
Episode 484 – Abandoned plots aplenty

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

Dan, Rick and Tsuneo were dressed in sombre-looking suits, while Rebecca was wearing a simple black dress. The four of them were standing around the coffee table, upon which was a box of staples accompanied by a wreath.

"Thank you for being here, everyone," Rick began. "We've gathered here today to remember the life of Gary-"

"-Glen," Tsuneo interjected.

"Glen LaBelle," Rick continued without missing a beat. "Who was tragically taken from us in a sudden timeskip. Glen LaBelle was a guy who piloted a hovertank. He spent his time in a base in Morocco that that lamp posts and Quonset huts and spent his time performing basic office tasks and avoiding his young wife."

He paused a moment before he continued. "Glen touched each of our lives in his own way, as well as the lives of those around him. As such, I've invited each of you, those that I know were closest to him, to speak here at his memorial."

"I'd like to begin with some words of my own," Rick said. "I'll never forget the first time that I met Glen LaBelle. He was newly transferred in and bought in to Gibraltar Base, but he knew what it was all about. Glen didn't have any questions about asteroid mining or outdated anime references, no. He immediately went to work and made himself the best office assistant that this space robot army has ever seen. Under his watch, there was no paperclip left uncounched, no form left unfilled and no television set that did not have his model immediately identified. He knew his job, and he was determined to do it, no matter what. While the rest of his unit were off at karaoke night, cooking jerk chicken or having incredibly awkward dates, Glen was there, making sure that every piece of stationary was properly accounted for. Glen LaBelle was the hero that this modern space robot army needed."

Dan nodded solemnly and took up the reading. "Glen was a guy who... was there. He did stuff around the base and, uh, he talked to people, I think." He paused awkwardly, casting around for something else to say. "You could always rely on Glen to be there and do that thing that Glen did when he was there... Whatever that was. Mostly, what I'll remember about him was that uh, his name was Glen."

"That was touching," Tsuneo replied.

"It's so vivid. How you brought him to life," Rick added, nodding solemnly.

"What can I say about Glen LaBelle?" Rebecca asked. "No, really, what can I say? He was barely a character and was mostly defined by his implied relation to a member of the canon cast. Like everyone else in this fic, he was barely a character; he was more of a name on a list, and any personality traits he possessed were more informed than actual. But yet, there was a strangely refreshing likeability to LaBelle. Whether it was his determination to perform his duty of being an office gopher, or his general enthusiasm in spite of his ineptitude or maybe it was the fact that he was primarily interacting with Grumbles McBumbletool, there was something endearing about him that we couldn't deny. A certain strange likeability born of his honesty, his reliability and the fact that he was so much better than that hack Ducasse. Which, I think, is the most that anyone could ever ask for."

"Sadly, Glen LaBelle was taken from us at a young age," Tsuneo began. "He was an unfortunate victim of the seeming need to add weight and pathos to a fic that deserved neither. Looking back, it becomes clear that he was set up to die so that our protagonist could feel vaguely bad for a couple of minutes, then move on as if nothing had ever happened."

"A rich and fulfilling life," Rick commented.

"And while Glen was not the only one who was cruelly cast aside in a vain attempt to garner sympathy for the lead character, we'll be sure to remember him as the one who touched our hearts, inspired us, and counted our paperclips."

"Finally, I'd like to read from a statement that Glen himself prepared in the advent of something like this happening," Rick continued before taking out his tablet. "Hold on, had it here... needs to run an update... dismiss a few reminders... aha, here we go."

He cleared his throat and continued. "'Being a hovertank pilot is a risky profession. I know that at any point that I could be called on to fight in a space robot war against soldier warlords from deep space. There is every chance that I could be grievously injured or killed in action. It is a risk, but it is one that I am willing to take. I know that thanks to my sacrifice, my daughter will grow up happy on a world entirely free from alien invaders and certainly won't end up hanging out with a weird nomad who will drag her into perilous situations, often involving her carrying explosives.'"

Rick took a deep breath and wiped back a tear. "And I think there is something really profound in that for all of us."

"Hear hear," Tsune finished.

"I'll never forget... um... that guy," Dan added weakly.

"Thank you all for being here," Rick finished. "The wake will be held at the Loco Cabana. But you'll want to leave early as the traffic is banked up all the way back to the airport."

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

"And good morning to you too, Voice," Rebecca replied.

"Voice, while you're here, would you like to say something about the recently departed Glen LaBelle?"

"Well uh," the Voice stammered. "Glen LaBelle was, um, a character in Dire Straights who did, um, things. In a fic. Yes."

"That was beautiful, Voice," Dan nodded. "Truly touching. You captured the essence of him in that statement, and I cannot think of a better summary of his life and times."

"Um, thank you, I guess," the Voice commented.

"Truly profound," Tsuneo agreed. "Which means that you're going to ruin it with giving us a fic to read today."

"Well, yes," the Voice admitted. "Today we'll be reading the next four chapters of Dire Straights."

"Thrilling," Rebecca noted. "Please tell me there's something interesting about this part?"

"It's part four of seven?" The Voice offered.

"Halfway there," Tsuneo considered. "I'll take that."

"It's about the best I could have asked for," Rebecca admitted.

"I mean, we had something that vaguely resembled an interesting plot twist las time," Rick offered.
"What with the whole abducted by aliens, given space drugs and forced to fight for the aliens thing."

"We did indeed," Tsuneo considered as he took his place on the couch. "But at the same time, it's this fic. I'm imagining that it will effortlessly blow it all off with no consequence for Crud Blandington at all."

"You know, that's an overly pessimistic approach to take to the fic," Rick replied as he and the others joined him. "But yet, I can also imagine that's almost certainly what's going to happen."

"If nothing else, the fic is predictable in its blandness," Dan smirked.

"Yeah," Rebecca replied as the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format.
"Unless you're LaBelle."

> Chapter 13: Heavy Losses

> I got off the base's shuttle bus and walked down the housing development.

Rick: A row of identical houses in a field outside Schofields

> Company grade officers

> with dependents lived here, as well as field grade officers with no dependents.

Tsuneo: As well as dependents with no field grade or company grade officers.

> The houses were all one level, with driveways and a single-car garage.

Rebecca: Can we at least hope they were full of futuristic hovercars?

Rick: It'd be nice

> I went to the house with the number that Major Jack Emerson had given me.

Dan: It took him a while to remember how numbers worked.

> I rang the doorbell.

Rebecca: Thrill a minute.

> Jack answered the door, wearing jeans and a sweater.

Rick: Jack is now the best described character in the fic

> "Welcome to my humble home," he said.

Tsuneo: [Jack] Crap, I gave him the right address.

> "It's not much, but it's mine."

Dan: Actually, it belongs to the army.

Rick: [Jack] You know what I mean!

> I was wearing black jeans and a black sweat shirt,

Rebecca: Why he'd dressed as a member of a generic nineties band was another matter

> as this was a very informal occasion.

Tsuneo: It was his class 'A' casuals.

> "Great to see you,"

Dan: Liar.

> said Lieutenant Michael Meyers,

Rick: [Mike] I'M FROM GLORIE!

Rebecca: Yes, we know.

> looking as he did before,

Dan: He had not had extensive cosmetic surgery in the last couple of days.

> dressed in khaki pants and a green sweater with "ARMY" stenciled on it.

Rick: Myers occasionally forgets which branch of the armed forces he's in and needs a reminder.

> "How is life as a major?" I asked Jack.

Rick: Well, he randomly shouts at people, has an abandoned subplot and then Larry Hama forgets he exists

> "Well, I am still getting used to the pay increase," he answered. "I guess it's compensation for all the
> paperwork I have to do now that I'm the battalion XO."

Tsuneo: He should have subordinates to fob that off to

> "I'm in charge of the 18th now," said Mike.

Dan: And who are you again?

Tsuneo: I have no idea

> "I'm still a second lieutenant since I didn't have enough time in grade for a promotion.

Rebecca: Increased responsibility without a pay rise. Is this the army or a corporate job?

> I guess Jack was lucky that there was an opening for a major and a battalion XO."

Dan: So you all get new positions, and I get my brain fried in an alien lab.

Rebecca: [Myers] Seems fair to me.

> I looked around Jack's new home.

Tsuneo: It was vaguely home-shaped and home-like, and resembled a home.

> The living room had couches and a coffee table, and in the back

> was a small kitchenette with a refrigerator, a stove, and a microwave oven.

Rebecca: I love how the author has created such a vivid picture of this amazing futuristic world.

> There was a door that

> led to the bedrooms. Jack took some steaks that were sitting on the counter next to the stove.

> "Let's start barbecuing," he said. And so he did.

All: [Chanting] And so he did.

> We went outside to this small backyard. The ground was paved with concrete tiles.

Rick: Large Concrete Slab is my hero

Dan: Large Concrete Slab is also a fair description of the protagonist

> A wooden fence
> surrounded the backyard. Next to the house was this gas barbecue grill; two cylindrical tanks sat
> under the grill.

Tsuneo: Now is it fair – and I don't want to make any undue assumptions here, but stick with me – is it Fair to assume that the readers – whatever blighted maniacs are reading this waste of bandwidth voluntarily – can we assume that they might actually know what a barbecue looks like?

Rebecca: Given the fic so far, I'm not sure they know what Robotech looks like.

> Jack placed the steaks on the grill. Soon, the steaks started sizzling. Jack held a
> barbecue fork, poking the steak at times.

Dan: It's not a proper backyard barbecue unless you're all drinking heavily

> "How are things going between you and Nina?" I asked.

> "Great," replied Jack. "It's convenient especially as I have my own house now.

Rick: [Jack] She's already moved in all her stuff. She has more belongings here than I do. I can't get rid of her. [Chuckles]

> Everything about her, the way she smiles, the way we just get along together."

Rebecca: Their entire relationship is an informed trait

> "You should have been at the party that celebrated his promotion," said Mike.

Tsuneo: Sorry, but he was having his brain fried at the time.

> "It was so wild. Jack's
> lucky he was not court-martialed for conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman."

> I could only imagine what Mike meant with that comment.

Rick: They played beer pong. It was wild.

> "How are things with Melissa?" asked Jack.

> "She was transferred to Tirol Base," I answered.

Rebecca: When she dumped him she did not mess about

> "At least she survived the attack on Casablanca. I've got to send a message to her."

Dan: I've had plenty of time to do it, but oh well.

> The memory of hearing about her transfer still tore at my soul.

Tsuneo: You can tell just how broken up he is about her

> I changed the subject. "Have you ever heard of jerk cooking?"

Rick: [Jack] I mean, I've met you.

> "You mean like beef jerky?" asked Jack.

> "It's a style of cooking in Jamaica.

Tsuneo: It's also the only thing he knows about Jamaica.

> Meat is grilled and brushed with this spice called jerk spice. It's really spicy.

Rebecca: The spice is really spicy. Thank you for that Mortimer W Clankitybritches, I never would have figured it out on my own.

> One of the things my dad does is add extra jerk spice to his food. We had jerk style
> turkey this Christmas."

> "Sounds tasty," said Mike.

> "There are plenty of places in Jamaica that serve jerk cooking.

Tsuneo: Wait, you're saying they serve Jamaican food in Jamaica? This is unheard of!

> I know there are Jamaican

> restaurants in foreign cities like London and Miami. I don't know if there are any here in Tangier."

Dan: He's only been here, what, a year now?

Tsuneo: It feels like we've been reading the fic for that long too

> "I suppose I could afford a trip to Jamaica after we win this war," said Jack.

Rebecca: Dream big, Jack

> After a few minutes, the steaks were done. They were served on white paper plates, with some of

> the juice soaking into the plate, and I sat down on a folding chair, eating the steak from a plate that I
> placed on a folding table.

Tsuneo: Outdoor furniture arrangements! Dire Straights!

> "This is good," I said, swallowing the slice of steak.

Dan: People keep telling me I should chew, but I never learned how.

> "And here's more good stuff," said Jack, coming from the house, carrying a cardboard case filled
> with Corona beers.

Dan: This may be the first time I've agreed with someone in this fic.

> "Something to wash down those greasy steaks."

> I used a bottle opener to open one of the Corona bottles

Rick: What a shocking twist!

> and sipped down the ice-cold beer. It was a

> great way to relax, especially after all that I had been through the past two months.

Tsuneo: Beer makes the brain probing hurt less.

> "So what are the natives on your planet like?" I asked Mike. I had seen pictures of the people that
> he called scalies. "The scalies?"

Rebecca: Put it like that and it sounds super-racist

> "That depends," said Mike, cutting out a slice of steak.

Rebecca: On whether they actually exist or not.

> "The scalies living within a hundred miles of

> the colony are basically hunter-gatherers with primitive tools. There are other tribes of scalies that
> follow their herds and ride in chariots, other scalies that live in small towns and scratch dirt for food,

Tsuneo: They literally eat the dirt. They are aliens, after all.

> and there's even a kingdom with over five million of them, complete with towns and cities."

Dan: Might want to lead with that fact next time

"Ever visited them?"

Rebecca: One time, and he ended up being completely gouged on overpriced supposed handcrafted baskets

> "Only the ones living near the colony. I've only seen pictures and video footage of scalies in other
> parts of the world. It is amazing that there are so many humans on Earth, even more than scalies on
> Glorie."

Tsuneo: Mike talks about Glorie is what this fic does when it can't think about anything else... Which is why he does it so much.

> "I've never been to another planet. I've never even been to space until my capture."

Dan: If he's trying to tell everyone that he's boring, then he's doing a great job of it.

> "Well, if you stay in the Army, you could be deployed to the other side of the galaxy in a moment's
> notice."

Tsuneo: Depending on how desperate they are to get rid of you.

> "Yeah," I said. Just like Melissa, I thought to myself as I sipped my beer.

Rebecca: Resentment burning within him

> I wondered to what she was up on Tirol Base.

Rebecca: Smash cut to Melissa dancing with a giant bear man.

> I recalled hearing or reading about a small colony there, as part of the Human
> Diaspora Project run by the UEG.

> After an indeterminate amount of time,

Dan: Insert Spongebob meme here

Rick: At this point, just about any of them would work

> we had finished the steaks, the case of Coronas, and even
> the Lay's potato chips that Jack had brought out.

Tsuneo: The Major's salary lets him afford such amazing luxuries.

> We all went back inside the house.

> "Don't mess this place up, okay," he said. "We don't have a crew of enlistees available to clean up
> the place."

Rebecca: He's terrified of the idea of doing any work for himself

> He went to the giant plasma television in the living room and turned on a plastic-encased device
> near the TV.

Rick: That is the most Dire Straights sentence so far
Dan: It's beautiful

> He held a microphone and this image appeared on the screen, with the title "It's Your
> Time to Be a Star". Jack held this microphone, which apparently had a wireless connection with the
> video game system.

Tsuneo: He lives in a world of spacecraft, aliens and giant war robots but that's what amazes him.

> "So you got the new Nintendo?" asked Mike.

Dan: It's got an even stranger controller and less games

> "It was on sale at the PX," said Jack. "I got a couple other games with this. With this game, you
> could download songs to sing."

Rick: GTA V's Self Radio ruined in-game music forever. And if you want to debate me, I'll be blasting rival gangs while listening to Weird Al.

> Jack selected a song from the song list. "Let's put this piece of robotechnology to action."

Tsuneo: This advanced futuristic device made possible only through technology recovered from an alien ship, the karaoke machine.

> And he then sang this rap song whose lyrics appeared on the screen and were highlighted in yellow
> even as the notes radiated from the speakers and filled the living room.

> "That was great," said Mike.

Rebecca: Two white guys doing karaoke rap would be many things, but 'great' is not one of them

Tsuneo: We're just assuming that the protagonist is white at this point, right?

