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## Episode 502 – When the B plot is the only plot

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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.

“Now this is between you and me,” Christina commented as she entered the apartment, with Rex behind her.

“I am the very model of discretion,” Rex nodded. “What’s up?”

“I might have gotten some details of equipment and such passing through some of the other competitors’ workshops during the mid-season break,” she explained. “Now obviously I don’t want to cheat or the like but also it would help if somebody, say, technically skilled looked at it.”

“If you ain’t cheating then you ain’t trying hard enough,” Jill commented as she and Mark entered. “I learned that a long time ago.”

“It’s a simple operation,” Mark added. “Don’t consider it to be cheating. Consider it to be getting an advantage while everyone else is trying to do the same.”

“Or are you just saying that because your team would have burned down the entire place getting a single bit of data that probably wouldn’t be of any use anyway,” Jill added.

“That too,” Mark shrugged.

“So, tech data aside, I was thinking about the fic,” Rex considered.

“Well, that’s your first mistake,” Jill added with a snort.

“Right, well, I think it’s fair to say that there’s a lot of things about it that don’t work,” Rex continued. “Well, um, all of them really. But at the same time, I don’t think that it’s inherently bad crossover at its core.”

“That’s an interesting point to consider,” Mark nodded. “I think I can see where you’re coming from.”

“At the most basic level there’s a lot to connect the two shows,” Christina agreed. “They have a lot of aesthetic similarities despite the difference in genre, with one being sci-fi and the other cyberpunk action.”

“The result of sharing almost all of their production staff and all that,” Mark noted.

“Although both also lean into the ‘girls with guns’ genre of cheese,” Rex added. “Mm, cheese. I like a good cheese on a ham roll.”

“Digressions aside it’s not too much to say that they’re not entirely incompatible,” Mark agreed. “In fact, I would go so far as to say that at the very most basic level, this fic has the right idea for how to make this crossover work. However, it then completely fumbles the execution.”

“By not actually doing anything with it,” Christina nodded. “As so far, the fic is really not using the Gall Force characters for anything meaningful. I would go so far to say that Catty has done more for the fic as a whole than any of the other Solanoids, and she was only introduced in the third chapter.”

“I mean, I’m kinda invested in Rabby’s garage project,” Rex offered.

"Yeah, that's you," Jill shot back.

"That aside, I think there's a lot you could do with the premise," Mark noted. "You could play up the idea of alienation and loss that the Solanoids are facing. After all, not only are they two million years removed from their now long dead civilization, but they're in an entirely alien culture that they have no idea how to function in."

"The fact that men exist should be a big enough shock, and yet the fic's never bought it up once," Christina added.

"Exactly," Mark nodded. "This could be a major plot point, one that would colour all their interactions with the world. Looking at it at a boarder level, it's clear that the Solanoids had no real idea of the concept of biological reproduction or possibly even sex at all. This could all make for a fascinating character study as these characters struggle to adapt to this completely alien culture."

"At the same time, you could do more with the tech angle," Rex offered. "Like have Genom become aware of the existence of this alien tech and have them actively pursue it and junk. The Knight Sabers and a couple of Solanoids fighting to keep this tech out of Genom's hands could make for a strong core story."

"Or here's another suggestion," Christina spoke up. "What if the core of Genom's technologies came from discovering the capsule on the moon? They've been progressively deciphering and decoding it over the years, allowing them to build up their technological supremacy."

"And the only person who knows what's going on is Catty," Rex offered. "Who is now trying to stop Genom from exploiting that tech and going too far. And, like, she's working with Sylia but the pair of them have very different methods and limits on what they will and won't do for their cause."

"And as we've seen, Catty considered mutually assured destruction to be an acceptable plan B," Mark noted.

"Which brings me to another problem which is this fic's horribly bloated cast," Christina continued. "At present half of the Solanoids aren't doing anything for it at all."

"They're filling up space," Jill interjected. "But that's about it."

"Right so you keep the cast small," Mark agreed. "Catty obviously since she's a fantastically useful McGuffin character. Luffy because she's the protagonist-"

"-and has cool hair," Rex added.

"That too, and then pick one of Shildy and Rabby," Mark finished.

"Luffy and Shildy's totally platonic lesbian handshake would make for a better core character story than what the fic's given us," Jill noted.

"There we have it," Rex nodded. "An actually workable Bubblegum Crisis/Gall Force crossover concept that does stuff with the premise."

"Well have fun writing it, nerds," Jill finished. "Because you know nobody else ever will."

"But if they did, then I would have to feed it to you," the Voice cut into the conversation. "Only because it would be so annoying that you read the inferior version first."

"Well hello there Voice," Rex spoke up.

"And hi to you too kids," the Voice replied. "How's my favourite collection of control specimens?"

"We're control specimens?" Rex asked.

"Maybe," the Voice replied. "Or maybe my telling you that you're the controls is actually a part of the experiment."

"You're sounding a lot meaner of late," Jill added. "And I'm annoyed mostly because that's my job."

"What can I say? Even I want to have some fun every now and then," the Voice explained. "But don't worry, you'll have a lot more on your minds soon enough."

"I assume by that you mean we have more of Bubblegum Force to go on with," Mark said.

"And you would be entirely correct," the Voice confirmed. "Today we have chapters four and five. I'd tell you what happens only I don't want to spoil the surprise."

"Because I imagine that it's nothing exciting," Christina sighed.

"On the contrary," the Voice replied. "These two chapters have my favourite moments so far in the story. These are ones that warmed my heart, or rather, would have if I had one, and that I could not wait until you engaged with them."

"So, all of that bodes," Jill sighed.

"Enjoy," the Voice simply finished. "Because I know I will."

"So, any idea what we are expecting?" Christina asked. "Especially given our host's apparent enthusiasm?"

Mark shook his head as he took his place on the couch. "At this point it could be literally anything."

"You know what?" Jill added as she and the others joined him. "Given how repetitive and dull the fic's been so far, I would take that."

"What if it was just Rabby listing sandwich ingredients?" Rex asked.

"At least it'd be something different," Jill finished as the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format.

> Bubblegum Force Episode 4  
> Brink of disaster  
> By nebulart@solnoid.nl

> After the highway disaster and Catty's return,

Mark: Which were surprisingly unrelated.

> a calm week had followed. Well, relatively calm.

Rex: Barring the blazing wreckage and all

> Construction crews worked 24 hours a day to get the bridge back up, and to clear the main Fault > access road.

Jill: Have to make sure that the dystopian slum is properly serviced

> Life had gone on for the last of the Solnoids.

Christina: They adapted perfectly fine to living on an actual planet where men existed.

> Rabby and Catty had several long talk sessions,

Rex: Which didn't always involve a soldering iron.

> resulting in stacks of papers filled with diagrams, equations, designs and explanations for all those.

Christina: Yes, your D&D campaign notes are very impressive, but shouldn't we be working on something else?

> They had gone down to the equipment bay, and had started tearing down the suits,  
> promising everyone they would return bigger and better.

Mark: New person coming in and taking over a project? This is pure office politics  
Christina: You just know that this is going to end in a HR meeting

> Luffy had taken a week off, wanting to spend some time with Priss, wanted to get used to her, befriend  
> her.

Rex: Commit Boomer hate crimes with her, that sort of thing.

> She had never felt the urge before to get acquainted with people,

Mark: Luffy firmly believed that people were an obstacle to be avoided at all costs.

> her combat training having taught her that your friends today could be dead by tomorrow.

Jill: Which meant it was a great time to bum money off of them

> But this wasn't a war anymore. It wasn't peace either.

Mark: It was just mildly annoying, really

> Deep down inside her, she felt the need to have someone to talk to, someone she could trust.

Christina: As opposed to the half dozen people she lives with who she has lived, fought and possibly died alongside, of course

Rex: Well besides that

> And Priss fitted that description nicely.

> They often drove down to the seashore, to near the new GPCC construction site.

Mark: Where they could bask in the toxic runoff.

> One day, as any other, they were down there, having a burger and a cola. Luffy noted Priss staring  
> out over the water. "Something wrong?"

Jill: Priss is well aware of what happens when she makes a new friend

> "Uh, no. I was reminded of a friend. We came here very often."

> "Why not anymore, if I may be so blunt to ask?"

Christina [Priss]: She turned out to be a robot space vampire

Jill [Luffy]: Yeah, that will happen

> "She's dead."

> "I'm sorry. It always hurts to lose somebody." Priss turned around, saw Luffy looking into infinity.

> "You've lost friends too, not?"

Christina: [Luffy] Other way around. I keep dying on people.

Mark: [Priss] Yeah, that makes – Wait, what?

> "Yes. And for what? For a senseless war, that ended in stardust." Tears welled up in Lufy's eyes.  
> "I can still remember. It was aboard the Sardine, that was the flagship of Central Intelligence;

Rex: Please don't laugh at our ship

> the ship of Captain Nebulart.

Mark: Say, why did Catty Nebulart get a last name and nobody else did?

Rex: That's a very good question

[Pause]

Rex: Didn't say I had a good answer

> Then, it hit me. I asked myself what I had been fighting for all those years."

Jill: Your Christmas bonus and stock options?

> She gulped. "I am an Attacker. We are destined to fight, drilled to perfection, trained to the  
> ultimate edge.

Mark: Like, Shadow the Hedgehog level edge

> Of all those, I am the only one to survive. And I still wonder, why me ?"

Christina: Because of your amazing hair

Rex: You may be on to something there

> Priss put a hand on her shoulder. "Take it easy. Doesn't time heal all wounds ?"

Mark: Time or prosthetics.

> "Time only heals the wounds of the body, but deepens the scar in the soul."

Jill: Therapy is for losers.

> Nodding, Priss agreed. "I still wish I could have saved her, you know", Priss commented.

> "Who ?"

> "My friend, Sylvie. She was.. special.

Christina: Like Catty special.

> I'd never felt like that before. I could talk to her about things I'd  
> never discuss with anyone.

Rex: She told Sylvie all about her Naruto fanfic

> We did things together, and it felt good."

Mark: Things?

Jill: You know, things.

Mark: And?

Jill: Stuff.

Mark: Things and stuff.

Jill: Right.

> Lufy nodded. "I know that feeling. I used to be a loner, thinking I never needed anyone or  
> anything. Until the Starleaf. They all cared for me. All of them. And I, jerk that I was, didn't do  
> anything with it until it was too late.

Jill: Too focused on walking around naked to notice what was really important  
Mark: And what was that? Pants?

> You don't know how it feels, to be trapped in space, between starship debris,

Mark: Again.

