
Episode 478 – Surely the massive megacorporation is just here to help

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.

“...and that's why creepy dogmatic Transhumanists are the worst type,” Rebecca finished as she and Dan entered the apartment.

“That still doesn't justify trying to blow me up,” Dan countered

“Would it help if I said I was sorry?”

“I think we're a bit past that.”

Anything she might have said next was cut off by Rick and Tsuneo entering. “We'll you're looking even more dour than usual,” Rebecca noted.

“So I went and did a stupid thing,” Tsuneo admitted with a sigh.

“This isn't related to your parents, is it?” Rick asked.

“Not this time, fortunately,” he admitted.

“Well it can't be that bad then,” Rick replied dismissively with a shrug.

“I joined a group fiction project,” he continued.

“Why on earth would you go and do that?” Rebecca asked. “Especially given what we do here.”

“Well..” Tsuneo glanced around. “I guess the thing is that it looked interesting and that it was a subject that I was interested in, and I kind of sort of knew some of the people involved with it.”

“Okay, so that doesn't sound too bad,” Dan offered. “I mean, its not my sort of thing, but I can see why you'd want to get involved with that. So why would you be acting like you just shot someone's dog?”

“Should I tell them, Rick?” Tsuneo asked.

“Might as well,” Rick admitted. “You bought it up.”

Tsuneo took a deep sigh. “So Rick and I were a part of one of these things... a while ago. Like, before we started this thing level a long time ago.”

“That feels like forever,” Rebecca admitted.

“To be fair, it was kind of my idea,” Rick noted. “I was both looking for cool things to do while avoiding work while at the same time looking for ideas that I could steal for my own stuff. At least I'm honest about it.”

“And to be fair, it looked good on the surface,” Tsuneo noted. “Write in a shared world with a group of writers, bounce off each other, exchange ideas, write both in your own silo and yet build up the world as a whole and so on and so forth.”

“You know how many of my red flags that is setting off?” Rebecca asked.

"I'm guessing a lot," Tsuneo replied.

"Oh yes," she agreed. "So now I want to know how badly it fell apart and just how awful it was, because I know that's what's going to happen."

"Personal experience?" Tsuneo asked.

"Oh no, this is your story," she countered. "So tell me how this all fell apart."

"I guess it was the usual sort of thing," Tsuneo continued. "Surface read revealed a vibrant, growing community with a lot of worldbuilding. And Rick and I started our own early work which drew the attention of those in charge of the group. The well-established, old guard who were the de-facto big names who had done a lot of the foundational world."

"And let me guess, they immediately responded with heavy-handed gatekeeping," Rebecca smirked.

"They basically told us we were doing it wrong," Rick nodded.

"Thought so," Rebecca sighed. "Happens every time."

"In short order they tried to push us out," Tsuneo noted. "Not in an active 'get the hell out of our community' level, but in a very passive-aggressive 'maybe you are looking for something different' level way. Not saying that were weren't welcome, but at the same time, making such that it was clear."

"So like my family gathering," Dan offered. "You know, where you all pretend to be nice to each other but really you hate each other's guts."

"Dan, your family is a mess," Rebecca noted.

"This is also true," He nodded. "But again, Tsuneo's story."

"So we were put in the situation where we could pull out and let the bullies win, or we could knuckle down and try to work around them," Tsuneo admitted. "And in a moment that I think was somewhat uncharacteristic in hindsight, Rick and I kind of formed an alliance with a couple of other 'fringe' users. And at the same time we tried to be friendly and open towards newcomers when the actual leadership wasn't."

"Enter the Malicious Compliance Crew," Rick spoke up.

"I like the sound of this already," Dan smiled.

"Basically we formed an alliance with several other fringe writers," Tsuneo explained. "We followed the rules of the community as laid down to the letter, while also refusing to engage with the spirit of it. We collaborated with each other while effectively locking out those that ran the group through carefully wording our content. We collaborated with each other but not through the 'official' channels. We ensured that we could write in the way we wanted without having to deal with the odious, toxic leadership."

"Oh I can see how this is going go," Dan nodded.

"So think of the staff as Yosemite Sam and us as Bug Bunny," Rick offered. "Every time they tried to push us, they instead ended up with cartoon dynamite in their pants."

"So how then did this all end?" Rebecca asked.

"For the most part the staff ended up choking the life out of the community," Tsuneo shrugged. "We wandered off because the fight had in many ways become more involving than the actual creativity, while what was left collapsed under its own weight. Last I saw, it was basically a skeleton with a single staffer slowly potting away at what was left to an audience of just himself."

"As is the fate of all things," Rebecca finished. "Well done."

Tsuneo shrugged. "So maybe it's a stupid move to try this again."

"Maybe," Rick offered. "Or we could get more stupid stories out of it."

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

"And speaking of stupid stories," Rebecca glanced up at the roof. "Good morning to you too, Mister Skullhead."

"Haven't we done that one before?" Dan asked.

"I lost track long ago," she admitted. "Besides, at this point I don't think anyone cares."

"This is also true."

"So skull," Tsuneo nodded, "what do we have today?"

"Well based on our recent experiences, we're going to be looking at another Ready Player One fic," The Voice explained.

This produced a round of moans from the four of them. "Really, Voice? Already?" Tsuneo asked.

"I mean, we just got through Lozer," Rick added. "And that's, like, the definitive Ready Player One fic. I don't think there's anything we could add to the Ready Player One experience."

"And since no human being on the planet has actually read Ready Player Two, it can't be about that," Dan noted.

"Well today's story is called A Helping Hand," the Voice explained.

"What's it about?" Rebecca asked. "Besides the awkward combination of nineteen-eighties nostalgia and contemporary gamer culture that has dominated all our other RP1 fics?"

"That's a very good question," the Voice commented.

"And?" Rebecca continued, waving her hand.

"Its in three parts," the Voice answered without actually providing an answer. "And we'll be covering the first part today."

"Oooh boy," Rebecca replied.

"But here's my big question," Rick asked. "Will it have the most important part of our Ready Player One fic experience?"

"You mean long lists of everyone's inventory?" Tsuneo asked as he took his place on the couch.

"Exactly," Rick nodded as he and the others joined him.

"You know what?" Tsuneo admitted as the big screen turned on, changing the world over to script format. "With our history? I'd take that."

> A Helping Hand by Vivori

> Chapter One

> "Advance! We're almost there GLURK!"

Dan: I'll let Glurk know then

> Armed Santa,

Rick: There's crazy people out there

> AKA Jonathan Green's avatar blinked into non-existence as he is pinged by dozens of
> Mass Effect rounds leaving nothing but coins and random parts of his red equipment all over the
> ground. His death though is barely heard

Dan: Nobody will miss Armed Santa.

> among the sounds of explosions and the cries of pain by
> NPC's and the occasional player.

> "Keep moving forward. Alliance soldiers with me!" Rodrigo Diaz AKA, John Shepard,

Tsuneo: But is this his favourite store on the Citadel?

> leader of the majority of the Mass Effect fans which formed into one big clan

Rick: United in their rage over the Mass Effect 3 ending

Dan: I bet they'll boot you if you say a single nice thing about Andromeda

> called out, urging the rest of his twenty-man squad to advance

Tsuneo: So there are only twenty Mass Effect fans in the entire OASIS?

Rebecca: Well it's not from an idealised version of the eighties.

Tsuneo: True.

> despite the rain of hellfire that the I-Robot NPC's hailed down on them.

> Currently the battlefield is on a ruined hologram of New York

Rick: I thought New York was down for maintenance

> and the prize is nothing else but a relic of power, which is the Core of Sonny.

Dan: It gives you the power to play volleyball

> Apparently according to game information brokers,

Rebecca: AKA walkthroughs.

> it is one of

> the best power sources in the entire OASIS and can power anything from your own personal ship to
> a car.

Rebecca: It can power a spaceship or something that's a lot smaller than a spaceship

> Surely everyone is gunning for it;

Dan: There's a whole twenty people out here.

> especially with the fact that it can be useful for any ride for the next race for Haliday's first challenge.

Rick: That was the swim race in the Snorks level, right?

Dan: You're getting started early.

> The only problem is the dozens of other clans and groups,

Rebecca: They were caught in a crossfire between the AV Club and the Jane Austen enthusiasts.

> not to mention hundreds of other single players

Dan: Ready player one is the loneliest number

> aiming for the same thing that their own group is trying to get.

Rick: A frost-free fridge [Ding!]

> Around the hologram of the battlefield, it is a complete warzone

Tsuneo: The battlefield was indeed a warzone.

> with players trying to advance against the NPC's NS-5's and

> trying to take potshots with one another to eliminate the competition as they pushed onward.

Rick: One guy was lucky enough to get the Volus Adept and was tearing it up out there.

> Not

> that it is going easy. NPC NS-5's with railguns are defending the lines in heavily defensible positions

> cracking down hard on any Player.

Rebecca: The robot NPCs had just enough intelligence to enjoy gunning down idiot players.

> The white robots are deadly both range and melee,

Rick: But ask them about their mothers and they break down in tears.

> able to switch attack modes completely easy.

Tsuneo: They switched from Salsa to Tango with ease.

> It

> is proven enough when a bunch of three player team whose avatars look a lot like Luke Skywalker,

> Princess Leia and Han Solo

Tsuneo: But just different enough to be legally distinct

> made a blind charge to one of the NPC lines' weak spots only to get

> their asses handed to them when an NS-5 appeared on their way.

Rebecca: Their plan was to charge into enemy fire under the cover of daylight.

> Solo got a gun blast to the face

Dan: Yes, but did he shoot first?

> and Leia have her neck broken.

Rick: But at least she got close enough to let a robot do that, I guess.

> Luke Skywalker despite obviously having better equipment than the other two with his laser sword

Tsuneo: His off-brand laser sword.

> survived the initial onslaught by blocking the gun blasts. When the

> NS-5 advanced to melee him though, it is a completely different story.

Rick: A story about a guy named Jack.

- > The real Luke Skywalker could have taken out the robot NPC without problem.

Rebecca: I sense an incoming social media rant

- > This Skywalker though has Luke's face and none of his skills.

Tsuneo: He bought the skin at the cash shop but didn't bother grinding his stats.

- > Two punches that he didn't manage to block with his sword, and a knee to the gut

Dan: Followed by a fierce Chinese Burn and a pink belly to finish him off.

- > made the wannabe player crashing down on the ground like a sack of potatoes.

Rick: To be fair, if you use the Holiday Special Luke Skywalker skin you will get that.

- > He ended up

- > getting killed when his foe crawled all over his knocked out body and bashed his avatar's head open

- > with a nearby rock.

Rebecca: A clear demonstration of caveman versus astronaut.

- > John Shepard on the other hand nearly got his head blown off when a stray railgun bullet whizzed

- > past his head far too much for his comfort.

Tsuneo: He could only tolerate so many near headshots.

- > He only got his ass saved when his partner and leading teammate Jane Shepard

Rick: Can we assume she's a paragon soldier too?

- > tackled him out of the way to the ground.

Rebecca: Given they're essentially playing the same character, this is not awkward in the slightest.

- > "Easy there John. Focus!"

Dan: 'Try not to get shot in the head' is sound advice.

- > hissed the female player, who is also his de-facto co-leader of the clan

Tsuneo: It's an entirely unofficial volunteer position which is held on a rotating basis

- > at his ear as she crouched back to release a stream of bullets

Dan: But what kind of guns is she using, huh? We need to know!

Rebecca: I'm sure there will be plenty of time for that later.

- > before ducking back for cover by the rubble as the NPC return fire is heard.

- > Shaking his head to clear his thoughts of the gory end that he had seen,

Rick: He was going to walk off the trauma

- > he crouched behind his

- > partner, peering through the wall towards an entrenched position manned by ten or so NS-5's

Dan: [Jane] So if we're pinned down by NPC robots, why did you take time out to kill that Santa?

Rick: [John] I mean, did you see that guy?

Dan: [Jane] Okay, fair point.

> raining down endless amounts of rail fire at them all down.

Rebecca: Literal aimbots

> More than one unlucky looter got busted

> who braved the amount of bullets out in the barely covered open.

Dan: I mean, it's not like they were trying to do something really stupid like rob a liquor store during a riot.

> "How are we doing?" asked John as he readied his own Avenger rifle snapping off a few shots that

> took out one random NS-5 before ducking back just in time for their return fire.

Rick: It's a very casual gunfight. You know, don't make a fuss, just return fire when you feel like it.

> "What do you think?" was the rather sarcastic reply.

Tsuneo [John]: I don't know. I was asking because I was hoping for a useful update on our situation.