Rebecca: If he isn't then some of his language choices would be very odd

> "Why don't you try it?" Jack asked me.

Rick: We could spend all night listing reasons.

> "Maybe we can play some of that reggae music."

Tsuneo: [Jack] Because you're from Jamaica.

Dan: Yes.

Tsuneo: [Jack] Where they have reggae music.

Dan: I get it.

Tsuneo: [Jack] Since that's your only character trait.

Rick: [Mke] I'm from Glorie Colony!

Tsuneo: [Jack] Shut up, shovel head.

> He selected one of the songs and gave me the microphone. "All right, go for it."

> And so I did. Reggae tunes radiated from the speakers, and I tried to follow the lyrics as they were
> highlighted in yellow.

Dan: Its not a good Karaoke session until everyone's drunk and somebody starts a fight

> "Everything's gonna be all right," I sang. I sang for a few minutes, trying my best to sound like the
> reggae bands that sing in bars in Kingston.

Dan: The really cheap house bands that are only there because the drummer knows a shift manager and they're basically doing it for free to get noticed.

> "You're no Lin Minmei," said Mike after I was done.

Dan: He's barely a Wendy Ryder

Rick: He's not even default Female Ryder

> We had a few more beers after that.

Dan: The conversation ended on this

> Oooooooooo

Tsuneo: You know, I thought about asking what any given scene actually adds to the narrative, but I thought instead I'll just mention when a scene actually does contribute.

Rebecca: So you're basically saying you'll be silent for the whole fic.

Tsuneo: That's about right.

> I was in my quarters on base, reading a book. It was Sunday, and most of the battalion had the day
> off.

Rick: Fortunately the Robotech Masters respect the Sabbath.

> I had done research into booking flights to Tirol Colony; they cost tens of thousands of dollars.

> Interstellar travel was understandably expensive.

Rebecca: Also there was an interstellar war on

Tsuneo: The little things you miss

> My brother and parents would not be able to

> afford interstellar travel even once a year. I had sent e-mail to Melissa; hyperspatial bandwidth was

> very limited so I could not call her.

Rick: He's going to wait six months only to get an automated out-of-office reply

> "Lieutenant," I heard a voice say.

> I looked and saw a young man in MARPAT camouflage. He had corporal's chevrons on his sleeve. I

> wondered what he was doing here in officer country.

Dan: This is officer country. We can't stop here.

> "Yes, Corporal?" I asked.

> "We're under full tactical alert, sir," he said. "Report to headquarters."

Tsuneo: He's very casually informed that they're under attack

> And so I did.

Rebecca: Wondering what happened to the actual alerts.

> As I walked along the streets of the base, I noticed activity was bustling, with soldiers

> and vehicles moving every which way.

Tsuneo: The general is coming, look busy.

> A few minutes later, I reached the battalion headquarters, dressed in my MARPAT camouflage.

Rebecca: No need to rush, it's not lives are at risk or anything.

> "What is going on?" I asked Master Sergeant Rebekah Avital, clad in her MARPAT.

Dan: MARPAT?

Rick: MARPAT.

Dan and Rick [nodding]: MARPAT.

> "We have been ordered to full tactical alert," she answered. "It came straight from HQ RDFCOM."

> "Okay then," I said.

Rebecca: He's as indifferent towards the idea of an alien attack as he is towards, well, everything that isn't his ex, really.

> "Excuse me, sir, I have to make sure all the hovertanks are ready to go."

Tsuneo: He has to make sure they have all their MDC by location

> And so she did,

All: [Chanting] And so she did.

> leaving the main office.

Dan: People tend to suddenly leave rooms when our protagonist is around. Make of this what you will

> "Good to see you here, Lieutenant," said Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera.

Rebecca: Demonstrably not true.

> "Make yourself busy."

Rick: He immediately sat down at a computer and browsed Facebook while pretending to work

> "Yes, sir," I replied.

> And so I did.

All: [Chanting] And so I did.

Rick: Oooh, this is fun.

> I had to keep track of all the supplies and equipment we were using as we prepared for

> whatever was to happen.

Dan: If they were attacked by a horde of killer bunny rabbits then they would be ready for it.

> After all, supplies were integral to our ability to perform combat operations.

Rebecca: Can't have a robot space war without your post-it notes.

> We did not even take our meals at the mess; MRE's and water were delivered to us and we ate

> them on the short breaks that we had.

Dan: I wonder if anyone's told them why they're on alert.

Rick: Eh, I'm sure they'll think of something later.

> We were all working to the brink of exhaustion.

Tsuneo: Intense data entry action!

> After all that detail work, it was my turn to sleep.

Rebecca: You go to snooze now

Rick: Snooze!

> I did not sleep in my quarters, as Colonel

> Kravshera had us sleep in the office so we could be ready to deploy at a moment's notice.

Tsuneo: Kravshera also lined the ceiling with aluminium foil and made them boil their water. After a while, he began to worry

> I slept in

> a sleeping bag provided to us by our logistics company. While it was convenient for us to have flush

> toilets nearby,

Rick: He tried digging a latrine pit in the middle of the office, but it didn't go over well

> it was much less comfortable to sleep in the bags than sleeping on cots.

Dan: At this point I can only assume that Colonel Kravshera is deeply disturbed

> I had to visit the garage where the command group's hovertanks were stored. It looked like the

> other garages,

Rick: In a related update, fire is still hot.

> with hovertanks parked in hovertank mode

Dan: Hovertank?

Rick: Hovertank.

Dan and Rick [nod]: Hovertank.

> and lighting coming from fluorescent lamps overhead.

Rebecca: And one guy in the back growing hydroponic weed in the hovertank garage

> "Lieutenant," a corporal dressed in MARPAT said to me. "Here is your hovertank, sir."

Tsuneo: He had to validate his robot parking

> I sat inside a hovertank, looking at the controls. Then I went back to work,

Dan: I had confirmed that the hovertank controls were indeed controls.

Rick: Hey, whatever you need to get you through the day.

> doing my part in handling

> paperwork and running between the office and the sergeants who were supervising the troops.

Tsuneo: I feel kind of foolish asking this, but who does this sort of work when they're not on alert?

Rebecca: I'm genuinely surprised that hasn't been explained in excruciating detail yet.

> After a while, when I was on break, Mike spoke to me.

> "There's a broadcast," he said. "Big news."

> And so I watched this broadcast on the Toshiba plasma color television.

Rick: Drink!

Tsuneo: Because the fic identified the television by name?

Rick: Oh, yeah. You could also do that.

> I saw United Nations
> Secretary General Wyatt Moran on the screen, standing behind a podium. I recognized Supreme
> Commander Anatole Leonard, clad in his green uniform,

Rick: Not to be confused with the brown uniform that he actually wears

> standing at his right. I noticed that they looked tired.

Rebecca: New parents always have that look

> "We have completed a major offensive against the Robotech Masters," said Secretary General
> Moran. "Our defensive space fleet, combined with ground-based air wings, launched an offensive
> against the enemy yesterday at 3:00 P.M. Central Time.

Dan: What time zone is it in space?

Rick: It's probably something strange, like South Australia time

> I have been meeting with my advisors since then.

Rebecca: [Wyatt] Trying to figure out how to spin this disaster – I mean –

> We have dealt a blow to the enemy, and we expect this to lay the foundation of crushing the
> enemy in orbit."

Dan: There were many casualties, but they were sacrifices that he was willing to make

> "Have you launched offensives against enemy territory?" asked a reporter. "Taken out their supply
> bases?"

Tsuneo: Have you bought any properties or built any Hotels?

> "I have been informed that the enemy is presently cut off from their supply lines," said Moran.

Rebecca: Of course they live in giant space fortresses that can make everything they need, so take
that how you will

> "We
> plan to continue supply interdiction operations, and our expeditionary forces will continue their
> search to destroy any enemy supply bases.

Tsuneo: [Moran] Operatives recently exploded a frost-free fridge. [Ding!] We're calling that a win.

> If you will excuse me, Supreme Commander Leonard will take more questions."

Dan: He said quickly passing the buck

> "Any word on casualties?" asked another reporter.

Rebecca: [Moran] The word is catastrophic, but I've been advised not to repeat that.

> "We expect there to be casualties, reports are still coming," said Leonard. "I want to thank the men
> and women who fought to protect our world and our community of nations."

> "Looks like we missed out," said Mike.

Tsuneo: Yes, your tank crew missed out on the space battle.

> Oooooooo

> After a long time, we were finally ordered down from full tactical alert.

Dan: Hooray, no more sleeping in the office!

Rick: [Lupon] That's what you think.

> But it was not time for me to

> rest just yet; I was still on duty until my shift ended. Jack was in command.

Dan: Jack in command, the less successful re-imagining of Charles in Charge

> "We might have to do this again," he said, sitting in his office.

Rick: Wow, this robot space war is such a drag

> "I wonder if that's how the enemy intends to win, by wearing us down like this."

Rebecca: Wearing us down by having us launch major offensives at them.

> I too could feel the exhaustion over the past three days, ever since we went into full tactical alert.

Rick: They maintain combat readiness by tiring out their troops.

> "I hope we are wearing them down, sir."

Tsuneo: The fic's certainly wearing me down

> I looked around. All there was to do was busy work, like the private vacuuming the carpet of the

> main office. I looked at a stack of reports through which I would have to go.

Dan: His regular duty paperwork is so much less intense than his alert paperwork.

> I wondered what Melissa was doing.

Rick: She was moving on with her life. Take then hint.

> Was she all right? I wonder how she felt being on another

> planet. She must have been excited at first, but the excitement would surely have faded by now.

Tsuneo: Every day under fantastic alien skies with a vista of faraway unknown worlds is such a drag

> Ooooooooooooo

> One day, after my shift was over, I went back to the men's BOQ. I was glad for some relaxation.

Rick: Man, filing leave requests all day really takes it out of you.

> I was in the rec room watching some action movie with a lot of explosions and stuff and very little

> plot.

Dan: Never show a better movie in your boring fanfic

> "Jack wants to see us at his house," said Mike.

> "Sure," I said. The movie was not that interesting anyway.

Rick: He'll be kicking himself for missing out on the end of act two twist.

> So we went to Jack's house at the family housing project; it was dusk when we arrived. He opened

> the front door.

> "Hi Jack," said Mike. "Anything new?"

> "Nina ...Nina's dead," said Jack.

Dan: Oh no! Not Nina!

[Pause]

Dan: Who's Nina?

Rick: No idea at all.

> "She was killed in the offensive against the Robotech Masters."

> I was stunned. I remembered Nina. She was a fine pilot and a fine lady.

Rebecca: And our protagonist immediately makes it as awkward as possible. Well done.

> And now she was gone and not coming back. "I'm sorry," I softly said.

Rick: [Mike] Did I tell you about Glorie Colony?

Rebecca: [Jack] Read the room, Meyers.

> "Listen, the colonel ordered me to take paid leave," said Jack. "I'm going to Monument City;

Dan: [Jack] There's a sports bar there with some sweet nachos I've been jonesing for.

> there will be a memorial service there.

Dan: [Jack] Oh, yeah. Also, that.

> My flight leaves tonight. I ask that you two take care of the house. I

> ask this not as your superior officer, but as a friend."

Dan: So trash the place with a wild house party as soon as he's gone?

Rick: You know it.

> "Sure," we said.

> I knew Jack was crying on the inside.

Tsuneo: You can tell this from the deep emotional impact of the loss

> ----

> Chapter 14: Who's In Command Now?

Rick: I believe the next in line is Misspelled Sapphire.

> I started shooting some more targets. And then another. And then another.

Tsuneo: Even the so-called action is boring and repetitive.

> They all disappeared in a

> ball of fire, lighting up the landscape of grass, trees, and rocks with orange and red.

Rebecca: Smokey Bear looks on, filled with resentment and plotting his revenge

> The exercise was finished, and I stepped out of the simulator cockpit. I could see the technicians of

> sim company in their MARPAT camouflage monitoring their equipment.

Rick: [Technician] Don't know why we need camos to work the simulators.
Rebecca: [Technician] Someone needs to justify their budget increase.

> "You did well, sir," said Master Sergeant Rebekah Avital, also dressed in MARPAT camouflage.

Rick: Meanwhile he was in a llama costume and felt a little silly.

> "As you were, Master Sergeant," I said. I went back to the officers' locker room to change out of my
> doublet. It was much more fun than handling paperwork in the office.

Dan: Although nothing beats the thrill of finalising a 34-E and filing it in the correct drawer.

> I wondered when the next live-fire exercise would be.

Tsuneo: Well that was an amazingly fulfilling and involved scene
Rebecca: I feel lucky to have read it

> Ooooooooo

> After a hard day's work, I was relaxing in the O-club,

Dan: Collecting O-parts

> sipping a beer with the guys. It was not too crowded that day.

Rebecca: Especially since he's been thinning out the cast.

> Memories of my former captivity still cast a shadow over me, even as I took another cold sip.

Dan: The beer helped.

> I saw Jack enter the room, wearing a sweater and jeans.

> "Good to see you back," I said.

> "Thanks for taking care of my house, you guys," he said.

> "It wasn't a big deal for us," said Mike.

Dan: Really, you were just gone for a few days. I didn't see the need at all.

> "Did you like sleeping in the house?"

> "It was okay," I said.

Dan: How are you emotionally dealing with Nina's death?

Rick [Jack]: The house is very nice

Dan: Yes it is

> His house did allow greater privacy than the men's BOQ.

Tsuneo: The toilet had a door, for starters

> Hanging with the guys was cool,

Rebecca: The way he said that suggests it was anything but

> but sometimes a dude needs just a little privacy and quiet sometimes.

Dan: There's only so many times you can wake up with your boxers on fire before it gets old.

> I enjoyed just taking naps on the bed. It was almost like a mini-vacation, at least when I was off duty.

Dan: Sleeping is fun

Tsuneo: This guy leads such an amazingly fulfilling life

> Plus, it was good sometimes

> just to have a snack for supper rather than going to the officers' mess.

Dan: A Snickers bar and a can of Mountain Dew. Living life to his fullest

> But I guessed that I get to sleep in my tiny room at the men's BOQ again.

Rebecca: Quietly hoping that somebody else Jack knew would die so he could stay in the house again

> And I wondered how Jack was doing. He seemed quieter than usual;

Tsuneo: How can you tell? He's barely a character to begin with and most of his exchanges are short, clipped sentences

> he did not even go up to the karaoke jockey to try and sing a song.

Dan: To be fair, it could just be because he doesn't like them

Rick: I could buy that.

> He was putting up a smile.

Dan: Mostly so he wouldn't have to talk to Alistair Smith-Smythe-Smith here.

> I wondered what he did on his leave to Monument City.

Rebecca: Smash cut to Jack Emerson in a panda costume with a wingsuit jumping off the top of command headquarters.

> I figured he stayed with his dad there. Did he spend all those nights crying himself to sleep?

Rebecca: Maybe he expressed his emotions like a functional adult human being instead of chewing on his resentment for years

Tsuneo: No comprende

> Oooooooooo

> Sometime the next day,

Dan: Just about tea-time

> Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera called the headquarters staff to a
> briefing at the main office.

Dan: I got to serve them coffee.

> We all stood at attention facing him, and Major Jack Emerson and Master
> Sergeant Avital stood at Kravshera's sides.

Tsuneo: He'd gathered the simulacrum of the cast

> "Listen up," said the colonel. "I just received an order from Colonel Trautman's office at regiment
> headquarters. We and the rest of the regiment are to prepare for a potential offensive against an
> enemy ground position.

Tsuneo: Translation?

Rick: They're going to Dippin' Dots.

> We will coordinate with the other battalions and the Military Airlift Command to get into position."

Rebecca: Well this would be interesting if we hadn't already seen the same thing a half dozen times already

Tsuneo: Usually repeated word for word too

> I recalled some of the reports; we should be ready to deploy.