> the only one you can talk to being a robotic combat trooper,

Christina [Lufy]: Hey murderbot, how's it going?

Rex: Beep beep death to the fleshy ones

Christina [Lufy]: Yeah, me too

> seeing the ship with your friends aboard making hyperspace."

Jill: Ever think that they just didn't like you

> "I don't know, but I have to admit something. That feeling Sylvie gave me, I feel the same around  
> you."

> Lufy looked up. "Serious ?"

> "Serious."

Mark: Because they've spent so much time interacting so far.

> They both sat down on a bench, looking out to sea as the sun slowly set.

Christina: The light casts such beautiful patterns on the oil slick.

> "C'mon, let's go home. Time to dig into some dinner."

Jill: [Lufy] That's enough mushy stuff. I got dangerously close to having a feeling.

> Lufy hopped on her bike, smiled.

> "I'm not going to challenge you to a race; you'll win anyway." Priss shot a smile back.

> "I'll have Mackie build a bike like mine for you."

Rex: Probably just as prone to exploding too

> "Cool. Can you really make him do that ?"

> "Just play on his lechery. Always works."

Jill: Priss had figured out Onlyfans before it was even invented

> Lufy laughed. And off they roared.

> Linna had two new students in her aerobics class; Rabby and Spea.

Christina: Spea's got to have something to do.

> The music was rolling, exercise followed exercise at a high pace, bodies sweating, working out.

Mark: Yui Takanaka, how's it going there?

> After her class, another instructor

> took the floor, Linna's class streamed out to the showers, except Rabby and Spea, who joined her  
> at the window railing.

Christina: [Rabby] We'd stick around for her class, but then we'd have to actually pay for it.

> "You're a tough instructor", Rabby sighed, mopping her brow with a towel.

> "Yeah. I've worked out before, but never this intense", Spea commented.

Jill: They're trained soldiers who have seen intense, deadly combat, but that's nothing compared to an afternoon aerobics class

> "But, did you like it ?" Pleasure shone behind Linna's eyes. Both girls nodded. And yes, they would  
> definitely keep following her classes.

Mark: This means a lot for Linna... in as far as the gym won't cut her class for low numbers.

> Linna stepped away from the railing.

> "Most of the girls will be out of the showers now. I'll go have one now."

> Walking towards the dressing room, both Spea and Rabby quickly fell in step with her.

> "Mind us joining you ?"

> "No problem."

Jill: You'd think that the staff would have their own showers

Rex: You're getting hung up on that?

Jill: Look, this fic has been so dull so far that I have to latch onto something

> While showering, Rabby let her mind wander, recalling the countless showers she had taken  
> aboard the Starleaf,

Christina: This shower is like a shower

> because the ship's climate control had partially broken down, setting the  
> temperature just a tad too high. Thinking of the Starleaf instantly brought back images of her  
> friends. Eluza. Patty. Pony. Rumi.

Mark: Okay, so not Pony.

Jill: She knows what she did.

> She recalled looking to Eluza, her ability to dare to take decisions, never regretting them,

Mark: Eluza had so many ugly tattoos

> never afraid to take the lead. But Eluza was dead.

Jill: Eluza got sick of this shit and punched out.

> She had valiantly refused the Paranoid Contact Point. It had become her death.

Christina: Someone else will have to create the human race.

> But she had died proud.

> Pony, who had sacrificed herself to copy all the data from OX-11 to Exanon.

Jill: Let's not beat around the bush here. Pony died because she was dumb

> Stupid computer. It had let those Paranoid scouts through.

Mark: It's good to know your forces were deeply compromised by a conspiracy aiming to use you as  
test subjects.

Jill: Really instils loyalty.

> Per Central Guard orders. Patty. Poor

> Patty, who's contact point fusion had been the only successful.

Rex [Patty]: My contact point fusion was successful

Christina [Marcie]: You're weird, sir

> Spea shook Rabby by the shoulders. "Ground Control to Rabby. Time to get dressed."

Mark: You've been staring into space for hours

> "Uh, yeah. Sorry."

> "Something wrong ?"

> "Just memories."

Christina: [Rabby] Just a long, drawn-out shower scene for no reason...

> Spea nodded. "Come on, let's go."

> The three of them walked out the aerobics studio, to the parking lot, engaged in some small talk, mostly talking boys and money,

Rex: Two things that only Linna was aware of.

> the discussion being lead by Linna. Who else.

Mark: Who else indeed?

> They piled into Linna's citycar, Spea squeezing herself in the backseat.

Jill: Where they could handily ignore her.

> "Linna, you got to buy a bigger car, or else I won't be going to aerobics class anymore."

Christina: [Linna] Or you could get your own car and stop being a mooch.

> "Spea, think of it this way. The moment you can slip in that backseat without trouble, that means my classes actually work." Linna smiled wickedly. They all laughed.

Jill [Linna]: You're such a fatarse, Spea

> "Are you absolutely sure ?"

Mark: Depends. Who are you, where are we and what is going on?

> "Once we have verification of that pilot, yes."

> The lieutenant sat back in his chair.

Mark: And gave it a spin, just for fun.

> "That can be a problem."

> "Why ? She resigned ?"

Rex: Her letter of resignation said that she was too good for this chicken-crap outfit

> "She has a week off. This case remains strictly between you two, me and her."

Mark: Oh, and HR who had to sign off on it

> He took the tape, and locked it in one of his desk drawers. "I trust you have copies ?"

> "Several."

Rex: I taped over your old Matlock episodes. I hope you don't mind.

> "I don't want to know where they are."

Jill: Probably cluttering up space in a self-storage unit

> "What now ?"  
> "Nothing.

Rex: We're not going to follow up on that investigation. It was just to justify our budget.

> Now Genom must make it's move.

Mark: Now we wait for the giant evil megacorporation to make its move

> Then we act. In the meantime, get working to get rid of  
> that backlog of cases you two built up over the last two years."

Jill: Being a loose cannon cowboy cop on the edge means filling out a lot of forms

> Leon and Daley looked at each other, then at the lieutenant. "Is this a joke ?"

Rex: A question people often ask of Leon

> "No. You'd better get to work. It's quite a lot." Slogging, they left the lieutenant's office, to their  
> desks, where Nene was busy piling file upon file. "Nene, don't tell me we have to work through all  
> that, will you ?"

Christina: Paperwork... of the future!

> "Okay I won't tell. Just do it." Leon seated himself, and looked at the huge pile of files in his In  
> basket.

Mark: You know, paperwork is actually my favourite part of the job.

Rex: Seriously?

Mark: Yep I do it on my own, and I'm not getting shot at.

> Sighing, he picked off the top file, read through it, wrote a few comments left and right,

Jill [Leon]: I like guns and cheese

> signed it, and tossed it in Daley's In basket, who also read it, commented on Leon's comments,

Rex [Daley]: Leon eats boogers

> signed it, and tossed it in the Out basket. Great.

Mark: Real-time paperwork action! Bubblegum Force!

> Reduced to piloting desks for quite some time.

Christina: Was this comedy?

Mark: We should kill it before it spreads.

> Sylia and Catty had locked themselves in Sylia's laboratory,

Rex: Absolutely nothing can go wrong with this at all!

> busy building a chipreader for the data chip. Catty marveled at Sylia's craftsmanship,

Jill: Sylia made chipreaders using traditional artisan techniques passed down for generations

> seeing how fast and accurately she worked from the plans Catty had prepared,

Christina: [Catty] You know, I am capable of doing this myself.

Jill: [Sylia] Yes, but I don't trust you.

Christina: [Catty] Okay, that's fair.

> often looking over an entire section of them once, then building it. But

> she had her own work. She fudged around with some materials she had asked from Sylia,

Rex [Catty]: I'll need a metric ton of aluminium cladding, a rubber band ball, two dozen marbles, a box of matches and an easy chair.

> building

> a dense, compact cylinder from parts, putting some small pieces of material inside. She screwed on

> a top, melted the top and the base together with a plasma torch, then constructed a miniature fusion

> ring and power convertor,

Rex: [Catty] I call it: Mr Fusion.

> put them on the cylinder base containing the control mechanisms, slid a

> dense, solid top over that, again melting it shut.

Jill: Intense welding action!

> She plugged three feeds into the base of the

> cylinder and two more into the fusion top. She opened a small hatch in the top, and lowered a small,

> fuming cylinder into it. Hydrogen.

Mark: Clearly very rare and difficult to obtain

> She closed the hatch, secured it. Laying out the power and control

> cords, she placed the microfusion plant in a bomb-box

Jill: Whereupon Hank McLean ran off with it.

> strong enough to contain any possible

> explosion, and ran it, monitoring its output on her internal energy sensors.

Rex: She's building her warrior robot race, assembling them one laser gun at a time

> Sylia came up behind her, looking at the object she had built from the parts she had

> requested. "What is it ?"

> "Microfusion powerplant."

Mark: You probably should have told Sylia that was what you were doing first

> "How much power does that one put out ?"

> "Enough."

> "For what ?"

Christina: [Catty] Enough to put up with your stupid questions.

> "To power a small shuttle."

Christina [Sylia]: Why do you need that?

Jill [Catty]: I'm certainly not planning to flee the solar system while leaving the rest of humanity to die at the hands of an enemy I was aware of and did nothing about. That would be dumb.

> Sylia was amazed. "And you built that from scratch ?" Catty shut down the plant.

Rex: [Catty] And there was only a 3% chance it would annihilate the city.

> "I have the plans for it in my head. It's really quite simple."

Mark: Like every transhumanist, Catty feels the need to brag about being a transhumanist

> "Difference of culture I'd say. Fusion power is still in its experimental stages here, so a fusion plant  
> at the size you just built would be a godsend to the technicians."  
> "All the more reason to handle it with care."  
> Sylia nodded. If Genom was to build a boomer around that....

> "Test 42B - main weapons." An 8-meter tall boomer thunderously walked onto the test range.

Rex: Well that wasn't a setup at all

Jill: God no

> It clicked open the arm blasters, aimed at the target and... froze in the firing position. "Damn,  
> another failure.

Mark: Look at the upside. Nobody died this time

> Okay, shut it down." An overhead crane put the boomer on its back,

Jill: The killer robot needs a good lie down.

> and three techs

> carefully removed the head armor plating, revealing the AI computer inside. One of them reached  
> into it, and with the flick of a switch, deactivated it. "Pull it out and reprogram it.

Rex: And try not to spill your coffee on it this time, Steve.

> We can't use a boomer that can do everything but tell where the enemy is and fire."

Christina: But can it make parfaits?