Rebecca [Jane]: Sure, that's totally what you were doing. Real helpful there.

> "Most of us are pinned down here and Traynor's

> just got a face full of rocket fire from one of those creepy Fire bending wannabees.

Rick: They're only beginner Firebenders. Cut them some slack.

> We are down a person short

Tsuneo: We're down a person and we're short.

> and we can't advance further without getting taken out. Garrus is doing the best he can

> to take out the NS-5's with sniper pot shots but they're respawning faster than he could kill them

> from their respawning sphere.

Rick: Ah hell, someone got together a 2x4 and triggered a hyperspawn.

Rebecca: That may be the geekiest thing you've ever said.

Rick: I try.

> "And the scattered loot?"

> Jane Shepard just smirked through her visor as she pointed at their clan member whose Avatar is

> Thane

Dan: So in order to join their team you must make your avatar into a specific Mass Effect character.

Rick: It seems to be the case.

Dan: I feel bad for the guy who ends up as Barla Von.

> using acrobatics and taekwondo with a M-3 Predator Pistol

Tsuneo: And a side order of smarm.

> cracking down on any looter that got on his bad side.

Rick: But if they asked nicely before looting then he was fine with them.

> "Unlucky for them," smirked John as he eyed back the damned defensive line of NPC NS-5's

Dan: Holding hard on the thirty-yard line and not letting a thing through.

> holding strong despite the hail of counterattack the Players down them are throwing back.

Tsuneo: So is there any structure to this zone, or is it just an endless gunfight?

Rick: Depends, what zone is it?

Tsuneo: The uh... endless... gunfight zone.

> "What about the clans allied to us Jane? Did they manage to advance or get taken out to?"

> The female Shepard

Rebecca: I suspect that will be the entirety of her character

> only grunted as she snapped off a few shots before answering back.

Dan: [Jane] I'm not even looking where I'm shooting, it's crazy.

> "The fifty

> or so Roman Avatar players under Maximus Aurelius are pinned down as we were north of here.

Rebecca: In retrospect, going into a space robot battle with spears was a bad idea.

> Dragon Age Clan with thirty or so of their members

Tsuneo: Do they all have to play as Dragon Age characters too?

Rebecca: Yeah, but someone gets stuck as Sera.

Tsuneo: Poor bastard.

> is reduced to fifteen when those Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles attack them from behind

Rick: Those turtle boys didn't cut them no slack.

> and got them by surprise when they're staging a mock battle along the right flank.

Dan: It's only a pretend fight to the death.

> They are currently making a triage point for their wounded in the east side

Rebecca: I can't think of a job I'd want more in a video game than field surgeon

Tsuneo: Good thing I put points into the bonesaw skill

> with some solo players

Rick: I thought the Han Solo player was taken out earlier.

> and smaller clans have also clumped up unable to advance.

Dan: The Gears of War guys have set up a barbeque pit in their foxhole. It's really cute.

> "So currently we're all in a stalemate," concluded Jane.

Tsuneo: Thank you for that, Doctor Obvious

> "No one has the numbers or skills to

> advance anymore without taking heavy losses along the way. Not with the next race starting up in a

> few days again.

Rebecca: The race starts every few days. It's a complicated arrangement.

> Everyone's trying their best to conserve both money and items for the event then
> and becoming killed here would be a bad luck for everyone;

Dan: Yeah, getting killed is a bit of a bummer.

> especially with the sad fact that you're both losing items and money.

Tsuneo: Getting killed is bad, but losing your stuff is even worse

> The NS-5's are making sure that bad luck keeps on though if the rate
> of dropped items without owners is anything to go by.

Rick: At this point I can only imagine there's a huge pile of stuff lying abandoned in the middle of the street

> "We need to take out that gun emplacement," John finally spoke as he stared at the center line of
> the NS-5's. "That's the only way we can break through.

Tsuneo: Unless somebody's got a mole machine on hand.

Rick: I know someone who can help you with that...

> The robots themselves are not a threat,

Dan: Tell that to Santa.

> not with the numbers that we have with us yet aiming to push through.

Rick: [John] And that's why we've stalled.

> But that rapid fire weapon can
> take out any number of us within seconds the moment we try to break through,"

> "And how do you propose we do that?" asked the female Shepard.

Rebecca: This is the OASIS where people can pull all sorts of pop-culture contrivances out of their arses. I'm just surprised that one of you hasn't flattened it with Voltron yet.

> "Every time a sniper takes out a
> gunner, they would just replace it. And it does have a portable barrier that can stop any sort of
> missile or explosive to pass through.

Tsuneo: That's the kind of game balance I've come to expect from the OASIS.

> Who's mad enough to even charge it in the first place?"

Rebecca: Half your team, from the sounds of it.

> "Would it be too late to say that I volunteer?" a gentle voice nearly made the two Shepards to jump
> their hearts out only to lay eyes at a very familiar figure well-known throughout the OASIS.

Rick: Soyuz Granny!

> Dressed in a red jacket type of shirt over a long dark blue inner attire. The person or his avatar is a
> handsome young man.

Rebecca: So odds are he's actually a sweaty shut-in who posts Joker memes.

> He has shiny black hair that is well-groomed in the back but flows in
> sweeping bangs which fall over the right side of his face, obscuring his right eye.

Rick: His peripheral vision sucks.

> Atop his head is a red bandanna.

Dan: But it clips through his overstyled hair.

> His visage is also that of peace and gentleness, not coinciding with his position as
> one of the top players of the game.

Tsuneo: Rated in the top five thousand players using that avatar.

> And at his side hanging from his belt is a long katana.

Dan: It's Generic Shonen Protagonist!

> "You-you're...", began Jane unable to mutter even the words as the man smiled gently at her.

Rick: [Jane] Uh, who are you again?

> "Leave this to me," as soon as that gun emplacements down. Advance with your clan so that the
> others can follow understood?"

Rebecca: And she immediately shot him for his loot.

> The two of them simply nodded dumbly as the man stepped out of cover and moved away from
> them forward to the next rubble.

> "Is that who I think it is?"

Dan: Brick Hactar? Yeah, he gets that a lot

Rick: Hard to recognise him when he's sober

> John asked still unable to believe his eyes that he had seen one of Oasis'
> legends and probably one of the richest men currently in the world.

Tsuneo: We've only just met him and yet the fic has to take every opportunity to talk him up

Rebecca: I'm sensing that this will be a nuanced and well-developed protagonist

> "It is. I never thought I would meet him in my lifetime,"

Dan: [Jane] Hoped, sorry. I hoped I'd never meet him.

> Jane replied looking at the back of the red jacket.

Rick: Yes, but where's his bike from Akira?

> Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, John tapped into his communication module. "Everyone this
> is John Shepard of Clan ME.

Dan: Successor to Clan 98, replaced with Clan 2000.

> We are about to charge in a few minutes once that gun emplacements down.

Rebecca: [John] Some chump's decided to charge them, IDK why.

> All players, I repeat. We are going to charge the enemy lines once that gun emplacements down,"

> "Who is taking out the bunker John?"

Rick: Well there's a German guy inside it with a Luger...

> the Krogan avatar of Grunt holding a large shotgun, one of his members asked.

Tsuneo: [Grunt] I'm here too! [Pause] Well, that's me. See y'all later.

> John only sighed still unable to believe to whom he had talked to a few seconds ago. "Captain
> Sagara,"

Rick: Not Captain Sagara!

[Pause]

Rick: Who's Captain Sagara?

>..

> "You really enjoy messing up other people don't you?" the rather amused female voice made the
> black-haired katana wielder

Tsuneo: That's Mitsurugi from Soul Calibur. Nothing to do with this scene, and really I'm not sure why we cut to him.

> turn his head back to the smirking face of his childhood friend and co-
> worker both in the real world and here in the game.

Dan: They were in adjacent cubicles and shared a lunchroom

> "Laetri, what can I say? I enjoy it a lot,"

Tsuneo: He enjoys being a dick.

> Sagara, AKA Timothy S. Williams, owner of Sagara Foundation

Rebecca: He named his company after a Japanese war criminal

> and one of the richest and most influential men in the world,

Dan: I wonder how many social media platforms he's crashed and burned?

> smirked at his secretary

Rebecca: I doubt her job description on the application included playing video games with her boss.

> whose avatar is that of a pretty female Night Elf in the familiar old Warcraft armor

Rick: A low-poly suit of shiny metal armour with a blue trim

> which is barely clad in anything that resembling armor anyways.

Rebecca: It does resemble a carnival dress, for some reason.

> To be honest it is more like a two piece with
> shoulder pauldrons and a long cape showing off the avatar's toned body for the entire world to see.
> It is both completely attractive and distracting.

Rebecca: Settle down, fic.

> Very good points that is useful for PVP games.

Tsuneo: Because you never see scantily clad female video game characters otherwise

> It's
> only an added bonus that Timothy also knows the simple fact that his secretary's avatar resembled
> her face a lot in the real world which is both angular and catlike in appearance.

Dan: Although he does find her real-world slitted eyes and fangs rather disturbing.

> The only difference
> is that here on the game, her skin color is light violet, her eyes the color of silver blue gemstones

Tsuneo: As in, they were blue.

> and her hair which fell to her back in a long waterfall is a lot longer here in the game than in the real
> world, though not by much.

Rick: She looks like her avatar in as far as she looks nothing like it

> "So what's the plan?" asked the Night Elf pulling an arrow from her quiver and knocking it on her
> bow,

Tsuneo: Everyone around her is using railguns, so she feels kind of silly.

> her slanted eyes peering through the rubble that the two of them are hiding only a few meters
> away from the gun emplacement

Dan: Turns out nobody had considered sneaking up on its obvious blind spot

Tsuneo: Cunning

> who had turned a little away from their direction as it focused on
> turning to dust two looters who made a break for some rare items in the open area.

Rick: I got a Nocturnal Golf Club!

Dan: I got an Exterminator's Rolling Pin!

> Sagara only smirked at her rather serious face.

Tsuneo: Just a life-or-death struggle, nothing to worry about.

> Give it to Cassandra or Laetri to take even a game
> seriously. It's one of the things he liked about her though.

Dan: That and her collection of Alf Pogs.

> "Distraction and destruction," he simply answered.

Rick: [Sagara] We blow it up.

Rebecca: [Secretary] You mean like those guys have been trying to do for hours?

Rick: [Sagara] Uhhh...

> Smoke arrows for cover the moment I advance and is our other friend finally here by the
> way?"

Tsuneo: Wow, I'm glad we've got such a brilliant player here to think up innovative tactics like 'using cover.'

> "Awww you, prefer her more than me? And here I thought I am showing enough skin to get your
> attention,"

Rebecca: Dialogue by somebody who's never met a real woman

- > she pouted at him making Sagara blink to shake his thoughts off about the distracting
- > violet-haired elf's words before glaring at her.

> "You're a tease you know that?"

> She only smiled innocently. "And you love me for it, so what's the problem?"

Tsuneo: Where do you want me to start?

- > And without warning
- > she stood up loosening three arrows from her bow creating a powerful explosion that sent large
- > amounts of rainbow colored smoke

Rick: At least their deaths will be fabulous

> all over the open area between them and the NS-5 emplacement gun.

> Sagara only frowned at the smoke. "I hate you,"

> "Love you too. Now go!"

Dan: Ha ha, banter.

> He needed no further urging.

Tsuneo: He always wanted to throw himself in front of enemy fire.

- > Jumping over the rubble he is taking cover at. Sagara immediately
- > charged forward towards the cover provided by the rainbow colored smoke.

Tsuneo: Right into the minefield.

> Activating the glasses that is specifically designed to protect his eyes from this color

Rebecca: He has rainbow-proof glasses.

- > he pushed in, feeling the usual feeling
- > of blinded for a few seconds as he ran before finally reaching the other side,

Dan: Only to find a chicken there

> almost there in front of the gun emplacement manned by the NPC's.

> Sagara never knew that NPC NS-5's can make an expression.

Rick: And that expression was contempt

- > However these ones surely did as
- > they stared at his rapidly charging form. The shock did not last though as they immediately turned
- > the direction of the manned turret towards him.

Tsuneo: And gunned him down on the spot. The end.

> Normally this is a move that no player would dare to take...

Dan: Usually they'd have done something smart instead.

> at least no player except him.

Rebecca: Because he's incredibly smart as this dumb move proves.

- > The distance may be shorter but it is still not close enough that
- > the guns would not be able to take down anyone approaching. Fortunately he is not just anyone.

Tsuneo: He's That Guy.

