> "I see our other Deva friends our

> failing miserably." He put down his drumstick, licked his lips vilely, and continued,

Rick: [Autumost] This calls for ham!

Tsuneo: [Soldier] Very good sir.

> "let's pay the

> rebel fools a visit. I'm sure they'd be very interested in seeing our new Gorilla Warfare."

Rick: Hey remember that set-up from nearly twenty chapters ago?

Rebecca: Not at all

Rick: Me neither, actually.

> "Shall I notify the other troops?"

Tsuneo: Nah, let's just spring a surprise war on them, they'll love it.

> "Yes. Tomorrow we set out for the island west of Delpoi.

Dan: The specific, nonspecific island

> I've heard of a large rebel force there. We'll give them a... demonstration of the Iron Kongs' power."

Rick: [Soldier] But sir, they've already got an Iron Kong.

Dan: [Autumost] They do? Why didn't you tell me?

Rick: [Soldier] I referenced it in my monkey business joke, sir.

Dan: [Autumost] Oh. Kind of takes the wind out of my sails.

Rick: [Soldier] Sorry, sir.

> "Sir!" The soldier then left from him, and Autumost glommed his food ferociously.

Rebecca: In case you missed it he's greedy and likes eating

> On the island Autumost spoke of, the rebel forces marched vehemently across the temperate
> landscape.

Rebecca: This is where the entire Tundra Armada who weren't blowing each other up got to.

> They were of Ultrasauruses, Gojulases, Seabatorases (24"), Shotgaroos (24"), and
> Kamakiras.

Rick: As well as a few Snallygasters, Ogopogos, Snarly Yowls and a Mothman

> They were standing by for the final assault on the Imperial capital.

Tsuneo: So is the imperial capitol on this unnamed island?

Rebecca: I think that trying to figure out where anything is in relation to anything else in this fic is a quick road to madness.

> As the colossi rumbled slowly forward, the Iron Kong units stood at a distance.

Tsuneo: And were ploughed down with overwhelming artillery fire. The end.

> They gazed at their foes maliciously,

Dan: They were trying to stare them to death

> with steady content. The pilots therein stood by, like riders of horses gleaning their steeds.

Rebecca: They were inside armoured cockpits rather than riding on the back, but you get the picture.

> Autumost's Iron Kong MKII stood at the helm, holding true to his position as leader.

Tsuneo: As the leader, he led them

> "Alright, forces," he said, "attack!"

> Receiving Autumost's orders with enthusiasm, the troops moved their Iron Kongs toward the first

> line of defense: the Gojulases. They fired their ten shot self-guided rocket launchers at them,

Rebecca: This fic is at its most coherent when it's reading off weapon lists.

> covering the Gojulases in smoke and fire.

Dan: The same sort of tactics and technology the Japanese army use when fighting Godzilla

- > One Gojulas's hide was torn and its inners were showing,
- > but the other two responded by firing their AMD double barreled 30mm beam cannons

Rick: AMD double barrelled 30mm beam cannons are my favourite characters in this fic.

- > at the Iron
- > Kongs, felling one, but with the other two still standing. They aimed for the next one, but one of
- > them was squelched by an AZ Missile fired from one of the Iron Kongs.

Rick: The narration makes it sounds like they dropped a cartoon anvil on him.

- > One of the shots made it through, but the Iron Kong dodged it adeptly,

Tsuneo: Not fair, it's your turn to fall over.

- > and fired a TVM ground-to-ground tactical missile

Rebecca: At this point the author's just reading names off a wiki page

- > right at the face of his adversary.

Dan: Yeah, shoot the cruise missile at point blank range. Sounds good.

- > The other two Gojulases recovered, and aimed whatever weapons they
- > could at their foe, but two Iron Kongs appeared behind them,

Tsuneo: Don't you hate it when a two hundred ton robot gorilla sneaks up on you like that?

- > and flung their iron hammer knuckles at their likenesses,

Tsuneo: They attacked the other Iron Kongs by throwing their fists?

Rebecca: I'm at the point of just saying 'Sure, why not?' to everything and waiting for it to be over.

- > then pounded them on their backs until they were no more. The riders inside
- > examined the carcasses of their foes carefully,

Dan: They were subject to a thorough giant robot dinosaur autopsy

- > then on of them stoutly notified Autumost, "Sir!" He
- > put on a stern face, "The Gojulases have been eliminated!"

- > "Hm, hm, hm. I knew those new Gojulas units were all talk." Said Autumost, closing his eyes with
- > assurance, "now onward!"

- > But in the distance, Autumost noticed a glimmer of hope for the rebels: the Ultrasauruses!

Rick: Hey remember all that time they spend setting up the Ultrasauruses?

Rebecca: Nope, sorry.

Rick: Honestly, I barely do either.

- > They
- > reared themselves for attack from afar, and aimed their 360 linear cannons at the fray, and fired
- > with a tempest blast, scattering the imperial forces and maiming them.

Tsuneo: Making you wonder why they didn't do that earlier while their first line was slaughtered

> The Iron Kongs then lay in a sizzling stupor on the ground.

Dan: Having been exploded like Elmer Fudd

> "Good job, men!" Said one of the female lead Ultrasaurus pilot,

Rebecca: Is that anything like a female operative?

> "now standby for the next assault! There ought to be more of them!"

Tsuneo: Or we could press our advantage and wipe them out. Just saying.

> Autumost quickly responded with a start, and moved his Iron Kong toward the Ultrasauruses at high
> speed. The Ultrasauruses fired as much weaponry as they could at the enemy,

Dan: The pilot even leaned out of the cockpit and fired her service pistol.

> but they were swiftly eluded by Autumost nimble reflexes.

Rebecca: This is like a fight in a roleplay community, in as far as one side keeps claiming that he dodged everything and got away with no harm whatsoever.

> "Keep firing men!" cried the Ultrasaurus pilot, but to no avail.

> Then with a bounding leap, Autumost's Iron Kong sprang over to the Ultrasauruses, grasped one of
> their necks firmly, crunching its structure, and swung it at the other Ultrasauruses like a whip.

Tsuneo: Take that, physics.

> As

> they crashed down on each other, grinding each other and crumbling at the force of the blow,

> Autumost yelled his battle cry with obnoxious pride,

Dan: [Autumost] HAAAM STEAAAK!

> "SOOOORYAAAAAH!"

> "NGGGGHH!" Cried the Ultrasaurus pilot,

Rick: Who was apparently trying out for a role in a Storm Force comic

> as she was having the wind knocked out of her.

Tsuneo: Her Zoid was picked up and used as a club to bash another. Being winded is likely the least of her problems right now.

> Then as

> the Ultrasauruses lie in a destroyed wreck, Autumost aimed his AZ missile launcher and fired all six
> of them, causing a roaring explosion, making the Ultrasauruses nothing more than rubble.

Rebecca: Oh yeah, now I remember that long and elaborate setup. And I'm pissed about it.

> "Hm." Said Autumost, crossing his arms;

Rick: I will kill a man to see his Iron Kong do that.

> then, as many Seabatorases and Kamakiras as possible
> got away to warn their allies of this coming horror.

Rick: Harambe's back, and he's pissed

> Autumost then glanced down at his fallen comrades, and sighed in inclemency.

Tsuneo: [Autumost] Well there goes the budget for the year.

> "HHHH. I suppose my soldiers were too weak. Oh well. A

> small price to pay for the rebels to see the ultimate power of my 'Gorilla Warfare'."

Tsuneo: We're really going with that, aren't we?

> Autumost then ambled slowly way, laughing an evil laugh, leaving his allies alone coolly.

Rebecca: This just in, the evil guy is evil.

> In the deep reaches of Europa in Elemia Desert, were Vald, Garrison, and Reni,

Dan: Garrison? Where'd they pick up the straggler?

Rick: I think that's meant to be Reni's dad.

Dan: Well I know that Reni's dad was named Garson, so there's no way it could be him with this fic's tight editing.

Rick: You're right, it makes much more sense that they lost her dad and picked up a complete stranger with a similar name between scenes.

Dan: Doesn't it just?

[Pause]

Rick: This is all about Gabby and Gabi, isn't it?

Dan: It is.

> sallying forth through the deserted wasteland.

Tsuneo: Wandering through the desert. It's what this fic does when... Well, I was going to say it can't think of anything else, but it can never think of anything else, really.

> Garrison was without a Zoid at the time, so he had to squeeze in with Reni, most uncomfortably.

Dan: Reni let one rip just to get the point over

> "I'm telling you, each time we've gone on this trip it's seemed longer!" Complained Reni, fussy.

> "We've only been on it twice." Stated Vald complacently.

Tsuneo: Put on some music or listen to a podcast or something to pass the time. Really, anything that spares us from yet another scene of petty bickering would be nice by now

> "Yeah, well..."

> And after long hours of slowly festering away in the rays of the sun,

Rick: They brought Ferrel with them, didn't they?

> they arrived at their destination:

> Tundra's base. "Land ho!" Sparked Garrison, drilling a hole in Reni's ears.

Rick: Garrison was learning body piercing and needed somebody to practice on

> "A little less loud, Dad... my ears have already been damaged by the constant hum of my

> thrusters..." Said Reni, safely distancing herself from her father.

Rick: Most Zoid cockpits are tiny affairs. It'd be like trying to squeeze two people into the same seat in a Lamborghini

> "Oh, sorry." But much to Reni's dismay, Vald's jubilant voice burst through her communicator with
> glee,

Rebecca: Mostly because it meant she'd have to talk to Vald.

> "YIPPEEE!"with a scalding effect.

Tsuneo: He literally burns with excitement

> "VAAAALD! Geez, you guys are both the same!" Said Reni fitfully.

> "Huh? Whaddaya mean?" Said Vald listlessly, with his goofy face appearing on the monitor.

> "Never mind..."

Dan: So banter happened.

Rick: Or at least a crude simulation of it.

> So soon they hustled into the large base, as the large mouth-like door opened. They exited their
> Zoids and soon reclined in their rooms. "Wait! I don't have a room!" Said Vald,

Dan: In the middle of the empty base.