> The exec shook his head. This way, he'd never make his 3-week deadline.

Jill: He needs to achieve minimum deliverable killer robot product.

> And it would be a dead-line. If he didn't make it, well, he'd rather not think of the consequences.

Rex: There would have to be a meeting of the project oversight committee to reassess funding  
priorities

> Thank god the infantry suits were doing better.

Christina: They were only two times over budget.

> Those were almost finished. And marvelous they were. Full hand manipulation. 120mm  
> recoilless rifle, shouldermounted. Dual machinegun in each arm. Two heat blasters, normally found  
> on a Bu-55c, one on each side of the torso.

Jill: Leather seats, in-car entertainment system and a slide back sunroof

> Flight capable, and very maneuverable.

Jill: He got all sweaty just thinking about it

> The Knight Sabers were in for it now,

Mark: I imagine a lot of retired Genom executives have said that.

> together with their new allies. He had them. Almost where he wanted

Rex: At the Starbucks on fifth and main.

> them. Six foot under. "Rerunning Boomer Test 42B - main weapons."

Mark: Well the bad news is they still don't work, but the good news is we got rid of that funky mildew smell.

> Again, the boomer marched onto the test range, clicked open the arm blasters, aimed for the test target. A huge blast of energy later, the target was vaporized. A second target, further away, came up. Vaporized.

Christina: The director's car. Vaporised.

> "Okay, this will do. End of test." Another test cleared. But a whole lot to go. And > that damn unstable AI - all because SDPC wouldn't let him use any Doberman parts for this project.

Rex: Not even the docked tails?

> Damn them. But once finished, this new boomer, codenamed Dragon, would be awesome.

Jill: Did a twelve year old write this?

> A high-  
> powered thermal blaster in each arm, triple barrel mouth laser cannon, each of them identical to that > of a Doberman.

Mark: But just different enough to avoid copyright problems.

> Armor plating strong enough to withstand the heaviest enemy weapons. Two 12-> pack missile launchers, one in each shoulder.

Christina: Two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese on a sesame seed bun

> Again, flight capable, and now being equipped with a new AI.

Jill: And this one almost certainly won't go insane.

> Oh, he almost forgot the crushing strength it had. Powerful enough to lift a K-12 off the > street and toss it away like a toy soldier.

Mark: Is being able to trash the ADP even a fair measure?

> Those puny Knight Sabers wouldn't stand a chance. And AD Police ? They could delete the A > from their name. Dead Police. Sounded better anyway.

Jill: You really feel like he spent hours working on that one.

> Sylia inspected her handiwork.

Christina: She's making her own killer robot for a competing bid.

> Cables ran all over the construct, a small slot in the front, numerous cables running to a dataterminal.

Rex: This whole thing is one giant trip hazard

> "What do you think; will it work ?"

> "It should."

> "Care to try ?"

Christina: [Catty] Let me take cover first.

> Catty nodded, and slipped the small gold square into the slot, where a little servo motor pulled it in  
> deeper, clicking it in place.

Jill: I have never been so thrilled to read a description of a CD tray in action

> Sylia seated herself behind the terminal, and accessed the reader.

Christina: [Sylia] Hold on... Licensing agreement... Accept cookies... No, I do not want to subscribe to  
your newsletter.

> A gentle whirring sound came from the drive as the reader heads searched over the surface.

> Then, data started scrolling.

> Opening her mind to all this incredible information, Sylia started taking in as much as she  
> could handle. Fusion power. Hyperspeed drives. Plasma weaponry. Planet Destroyers. Cloning  
> technology. History. Culture. Spaceships. Troopers. Struggle suits. Fighters. Shuttles..

Rex: Office furniture. Dinosaurs. Train timetables. Zoning laws...

> on and on it went.

Jill: My summary of the fic so far.

> All the time, Catty was keeping an eye on her, drawing a conclusion.

Christina [Catty]: I like ice cream

> Fifteen minutes later, the reader stopped whirring, data stopped scrolling.

Jill: She'd hit the power armour specs and had to take a breather.

> Sylia blinked a few times. Catty was looking at her intently. "Something wrong ?"  
> "No, not wrong. I am curious to something, though,

Mark: She wants to know why Mackie. Not why anything, just why.

> but nothing is wrong."

> "Well, what are you so curious about ?"

Rex: [Catty] Why a lingerie shop? Seriously?

> "You have, in fifteen minutes time, digested all our knowledge.

Christina: [Sylia] And I have an amazing headache.

> How ?"

> Sylia closed her eyes. One image appeared. Her father. "I did. I have the ability to process data  
> at very high speeds."

Rex: She's a speed reader

> "But no living being can ever process that much data in so few time."

> "I can. I can't fully explain this, but I can."

Christina [Catty]: Are you, perchance, a part of a transhumanist conspiracy?

Jill [Sylia]: Maybe. Its complicated.

> Catty nodded. She removed the datachip from the reader, and pulled off her sweater.

Jill: [Sylia] Um, should I be undressing too, or...

> Feeling

> around on her upper left arm, she depressed a part of her skin, which clicked open to accept the datachip. Inserting it, she pushed it down, back in her body. Sylia was amazed.

Christina: [Sylia] That is a really inconvenient place for a drive.

> Catty smiled. "This way the chip is safe."

> "Until you meet a boomer. It'll tear you limb from limb."

Rex: That's a very specific scenario

Mark: And yet...

> The small girl smiled mysteriously. "Don't underestimate me."

> "Don't overestimate yourself."

Christina [Catty]: No you

Jill [Sylia]: No you!

> They left the lab.

> Back on the job, Lufy immediately got a call from upstairs. She was needed to verify something.

Rex: Leon and Daley were having an argument over whether a hot dog counted as a sandwich

> Sighing, she went up to the detective department. Probably nothing. She was guided in to a small office, Leon, Daley and the lieutenant waiting.

Mark: The consistently unnamed lieutenant.

> "Well, what's up here "

> "We want you to look at this videotape. If you recognize anything, please tell so."

> Nodding, she agreed. The picture started hazy. Lowlight camera, Lufy said to herself.

Rex: [Lufy] Pretty shoddy camerawork, to be honest.

> Then, arclights came on, and something came out of a hangar. "Stop the tape."

Rex: [Lufy] You call that lighting? I can't watch this.

> She tapped on the object being removed from the hangar. "That's the craft I put that officer down at.  
> On the way back here I got shot down."

Mark: Something that nobody seems to have really been bothered to follow up on

> "Are you sure ?"

> Lufy pointed at the yellow and black marker. "I'd recognize that anywhere."

Christina: It's the Blacktron logo, isn't it?

> Sure you do, she thought. You've flown under that sign. You've lived for it. You even died twice for it.

Jill: That sign left her standing at the altar and she will never forgive it

> She saw Leon and Daley nod. That was all they needed. The lieutenant sat down, drummed his

> fingers on his desk. "I can't give you a search warrant."

> "Wha...."

Rex: Wait, the ADP are ineffectual? Who could have seen that coming?

> "Since Genom is using that factory to develop new prototypes, it has been completely cut off from  
> the outside world; noone gets in, noone gets out."

Mark: They built a moat around it and everything

> "Unless we let ourselves in."

Jill [Lufy]: New plan; we dress up as sexy pizza delivery

> The three police officers stared at the pilot, who had her arms folded, was leaning against a wall.  
> "And how were you going to do that?", the lieutenant asked sarcastically. Lufy broke out in a smile.

Christina: [Lufy] It's probably best for everybody's career if I don't answer that.

> "Can you arrange that warrant, useless or not?"

> The lieutenant nodded, then understood what she was aiming at. "You get a warrant, I just don't  
> want to know what you are planning."

Jill: Plausible deniability has kept him alive thus far.

> When they walked out of the office, Leon having the warrant in his hands, he asked her what  
> she was planning. All she did was smile and take them down to the K-12 bay.

Rex: Where the ADP keep the robot suits that haven't blown up yet

> "Figure you can load two of these in a chopper?"

> "Choppers are designed to hold four."

> "Good. Or two souped up ones."

> "What do you mean?"

Mark: One of you can't do basic maths

> "Is there a way to soup up these beasties?"

Rex: This is an Artmic show. There's probably unused production art of K-12s with all sorts of  
weapons strapped to them

> "Confiscated combat boomer parts", Leon replied.

Jill: Sure, this sounds like a good plan. Nothing can go wrong with this

> "Are you nuts?" Daley's eyes were wide with alarm.

> "Nope. He's just smart."

Mark: Something nobody has ever said about Leon ever

> Lufy grinned. Yeah, this Leon guy, he knew how to play the game.

Christina: He rolled his dice and moved his little piece around the board

> She almost liked him.

Jill: But then she remembered that he's Leon.

> "She's right. Let's get down to the armory." Leon decided he liked this pilot. She  
> didn't play by the rules either.

Rex: Lufy is only an apprentice loose cannon cop on the edge

> Down in the apartment equipment bay, another discussion was going on.

Christina: Pointless discussions is what this fic does best.

> Sylia, Catty and Rabby

> were discussing the new suits. How they were going to look. What power system they should use.

Mark: Things that you should have decided on before you started

Rex: Project management at its best

> Finally, Rabby signalled for a timeout. "All very nice and friendly, thank you very much. But I don't  
> have the space in here to build all that stuff.

Christina: She already has her giant abandoned factory workshop. What more does she need?

Jill: At this rate, a runway to launch off

> Besides, next to those suits I had something else in mind, something Shildy told me about."

> "Like what ?"

> "Assault Shuttle.

Jill: Well there you go

> Only a modified version employing more VTOL power and less forward power."

> "Good idea."

Mark: Sure, why not? We can just make that out of spare parts too.

> "And, if Sylia's boomer info is correct, we're going to need one or two heavy troopers."

> "We can upgrade a struggle suit", Catty commented

> "No, I meant a real trooper.

Rex: One who bashes his head on a door and can't hit a thing

> Along the lines of the Bronz-D."

> "Better yet, it's successor, the Bronz-X.", Catty commented. Rabby nodded.

Jill: She must have been asleep for that one.

> Sylia shook her head. "Too big and too cumbersome."

Mark: She's already planning to build a spaceship. We're well past that point

> "You'd be surprised. Besides, we can use the extra firepower. Just in case."

> "Isn't it too big to be built here, then ?"

Rex: Sure, but you don't seem to be letting that stop you.

> Rabby eyeballed the space she had. "It'd fit. Barely. But we need some bigger doors there  
> then."

> "In short, time to move."

> "Most probably, yes. But where do we go ?"

> "Across the street."

> Looking out the door, Rabby saw a dilapidated truck dock and storage hall across the street.