- > Using his momentum to slide upward, Sagara only smirked seeing barely a second after lines of
- > yellow swiftly pass where he is before. Quick hand movements to reverse the polarity of his gravity
- > boots

Rick: By the way, I have this

- > pushed him upward flying in the air and down straight to the open cover where five NS-5's are
- > manning the turret.

Tsuneo: Oh, from above! That's why they were pinned down, nobody else in the OASIS is capable of moving vertically at all.

- > The katana blade immediately left the scabbard cutting two by the first swing and badly damaging
- > another before landing in the ground. Instincts honed from years of Kenjutsu practice

Tsuneo: At this point he might as well wear a t-shirt declaring 'I am an obnoxious weeb'.

- > made him
- > sidestep the lunge made by another NS-5, smashing the hilt of his blade to its dome the moment it
- > stepped past him.

- > "That's four down," he thought mentally

Rick: [Secretary] You only took down two...

Dan: [Sagara] Four. Down.

- > as he turned just in time to see the last NS-5 attached to the
- > gun emplacement which looked like one of those World War Two Calibers

Dan: Can we say it's 7.5mm French?

- > being turned slowly towards his direction.
- > "Too easy," pulling a gum grenade from one of his red jacket's pockets.

Rebecca: Making you wonder why he didn't do that first.

- > He simply lobbed it at the
- > NS-5 who NPC or not by instinct tried to pry it away from its chest not seeing the Spartan kick

Rick: Followed by an Athenian punch and a Thebean bodyslam

- > that sent it flying away into open air from the bunker they are in to explode just in time outside.

Dan: Where it burst into a big glob of Hubba Bubba.

- > "CHARRRRGGGEE!" the sound echoed outside and Sagara despite the smoke and debris flying
- > everywhere could see that the other players at this side now clear from being pinned down are
- > pushing forward,

Dan: Even the Roman cosplayers?

Rick: I imagine they have to announce it in Latin first

- > leaving their covers as they met head on the NS-5's who also had broken their defensive line

Rebecca: [Robot] Let's give up our cover and meet them out in the open, beep boop.
Tsuneo: [Robot] We are really bad at this, beep boop.

> formation meeting the players head on turning the battlefield into one big melee contest.

Rebecca: Their tactics amount to 'angry mob'

> Perfect.

> Moving forward in fluid motions

Rick: Like water going down a drain

> that made him famous throughout the OASIS as a player,

Dan: He is one of the most players that ever did OASIS

> Sagara

> flitted this way and that surprising both NPC's and players as his sword flashed in seconds taking

> down any NPC barring his way within seconds.

Tsuneo: In seconds, even.

> The sword, the Grass Cutter

Rick: It was designed for lawn care

> also known as Kusanagi

Rebecca: He's just checklisting odious weeb clichés, isn't he?

> is designed to elongate to any size

Dan: That's also what he claimed to his secretary.

> and specifically to cut through anything with the NS-5's are a good example of that,

Tsuneo: It can cut through anything and it can cut through this specific thing

> their flimsy frames becoming digital mesh

Rick: They lost their textures

> once more once his sword swerves through them like a loan mower.

Dan: There you go. It was indeed designed for lawn care

> Sagara is known throughout the OASIS not because of his

> reputation as the leader of the Seikihoutai group

Dan: In fact, as a leader he kind of sucked.

> which is one of the biggest guilds reaching hundreds of members

Tsuneo: Maybe three of which actually ever logged in

> and owning their own planet MULE,

Rebecca: The donkey planet

Rick: It sent troops to the San Riviera war
Rebecca: Deep cut

> which supported a large industry of the game

Tsuneo: And the most oil reserves

> with cities there.

Dan: But nobody could repair anything. That was Jack's job.

> Rather he is known with the way he fights.

Rick: Players would get together and roast his streams.

> Unlike most players, he never

> used a range weapon other than hand-held grenades, the occasional exploding knives and

> shuriken.

Rebecca: He never uses ranged weapons save for all the ranged weapons he uses

> His skill with a sword is unmatched

Tsuneo: Given who his character is named for, that's not something I'd brag about

> and the Seikihoutai dojo at MULE is always filled with hopeful applicants.

Rick: It's the biggest strip mall Karate dojo in the OASIS

> Decapitating five feet away an escaping NS-5 with extending his sword,

Dan: [Robot] Please, I have a wife and kids, beep boop.

> Sagara paused for a minute as he looked at the direction that the battle is going.

Tsuneo: Just stood still in the middle of a raging gunfight. I'm sure nothing bad could happen to him there.

Rebecca: I imagine nothing bad has ever happened to this guy.

> The players so far are gaining ground despite the stubborn resistance.

Tsuneo: The stubborn resistance he effortlessly cleaned up in a way that anybody could have.

> The Mass Effect guys apparently spread the word and nearly every available Player

Tsuneo: Save for those guys at the back who just didn't care

> that is pushing through to win this artifact is trying their best to break through. As far

> as he can see, everyone has no such luck yet though.

Dan: So do the clans have some kind of lend-lease arrangement to share the artefact, or...

Rebecca: I doubt anyone thought that far ahead.

> They are making good time but the NS-5's

> are clumped together especially those that are blocking the top of the ruins which is the only

> pathway to the top where the Core of Sonny is located.

> "Yaaaaaaahhh-ayieeehhh!" the charge of a player's avatar looking like a hobgoblin

Rick: What you gonna do with that hobgoblin?

> exploded into pieces as an arrow got stuck between his head and his body in the neck.

Dan: That. That's exactly what you do.

Rick: Well I did wonder.

> "Hey Sagara! You're spacing out a lot these days," the tinkling laugh of Laetri is heard as the
> graceful Night Elf jumped up from where she is hiding

Tsuneo: Not the same Night Elf as before. Actually completely unrelated.

Rebecca: Just check how much he drools over her skimpy armour to be sure.

> giving a roundhouse kick to one of the NS-5's
> sending it careening to a nearby player who is caught off guard by a robot flying in his direction.

Tsuneo: Things you do not expect

> "Laetri, you're late...again,"

Rick: [Laetri] Sorry, I was shuffling your meetings to account for your game time. I do have a real job, you know.

> he only smiled back in response at her who shrugs as if saying: "What
> you gonna do about it?" before looking back at the prize of this contest.

Dan: A first class one-way ticket to Albuquerque

> "Sooo...you've got a plan yet?" asked the Night Elf

Rick: [Sagara] Uhhh, kill things? Worked fine so far.

> following him forward in a light jog towards that
> direction, her hands gripping twin silver knives putting down any NPC on their path,

Rick: Store keepers, quest givers, invisible action triggers... any NPC.

> which is not by much with the majority of them focusing on defending the path entrance.

> "I believe we can just push through their lines you know. Take down anyone along the way and
> claim the prize if you get what I mean,"

Dan: He's going to get the thing he came here for? What a cunning and creative plan!

> he simply said smirking inwardly at the thunderous scowl that adorned Laetri's face.

> "That's it?"

> "That's it," he simply shrugged.

Rebecca: [Sagara] Kill things it is, I guess.

> "So that's our plan? Move forward, kill everyone that try to stop us, hope we don't get killed along
> the way and win," she repeated in a sarcastic tone that Sagara simply nodded to.

> "Right in the spot, simple and precise, easy to remember,"

Rick: [Laetri] I'm bringing this up with HR.

> He isn't exactly surprised that she blew the gasket afterwards. "YOU ASS! Not even you and I with
> our skills can push through all of that. We'll be taken down and I exactly have no plans to get myself

- > blown up before the upcoming race,"
- > "Whoever said that it is simply you and I?"

Rebecca: You see, he met this guy called Lozer...

- > he made a show of picking his digital nails laughing at his friend's confused expression

Tsuneo: So far our lead's personality is that he's an arse.

Rebecca: Now to be fair, it's just the first chapter and I'm sure there will be plenty more opportunities for him to show us just how much of an arse he can be.

- > just in time for a blur of yellow to suddenly appear in front of them,
- > smiling brightly enough to rival the sun.

Rick: Mister Happy!

- > "Yow pips! Sorry I'm late. I'm busy saving as much as possible of our Roman allies from being
- > decimated at the other side of here,"

Rick: As Romans, they're upset by her misuse of the word 'decimate'.

- > the newcomer greeted.

- > "Janine what, why are you here?" asked a flabbergasted Laetri knifing a curious NS-5 who tried to
- > peek on them

Tsuneo: Casual murder

- > before focusing her shining eyes on their old friend once more.
- > Janine Beric Holly, also known as Rapid Gunner33

Dan: And yes, she tried to get that name 32 times.

Rick: Laetri's just happy she didn't have to put an accent on her name's vowels.

- > in the OASIS is one of the leading females ranged weapon user in the game.

Rebecca: Being gamers, they need to bring up her gender at every point to qualify any achievements she might have

- > Unlike the other players, she is the only player in the entire game
- > to have been logged in three years straight without stopping

Rick: She had been fed intravenously and her haptic suit was very, very full.

- > as the same time as Sagara first appeared.

Dan: During the tenebrous reign of the Spider Kingdom

- > Her avatar is also every guy player and some females' version of a wet dream.

Tsuneo: I'm sure Sagara has opinions on her outfit.

- > Her attire
- > is nothing more than that of a yellow trench coat above a leather bra, showing off her curvy body
- > and short shorts that completely failed to hide her long legs.

Rebecca: The sort of look that says 'yes, I am a creepy sweaty guy in real life'.

- > She's also wearing high-heeled combat boots and steel studded gloves.
- > Her primary weapon is that of two Colt Pistols designed specifically to be fitted in by any ammo...

Rick: Wait she puts ammo in guns? She is a genius!

- > or explosives. Her rapid way of reloading and firing is the one that
- > made her very famous in the OASIS.

Dan: She's famous for being able to reload a gun

Rick: I guess most people just throw them away when they're empty

- > More than one unlucky suitor got first-hand experience of her unique way of shooting guns.

Tsuneo: She pulls the trigger with her tongue. It's unique, but we never said it was smart or useful.

- > Not to mention that where Sagara goes, the Rapid Gunner is also there.

Rebecca: So in short, there's no reason to be surprised that she's there

- > "Sagara here mentioned something of a challenge to keep me interested to joining the battle,"

Dan: You mean she's playing this for the fun of it?

Tsuneo: It's a concept that's entirely unheard of throughout the OASIS.

Rick: Laetri's only here to rack up overtime.

- > she answered smiling with her perfect teeth

Rebecca: I mean, it's an avatar created for a virtual world, of course she's going to give it perfect teeth. Unless she's British, that is.

- > gleaming on her heart-shaped face. "Besides," the gunner
- > whipped her long hair to remove the strands of it to stop covering her amber colored eyes. "You
- > know that wherever Captain Sagara goes, I go,"

Dan: Yeah, we read the narration. We know.

- > Seriously, Sagara doesn't know what the story between the two

Rebecca: But because they're women, he doesn't care either.

- > is as the two female avatars glared
- > daggers at each other. Despite his best efforts, the two of them simply can't be friends with one
- > another. Confusing too since their two attitudes are almost the same, kind and sweet with a hint of
- > gentleness.

Tsuneo: As we have seen so amply demonstrated so far.

Rick: Informed character traits are the best character traits.

- > So for the life of him, he doesn't know why they are trying to bite each other's head off
- > every time they meet. It's even worse when he's around for some reason.

Rebecca: For some reason, almost everyone is agitated when he's around. He's never figured out why.

- > "Girls, girls, can't we leave the fighting for another day?" the black-haired avatar spoke in a
- > placating tone

Tsuneo: I mean, that attitude is probably a good start.

> only to face two pairs of glaring eyes redirected in his direction. It's impossible to
> sweat drop in the game,

All: Thank you

> but there's just that something in the female glare that can make you extremely uncomfortable

Rebecca: If this guy wants to let us know that he's a cringy nerd stereotype then he's doing a great job of it.

> "I'm not intruding or anything, but else we move, the artifact won't be ours,"

Tsuneo: While you were going though your infodump it was taken by a guy with a George Costanza avatar.

> he pointed out forward to the direction of the uphill climb where a bunch of Pirates of the
> Caribbean wannabees

Rebecca: Less Pirates of the Caribbean and more Pirates' World.

> are making a demented charge over the larger group of NS-5's.

> "Oooh, they're about to get slaughtered. Should we help them or should we fight with them?" asked
> a too happy Gunner.

Dan: Unaware that the Sole Survivor was about to kill her for her Combat Armour

> "Let's just use them as a distraction as we advance," grunted a still very unhappy looking Laetri

Rick: The sooner she's done here, the sooner she can catch up on answering emails.

> as she knocked ten arrows on her bow.

Rebecca: Having decided that the laws of physics no longer apply to her

> "What do you say Sagara?"