> halfway from departing from the others.

Tsuneo: So where were you staying before?

Rebecca: I can only assume that he went back to his hole in the ground.

> "You don't count, Vald!" Said Reni, sticking out her tongue.

Rick: Vald, stop trying to be a character. It doesn't suit you.

> "You're cute when you're teasing!" Noted Vald happily. Reni's face flushed, when her father came
> up with a solution,

> "You'll just have to make due. That Stark guy's room is now empty."

Dan: As well as everyone else's room, but hey.

> "But he's creepy!

Dan: I mean, the guy has a Sasuke poster. That's not a good sign.

> How do you suppose I'll sleep in there?!"

Rick: Try lying on the bed and closing your eyes.

> Ignoring him, the other two indifferently shuffled away,

Rick: A fairly typical reaction to Vald.

> with their backs thoroughly turned to Vald. "Ahhh... Oh, well..."

> The other two arrived at Reni's room shortly.

Tsuneo: Sleeping arrangements! Zoids Battle Saga!

> "I hope you haven't been up to no good in this place, young lady!

Rebecca: You can trust that the mercenary pilot has been keeping everything above board.

> I trust that fine gentleman over there

Rebecca: I have no idea who he's talking about, because it certainly isn't Vald.

> but I don't know about anyone else!" Said Garrison parentally.

Tsuneo: Garson's going to keep trying to set them up despite Reni showing no interest whatsoever.

Dan: It's his eternal dad duty.

> "I can take care of myself, Dad! You can trust me!" Said Reni, expanding the length of her mouth.

Tsuneo: Suddenly, an animation error occurred.

> She entered her room, and crashed on her bed, and held up her hand. She looked ponderously at
> it,

Rick: Four fingers and a thumb. Took her a while to process it.

> rubricated her thoughts for a few moments, and looked at her father, as her hair locks flopped
> down her face.

Rebecca: Her entirely undescribed hair.

Tsuneo: I suppose this means she's not bald, at least.

> "Still though," she started, "you must have wondered what my real father was like, huh?"

> "Not even once!" Said Garrison gruffly, snorting and turning his head, "your father must have been a
> very irresponsible man, abandoning you like that!"

Rebecca: So what about Reni's mother?

Tsuneo: I can only assume that she existed at some point.

Rebecca: Are you willing to bet on that?

> "Then you have thought about him then?" Reni's father stalled, then said softly,

> "How could I not, Reni? He's a very important man..."

Tsuneo: He's thought about him, but he knows nothing about him at all.

> he closed his eyes, and continued, "but I think about you a lot more.

Dan: [Garson] After all, who's going to clean my bunions when I'm old?

Rebecca: [Reni] Dad. Ew.

> Ever since I found you on that island in the Daras Archipelago

Rick: He was digging for pirate treasure at the time.

> I knew I had to take you in...

Dan: [Garson] As an unwashed hobo, I knew I'd be perfectly qualified.

> I didn't want you to be subject to poverty your father planned to put you in...

Rebecca: He'd enrolled her in a public school, the fiend.

> but now that you're chasing after him, it just doesn't seem like you're grateful."

Dan: [Garson] How dare you try and live your own life. That's not how I raised you!

> "I... see, Dad... I'm sorry... but it's not like that at all..." After a few moments of heartfelt silence,

> Vald dashed into the room, full of energy.

> "You guys are never gonna believe this!" He said ecstatically.

Rick: If this is about Snape killing Dumbledore, then we've heard it

> "What? What is it, Vald?" Said Reni, rising.

Dan: [Vald] I've flooded the entire bottom level!

Rick: [Reni] Thank you. Thank you so much.

> "I just went to the communications room, talked to an Armada official and... and..."

> "Yes?"

> "He's dead! Tundra's dead!"

Dan: Didn't that happen about half a dozen chapters ago?

Rick: People didn't want to make a fuss about it.

> At this, Reni's and Garrison's eyes widened and their attention spurred.

> A small tear glistened in Reni's eyes, as she sat there in agony.

Rebecca: Seeing that she was clearly upset at this news, Vald took the opportunity to dump on her some more.

> In the far reaches of Delpoi,

Rick: This feels like one of those bad fantasy novels where you need to keep flipping to the map at the front of the book.

> across the white sand dunes and the strange, wild climate,

Dan: The idea of a desert was strange to them

> was Zephyr's shuttle, flying over the rich expanse.

Tsuneo: I mean, it's flying over a desert so it's like wandering aimlessly through one.

> She sat at the helm of the ship apprehensively,

> tapping her foot and looking out the main window anxiously.

Rick: Wondering where the Salamander she was flying earlier had gotten to

> One of her crewmates said fearfully,

> "Ma'am, we're entering Imperial territory! Keep looking?"

> "By all means, shipman.

Rebecca: Alright, just don't say I didn't warn you.

> I know Marcus's signal is around here somewhere... It's got to be." Replied Zephyr worriedly.

> "Very well."

> In the deeper reaches of Delphi,

Tsuneo: Okay, I'm confused about the geography here.

Rick: Yep.

[Pause]

Rick: That's not any kind of explanation, by the way. Just go ahead and be confused.

Tsuneo: I think I will.

> some two-hundred kilometers from Zephyr's point, were indeed Marcus and Zozos,

Rebecca: They were concerned with the idea that not only were they no longer relevant to the plot, but that they never were a part of it to begin with.

> being kept safely under the wing of Euripides.

Dan: The pro is he's got some kind of legendary Zoid that can protect them. The con is they have to listen to him go on about his rheumatism.

> While Marcus's communications

> bay was at work, to possibly shine a ray of hope on them and catch the attention of other forces of

> the Armada,

Tsuneo: Sure, broadcast an open radio signal when you're alone in the middle of enemy territory.

Nothing can go wrong with this.

> they discussed military matters with Euripides.

Tsuneo: Oh, and while you're at it, be sure to reveal military secrets to a member of the enemy's elite.

> "So you're saying you'll tell us a good route into the Imperial Capital, old man?"

Dan: [Euripides] Depends, are you still going to attack it?

Rick: [Zozos] I mean, maybe?

> Said Zozos, pointing his saucy fork at Euripides.

Rebecca: Well that was an interesting quote without context

> Marcus glanced at him crossly, with a curdled brow,

Tsuneo: His brow had long since expired.

> as Euripides closed his eyes and replied,

> "Yes. As far as I remember, there's a weak point on the walls of the 23rd gate.

Dan: [Euripides] Used to nip out that way for a smoke all the time.

> It's entered by the
> northeast side. I'd suggest landing at Estrella Port and then go straight diagonally down."

Tsuneo: It's easy to find. Just venture into the heart of the evil empire and turn left.

> Zozos nodded his head energetically while jostling his hunk of sausage in his mouth.

Rebecca: Can you at least not plan a battle with your mouth full?

> "Thank you for all you've done, Mr. Euripides... we can't thank you enough." Said Marcus,

Tsuneo: Thanks, and thanks again.

> as Euripides poked at the cheery fire.

> "No problem. Just friends helping out friends.

Rebecca: Because their friendship has been so deeply and richly developed so far.

> I hope you'll succeed." Marcus looked thoughtfully at powdery sand,

Dan: Sand. It's what keeps this fic together.

Rick: Sand. You're either walking on it, or it's blowing at you.

> considering the difference between the Armada and the Empire.

Tsuneo: Well, one's lead by a comically evil and woefully ineffectual commander, and the other one's... also lead by a comically evil and woefully ineffectual commander.

> At this point, he really couldn't discern them.

Dan: Marcus long ago forgot who he was fighting for. Which is fair, because we did too.

> With this, he didn't even know if he wanted to succeed.

Rebecca: He just crashed head-long into his midlife crisis. Next thing you know he'll have a hot red Descat parked in his garage.

> "Something the matter, Marcus?" Said Zozos jovially. Marcus rose stoutly, and said distantly,

> "Nothing. I'm going to go check on the communications."

> Zozos stared wonderingly, and asked Euripides shortly, "What's got his go?"

> Euripides made a wise smile, and said approvingly, "ahh. I see he's gotten tired of war..."

Tsuneo: He approves of Marcus' angst.

> I remember when I went through that stage. It was the happiest stage in my life.

Dan: That moment where I was overcome with ennui and questioned all that I believed in and all I had done in my life was the happiest day of my life.

> Quite a transition, it was."

> "Oh."

Tsuneo: Zozos is left wondering what he meant by a transition.

> Marcus arrived at the communications bay, after climbing the tall hull of his Zoid.

Dan: [Marcus] Wouldn't have killed them to... put on... handholds or something...

> He fiddled with the

> controls, and soon noticed a fizzle being picked up by the radar. With surprise, he ejected out of the

> bay

Rick: Like a spring-loaded toy with a part you'll lose after the second try.

> and scurried down the leg of his Zoid,

Dan: Much like this operation, Marcus was sent right down his leg.

> ran out to the others, and warned them, "We've got company!"

> Zozos rose with a dismembered face. "Where? What are we fighting?" He asked slowly.

Rebecca: [Marcus] Oh, you just assume it's going to be hostiles, don't you? What if it's allies this time?

Tsuneo: [Zozos] Like our allies who bombed us?

Rebecca: [Marcus] I'll get the guns ready.

> "I don't know! Just get to your Zoid!"

Dan: The girl scouts coming around to sell cookies were going to be in for one hell of a surprise

> "Roger." Swiftly, Zozos ran off to his Command Wolf.

> "Euripides? Are you joining?" Euripides looked regretfully at the crackling fire.

> "I suppose." He said dejectedly.

Dan: [Euripides] Man, giant robot animal combat is such a drag.

> The three, inside of their Zoids, then trudged forward, and aimed

> their weapons skyward. Soon, a ship started to take shape, and it slowly increased in size.

Rebecca: Thank you for that, fic. I would have forgotten that things appear bigger when they get closer otherwise

> "Take aim!" Said Marcus intensely. It got larger, and as Marcus caught eye of the Tundra Armada

> insignia branded on its flank, his heart burned with rage. He remembered his friends... Melk...