Rex: And the abandoned car factory with fully functional equipment still left entirely intact down the road from that

> "Perfect."

> Shildy had needed time to come to terms with herself. So much had happened around her. First  
> DAMIA. Then, the Stardust.

Rex: Then Diamond Dogs, Station to Station and The Budda of Suburbia

> Now, this city, that threatened to be torn apart any minute now.

Mark: Just take our word for it

> And

> then, there was Rabby. Tough girl. Lufy had spoken of her when they had first met on the Lorelei.

Jill: To the point where Shildy began to feel a little inadequate

> Now she got to meet this person herself. She had to admit, she liked her. Not afraid to take a  
> decision. Dared to take the lead. Just like her.

Mark: Informed character is the best character

> But she had another responsibility.

Rex: She'd bought into a struggling alpaca ranch

> Amy. Amy was really just a little girl caught up in this maelstrom of events.

Jill: Here I thought Amy was part of the ship's crew.

> Not that she wanted to treat her like a child, oh no. But this was a different  
> place. She seriously considered putting Amy in boarding school, away from the city.

Rex: Does Amy get a choice in this?

Mark: Hopefully not.

> Amy looked disappointed. "Shildy, tell me this is a bad dream."

> "It's not, Amy. I've talked to Sylia, and we've agreed it's best for you to go to that boarding school."

Jill: And this is not just Shildy unloading her so she can sit back and sip cosmos

> Amy's shoulders slumped. According to laws here, she was just a kid, and had to go to a school.

Rex: She was at least hoping for a shonen fight school

> "Please, I want to stay with you." She practically cried. Shildy shook her head.

> Sighing, Amy began packing. At the bottom, her uniform. Although Shildy had told her not to wear it  
> anymore, she still took it along, just as a memory.

Jill: And an obvious setup.

> Some more clothes, books, all the things one needed when going away.

Mark: Trail mix, survival knife, cyanide capsule...

> Once packed, Sylia brought her out of the city to a private school, the  
> same where Nene had spent some years, and had run away from.

Christina: It's St. Trinians, isn't it?

> Now it was Amy's turn.

> Rabby had taken the afternoon off from her work as receptionist at Phoebe's

Jill: Where Phoebe's is...

Rex: For want of anything else, I'm going to assume it's a specialty model trains store

> to scout out the

> storage hall. A large skylight was a great way to function as an aircraft exit door. Several overhead  
> loading cranes would ease construction.

Mark: This goes well beyond convenient to the point of stupid

Christina: I have a feeling that we're only just getting started

> Securing this place against unwanted visitors would be

> easy; just weld shut most of the doors, seal up some windows.

Jill: And lay out some bear traps

> Looking across the street, she saw

> the small workshop she had used until now. Smiling, she shook her head.

Rex: People kept asking her about something called 'rent,' but she assumed it wasn't important.

> For a few struggle suits, a

> good place. But for what she was going to build now, way too small.

Mark: It's not so much that Rabby is dreaming big as she's dreaming completely insane

> A few discussions with Sylia and Catty had yielded a thorough plan;

Christina: A small down payment and a low rate of interest.

> 4 struggle suits for normal work,

Rex: And one for the weekend

> one assault shuttle for delivery and support and two heavy Bronz-X troopers for emergencies.

Christina: Like if there was a cat stuck in a tree

> Catty would fly the shuttle, Lufy, Shildy, Spea and she would pilot the suits.

Mark: Amy would provide colour commentary.

> The troopers were unassigned, but Lufy would get

> one, and most probably either she or Shildy; Spea never had any trooper training.

Jill: Spea gets left out of a lot of things.

> There was a lot of work to be done.

Mark: Given that this fic is about ninety percent people standing around and talking, I don't see her getting anywhere anytime soon

> Deep in the recesses of a Genom Industrial area, the Genom Force slowly took form.

Rex: Genom Force sounds like a cartoon show Genom made to indoctrinate a young audience that flopped spectacularly.

> Fifteen high powered infantry suits, pilot hatches open, were standing in a line,

Mark: Cool. Cool. Okay. Cool. What are you going to use them for?  
Jill: That wasn't on the project brief.

> while in another part of the complex, the Dragon Boomers were on their final assembly.

Rex: The flat-pack death robot was what allowed Genom to dominate the market

> All five of them. And with a stable, functional AI.

Jill: They'd gotten the uncontrollable murder rampage rate down to an acceptable level

> Of course, Quincy himself had come down to the factory. He had been most pleased  
> with the progress.

Mark: Wait, he had? How are we meant to do our shouting Quincy bit now?

> But he also had made it very clear they had better get rid of the Knight Sabers  
> this time, and any ADPolice that interfered with them.

Christina: Quincy was beginning to sound more like a James Bond villain

> Not that the exec was afraid of the ADPolice.

Rex: Few people were

> He was wary, though, about the Knight Sabers;  
> he had no idea how powerful those heavy suits were that boomer had reported.

Christina: Or how marketable.

> And those  
> hardsuits, they could prove a problem, as their small size and incredible maneuverability allowed  
> them to dodge most fire. The D.D. experiment

Jill: Genom's effort to build a practical, breathable sports bra

> had shown that maneuverability counted at least double in any combat situation.

Rex: Double what?

Mark: Just double

> But, he had enough firepower available to deal with them. Saturate  
> an area, and even the most maneuverable unit had a problem.

Rex: Collateral damage? Never heard of it.

> In a normally unused workshop,

Christina: All of Tokyo seems to be made up of unused workshops

> Leon, Daley and Luffy were busy modifying two K-12 units for a bigger punch.

Rex: They gave them bigger hands.

> The combat boomer parts they had snuck out of the armory over the last few  
> days proved to be very useful,

Mark: [Leon] Not sure what this part does, but it's trying to eat the power armour, so I'm going to assume it's safe.

> and soon, they had what thy dubbed the K-12P, with the P standing for

Jill: Penis. This is Leon we're talking about here

> Punch. They had removed the gatling guns in the arms, replaced them with heavy laser cannons  
> off a boomer, and added some extra armor and maneuver jets to the suit.

Rex: They can do this because they're all well-known technical geniuses.

Christina: I just do whatever my mechanic says and don't go near the repair bay.

> The net result was 10%

> more maneuver ability, and a hefty 75-100% firepower increase. A few strap-on missile packs on  
> either side of the body were for short-term extra firepower.

Rex: Damn, I think this actually is unused Artmic production art

> The hydraulics had been improved, for

> greater strength, and the claws on either arm had been strengthened to deal with the increased  
> power.

Jill: They might have had some of the original parts left in it.

> Now to hope it all worked. Only one way to find out.

Rex: Extensive testing?

Jill: Ha ha ha no.

> Use it. And for what ?

Christina: The Mega Tokyo floral festival?

> To enforce a simple search warrant.

Mark: People cooperate more when you knock on the door in powered armour.

> They landed the chopper on the parking lot in front of Genom Aerospace.

Mark: Wait, stop! You can't land here! We're not zoned for choppers!

Rex: [Leon] Then where can we land?

Mark: Chopper bay. Right next to the parking lot.

> Leon hopped out, walked to the reception booth, knocked on the glass. A bored  
> guard came out. "Yeah ?"

Mark: What do you want?

Rex: You got any glazed donuts?

Jill: No, no, I'm cutting you off, we are not doing this.

Rex: Awww.

> "I have a search warrant for this complex."

> "Sir, nobody gets in, nobody comes out. Come back next year."

Jill: He's a loose cannon cop on the edge and you're a minimum wage security guard. You might as well just let him in and save yourself the bother

> Leon pulled the guard from his booth. "I think you didn't hear me: I said I had a search warrant.

Mark: [Leon] Also I've assaulted an employee on Genom property and expect to be gunned down by security boomers any second now.

> Now do you let me in or do I have to let myself in ?" The guard shrugged.

Christina: [Guard] Doesn't matter to me, I'm already dead inside.

> "Try letting yourself in. Might give you a rude surprise."

Mark: Bearing in mind that they parked a huge helicopter loaded down with heavily armed battle suits right in front of you. You might want to consider your next words very carefully.

> Steaming, Leon walked back to the chopper. Lufy was hanging out a side window of the cockpit, having seen Leon argue with the guard and returning.

Rex: Daley owes her five bucks.

> "Let me give it a whirl. I'll get us in.

> No prob."

> "That guard is as standfast as a block of concrete. But I'll pay you a dinner if you can convince him."

> "You're on."

Mark: Dumpster diving behind a Chipotle it is.

> Slinging an assault rifle over her shoulder, she accepted the warrant, and walked for the booth.

> The guard sighed. Another ADP sucker.

Rex: Third one today.

Christina: Wait, third?

> He was mildly surprised to see a female ADP officer,

> wearing a pilot's uniform, appear at his guardpost.

Mark: Mildly surprised. But not too surprised to do anything about it.

> "We don't do tours today, miss.

Rex: [Guard] You've got to call ahead and book first.

> I told your partner that much."

> "You don't get it, do you ?"

> "What do you mean ?"

> Slowly, Lufy unfolded the warrant. "This slip of paper permits us to search these premises. With or > without your cooperation. I'd advise you to cooperate."

Rex: Because otherwise this scene goes nowhere.

Jill: Just like the rest of this fic

> "Or ?"

> "Or I'm gonna fly that chopper over this puny fence, and put it down inside it. After that, two officers > will disembark and search these premises."

Christina: She's doing you a favour here. Just accept it and stop being difficult because you know what will happen otherwise

> "We protect a valid national interest. If you try that, we are forced to open fire on your craft and on > the officers in question."

Mark: And then he'll have to escalate it to his supervisor, and that's when the trouble really starts.

> Lufy unlimbered the rifle. "Guess I'll have to do it my way then. Got a wife and kids ?"

> "Yes."

Jill: Your body pillow doesn't count

> "Want to see them tonight, after work ?"

Rex: [Guard] Let me think about it.

> "Yes. Why ?"

Jill: Unimpressed security guard is now my favourite character in this fic.

> She pointed the rifle at his stomach. "If you don't get out of that booth right now, after you've opened the fence, I'm going to blow your innards out your back." Lufy smiled.

Mark: Think about it. Is your clip-on tie allowance really worth this?

> Sweating, the guard opened the fence.

Jill: [Guard] Way above my pay grade.

> "Good boy. Now, you walk in front. My 'partner' will take it from here." She signalled Leon, who had walked out the back in his K-12P to keep the guard covered

Rex: Yes, he is dangerous enough to warrant an up-gunned power armour.