> "I say to each his own," he simply shrugged knowing that the Pirates are getting decimated
> anyways if the cries of pain

Rick: Yarr, they got me in me parrot!

> are any indication to what is going on as the NS-5's mobbed the wannabes. "Let's move out!"

Dan: [Sagara] Ha ha, let them suffer.

> "Sir,"

> "Aye,"

>..

> "Next time when you say that you owe me a small favor! I'm going to demand extra pay!"

Dan: Rule one is to never ever help anyone under any circumstances.

> Parzival, AKA Wade Watts yelled

Rick: Before immediately comparing the situation to a piece of 1980s media.

> despite the firefight as he unloaded a stolen rifle energy weapon

Tsuneo: That is conspicuously not from Star Wars.

> that he managed to nitch on the battlefield during the first push.

> "I never thought that this would be this hard of a resistance,"

Rebecca: Only that every player in the game seems to want it.

> Helen Harris AKA Aech replied as the

> large avatar of hers ran this way and that trying to stem off jumping NS-5's from breaking their line.

> "With the Romans here alongside some of the major clans,

Dan: To be fair, they had shiny breastplates and plumes and everything.

> I didn't know that it would be just a small

> push that can help us stack up some money and rare items,"

Rick: There's only so many Ghoul Slayer's Walking Canes a guy can carry

Dan: Haven't you done that one already?

Rick: This one has bonus Charisma.

> The sudden explosion that followed made the two friends take cover as one of the Romans they are

> tagging alongside went flying over their heads thanks to the impact force

Rick: He'd just tried to invade the indomitable Gaulish village

> "You and I have a very big difference on the word small,"

Tsuneo: Aech could never get the hang of quantity surveying

> Parzival growled out snapping off a few

> beams catching an NS-5's arm off of it before ducking back as rail fire zeroed in on his position.

> Around them, the Romans and some solo players are also pushing forward,

Rebecca: But how historically accurate is the kit being used by the Romans? And does it represent a specific period in the empire or is it a mish-mash from across centuries?

Tsuneo: They're fighting robots in New York and that's what bothers you?

Rebecca: I like to know these things

> taking cover as best as they can despite the deadly return fire.

Tsuneo: So right back where we were at the start of this chapter.

Rick: Ah, but these are the main characters so Weeb Johnson can look good when he saves them.

Tsuneo: Of course, silly me.

> More than one player has gotten themselves zeroed out

> already, their items picked up by looters or other players.

Dan: So the looters weren't other players?

Rick: Maybe there's roaming packs of Loot Goblins

Dan: That would explain a lot.

> "We're never going anywhere with this.

Tsuneo: My review of the fic so far.

> Time limit for this round is almost over," he muttered over his radio

Rick: There was a time limit? Why didn't anyone mention that before?

Dan: Marcus Fenix wouldn't have set the brisket to smoke if he knew that.

> as he finished the last of his rifle's clip to the one-handed NS-5 before shifting to his pistols.

> "You're welcome to jump in and make a break for the prize if you want," suggested Aech also

> reloading his bigger weapon.

Rebecca: [Aech] Don't worry, I'll be right behind you.

> "Besides, even if we cannot win, that doesn't mean we performed as bad as the Sixers,"

Tsuneo: Measuring themselves by the lowest standards possible.

Dan: You think they Sixers are worse than the NPC bots?

Tsuneo: The bots aren't motivated by minimum wage.

> Despite himself Parzival only snorted. The well-known IOI players in the Southwest

Rebecca: From IOI's branch office in New Mexico.

> despite their

> fancy equipment and with heavy armor support got their asses handed to them by the NS-5's that

> they tried pushing through.

Dan: [Sixer] I'm just losing company loot, what do I care?

> Reloading his gun, he's just ready to open up again when the sound of rapid fire is registered by his

> senses, a sound that he only has seen and heard through the vids about the famous players of the

> OASIS.

Rick: And it went FAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRRT

Dan: Damn, well done.

> "No way, that is Rapid Gunner33's-,"

Rebecca: Absolutely nobody else has guns that sound like that.

Rick: It's not her guns, it's her obnoxious warhorn that plays a vuvuzela chorus whenever she gets a kill.

> he didn't even finish his words as he like every other player peeked out

Tsuneo: The robots immediately went on a killing spree.

> to see the familiar yellow trench coat

Dan: Jubilee?

> of the famed player dodging this way and that, her

> pistols loading and reloading in a way that would have made any gun user green with envy.

Rick: Look at that! Can you believe it? She's reloading her pistols!

Tsuneo: Oh my god, she's reloading! That's outrageous!

Rebecca: I have never seen anyone reload in all my years playing this nostalgia-driven pastiche!

> "And that is the Night Elf, Laetri. One of Captain Sagara's, companions,"

Rebecca: Although he completely messed up her Loyalty mission.

> called another player making Parzival turn his attention to the violet-skinned beauty

Dan: Aech mutters something about hairy knuckles.

- > a little bit farther than the yellow
- > gunner taking pot shots either through magical exploding arrows to splitting arrows that can
- > separate as they fly taking groups of enemies at the same time.

Dan: In short, arrows.

Rick: Arrows it is.

- > His eyes though are contained to one person cutting through the enemies like fire on grass,

Tsuneo: I don't think that metaphor works as well as you think it does.

- > taking down anyone unlucky enough to get in his way. Of course he knows who he is.

Rick: Charles!

Dan: No.

Rick: Charles?

Dan: No!

Rick: Sean?

Dan: Sean's dead!

- > He is the one

- > representing the Sagara Foundation in the Oasis, the head honcho of Planet Asgard

Rebecca: Captain of the Kid's Crew, heir to the throne of Essex, and so on and so forth

- > and the famed leader of the second largest Clan that rival the IOI players in terms of numbers,

Tsuneo: Second only to the Captain Caveman fanclub

- > the Seikihoutai.

Dan: An ancient Japanese word meaning 'bicycle repair man'

- > "Captain Sagara!"

Rick: Captain Sagara!

Dan: Indestructible Man!

- > he didn't even realize that he had spoken the name out loud.

Rebecca: Parzival just soiled himself in awe.

- > Like all other players, he had observed that player's rise to legend for the past three years.

Rebecca: Even though Sagara isn't a white male action hero from the eighties?

Dan: He's that awesome.

- > He even had recordings of his tweets,

Rebecca: Before Musk deleted them all as a part of a new premium package.

- > the numerous wisdom phrases he posts on his page

Dan: The sort of deep wisdom you only get from the really cheap and dodgy fortune cookies.

- > and his walkthroughs and discussions.

Rick: So tell us, Sagara. What is the secret to your success?

Rebecca: [Sagara] Well, I stab things.

Rick: There you have it.

> He's seeing personally a legend in action and damn it if he's not drooling right now.

Tsuneo: Enough of Sagara talking about himself. Time for other people to talk about him instead.

> "Come on Z! What are you lazing there for?"

Dan: The author's OC is here so Parzival figures there's no point in doing anything any more.

> the booming voice of Aech brought him out of his stupor

Rick: Duuuuuuh

> as he saw his friend running alongside the Romans

Dan: They'd formed a Testudo.

Rick: The guy with the bike from Akira?

> who with some solo players are charging

> to the now broken defensive lines of the NS-5's thanks to the efforts of the three top players of the

> OASIS.

Rebecca: Being Weeb Johnson, secretary lady and Tits McGee.

> "Hey wait for me!" morphing his guns to appear at his hand once again,

Tsuneo: He could pick them up, but that's too conventional.

> he ran after his friend who had pulled a massive mini-gun to be his primary weapon

Dan: Probably best not to ask where he was keeping it.

> mowing down the nearest NS-5's. Up

> ahead he could see the Golden trio pushing down NPC after NPC like dominoes.

Tsuneo: Golden Trio?

Dan: I suppose they had to give themselves more titles.

> "Why are we even trying to advance?" asked Parzival blasting an NS-5 trying to crawl with its hands

> like a creepy zombie. "It's pathetically obvious that the golden trio is going to get the artifact if the

> rate of destroyed NPC's they're clearing is any indication,"

Tsuneo: Parzival is more self-aware here than he is in his own book.

> Aech only laughed as he dismembered to a hundred pieces his own opponent.

Rebecca: Which is actually kind of disturbing.

> "That's true Z. But

> unless you can't see, everyone is recording this battle," he pointed out making Parzival to where

> indeed the others have their own floating cameras out recording the fight.

Rick: This one's going on the 'Sagara's greatest blunders' compilation for sure.

> The odd thing is though; they are angled to include the image of the three forward players.

> "Everyone wants a record of this fight for bragging rights," Aech elaborated

Dan: They want to brag about how somebody else stole the prize after they'd done all the actual work.
Rick: Well obviously

> still blasting with his mini-gun. "It's not every day people met a member of the Seikihoutai,

Rebecca: Even though they're the second largest guild in the OASIS

Tsuneo: Maybe they're all shy

> and even rarer to fight alongside the clan leader of them most of all.

Rebecca: Even his clan don't get to fight alongside him.

> So unless you want to be the only one without a

> record, I advise you pop your floating camera up before this game is finished,"

Dan: We are all so deeply invested in these three people that we must record their every move

Rick: To be fair, that's how Instagram influencers work too

>..

> The sound of servos breaking

Rick: A typical day in the Best Brains prop room

> brought Timothy back to the real world as he took off the glasses (that

> is a step up from the uncomfortable goggles)

Rebecca: Of course, Weeb Johnson doesn't have to suffer the indignities of regular players.

> used for entering the OASIS.

Tsuneo: Because we all know how much of a roaring success Google Glass was.

> As usual, three of his aides sitting and reading through their data slates is at his side

Dan: [Aide] I went to Harvard for this.

> helping him out from his harness.

Rick: Yes, but how many discrete openings does it have?

> Being the owner of Sagara Foundation may be troublesome at times, but it does have its perks,

Rebecca: He had a minimum-wage flunkey there just to wipe him.

> the money included.

Tsuneo: If the fic wants us to not like him then it's doing a great job of it.

> Timothy Sagara Williams.

Rick: Sollyarku Asakura Foo-Foo Cuddlypoops, the third

> That is his complete name.

Tsuneo: And his sounded like a complete tit

> Only son and heir of the Sagara line in his mother's side.

Dan: The rest of his family had died in a tragic yet hilarious accident with a soft-serve machine

- > The Sagara Foundation is one of the top tiers companies of the world, not because of
- > digitalization as most of the richer companies like IOI

Tsuneo: In a world defined by a global virtual reality information network, they are the leading producers of Laserdiscs.

- > but by food production and humanitarian efforts.

Rick: They're the people who make the goods and services that are shipped in electric vehicles through the leather-clad booster gang infested wastelands between the cities.

- > With the world going into the deep end and poverty spreading out like locusts as the people
- > lost hope and interest on making the world a better place. Sagara Foundation stood up to the
- > challenge.

Rebecca: Which was why their leader spent all his time in a video game.

- > Pulling all its resources together that the company nearly went bankrupt,

Rick: Sagara was voted out by the board of directors.

- > Sagara Foundation focused on the three basic things to keep people living,

Dan: Toilet paper, Netflix and pizza delivery

- > food, clothing, shelter; especially the food.

Rick: They'd massively invested in Soylent Green

- > All around the world Sagara Foundations bought large tracts of land that are dead lands with no one
- > living on them and transformed them to great agricultural plains that are used for farming and
- > breeding livestock.

Rebecca: Those plans all went belly-up because it turned out there were reasons why they were 'dead' lands

- > Cloning also became one of its leading projects to replenish the depleted fish
- > population of the ocean.

Dan: Their three-eyed sushi was considered a delicacy.

- > The large number of job openings also gives an opportunity for many that
- > are homeless and lacking of work,

Dan: He'd just appointed a hobo as their CFO. Sure he reeked of urine and screamed obscenities at anyone who entered his office, but he felt it was a job well done

- > helping a little on reviving the poverty problem.

Tsuneo: Timothy here strikes me as the kind who dumps his garbage at a charity shop and thinks he's ending world hunger

- > One thing led to another and before Timothy knows it,

Rick: He's robbing a bank while dressed as the Pope.

- > Sagara Foundations is one of the richest companies in the world

Dan: Based on their policies of pissing money to the wind.

> with governments of countries breaking deals with it to streamline goods, especially the food.

Tsuneo: How do you 'streamline' food?

Rebecca: No idea. Easy to open packages, maybe?

> With a lot of money training in, the board and him included agreed to extend their business to the
> much valued OASIS.

Dan: And that's when IOI stonewalled them.