> Trowa...

Rebecca: His friend, the attempted rapist.

> Teal... Greg... Zeon...

Tsuneo: Rosencrantz... Guildenstern...

> and he balled his fist with rage. Zozos quickly complied with closely

> matched zeal, tightening his lower lip and breathing in like a bull. "FI-" but just as Marcus gave the

> order; a figure emerged from the ship.

Dan: Or – and here's a thought – you could have avoided all this by using the radio.

Tsuneo: No radios, remember? Fic's rules, all messages are delivered by hand.

> It was a figure that was refreshingly familiar to him—

Dan: The lunch lady from the commissary. He'd missed her warm nature.

> one that soothed his troubled heart and filled it with a feeling of warmth—

Rebecca: Or indigestion. His rations were pretty dated.

> Zephyr. Zozos recognized it too, and quickly lowered his firearms. The shuttle shortly landed,

Tsuneo: Zephyr had apparently decided to get out of it before it landed. Not the best plan

> with Zephyr pouring out of it

Rick: Zephyr was a liquid at room temperature

> with

> excited love and emotion, running a mad dash to see Marcus. Marcus did the same for his Zoid,

Rebecca: He stared at his Zoid longingly with love and affection

> and fled over to see Zephyr. They approached each other, straightening themselves out. They

> looked at each other strangely, chuckled, and then stared an ocular stare.

Tsuneo: He used his eyes to stare

> They came nearer to

> each other, with this interaction swiftly converting into a loving hug.

Rebecca: Because their relationship had been so deeply developed before now

Dan: Were they even in the same scene together before?

Rebecca: I don't remember, and frankly, I'm not sure I care anymore.

> They grasped each other firmly,

> pouring out a strong emotion that was felt in them ever since they met each other, and was

> resparked dynamically during this fateful reunion.

Rebecca: It sounds more like a mission statement than a hug.

> Zozos and Euripides stared on in speechless wonder and amazement,

Dan: Zozos was trying to remember just who Zephyr was, while Euripides was amazed that girls exist.

> wondering what to make of this outbreak of romance.

Rick: They both sanitised their hands and wore facemasks, just to be sure

> Finding nothing to say, they simply stared on more.

Dan: Well that's going in the spank bank for later.

> Meanwhile, in Tundra's base in Elemia desert,

Tsuneo: We've got to make damn sure we don't develop that scene any further.

> Reni, Garrison, and Vald didn't know what to make of Tundra's death;

Tsuneo: Yeah, that's pretty much how I responded too

> just like the rebels situated at Gale Port.

Rick: The occupants of a steam bath in Croydon felt the same, for what it's worth.

> They were situated in the base's kitchen, each chowing down on some food.

Dan: Troubling news to handle? Try stuffing your face.

> Reni was especially moved by his recent fatality,

Rick: He'd ripped a guy's heart out and held it in the air

> as she stood against a wall with her fist against it contemplatively.

Rebecca: So help her, she's going to punch this whole base down.

> After a few moments, she swiveled around resolutely, and started,

Dan: [Reni] Oh well, so much for that. Who wants pie?

> "well," she raised her cackling voice, "we can't just stand around! I've...

> we've got to get to him somehow... I feel... it's not too late to make ends meet."

Rebecca: I'd say we're a little past that point by now, sorry.

> Vald stuffed his face a little, and raised a finger matter-of-factly.

Dan: [Vald] No funeral plans while I'm eating.

> "Well Reni," he started, "I've received information that the funeral is tomorrow...

Dan: And by that he means he's stalking Harris' Instagram.

> burial at sea at a brig near one of the Andar Islands...

Rick: Followed by drinks at an unironic tiki bar. It's a low key and discrete affair

> so unless you're planning to swim down and talk to a guy

> who's already dead, I'd suggest you rethink things a little."

Rebecca: Vald, displaying his renowned tact and sensitivity.

> Reni lowered her head hopelessly, and said in a down tone,

> "Yeah I guess we can't get there early enough, huh?"

Dan: Funeral crashers are the worst

> "You got it."

> "Hey! You don't care about this at all, do you?"

Dan: [Vald] Um... Nope. No, not at all. That's pretty much the end of it.

> "Well the guy sounded like a jerk for abandoning you and all. I can't imagine why'd you want to see

> him, but I'm with you all the way, baby."

Rebecca: Oh Vald, you complete arse.

- > Vald gave a wise guy look at Reni, and they stared at each other oddly for a few moments,

Tsuneo: And so she slowly, with much grace and deliberation, hit him over the head with a food tray.

- > when Garrison was noticed to be standing at the topmost part of the room, as he started a jolly laugh.

Rick: Haha, funerals are hilarious

- > His belly shook, and he spread his arms out as his laugh got more and more maniacal.

Dan: Everyone else was backing away slowly

- > Vald and Reni stood by indifferently, plucking phlegm from their nostrils.

Tsuneo: It was when they started comparing results that things got weird.

- > "What's wrong with him?" Still laughing.

- > "Maybe he's gone insane." Still laughing.

- > "Think we should do something?" Still laughing.

Rebecca: Strange thing is, this is the most natural-sounding exchange in the entire fic so far.

- > "Nah, we should just let him take his own sweet time." Still laughing.

- > "Really? Think so?"

Dan: Not really, no. I'll get the horse tranquilisers.

- > Still laughing.

- > "Man he's still laughing." Still laughing.

Tsuneo: It turns out that the man who is still laughing is still laughing.

- > They stared in interrogative incredibility, as he finally died down.

- > "THE PERFECT SOLUTION!" He boasted, turning to them, "THIS THING CAN FLY! HA, HA, HA, HA!"

Rebecca: Yes, the base kitchen can fly. That's nice, just come over here and take your meds.

- > "Is it really that funny?" Said Reni, noticing Vald was chuckling uncontrollably, slapping his knee in merriment.

Tsuneo: [Reni] You know what, forget it. You two chuckleheads get the kitchen airborne, I'll be over here drinking myself into oblivion.

- > "Eh... Never mind... It seems I'm outnumbered here."

- > "But isn't it GREAT?" Reni quickly phrased without stalling,

> "Yeah! But... how'd you know that?"

Dan: The jet engines strapped to the side were a bit of a giveaway

> "Heh, heh, heh. I did some research on this base before I came.

Rebecca: And he knows more about it than the people stationed here, obviously.

> Don't ask me how it's aerodynamic, considering this place it just a block, but..."

Tsuneo: Or, for that matter, why it can fly in the first place

Rick: Their architect must have been laughing all the way to the bank

> he caught his breath, "but right! Let's be off to the bridge straight away!"

Tsuneo: So what, they just had a bridge all along?

Rick: Seems like it.

Tsuneo: And what, people just knew that they could fly this base?

Rebecca: Problem is, that poses a lot of questions.

> "Right! Vald, stop laughing and come on!" Vald desisted his chuckling and knee slapping, rose and

> followed them hastily. They passed through the corridors speedily to reach the upper areas of the
> base.

Rick: Yeah, like why they were so concerned about moving the Ultrasauruses with endless amounts of cranes when they could have transported them wholesale in the flying base.

Tsuneo: Wait, you remember that bit?

Rick: I just pick up these things, you know?

> It was there that they located an offset room with the words 'OPERATION' engraved above

> the doors. They sundered in through the flapping doors, and quickly took to the controls.

Dan: Turns out we had a room full of flight controls all along. Wonder why nobody ever noticed that before?

Rebecca: Maybe nobody actually knew the base could fly all this time.

Rick: And yet some rando who looked it up knows?

Rebecca: Given the general competency on display?

Rick: Yeah, fair point.

> "How do

> you work these things? It doesn't look like it's been used in years..." Reni's father snickered.

Tsuneo: Putting that aside, I guess the question is why didn't they just deploy the whole base with all their troops and Zoids?

Dan: I mean, it certainly wasn't to leave a garrison, since the place is basically empty.

Rebecca: Maybe it's a highly disruptive operation, so they want to use it sparingly?

Rick: Sure, and it's just that these randos don't care.

Voice: Um, if you don't mind, there is still a fic to read.

Tsuneo: Oh, alright.

> "Heh! I used to pilot ferry ships all over the world! This'll be a breeze for me!"

Rebecca: I mean, how hard can it be to fly an immobile building anyway?

> He said, aching the

> levers, switches and notches with ease. Shortly, the large behemoth structure lifted off the ground it

> for long sat on, and was soon airborne.

Tsuneo: I'm sure it would be a magnificent sight if there was anyone around to notice.

- > Dust scattered and powdered off of its bulky hide, as
- > thrusters appeared on its posterior. They blasted ferociously, quivering the air around them. It then
- > cinematically took off,

Dan: That's why it makes no sense, we wandered into a cutscene.

- > into the deep blue and tan scenery.

- > Meanwhile, also in Elemia Desert, was Stark,

Rick: Remember when he was the protagonist of this fic?

Dan: Not really, no

Rick: Me neither

- > in the midst of a huge sandstorm,

Tsuneo: That's what this fic has been missing.

Dan: Plot?

Rick: Direction?

Rebecca: Sympathetic characters?

Rick: Imagination?

Dan: Vision?

Rebecca: Any kind of rational coherence or storyline whatsoever?

Tsuneo: Yes. But also, perpetual sandstorms.

- > as was the climate in his location. He braved it, clawing his way through, trying to survive.

Dan: You think we'd lose more characters in this fic's sandstorms. [Pause] Hope, sorry. You hope we'd lose more.

- > He would avenge his friends. He would save Uziel. As he slowly fainted due to strain,

Tsuneo: This seems to happen to him a lot

- > he gritted his teeth in desperado. He would not give up.

Dan: And then, he gave up.

- > But soon, he would find something that he never imagined possible. A place very
- > familiar to him... a place that he wished he'd never lost but that he'd never even lost in the first
- > place...

Rick: A place that was actually behind the sofa all this time.

- > a place that could very well be identified as home.