> while she went back to the chopper, getting it airborne to get them out when needed.

Christina: She's taking off so she's ready to take off at a moment's notice.

> She keyed her mike on Leon's frequency. "You owe me a dinner."  
> "When we're done here."  
> "Deal."

Jill: A woman actually talked to him, so Leon counts that as a win.

> The search of the Genom Aerospace complex progressed smoothly - well, as smooth as a K-12 walks anyway.

Mark: I imagine a lot of accidentally crushed stairs and railings were a part of the deal

> Once they were in, they got everyone's 'full cooperation'.

Christina: You mean they were held by repeatedly verifying the warrant while Genom hid the evidence?

> You simply don't challenge a K-12 when you're on foot and you're not a boomer.

Rex: You don't? Is that what I've been doing wrong all my life?

> In one storage hangar, they found what they were looking for.

Christina: A massive pile of unsold Beanie Babies

> "Well, well. What do we have here. Looks to me like a wreckage. And not from a prototype."

Mark: Mate, you don't know the failure rate on our prototypes.

> The hangar chief sighed. "So, now what?"  
> "You will order the plant's defenses not to fire when an ADP salvage chopper will come here to confiscate this wreck. also, if anything goes wrong, I will hold you responsible for it." Sagging his shoulders, the chief agreed. Not much use protesting anyway.

Mark: There you go, folks. Forget negotiations, subtlety, misdirection and working within legal boundaries to your own advantage. Just wave a gun at someone and that solves everything

Jill: So your old team, then

Mark [Sigh]: Every time

> Doc Raven, Sylia, Rabby and Catty

Rex: [Raven] How did I get roped into this? I've got important curmudgeoning to get back to.

> were busy preparing the old truck dock for construction area

Christina: I'm honestly surprised it's empty and available.

Mark: Yeah, a place like that should either be a hobo squat or a trendy loft apartment by now, and absolutely nothing in between.

> when Mackie came in, wearing a big smile. "What's up Mackie ? Someone kissed you ?"

Jill: And again, your body pillow doesn't count

> Immediately, the smile disappeared.

> "Very funny, Rabby. Very funny.

Rex [Mackie]: I will never know love

> No, I heard an ADP radio message that they had confiscated something over at Genom Aerospace.

Christina: [Catty] A massive pile of unsold Beanie Babies?

Rex: [Mackie] That was my first guess too.

> They were requesting a salvage team to be sent. But you'll never guess who called it in."

Mark: Remo Williams, the Destroyer. Because otherwise I have nothing

> "Well, spill it."

> "None other than our associate and friend, Luffy Starleaf."

> "Any other names," Sylia inquired.

> "Leon McNichol and Daley Wong."

Jill: She's amazed that they achieved anything

> Sylia nodded. "ADP's gruesome twosome."

Christina: Please, they're Blubber Bear and Lazy Luke at best

> Or better, gruesome threesome right now."

Christina: Eh, kind of kills the rhyme.

> "Are they that bad ?", Catty asked innocently.

> "Worse." Mackie nodded gravely.

Mark: You have no idea at all.

> "If you hear what a pain in the ass they have been for Genom up

> to now, I'm amazed they weren't already eliminated."

Rex: [Rabby] Oh really? And what have they done that's pissed Genom off so much?

Mark: [Mackie] Well, they um... I mean, there was the time that... Okay, I've got nothing.

> "They're not worth the means. They are only  
> ADP officers. Spending a boomer on them would be a waste.", Sylia commented.

Jill: A statement that says a lot about Leon and Daley, really

> After that interruption, they all got back to work,

Christina: [Rabby] It sounds like the ADP now has our spaceship. [Pause] Oh well, back to it.

> Mackie being drafted as well to clean up the dock and prepare it for moving in materials.

Rex: Mackie had been put on sweeping and hazardous materials removal duty

> By the end of the day, they were finished, although  
> several doors and windows still needed to be sealed up.

Jill: They thought about using Mackie to sure up the windows but eventually decided against it.

Christina: Eventually.

Jill: It was a near thing.

> Quincy was steaming. Pacing angrily before his desk, he considered taking measures against  
> ADPolice, almost forgetting that the person responsible for the disaster,

Rex: The lone security guard who didn't consult his superiors?

> the director of Genom Aerospace, who was in the office, needed to be taken care of as well.

Mark: I foresee a shark tank in his future.

> Finally, he sat down, and  
> pointed his cane at the director, eyes blazing. "I'm holding you fully responsible for this disaster."

Mark: Sir, they had a helicopter

Rex [Quincy]: So build a higher fence next time!

> The director bowed, accepting his fate.

Christina: This is definitely going to affect his end of year bonus

> "With all due respect sir, the only blow we have suffered is losing the wreck. But there was nothing  
> to learn from it anyway."

Jill: It had a sealed room full of enigmatic alien artefacts, but besides that, nothing.

> "You seem to forget Genom is being sued for stealing something belonging to the Government!"

Christina: Wow, I'm sure that tiny fine will greatly impact the world-leading megacorporation.

> The director winced, then got an idea.

Rex: Did it involve monkeys?

> "Sir, I'll take full responsibility.

Rex: [Quincy] Oh, I've already assigned it to you.

Mark: [Director] That's... I... Thank you sir.

> I will tell the Court I was

> acting on my own, without proper authorization from you or the Government. I will tell them I hoped  
> to use the wreck to introduce new technologies to the fighter market, to gain an advantage over

> other manufacturers."

Mark: I think we're missing the real issue here which is that Genom had a crashed alien spaceship  
Christina: It's the little things that get you

> Quincy nodded. "You realize we have no more place for you, then ?"

> "I do. But since someone must take the blame, as penance, I will take it."

Jill: Well, I'm sure that his unceasing loyalty will definitely be rewarded by his grateful - Ha ha ha, I'm sorry, I couldn't finish that with a straight face.

> "You know, people never cease to amaze me. But I still want an explanation on how this could  
> possibly happen."

Rex: A wizard did it. That's what's on the official report too

> "The guard at the gate was a human. A married man. When one ADP officer, a woman, threatened  
> to shoot him, he relented, opening the gates.

Mark: This probably could have been avoided if he'd had any training whatsoever.

> A proper prevention measure, replacing all gate

> guards by boomers, would prevent something like this happening in the future."

Christina: It makes you wonder why the company that makes Boomers didn't think of that sooner

> Quincy nodded. "Doomed though you are, you are still loyal to Genom."

Mark: [Director] I was kind of hoping to be bailed out sir, or...

Rex: [Quincy] In recognition of your many years of loyal service, I will not laugh in your face.

> "Chairman, I devoted my life to the greater glory of Corporate Genom. If I am to be sacrificed for it,  
> so be it."

> "Very good. You may go."

Rex: ...did the fic just do shouting Quincy for us?

> As the director started for the doors, Quincy asked one last question. "A female ADP officer,  
> eh ? Those are quite rare."

Christina: Quincy keeps himself well informed of staff demographics within the AD Police.

Jill: Sure, why not? I'm sure he's got nothing better to do.

> The director turned around. "If I recall the guard's story correctly, it was a helicopter pilot."  
> "Most interesting."

Mark: Helicopter pilots are fascinating

> Where is this guard now ?"

> "At home. I have suspended him."

> "Your last job for Corporate Genom will be to bring that guard, in full health, in my office.

Christina: [Quincy] Oh, and while you're at it, get me a bagel.

> Then you

> will turn yourself in. Consider yourself unemployed the second you leave the Tower after bringing  
> that guard here."

Rex: Smash cut to the exec sleeping on the guard's sofa

> "Yes Chairman. It will be done."

Jill: This summary firing could have been an email.

> The guard wondered what was going to happen to him, being called up to the chairman's office in  
> the Tower.

Rex: Only good things I imagine

> Probably another massive scolding for his actions at the gate.

Christina: Chairman Quincy told him to stand in a corner and think about what he had done

> Well, so be it. After all, he

> was guilty. No, actually, that stupid pilot was guilty. She had pointed the assault rifle at his stomach.

Mark: She had a gun. He had a week of basic mall cop training.

> And damn, having a job was one thing, but he wasn't about to die for his boss. He left that to  
> the execs and directors.

Jill: He'd happily die for middle management though

> But now, he was a bit worried. For what else but another punishment would he be brought up  
> to the Office of Offices.

Mark: It's the boss office. Not the boss' office, the actual office itself is the boss of offices.

> He'd know soon. The elevator was almost there.

> The doors to Quiny's office squeaked open, each door large and tall enough to let a Dragon  
> boomer through.

Christina: To be honest, it seems a bit impractical

> With 5 meters head space. Hesitant, he entered the office, seeing Quincy looking  
> out the window. "Y-You called for me, sir?" He bowed respectfully.

Christina: [Quincy] Yeah, have you got my bagel?

> The chairman turned around, seeing the hesitant and scared guard, still in his uniform.

Jill: He slept in that thing, didn't he?

> The guard straightened out, and approached the desk, stopping at about five meters away from it.

Rex: I'm beginning to think that Genom overbuilt

> A very respectful distance.

Christina: Enough to get a good head start.

> Leaning on his cane, Quincy walked towards him, indicated a chair at the side  
> of the office. He seated himself in the sofa opposite the chair.

> For a moment, he looked curiously at the guard. "Tell me what happened at the gate."

Rex: So there was this cyborg chick with a transforming motorcycle robot and she was working for a  
secret plot by a transhumanist conspiracy within the Martian government...

Jill: Dude, what the hell?

> It was an order, not a request.

Jill: Oh. Okay, cool. We'll just recap that whole scene. That we just had. Again. No, fic, that's okay. It's alright. Our time isn't valuable. You just do... whatever you feel like. We'll be here. Waiting.

> "I had an afternoon shift, when this ADP helicopter landed on the parking lot, and one officer  
> showed me a search warrant. Per orders, I refused to let him in, indicating the defenses of the  
> factory to enforce our isolationist policy.

Mark: Genom is run on the policy of Juche

> He left, and some other officer, a young woman wearing  
> pilot fatigues, comes up to me. I tell her the same, and she pulls out an assault rifle and simply tells  
> me to open the gate or she would, over my dead body." He gulped. "Sir, please understand, I have  
> a wife and three kids."

Rex: And a collection of unused Pokemon cards that he's hoping to retire on

> Quincy nodded. "Don't worry. What happened is not your fault.

Jill: It totally is.

> However, what I'm interested in is, would you recognize that pilot if you ever saw her again ?"

Christina: Giant Muppet with six arms? I'd know that pilot anywhere

> "Definitely sir."