> With enough money and team recruiting, the designers managed to build and
> establish Asgard, probably one of the largest hubs planet on the OASIS

Rick: Not as big as the Snorks planet though.

Dan: Of course.

> primarily policed and owned by the Sagara Foundation.

Rebecca: Because as we all know, there's nothing wrong at with private police forces.

> It is also the world's currently largest center of education.

Tsuneo: And there's certainly nothing wrong with corporate controlled education either.

Rebecca: Gods no.

> All in all, the Sagara Foundation is the anti-thesis of the IOI

Dan: So much so that they changed their name to OIO.

> and the Sixers and the Seikihoutai ever since have been odds with one another.

Rick: Bet they don't have a Ben Mendelsohn as their head.

> IOI ships continue to attack Asgard every now and then and the
> Seikihoutai do their best to try on disrupting Sixer operations.

Rebecca: So the IOI just cut them off from the OASIS at the service provider level.

> The only difference is the fact that
> Seikihoutai members are stronger and more skilled than IOI "drone" players

Tsuneo: They are being the best because Sagara are be having them.

> with them coming up top all the way.

Tsuneo: Even though they're rarely seen

Rebecca: Consistency is over-rated.

> All in all, for Timothy, life is good so far

Rick: And by 'life is good,' we mean 'Timothy has to have the absolute best of everything ever.'

> and he had a lot of time on his hands focusing on personal problems.

> "Tim," the musical voice of his secretary and his childhood friend, Cassandra

Rebecca: Cassandra won the position over three more experienced candidates when she threatened to release pictures of Timothy in a Bluey costume from his fifth birthday.

> (who is Laetri's avatar)

Dan: The real person is the avatar of the video game character. This makes sense.

> brought him out of his musings

Rebecca: You misspelled 'masturbatory self-congratulation'

> from where he is sitting. Apparently she had logged out to a little bit

> later than he did. Or did she just use it to freshen up? If there's one thing that Timothy knows about

> her,

Rick: Is that she's written a disturbing amount of fanfic about Brainy Smurf.

> is the fact that she's a neat freak.

Rebecca: This is her only personality trait. Treasure it.

> "Yes Cassie? What is it?" he asked looking at her holding a data slate.

> "It's just a priority message," answered the pink-haired twenty-one year old, only three years

> younger than he is.

Tsuneo: So she's his executive secretary at 21.

Dan: Yes.

Tsuneo; And he's the CEO of one of the world's richest companies at 24.

Dan: Also correct.

Tsuneo: Well that all sounds reasonable to me.

> "There's this Aech offering to pay a lot of money for listed spare parts we have at Asgard,"

> "And you brought this to me why?" he asked. Cassandra never brought anything to him unless it's

> something she deemed important.

Rebecca: You'd also assume that 'important' meant 'vital to the massive company he was running' and not 'something that's happening in a video game'.

Tsuneo: Good thing they've got their priorities right.

> "Some of the parts this person is ordering are deemed unimportant Tim. However once we put the

> parts together,

Dan: Something about enriched uranium...

> they can result to something....strong;

Rick: And yet with a gentle touch.

> strong enough to withstand the strongest firepower on the OASIS. I need you to look over this Tim,"

Tsuneo: [Sagara] Please, we're alone. Call me by my avatar's name.

Dan: [Laeri] I most certainly will not.

> "Fine, fine I'll be there in a second," he sighed once more looking over the teenage girl whose hand

> he is holding. "I'll come back later Zyra," he whispered before kissing the cold knuckles of the girl

> strapped unto a bed to an Intensive Care Unit.

Rebecca: That moment when you try for 'romantic' and go straight to 'super creepy'.

> On her eyes though is the goggle of OASIS with a

> headband attachment over her head that kept her connected to the OASIS despite her
> unresponsive body.

Rick: Which he keeps in his office.

Dan: Yes.

Rick: I have many questions about this.

> Moving over to the side of his best friend, he wasted no time flinging an arm over her back pulling
> her playfully to him that earned him a mock scowl.

Rebecca: Power imbalance, professional boundaries, abusing his position... this guy is all charm.

> "Come Cassandra, tell me about this Aech you are so worried about?"

Rick: Well they got their entire backstory and motivation cut from the movie adaptation, and that might be a good thing.

> ----

> Chapter Two

> "Would you look at that? I never thought the views of people watching my page would be this many
> before,"

Rebecca: In excess of three views

> Parzival commented as he opened for the hundredth time his page screen quite feeling full
> of himself

Tsuneo: Parzival, more in-character than we've seen him in any fic so far.

> as he saw that the number of views his post has gotten skyrocketed from a meager
> number of a hundred thousand

Dan: Some of which were actually humans rather than his usual Spambots

> to something close to eight hundred thousand in a few hours alone.

Rick: The idea that people would be interested in him was amazing

> He and his friend Aech wasted no time going back here to Aech's workshop the moment the battle
> for Sonny's Core which Gunner33 claimed with the help of Captain Sagara and Laetri.

Tsuneo: People went to his page to look at videos of other people. That'd be crushing,

> The two
> gunters (egg hunters), immediately took apart the recording of their videos, editing it and posting it
> for the entire world to see. Easy to say it spread around like wildfire.

Dan: Like the recordings everybody else had of the same battle, apparently.

> "What can I say man?" Aech grunted from his elevated position

Rebecca: [Aech] It's so cool that they swooped in and stole the item after we sat in the trenches for hours.

> trying to fix the upper ear part of his almost finished Iron Giant. "Everyone loves the Seikihoutai,

Rick: Dental hygienists, antique furniture collectors, the leather-clad booster gangs... everyone

> especially their leader, Captain Sagara.

Tsuneo: [Flat] Everybody loves Captain Sagara. He is smart and cool.

> Rumor even has it that the guy is as good looking as his avatar is at the real world,"

Rebecca: Because Aech knows all about how much people look like their avatars

> "You sound like a rabid fan Aech," Parzival commented as he read another of the comments being
> thrown second by second on his video.

> "I am a rabid fan Z,"

Tsuneo: [Aech] Simping for him has become my entire personality.

> said his friend pulling a wrench as he adjusted one of the metal linings of his
> Iron Giant. "Imagine being employed by Sagara Foundations, and the renowned Timothy Williams?

Dan: Can you imagine being a data entry clerk or janitor for them? It'd be amazing!

> That is a first-way ticket to be part of the Seikihoutai.

Rebecca: Everyone who's an employee has to join their guild. It's in the employment contract

> You know as well as I do how much everyone wanted to be a part of the group.

Dan: [Parzival] I mean, you could apply...

> It would be also free-for-all fighting against the Sixers,"

> "That would leave us little to no time on hunting Halliday's egg though,"

Tsuneo: He'd have to take time out from his busy schedule of watching every episode of Family Ties.

> pointed out Parzival. For gunters like them, Haliday's egg is the real prize.

Dan: It was literally their only defining trait.

> With the amount of effort and time they placed on
> it, backing out is simply not just an option anymore.

Rebecca: Parzival had dedicated a huge portion of his life to memorising the scripts of movies made decades before he was born. I'd imagine he'd be a bit annoyed.

Tsuneo: Do you think he had a Plan B in case somebody else found the egg?

Rebecca: I doubt that the idea has ever occurred to him.

> For them gunters, this adventure on finding
> Halliday's egg is their life and the road that comes with it, their lifeblood.

Dan: It is literally their entire lives

> "Yeah," agreed Aech in a bit more somber tone than his usual optimistic self.

Rebecca: Wait, so Weeb Johnson's group isn't after the egg?

Tsuneo: That seems to be the case.

Rebecca: But since that's literally the only reason anyone plays in the OASIS, what are they even there for?

Tsuneo: I cannot fathom.

> Parzival only sighed as he began screening down his profile though watching the comments of

> people on his video trying to fight one another. In a way he understood why Aech is a bit down.

Dan: Aech had just remembered that her only friend is Parzival

> One

> can't simply be a member of the Seikihoutai and be a gunter at the same time. Seikihoutai does
> their best to patrol the entirety of the OASIS

Rebecca: Self-appointed net cops. I see no way this could end badly.

> other than their home planet MULE. Sure the majority
> of them protect their city of Asgard with it being a player-generated planet, despite one of OASIS'
> greatest education and training hubs not exempted from PVP raids and killings.

Dan: It made taking class roll in the morning rather difficult

> Groups of them
> however at times spread out through other places looking out for those who are being bullied by
> stronger players or simply helping out where they are needed.

Rebecca: They would White Knight for anyone

> Most of the time though they are
> hunters of IOI's Sixers who are like fleas everywhere, grabbing rare items and opportunities by
> lobbying IOI's backing and money.

Dan: They large corporation abusing its wealth for unfair advantage has dedicated themselves to
stopping the other large corporation abusing its wealth for unfair advantage

> It is not rare to see groups of Seikihoutai fighting Sixers at some
> parts of the OASIS. People tend to back away to avoid the crossfire when members of the two large
> groups are present in one area.

Tsuneo: Aech nearly got caught up in a throwdown on the Wuthering Heights planet.

> With their focus on looking out for Sagara Foundations' interests in the game, looking out for the
> common folk and waging an unending war with the Sixers,

Rebecca: When both sides can endlessly respawn, one does have to wonder what they aim to
accomplish.

> being a member of the Seikihoutai
> simply prevents one from being a gunter timewise. In the entire history of the black and red jacketed
> group,

Dan: They have a uniform, and you have to wear it regardless of how your avatar looks otherwise

> no Seikihoutai has ever been focused on trying to find Halliday's egg...except for one.

Rick: Lozer. Turns out he's one of their top players.

> Rolling up his profile interface to the trending news, Parzival isn't surprised to see Captain Sagara's
> face and snapshots present their again.

Dan: Worldwide newsagencies must carry stories about Sagara at all times, by law.

> Apparently the newly dubbed "Batte for the Core" became a hot topic for OASIS users worldwide.

Rebecca: OASIS users have no lives of their own.

> In a way it is.

Tsuneo: It's a hot topic, because it is.

> Large numbers of players who have aimed for
> the newly found rare artifact got Zeroed in when the resistance that they anticipated from the NPC's
> is a little bit off.

Rick: It helps that nobody had any ideas beyond 'shoot.'

> If not for the Golden Trio joining the fray, it would have been the first ever Dungeon
> push that the players got defeated by NPC's.

Tsuneo: Nobody has ever been killed by a video game monster before.

> Captain Sagara, the name and the face is a big picture at the OASIS. He is the only known member
> of the Seikihoutai that "slightly" got an interest on the Hunt for Halliday's Easter Egg.

Rick: He was slightly interested in as far as he knew some Care Bears trivia

> The fact that it
> is public news that he accepted only orders from the head of the Sagara Foundation Timothy
> Williams, only added to his mystique.

Rebecca: The screamingly obvious idea that he might be Tim's avatar never occurred to anyone

> He is the Foundation's face in the OASIS, handsome, skillful, a good leader

Tsuneo: Fic, don't hold back. Please heap even more platitudes on your pet OC.

> and some mighty high instincts to predict when and where most of the Sixers are
> congregating at times.

Rebecca: Anywhere that has a lead to the egg? I mean, it's not hard.

> It is a fun pastime for OASIS players to try and guess who he is in the real world

Dan: The most popular theory is that he was actually a lizard person

> In fact he is one of the greatest celebrities on the OASIS alongside his Night Elf partner,

Rick: Nobody else had ever used a Night Elf avatar

> who is not a member of the Seikihoutai and the ever elusive Gunner33.

Rebecca: The only pictures of Gunner33 are blurry, grainy distant shots

> So when the video of them turning the tide on the "Battle of the Core"

Rick: But what about the Arm?

> came out, everyone was interested to see it.

Rick: Really?

Dan: No.

> "Man I wish they would have just sent it through the mail," Aech grumbled out making Parzival pull
> his eyes away from a very nice picture of Gunner33

Rebecca: A framed glamour headshot

Tsuneo: That was blurry, grainy and taken from a long way off
Rebecca: Of course.

> who is also going viral...as usual to his friend hammering at the face screw of the Iron Giant.

Dan: Not how you use a screw.

> "Sent what Aech?"

> "I've requested some spare parts from Asgard,"

Rick: They're being delivered by goat.

> he simply grunted out as he finished hammering the
> nail in. "The improvised core I've built here doesn't react well with some of the metal compounds
> and have to be replaced else the moment I activated this big baby, we'll all be blown sky-high,"

Tsuneo: [Parzival] So why did you install it?

Dan: [Aech] It was cheap on Etsy.

> "So they're not delivering it?" asked Parzival. He won't be surprised if they don't. Asgard is one of
> the busiest cities and their products here at the OASIS are top-tier.