Dan: They may or may not be ready for combat. Who can tell?

> "Inform all troops and companies," said Kravshera.

> "Yes, sir," we all said

Rick: So he sat on the phone for hours.

> We spent the next few hours or so making sure everything was tidy, that the hovertanks were
> working, that the ammo, equipment, and supplies were ready to go, and other things.

Rick: Like watering their potplants and separating their recyclables

> Master

> Sergeant Avital and the other sergeants were working the soldiers even harder than usual.

Tsuneo: So are they not normally combat ready or something?

Rebecca: They appreciate it if the Robotech Masters give them a head's-up before attacking.

> And I had to do my part to check and file all the paperwork and even go around the troops.

Tsuneo: Thrill as our hero fills in paperwork! Again!

> And finally we were ready to go, with the hovertanks and supplies and equipment being mounted on
> trucks.

Rebecca: The tanks got to go on trucks. Everyone else had to walk

> It was a long journey by road and rail, with local soldiers escorting us. I remembered reading
> somewhere that the King of Morocco had agreed to allow United Nations forces to use the highways
> and railways of the kingdom for transporting personnel, supplies, and equipment from the U.N.
> bases in Morocco to the battlefield.

Rick: But only because they asked nicely

> In my mind, there was some stress. Would I be captured again by the Robotech Masters?

Dan: He was wondering if they would probe him, and realised he wasn't entirely opposed to the idea

> I looked at a few other officers with whom I was riding.

> "Anyone up for a game of poker after we beat the enemy?" asked a young lady who was a butter
> bar.

Rick: She was an actual bar of butter. They had to keep her refrigerated in the desert heat

> "I just hope I still have enough fingers to hold the cards," said a male lieutenant, whose name I
> knew as Volchek.

> Humor like that did ease the tension a bit.

Dan: That was humour?

Rick: When you need to point out that something was a joke, maybe you didn't land it well.

> It was after a long journey that we reached the fallback point- where all of the troops would withdraw
> should things go pear-shaped.

Tsuneo: What if they turned into the shape of other soft fruit?

Rebecca: I think you can only have so many contingencies. Like maybe if things are now Kiwifruit shaped then you should just give up

Tsuneo: True. [Pause] We're bored, aren't we?

Rebecca: Like I cannot believe

> Already, some battalions were setting up tents and Quonset huts.

Dan: And some were setting up beach volleyball nets. They know what's important.

> We

> were in the desert, though it was just warm, not blazing hot, on account of the earliness of the year.

Rick: It was a cool, pleasant day out in the desert

> Once again, we unloaded, with Sergeant Avital

Rebecca: I'm pretty convinced they just keep coming up with more paperwork to keep Stack Overflow busy while Sergeant Avital does all the real work.

> and the other sergeants barking orders to the junior

> enlisted soldiers as they unloaded the ammo, supplies, and equipment.

Tsuneo: They unloaded because they were ordered to unload

> A perimeter was quickly established, and soldiers in full gear patrolled;

Rebecca: They'd set up the stage and started the USO show.

> I did not envy them. As for my part, it was doing more paperwork

Dan: Yeah, eat it guys on patrol! I get to fill in forms!

> like any third lieutenant would do in a combat battalion when not fighting the enemy or

> training to fight.

Rick: This guy leads such an exciting life

> Neither Colonel Kravshera nor Major Emerson was with us at this moment;

Rebecca: They were reclining in the hot tub in the officer's lounge back at base.

> they were attending a briefing with the regiment's staff.

Dan: Briefing and piss-up.

> "At least the change of scenery is nice," said Lieutenant Michael Meyers.

Tsuneo: Wow. Sand. So amazing.

> "Yeah," I said, looking beyond the perimeter to the seemingly endless desert beyond.

Rebecca: Its as endless and empty as this fic

> Even as more soldiers, supplies, and equipment arrived by truck and helicopter, a sergeant
> announced to us, "Chow time, everyone!"

> And we were served our chow, which was simply MRE's.

Rick: Today's meal is unidentified brown thing with a side of unidentified white thing.

> We were not expected to stay here for long, so no mess tents were set up.

Tsuneo: Not staying long enough to warrant mess tents, but long enough for him to fill in the paperwork

Rick: Maybe he's filling in the paperwork requisitioning a mess tent?

Tsuneo: Sure, why not?

> "Nothing like an MRE for lunch," said Lieutenant Volchek, sticking a plastic fork into the aluminum
> container.

Dan: Australian soldiers get Vegemite in their standard ration kit. That's why they're such fierce fighters

> It was better than starving,

Rick: Golden Corral's new slogan

> and that was all I could say or write about it.

> Colonel Kravshera and Major Emerson came out to greet us;

Rebecca: [Lupon] What are you peasants all still doing here?

> all of us not on a work detail stood at attention.

> "All hovertank drivers get ready for action," he said.

> And so we did.

Dan: All people do a thing

Rick: And so we did

Dan: All people do another thing

Rick: And so we did

Dan: Repeat for twenty-eight chapters

Rick: Dire Straights!

> I started my hovertank's engine and glanced at the gauges.

Rebecca: Had to check they were still there.

> Kravshera then led us

> out. I was assigned to be with the command group, as extra mechanical muscle.

Dan: Check out my sweet robo-gains

> After a few minutes

> of driving, we reached our destination, which looked out over a wide expanse of desert.

Rebecca: In the desert, there was desert

> I could
> clearly see the enemy encampments, with the parked enemy spaceships and bioroids and enemy
> infantry.

Tsuneo: Out in the middle of the desert for no adequately explored reason.

> I did not even need to hear the announcement to know that the attack started.

Rebecca: He slept through it anyway.

> I saw explosions and plumes of smoke.

Dan: Hang on, did someone start the war without me?

> Some veritech fighter jets moved in and transformed into helicopters- they were Ajaxes.

Dan: The obscure Spider-Man villain?

Tsuneo: I hate you so much

> I had read about Ajaxes on the way here, reading about how they can provide close infantry
> support, close air support, and air interception duties.

Rebecca: Quick stop to quote from a wiki and we're good.

> "Okay, the enemy is being engaged," said the colonel. "All troops close in."

> And we did.

Rick: I mean, did we have to? It looks like they're doing fine on their own.

> We got closer and changed into battloid mode, making a solid wall of VHT-1 Spartas
> battloids. We delivered volleys of fire at the Robotech Masters' forces. The thick smoke made it
> difficult to see our targets.

Rick: After a while they just took to shooting randomly into space to see what would happen

> "18th, cover my flank," said Kravshera. "17th, lay cover fire for the infantry!"

Tsuneo: [Lupon] I'm going in! Leeeroy Jenkins!

> "Enemy reinforcements coming from south-southeast," I heard a voice say. "They're
> approach...ahhhhhh!"

Rebecca: The 'boom' is implied.

> "More reinforcements?" asked Jack.

> "All units, keep it together," said Colonel Trautman, speaking to all of the battalions in the regiment.
> "Able Squadron will move to intercept."

Rick: If they're... able!

Tsuneo: Get out

> "Here they come!" yelled Colonel Kravshera. "Command group, provide cover fire for the 18th as
> they engage the enemy."

> And we did, transforming into guardian mode.

Dan: We hit them with a precise volley of 'and so we did.'

> "We are getting coordinates," said Kravshera. "Open fire."

> I looked at the HUD and fired upwards, the rounds flying in an arc before hitting the ground.

Rebecca: He was half convinced that the shot would keep flying up forever.

> "All right, command group, let's change position," said Kravshera.

Rick: Swap partners with the couple to your left and keep dancing

> "Incoming!" yelled Avital.

Rebecca: At least someone's awake in this battle.

Dan: Not me!

> We all scrambled to move out of the way. I heard some explosions and my vision was obscured with
> smoke.

Dan: And that's when he realised that his pants were on fire, and not for the first time either.

> "Is everyone all right?" asked Jack.

All: No.

> "I think so," I replied.

> "Colonel?" asked Sergeant Avital. "What is your status?"

Rick: Running away from Zenigata with a smirk on his face

Rebecca: Nice callback.

> Through the smoke I could see an overturned hovertank.

Dan: It'd rolled on a sharp corner. Should have read those safety reviews

> "Cover me!" I yelled.

> I leaped out of the cockpit of my hovertank.

Rick: That's the giant robot with hands that could be used for rescue operations, right?

Rebecca: Right.

Rick: Cool, just checking.

> I felt as if I was on some sort of automatic pilot.

Tsuneo: Truth was he stopped thinking long ago

> I did not

> deviate from my course even as explosions rang around me, kicking up rocks and dirt and

> showering me with some of it.

Dan: He had no idea what he was doing.

> I ran to the fallen figure next to the hovertank, pulling him away. I heard myself say, "You'll be safe,
> sir", though I did not feel myself say it.

Tsuneo: Mostly because he could see Lupon's spleen spilling out.

> I removed the helmet and saw Colonel Kravshera's face. He winced a smile.

> At least he was alive for now.

> And then came a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter

Tsuneo: Wow, what an amazingly futuristic mode of transport!

Rebecca: I love this vivid, fantastical future world

> with the red cross logo. I ran to the helicopter. Army medics rushed out to meet me

Dan: Not me, I'm fine.

Rick: [Medic] With that face? Are you kidding?

> even before the helicopter's landing gears had made contact with the rocky ground.

Dan: The strength of their dedication is matched only by the strength of their ankles

> "We'll take over from here, sir," said a sergeant with a red cross armband on her left sleeve.

> I watched as they loaded the colonel onto the helicopter, presumably to fly him to the theater

> emergency room.

Rick: The truth was that they were taking him on a package tour. You buy the economy package, this is what you get

> I ran back to where my hovertank was parked,

Rick: Oh, that sure was nice of the Robotech Masters to put the battle on hold for them.

Rebecca: I know, they're just such thoughtful alien invaders.

> hopping into the cockpit and checking the instrumentation.

Rebecca: He'd left his tail lights on again

> "We've orders to retreat," said Jack.

Dan [Jack]: We could have won if one guy hadn't jumped out of his tank and run off in the middle of the fight

> A retreat did not mean we turned tail and ran. Instead, we slowly pulled back, firing on the enemy. I

> could see the Ajax veritech battroids at the very front, with other Ajaxes in helicopter mode providing

> close air support.

Rebecca: Don't mind us, we'll be up here doing all the real work.

> Hover-transport carrying infantry left the battlefield, with at least one soldier firing

> a high-caliber machine gun at the enemy bioroids.

Tsuneo: It wasn't doing much, but it made him feel better

> More artillery fire was delivered. We crept back from the battlefield.

Rebecca: Creeping is one of the few things he's good at

> I saw one of the enemy ship take off and fly towards the sky. I then saw several streaks of smoke

> head right at the ship, turning it into a bright fireball.

Dan: That was good. Maybe lead with that next time.

> I focused on shooting whatever enemy targets that I could lock on.

Rick: He blew up another Dippin' Dots. He's just really not good at this.

- > The fighting continued for some time even after we reached our fallback
- > position, which was fortified with portable blockhouses and machine gun and cannon
- > emplacements.

Tsuneo: But no mess tent, because they didn't have time to set up one of those.

- > And then the fighting died down. There was tension for a while; I had wondered if this was the eye
- > of the hurricane .

Dan: On the upside, there's every chance he could get hit in the face with a flying cow

Rick: I'd be down for that

- > It was not until nightfall that most of the regiment stood down,

Rebecca: The regiment is sleepy and needs to go to bed.

- > save for a few soldiers on watch.

Tsuneo: The enemy had gone home for the evening

- > Oooooooooo

- > I went to the Quonset hut that served as the theater hospital.

Tsuneo: Where I can tell that he'd be of immense use and that his presence would be greatly appreciated

- > I could glimpse through the windows
- > the hectic activity inside, with doctors, nurses, and orderlies trying to save lives.

Rick: Rolling their saves versus coma/death and restoring a d6 hit points per hour

- > A man in his late thirties to early forties approached the hospital.

Dan: He was exactly forty

Rebecca: Happy birthday to him

- > I could see he had the eagle
- > insignia of an O-6 colonel; the name on his lapel identified him as Colonel Trautman, commander of
- > the regiment.

Tsuneo: In deference to his rank and position, he did not immediately drop his pants and moon the Colonel.

- > I stood and saluted, and he saluted me back.

- > Then an orderly in a blue outfit went out of the hospital, put on his cover, and saluted me. I returned
- > the salute.

Tsuneo: This didn't stop until he'd saluted everyone on the continent

- > "Colonel Kravshera would like to see you, sir," said the orderly.

- > I went inside the hospital.

Rebecca: [Orderly] Uh, Colonel Trautman, not you. Whoever you are.

- > There were curtains everywhere. Some of the people were even missing limbs.

Dan: The patients, not the staff. Just thought I'd make that clear.

> I looked and saw the lavender shape of Lupon Kravshera lying down on a bed.

Rick: Wait, that's just a grape-flavoured Nerd. Never mind.

> He had tubes going

> into his arms and a bag with this red fluid was held up by this stainless steel stand.

Dan: I naturally assumed it was full of creaming soda.

> A bandage covered the left side of his head. The colonel seemed to be in one piece.

Rebecca: Horrible unseen injuries notwithstanding

> "Please don't take too long, Lieutenant," said a nurse.

Tsuneo: We're well past that point

> "How are you feeling, sir?" I asked.

Dan: Regretting that open cockpit on the Hovertank yet?

Rick: But he loves the feel of the wind in his hair

> "Messed up," replied Colonel Kravshera. "I owe you my life, Micronian."

Dan: In that case, can you not refer to me by a racial slur?

Rebecca: [Lupon] Not a chance.

> "Not just me, sir," I said.

> "We lost another one," I heard someone say, perhaps a doctor or a nurse.

Rebecca: Another set of keys, that is. People just keep leaving forgetting where they put them

> "These doctors and nurses and orderlies, you owe them your life too," I continued.

Rebecca: [Lupon] Eh, screw them. If they're not killing bad guys, they're a waste of space.

> "They're the real heroes, sir."

Rick: Truth is that I'm kind of a chump

> Indeed they were. I could only admire their dedication to fight despite the odds, to work continuously

> for up to fourteen hours at a time to save people's lives and limbs.

Dan: And if not then that's what the bonesaw's for

> "Yes, Lieutenant, they are."

> I left the hospital. Jack and Sergeant Avital were waiting outside.

> "Colonel Kravshera is alive, and he needs to rest," I said.

> Jack breathed a sigh of relief. "That's good to know," he said.

Dan: He was ranting about burning Singken and exterminating the natives, but that's pretty normal for him.

> "I just got out of a debriefing with the regiment commander."

> "What do we do now, sir?" asked Master Sergeant Avital.

Rebecca: Continue to fixate on pointless minutiae while pushing along a drab, lifeless narrative full of flat characters?

> "Why are you asking me?"

Rick: [Avital] Because it's better than going to Humdinger Postlethwaite here.

Dan: No, no, that's fair.

> "Because, Major Emerson, you are in command now, sir."

Rebecca: I guess this is a twist? Or something?

Tsuneo: Let's pretend it is and just move on.

> ----

Tsuneo: Just so you know, we're now halfway through the fic

Dan: And yet, it feels like we've accomplished nothing

> Chapter 15: Floating Duck

Rick: Its not the worst thing anyone's called him.

> "How are you doing so far, Jack?" I asked.

> We were having dinner in the officers' mess.

Tsuneo: Dinner or lunch that was called dinner? We need to know these things, fic.

> The dinner that I was eating was a ground beef casserole with tomatoes and bell peppers.

Rebecca: But it doesn't have jerk spice, so he doesn't understand it.