Rex: Luffy is the definition of distinctive features.

> The chairman slid a picture of a woman in a hospital bed over to him, face visible. "Is this her ?"  
> He picked up the picture, and stared straight into Luffy's sleeping face, the rough dash of blonde hair  
> even more pronounced, as was her middle green lock of hair.

Jill: And her career-killing tattoo

> She wore a peaceful smile on her face.

Mark: She was chasing bunnies in her sleep

> Not quite the face he had seen from her that afternoon. "Yes sir."  
> Picking the picture off the table, Quincy nodded. So she not only had escaped the Tower with  
> her partner, but she also had an identity and a job at the police force.

Mark: Luffy really doesn't understand the idea of keeping a low profile

> "Can you remember her name tag ?"  
> "She wasn't wearing one, sir"  
> "You are sure of that ?"  
> "Absolutely. That was the first thing I looked for on her uniform. I wanted to know who threatened to  
> kill me."

Jill: He was going to report her to her supervisor, if he survived.

> "She didn't say her name ?"  
> "No sir. Not that I heard."

Rex: Did you try asking politely?

Christina: She had a gun pointed at him

Rex: Couldn't hurt to try

> "Very well. That will be all."

> The guard got up, bowed, and got a worried look on his face.

> "Sir ? What is going to happen to me now ?"

Mark: You work a basic, expendable job at a giant evil megacorporation. Doesn't take a genius to figure this out

> "Nothing. In fact, tomorrow, you will report for duty here at the Tower."

> "Yes sir. I will."

Rex: They have a vacancy in their weapons testing division.

Mark: I didn't think he'd be qualified for weapons testing.

Rex: He is very qualified for weapons testing.

> An aide of Quincy showed the guard out, who, once in the elevator, mopped his dripping brow. That had been close.

Jill: He was this close to wetting 'em

> Amy was bored. This boarding school was worse than death.

Mark: Well, console yourself with the fact that it will only get worse.

> All these stupid lessons, all these

> stupid rules. She had been forced to wear a school uniform, something she got to hate very soon.

Christina: Space combat uniform? Fine. School uniform? Too much.

> Lights had to be out at 10, up at 7. Breakfast at 8, school was in at 8:30. Oh joy.

Rex: Stupid school schedule

> There was one silver lining to this dark cloud, though. She had found a way to sneak out of the building unnoticed, down to the large garden, where she could spend hours in watching stars on clear nights.

Jill: Thick clouds of pollution permitting.

> One night, she had snuck out with her small telescope, wanting to see one specific star. Marsus. She looked around nervously, before removing a small object from her pocket. A Solnoid starmap.

Christina: It shows the way to the Star Forge

> She set her coordinates for Terra, current location, and ordered the tiny computer to find Marsus. It scrolled the image, then highlighted one star.

Rex: Barnard's Star. Terran Trade Authority explorers found a mysterious crashed spaceship there.

> She zoomed out until she could identify the part of the sky the computer had designated.

> She placed the minicomputer in her pocket, then set up her telescope.

Jill: Great. Now the fic has decided we need a blow-by-blow account of the character we care about the second least getting ready to stargaze. Not actually stargazing yet mind you but getting ready.

Christina: Second least?

Jill: Spea.

Christina: Oh yeah. Forgot her.

> Peering through it, she

> looked homewards. A bright yellow star, about the same class as this star. But without a habitable

> planet now.

Jill: It was demolished and replaced with a McDonalds.

> She knew.

> All the time, she was being watched by one of the teachers. She had discovered this little  
> girl's penchant for stargazing, and her nightly expeditions to the main garden. Now it was time to  
> punish her.

Mark: Time to pummel any sense of joy and whimsy out of her

> Amy had trained her telescope on Sigma Narse, a deep red star far, far away. The  
> location of the Stardust War,

Rex: And also, where she last saw her keys

> when suddenly her image went black. She looked up, wanting to  
> remove whatever blocked her field of vision, then uttered a soundless scream as she saw one of  
> her teachers,

Mark: The amorphous form of a miscellaneous educator.

> who proceeded to drag her and her telescope into the main building, depositing her in  
> her room. The door was locked, and all Amy could do was sit down on her bed, crying.

Jill: Nothing for it but to kill everyone there.

> This was going to be bad. Very bad.

Mark: My review of the fic so far

> She pulled the little computer from her pocket, and hid it  
> in a small compartment in her cupboard, together with some other Solnoid items.

Christina: I mean, they wouldn't have let her smuggle a gun in, would they?

> Now to hope they wouldn't find those. Then, all hell was about to break loose.

Christina: Oh dear.

> The first Saturday of the month was a free day for all the girls in boarding school, except for Amy,

Jill: Amy knows what she did

> who was kept locked into her room for having been out during the night.

Rex: I feel like 'Another Brick in the Wall' is about to break out.

> But her punishment would  
> be far worse than one day locked in. She still had to appear before the director, that old hag,

Rex: I'm now imagining this Romanian grandmother who is obsessed with stew

Christina: That's an oddly specific image

Rex: I'm just saying...

> for her

> final punishment. She heard the door unlock. It opened, and one of the teachers filled the door  
> opening, signalling her to come along. She walked along, on the way to the Old Hag.

Jill: Her office was in a hut with chicken legs

> While walking,  
> she took off and cleared her glasses, which was instantly rewarded with her glasses being taken  
> from her,

Christina: Okay, this boarding school is obviously a cartoonishly evil Dickensian hellscape, but that's just inexcusable.

> and a strong hand propelling her through the hallways to the Office of Horrors.

Mark: I have to admit, this is the most entertaining the fic's been so far

> The door to the office opened, and she found her glasses were pushed into her hand. She put  
> them on, straightened them, and saw an angry director in front of her. Uh oh.

Christina: The bubbling cauldron is assumed

> "Young lady, you have a lot to explain.", she started. Amy nodded softly. "First and foremost of all,  
> what were you doing outside ?"

Rex: Because it's hard to do astronomy while inside

Mark: Not helping

> For a moment, Amy wanted to tell the truth, then bit on her tongue. She almost had said 'Looking to  
> my birthplace'. It was best to lie now. For her own good. "Watching stars.", she replied.

Jill: Really? Is that what you were doing with a telescope? I never would have guessed.

> "That much I understood from Miss Beverley. How many times have you been watching stars ?"  
> "Seven times."

Christina: Twice on weekends

> "You know there is a severe penalty for going out at night, don't you ?"

Jill: Run the obstacle course and do a hundred push-ups, followed by KP duty. It's a weird school

> Amy nodded, felt it was coming now.  
> "Good. As punishment, your telescope will be taken from you, and put in the school's storage room,  
> to be returned to you when you leave this school. Also, to prevent this from happening again, you  
> will get a roommate."

Christina: Wait, she had her own room?

Jill: I guess Shildy gave a generous donation or something

> A tall, bossy girl was ushered in.  
> Amy knew her. She was the bully of the school, always taking advantage of others, always ready to  
> inform the teachers if someone had done something not allowed.

Mark: The baseball bat and old-timey delinquent slang is assumed

> Amy gasped for air. No more  
> privacy. Tasha Sorenson smiled cruelly at Amy, having seen her dismay.

Christina: This is a silly question, but when did this fic turn into a teen drama?

Jill: When it couldn't think of anything better to do.

Christina: If that was the case, it would have happened a long time ago.

> "Now, both of you, get used to each other. Tasha, you move into Amy's room."

Rex: Joke's on you. Amy is a night farter

> She nodded, and left. Then, the Hag turned to Amy. "If I ever hear you break another school  
> rule again, you will suffer for it. Expulsion would be too easy. Way too easy.

Jill: So apparently the headmistress is a Disney villain

Mark: I think she might be my new favourite character

Jill: More than Truck Driver Guy?

Mark: I mean...

> Don't count on any good

> grades if you do something like this again." Beaten, Amy slumped her shoulders and nodded.

Christina: Amy wishes she'd been allowed to bring her Struggle Suit to school.

> Back in her room, she found Tasha had vacated her second cupboard by throwing all her  
> things onto her bed. Angry, Amy repacked it into her own cupboard, secretly looking if her secret  
> had been kept. So far, it had. But right now, she knew the day would come Tasha was going to root  
> through her cupboard, and discover her secret. She prayed that day wouldn't come.

Jill [Amy]: And then I'll have to hide another body...

> "Please Shildy, get me out of here." Amy clung to her 'big sister', crying behind her glasses.  
> Shildy kneeled, bringing her face level to that of Amy, who instantly flew into her arms, crying.  
> Hugging her, Shildy put her down.

Jill: [Shildy] You're a whiny, clingy brat and nobody likes you.

> "Amy, I can't. Not unless you make this year."

Rex: ...what exactly are the rules of this school?

> "Don't you understand ? I never will." Curiously, Shildy looked at Amy. "They've roomed me in with  
> the bully of the school. All she needs to do is tell I broke one school rule, even if I didn't, and the Old  
> Hag garantueed me I wouldn't get a single good grade anymore.

Christina: The cackling was assumed

> Please get me out of here. I miss you all so much."

Jill: [Shildy] How do I tell her that we've already turned her room into a gambling den?

> From a distance, Tasha saw how Amy clung to Shildy, trying to find some comfort in her arms.  
> So that was her weak point. She needed others. Well, the Hag would be interested.

Rex: The Hag keeps Tasha on a retainer.

> How about Amy

> not being allowed any visitors anymore. Now that sounded cool. Silently, she slipped through the  
> door, down to the director's office, while Shildy and Amy went up to Amy's room.

Mark: I'm torn. On one side, this school subplot doesn't seem to be adding anything to the story and  
really feels like it's just there for a character that the fic didn't have any use for otherwise. On the other  
hand it's so hysterically over the top that it's amazing

> In the relative privacy of the room, Amy quickly unpacked her stash, put it in a bag, and  
> pushed it in Shildy's hands. "Please take this, I don't want Tasha to find it."

> Shildy was stunned. "But Amy... this is all you took to insure you wouldn't forget what you was.  
> Can't you keep anything here ?"

> Amy shook her head. "I can't. I really can't. That's why I want you to get me out of here. Or I'll  
> run away."  
> At that moment, the door opened, and Tasha came in. With the Hag, who had an icy look in her  
> eyes.

Mark: Were both of you lurking outside the door? Don't you have anything better to do?

> "Threatening to run away, little girl ? Well, that's worth the worst penalty possible in this  
> school. From now on, you will not receive any outside visitors anymore."  
> Amy gasped for breath. Shildy stood stunned. Finally, Amy spoke. "You can't do that!"