Dan: It could, but it wasn't.

- > -----

- > Zoids Battle Saga Chapter XXI

- > Salle

- > In a peaceful village five-hundred kilometers east of Protos,

Tsuneo: That's nice, but where's Protos?

Rick: Five hundred kilometres west of this village, obviously.

> was beautiful scenery, serenity, and lush grass.

Tsuneo: Won't last.

Rebecca: Oh, it is so doomed.

> This village was nestled under the shadows of the Gilges Mountains, which symbolized

> nature protecting this pinnacle of happiness.

Dan: Or maybe it was just geological processes and the narrator was reading too much into it

> Few times has the shadow of war cast its blackness over this place.

Rick: Mostly when someone was flying a giant base overhead.

> At this particular moment in time, villagers walked about on its brick floor,

Rebecca: The entire village was a backyard barbecue pit

> with large

> baskets balanced on the heads of women, children playing happily with each other, and men

> enjoying hearty laughs as they throng about.

Rebecca: The village had clearly defined gender roles. Nobody was allowed to do anything else.

> At one certain conclave, a group of men huddled together at a shop called Gerge's Joint,

Rick: It sold drain pipes and other plumbing supplies.

> and conversed about recent events.

Rebecca: You know; wars, wandering loonies, whole military installations tearing themselves out of the ground, that stuff.

> "Hey, heard about that weird guy that was found at the edge of town?

Dan: It was strange, because usually the hobos hang out under the railway bridge.

> Pretty unusual..." Said one.

> "Yeah, stuff like that hasn't happened in years..." Said the other.

Rebecca: Somebody came to the village is big news. I can tell that things get really dull around here.

> "He was found with a lone Guysack..."

Dan: The Guysack got ahead of things and had torn itself apart.

> the guy seemed pretty enraged..."

Rick: [Stark] Damn this village being nice and peaceful! How dare they?

> "Looked like he had been wandering for hours... Can a guy survive that long without food?"

Tsuneo: He'd been whole hours between meals. How could anyone live that long?

> "Apparently... he must have had a will of steel."

Dan: And a stomach of iron.

> The other turned to Gerge, who was scrubbing dishes with a stern face.

> "Hey Gerge! What do you think of all this?" Gerge closed his eyes.

Rick: [Gerge] Don't ask me, I don't even know who I am.

> "That Guysack," he said, solemnly, "it looks familiar."

Dan: Probably saw it clogging shelves around '05 or so.

> The two looked at Gerge wonderingly, and

> then to each other, catching glimpse of their shared surprise.

Rebecca: They're genuinely shocked that their chef doesn't know anything about random Zoids.

> This was odd for Gerge; he was usually silent,

Tsuneo: Obviously this is why they asked him.

> but never as disturbed as this.

Rick: Because we all know all about how Gerge is.

> He always went about his work unassumingly and

> prudently; and despite his brawny exterior, he was a very wise man.

Tsuneo: Informed characterisation is the best characterisation

Rebecca: I feel an 'as you know' coming on

> However, this recent discovery spooked him...

Tsuneo: Could it be that he's worried about a hostile foe following this stranger and dragging their idyllic village into the fires of war?

Rick: No, he's just not sure if they can seat another at the buffet.

> but not in a way that he was afraid, but in a way that made him happy

Dan: He was terrified, and felt good about it

> and reminded

> him of older times. The two customers soon departed from his presence, as he continued his dish-

> washing.

Tsuneo: [Gerge] The heck were they doing in the kitchen?

> In another part of town, a man was walking about jovially, enjoying the daylight.

Rick: But let's move on from him, and focus on anyone else.

> He had a fancy of talking to himself when he was in a good mood,

Rebecca: And people had a fancy of crossing the street to avoid him.

> and on this afternoon he was in an especially good

> one and was about to gorge on some food he had recently 'purchased'.

Dan: And of course, buy 'purchased' we mean 'robbed from the convenience store at gunpoint.'

> He had a long nose, and flowing, red hair;

Tsuneo: He is now the best described character in the fic. Make of this what you will.

> he wore checkered, patched pants and a torn jacket.

Dan: I can only assume at this point that he's an old timey cartoon hobo

> He sat down, praising, "ah,

> what a beautiful day!" He looked about himself. "And beautiful women! I couldn't be happier." He

> then plucked a doe knot out of his bag

Tsuneo: That's either a very strange typo or this guy has some very strange hobbies.

> and began his feast, with rejoicing noises blurring out as he gobbled them.

Rebecca: Great, we get to sit in on the world's messiest eater.

> Then, a large cloaked man with a bandana and sunglasses approached him and

> held out his hand.

Rick: Hello, I am incredibly conspicuous man

> "Royal! You have been stealing again! What do you have to say for yourself?"

> "Uhh... I was hungry, maybe?"

Rebecca: [Man] Seriously, I don't know. I've been malnourished for so long, my signals are all over the place.

> "Thief! Cretin! After him!" Then, two other men that looked just like him gamboled after the already

> fleeting Royal, who was nimble on his feet.

Tsuneo: Have we accidentally walked into another fanfic?

Dan: And not for the first time either.

> In another part of town,

Tsuneo: Well let's just abandon that abrupt scene for another entirely unrelated abrupt scene change.

> was a homey little house ornamented with flowers and cute little trinkets.

> Within it were tapestries and scarves embroidered with wild and artsy designs.

Rebecca: Hold on, I think a cozy mystery is about to break out. Check for large cats and packets of chamomile tea.

> Also, there lived a woman there;

Rick: Really? Because after that description I assumed it was home to a large guy called Bubba.

> quite content with life and always going about things cheerily.

Tsuneo: I'm about to choke to death on this quaint whimsy

> At this moment, she
> was tending to Stark, who was the 'wounded wanderer', who lay deathly asleep in her bed.

Rick: So at least the pillow she smothers him with will be pink and lacey.

> She
> went into the bathroom with towels clasped in her hands, wetted them with water, and applied them
> to Stark's wounds gently,

Dan: So how did Stark get injured again?

Tsuneo: At this point I feel that Stark could hurt himself while sitting down for breakfast

> while humming a sweet little song.

Dan: It's just a just a quaint little something by Rammstein.

> She looked worriedly at the fallen
> Stark, with a curdled brow. After finishing her appointed task, she wisped into the other room like a
> fairy.

Rebecca: Is it possible to overdose on 'quaint'?

> A green field; red, yellow, and blue flowers blossoming; and an ethereal woman fading away, from a
> desperate man's grasp:

Tsuneo: A low cloud of locusts, blotting out the sun.

> she uttered those eerie, familiar words again, into the man's ear,

Rick [Whispered]: You left the toilet seat up again

> as her
> remaining form faded away and turned into fluttering butterflies. The man ran through the green,
> grassy fields, after the butterflies,

Rebecca: Net in hand.

> yelling, "Salle!" He upped his pace, and yelled louder with a
> quivering voice, "Salle!" He fell over some reeds, and outstretched his hand, crying, "SALLE!"

Dan: Salle?

Rick: Salle.

Dan [Nods]: Salle.

> Just then, Stark woke up,

Rick: Just then a massive war broke out on the Vok homeworld.

> finding himself sitting up in bed, clutching his covers tightly. It was another dream.

Dan: [Stark] Yeah, screw this place, I'm going back to bed.

> Just then, the woman walked in, with a quaint little platter with tea on it in her hands.

Rebecca: Unknown to him, Stark had crashed into somebody's cottagecore pinterest page.

> She looked around confusedly, putting the platter down, and answered,

> "Yes?" Stark looked about himself.

Dan: [Stark] And a quick check under the covers... Oh, thank god.

> He raised his eyebrow, and said in a low tone,

> "What do you mean? Who are you? Where am I?..." The woman giggled shortly, putting her hand
> on her mouth, and continued,

> "Well you just yelled my name, silly. What else would I mean? Oh and you're back in Cid Village,

Dan: A village populated entirely by Final Fantasy characters.

> Stark." Stark's pupils retracted, gasping faintly. He pointed to the woman crookedly, and uttered in a
> distant tone,

Rick: [Stark] Unlcean!

> "You're... you're... Salle..." Salle looked at him with concerned yet calm face.

> "Well of course I am." She said surely,

Rebecca: Well you just managed to invalidate his entire generic tragic backstory. Well done.

> sitting on the bed beside him. He neared toward her,

Tsuneo: While she quietly shuffled away.

> and fell on her, sprawling his arms around her.

Rick: [Salle] Okay, enough of that. Yes, we're all very happy here... If you could just... A little...

> He held her firmly, as tears ran down his face.

> "I'm so glad you're alive!" He said sobbingly.

Dan: [Salle] Like, duh, why wouldn't I be?

> Salle moved her arms slowly up, and touched the top of Stark's head as he shook and trembled.

Rebecca: [Salle] Wow, you really need a better shampoo.

> Whilst this emotional transaction was transpiring,

Rick: Way to kill the mood with the narration

> there

> was a tumultuous bang on the front door. Salle looked to it bravely, and motioned Stark to let go of
> her.

Dan: I think she needs a crowbar to pry him off

> "I've got to see who that is." She said, as Stark released her.

Rick: [Stark] But I've just found you again!

Tsuneo: [Salle] I've got a life too, you know.

> She slowly moved away from him, with

> her eyes fixed on his, and strode over to the door. "I'll be right back," she said simply, as Stark sat in
> a daze.

Rebecca: He's wondering if his whole life was a dream and he just stepped out of the shower or something.

> She opened the door, revealing Royal standing meekly outside, with his arms filled with baggage.

Dan: Royal, have you been stealing from the airport baggage claim again?

> "Umm..." he started, humbly, "could you..." Salle rolled her eyes.

Tsuneo: And so she slowly, with much grace and deliberation, hit him over the head with a tea pot.

> "Yes?" Royal looked behind himself, as Salle peered out the door. Soon, the cloaked men, now
> brandishing spears, jogged over, looking gravely at Royal. "Eh... not this again!"

Tsuneo: Not reasonable authority enforcing local laws!

> "Sorry!"