Rick: They made only the best microfibre crotch inlays.

> Most of the clans and groups that deal with them are filthy rich

Rebecca: They were just rolling in Lindens.

> (minus the IOI) and small tier players like them are sometimes ignored.

Tsuneo: It was all a scam to make you join their 'preferred customer' program

> Having an Asgard made product is more than enough usually for players to lob around
> bragging rights.

Rick: Well I have an Asgard branded clothes peg. Take that, losers.

> No Asgardian product is cheap and only those with lots of loot coins or those lucky
> enough to win the annual lottery in Planet MUL E managed to snag some of their goods.

Tsuneo: But Sagara supports the poor.

> "Oh they're delivering it. Only in person towards here though,"

Rebecca: It's being delivered on a silver platter by an old-timey English butler. It's a very expensive service.

> shrugged off his big friend. His hands
> patting the screws he nailed at the edge of the Iron Giant's mouth.

Dan: You don't nail screws!

Rebecca: Yeah, you said.

Dan: It just bugs me!

> "Which is kind of weird in my opinion; they could have just mailed it at my locker,"

Rick: Given that this is the OASIS, why not have the part simply appear in Aech's inventory?

Tsuneo: Because the moment you begin to question the OASIS' logic, the entire thing falls apart.

Rick: This is also true.

> "Maybe what you bought is pricey enough," I reasoned out making Aech look at me with a deadpan
> expression.

> "What?"

> "It's only some spare parts Z," he pointed out making me rub my head in embarrassment.

Rebecca: Parzival was embarrassed by the sudden shift to first person.

> "Right so what are your plans for this upcoming race Ae-,"

> "DING! DING!"

Dan: Comedically inappropriate school bell? Is that you?

> the sound of the doorbell cut me off as both of us turned our heads towards the
> direction of the door.

Rick: [Parzival] Uh... Pretend we're not here!

> "That must be the parts I ordered. Be a good friend and get it for me would you,"

> "I'm not your servant Aech,"

Rebecca: Quite the opposite, actually.

> Parzival grumbled out but acquiesced his friend's request nevertheless.

> Frankly in all words, Parzival is a free loader in his friend's bunk.

Rick: Parzival was a virtual couch-surfer.

> In the real world, he had no money
> and though he can afford it with his current wallet, he can't afford a respawning room point for
> himself in the OASIS or a workshop like Aech's.

Rick: He'd been priced out of the virtual real estate market.

> So here he is, calling his best friend's money-
> making place his own bunkroom. He's just thankful that Aech is kind enough not to kick him out.

Dan: For roughly the thirteenth time that day, Aech wonders why she puts up with him.

> "DING! DING!" the doorbell repeated again making Parzival quicken his steps towards the
> workshop entrance throwing his profile pad over one of Aech's side table still showing a rather
> realistic looking wallpaper art of Laetri and Gunner33 intertwined and lips locked over each other.

Rebecca: On one side, Aech is being a creep. On the other, it is still more character than they get otherwise

> "Alright, alright I'm coming," he called out a little bit annoyed as he unlocked the latches of the steel
> door. "Can't you wait for just a-," Parzival immediately stopped talking as he felt his digital tongue
> glue at the top of his digital mouth

Rick: While his real-world reaction is a prolonged 'Duhhh...'

> as he believed for a moment that who's he's seeing is not some
> kind of hallucination. For there at the door is no one else but the renowned Captain Sagara of the
> Seikihoutai with two other members

Dan: But nobody we know or care about.

- > wearing the trademark red and black with red sashes over their
- > heads, and the ever present primary weapon of members of that group katana at their belts.

Rebecca: In order to join their guild you have to dress like a Shonen Protagonist. That's the rule

- > At
- > Captain Sagara's side is also his usual partner, the radiant Night Elf who smiled softly at his gob
- > smacked expression.

Rick: It's funny that he's surprised.

Dan: They are very easily amused.

- > Parzival can't believe it. When he saw these two tier players fighting alongside them on the "Battle
- > for the Core," he had thought himself lucky on witnessing first-hand two of OASIS' top tier players.

Rebecca: [Aech] You got the door, it's your turn to talk up the OCs.

- > He never dreamed that he would see them, much less meet them again. But here they are, standing
- > outside his free-loading house very real.

Tsuneo: Aech was suddenly very self-conscious about his hobo shack.

- > He felt like squealing like a fangirl

Rebecca: Well, you know...

- > and part of him wanted
- > nothing more than to pull his floating strobe and get a picture for bragging rights to any gunter that
- > he may come across for later.

- > "Good afternoon, may we come in?" the rich accented voice of Captain Sagara

Rick: Specifically he had a regional Austrian accent that sounds hilarious if you speak German.

- > made a little sense to come back to Parzival's overloaded mind.

Dan: [Parzival] No.

Tsuneo: And the fic ends.

- > "Wh-what?" he only blinked dumbly not knowing that his voice sounded more like the croaking of a
- > frog instead of the voice of a real person.

Rebecca: Heh, Parzival claims to be a real person.

- > He barely even registered the sounds of his friend's footsteps coming in behind him.

- > "Hey Z, what's taking so long man? I've been waiting for..." Aech's voice trailed off like his as the
- > two registered the two legends just standing there outside their door.

Dan: Madam Z and Misspelled Sapphire? No way!

>..

- > Sagara have to admit that when he made the decision to follow the suspicious trail of rare order of
- > raw materials, he'd been expecting more.

Rick: Sagara is a total snob.

- > Maybe a group of players trying to put something new
- > using experimentation that could cause havoc on populated player areas,

Rebecca: So he could acquire it for purely peaceful purposes.

- > not two avatars who looked like they could belong on the everyday crowd of the OASIS.

Dan [Sagara]: Ewww, poor people

- > One was a wimpy kind of dude
- > with a faint resemblance of the main character of Dante in the video game

Tsuneo: From Dante's Inferno for the X-Box 360, I assume.

- > looking absurdly grayish pale with blue tattoos on his face and white hair,

Rebecca: On one side, the OC is totally talking down to the canon protagonist. On the other hand, Parzival's avatar does look awful.

- > while the other looked like a grayish bald orc with
- > his midsection turned to springs instead of a real body part. He is totally not impressed.

Dan: That's the third cyborg orc he's seen this morning

Rick: And this one didn't even have a beret or a Kalashnikov

- > Laetri however who as usual opted to follow him around here

Tsuneo: You make it sound like she has a choice.

- > did not waste her time gushing out her usual bright attitude that could literally warm up the sun.

Rebecca: She's one of those obnoxiously chirpy people that instantly gets on your nerves

- > "Good afternoon," she greeted pleasantly...too pleasantly with enough white teeth showing to make
- > even the most doubtful person trust her.

Tsuneo: Spoken like somebody who's never interacted with a real human before.

- > "I believe we have an order here for someone called Aech," she gushed out.

Rick: [Aech] I might be someone called Aech.

- > Sagara only raised his eyebrow at the two avatars who remain rooted on their spots obviously too
- > overwhelmed by the fact that two of OASIS' top players are standing here outside their doorstep.

Rick and Dan: Duuuuuuuuuuhhhhhh

- > They sincerely did not look like threatening standing there like that

Tsuneo: To be fair, they do look like complete morons

- > as he assumed when he put two and two together

Tsuneo: [Sagara] ...five, right?

Rebecca: [Laetri] *No.*

- > when Cassandra a day before showed him the list of things ordered by this Aech.

Rick: Aech had ordered a pile of enriched uranium for entirely non-threatening purposes

> Putting the initiative to start the conversation and probably to just rest his fears, Sagara placed a
> hand on the purple shoulder of his secretary.

Tsuneo: And he was before an HR board faster than he could say "harassment."

> "I believe we are in the wrong house Laetri," he simply spoke coolly looking the other two in the
> eyes.

Dan: [Parzival] Hey, are we in this scene?

Rick: [Aech] Shut up and keep staring!

> "My apologies for disturbing the two of you fine gents, but we must be going,"

Rebecca: As the CEO of one of the world's largest companies he has plenty of time to just turn up on
random people's doorsteps

> That seemed to pull the two out of their stupor for big and grayish one immediately stepped forward
> (he had paid nearly thirty thousand credits for these spare parts),

Rick: Oh sure, it seems like a lot but his workshop finally has a flushing toilet.

> nearly trampling his friend aside to stand in front of him and Laetri.

Dan: [Aech] Tough break Z, these are my new friends now.

> He unfortunately barely got three steps forward when the two
> Seikihoutai guards immediately rushed forward

Tsuneo: The ones who we totally knew were there beforehand.

> making him stop dead in his tracks as he eyed
> fearfully (and a little bit of awe) the half-drawn swords.

Dan: He was about to be killed, but at least they had cool swords.

> The planet we may be in is Ludus and no
> PVP is allowed here with it being a safe planet and one dedicated to business and commerce,

Rick: It may be, but it isn't.

> but that doesn't mean that you can't intimidate your enemies if needed.

Tsuneo: Sagara strikes me as the kind who camps low-level spawn points.

> The OASIS is awesome that way.

Rick: Really?

Rebecca: No.

> Some planets are simply safe zones for players who do not do the challenges of tearing one
> another apart. Avatars could not kill one another here and it is only through accidents on this
planets
> that can lead players to be zeroed in.

> "Sorry my friend," Sagara only smiled at their looks. "No touching...for safety purposes,"

Dan: [Sagara] Only I get to touch people up.

> He

> pretended not to see the half-glare and the look of Laetri obviously saying "Play nice," at him.

Rebecca [Laetri]: You can lord over them later.

> "O-of course," the orcish one replied rubbing his head trying not to sound the "wow" that escaped
> his lips before he managed to regain his mental faculties. "I'm just trying to say that I am Aech

Dan: Son of Eff and Gee.

> and this is my friend Parzival,"

Rick: Aech is this close to realising that his role in life is 'Black best buddy'

> he pushed blue and lanky forward who still looked awestricken at them.

Dan: [Aech] It's your turn to be the meat shield today.

> "Are you here for my delivery?"

> "Yep," it was Laetri this time who answered pushing the two guards aside who immediately looked
> to Sagara for confirmation who simply nodded

Rebecca: She has to run everything through the CEO. Their work processes are strangled.

> letting Laetri take the stage and work her charms as they stood down.

Rick: [Guard] Aw, I never get to sword anyone.

> "Open your profile box please," she requested sweetly making Sagara mentally roll his eyes

Dan [Sagara]: Being nice to people is so lame.

> as he adjusted his profile view watching the heart rate of the two jump somewhere near
> a hundred seventy and a hundred eighty.

Rick: It was funny because they were both going into cardiac arrest.

> "Uh-uh yes of course," Aech answered an octave higher than he usually does

Tsuneo: Do you think they might possibly be impressed by these two?

Rebecca: I don't know, maybe we need to spend a few more pages hammering it home.

> as he opened his own

> screen and accepted the items that Laetri sent him; time for Sagara now to start his inquisition.

Rick: His chief weapon was surprise, fear and surprise.

> "So...tell me Aech, what do you plan to do with those items you've just bought?"

Dan: You know, basic doomsday weapon stuff

> it's amazing how

> much regular players tend to be nervous among the famous ones when they're addressed directly.

Dan: Aech is seconds from begging to lick his feet.

> If avatars could sweat in the OASIS, this one just did.

Tsuneo: Well I'm torn

Rebecca: What's wrong?

Tsuneo: On one side, this is a gratuitous case of the OC's talking down to the canon cast while lording

over them with how they are superior in every single way

Rebecca: But?

Tsuneo: But on the other side, it is Parzival and Aech.

Rebecca: Tricky.

> "N-nothing important," captain he stuttered a little which sounded funny in his big voice. "I-it's j-just
> for a little p-pet project of mine nothing more,"

> "Really?"

Rebecca: Aech is just trying to build a Hyperspace Tube in his garage.

> "Yes, it is," now his reactions are really starting to get fishy. If his fidgeting fingers isn't proof enough,
> then the roving eyes back towards the entrance to his workshop is;

Dan: Or the fact that you've decided to make this as intimidating and confrontational as possible.

Rick: That too.

> time to drop the good cop part

Rebecca: Time to lord over them in a completely different way

> and start hashing out the big guns.

> Pulling Kusanagi with a speed that only he is able to do,

Rick: He'd actually measured every other OASIS user and how fast they could pull it out. He was the only person who pulled at that exact speed.

> Sagara felt highly amused as he saw their heart rate spike up even more

Tsuneo: Remind me how he can read their heart rates.

Rebecca: He's rich. He can do anything.

> as they are caught off guard and faced with one of the sharpest swords in the OASIS.