> Jack was having some sort of fish, perhaps tilapia or cod.

Dan: He failed his 'recognise fish' skill check.

Rick: 'Recognise fish' was probably a skill in some random Rifts sourcebook

> "Everything's going great," said Major Jack Emerson.

Rebecca: This is fine

> The first few days after we returned kept us busy, as we unpacked everything and made sure to

> keep a record of it, some of it resulting in me being buried in paperwork for hours.

Tsuneo: So did they just leave the enemy there in the middle of the desert? They aren't worried that there might be some sort of future offensive or the like? No concerns that their base could be over-run or that the aliens might target civilians again at all?

Rick: I wonder what fish Jack is having?

Tsuneo: Forget it.

> Things have slowed down a bit, to as slow as a military combat unit could be during wartime;

Dan: I mean, it's not like the enemy are actually doing anything.

> I had noticed Jack had been spending a lot of time out of the office.

Rick: His automated reply emails were really banking up

> And yet he was still reeling over Nina's death,

Tsuneo: And you can tell just how deeply it effected him

> and to top that off Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera was wounded

Rebecca: He has nonspecific debilitating injuries. And by that we mean he stubbed his big toe.

> and we did not even know if he would return to duty.

Dan: Would you want to come back to these people? Be honest

> Jack had not spent

> much time in grade to earn a promotion to lieutenant colonel under normal circumstances,

Tsuneo: Does an alien invasion count as 'normal circumstances'?

Rebecca: Depends on if our hero has to fill in paperwork about it

Tsuneo: True

> and we would expect another lieutenant colonel

Dan: I'm sure they have plenty of those just lying around.

> to take command if Kravshera could not return to duty,

Rick: And next thing they know they have a substitute lieutenant colonel who thinks he's quirky and relatable.

Dan: Probably sits backwards in his Hovertank's chair too

> but

> these were not normal times. I remembered reading somewhere that some of the officers and

> enlistees who served in the SDF-1 campaign got rapidly promoted.

Rebecca: The old days when you could join the army at sixteen, go through a quick training montage and be a fully qualified robot pilot a week later

Tsuneo: Applying real world military logic in to a series that relies heavily on anime tropes is not a good look

Rebecca: And yet, here we are.

> "Just take care," I said. "You were training for this."

Dan: [Jack] Wait, I was? This comes out of nowhere.

> "I know," replied Jack. "I took some graveyard shifts before, but now I have complete charge.

Rick: [Jack] And frankly, I have no clue what I'm doing.

> At least I know you and Lieutenant Chalmers and Master Sergeant Avital will support me."

Rebecca [Avital]: Oh no. You leave me out of this.

> Oooooooo

> One afternoon, Jack was meeting with me in his office about some matter dealing with the

> readiness of the battalion.

Rick [Jack]: Toilet paper supplies are at a critical low.

> "Yes," said Jack, looking towards the door where Master Sergeant Rebekah Avital was waiting.

> "May I come in and talk to you alone?"

> "I trust the lieutenant here," said Jack, referring to me.

Dan [Jack]: Mostly because he's too dumb and bland to do or say anything on his own anyway

> "Whatever you want to say, you can say it in front of him.

Rebecca: [Avital] Alright, I wanted to put in a formal complaint about Second Lieutenant Fingus Dingaling here.

> Just remember that what you say and hear stays in this office."

> "Yes, sir," answered Avital, closing the door. "I have reservations about your command style."

> "What reservations, Master Sergeant?" asked Jack, leaning back against his chair.

Rebecca: [Avital] Well for starters, you're still in your bathrobe and bunny slippers.

> "You spent most of last day at logistics company."

> "Logistics is very important to our combat readiness,

Rebecca: [Avital] Yes, but you were hiding in a fort made out of spare blankets.

> Avital. I need to know how things are going.

> And Lieutenant Proudcloud tells me everything is going well."

Rebecca [Avital]: With respect, sir, you made that name up

Dan [Jack]: I did.

> "You don't need to look over the shoulders of the soldiers as they do their jobs, like you did when
> you were standing behind that clerk. I don't do that anymore;

Rick: She gave up caring long ago

> I leave that for the sergeants and staff

> sergeants. Yes, I understand that you have to meet with the troop and company captains. And yes, I

> understand this is the first time you had the responsibility to command an entire battalion.

Rebecca: [Avital] The training wheels are not literal, sir.

> But you have to learn when to let us do our jobs, Major.

Tsuneo: Heaven forbid anyone in this fic focus on pointless minutiae

> That's as important as knowing when to tell us what to do."

Dan: Uh, do I have to be here for this?

> The master sergeant did have a point here. Jack had a lot of responsibilities now that he was in
> command.

Rick: Jack is genuinely shocked that one follows the other.

> "Thank you for your advice, Master Sergeant Avital," said Jack. "I am sure you have important work
> to do. Dismissed. Both of you."

Dan: That was an official military brush-off. She should feel honoured.

> "Yes, sir," we replied, standing at attention and presenting arms.

Tsuneo: [Jack] Blanket fort it is.

> oooooo

> I walked along the sidewalk on the street in the family housing project, where soldiers with dependents were billeted.

Rick: Say, if Jack has been field promoted, does that mean his army house has been field promoted too?

Tsuneo: How do you field promote a house?

Rick: I don't know, put on a granny flat?

> Houses lined the streets, with cars parked in some of the driveways. I

> approached one of the homes, a two-story house.

Dan: He picked one at random.

> I rang the door, and a dark-haired woman answered it. I introduced myself.

> "We were expecting you," she said.

> I got a message from Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera, inviting me to his home.

Rick: That's how vampires get in too

> I wore casual

> clothes- jeans and a short-sleeved green collared shirt, as this was definitely not official military

> business.

Dan: Which is why he turned up looking like a supermarket checkout attendant

> The woman who answered the door was his wife; I remembered meeting her at the

> Christmas party on base months ago.

Tsuneo: Which is weird, because he usually can't remember what he had for breakfast.

> The first thing I noticed upon entering the house was the prevalence of little kids' plastic toys,

Rick: [Leslie] Those are my husband's. We worry about him.

> some of them in corners, others sitting in the middle of the wooden floor.

Rebecca: The whole place was strewn with loose Lego bricks. It's a deathtrap

> Two kids, a boy with black hair

> and a girl with purple hair ran around. Neither of them looked to be more than six years old.

> "Who is the man, Mommy?" asked the girl.

Tsuneo: That's what we've been wondering for the last fourteen chapters

> "A friend of your daddy's," replied Mrs. Kravshera.

Dan [Kid]: But you said daddy was a loser who didn't have any friends

Rebecca: [Leslie] Hush, dear

> I then saw the colonel.

> He was not in military uniform.

Tsuneo: It took him a while to process this ideas

> He wore shorts and a T-shirt and a cast on his left foot.

Dan: Which was weird, because he'd sprained his wrist

> He was

> sitting in a wheelchair, and a man in his late fifties to early sixties with streaks of gray in his black

> hair pushed the wheelchair to the living room. His skin was a ruddy brown, and it looked like harsh

> weather drew a pattern of lines on his face.

Rick: This guy is now the best described character in the fic by a long way. Take that how you will.

> "Welcome to my home," said Colonel Kravshera. "You've met my wife Leslie."

Rebecca: In the vaguest sense possible.

> "Yes," replied Leslie Kravshera. "I remember this young man from that Christmas party."

Tsuneo: As the narration mentioned just a little earlier.

> She looked at me. "I thank you for saving my husband's life."

Rebecca: And to think, she'd just updated his life insurance.

> "You are welcome," I said in reply. It was hard to believe that happened almost a month ago. "He

> would do the same for me and his people."

Dan [Kravshera]: Whatever you say, Micronian

> The two kids ran up to me.

> "Thank this man for saving daddy," said Mrs. Kravshera.

> "Thank you," said the boy.

Rebecca: The girl naturally kicked him in the shins.

> "And you are?" I asked the older man.

Dan: Not even trying to engage with the kids

> "Call me Johnny," he answered,

Tsuneo: Sir, I will not.

> clad in a plaid shirt and Levi's jeans. "I'm Leslie's father.

Rick: Johnny Leslie Senior.

> I flew in from Arizona to help her take care of Lupon.

Tsuneo [Johnny]: She insisted she was fine without me. Practically begged me to stay away,

> So you are a soldier."

> "Yes, sir," I said. "A third lieutenant and a VHT-1 Spartas veritech hovertank driver."

> "I too am a veteran, Arizona National Guard, infantry, staff sergeant. I fought in the Global Civil War
> about thirty years ago."

Dan: Well, he stood outside a port-a-potty with a rifle, but it counts.

> I remembered learning about the war from history classes. "What was that war about?"

Rebecca: [Leslie] I'm here too.

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

Tsuneo: [Johnny] I just killed for my CIA masters.

> "It was over so many reasons, and there were as many as six sides.

Dan: Possibly more. Nobody knows.

> One nation that was an ally one day would be an enemy the next day.

Rick: [Johnny] And don't get me started on the Lemurians.

> All we accomplished was

> killing over a billion people and destroying so much of the planet.

Tsuneo: Say, wasn't there another war after that? Nearly ended all life on Earth or something like to that effect?

Rick: I have no idea what you are talking about.

> And there was never a real peace

> treaty. Sure, there was a truce among the big nations after that ship crashed here, but fighting

> continued in places like eastern Europe and central America."

Rick: God-damn Exclusionists. You can't get rid of 'em.

> "I've prepared lunch," said Mrs. Kravshera.

Rebecca: In an effortless segue

> "You know, ma'am," I added, "in the Army we can lunch dinner and dinner supper."

Tsuneo: The assembled cast take turns slapping him.

> "I'm an Army wife, Lieutenant."

Rebecca: [Leslie] Now get your condescending arse in here

> She set up lunch at the dining table. There were tortilla chips and salsa, some tacos and other
> dishes, and this kind of bread. I tried it; it tasted different from most bread.

> "That's corn bread," said Mrs. Kravshera. "It's a classic from the American Southwest, dating back
> before Columbus was a gleam in his daddy's eye."

Rebecca: I imagine Columbus is one of Lupon's favourite historical human figures.

> "It tastes different," I said.

Rick: It tastes like corn!

Rebecca [Leslie]: Who invited him?

> "The kids love it, though. I always tell them to behave good or else they don't get corn bread.

Tsuneo: She sets her sights really low

> I've also learned to cook new recipes."

Rick: [Leslie] I have no life beyond these doors.

> "You know, Mrs. Kravshera, there's an Italian-Spanish-Lebanese fusion restaurant in Tangier.

Rebecca: [Leslie] Yeah, I've lived here longer than you have, you malingering cake hole.

> You might try going there for dinner some time.

Rebecca: [Leslie] Don't try and mansplain restaurants to me, second lieutenant.

> And I mean dinner as in the evening."

Rick: Quick stop for definition and we're good

> "Is everything all right back at the office?" asked Colonel Kravshera, taking a taco.

Dan: Avital KOed Jack with a folded metal chair during a staff meeting.

Tsuneo: [Lupon] Business as usual, then.

> "Yes, sir," I said. "Jack, uh Major Emerson, he's growing into the role of battalion commander.

Dan: We measured him against the height chart yesterday and he's put on three centimeters.

> Last time I checked, we were combat ready."

> "I know the Army wasn't Emerson's first choice," said the colonel.

Dan: He wanted to be... a lumberjack!

> "But he's able to do well."

Rick: He's entirely passable

> And we talked some more. They learned about my life in Jamaica,

Tsuneo: Especially about the drive to the airport

> even about jerk cuisine,

Dan: He talked about how much he loved to jerk the turkey

> and I learned about Mrs. Kravshera's old life in Arizona, before she got married.

Rebecca: Which we won't even bother discussing because clearly she's irrelevant to this fic

> "I joined the National Guard to get a chance to leave the rez once in a while and have the state pay
> for it," said Johnny.

Dan: He's immediately giving me 'drunk uncle you have to pretend to like' vibes

Rebecca: Speaking from experience?

Dan: Like you wouldn't believe

> "Then I was overseas for a year at a time. I don't know if I would have left Jamaica though.

Rick: [Johnny] I'm sure I could get a whole country to kick me out if I tried.

> It seems too much like paradise to want to join the military and be deployed on the
> other side of the world."

Tsuneo: Yeah, but it's really nothing but jerks.

> "Only parts of Jamaica are paradise," I said. "The interior is known for shantytowns and poverty."

Dan: Most of Jamaica is a dystopian hellscape

Rick: It's probably infested with groups of 2d4 Orcs

> "Sounds like the Arizona back country, away from the cities and the big ranches."

> "Not all problems can be solved with guns," said Mrs. Kravshera.

Rebecca: Clearly she's not actually from Arizona

> "But this war is probably one of those problems."

Tsuneo: I guess they've given up on using J-pop to win this one

> None of us had to speak it, but the war will be decided in space. Whoever controlled the space
> around Earth would be the winner.

Rick: As tank drivers they all felt a little stupid by now

> Johnny was outside, a glass of cold beer in his hand.

Dan: He wasn't nearly sober enough to be seeing his in-laws

> "How do you like Morocco?" I asked.

Rick: [Johnny] Needs more beer in it. [Belches]

> "I was surprised when I first saw the scenery," said Johnny. ""I thought the whole place would be a
> desert."

> "The desert is behind the mountains," I said.

Rebecca: Thanks for that, basic geography lesson

> "Yeah. A lot of people think desert when thinking of Arizona, and I don't blame them. A lot of the rez-
> the Navajo reservation- is desert. Phoenix and Tucson are in the middle of the desert.

Rick: The desert is in the desert

> But we have

> grass and forests too in Arizona. I once worked at a ski resort near Flagstaff when I was sixteen."

> "I worked a hot dog stand on the beach near Kingston when I was that age," I said.

Tsuneo: You can just imagine how much Johnny cares

> "You have brothers and sisters?"

> "One brother, Paul. He lives with his wife and son in Jamaica."

Dan: Paul is strong running in the contest to be the least interesting character in the fic.

> "I had a kid brother. He wanted to be an astronaut. He joined the Spacy and became an aviator,
> flying one of those transforming planes.

Rick: [Johnny] They call them wave riders or something, I don't know.

> He was killed during the SDF-1 campaign."

Rebecca: His beloved brother, Nameless Veritech Pilot

> "I'm sorry," I said. "Some of the soldiers in our battalion were killed in combat."

Dan [Johnny]: Look, this is my story, kid. Stop interrupting.

> "It wasn't until after the war was over that I learned about his death.

Tsuneo: They were trying to sort through the near annihilation of the human race, so that's going to happen.

> The Zentraedi started living among us,

Rick: Aliens among us? Seems sus.

> some of them even shrinking to our size.

Tsuneo: The ones who stayed as giants also tried to blend in, but it wasn't as successful

> I wasn't concerned at first, there weren't too many Zentraedi wanting to live in northern Arizona,

Rebecca: I mean, who would?

> most of them settled in places like New York

Dan: I want to go to a Zentraedi deli in Queens now

> and Detroit.

Rebecca: Post-apocalyptic Detroit is really just normal Detroit with slightly more broken windows

> A lot of them went into the U.N. military, as they were warriors bred from a clone chamber.

Rick: Yeah, I know all this

Dan [Johnny]: Look, kid, this is my racist screed. Shut your trap.

> The U.N. had a base near Flagstaff, and that was how Lupon met my Leslie."

Dan: Was she working on the base, or –

Rebecca: [Johnny] How am I meant to know?

> "They seem to be happy."

> "I didn't agree with the relationship. My daughter was marrying an alien, an alien who fought against
> us.

Rick: [Johnny] I didn't even have slurs for that.

> She might have been marrying her uncle's killer. I only went to the wedding because I didn't
> want her to hate me, and because of the food.