Dan: [Royal] I keep confusing you for a safehouse.

> One of the guards restrained Royal with stiff hands, and the other pointed his spear at him.

Tsuneo: [Guard] You're under arrest for being irrelevant to the plot!

> "You're not getting away this time!" Said one.

> "Now come along quietly so you can do your time." Said the other, gnashing his teeth at him. Salle
> sighed, and held out some currency.

> "Must we go through this every time?" She groaned, "now here. This should pay the fee. Now leave
> us in peace."

Dan: [Guard] Actually, ma'am, this man is a repeat offender and as such is facing substantial jail time.
Furthermore, your offer could be construed as a bribe, and we could bring you in as an accessory.
Rebecca: [Salle] Oh. Well in that case, let him hang.

> One of the guards took the money out of her hand confusedly, as the other released Royal.

Rick: [Guard] I guess we gotta do what she says for absolutely no adequately explored reason.

> They then commenced ambling back the way they came, vaguely.

Tsuneo: Did this just turn into some indy CRPG?

Dan: Well, we are about to review-bomb it.

> Royal sighed deeply and closed his eyes.

> "Thanks, Salle." He said apologetically.

> "No problem, but you really have to get yourself out of these things."

Rebecca: You're only enabling him. He's not going to change until you stop doing it.

> Royal looked at his feet sadly,
> as Salle continued with renewed enthusiasm, "But anyway... Stark's awake now."

Dan: I mean, before he was quiet and unresponsive but now he's... Oh.

> The two moved in quietly, and shut the door behind them.

> "Really? How's our boy doing?" Said Royal, raising his eyebrow. Salle looked worriedly at the room
> where Stark was, biting her nail.

> "HHHH. I don't know. He seemed a little... out of it.

Rick: Babbling on about tiny robot dinosaurs and flying bases and teleporting devas... I mean, none of that makes sense, right?

> He was so happy to see me, that he hugged me really tightly... I mean that's okay, but..."

Rebecca: [Salle] He could be like, a hundred percent less gropey.

> "Yes?"

> "He seemed to think we were all dead... or at least me, anyway."

Tsuneo: It's almost like the fic undercut its own premise or something.

> "Weird." They stalled for a few moments, looking downcast.

Rick: They died, but they got over it.

> "Alright, well let's go see him..."

Tsuneo: In a tone that all but added "Do we have to?"

> "Yeah." They then entered into the room, noticing the subdued Stark, staring off into space.

Rebecca: Yep, that's Stark alright.

> "H-hey,

> Stark, old guy! How're we doing?" Stark veered slowly around, and Royal caught his glance; he
> then bolted from his spot while exuberating joyfully,

> "ROYAL!"

Rick: [Stark] Still committing petty theft and dragging the authorities to Salle's doorstep?

Dan: [Royal] You know it!

> "Oh no, he's not going to hug me t-" Before Royal could finish; he was overpowered by Stark's
> arms.

Dan: Stark then suplexed him and covered him for the pin.

> "Royal! Thank goodness, I thought you were all dead!"

Rebecca: [Stark] I mean, I only cared that Salle was dead...

> Royal slowly creaked his bony arm upward, and gave the tantalized Salle a thumbs up.

> "G-good going Salle! Looks like your guess was right on the money!" Said Royal, engulfed by
> Stark's bosom.

Rebecca: Stark's changed a bit since he left.

> "Y-yeah..." Said Salle, distantly. Stark let go of Royal, sniffing.

> "Salle? Aren't you happy to see me?" Said Stark, unsurely.

Rebecca: Salle had been planning to break up with him before all this happened. Now she needs to ease him in to how she's moved on with her life.

> "Well sure, it's been six years and all,

Rick: When they last met, she was a big Hillary Clinton supporter who watched Empire and was waiting for the Star Wars sequels.

> and I was worried about you, but..."

> "But what? Tell me!"

Rick: But not enough to actually look for you, that's all.

> "Isn't this a bit much?" Stark hesitated, and sharpened his glance.

> "No. After that big fire, I would think we'd all be worried about each other. Even think of each other
> as dead!" He said indefinitely.

Tsuneo: You didn't even bother to check if anyone was alive, did you?

Dan: He saw an origin story and he ran with it.

> "What are you talking about?" Queried Royal, unknowingly. Stark backed up, and shook his head.
> He revolved around, furling his hair maniacally.

Rebecca: [Stark] But it was so real. And you were there, and you...

> "It's all wrong... this is all wrong! Maybe Lexie was right..."

Rick: About what? All he ever does is cackle and run off.

> Cried Stark, wringing his hair thoroughly.

> Royal put his hand on Stark's shoulder, and said in a considerate tone,

Dan: [Royal] Boy, let's have none of this crazy talk about everyone dying.

> "It's all right, Stark. This village is still here, and we're all still alive." Stark shunned Royal, and
> rushed to the door.

Rebecca: Somehow, Stark doesn't believe a man when he says he's alive.

> He opened it promptly, finding people thronging about, and the buildings still standing.

Rick: It was remarkably un-burnt

> He shut the door, and leaned up against it with his back, letting out a sigh. He closed his
> eyes, saying,

Tsuneo: [Stark] Better check again, just to be sure.

> "I just don't think I can bring myself to believe this."

Dan: Roll to disbelieve the illusion

> Royal and Salle stared at him silently, and Salle snapped her finger and said victoriously,

> "Hey! Maybe he's talking about that Imperial drafting that happened here six years ago!"

Rebecca: They took all the able-bodied young men, so Stark was naturally left behind.

> They both looked at her doubtfully. Stark turned his head away, and asked,

> "Would you care to enlighten me on that?"

Dan: [Salle] Just let me make sure the chairs are bolted down first.

> "Well, some Imperial troops came and forcefully took some people from their homes to be soldiers
> for the Empire, including Zach...

Rick: Not Zach!

[Pause]

Rick: Who's Zach anyway?

> they didn't exactly burn down the village or anything, but..."

Tsuneo: In fact, they were remarkably polite about it all.

> Stark looked at her positively, and Royal elaborated,

Dan: [Salle] Go on, we agreed you'd take the blame for this.

> "Yeah, that was the day you left. You said there was a man among them you had to settle a score
> with."

Rick: Zach borrowed his eraser, and he was going to chase the imperials to get it back.

> Stark stared at him wonderingly, with fire in his eyes.

> "What was this man's name?" Salle walked up to him, in transit to the other room.

Tsuneo: She had to check the bus timetables, to make sure she didn't miss her transfer to the other room.

> "You never told us," she said, entering the other room, "you were always mysterious like that."

Dan: At this point, I think the term 'delusional' would be more appropriate

> "I see..." Stark said, closing his eyes again. Salle walked back into the room, with a basket in toe.
> She put the towels in the basket, as Stark said quietly with gloomy eyes,

Rebecca: [Salle] Now scoot over, I've got laundry to do.

> "How many others are here? Other than Zach, I mean." Royal held his hand, starting to count.

> "Well let's see... there's me, Salle, Gerge and Velvette;

Rick: They're all the people in the village

> that is, if you can remember us. It sounds like you have some repressed memory there, chief."

Tsuneo: Casually mentioning his major dissociative state.

> He said. Salle started walking back to the other room, with the neatly folded towels in the basket.

> "Where's Uziel?" She said,

Rebecca: No longer relevant to the plot, it seems.

> as she hustled. Stark made an ever gloomier face, saying,

> "I don't know... that... man... took him from me. I think he was the same man that I chased after
> before... by now though, I can't be sure of anything. I thought he killed you all..."

Dan: Maybe Lexe just had a barrel fire going to keep the draftees warm and Stark blew it all out of proportion.

> "Luckily not." Exclaimed Royal,

Tsuneo: He just learned that he died in somebody's generic tragic flashback, and he's not sure how he feels about it

> leaning against the wall. Stark nodded his head, as Salle started making the bed saying,

> "Yes, the Empire has taken a lot from us all. We all hate it for different reasons,

Rebecca: Salle hates it because of their overly-restrictive street parking laws.

> but you seemed the most offended... at least at that one particular soldier.

Dan: Maybe he just has a very punchable face.

Tsuneo: It'd help if we knew what he looked like

Dan: Hey, we got one description of a character in the final chapter. Anything else is asking a bit much

> It was enough for you to chase after them."

Rebecca: [Salle] Especially since it meant you left the house.

> "Mm." Confirmed Stark, turning around, "I think I'm going to go see how things are in the village;
> although it's probably only going to make me even more confused..."

Tsuneo: Yes, seems like a good idea for the volatile man to go undermine his own hold on reality.

> "Okay." Said Salle, acceptingly.

> "Go ahead!" Invited Royal. Stark then shut the door, leaving abruptly.

Dan: [Royal] Oh, and if you see any cops, tell them I'm not home.

> Royal stalled for a few

> moments, and a bleak silence covered the room, as Salle bustled about, fixing the bed. Royal
> raised his hand, and said in a jesting tone, "Zach mattered?"

Rebecca: [Salle] He had such a crush on that boy.

> Salle just looked at him crossly, shaking her head, as Royal snickered slyly.

Tsuneo: He's going to make light of his friend's trauma. What a guy.

> Stark wondered to and fro in the village, amidst the villagers.

Tsuneo: His incredulous stares matched by their own.

> He looked about himself, with a distant

> expression. How long has it been? Only six years? It feels longer than that...

Rick: Since we started this fic.

> I thought I had lived

> here most of my life, and then took off on my journey when Salle told me to save all the

> Organoids...

Rebecca: Salle had actually told him to save her organic produce. He just misheard.

> He thought, with a cloudy mind. Suddenly, before he could think anymore, a heavy-set

> lady with a basket of scrumptious looking cookies accosted him.

Dan: It sounds like she's about to mug him

> "Some cookies?" She offered, as she squinted her eyes.

Dan: Quick, say yes. Last guy who refused ended up bleeding out in an alley.

> "Sure." Answered Stark, taking one.

> "Hey, don't I know you from some where?"

Rick: Mugshot? Crimestoppers? Wanted poster, maybe?