Dan: Did he also measure its sharpness?

Rick: Of course. He's got it all laid out on a spreadsheet

> "Don't take me for a fool gunter,"

Rebecca: Given how your avatar looks it's a bit late for that

> Sagara bit out harshly eyes flashing making the two immediately

> wince again in no small bit of alarm.

Dan: [Aech] Dude, this is a non-PVP zone. You can't actually hurt us.

Rick: [Sagara] Yeah, but I can make a mess of your workshop.

> "I'm not one of those store clerk jockeys you could easily fool

Tsuneo: Trying to get nine items through the eight items or less lane.

> though I admit that if not for the fact that I'm pretty versed about power sources, then I would never

> notice the slight discrepancies about the items that you've ordered,"

> "I don't know what you're talking about,"

Rick: [Aech] Really, I don't! They're random items from a loot crate.

> "Seriously, still denying?" the Grasscutter edged ever closer to his throat

Dan: He was armed with a gardening tool

> and though this place is

> obviously a no PVP area, there's just that something that is intimidating when you're being

> threatened by a pointy sword at your throat and he felt that too.

Rick: Me, I'd just be laughing at the fact that he can't hurt me

Rebecca: Sagara is such a fake internet tough guy

> "The parts you've bought may look like scrap to everyone else, but if those spare parts are added to

> some say...other parts in the right way.

Dan: He'd need a tube flange, a broken Prosnap camera and a jawless skull.

> They can be used together as some sort of cover to sustain heavy power of a core.

Tsuneo: And of course, he can't let anyone else build something like that.

> Even a thermal warhead contained inside can be sustained and it is also

> heat resistant to high temperatures.

Rebecca: You'd think, given the thermal warhead bit.

> Pretty convenient won't you agree? So either you're building a

> nuclear warhead here in a safe zone area where there are millions of avatars that are at risk, or you

> are containing a power source that you don't want anyone else knowing about. Am I right or not?"

Rick: You're the one who was selling these parts. This is entirely on you.

> Judging from the dumbstruck expression in his face, I knew that I've hit the nail hard.

Dan: So hard they changed person perspective again

Rick: Wait, I thought this was still Parzival

Dan: Truth being told, I lost track

> Time to let bad cop go now and pull out the goody two shoes to make my final assessment then.

Tsuneo: Yeah, it's a bit late for that having threatened them at sword-point.

> "You two don't look like untrustworthy though

Rebecca: They look like their avatars! For all you know, they could be played by North Korean nuclear scientists.

> so I bet that it's the latter rather than the former yes?"

Dan: Actually he's making a really big barbeque.

> "R-right," the guy called Aech finally admitted. "I just need these parts for the containment of a

> power source. Nothing more,"

Dan [Sagara]: Well that's okay then

Rick [Aech]: Which is going to power my planet-destroying laser

Dan [Sagara]: Fine with me. Carry on.

> "Would you mind if we take a look...please?" this time it was Laetri who asked obviously noting that

> I am done scaring the poor schmuck to the next life.

Tsuneo: Aech is going to send you the cleaning bill for the micro-fibre crotch inlay.

> "It must be pretty awesome if you're trying to hide it from everyone else.

> Not to everyone: Don't look at Laetri when she's making the puppy dog eyes pleading type of
> request. No one would be able to resist her.

Dan: What if they're blind?

Rick: What if they don't like purple?

> Aech and Parzival blinked once at her before caving in
> like a stack of cards as they began beckoning her in,

Tsuneo: So... You could have just let her ask nicely to start with?

> saying out loud how it would be a pleasure to
> show her what "they" (or I, Aech corrected, as he smacked Parzival in the head) are working at.

Tsuneo: I wonder what's the amazing power she has that makes them forget an elitist arsehole threatened their lives moments ago.

Rebecca: Her avatar has boobs.

Tsuneo: Ah. Of course.

> The

> fact that they almost forgot that the three other male members of the Seikihoutai have followed
> through alongside Laetri as they entered the warehouse.

Rebecca: Sagara forgot that his employees existed.

> At first, it doesn't seem impressive to the young captain's eyes.

Rick: [Sagara] Where's the Rembrandt and the crystal chandelier? I'll never understand why people choose to be poor.

> There are a lot of junk here...correction, a lot of technological junk.

Dan: He realised that Aech was a scrapper and had been stealing copper wire

> It's obvious that this Aech guy alongside this Parzival

Tsuneo; So in this context, what is it that makes Parzival so noteworthy?

Rebecca: Well, he knows that Haliday's favourite restaurant is Chuck-E-Cheese, so he obviously deserves to inherit the backbone of the world's communication infrastructure.

Tsuneo: Right, I forgot.

> who is currently showing some of the miniature space shuttles to his secretary

Rebecca: She had lost all interest in seconds

> to impress her is quite the inventor.

Rick: Aech created the virtual artificial appendix

> Majority of the junk is obviously combined items made as trial and error simply.

Dan: Aech tried duct-taping various appliances together to see what would happen.

> They can be quite lethal if he got the proper equipment in his eyes;

Rebecca: The whole place was one gigantic bomb

- > equipment that can only be
- > found and bought in Asgard. If his hunch is right and the guy isn't experimenting something
- > extremely dangerous here, he just might offer him a job as part of their extended R and D
- > department. If there's one thing that Timothy Williams is good at,

Rick: It's making parfaits

- > its judging character

Tsuneo: Please ignore the way he flew off the handle and threatened them just moments ago.

- > and the two didn't exhibit anything negative so far yet.

Rebecca: Wait until he sees that poster.

- > The workshop didn't extend that far out and the Seikihoutai captain soon found out why in the world
- > obviously did Aech order the parts.

Tsuneo: And who hasn't wanted to build their own nuclear pile?

- > There at the middle of the warehouse and occupying a very
- > large open space suspended in chains and looking almost done is a very accurate representation of
- > the old movie that Halliday also got engrossed with,

Rick: The helltrack from Rad

Dan: I mean, it is from the eighties

- > the Iron Giant. Stairs lead to some of its outer
- > parts not covered by metal and there are still empty screw slots here and there.

Tsuneo: Plus the lack of legs might be a sign.

- > However it looked
- > almost finished and he had to mentally shake his head at how these gunters (Egg Hunters) take
- > Halliday's Easter Egg hunt way too seriously.

Rebecca: I mean, it's only control over the key backbone of all global telecommunications and entertainment that'd make you the richest and most powerful person in the world. Like, whatever.

- > "So I will take a guess and say that this is what you may need the spare parts huh?"

Dan: Naw, he needs them to make waffles. It's a very special recipe

- > he commented
- > with his arms crossed since Laetri like his other two guards are also caught off guard by the
- > massive form of the deactivated robot.

Tsuneo: They had failed to notice the giant robot that towered over everything else in the room.

- > "Yes," the gunter sheepishly replied scratching his bald grey head. "I've built it myself with the
- > credits I've earned with some help from my best friend here," he patted the Parzival guy who looked
- > as pleased as he is.

Tsuneo: Parzival is the 'I'm helping' of their partnership.

- > Sagara only nodded at his words. It's obvious that he is taking great pride of this masterpiece of his.
- > Heck, even he would be.

Dan: Won't stop him from being a condescending dick about it.

> "I'm guessing that for something this big, you have put in a fourth
> generation core or a third generation but on the highest tier to power it up.

Rick: Actually he just filled it with AA batteries.

> I believe it is more on the
> latter since most fourth generation power cores are designed not to affect their containers, am I
> right?"

Tsuneo: [Sagara] Since I am the bestest at all things, I know everything about this thing too.

> "Woah you know your machines dude," Aech chuckled clapping his hand in delight. "Most OASIS
> players never know how to fix and design things,

Rebecca: They simply buy all their doomsday weapons off the shelf.

> my respect to you oh great captain," he made a
> sweeping exaggerated bow that completely looked wrong with his huge frame with the springs in his
> midsection.

Tsuneo: [Sagara] Yes, go on. Heap more praise on me.

> "Very well, my apologies then for mistaking you for making a bomb Aech,"

Rick: He probably should call off the SWAT team then

> stated Sagara simply
> before throwing a call card at the big avatar that caught it easily with his meaty hand. The moment
> he read it though, his eyes bulged from its sockets as it absorbed the words written within.

Rebecca: [Aech] A restraining order? But you broke in here!

Dan: [Sagara] Ha ha, I'll see you in court!

> "This is, this is-," he yammered in disbelief making the Seikihoutai captain only chuckle as he
> beckoned to his guards and Laetri to follow him in the direction leading outside.

> "That's my compensation for the wrong assumptive investigation my group just made," he simply
> explained.

Dan: A five dollar discount card at the local strip mall Karate dojo. He's so generous

> "But this is-,"

> "A full entrance identity ticket to Planet MULE and an access code for the city of Asgard,"

Rick: Knock on the door and ask for Frank

> finished
> the red-jacketed avatar. "With that with you, you don't have to pay the entrance and docking fees
> when you wish to visit the planet.

Rebecca: The parking fees are how he funds the whole thing.

> Overall access everywhere except for the command center is also
> allowed to you and present also there is an invitation to work part time on our R and D department,"

> "Part time?"

Tsuneo: You'll get all the worst shifts and few benefits. Congratulations!

> the big guy blinked in confusion making Sagara smirk at him from where he is opening
> the exit door for his guards and Laetri to step out.

Dan: [Parzival] And what about me?

Rebecca: [Sagara] Wait, you're still in this scene?

> "We know that you gunters spend half of your time either researching about Halliday's life

Rick: They go eat at Chuck-E-Cheese for research purposes

> or trying to find clues as to how to get past the first race.

Dan: Clearly they're not gunting hard enough

> You can't dedicate full time on our R and D thus if

> you do agree on the contract, it would then be part time only.

Tsuneo: Is he allowed to gunt on company time?

Rebecca: I'd imagine that any gunting he does would be unpaid.

> Don't worry, the Foundation is generous and the pay is good despite it.

Rick: [Laetri] Of course we'll have to run extensive background checks...

Rebecca: [Sagara] Don't be silly, he's building a robot! I trust him implicitly.

> You can bring to a maximum of four friends

Dan: Three more than Aech actually has.

Rick: Not actually a joke

> when you visit

> the planet too. See ya around kiddies," giving the two a two-fingered farewell salute, Sagara

> stepped out of the warehouse and back to the open street of Ludus where their shuttle is waiting for

> them. He simply acted that he didn't hear the two's shouts of "He's so awesome!" inside.

Tsuneo: [Aech] The way he assumed I was a terrorist and threatened my life!

> They really should have made their workshop's door sound impervious.

Dan: Sagara could hear them perfectly through the heavy metal door set into a concrete wall

>..

> Laetri or Cassandra have always been proud of the fact that on the entirety of the Sagara

> Foundation,

Tsuneo: That the whole thing would fall apart without her.

> it was her that the owner, or boss considered her to be the person he trusted above all else.

Rebecca: She was proud of her position as chief toady.

> They have been best friends since they are barely out of their diapers and that friendship

> survived until now.

Rick: She'd gotten where she was based on nepotism and not any actual skill or ability

> It might be a factor as to why he treated her more like a partner instead of the

> secretary position that she held.

Tsuneo: But not enough to give her an executive salary or any sort of authority, of course.

> Never did he make any big decisions since he started heading the
> company without consulting her.

Dan: But did he pay her a consultancy fee?

Rick: Depends on how often she uses the word 'synergy'.

> On the other hand, Cassandra prided herself on keeping him stable

Tsuneo: So the massive corporation pissing money to the wind on unfeasible community projects is the result of her stabilising influence?

Dan: Oh yeah, otherwise they would have been bankrupt years ago

> and guessing the small tidbits that he might left out during their little talks.

Rebecca: Her job was to remind him to wear pants

> "So," she began as she watched his form exit the head office to their own private suites (which is
> side by side)

Dan: There are no words for how awkward their relationship is

> where she sat at one of the sofa off of her stuffy suit uniform only in comfy shorts and
> a warmer covering her shirt.

Rebecca: [Laetri] I'm off duty so I can actually wear clothes.

> "Would you mind telling me as to why did you grant that gunter free
> access to MULE when we are denying left and right other players with a lot to offer that can help the
> company and our campaign in the game?"

Tsuneo [Sagara]: It's simple. I'm an eccentric tech billionaire so I don't need to justify myself

Rebecca [Laetri]: Of course

Tsuneo [Sagara]: By the way, I'm thinking of buying a social media platform then launching it into space

> To his credit, Timothy simply smirked as he sat at the sofa in a more formal way than her lax form.

Rick: He was smirking because he was... less comfortable?