Dan: He's got his priorities right

> It took a long time for me to get over it, to stop hating that she married a Zentraedi."

Rebecca: Instead he went back to complaining about California liberals

> "The war's over. The Zentraedi Nation is now a member of the United Nations."

Tsuneo: Mostly they're a swing vote that sides with whoever will give them the most aid donations

> We went back into the house.

Dan: Racist Uncle Johnny is now the best developed character in the fic. Make of this what you will

> Soon all the food was finished.

Rebecca: The kids had devoured it all while they were out in the yard.

> "Mrs. Kravshera, thank you for this," I said to her.

> "It was my pleasure having guests over," said Mrs. Kravshera.

Rebecca: Her tone only ever so slightly forced

> "It was her idea," said Colonel Kravshera.

Rebecca: [Leslie] I can speak for myself.

Dan: [Lupon] No you can't.

> "You had a duty to rescue me,

Rick: [Lupon] And unlike the rest of your duties you didn't fluff it.

> just like I had the duty to

> do the same for you and the others. But you rescued her husband, and that's why you were entitled

> to a reward.

Dan [Lupon]: Otherwise you get nothing, you hear me? Nothing!

> For as long as I remembered, I thought that fighting was the meaning for life. But living

> among Micronians, and raising Micronian children,

Tsuneo: [Lupon] Not like good, strong Zentradi children.

Dan: Zentradi don't have children.

Tsuneo: [Lupon] Well, if they did they'd be better than micronian children.

Dan: Okay, whatever.

> experiencing their cultures, I knew what I was fighting for."

Tsuneo: Corn bread, right?

> "Good bye," said the Kravshera kids.

Rick: And went back to tormenting Der Kaptain

> Oooooooo

> The next afternoon, just about an hour before the day shift ended, Jack made an announcement.

Tsuneo [Jack]: I have no idea what I'm doing

> "We need to get the troop and company captains here for a meeting," said the major.

Rebecca: He announced he wants a meeting. This is leadership in action.

> So we did.

Rick: I figure each 'and so we did' should be accompanied by a spinning scene transition and dramatic music.

> I picked up a telephone and dialed a number.

Tsuneo: As people tend to do with telephones!

> "Lieutenant Meyers here," said Mike.

Rick: [Mike] You know they have phones on Glorie Colony?

Dan: Quit padding your part, Meyers!

> "Mike, Jack wants all troop captains to a meeting right away."

> "All right, I'm coming."

Rick: Thrill as we engage in real-time phone conversations to organise a meeting

Dan: I'm riveted

> Soon all of the troop and company captains arrived.

Rebecca: And yes, before you ask, he called every single one of them individually.

> We all met in the battalion briefing room, a room with very little furniture save for a table next to the
> wall.

Tsuneo: The base seems to consist of an endless number of meeting rooms that he can be fascinated to discover.

> A coffee pot sat on the table.

Dan: I check for secret doors!

Rick: I loot the coffee pot!

> The room's walls had various maps and charts.

Rebecca: All of which were scanned by obsessive fans for Easter eggs

> Jack, Lieutenant Chalmers, and Master Sergeant Avital faced us all.

> "We are being deployed to Moon Base ALuCE," said Jack.

Tsuneo: And I am sure that this deployment will be as exciting, fruitful and plot-relevant as all the others

> "Inform the troops, make sure we are all ready to go. I will be in contact with the Air Force
> transports.

Rebecca: [Jack] We're going to fly by C-130 to the Moon. Any questions?

> Once we arrive on base, I will brief you on our mission there."

Rick: Once we get to the moon, I'll tell you what our mission is.

Dan: Is the mission to go to the moon?

Rick: You may be on to something there

> "Yes, sir," we all said.

> Today was going to be busy. I had the task of having to contact the headquarters of the Air Force
> transport wing

Dan: Didn't Jack just say he's doing that?

Tsuneo: Jack's delegating while he locks himself in his office and plays paddleball.

Dan: Truly he has become a great leader.

> that would be responsible for transporting us to the moon.

Rebecca: He wondered if he could get a group discount for a moon shot

> I remembered reading about the lunar missions. The first lunar landing was before my time,

Rick: It was made by a bunch of French wizards in 1902

> before my parents' time, even.

Dan: There were people back then?

> Further manned missions and probes revealed a huge underground lake,
> as big as Earth's Arctic Ocean,

Tsuneo: An understanding of the moon on par with a 50's B-movie

> which enabled the establishment of a permanent colony and a
> United Nations base there. Part of me was excited to visit the moon that I had seen all of my life.

Dan: He was going to see if it really was made from cheese

> And so we all worked, taking inventory of all equipment, ammunition, and supplies, making sure our
> veritech hover tanks were working, and making sure all of us soldiers were in top shape.

Rick: Why are you preparing? You're always preparing! Just go!

> Master Sergeant Avital was out in the garages, making sure to supervise everything,

Rebecca: Her job is middle management

> or at least follow up with the troop captains and executive sergeants.

> "We're ready to go," said Jack. "All we have to do is wait for the Air Force."

> The Air Force was not ready for us yet.

Tsuneo: The modern military, folks.

> We relied on the Air Force to shuttle us around the world or
> into deep space, much like how the Space Marines relied on the Spacey for those functions.

Dan: But would still effortlessly crush any other army once deployed. Stupid company favourite meta faction.

> It did

> annoy me a bit that we spent all that effort getting ready as fast as we could without the Air Force
> being ready when we were done.

Tsuneo: Stupid air force. Get your act together!

> But I figured that the Air Force's transport wings must be very
> busy if they had to shuttle not only us, but other military units to ALuCE.

Rebecca: I'm sorry I'm not ready for you yet, I've been too busy flying people to the moon

> Finally, I got word that we were ready.

Dan: A delay that served only to delay the fic.

> "Major, the 8th Transport Wing informs us that they are ready," I said to Jack.

Dan: You're really a Spaceball, you know that, don't you?

> "Perfect," said Jack. "Inform all troop and company captains that we are moving out now!"

> And we did.

Tsuneo: Or, as soon as we got clearance, we did.

> We got into the trucks.

Dan: So, these trucks are taking us to the moon?

Rebecca: [Jack] Get out.

> After about an hour or so, we arrived at the air base in Spain

> from where we would be transported to the moon.

Rebecca: A charming, rustic, Mediterranean spaceport

> I looked around the place. This was where Nina

> had been stationed, and where we had a battle a few months ago, a battle that Lieutenant Isamu

> Shirogane did not survive.

Dan: Who?

Tsuneo: You know, that guy.

Dan: Oh, that guy.

> It looked like the damage to the buildings had been repaired. We made

> sure everything on the list was here.

Rick: Rotate blade?

Rebecca: Check.

Rick: Nuclear-based cannon?

Rebecca: Check.

Rick: Nightwing boxer shorts?

Rebecca: Check.

Rick: Machine gun arm?

Rebecca: Check

Rick; Sword of Catholic Guilt?

Rebecca: Check.

Rick: We're set

> "All right, people," said Jack; we all stood at attention. "We are boarding the shuttles that will take us
> to the moon.

Dan: Really? I thought they were going to shoot us out of a cannon.

Rebecca: Only you.

> We will be escorted by Spacy vessels that will cover us from attacks by the Robotech Masters."

Tsuneo: They will politely ask them to stop

> I was assigned to board the Liewneutzs

Dan: Bless you

Rick: Its back again. Might be an allergy or something.

> cargo shuttle that was carrying our veritech hoversuits to

> the moon. I watched as the soldiers loaded the hoversuits and secured them with straps and bolts.

Tsuneo: Time to tape him to a storage crate again.

> I spoke with the pilot, dressed in some green outfit.

Rick: For want of any other description, I'll assume they're wearing the Green Monster costume

> "So you're not a butter bar anymore," I said. "Madam."

Tsuneo: She's margarine now

> "I got promoted a few months ago," replied Second Lieutenant Shelby Porter. She looked pretty

> much the same as before, except for a scar on her forehead.

Rebecca: Shelby learned her lesson about bicycle safety the hard way

> "Congratulations on your promotion, madam," I said. "So now you get to fly transports."

Rick: [Shelby] Yeah, hell of an upgrade.

> "I was transferred to this squadron after almost all of my squadron was destroyed in that offensive

> against the Robotech Masters," she replied.

Rebecca [Shelby]: You insensitive jerk.

> "Sometimes I can't believe they're all gone."

> "Well, I have to babysit these hoversuits," I said even as the last of them were loaded into the

> cargo shuttle.

Tsuneo: He's actively trying to be loathsome, isn't he? I can't think of any other explanation.

> I entered the Liewneutzs's

Rick: Gah. Sorry guys.

Tsuneo: I think we need to dust in here.

> passenger cabin, which was directly behind the cockpit.

Dan: I guess he's a priority boarder

> I could see the instrument panel.

Rebecca: He was entranced by the flashing lights

> Shelby and another pilot, a man, sat in the seats.

Dan They gave him his junior pilot badge.

> I sat down on this seat facing
> towards the cockpit window. An airman sat on the seat on the opposite side.

Tsuneo: Enough with the detailed seating arrangements, We don't need to know who's next to who every time

> "All right," said the male pilot. "Everyone strap yourselves in."

> I felt the shuttle taxi for a few minutes, and then I felt it tilt.

> "What is this?" I asked.

Rebecca: An overly long, excruciatingly dry fanfic, but that's not important right now

> "We are being loaded on a launcher," answered Shelby even as she checked the flight and engine
> instruments.

> "Errand Flight Two Four, we are ready for takeoff," said the pilot. "We copy."

> I sat in the seat, patiently. I knew the drill;

Tsuneo: It's this metal rod with grooves in it used for boring holes, but that's not important right now.

> we all had to work as fast as we could to get ready, but we
> could not go forth until the last person is ready. And there were almost always one delay or another.

Rick: Sometimes he sat on the runway for hours before going to the moon, Happens all the time.

> I took out a picture of me and Melissa, wondering what she was doing now.

Tsuneo: Moving on with her life, something you should probably do.

> "Copy that," said the pilot after a long while. "We are taking off."

> I felt myself squeezed against the back of the seat as the Liewneuatzs

Rick: Oh man, maybe its my hay fever or something

> cargo shuttle lifted off, flying
> into the sky. I felt vibrations, as if some invisible force was shaking me. The last time I had
> experienced this, I was a captive of the Robotech Masters.

Rick: And boy, did that plot go places.

> Now, while I was with friendly forces, I could not exactly step off the shuttle now.

Dan: And that's the point where he realised he forgot his change of underpants

> "Altitude ten miles," said Shelby.

> As I continued to feel the shaking, I could see the sky outside turn black; we were out of the
> atmosphere.

Tsuneo: Well here I am in space, having finally slipped free from the bonds of gravity. It's a humbling experience, one that makes you appreciate just how small and fragile our world is, and yet, how unique and precious it is as well. In this moment, all I have are my own thoughts as I can but contemplate the wonder and the magnificence of the cosmos and our tiny, yet strangely important place in it.

[Pause]

Tsuneo: I like Zabanya.

> "Shutting off main thrusters," said the lead pilot, pressing buttons and flipping switches on the panel.
> "We are now orbiting the Earth. Awaiting instruction to begin lunar trajectory."

Rick: [Pilot] I've never done this before, so I'm hoping someone will hold my hand.

> The rumbling stopped. I took a piece of lint from my pocket, and it started floating.

Rick: He could watch it do that for hours

Dan: I get the feeling he would just watch lint for hours anyway

> "Keep yourself strapped in, Lieutenant," said Shelby. "We will be burning the thrusters again to
> reach the moon."

Rebecca: It takes a rare talent to make the majesty of space travel dull.

Tsuneo: And yet...

Rebecca: And yet, here we are.

> Soon enough, I felt myself squeezed to my seat and felt the shuttle shake as the thrusters were
> burning, expelling reaction mass and placing the ship on a course to the moon.

Dan: Rocket go up!

> "There," said the main pilot.

Rebecca: He worked hard to be Main Pilot. You have to hand it to him

> "There might be slight bursts of acceleration to correct our course, but
> we should be able to coast to the moon most of the rest of the way."

> "Wow," I said. "I thought you'd have to keep the engines running all the time."

> "Most of the fuel is used during takeoff," said Shelby. "We let gravity take us most of the distance."
> She checked the gauges,. "We should have more than enough fuel to land at ALuCE."

Dan: Wait, should have?

Rick: [Shelby] Eh, give or take.

> Suddenly, this red siren went on.

> "The enemy has decided to attack the convoy," said the lead pilot.

Dan: They were bored, didn't have much else to do.

> "What do we do, sir?" I asked.

> "We stay on course for now. The space vessels will cover for us."

> Outside, I could see some flashes. That must be the space battle.

Dan: Either that or they're just driving through Vegas

> "Strap yourselves in," said the lead pilot. "We need to make some evasive maneuvers."

Rick: They may or may not need to make some daring, edge of their seat manoeuvres in order to survive this deadly attack. Who knows?

> And we did. I could feel the shuttle accelerating even as I saw more flashes through the window. I

> felt the ship suddenly shake really hard. I wondered if we were hit.

Rebecca: He also wondered if he left the oven on. It's that level of gripping

> I wondered if we would make it to the moon alive.

Tsuneo: Sadly, Doodleberry Cankers suffered a fatal head injury when he was struck by a free-floating clump of lint. Services will be held in the Quonset hut.

> ----

> Chapter 16: Blue Moon

> We were helpless.

Tsuneo: That's about how I feel while reading this

> There was a war waging outside, and all we could do is evade the enemy.

Rick: They didn't return the enemy's calls and pretended that they weren't home

> We had to leave it to the cruisers and fighter-interceptors to protect us.

Rebecca: And if that didn't work, then they'd ask the bad guys politely go away

> I supposed in a sense, we were relying on our defensive space fleet to protect us.

Tsuneo: He supposed that it was what was happening because it was what was actually happening

> I knew that if the defense fleet were destroyed,

Dan: I'd be up twenty in the betting pool.

> our battalion would have no way to attack the enemy in orbit.

Rebecca: Even worse, they'd have to walk home.

> It was

> only the stalemate between our fleet and the enemy fleet that the enemy was forced to take the

> battle to the ground.

Rebecca: The enemy was only very begrudgingly fighting them out of some sense of obligation

> We did not feel helpless as we fought the enemy on the ground.

Dan: Aside from my general overwhelming feelings of inadequacy, of course.

> "We got a radar lock," said Lieutenant Shelby Porter.

> "Deploying countermeasures," said the lead pilot, pressing a button on the console of the cargo

> shuttle's instrument panel.

> "Countermeasures effective," said Shelby. "We have no more countermeasures."

Tsuneo: This is thrilling. The sofa cushions, I mean. They're just amazing

> I read about countermeasures somewhere,

Dan: Possibly the back of a cereal box

> how they can fool guided missiles into going off their intended courses.

Tsuneo: One would assume this was part of a standard briefing on military equipment.
Rick: Sure, but he slept through them since hey weren't about paperwork.

> But a ship can only carry so many countermeasures. We now needed the
> cruisers and fighter-interceptors to cover for us, more than ever.

Rebecca: I mean, just think. We could be watching this battle unfold from the perspective of an active participant who's caught up in it and fighting for their lives. But no, having this dumb schlubb giving the world's driest narration is what we're going with

> I could see a bright flash outside. Was that one of the enemy ships being destroyed?

Tsuneo: Wait, that's just the Rapture. Never mind.

> Or one of ours?

Rick: Or some random guy who needs to turn down his high beams?

> "Too much radar interference," said the lead pilot. "Can't see."

> We were all quiet for a moment. Did the enemy have the same problem? If they could see us, but
> we could not see them....

Rebecca: Next thing they knew, a Bioroid was wiping their windscreen and asking for a tip.