Christina: Like, seriously, you can't. You don't have the legal power to stop Amy from getting visits  
from her family

Rex: This is real anime high school logic

> "I just did. And by the way, you're going to be here for a long time."

Jill: In retrospect, enrolling her in Arkham High was probably a bad move

> Amy grabbed the bag she'd given Shildy moments before, and ran out of the room as fast as her  
> short legs could carry her.  
> Shildy looked at the Hag with fire in her eyes. "You'll pay for this.", and left, looking for Amy.

Rex [Hag]: Yeah, just you try it, sweet cheeks

> Bubblegum Force Episode 5  
> Preparations  
> By nebulart@solnoid.nl

> Shildy found Amy on a bench in the school park, sobbing. She sat down next to her, put her arm  
> around the girl she saw as her little sister.

Christina: Or a crewmate. The lines are blurry.

> Amy kept crying, finally managing to get some words out.  
> "I-I don't understand... after all we've been through... why this?"

Jill: Have you ever considered that nobody likes you?

> Shildy pulled Amy close to her. "I thought this was the best.

Rex: Then again, she also put all her money in meme coins.

> But I've been wrong. Unfortunately, they made me sign some papers when I put you here,

Mark: Something about a full waiver of liability. Shildy didn't sweat the details

> stating I cannot remove you from this school unless you make at least one year."

Jill: She can't even trade Amy to the Pistons.

> "Or ?"  
> "All guardianship is taken from me and transferred to the school."

Rex: What the actual hell is this school anyway?

> "In short, either sit here and take it or be adopted by the school."

Christina: And uh, why does the school want custody of her?

Mark: It's probably best for everybody if we don't ask those questions.

> Amy's voice sounded bitter. Very bitter.

Jill: [Amy] I blame you entirely for this.

> Shildy cast her eyes down. "Yes."

> Defeated, Amy slumped her shoulders. "All this because I couldn't forget home."

> Her big sister fell silent, having no solution for the problem at hand. "Shildy, please. There must be  
> something you can do. I mean, there never was a problem you couldn't solve."

Jill: Admittedly Shildy's master plan was to ram the enemy flagship and explode

> "Because I could always grab a gun and empty a magazine at the problem. It's not that easy here."

Rex: It's slightly frowned upon.

> In the distance, they saw the Hag with Tasha on her heels approaching.

Mark: The ominous thunderstorm is just assumed

>"Here come the vultures," Amy murmured.

Rex: Circling in the midday sun.

> Shildy nodded. "Amy, are you sure you want me to take this ?" She pointed at the bag Amy  
> clenched in her hands.

> "No. I'll keep it here. I don't care if they find it anymore."

Christina: [Amy] They'll just strip me of my last treasured mementos of my long-lost home, no biggie.

> A slight smile played over Amy's face. "Maybe they'll expel me for it."

Christina: This is her new plan

> "Small hope."

> "Better than nothing."

Mark: Got any other plans?

Jill: Assume that the school is bound by sane laws and can't actually enforce any of the Hag's claims?

Mark: I mean, besides that

> The Hag had reached the pair of girls, Tasha behind her, smiling. "Visiting time is over.", the  
> Hag coolly announced. Shildy nodded, cuddled Amy once more, told her in Solnoid to take care,

Rex: [Hag] What was that? I don't speak Quebecois.

> and walked past the Hag to the exit, wanting to pass Tasha.

> At that moment, Tasha made a severe judgement error. She perceived Shildy as a harmless  
> caretaker, a fluffhead.

Rex: The mistake that would ultimately lead to her downfall

> As she walked past Tasha, she heard the bully say something to her. "Too bad you can't see  
> your little squeaker anymore eh ? Don't worry; I'll make a complete whiner out of her." Something  
> snapped inside Shildy, who spun around at blinding speed, grabbed Tasha by her school jacket,

Rex: And into the powerbomb! Look at the carnage! Mah gawd, she's broken in half!

> stared deep in her eyes. "Mark my words: one day, you will regret ever messing with either me or  
> Amy."

Jill: To prove the point, Shildy rammed her car in the parking lot and ambiguously died

> For a single moment, Tasha was scared. Something feline, something very dangerous had  
> flashed inside this black haired girl's deep blue eyes. Something she later would recognize as the  
> Killer Instinct;

Rex: Or at the very least, Killer Instinct Gold

> the look of someone who has killed before and was ready to do it again. A soldier's look.

Jill: Tasha having that brief moment when she realises just how deep she's been thrown in

> Shildy let her go, put her down.

Christina: True to her authoritarian roots, the headmistress did nothing.

> As she walked away, she ground one of her heels hard into  
> Tasha's foot, pretending it to be an accident, enjoying the howl of pain that followed.

Jill: Shildy's bloodlust has been reawakened.

> Amy spurted for  
> her room, wanting to put away some things before Tasha had a chance to see them. Besides, she  
> wanted to be alone for a few.  
> The Hag had watched everything thoughtful.

Mark: Wondering if she should have actually done something.

> Whoever that girl with her long black hair and fiery blue eyes was, she was very dangerous.

Christina [Hag]: Now she's building an effigy of me, and pouring petrol all over it... I wonder where  
she's going with this?

> And the little one, Amy, was a much a fighter.

Jill: In that she's been a complete pushover so far.

> Well,  
> she had had worse kids in this school. She'd subdue her. Anastasia Sorenson, better known as the  
> Old Hag smiled cruelly. Her daughter would be a great help.

Jill: Okay, now is the time for the evil cackling

> Shildy came home, to the apartment, silent. She walked up to the roof, put her hands on the  
> balcony and stared out over the big city. Footsteps. Lufy came up next to her, also looked out over  
> the city.  
> "Anything wrong?", she finally asked.

Rex: [Lufy] I've been with the ADP for a whole week and I'm not dead.

> Shildy hung her head in shame. "I've made a mistake. A very big mistake."

Christina [Shildy]: I bought a Cybertruck

> "Care to tell me about it? Maybe I can do something about it."

Rex: [Lufy] A late night extraction maybe?

> "There's nothing you can do. Believe me."

Mark: These hardened soldiers from an advanced civilization are helpless against one old woman.

> "Look, if I can have a locked down factory with no outside access searched, I can solve your  
> problem. Now what is it ?"

> "Amy. I should never have put her in that boarding school."

Rex: Wasn't it Sylia's idea?

Jill: Details

> Defeated, Shildy told the story. At the end, Lufy thought for a second,

Rex: [Lufy] Spaced out, wasn't listening. Amy's the robot, right?

> then smiled. Shildy looked at her, curiously. "You have a solution."

> "Damn right. And my job is going to help me."

> "What do you have in mind ?"

Jill: She's going to SWAT the whole school.

> "My unit is due out of the city for three days for an exercise. We have to pick a position, clear it of  
> civilians if needed and practice. What if I whispered a certain location in my boss' ear ?"

Jill: Wait, that actually is her plan?

> "And then ?"

> "When playtime is over, there will be one more passenger aboard my chopper."

Jill: So to summarise, Lufy is going to use an ADP training exercise to storm a private boarding school  
and extract a single girl from it

Rex: Yes

Jill: Well I can't see any way this could possibly go wrong at all. Fantastic plan all around

> Shildy shook her head. "That'll never work. Then, the contract is broken and the school  
> becomes the guardian of Amy."

Mark: This is Amy, the non-person who doesn't legally exist, right?

> "They won't. If what you said is correct, only if you remove her from that school. Besides, if we don't  
> try, we don't know."

Christina: This plan hinges entirely on technicalities

> Shildy nodded. "On your responsibility."

> "Don't worry. It'll work. My plans always work."

Jill: Says the woman who died twice

> "That's what I'm so afraid of."

> Quincy was troubled,

Mark: I mean, his teeth were white, but how could he be sure if they were whiter than white?

> for the first in a year's time. Last time he was worried was with that bastard Largo.

Rex: You know, we're this far into the fic and this is the first mention of Largo so far. Normally he'd  
have inevitably returned by now

Mark: I think we should treasure the moment

> Thank god he had plenty time to put his double in his place and hide in the bottom of the  
> Tower, in the bunker.

Jill: With his shotgun, bottled water and supply of dolphin jerky.

> The Knight Sabers had some help, powerful help.

Mark: They had brand recognition on their side.

> One of his assets was running around in the city,  
> working for the ADPolice. And worst of all, he still didn't know who that pilot was. She wasn't in the  
> police records,

Rex: Despite being a member of the police force, Lufy isn't in their files

Christina: That must make paying her awfully hard

> she wasn't in the civilian records. It looked like someone was specifically filtering  
> data that was being fed to them. Now that was reason to worry.

Mark: Doesn't he have people to worry about that for him?

> Who knows what we're missing, Quincy thought. Ah well, time for the independent search team.

Jill: Oh, come on. Really? That's his answer for everything. "Time for the independent search team."  
Rex: But he really needed those gummy bears.

Jill: They were in the cupboard!

> Genom had contacts with a pro hacker team that loved nothing more than a good challenge in  
> breaking into computers.

Jill: Okay, it's the North Korean government.

> And they owed him a favor.

Rex [Quincy]: So remember that time with the pack of angry baboons...

> Two phone calls to execs later, the team was at work.

> A unit ADP, five choppers strong, left the city. They were heading out into the countryside for an  
> exercise and a rest. Their exercise location was a boarding school a few miles outside the city,  
> which they would evacuate and occupy for three days.

Mark: I cannot imagine who approved this idea

Jill: Somebody who hated his career, I'm sure

> They had arranged shelter for the inhabitants  
> of the school, the choppers would fly the people who lived there to barracks at the edge of  
> MegaTokyo.

Rex: ADP barracks were actually more comfortable.

> The Hag was mildly surprised to see ADP choppers land on the big field next to the school.

Christina: But only mildly. She'd been expecting this for years.

> That surprise quickly turned to anger when she heard why the ADP was there.

Rex: This was all about Tasha's unpaid parking fines

> However, she didn't have the political clout to chase them away,

Jill: But enough to get away with human trafficking.

> so she had to accept.

Mark: I imagine the ADP chief is going to wake up to a horse's head in his bed

> All the girls were told to pack up some things; they would leave the school for some time.

Jill [Hag]: Pack your thick boots, some warm clothes and lots of extra rations. We're going on a long march

> Amy was packing her things, first year students were to go first, when someone knocked on the door. She opened it and had to restrain herself not to jump into Luffy's arms and hold on to her.

Christina: To maintain the illusion, she pelted Luffy with rotten tomatoes.

> "What the hell are you doing here ??!"

Mark: Massively overstepping her boundaries?