Rebecca: Whatever works for him, I guess

> She simply rolled her eyes at his dramatics as she kneeled at his side, helping him get out of the
> grey suit uniform

Tsuneo: That he somehow can't manage on his own.

Rick: Buttons confuse him.

> that is required of him as being the head honcho around Sagara Foundations.

Dan: As the owner of the company he instituted a rule that he had to wear an uncomfortable suit at all times

> The
> two of them simply remained silent enjoying each other's companionship and presence as she
> finished peeling the thicker layers leaving Timothy in his pants and regular shirt.

Tsuneo: Well this isn't creepy at all

Rebecca: Gods no.

- > They are both
- > young adults now and despite the fact that both of them know the fact that they harbor each other
- > feelings, none are willing to take the step forward and confess in fear of destroying what they have
- > with each other.

Rick [Sagara]: I've always seen you as being like a sister

Rebecca [Laetri]: That's so sweet

Rick [Sagara]: Also I watch a lot of anime, so...

Rebecca [Laetri]: I'm going to cut you off right there

- > "So you're going to tell me now?" she asked as he stood up also helping her up as they followed the
- > usual clean walkways that connected the private suites to the ICU unit of the medical bay.

Tsuneo: So to summarise, his office is next to his bedroom which is next to a medical facility

Rick: Yes

Tsuneo: This guy has a very disturbing life

- > "It's just a hunch Cassie," he finally answered making her blink.

- > "A hunch?" she asked not quite sure she heard right.

Dan: [Sagara] Yeah, I throw away millions on hunches every day.

- > In a way she is right to be concerned. With
- > MULE leading as one of the most well sought out planets,

Tsuneo: It has the best skybox.

- > the Seikihoutai simply doesn't let anyone
- > enter it without an invitation which can only be given by members of the Board.

Rebecca: It made for an overly complicated, incredibly slow and unwieldy hiring process.

- > Even students who go there are required to have it.

Tsuneo: Sagara was a firm believer in gatekeeping basic education

- > A lot of rich players and clans have been waiting for long months
- > already to even get a slot of having the chance to enter.

Dan: I'm sure graft and corruption have no place in this process whatsoever.

- > So when he gave that Aech guy an open
- > invite, it could cause problems to everyone else who is at the wait list once news got out.

Rebecca: [Laetri] Yeah, and guess who's going to have to deal with the fallout when this gets out?
That's right, it's me. It's Muggins here, isn't it?

- > "Yes, a gut feeling that what I did can affect us greatly in the future," he explained.

Tsuneo: So when they're penniless, destitute and huddled up in cardboard boxes on the roadside next to each other, he can say he totally called it.

- > "Do you believe in destiny Cassie?"

Rick [Laetri]: Well I do have an epic-tier Guardian.

- > "Yes, you already know that," she pursed.

Tsuneo: [Laetri] As long as you keep paying me to.

- > Despite majority of the world and humanity going down to
- > the drain, Cassie and him never wavered on their beliefs,

Dan: That you could make potent moonshine out of lizard squeezings

- > believing still of the higher power above everyone else.

Rick: And by that, he means Zenu

Rebecca: I'm just saying that if these two were high-level Scientologists then it would explain a lot

- > With so much darkness around humanity the two of them have chosen to cling to
- > whatever light that is left to keep it shining. In the end after all, it is hope that stays with mankind.

Rick: But they both had reserved their places on the Star Ark no less.

- > "Then trust me in this. I know what I did has no significant meaning whatsoever. No logical decisions
- > to be based, no backup plans, it's just a gut feeling.

Dan: Wait, that's just indigestion. Carry on.

- > Trust me, I know the consequences also of what I've done Cassie.

Rebecca: And when the company comes crashing down around him in a burning heap, he can feel good knowing that he was right

- > But something tells me that what I did now would lead to something bigger than all of us,"
- > "Well aren't you the prophetic one,"

Rick: Pfft, call me back when you have a book of the Old Testament named after you

- > she grinned at him playfully making him scowl though she knew he loved it when she's playful.

Rebecca: [Laetri] Your reckless decisions are driving this company into the ground.

Dan: [Sagara] I love it when you're playful.

- > "I bow to your wisdom oh great and wise sage," she made a mock
- > imitation of a kowtow standing up as he simply rolled his eyes continuing to walk on.

Tsuneo: She's come to accept that the be all and end all of her existence is as his plus one

- > "Yeah, yeah very funny, just laugh it as best as you can you irritating blonde," he huffed making her
- > laugh

Rebecca: She loves the verbal abuse

- > as she ran after him, clinging to one of his arms, smelling his fresh scent

Tsuneo: The fresh scent that comes of spending eight hours in a haptic suit.

- > and enjoying his
- > warmth. She's a head shorter than him and she looked a lot like her avatar except for her ears and
- > skin and hair color which is blonde instead of violet.

Rebecca: She looked like her avatar in that she didn't

- > All in all, Cassandra's a beautiful woman that
- > many employees envy their boss to hoard all to himself (without her and even him knowing it).

Dan: How is it that this fic is managing to constantly escalate the creepy?

Rick: It is a true gift. A disgusting, sleazy, awful gift.

> "Tell me though Tim, as impressive as that Iron Giant that we just saw.

Rick: [Sagara] I must have it. Bankrupt Aech and buy it in the estate sale.

> Is that Aech person never truly a threat?"

> "No, he's not," he answered. "They're just kids Cassie. The moment I talked to him made me aware
> of that immediately.

Tsuneo: Say, is there anything else you might have noticed about Aech? Anything that wasn't immediately apparent?

> The way he moves, the way he phrased his words, and even the way he reacts
> is proof enough of it,"

Rebecca: Says the guy with a shonen anime avatar

> "Well I had to admit, that was one badass kid," she answered simply still leaning. "I've pulled out his
> records and I am impressed. He's one of the best pvp leading players

Rick: He's teabagged so many opponents

> currently taking tiers up to the top five hundred. Only twice have he ever been zeroed out

Tsuneo: One was due to an addled frog.

> and apparently both were caused by
> sixers overwhelming him only then in numbers in a no safety zone,"

> "Interesting and what about his friend Parzival?"

Tsuneo: Oh he'll never amount to anything.

> questioned Timothy making Cassandra frown as
> she remembered the rather unimpressive stats that the blue tattooed Dante looking guy have.

Rick: [Laetri] I kind of forgot he was there, to be honest.

> "Nothing much on him, he's just another regular gunter

Dan: He's written copious amounts of Ms Pac-Man porn, just like every other gunter

> trying to survive in the OASIS. Apparently
> the only reason he's still considered a gunter by the other gunters

Tsuneo: Please stop saying gunter

> is because of the fact that he's hitching a ride with his friend.

Rebecca: Something she'd know all about

> His skills are average but his perception skills are high.

Rick: He's really good at finding traps and secret doors

> His items are mediocre though and his accounts have records of being zeroed in five times.

Dan: Say, do you reckon it's normal to have access to other player's records?

Rebecca: What do you mean? He's got money.

> Cassandra simply watched as his friend's face morphed into

Rick: The Red Power Ranger's helmet.

> a thoughtful one. Probably the

> probability whether his "hunch" is caused by a random stomachache.

Dan: Turned out it was and he'd hired Aech because of a bad burrito.

> Still, she let him stew on it for now. If he gets too emotional, only then she'll intervene.

Rick: Emotions are forbidden

> Reaching the entrance of the ICU room, Cassandra promptly removed her hand from Timothy's

> arms as she smiled at the nurses at duty

Tsuneo: [Nurse] My whole job is to sit here and watch this machine go ping.

> before heading toward the pale figure who had lain unmoving there for six years already.

Rebecca: The ultimate shut-in.

> Her body is attached with dozens of tubes to keep her alive in

> her state and the only thing that's different is the masked OASIS visor that covers her eyes.

Dan: Back off man, you're interrupting my kill streak.

> She would have been chased by boys left and right if not for her being in this state.

Tsuneo: Sure, get horny for the coma girl. That's not creepy at all.

> "Hello Zyra," Cassandra greeted grabbing the slightly warm hand as she kissed it despite the fact

> that it remained unresponsive.

Dan: [Sagara] Whoah there, hold on! I'm meant to be the creepy one here.

> "I hope you are happy wherever you are in there?"

Rebecca: Given that the OASIS is entirely user-responsive, I can only assume she's staring at a perpetual load screen

> she chuckled

> sadly massaging the hand. "Me and Timmy here would just sleep and we're going to meet with you

> back then okay? Just...just have fun there without us for a while,"

Dan: Yeah, whatevs. Busy spawn camping rares over here.

> it took all her might not to sniffle,

> but the floodgates are just too impossible to stop every time she comes here. She barely felt the

> warm hand of Timothy touching her shoulder in support.

Tsuneo: It's touching until you remember that there's a nurse changing her bedpan

> "I'm sorry...I'm so sorry," the pretty blonde's voice cracked unable to keep herself from crying loudly

> anymore as she left the motionless hand and buried her sobbing face to the chest of her best friend

> as she let him hold her.

Rebecca: Sagara thinks this is a touching tribute to their mutual friend. Also, boobs.

> "She'll come back to us Cassie, she'll come back. She has to,"

Tsuneo: Sagara is looking after a sick girl, ergo every douchey thing he does is justified

> the strong but rich voice of the head

> of Sagara Foundations comforted making her snuffle even more as she tightened her hold.

Dan: [Nurse] Look, do you mind? I've got to clean her... Look, it's not going to wipe itself.

> She had

> to hope...for it is the only thing she can hold on to in regards for the nineteen year old girl who lived

> almost half her life in the OASIS.

Rick: So... she was an average gunter then?

On that final comment, the big screen turned off, reverting the world to prose format. "And so that was the first portion of A Helping Hand," Tsuneo considered. "In which we have a protagonist, regardless of if we like it or not."

"I mean, I have to give Captain Sagara this much," Rebecca offered. "In that we're only one part into this mess and already he's one of the most aggressively unlikeable OC protagonists that we've had to date. And that's saying a lot."

"You have a fair point there," Dan nodded. "And you know what? I think that he manages to do it in a lot of ways too."

"Let's see," Rick offered, "He's a cool dude who is the richest man in the world, has an army of loyal followers, is the best at everything, has a girl who is his second banana and who is amazing at everything ever and is super hot and has another friend who is also super hot and everything."

"And yet he manages to make every single part of that incredibly odious," Tsuneo noted.

"Amazingly so," Rebecca agreed. "It's not just that he has to be the best in the universe, either," she noted. "But everything about it is done in a way that's about putting down everyone else with an accompanying bragging, self-important, egotistical personality and approach."

"He's aggressively unlikeable," Rick agreed. "Which leads me to the fic's biggest paradox."

"What's that?" Dan asked.

"The people he's rampantly putting down and going over are Parzival and Aech," Rick replies.

"Who are incredibly odious in and of themselves," Tsuneo agreed. "I mean, they're the protagonists of the Ready Player One series. Parzival is an odious manchild who is stuck in an eighties nostalgia vortex and manages to be unlikable at every step of the way."

"And yet Sagara is going over them at every step," Dan noted.

"Which means that Parzival is the good guy here," Rebecca finished. "Thanks. I hate it."

"I can tell that you're really getting into this fic," the Voice crashed into the conversation.

"Like we really have a choice," Tsuneo noted.

"Fantastic," the Voice beamed. "Well then you'll be glad to know we've got another two episodes of it to come."

"I'm thrilled," Tsuneo sighed in a way that sounded like all the joy was being sucked out of the universe.

"In that case I'll see you all next time," the Voice finished.

"Well there we go," Tsuneo finished. "Why are we doing another Ready Player One fic?"

"I don't know," Rebecca shrugged. "But I'm going to blame some sort of algorithm or the like on this."

"Well if nothing else, this gives me inspiration for the fiction group," Tsuneo offered.

"Really?" Rick asked. "How so?"

"It tells me what not to do," he finished.

Author's notes:

Sagara is the sort of character that we encounter oh so very often in these things. It's not that there's something inherently wrong with a character who is the best at stuff, but at the same time there's no need to be so odious about it. And yet, the fic can't help itself. It has to keep pushing the main character so hard while making sure that they are never once called out on being a complete and utter arse. A dose of self-awareness could make this character so much more tolerable. But fanfic, well, self-awareness is a rare trait indeed.

Next time: Sagara is even more annoying

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A Helping Hand written by Vivori

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

Questions? Comments? Complaints? A too-small helmet? Email us at [elmerstudios00 \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:elmerstudios00@gmail.com) and register your Jeff.

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> One thing led to another and before Timothy knows it,
> Sagara Foundations is one of the richest companies in the world