> The glow from outside faded. I intensely waited, wondering if we would make it to the moon safely,

Dan: They made it to the moon just fine, only to end up tailgating some guy in the parking lot

> or if we would soon be blasted to bits.

Tsuneo: And if he was reduced to a floating cloud of space vapour, could it somehow make him more personable?

> "Copy that," said the lead pilot. "There is no damage to our systems; we can make it to lunar orbit."

Rick: Well that was an entirely uninteresting resolution to a boring situation. I feel so rewarded.

> The rest of the trip was pretty much uneventful.

Tsuneo: Uneventful after the massive space battle, that is.

> I could feel the acceleration as the shuttle matched the moon's velocity.

Rebecca: The moon had been stuck behind them in traffic, angrily honking its horn

> "Errand Flight Two Four to ALuCe flight control, we are requesting permission to descend into the
> landing bay," said the lead pilot.

Rick: [Pilot] What's that? Come back tomorrow? Well, you heard the man.

> "...We copy. We will set course for the descent vector. Landing thrusters are engaged."

> "We've more than enough fuel to go," said Shelby.

Tsuneo: You would hope so. I mean, I imagine they planned for this, but this is also the military where an Inanimate carbon rod becomes a second lieutenant.

> The landing thrusters engaged and I could feel pressure on my feet.

Rick: The guy next to him was standing on them.

> Finally, after a total travel time of seven hours, we finally landed.

Dan: Everyone immediately was tripping over each other to get their luggage and be first off the flight, like their lives depended on it

> "That wasn't too hard," I said.

Rebecca: Discounting the many lives lost to get him there.

> "It is a bit tricky," said Shelby. "There's no atmosphere here to assist our landing, unlike Earth and
> Mars.

Rebecca: You get the feeling that he wasn't even aware of this fact

Tsuneo: He was about to ask to open a window

> We have to use the landing thrusters to generate enough thrust to almost counteract gravity.

> It's like flying a Thunderbolt in guardian mode."

Rick: A comparison that doesn't actually help in the slightest

> "Veritech fighters landing on the moon have to switch to guardian mode," said the lead pilot. "The

> controls for the landing thrusters are much like the controls for guardian mode on a veritech."

Dan: In truth, he just presses the 'down' button and the rest happens in a cutscene

> "And, except for takeoff, landing uses the most fuel. We're lucky we didn't leak fuel."

Rick: They'd have to have started throwing junk overboard to reduce weight. Like, say, our protagonist here

> "Time to go," I said.

> I went through this open door that was marked with a green light. It was an airlock door, and it only

> opened if the pressure inside the airlock equaled the pressure inside the passenger cabin.

Tsuneo: Thank you for that, pointless digression

> I soon passed another open door, also marked with a green light.

Rebecca: The last light was a bright green, whereas this one was an emerald green. I wondered what that meant.

> This door could only open if the pressure outside equaled the pressure in the airlock.

Tsuneo: This is a Robotech fic, right?

Rick: Questionably.

Tsuneo: And you could broadly classify it as science fiction, correct?

Rick: Reasonably.

Tsuneo: Particularly with an emphasis on space and aliens and such.

Rick: Arguably.

Tsuneo: So you could assume that airlocks are a staple of such stories? A common element, say?

Rick: Presumably.

Tsuneo: So can we then assume that anyone reading a fi would be familiar with the workings of an airlock. Correct?

Rick: No.

Tsuneo: And why not?

Rick: Because they're actually reading this fic voluntarily.

Tsuneo: Good point. Let's move on.

> I then walked through this moveable, pressurized jet
> bridge that led me to a pressurized section of the moon base. On the other side of the jet bridge,
> people in olive green overalls- Space Marines-

Rick: What chapter is that?

Dan: I don't know, but they've got a brokenly overpowered codex already

> welcomed me.

> "Welcome to Moon Base ALuCE, sir," said a Space Marine sergeant, saluting me.

> I returned the salute. "The others from the 6th Battalion?"

Rick: They got lost in the mail.

> "Their flight is landing shortly, Lieutenant," replied the sergeant.

> The sergeant led me to a boarding gate for spacecraft.

Tsuneo: Are the rest of his squad with him, or..

Rick: Heck no. They booked it to the VIP lounge and are enjoying the complimentary coffee.

> It looked pretty much like an airport terminal,
> minus the color ads for businesses that airport terminals usually had. I sat in one of the seats,
> leafing through a magazine published by the Space Marines Public Affairs Department.

Dan: And by that we mean the Games Workshop marketing department

> I saw some more people come out of the gate, all dressed in MARPAT camouflage.

Rebecca: Yes, I'm sure their desert camos are really effective on the moon.

> I stood at attention as Major Jack Emerson emerged.

> "Did everything arrive safely, Lieutenant?" asked the major.

Dan: Beats me, I haven't bothered to check.

> "Yes, sir," I replied. "All of the hovertanks are accounted for, sir."

Rick [Jack]: And the people?

Dan: Um, let me get back to you on that

> "You will need to oversee the unloading."

> "Yes, sir."

> And so I did.

Rebecca: One day he will surprise us by not immediately doing something after confirmation that he was going to do it.

Tsuneo: You really think that?

Rebecca: Well no, but I can hope

> The hovertank suits, when worn with the helmet, protected the wearer from the vacuum of space.

Dan: When worn without the helmet you just needed to hold your breath

> I made sure to attach the oxygen tank. A heads-up display on the visor of my
> helmet showed me how much oxygen I had. I went through the cargo airlock, which was much
> larger than the passenger airlocks used by personnel to enter the base.

Rick: There were a few delivery guys hanging around in it having a quick smoke

> I waited awhile with a few
> other soldiers assigned to assist with the unloading of our cargo, as the air was pumped out of the
> airlock. Then the door to the hangar was unlocked.

Rebecca: Space. It's just as dull as the Earth.

> We went to the Air Force cargo shuttle in which I rode.

Tsuneo: The USS Insert Name Here

> "Can you hear me, sir?" asked Private First Class Philip Ducasse, his voice transmitted over the
> speaker.

> "Copy," I replied. Our voices had to be transmitted over the radio, as a vacuum obviously does not
> transmit sounds, despite what I had watched in movies and on the television.

> I looked into the cargo bay of the Liewneuatzs,

Tsuneo: Bless you

Rick: Gah, my eyes are watering here

> which was never pressurized. There were at least
> ten VHT-1 Spartas veritech hover tanks inside. Glancing at the cargo airlock, only four of the
> hover tanks can go through at one time.

Dan: And yet they'll try to squeeze through anyway

> "All right, people," I said. "This is going to take a long time. Remember, safety first, last, and
> always."

> "Yes, sir!" snapped the other soldiers.

Rebecca: Obviously being completely unfamiliar with their own jobs and having never done anything like this before.

> The veritechs were all stored in battloid mode.

Rick: In individual display cases

> We walked the battloids into the cargo airlock, which
> was big enough to fit at least two Monster destroids.

Dan: Or two cans of Monster energy drink, whichever is bigger.

> After passing through the airlock, we walked
> the battloids through the streets of the base. The streets were lined with buildings,

Rebecca: As streets often are

> many of them connected by footbridges.

Tsuneo: Hold on, you've flown into Minneapolis

> We were guided to this garage where our hovertanks would be stored
> and maintained. It took maybe over an hour to finish.

Rick: You get the feeling that given half a chance the fic would describe it in real time too

> In the meantime, other soldiers were
> unloading essential equipment and supplies we would need.

Tsuneo: He'd been sure to pack his emergency Styrofoam peanut supply

> Finally, Jack gathered all of us in the hovertank hangar. All of us stood at attention by troop and
> company.

Rick: Then somebody farted

> "All right, people," he said. "I know for many of you, this is your first time on another world.

Dan: Is the moon really a world, sir?

Tsuneo: [Jack] Shut up!

> We are not here on vacation.

Tsuneo: Yes you with the sandals and the suntan lotion. You know who you are.

> We will continue training and drilling and working as we did on Earth.

Dan: Time to count all the bog rolls on the moon.

> The
> base here has clubs for enlistees and officers, as well as restaurants if you do not want to eat at the
> messes.

Rebecca: Pointless minutiae... in space!

> After we check in to our quarters, the Space Marines are inviting us for chow at the mess halls."

Dan: While issuing new army painting guides.

> We were all billeted in this huge room elsewhere in the base; it must have been a spare room for
> storage,

Rick: His pillow was made from a sack full of expired potted meat

> such as storing personnel who are guests here.

Dan: That's right, Reginald Smith-Smythe-Smith counts as cargo.

Rick: Hold on, you already did that one.

Dan: I did?

Rick: Yeah, earlier on today.

Tsuneo: That was Alistair Smith-Smythe-Smith, though.

Rick: Hmm, could we get a ruling?

Rebecca: Too close, I reckon.

Rick: Yeah, give it another shot.

Dan: Okay, how about how Reginald Lubbernutz LXVII counts as cargo?

Rebecca: Brilliant.

> Canvas walls were set up to partition the
> room, separating men from women and officers from enlistees.

Tsuneo: He found that he'd been partitioned off from everyone else, and not for the first time either

> Cots were set up for us to sleep on.

Tsuneo: The moon wasn't expecting guests.

> "All comfy there, guys?" asked Jack as he entered the room.

> "Yes, sir," said Lieutenant Michael Meyers.

Dan: I'll just assume that he's a character who was there all along and move on

Rick: Not LaBelle, don't care

> "At least there's running water on base," said Jack.

Rebecca: He was worried that he'd have to step outside in the middle of the night to take a leak

> "I'll be attending meetings for the next few hours. I am sure you can take care of yourselves."

Tsuneo: Smash cut to the room on fire and everyone fighting

> "Of course," said another officer.

Rick: A modern major-general.

> "Good," said Jack, leaving the room.

> Supper was served in the officers' mess. The supper that was being served was chicken stew. I had
> a cup of water to wash it down.

Tsuneo: How does this fic do it? How does it keep managing to make itself even duller and more
pointless with each passing moment?

Rick: Truly it is a gift

> The officers' mess was painted with a mural with scenes from all the
> armed services- while Moon Base ALuCE was operated by the United Nations Space Marines,
> personnel from all five services were stationed here.

Rick: Take that, Tactical Corps Marsh Division!

> After I was done, I left the officers' mess. I saw Master Sergeant Rebekah Avital approach me.

> "Lieutenant, Major Emerson wishes to meet with you, sir," she said.

Rebecca: I doubt anyone truly wishes to meet Snack Lightly here.

> And so I did.

Rick: Did he? Did he really?

> The base had this transit system for transporting personnel; from what I have read,
> Moon Base ALuCE was huge, at least ten miles across.

Dan: It was very popular with mall walkers

> The master sergeant had given me directions to where I would meet Jack.

> Walking through the corridors, I met Jack inside this observation room where I had a view of the
> cratered moonscape beyond the transparent walls.

Tsuneo: We can watch Sam Rockwell go crazy from here.

> The room itself had some chairs and tables.

Rebecca: Only Dire Straights would dare to claim that furniture exists!

> There were a few other people with Jack.

> I recognized one of them as General Rolf Emerson, now the commander of the Robotech Defense Forces Command.

Rick: Rolf's appearance fee ate up most of the chapter's budget. That's why the space battle consisted of a bunch of sound effects and shaking the camera a few times.

> "Lieutenant, we have reviewed your actions during that battle in the western Sahara,"

Dan: Quite frankly, you suck.

> said the general. "For this, you are awarded the Titanium Medal of Valor."

> He then gave me the medal.

> "I am honored, sir," I said.

Rebecca: It was a very casual reward ceremony

> "And now I will take action," said Jack. "Under the authority vested in me by Section 702 of the United Earth Forces code, I hereby promote you to second lieutenant."

Tsuneo: Wasn't he already a second lieutenant?

Rick: Ssshhh!

> I will assign you as XO of the 6th ATAC Battalion's 18th troop, under First Lieutenant Michael Meyers."

> "You can do that?" I asked.

Tsuneo: I mean, he just cited the military rulebook, so there is that

> "I am a major; I have the authority. Unless someone higher in the chain of command has any objection."

Dan: Nope, it's your problem now.

> "Not at this time, Major," said General Emerson.

Rebecca: [Rolf] But next time you promote someone behind my back, you are grounded, sport.

> "Everyone, back to your posts."

> "Yes, sir!" we all replied.

> Oooooooooo

> My battlefield promotion was celebrated at the O-club at Moon Base ALuCE.

Dan: All my friends were there. [Pause] It was empty.

> It was a small place, with wooden tables and chairs and stools, a full bar with a wooden countertop,

Rick: It had that rustic, old-world lunar charm.

> recruitment posters from all five services decorating the wall,

Rebecca: Army, navy, airforce, marines and customer service

> and menus listing expensive food and drink.

Rick: Import fees are a doozy.

> There was a stage on the O-club for singers.

> "Now you don't screw up, or Jack will make you a butter bar again," said Mike.

> "Got it," I said, sipping my vodka cranberry. I would indeed be taking on new responsibilities.

> I looked and saw Shelby enter the O-club. She was clad in the Class "A" Air Force uniform, the
> analogue of the Class "A" Army uniform.

Dan: The nearest metric equivalent allowing for rounding

> "You're still here?" I asked.

Rick; He thought she'd booked it out of here the first chance she got.

> "I was told that I could not fly back to Earth until the route to there is secured," said Shelby.

Tsuneo: [Shelby] There's been a landslide on the highway and traffic's backed up to Pittsburgh.

> "I'm being billeted with an Air Force transport squadron stationed here."

> "And how long will you be here?"

> "We'll be here until a path can be cleared to Earth."

Rebecca [Shelby]: I just said that. Weren't you paying attention?

> Jack entered the club.

> "It's been a long time since I was here," he said.

Dan [Jack]: Stupid lifetime ban

> "You were here before?" I asked.

Rebecca: Completely forgetting Shelby's existence.

> "Yeah," replied the major. "I was assigned here a few years ago, behind a desk at HQ REFCOM.

> That was before I was assigned to Colonel Kravshera's battalion."

> "How was it like?"

Rebecca: Well for starters, the weather was really lousy

> "Not as much stuff to do here as on Earth.

Rick: Sunbathing is right out, for example

> Apolopolis- that's the civilian city located next to the base-

Rebecca: And worst city name in the Sol system seven years running.

> it only has about a hundred thousand people, less than a tenth of Monument City's
> population. And everything is so expensive, since most stuff has to be shipped from Earth."

Dan: Can you imagine the import duty on everything?

> Jack looked towards the stage.

> "You gonna sing?" asked Mike.

Rick: He didn't pack his lounge singer dress.

> "No," said Jack, holding a glass of vodka cranberry. "I just want to relax. I've had to attend meeting
> after meeting after meeting."

Rebecca: I'm always impressed how this writer makes military life sound so exciting.

> "You're a major," said Mike. "It goes with the territory. That's why you get paid more than lieutenants
> and get your own room."

Tsuneo: Screw the authority, decision making and responsibility. Getting your own room is what a promotion is really about

> I sipped my own vodka cranberry,

Dan: The only drink on the moon.

> wondering if I would be promoted to major or even lieutenant
> colonel before my service obligation was up.

Tsuneo: The mere thought of which made the rest of the assembled officers burst out laughing.

> Would I be able to handle the responsibility?

All: No.

> And I wondered how Melissa was doing.

Rebecca: Melissa's moved on with her life. Maybe you should too.

> Oooooooo

> The troop leaders were being briefed in this huge bare room. A lieutenant colonel clad in a Class
"A"
> uniform

Dan: That means he has fancy epaulets

> was addressing us; we all stood at attention.

Rebecca: All scratching was covert, as was military procedure.