> She said, curiously. Stark started moving on, and with his back turned to her, he said,

> "Maybe..." as he ate the cookies in nibbles. Soon, he arrived at Gerge's stand.

Rick: Is that separate from Gerge's joint?

> He peered around, with memories spurred inside his mind.

Tsuneo: Being violently ill in the back room... Ah, such memories.

> "Hey, don't I know this place?" He said, looking about.

Dan: Stark has begun to realise that his hometown is indeed his hometown.

> Before he could get a chance to do anything, Gerge sprang up and punched him, aiming straight at

> his face.

Tsuneo: Good to see you too

> "SEYAAAA!" He said, furiously. Stark eluded him though, by blocking his strike with his hand.

> "What was the point of that?" Questioned Stark, tilting his head.

Dan: [Gerge] I mean, for starters it's you.

Rick: [Stark] It's a fair cop.

> Gerge drew back, slumped down, and began laughing merrily. "Hm?"

> "I knew it! It was you! No one could block my attacks as well as you can!"

Rick: Stark can hold down the block button like nobody else

> Laughed Gerge, shaking his belly.

Dan: In my mind, Gerge is now an old-timey strongman

Tsuneo: Why not? It makes as much sense as anything else in this fic.

> He rose, and smiled at Stark. "I'm glad to see you again, Stark."

> "I guess you always had a strange way of showing your affection, Gerge." Said Stark, startled.

Rick: Gerge poisons his customers because he loves them.

> "It's alright," said Gerge, going back into his stand, "I'll give you a loaf of bread in exchange for my
> antics."

Dan: [Gerge] And not because I need to get rid of it before the FDA shows up.

> Stark raised an eyebrow, as Gerge returned and gave him a wholesome loaf of bread.

> "Man, people keep giving me things." Said Stark, taking the bread.

Rebecca: These are all quest items. He'll need them later.

> "Well welcome to Cid Village!"

Rick: There will be a creepy robot who will try to hit on you along in a moment.

> Said Gerge, smiling, "It's good to have you back!"

Tsuneo: I need to keep a picture of the Lying Cat on hand for just such occasions.

> Stark looked oddly at Gerge, and made his way down the street. "And you might want to check

> Velvette's house! She's cookin' up something special for your Zoid!" Yelled Gerge to Stark, walking
> away.

Dan: To celebrate their return. Velvette is making the Guysack an elaborate serving of lobster thermidor with a homemade tiramisu to follow. Stark gets a bucket of scraps.

> "Velvette..." Said Stark quietly, ponderously.

Tsuneo: [Stark] Man, now I gotta go introduce even more characters.

> He finished his cookie, and ventured forth on to Velvette's house.

Dan: [Gerge] Well I sure contributed.

> Velvette's house: it was a quaint little article at the northeast end of town; it was fenced in by a hard-
> wooded fence and the entire perimeter thereof was overgrown with grass and roses.

Tsuneo: Velvette had been dead for years, and the house was left abandoned.

> The inside of

- > the fence was a romantic environment, as it was decorated with more roses and had pair trees
- > spreading their leaves all around, and there were pools of water that trickled with an enchanting
- > noise.

Dan: Most of her household budget goes into landscaping.

- > There was a dark side to this place, however:

Rick: A huge guy in a black mask carrying a red lightsaber

- > all around there were gargoyles guarding the
- > place, pouring water into the pools, overseeing from the verandah,

Tsuneo: Remember, this is a small, quaint house.

- > and large ones standing in frozen poses on the lawn.

Rebecca: The look it seems to be going for is 'tumbledown country cottage crashing into gothic cathedral'.

- > Stark stumbled clumsily around the lawn, tripping over all of the decorations.

Tsuneo: The idea of using the path had eluded him

- > "Man, Velvette seems pretty weird... was she always like this?" He said to himself,
- > scratching his head. He arrived at the front door.

Rebecca: After the long, arduous trek up the garden path.

- > The house itself was rather big, but built with the
- > same rudimental wood that was used for the fence.

Dan: The wood was fresh-hewn from the tree and still had bark and bits attached.

- > He approached the front door hesitantly, and
- > raised his arm to knock on it, but before he could, the door flung open,

Tsuneo: And, ow in the face.

- > and he was confronted by a feisty woman, who inspected him frantically from head to toe.

Rick: Looking for concealed guns.

- > She wore glasses, a long blue dress, and a black vest.

Rebecca: With fingerless gloves and hobnail boots.

- > She had black, long hair, and was a tad wrinkled. She looked around
- > questioningly, and then rushed into the room, beckoning Stark to follow.

Rick: [Velvette] Quick, before the cops see you.

Dan: [Stark] Why would I need to –

Rick: [Velvette] Too late! Pretend you're a gargoyle!

- > "Come! Follow me. I've got something to show you." She said, disappearing into the house.

Rebecca: Stark's got this sudden 'cabin in the woods' feeling.

> Stark stood there wordlessly for a few moments,

Dan: He's wondering if it's too late to go back to wandering aimlessly in the desert.

> and then followed her with a sterner face. He went into

> the house, and looking about himself, he saw many unfinished projects, such as robots, computers,

> motors, and things like that sprawled on the cheaply constructed furnishings.

Rebecca: Aaah, she's a hoarder

> He followed her deeper into her lair,

Dan: Stopping to search for secret doors or traps

> where they finally came to a large room with a high ceiling, and a large door

> that opened out into the town.

Tsuneo: She would have taken her around the outside, except that she hasn't stepped out her front door in years.

> "This your garage?" Jested Stark, rumpling his brow at Velvette.

Rick: [Velvette] No, it's my granny flat.

> Velvette paid no heed, and

> switched on the lights, which illuminated the entire premises such that a huge blanketed object

> could be made out.

Dan: She's been restoring her dad's old Challenger, and she can't wait to show him.

> She hurried around the outsides of the object, and yanked on the blanket, till it

> soon slipped off fluffed upon the ground. Stark's Guysack stood supreme!

Rick: This is a very big garage.

> It brandished new

> weapons, such as missiles attached to its sides, a large cannon on its back, some thrusters

> installed on its side,

Dan: Mortars on the roof and a block dropper under the boot.

> and an improved laser gun on its tail.

Rebecca: She's a very quaint and romantic arms dealer

> "Behold!" Said Velvette, "your new and improved Guysack!" Stark raised his eyebrow,

Rebecca: [Velvette] And now, the bill.

> and walked around the Zoid, feeling its finely polished legs.

Tsuneo: Given how many times it's been blown up so far in the fic, this does seem to be a bit pointless

> "I see..." Said Stark, bedazzled, "so this is how you get the kinda cash to buy all that stuff on your
> lawn."

Rick: She's also got a Geruder up on bricks out the front, waiting for parts.

> Velvette looked at Stark wildly, and looked away, shaking her head.

> "No," she said, walking over to a tool table, "with this money I buy my books.

Rick: She steals her decor from abandoned buildings. She's also sitting on a mountain of copper wire.

> Don't you remember?" Stark looked downcast.

> "I..." he started, "I guess it's been... a long time." Velvette smiled.

> "I suppose I lose track of time, too." She said.

> "Yeah..." Said Stark, passively,

Rebecca: I mean, it already feels like this conversation's been going on for hours.

> "hey! Did you do all of that while I was out? I'm impressed." Velvette

> looked at him with a conniving grin, as light shined brilliantly on her glasses.

Tsuneo: [Velvette] I mean, don't be too impressed, I had almost a year... Wait, nobody told you yet?

> "Heh, heh, heh..." She laughed.

> "What's so funny?"

Rick: Mostly how she's going to extract payment from him.

> "Did I?! I did it in one day! Be more impressed! Ha, ha, ha!" Stark stared at her in disbelief.

Dan: While quietly looking for the exit.

Rebecca: Good move.

> "Whoa..." Said Stark, awe-stricken. They were silent for several minutes,

Rick [Stark]: So, uh...

Rebecca [Velvette]: Yeah

[Pause]

Rick [Stark]: I like Zabanya

Rebecca [Velvette]: Oh god damn it, not you too!

> as Velvette toiled away

> and Stark looked at his Zoid with intent. He looked at Velvette thoughtfully, and asked, "so... how

> many books do you own?"

> "Five-thousand two-hundred and eighty three. I counted." Said Velvette proudly.

Dan: [Velvette] I have a whole separate warehouse for my collection. [Pause] I think I need help.

> "Wow. That many?" Said Stark, stupefied. Velvette put down her tools and closed her eyes.

> "Yes, well... those are all the books I've bought for the year... When I'm finished, I turn them into the

> library and start on the next batch."

Rebecca: So she's a data hoarder as well. Leave no Wordperfect document or TIF image behind.

> Replied she. Stark was dumbfounded,

Tsuneo: That's an entirely fair reaction to this obvious madwoman.

> so he stared at her bleakly for a few moments.

> "Batch'?" He asked interrogatively.

Dan: You know. Junk. Area.

> Velvette looked at him decisively.

> "Yes. Batch. Probably around the same number as the last year." She said exasperatedly.

Rebecca: I have to wonder what the hell it is she actually does with them, because she's sure as hell not reading them

> "Whoa, sorry for asking!" Said Stark, holding up his hands in innocence,

Tsuneo: Probably sorry that he got involved at all by now.

> "hey... um... should I have

> known that already?" Velvette was already at the other side of the room, tending to some parts,

> humming.

Rick: She's bored of him already, and frankly who can blame her?

> "Oh..." There was another long, bleak silence about the place,

Dan: I'd say the fic ran out of things to say, but that probably happened long ago.

until Stark spoke up, "so...

> do you have to go outta town for all of those books? I mean, where do you get them in a small town

> like this?"

Rebecca: At this point I can only assume that the town has a quaint bookstore run by a quirky character and their pet, as it seems to be what we're going for here

> Velvette looked up, with a bewildered face.

> "What books? Where?" She asked demanding.

> "Oh... Never mind." Velvette resumed her work with a grunt. Stark then walked towards his Zoid,

> deeming it time to leave.