> "We have adopted the Special Vision Track Firing System for the VHT-1 Spartas veritech
> hover tanks," said the colonel even as a sergeant handed us these booklets.

Tsuneo: I'm glad we came to the Moon for this briefing. Definitely something we couldn't have done on Earth.

> "They were developed a few weeks ago,

Dan: Who by?
Rebecca: A hovertank pilot.
Dan: A pilot? What's his specialty?
Rebecca: Nerd.

> and the results were very promising. The simulators have already been upgraded.
> These booklets should give your technicians instructions on how to install the SVTFS into the
> cockpit of the hovertanks."

Rick: You'll each be given an Allen key and a bag of screws. Good luck.

> "Sir, we will need to test the system ourselves," said Jack.

> "You are all dismissed," said the colonel.

Tsuneo: Casually ignoring his comment

> "You're in charge in overseeing the installation of this system for our troop," said Mike.

Rebecca: Mostly because Mike can't be arsed.

> "Yes, sir," I replied.

> And that was what we did.

Rick: Does that count as "and so we did?"

Tsuneo: I'll allow it

Dan: Good. Everyone drink.

Rebecca: No!

> We- or rather the technicians under my supervision- installed the new
> firing system inside the Spartases.

Rebecca: I get the feeling that he would micromanage every step of the process

> "It's a good thing that the hovertanks were equipped with expansion modules, sir,"

Tsuneo: They have lots of USB ports

> said Executive
> Sergeant Wing, who had replaced Rebekah Avital when she was promoted to battalion master
> sergeant.

Rebecca: She'd left without saying a word.

> "We don't have to take the whole thing apart."

Tsuneo: It's good that they have this feature that was never mentioned before which is suddenly
convenient to the plot.

Rebecca: Such as it is.

> I glanced at the specs for the hovertank. There were plenty of empty spaces inside for future
> customization,

Rick: And for paid cosmetics

> in case something like a missile launcher had to be installed.

Dan: Or maybe some neons and a totally sweet sound system

> As I walked in the garage, I noticed some of the technicians with laptop computers connected to the
> veritech.

Tsuneo: Since this is the future of the eighties, I'll assume that laptop is the size of a briefcase and takes fifteen minutes to start

> I read that they had to program the SVTFS.

Rick: He'd broadly assumed that it was going to happen off-screen; he never expected to actually see people doing it.

> "That's the last of them in this troop, sir," said a staff sergeant.

> "Good," I said.

Rebecca: He's bushed from all this standing around and doing nothing.

> I looked at Executive Sergeant Wing. "Executive Sergeant Wing, see if you can loan
> our people to assist with the other troops' upgrades."

Dan: I assume they are equally as incompetent as us and will be flailing around in a pile of limbs by now.

Rick: [Wing] They all finished three hours ago.

> "Yes, sir," replied the executive sergeant.

> Ooooooooooooo

> The final test of the upgrade was a live exercise.

Rebecca: Wing had taken the time to paint concentric red circles on my Hovertank's back. He's so thoughtful.

> We had first practiced in the simulators that had
> incorporated the SVTFS. But we had to make sure that the system was compatible with our
> hovertanks.

Rebecca: The sort of thing you'd want to check before issuing an army-wide upgrade

> The Space Marines had escorted us to the target practice area for armor units.

Dan: It was a regulation play area with official overpriced terrain objects.

> It was
> outside the pressurized areas of the base. Fortunately, our hovertank suits were airtight, and we
> had oxygen masks.

Rick: Didn't he point that out a few pages back?

Tsuneo: That was a few pages? It felt like a lifetime ago

Rick: There's a bit of that

> "Okay people," said Mike, addressing the 18th. "Listen up. This is a practice fire exercise. As
> commanding officer of this unit, I shall have the privilege of going first."

Rebecca: He called dibsies

> I got into my own veritech even as Mike entered his.

Tsuneo: Everyone else was just kind of standing around on the surface of the Moon, I guess.

Rick: You'd think they would have boarded their hovertanks in their pressurised hangar.
Tsuneo: You would, wouldn't you?

- > Mike fired a few rounds at the targets while in
- > hovertank mode. The rounds were practice rounds, which were basically giant paintballs; they were
- > cheaper than live ammunition.

Tsuneo: They're fighting this robot space war on a shoestring budget

- > "Okay, it's your turn," Mike said to me.

- > And so I did.

Rick: He "and so I did" -ed the hell out of those targets.

- > The SVTFS tracked the movement of my eyes as I looked for the targets.

Tsuneo: [Mike] The big cardboard things. Right in front of you. OVER THERE!

- > I saw a
- > target, and then pressed the button to fire. The cardboard target was sprayed with paint. I fired at
- > the targets again and again, coating them with colored paint.

Dan: Also known as the 'slop and go' technique

- > "Good," said Mike. "Now Executive Sergeant Wing, show the others how it is done."

Rebecca: Fortunately, Wing had set up an extensive Powerpoint presentation on the subject

- > "Yes, sir," said Wing, maneuvering his hovertank.

- > We continued the exercise for quite some time, firing paint at the targets in all three modes-
- > hovertank, guardian, and battloid.

- > "Okay, we're done," said Mike. "We'd better head back inside before we run out of air."

Rick: They'd been holding their breath all along.

- > And so we did.

Tsuneo: Run out of air, that is.

- > As we went through the vehicle airlock leading into the moon base, a few soldiers
- > commented on how they could use a break.

Rick: They've been standing around in their hovertanks for whole minutes.

- > I would have to continue my work, both with evaluating the performance of the SVTFS and
- > attending meetings with the battalion staff.

Tsuneo: Yes, this is exactly the sort of thing I want in my eighties anime mecha fic

Rick: Only thing I'm here for

- > I did sometimes envy the junior enlistees, even though they had to do the dirty work.

Rebecca: Yes, it's so hard getting your own room, dining in the officer's mess, being better paid and being able to lord over those around you. Suck it up, princess

- > Oooooooooo

> I was finally glad for a break, after having to review the troop's performance and attending an hours-long meeting with Jack and the others in the battalion staff.

Rick: Most of which consisted of going over the minutes of the previous meeting.

Tsuneo: The previous meeting which amounted to?

Rick: Going over the minutes of the meeting before that.

Tsuneo: Ah. Of course.

> I went to the base's Internet kiosk. It

> basically had rows of computer terminals consisting of a screen, a keyboard, and a trackball.

Rick: We're reading a fic based on an eighties mecha anime and yet this may be the single most dated thing in it

> A few soldiers were already online, checking e-mails and web sites.

Rebecca: Some of them were updating their Myspace pages.

Tsuneo: It does feel a lot like that

> I logged on to my e-mail account and I saw a list of messages. Many of them were typical junk e-

> mails that somehow got through the junk e-mail filter.

Dan: You click 'accept all cookies' once and this is what happens.

> One e-mail caught my attention.

Rick: It was from the Ethiopian Freeholds' finance minister.

> It was an e-mail from Melissa Sharp. I clicked on the link to open the e-mail.

> I was stunned after reading the first few words.

Dan: I may have already won!

> "I can't continue this relationship," she had written. "We haven't seen each other and we are light-years apart."

Rebecca: Melissa is now my favourite character in this fic

Rick: Eat it, LaBelle.

> I read those words, over and over again, for a few minutes. I could not believe this. How could she

> do that to me? I had waited to see her ever since I was captured, and waited even harder after

> learning that she survived the attack on Casablanca. For her to do this to me, after what we had

> been through?

Rebecca: Hold on here, bucko. You were missing, presumed dead for months after an alien attack.

There was no evidence at all of where you were or even if you were still alive, and you've made no effort to contact her since you were released. Why is this her fault?

Rick: Because he's a whiny creep?

Rebecca: Yeah, I'll take that.

> I just sat there at the Internet kiosk terminal, staring at the screen for a long time.

Tsuneo: A cleaner came along and hauled him into a dumpster.

> I looked and saw Shelby at one of the Internet terminals.

Dan: Say, she's a woman.

> "How are you doing?" I asked.

> "Great," she said. "It's different scenery than Spain."

Dan: Less olive trees, for example

> "If you like barren rock. You can't even see Earth from here. Here we are indoors all the time.

Rebecca: Something to do with the lack of atmosphere.

> Would you like to join me for a drink in town."

> Shelby looked at me. "Sure," she said. "I can show you around."

> And so we did.

Dan: Well he moved on fast

Tsuneo: I'm sure he'll come to resent Shelby quickly enough

> Ooooooooo

> Apolopolis was the site of the first civilian human settlement of off Earth, built above an
> underground ocean,

Rebecca: In case you missed it earlier in the chapter, here it is again

> with construction finished about ten years before the arrival of robotechnology.

Rick: During the tenebrous reign of the Spider Kingdom

> Many, many habitats, with their own air supply,

Dan: Some got The Whole Thing's Started and others got Hearts in Motion

> had been added to the city since.

Tsuneo: Like adding 483 Alpha-1 Rocket Base to 493 Space Command Centre.

Rick: That may have just been the nerdiest thing you have ever said.

Tsuneo: Thank you.

> Shelby and I left through ALuCE Base's main gate, which was a short tunnel that can be sealed off
> in event of a hull breach.

Tsuneo: If something happened, they would be the first to die

> Apolopolis had a mass transit tram; from what I had heard, most people in
> town did not have their own personal cars. Boarding the tram, we sat inside with some soldiers,
> airmen, crewmen, and marines from the base, all in Class "A" uniforms like us.

Dan: I'm trying to think if there's something I care less about than what uniforms everyone is wearing,
and it's a challenge.

> "Here's our stop," Shelby said after a few minutes.

> "You've been here before?" I asked.

> "It was part of my flight candidate training," she replied.

Rebecca: [Shelby] Getting hammered, that is.

> We and many of the others got off. The

> station here looked different from the station serving Moon Base ALuCE, which was bare except for
> some benches and recruitment posters on the walls. Here, there were wooden benches and potted
> plants.

Rebecca: I love this fic for its exotic, futuristic environments

> A vending machine served Coca-cola; I noticed that the prices were much higher than prices
> on Earth.

Rick: Still, you get special edition "Space" cans.

Tsuneo: Which are?

Rick: Exactly the same with "Space" added on a sticker.

Tsuneo: Of course.

> The station was identified as Lunar Park Station.

Rick: It had a big leering face and overpriced rides

> We went up an escalator, walked
> through this hallway which had an air pressure gauge on the wall, and then we rode up another
> escalator.

Tsuneo: Thrill as our protagonist goes through a subway station!

> The first thing I noticed upon reaching the top was the sky.

Tsuneo: Wait, there's a sky? On the moon? The moon has a sky? This is all too much.

Rebecca: [Shelby] Remind me why I agreed to this.

> Apparently there was a transparent dome; we could see the stars.

Dan: The idea of a window was new to him

> There were concrete paths winding among trees and grass. Wrought-
> iron lampposts lined the concrete foot paths. There were some benches and picnic tables on the
> sides.

Tsuneo: You can have a romantic Earthlit picnic on the moon.

Rebecca: Yet somehow it's still invaded by squirrels and ants.

> "Sort of like we are inside, yet outside," I said.

Tsuneo: He's at Leena Forst-Wagner levels of observation here.

> "There's the place," said Shelby.

> There was this food court like place, enclosed in velvet ropes.

Dan: Food Courts of the gods!

> Chairs and tables were set up on a
> concrete surface, with many people already sitting in them. There were several stands, some
> serving food, others serving alcohol.

Tsuneo: As stands in food courts often do

Rebecca: Amazing

> Some of the stands had already closed.

Rick: Some of them had been closed for months with signs suggesting that an 'exciting new

development' would be coming soon

> Music was played from these speakers in the corners of this food court.

Tsuneo: Every effort was made to make space feel as bland and mundane as possible.

> We walked to the bar, and this pretty lady in a sleeveless top smiled at us.

> "What would you like to drink?" she asked, standing behind the bar.

Dan: And so Heimlich Fortescue stared at the drinks menu, long into the night and through the next day. Some say if you come to Moon Base ALUCE, you may find him to this day, staring at the menu still.

> "Lunar water vodka," said Shelby.

> "Lunar water?" I asked.

> "Raw lunar water straight from under the surface.

Rebecca: [Shelby] It has so many impurities you have to sign a waiver.

> We had this last year when our squadron was assigned here for a training mission."

Dan: They were taking breathing in space lessons

> I held the drink in my hand and sipped it. It had this sharp taste of alcohol mixed with salty and
> sweet tastes.

Tsuneo: It has notes of moon dust and Tang.

> "Tastes different," I said, sitting on a barstool. "Anything new happening?"

> "I have T.A.D.

Rick: Tad Ghostall, that is

> with a Space Marine Thunderbolt squadron."

Tsuneo: Thunderbolt, that's a kind of Dreadnought, right?

Dan: Sure, why not?

> "Space Marine?" I asked, puzzled. "Why weren't you assigned to an Air Force squadron?"

> "The only Air Force squadron here is an Ajax squadron, and I can't fly an Ajax."

Rick: But she can fly any other brand of drain cleaner you care to name

> "How's it like being billeted with Space Marines?"

Dan: You get a lower spot on the game store's shelf and are more likely to end up in the discount bin

> "I'm not being billeted in their section; I still have the same temporary quarters.

Tsuneo: She's living in a lean-to shack

Rebecca: On the moon

Tsuneo: It's not the most comfortable of arrangements

> I just have to report to the squadron on my duty shifts."

Rick: Sure, seems needlessly complex.

> I looked around. Sure, Apolopolis has its novelties, but I was at a loss to wonder why anyone would
> live here.

Rebecca: The idea of forging a new frontier for humanity is lost on him

> One could not go outside without a spacesuit and the food here is expensive.

Rick: Yeah, but the rent is cheap

> I ordered another round of drinks. "A lot different from that place, Mansota?" I asked.

> "Minnesota," replied Shelby. "No way it would ever snow here."

> "But you won't get hurricanes here either."

Rebecca: Snow and hurricanes. Literally the only things there are in Minnesota.

Rick: Well, actually...

Rebecca: Okay, fair.

> I have lived through one or two hurricanes in Jamaica. They had always caused quite a wreck, even
> destroying a few buildings.

Dan: Hurricanes were mostly minor annoyances that happened to other people.

> I had heard and read about what happened in Jamaica near the end of

> the First Robotech War; while I lived through it, I was too young to remember. I heard that it was like
> two Category 5 hurricanes striking the island from two sides, and the pictures of battered cities that I
> saw reinforced that saying.

Rebecca: You'd think that something else that happened at the end of the First Robotech War would
have warranted more attention

> "Yeah," she said, looking around and sipping her drink. "But sometimes I like weather,

Rick: Shelby just failed the Turing test.

> especially after a good snowstorm when you can just ski around."

> "It snows in parts of Spain, right?" I asked.

Rick: The snow in Spain falls mainly on the plain

> "In the mountains. But they don't have cross-country skiing; the flat lands don't get snow. Right now,
> I think we need another drink."

> "Okay. What else are we going to do with our bonus pay?"

Tsuneo: Save for the future?

Rebecca: Move out of his parents' house?

Dan: Buy a farm in Fiji?

> And so we had more drinks. The music seemed to blend into us. I could feel a buzz in my head, like
> I was partially detached from the Universe.

Rebecca: Or maybe he had head trauma

Tsuneo: How would you tell with this guy?

Rebecca: Well...

> I took Shelby's arm, and we danced to the music. I could feel my heart race. This was fun. I felt as if
> all the stress of our deployment here melted away.

Rick: All the stress of his long meetings and target practice.

> Oooooooooo

> I woke up and felt that I was on a bed, which was remarkable,

Tsuneo: Beds are surprising to him

> as I had been sleeping on a cot in a room with other junior officers these past few weeks.

Dan: Weeks? He's been on the moon for weeks? What has he been doing all this time?

Rebecca: Uh, nothing.

Dan: Oh good, I was starting to get worried.

> I also felt warmer than I did when I slept on the cot.

> I noticed Shelby sleeping next to me; her blond hair tangled.

Rick: Update: Shelby has hair. I repeat, Shelby has hair.

> "Uh, good morning," I said.

> "Good morning," she replied.

Rebecca: He instantly starts resenting Melissa and blaming all his relationship problems on her.

> Looking around, we were clearly in a hotel room with the typical furnishings- a plasma television,

Rick: Not named, a clear violation of this fic's rules

Dan: Actually they haven't been named for a long time.

Rick: So why didn't I notice?

Dan: I think the real question is why I did. Help.

> a varnished wooden desk with a chair in front and a lamp on top, a dresser,

Tsuneo: How does a hotel room on the moon manage to look dated?

> and of course, the bed where we slept.

Rebecca: This room is now better described than any of the characters. Take this how you will

> The floor was covered by a carpet; clothes were scattered on the floor near the bed.

Tsuneo: The clothes belonged to a clown and a sanitation worker. He was understandably worried.

> On a small wooden desk next to the bed, a clock radio read in red numerals that the time was 5:30.

Dan [Singing]: I got you babe... I got you babe

> "I have to get back to base," I said. "If I'm late, I'll be lucky if all Jack does is take away my
> promotion."

Tsuneo: Jack and the whole unit shipped out overnight. He is in so much trouble they don't have a word for it.

> I quickly put on my clothes.

Rebecca: As they carefully tried not to meet each others' eyes.

- > Looking at the mirror, I noticed that my uniform had a few wrinkles. I
- > hoped that the Class "A's" were not the uniform for the day.

Rick: I've reached the conclusion that uniform regulations are the single most important part of this fic.
Tsuneo: I think you may be on to something there

- > "We'll have to check out," said Shelby. "There should be video check out on the TV."

Dan: You've uh, done this before, haven't you?

Rebecca: [Shelby] Except usually it's fun.

- > "Right," I said. I turned on the TV and pressed a few buttons. There were all these menus with
- > options. I had trouble trying to find video checkout. I tuned into one of the channels, which played
- > some cartoon show featuring giant robots. I pressed the Menu button on the remote control. After a
- > while, I found the Check Out option under the Guest Services menu. Selecting Check Out, I went to
- > another menu and I selected Yes.

Tsuneo: Intense Teletext action!

Dan: That may be the single most aged part of this fic, and I am impressed.

- > "I checked us out," I said. "Don't forget anything."

Rick: Time to steal some towels

- > I left the room and went to the elevator, emerging in the lobby less than a minute later. Not even
- > glancing to loom around,

Rebecca: He was promptly run over by a truck

- > I left the lobby, emerging out to a street lined with lampposts and buildings

Dan: Lampposts and buildings? Wow, this place has everything!

- > and with cars and trucks driving down the street. I wondered how to get to base.

- > Looking down the street,

Tsuneo: He was baffled by the fact that it remained a street.

- > I saw a sign above a stairway leading to the underground tram. I quickly
- > walked down the stairs and into the station.

Rebecca: Without confirming it would take him to the base.

- > It was not crowded; only a few people were there. I
- > looked at a map hanging on the wall and I found out I would have to switch tram lines to reach
- > Moon Base ALuCE.

Dan: I knew what I had to do.

Rebecca: Three days later, a search party found him holed up in a maintenance cupboard in a water treatment plant.

- > I briefly wondered how we got from the lunar park to the hotel.

Tsuneo: And why he had rope burns across his back.

- > Sitting inside the tram gave me time to think.

Dan: Why didn't Martian Manhunter just phase through the door?

> I did not love Shelby Porter. Sure, she was a fun person,

Rebecca: Is she? At this point her entire personality is just an assumed trait

> and I got along with her, but there wasn't that emotional connection.

Tsuneo: At no point did he wonder how Shelby felt. Although I imagine deep regret is a factor.

> I then thought about

> how much I missed Melissa, and I then wondered if I spent the night with Shelby because I missed

> Melissa so much.

Rebecca: And there you go. Less than a page and he's already simmering with resentment

Tsuneo: Our hero, folks

> After one stopover and one more tram ride,

Dan: And a pause because his bus was delayed again

> I reached ALuCE station, which served the moon base.

Tsuneo: The moon base station served the moon base. I don't know who needed to hear that, but I'm glad we got it out there.

> I

> rode an escalator up to this small underground room. One path led to the street level of Apollopolis.

> One path led out of the base, and one path led into the base. That was the foot entrance into Moon

> Base ALuCE

Rick: For those people who walked to the moon

> and I ran inside, passing through the tunnel, and to the guard post manned by Space

> Marine Military Police.

Dan: Their job is to ensure you only play using official miniatures.

> "Lieutenant," said a Space Marine sergeant.

> I showed my ID, telling them my rank and post.

Dan: Autogyro Whitherington, lamp post.

Rebecca: [Marine] Go away, you silly person.

> "Tell Lieutenant Meyers and Major Emerson at the Army's 6th Battalion forward post that I am on my

> way," I said.

Rick: [Marine] No.

Dan: Well... Okay, then.

> "Yes, sir," replied the sergeant.

> I ran along the sidewalks of the base, passing people. I nearly ran into a truck along the way.

Tsuneo: Try harder next time

> Finally, I reached the building where my battalion was stationed.

> "Lieutenant," Executive Sergeant Wing addressed me upon seeing me. I noticed he was dressed in

> MARPAT camouflage.

> "Is that the uniform of the day?" I asked.

> "Yes, it is, sir. I strongly recommend you get dressed, sir."

Rick: Told you, uniform regulations

Rebecca: It's kind of sad that you're right

> And so I did,

Dan: 'And so I did' fixes everything. It folds your laundry and gets embarrassing stains out of your Class As.

> quickly changing from my Class "A's" to my MARPAT.

Dan: Everyone around him is wearing eighties futurist jumpsuits but he knows what's important

> And just in time, as it was time for breakfast.

Rebecca: The breakfast buffet closes at 10 AM sharp. That's when they pack away the bacon and switch off the pancake extruder.

> Breakfast was less stressful, as I had scrambled eggs and toast.

Tsuneo: Space breakfast!

Rick: A part of a complete space diet

> A third lieutenant from the battalion staff- I knew her as Lieutenant Mejian- called our attention.

> "Major Emerson is in a meeting right now," she said,

Dan: Um, does that effect breakfast?

Rick: [Mejian] Well, no.

Dan: Okay then.

> her dark hair tied in a ponytail.

Rebecca: This is her only character trait. Treasure it

> Oooooooooo

> A while later, we found out what the meeting was about.

Rick: Picking the battalion's colours for next months' charity football match. Important stuff.

> Jack assembled the entire battalion.

> Lieutenant Chalmers and Master Sergeant Avital stood by his side.

Rebecca: [Avital] That's right chump, see which one of us really matters.

> "All right, people," he said. "We are being deployed for an attack against the Robotech Masters in orbit. Our job will be to be to seize the Robotech Masters' ships."

Rick: They're late on their repayments.

> That's right; we're now doing the job of the Space Marines."

Dan: Time to effortlessly steamroll opponents and be the dominant meta

> I figured so many Space Marine veritech armor battalions were lost over this war.

Rebecca: The people who's job this is all died trying to do it, so now we're sending what's left. Really fills you with confidence.

> "Remember," the major continued, "the most important thing you have is your air supply.

Rick: Not getting shot is a close second.

> The enemy will surely try to deprive us of air as soon as we board.

Dan: So be sure to take deep breaths

> All combat troops are to gear up and move to their assigned drop ships."

Dan: Do you mind going over the assignments? I missed that meeting because I was busy getting some.

> And we did.

Tsuneo: Each time he goes into battle, he's wracked with doubt. Is this going to be the last "and we did" he'll ever see?

> I suited up and then drove my hovertank to Hangar 32, where our drop ship was

> waiting. After passing through another cargo airlock, we entered the hangar.

> Inside the hangar was this huge rectangular ship, much larger than a Liewneuatzs

Tsuneo: Bless you

Rick: Oh man. It's got to be dust or something.

> cargo shuttle. It

> sort of looked like a sawfish, with a long, sharp extension extending from the front. "U.N. SPACE

> MARINES" was stenciled prominently on the hull of the craft.

Dan: Oh sure, it looks great, but it takes hours and as soon as you're done they come out with a new Thunderhawk model and you've got to start again.

> It dwarfed everything else inside, including our hovertanks.

Rick: Rising above the city, blocking out the noonday sun. It dwarfs the mighty redwoods and towers over everyone

> "I'm Lieutenant Meyers of the 18th Troop of the 6th Battalion," said Mike.

All: We know.

> "Major Shu, commander of this Daedalus boarding ship,"

Rick: It was easy for him to get this job

Tsuneo: Really?

Rick: Yeah, it was a Shu-in.

> said a person in a space suit; I could tell

> from the voice that the major was a woman. "I never imagined we'd have to haul the Army. You've

> heard how we operate, right?"

Tsuneo: Try to remove the pieces and don't touch the sides or else the red nose lights up

> "Yeah, basically if there is a hull breach, you guys jam the ship in and we go in."

> "For obvious reason, the whole ship is unpressurized.

Rebecca: [Shu] It's an operational nightmare and we lose troops to minor accidents daily.

> Better make sure you have spare tanks."

> "We got plenty of tanks, madam."

> "I mean air tanks, Lieutenant."

> "Yeah, that too, Major.

Tsuneo: Was that an attempt at humour?

Rebecca: God I hope not

> Okay, people, everyone get in."

> We all boarded via this ramp in the front of the Daedalus. Mike did a quick head count.

Dan: He didn't want to have to turn the space ship around and go back for someone like they did last time

> "We're all in and ready to go," he said.

> "Okay," replied Major Shu. The ship's ramp was shut.

> "I never did this before," said a corporal.

Dan: Don't worry, odds are you'll never do this again.

> "This is our plan," said Major Shu.

Tsuneo: Have we seen Major Shu before?

Rebecca: Would it matter if we had?

Tsuneo: Good point, let's move on

> "We are stay in the rear while the Spacy blasts holes in the

> enemy ships. Once a hole is punched in the enemy ship, we will go in."

> "It sounds simple," said Mike.

Rebecca: [Mike] Can't think of a better way to get us all killed.

> I agreed. Of course, things can get really complicated, such as enemy bioroids attacking the
> boarding ship.

Rick: Or two of your exes running into you at the same time. That sort of complicated

> And I knew that some of the people driving those bioroids were prisoners of the Robotech Masters,
> robbed of their will, their brains connected to the bioroid's systems.

Rebecca:: When the bioroid tried to connect to his brain, it had a 404 error.

> And we would be killing people who were victims of the Robotech Masters.

Rebecca: He's done it plenty of times before now, but this is when it bothers him

> And yet, the only way to stop the Robotech Masters from taking more people from Earth and

> sticking them into their bioroids was to destroy their ability to do so, which would kill some of their

> prisoners.

Rick: Have you considered asking nicely for them to stop it?

> Maybe, just maybe, we could rescue them.

Tsuneo: Just like he was... Say, how was he broken out of his brainwashing, anyway?

Rebecca: Looks like we're taking off, no time for questions, goodbye!

> "Okay, people," said Major Shu. "We've been cleared for takeoff."

Dan: There was another ship stuck in the station and they had to wait for the signal to clear.

> And I felt a little heavier as the Daedalus's landing thrusters burned, lifting us out of the hangar and
> into deep space and the battle ahead.

Dan: But that's for another time, as we are so done here

Rick: And yay for that

On that final comment, the big screen turned off, converting the world back to prose format. "And that was the midway point of the sequence of breadcrumbs that resembles the narrative of Dire Straights," Tsuneo considered. "A fic that goes out of its way to be as exceptionally dull as possible."

"It puts effort into being dull," Dan commented. "That'd be admirable if it wasn't so damn boring."

"Yeah," Rick nodded. "The fic has this very strange thing where it spends forever focusing on the things that don't matter."

"Cooking jerk turkey," Dan offered.

"The traffic to the airport," Tsuneo added.

"LaBelle," Rebecca finished.

"Exactly," he nodded. "And yet it blows off the things that are more important, like, say, everything that happened with that whole alien abduction arc."

"I think that calling it an 'arc' is being overly generous to it, but I see what you mean," Tsuneo agreed.

"We basically blew the whole thing off in nothing flat and instead immediately went back to day-to-day inanity of karaoke machines and living arrangements."

"Right," Dan agreed. "The fic rushed past it with no consequence at all."

"Lumps Mugglewhump was left with the very real risk that he might be court-martialled for his actions," Rebecca noted. "And that's before we consider all that would have come with his being abducted, drugged, brainwashed and forced to fight against his will. Imagine all the psychological stress or trauma and all the long-term consequences of that could come with that."

"And nothing happens with all of that," Tsuneo replied. "Instead it's back to life as normal as if nothing happened whatsoever. The whole thing is immediately forgotten."

"I'll go one further," Dan offered. "I'll imagine that it's never even bought up again."

"And when something finally happens, the fic again goes out of its way to make it as dull as possible," Rebecca considered. "Because the fic managed to make going into space to fight against the alien war fleet terminally dull. Once again, it focused entirely on the bland, functional and dry minutiae while sucking all the joy out of the whole thing. It's impressive in how bad it is."

"But I think we're overlooking the most important part of this chunk," Rick spoke up.

"Which is?" Tsuneo asked.

"We're now half way through the fic," he explained. "And yet, it feels like we've achieved nothing."

"You have a good point there," Rebecca admitted. "So far it feels like the fic could have easily been half as long and we would have missed nothing. But even then, I know it would still manage to be fantastically dull."

"In fact, I'd go so far as to say that this is our dullest fic so far," Dan finished. "Which is pretty telling in and of itself."

"Well I can see you're all getting really excited for the fic," The Voice beamed. "And I can't wait to see how you feel about the second half of it."

"Don't remind me," Tsuneo sighed.

"That's the spirit," the Voice beamed. "So you'll be pleased to know that we'll be covering the first part of the second half the fic next time."

"Way to drive home how much of a slog it will be," Rebecca noted. "Thanks."

"Great to hear," the Voice beamed. "So I will see you all next time."

"Thrilling," Dan finished.

"So, um, guys," Rick considered. "I just had a horrible thought about this fic."

"What's that?" Rebecca asked. "Because we've got a lot of things to dislike about it so far. On the other hand, one more won't hurt."

"It's Lupon's racist father-in-law Johnny," Rick explained. "Irrelevant to the story and probably will never be seen again, and all the personality traits he displayed were repulsive to the point where I have to wonder why Leslie even remains in contact with him."

"So what about him?" Tsuneo continued

"I think he might be the best realised character so far."

There was an awkward pause. "I think you're right," Tsuneo finally admitted. "And that scares me."

Author's notes:

In case you were wondering, no, we did not skip a bit. The entire 'abducted by aliens, given space drugs and forced to fight for them' thing was resolved entirely off-screen with no meaningful impact whatsoever. The one time the fic has an interesting plot and it skips it entirely.

We are halfway through this fic. I just want to point that out because it really does feel like we've accomplished nothing and gone nowhere with it so far. Sure, we've had a lot of text, but at the same time there's nothing actually in it. And, sadly, that's not going to change for some time to come. Yes, it does eventually get started, but that still doesn't make up for the copious quantities of nothing we've had so far.

Next time, when will this mad whirlwind existence ever cease?

Robotech copyright Harmony Gold

Dire Straits written by Michael2

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

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Space robots? Email us at [elmerstudios00 \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:elmerstudios00@gmail.com) and register your Jeff.

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