Dan: Oh, we passed that point long ago.

> "Whelp, I'll be going now, it seems."

Rebecca: He's figuring that his previous life of aimlessly wandering through the desert is looking like an upgrade right now.

> He said, leaping into the cockpit. "Good bye, (if you're paying

> any attention)..." Said Stark, operating the controls.

Dan: Only to find they've been replaced with a Wii controller.

> Velvette noticed that he was leaving and quickly rushed towards him as he started moving.

> "Wait!" She said, huffing. She cried out once more, and Stark opened the cockpit.

Tsuneo: Against all advisement.

> He looked out in
> wonderment, and she added, putting up her finger, "I've got another surprise for you!" Stark raised
> an eyebrow, as she continued, "come!"

Dan: Don't do it, Stark! It's a trap.

Rebecca: At this point she's either luring him into a dungeon or going to show him photos of her pet rats. Not sure which would be worse.

> She motioned him to follow again, and he came out of his
> Zoid, ambling after her. They arrived back into the house, streaming up the staircases, amidst the
> broken and half-finished machinery lying about.

Tsuneo: She never saw a discarded appliance she didn't immediately take

> They got to her room, which was accordingly
> stuffed with books. Stark peered at them, noticing all sorts of genres, the likes of which were sci-fi,
> horror, romance, and even technician and engineering books.

Dan: I'm curious to know why we're suddenly getting all these details on this random woman's life.

Rebecca: Oh, that's because the fic's turned into a small town romance where these two unlikely strangers are brought together by wild circumstance and teach each other to open up to the world once more.

Dan: Huh. Must have missed the memo.

> Velvette rustled through some
> baggage, and eventually stumbled upon a long, black trench coat, with a dragon emblem branded
> on its back.

Tsuneo: My, how ferociously generic.

> "There!" She said, victoriously. She handed it to Stark. "Here. I made it myself."

Rick: And by that she means she got it from an Etsy store.

> She quickly let it go, and it was quickly snatched up by Stark.

Dan: So she either dumped it on the floor or threw it at him.

> She then came to a dresser, and she
> picked up a pair of orange, ovular sunglasses from its surface. "Here!" She said,

Tsuneo: [Velvette] I'm sure I cleaned them this decade.

> handing them to Stark. He looked at them curiously.

> "Okay..." He said, "but why...?"

> "They'll make you look cool!"

Tsuneo: I wouldn't say so much 'cool' as more 'like a complete and total tit'

> "Alright... then..." He slipped on the jacket, and put on the sunglasses. He peered in the mirror on
> the door of her room, and was impressed. "Ha... I guess they do look cool. Thanks."

Rebecca: Wow, Stark, you look like every teenage boy trying to be edgy.

> "You're welcome." Stark looked nervous.

Dan: [Stark] So any reason you're giving me all this stuff when I'm just about to head out?

Rick: [Velvette] Ha ha ha, it's not like you're ever going to leave here.

Dan: [Stark] Ha ha, you're right... Wait, what?

> "Well, I think I ought to-" He started, as Velvette interrupted,

> "Go? I'll follow you out the door."

Rebecca [Velvette]: We will be friends for ever

Dan [Stark]: Get away from me!

> They arrived back in the garage, wherein Stark entered his Zoid and started off. "You know..."

> Started Velvette, "I do go out of town for my books. Sometimes even into the city."

Dan: Sometimes she finds them from the road, or takes them from dead bodies

Tsuneo: Neither would surprise me

> "Oh," said Stark, turning around in the cockpit, "should I have already known that?"

> "No. I started getting into books more when you left," said Velvette,

Rebecca: Before that, she was all about clay tablets

> "was your time here really not that important?"

Dan: Stark has deliberately tried to forget his former life, and now we know exactly why.

> "Well that's not it... it's just..." said Stark tensely, "I can't remember anything... Something

> must've... happened..."

Tsuneo: You're an anime protagonist. Amnesia is a common generic trait.

> "I see." Stark turned around, fastened his seat belts, and put on his sunglasses.

Dan: And in doing so, drove his Guysack right into a telegraph pole.

> "Oh, and Velvette," he said, catching her attention, "thanks for... well, you know, everything."

Tsuneo: So is he just going to leave now without telling Salle and Royal?

Rebecca: With all possible speed.

> "You're welcome." Said Velvette, smiling oddly, as Stark closed the hatch. She called out, "good

> luck, Stark!" as he commenced his way out.

Dan: [Velvette] Don't get trashed in the first fight you have! Again!

> She scrambled to a lever, which opened the 'garage

> door', and Stark slowly made his way out. Soon, he was out in the clear, crisp daylight, surrounded

> by the beautiful day.

Rick: Say, what happened to Kenji anyway?

"And so in its dying moments, Zoids Battle Saga manages to undermine its own basic premise," Tsuneo concluded as the big screen turned off, reverting the world back to prose format. "Which, in its own way, is a very apt summary of the fic."

"It's a lot like that," Rebecca nodded. "Stark's entire motivation for everything is that Lexe destroyed his beloved peasant village and killed his prop girlfriend. Only it's not destroyed and she's still alive, so, um, now what?"

"It does take away from it a bit," Rick agreed. "Especially given that the other part of his motivation, the magical exposition fairy, had been completely forgotten about by the fic."

"Yeah, about that," Dan nodded. "When you think about it, what did the Magical Exposition Fairy actually add to all that? She basically told him to do the thing he was already doing."

"She did give him a McGuffin," Tsuneo noted. "Of course, since that was never even mentioned again, it's just as pointless."

"What gets me more than all that is that the fic had no reason for this twist," Rebecca noted. "What did having him hang out in Whimsy Village actually accomplish beyond undercutting his motivation?"

"He got an upgrade to his Zoid," Dan offered.

"But he already had the McGuffin Liger," Rebecca shot back.

"Which the fic seemed to have completely forgotten about anyway," Tsuneo finished. "Which really just brings us around in one huge circle of pointlessness."

"It doesn't help that the whole village just seemed so out of whack with everything else," Rick continued. "When you look at it, the whole thing felt like it was trying to be full of whimsy and colourful characters and the like when otherwise the story had been focused on war, betrayal and the like."

"Especially given that we'd just come off Thaemos going full slasher film killer on us," Rebecca noted. "I see what you mean there."

"Suddenly the fic felt like it was in an old 16-bit console RPG," Tsuneo nodded. "Which is a really weird direction to take it all in."

"On top of that, it's not like Stark had even gotten anywhere in his mission," Rebecca considered. "He'd rescued a sum total of zero Organoids so far, and had even managed to lose the one he started with. And between them Vald and Ferrel had done more to stop the threat of the Empire in rescuing Stark than Stark had done on his own."

"So he'd managed to achieve nothing before the fic threw this nonsense twist in," Dan concluded.

"Exactly," she nodded. "Really, Stark hadn't managed to do a thing so far. Now I know we've had unlikeable protagonists, and we've had those that are utterly lacking in any decent traits in and of themselves. But Stark might be the first case where we've had a protagonist who doesn't actually do a thing."

"He brooded and talked to his Organoid, and that's it," Tsuneo noted.

"And while that is an excellent summary of your average Zoids role-play character of the early 2000s, it hardly makes for a compelling narrative," she concluded.

"Do you think this could be based on something like that?" Rick asked. "Much like how the Saga of Yurei and Lance grew out of some crappy RP on now forgotten forums?"

"I doubt it," Rebecca admitted. "While there's the root part of the character there, none of the other elements fit with it. If this was based on role-play then likely at least some of the other characters would be better developed, for starters. And there would be a more straight-line narrative."

"Which means you've probably put more thought into the matter than the author did into writing the fic," Tsuneo added.

"Sadly, this is also true," she sighed. "Why do we reach that conclusion that often?"

"Because it's the only logical way to explain the huge holes we find in these fics," Tsuneo offered.

"Speaking of which, why do you think the fic had Lexe go all Dragonball Z in that fight with Ferrel?" Dan asked. "He was pulling new powers out of his butt all the way through it. I mean, yeah, Ferrel was too, but Lexe still won by simply having more arse-pulls."

"Two thoughts come to mind," Rick offered. "The first is a desire to show off what being a Deva is actually about, given that it's something that really hadn't been demonstrated so far in the fic. Yeah, they'd talked up the point a lot, but what had any of the Devas actually done before that? But now here's Lexe being a killing machine, and boom, suddenly Deva is a real threat."

"Interesting idea," Tsuneo admitted. "And your second thought on the matter?"

"The writer couldn't think of a good way to have Lexe actually win the fight otherwise."

"Should have figured," Tsuneo sighed.

"Well I can tell you're all really excited to review the fic," the Voice cut in to the conversation.

"If it'll get this over and done with so we can be out of here and never speak of it again, I'm all for it," Dan nodded.

"Fantastic," the Voice replied without the slightest hint of acknowledgement. "In that case, I'd love to hear what you have to say."

"As seems to happen a lot, I'm going to start with the story," Rebecca began. "And as I often end up saying in these things, there is none. Now don't get me wrong here. It had an initial premise; there's a guy called Stork-

"Stank," Dan corrected.

"Struck," Rick added.

"Stark," Tsuneo finished with a sigh.

"Stark who has to save organoids and save the world or something," she continued without missing a beat. "And on top of that we even get the chapter with the magical exposition fairy throwing a McGuffin at him. That's about as obvious a setup as you can get for this sort of story. And let's not forget that this also was all laid out in the initial infodump right at the start of the fic."

"But then once the fic starts you realise that there is no actual story," she explained. "Rather than following through on this rather obvious narrative, the fic instead keeps jumping back and forward across all these different arcs that have only the most minimal of connection to each other and do nothing to create a cohesive narrative in and of themselves. If anything, a lot of them take away from what is presumably the central narrative by wasting time on subplots that don't matter about character who we have no reason to care about."

"The big takeaway for me in all this was that the central narrative would have likely been stronger if the fic had simply focused on it and it alone. Here's this guy Stark, now show him saving Organoids

and fighting the bad guys. Simple. Instead it basically threw all that away and, in doing such, killed its own story.”

Tsuneo frowned to himself as he began. “The thing that got me is that, for all these different arcs and storylines running through the fic, it really doesn’t have any solid characters. I mean, there are dozens of names spread throughout, but there’s very little to hang off any of them. I found myself frequently getting confused as to who anyone was simply because I couldn’t remember anything about them.”

“Stank’s crew are the closest to being defined, and even then it’s by the barest of measures. Burge has a silly accent, Vald is a creep and Reni’s character is less about her as it is about everyone talking down to her. But once you verge away from that group, there’s very little else to say. People like Harris and Zephyr feel like they should be important, but they get no development and no chance to do anything but react. I felt that Marcus’ soldiers were probably the worst as names dropped in and out with no definition. When they all got wiped out save for Zozos, my first thought was less that Zozos survived as it was to wonder who he was in the first place.”

“A special note has to be said for the antagonists of the fic. There was a whole pile of different Imperial commanders and Devas spread throughout this piece, but I had a really hard time telling who was who, who was doing what, and even who was in any given position. This is simply because they all acted the same. Self-indulgent cackling maniacs who revel in how evil they are with no individuality or definition. Sadly, I had to include Tundra and Thaemos in that list, as even though they were supposedly on the hero’s side they still acted identically to the Imperials. It’s hard to understand what’s going on when half the characters act the same and the other half have no definition – and even harder to care.”

“I’m going to follow through with my own thoughts on the matter,” Rick continued. “I have to ask myself this; who is the hero of the fic, and who is the villain? I know that the narration says it’s Stark, but when you look at it, you have to ask yourself what did he actually do? Mostly he just dunked on Reni, whined about things and got beat up by Lexe. Hell, you could say that Vald or Ferrel were more heroic in their efforts, and neither of them were ever even remotely likeable as people. If anything, you could say that Harris was the most actually heroic character for saving everyone’s arses after escaping his wrongful imprisonment, but that’s still a low bar to clear.”

“However, for all that, there’s an even bigger issue at play here. Who is the villain of the piece?” Rick asked. “You’d think it’s Lexe, given that he’s the first guy that Stark fights and that the pair are set up to be enemies. But then Lexe basically drops out of the fic for extended periods and never really does anything that isn’t directly connected to Stark. He’s only the villain because the fic says so.”

“And this is a problem shared by a lot of the other supposed villains of the piece. Okay, so Tundra’s obviously evil and engaged in some sort of power grab but no, just dies in the middle of the fic. Thaemos comes out of nowhere and has little motivation beyond being stupid evil for the sake of it. Automoose basically vanishes for most of the fic, and when he returns it’s sort of a ‘oh, he’s that guy’ thing. And then there’s a raft of other minor bad guys who are mostly only there for a chapter or two and never amount to anything.”

Dan nodded his agreement. “Well what I’ve got to say is not going to be much of a surprise, in that this whole mess could have easily been half, or even a third as long as it was. It’s not just that half of the subplots don’t interact with each other, it’s that half of them barely go anywhere or serve any purpose. Marcus off in the desert was, I think, one of the worst offenders because it spends so much time wandering from one point to another without accomplishing anything. They blow their raid by destroying the generator, then they’re repelled on their next assault, then they all just die. You have to wonder why we were following them in the first place.”

“I’ve got to make particular note of Kenji and Ferrel while I’m at it. Kenji stands out because he has literally nothing to do with anything else in the fic. He’s an entirely isolated storyline that has no crossover characters, is never referenced anywhere, and is set well before the rest of the fic to boot. Plus it ends with everyone dying to make sure there can’t be any lingering impact. Ferrel at least interacts with the rest of the story, but the problem is that most everything he’s involved with only

comes back to him. Not only the two maniacs he was hunting, but the two Devas they killed had no influence on the story outside of Kenji's pursuit. Even his supposedly heroic sacrifice did nothing – it left the lead group in the exact same situation they would have been without him. Really, his own contribution was to kill Tundra – and all that served to do was make Tundra's build-up pointless as well."

"So yeah..." Dan ground his teeth for a moment as he thought. "Everyone dies without contributing actually describes how half the fic's plotlines go. Really, you could yank them with no impact at all."

"So there you have it, Voice," Rebecca finished. "The fic was an utter mess in every way. And since it had a 'go to hell' fic moment relatively early on, it squandered any chance at inadvertent enjoyment too. All in all, it feels more like we wasted time on it than anything else."

"Seventy-one thousand words that we'll never get back," Tsuneo nodded in agreement.

"And thank you all very much for that," the Voice finished. "As always, your feedback is greatly appreciated and will be very helpful for selecting future reviews."

"As long as it means no more doorstopper Zoids fics, I can deal with that," Dan offered.

"Could you take either?" Rick asked. "Like a doorstopper fic that wasn't Zoids, or a Zoids fic that wasn't a doorstopper?"

"Shadow of a Phoenix and Firecat exist," Dan replied. "So no."

"Fair," Rick nodded.

"And I will see you all next time for another new review," the Voice finished. "Until then, farewell and take care."

There was an awkward pause. "So how do we encapsulate something like Zoids Battle Saga?" Tsuneo finally asked. "I mean, yes, we had our reviews, but they still don't capture the... well any of it, really."

"The phrase 'sheer screaming madness' comes to mind," Rebecca helpfully added.

"Well fortunately you don't have to," Rick offered. "Because I've taken care of that myself."

"How so?" Dan asked.

"Well by that, he means he hired us," Natasha Isavia interjected. She and her band had somehow managed to set up an improvised stage behind the couches during the fic, and were presently tuning up their instruments.

"It's good to see you," Rebecca admitted. "And I'm not just saying that because we're not reading Storm Force, as pleasant a development as that is."

"I'll take not reading Storm Force any day," Natasha agreed. "But naw, it's cool. Rick told me you all were having a little fic problem and I thought we'd drop by and try to lighten the day up a bit."

"And besides which, you are all sending off a big fic," Lynne added. "Which sounds like a good excuse for a big number."

"I heard this was all about Zoids and so brushed up on my golf clubs," Trabe admitted. "Boy was I wrong."

"You always are," Lynne needled.

"This is also true."

"So anyway, Rick threw me a summary of the fic," Natasha continued, "so that we'd have something to work from."

"How did you manage that?" Tsuneo asked. "I'd have thought this fic was just too much of a mess to encapsulate."

"I just blurted out whatever came to my mind," Rick shrugged. "Which when you think about it is probably how the fic was written in the first place."

"And then I picked up on all that and crudely mashed together some lyrics," Natasha noted. "Lynne helped with that part too."

"I don't know much about plastic robot dinosaurs," Lynne shrugged. "But I do know terrible music."

"I just ate some snacks and fell asleep on the couch again," Trabe commented. "Helps the process a lot."

"So without further ado, I am Natasha Isava. This is Lynne Street James—"

"Wandering desert lunatic is a lifestyle choice," Lynne commented.

"—and this is Trabe Stillewater—"

"I have an unreleased North American variant," Trabe added.

"—and we are Remaindered in Australia with Walk the Organoid"

Walk the Organoid

(With apologies to 'Walk the Dinosaur' by Was (Not Was))

There was a guy called Stark sulking in his room
Trying to avoid saving the world from doom
Bruge was being folksy, Vald digging holes
Remi being ignored, Tundra arranging Zoids
And walked the Organoid, I walked the Organoid

Stark and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody walk the Organoid
Stark and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody walk the Organoid
Stark and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody walk the Organoid
Stark and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody walk the Organoid

I met you in a cave, you were expositing
I said I'd do whatever, clearly not caring
You gave me a Liger, said that I would need it some day
But I never used it and forgot about it anyway
And walked the Organoid, I walked the Organoid

Stark and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody walk the Organoid
Stark and Vald, get in your Zoid

Everybody walk the Organoid
Stork and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody walk the Organoid
Stoke and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody walk the Organoid

Oh and there was this bit with this kid
Prune juice guzzling was what he said
And there was something his dad did
Got chased by the goons
Who hit a button and the town blew up
But why should I give a crap?

Ferrel showed up to steal soup and kill guys
Then he died and all I can say us 'why'?
Lexe got to do stuff and talked to Automoose
A bunch of dropped plots and the readers were annoyed
I stole the Organoid, I stole the Organoid

Stark and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody steal the Organoid
Steak and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody steal the Organoid
Stink and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody steal the Organoid
Stronk and Vald, get in your Zoid
Everybody steal the Organoid

Author's notes:

Probably the strangest thing about Zoids Battle Saga (And yes, that's saying a lot) is the way it was presented. The fic was posted on Fanfiction.net as a single extended chapter that went on forever before suddenly stopping. From that, I can only deduce that it was a repost from somewhere else, but what that original source was has long since been lost to the mists of time. Likewise, while the fic was dated to 2017, it feels like it was a lot older, probably written during the peak of the Zoids fandom in the early 2000s.

What does this mean? I really have no idea. But it's kind of interesting when you think about it. Maybe there's another version of the fic out there with its original context preserved that will add some sense to it all. Of course, the odds are that if there is, it was on some now long-defunct small archive or personal website that has long since succumbed to the dual threats of entropy and Web 2.0.

And no, I still have no idea what was up with Kenji.

Next time, we start with a good premise then immediately abandon it

Zoids is copyright Tomy-Takara

Zoids Battle Saga written by Zero Input

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

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Lists of plastic dinosaurs? Email us at elmerstudios00 (at) gmail.com and register your Jeff.

The Elmer Studios Blog
<http://elmerstudios.blogspot.com.au>
Elmer Studios MSTings, commentary, random thoughts and other stuff

Elmer Studios!
<http://www.heavens-feel.com/elmer/>
All of Elmer Studios' Classic MSTings, random DELTA Invasion Episode Generator and other stuff in one spot

> "THE PERFECT SOLUTION!" He boasted, turning to them, "THIS THING CAN FLY! HA, HA, HA,
> HA!"