Rex: I mean, besides that

> "Getting you out. Pack up your stuff. Fast. You will be on chopper number 3. That's my craft. Got it?"

Jill: To get ahead of the curve, chopper number 3 is already on fire.

> "Got it." And Luffy was off, telling the rest of the block they would fly on chopper 3.

Rex: She would indeed get to da choppa

> The high pitched wail of the helicopter engines was clearly audible throughout the building, as chopper after chopper took off and returned for a new load.

Jill: The ADP apparently setting up an armed occupation of this one boarding school

> Luffy gently lifted the big craft off the ground, setting course for the city. She had invited Amy up to the cockpit,

Christina [Amy]: I'm a junior pilot!

> after Amy had expressed an interest in the craft's mechanics.

Mark: She finds it charmingly primitive.

> Some fifteen minutes later, the chopper landed at the barracks, and Luffy began ushering everyone out. Except Amy, who crawled under a blanket in the cockpit.

Mark: No part of this is not suspect

> When she had everyone out, Luffy lifted off, called in. "ADP Tower, this is Chopper 3, come in please."

> "Chopper 3, this is Tower. Go ahead."

> "Tower, I'm having some mechanical problems.

Rex: What sort of problems?

Jill [Luffy]: Well the wibbly bit is making a kind of wonky noise and there's a light on the console that's saying a thing

Rex: Seems legit to me

> Request permission to return to base for a fix and a cup of coffee."

> "Chopper 3, you can come in for the fix, not the coffee.

Christina: We've exceeded our annual coffee budget. All we have now is instant.

> Tower out."

> "Roger."

> When Lufy had cut communication, Amy crawled from under the blanket, complete with her bags. "Where are we going ?"

Rex: We're going to find you a better subplot.

> "First, we go home to drop you off.

Mark: Do you think they might notice the helicopter making an unscheduled stop in the middle of the city?

Rex: They're the ADP. At this point they're probably just thankful it doesn't explode

> Then I go to ADP Tower to have my problem fixed."

> "What problem ?"

Jill: [Lufy] Oh, you know. Just slightly on fire.

> Lufy laughed. "There's always a mechanical problem with these things.

Rex: [Lufy] Ha ha, I'm flying a death trap.

> Nothing serious, just irritating. So that's what I'm having fixed."

> It was Tasha's turn to pack. She found the door to her's and Amy's room open. That damn squeaker.

> Packing up some clothes and books, she decided to torture Amy a bit. She would take some of Amy's clothes with her, with no intent of giving them back.

Jill: And then she would cut Amy off at the buffet. She's that kind of villain.

> She opened Amy's cupboard. Empty.

> Completely empty. Diving under Amy's bed, she noticed the little girl's suitcase gone.

> Damn. She had seen her chance and had run for it. Mother would be interested.

Rex: I'm just saying that if this takes over as the A plot then this will be the best fic we've ever read

Mark: Wait, there's an A plot?

Rex: Now that you mention it, I'm really not sure

> Rabby and Catty were busy rebuilding a struggle suit

Jill: The struggle suit is real

> when the high wail of helicopter engines echoed through the hall.

Christina: Is this another one of their pet projects? I've lost track.

> For a moment it remained, then it pulled away. Probably an ADP chopper checking.

Christina: It's probably just the police passing over our secret workshop where we're building highly advanced weapons. Nothing to worry about

> Then someone banged on the door. Rabby walked over to the door.

Rex: She did? What a twist!

> She opened the door and saw Amy, suitcase and bag.

Jill: And slammed the door in her face.

> Five seconds later, Amy was inside, sitting on a chair, shivering with  
> both fear and cold. Lufy's plan had worked as advertised. Well, at least so far.

Mark: The next stage involved an amphibious landing in the school's swimming pool and establishing a forward staging base on the lawn

> That afternoon, when Lufy had long since returned to the exercise grounds, which were fully  
> evacuated by now, Sylia came in, seeing Amy and Spea play a game. "Aren't you supposed to be in  
> boarding school ?"

Jill: They chose not to tell Sylia about their plan. Which, in retrospect, was probably a good idea

> Amy shook her head, her ponytail swinging from side to side. Sylia turned to Shildy, who was busy  
> drawing.

Christina: Shildy is doing her best not to be in this scene.

> "What has happened. I thought you put Amy in boarding school ?"  
> "I did. Until I found out what was going on there."

Rex: They made her sit through drama club rehearsals, the fiends

> Shaking her head, Sylia sighed. "Shildy, you'll lose guardianship over Amy this way."

Jill: I'm just saying that if you don't read the fine print when you enrol your child in an absurdly evil  
boarding school then its entirely your fault

> In response, Shildy picked up a copy of the contract.

Mark: She keeps it on hand at all times for just such occasions.

> "It says here that only if the signee  
> removes the placed person from the boarding school guardianship is transferred to the school."

Mark: I wonder how many times they're tried to enforce that clause

> "Did you ask someone to remove her ?"  
> "No. Lufy offered and did it."

Christina: I didn't remove her, I asked my friend to kidnap her instead is not the defence you think it is

> "Who else. She's almost as bad as Priss.

Rex: She never separates her recyclables

> No sense of discipline."

Rex: That too

> "She's worse", Rabby commented, having come in after a shift of hard work.

Rex: Rabby's still building a zero point generator in their basement.

> "But I'll give her this; whatever she does, she does it good.", Shildy added.

Christina: Whatever it is she does anyway

Jill: I think its interpretive dance

> The doorbell rang. Shildy grabbed Amy, took her down to the workshop. Rabby walked down  
> to the front door, opened it. Two goons.

Rex: Of course, since they are literal fugitive aliens, they gave their actual address to the school.

> They were looking for a 15-year old girl, named Amy. Green  
> eyes, brown hair in a ponytail, large round glasses. Had she seen her ?

Jill: The fact that the girl being enrolled in a prestigious boarding school's home address was an abandoned workshop in the post-apocalyptic slums doesn't seem to have raised any red flags

> Rabby shook her head. Not since she had gone to boarding school, she answered.

Rex: And what's your relationship to her?

Christina [Rabby]: I'm her housemate

Rex: And how many of you live here?

Christina [Rabby]: Besides her, there's four of us.

Rex: And you're all women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one?

Christina [Rabby]: We are

Rex: And you all live here together in this run-down workshop?

Christina [Rabby]: Yes

Rex: I have no further questions

> When one goon told her Amy had run away from the school, she appeared shocked,

Jill: Usually, Amy would torch the joint instead

> telling them that when she saw her, she would send her back to school right away.

Jill: But they only lost one student in the exercise, which the ADP considers acceptable casualties.

> The goons greeted Rabby, and left.

Mark: [Goon] You don't think they might have been hiding the kid there, do you?

Rex: [Goon] I'm not going to put in the effort looking for some runaway kid just because an old hag says so.

Mark: [Goon] Yeah, but the old hag scares me.

Rex: [Goon] No, fair, I get that.

> The exec made one final inspection tour of his small army. Impressive. Downright impressive.

Christina: He sanded all the sprue scars and everything.

> no police force, no mercenaries could stand up to this amount of firepower he had assembled here.

Mark [Exec]: And they said I would never amount to anything in my life. Who's laughing now, mom?

> Maybe the Army could. But the Army wouldn't be interested in a small scale corporate struggle.

Christina: Hey some guy has unleashed an army of combat boomers and battlesuits to destroy the AD Police in the heart of Mega-Tokyo

Jill: Not interested. Don't care.

> They were paid for that. By Genom.

Rex: Which is why he needs a separate army.

> Five heavy combat boomers. Fifteen battlemovers, fourteen of  
> which would be piloted by 33C boomers,

Rex: And the last one by Oscar the Grouch. It's complicated

> one of them by himself. Perfect. Now to wait until the Knight Sabers fell into their trap.

Mark: I get the impression that his 'trap' involves free bird seed

> Catty was walking through the city, doing a bit of shopping,

Jill [Catty]: Doo de doo just here being a totally normal human doing totally normal human things beep  
boop

> when she saw a disturbance some

> hundred meters down the street. Curious, she walked down to it, pushing herself through the mass  
> of people to the front.

Jill: [Catty] Out of my way, fleshy ones.

> A tall, bossy woman with a cruel smile on her face was busy crushing the  
> hand of a girl, who was crying.

Mark: A typical Chinese-American mother

> Nobody did something.

Jill: But they furiously condemned both of them on Reddit no less

> Catty put down her purchases and walked over to the cruel woman,

Rex: [Catty] Hold these, random bystander. And do not run off with them, or I will find you.

> asking her to let go of the girl. Her polite question was greeted with a solid  
> blow to her chest. Had she been human, her ribs would have been crushed by it.

Christina: Not the worst meet-cute I've seen either

> Angry, Catty got up, walked over to the woman, and asked again.

Jill: [Catty] That was invigorating.

> The 33C boomer struck  
> again, only to find her hand encased by a solid grip. Catty had predicted her blow, and had stopped  
> it, with one hand.

Christina: [Boomer] Oh no, this is going on TikTok, isn't it?

> Amazed by this little girl,

Jill: Wait, you're a killbot too?

Christina [Catty]: Yes

Jill: This is so awkward for me. Boy am I embarrassed.

> the 33C let go of the girl, who immediately scrambled for safety among the crowd

Rex: [Catty] I wonder what that was about. [Pause] Oh well.

> while Catty slowly crushed the hand of the 33C.

Christina: Catty is of course doing a great job of maintaining her cover.

> No pain, just surprise, was

> visible in the cruel woman's eyes. Boomer, Catty thought. Probably an undercover model.

Rex: She'd know that if she'd paid attention to the narration

> The 33C took a swing with her other arm at Catty, who easily caught her other hand with her  
> own. "What the hell are you?", the 33C hissed.

Christina: [Catty] A robot duplicate of my creator made as part of a transhumanist conspiracy. But  
that's not important right now.

> Catty only smiled gently, then collapsed the 33C's hand into a shapeless ball in one crushing move.

Rex: If a random stranger walks up and crushes a boomer's hand, just look away and pretend you  
didn't see anything.

> She let go, and the boomer took one last look, then made her way out.

> Catty went back to the line of people, picked up her purchases and continued her shopping  
> tour.

Jill: Well this was all perfectly normal and I see no reason for anyone to dwell on this at all.

> Back at Genom Tower, a 33C boomer reported in with battle damage. One crushed hand.

Mark: And terminal embarrassment.

> As the biotech examined it, he was amazed. "What caused this?"

Christina: So my drink got stuck inside the vending machine...

> "This", the boomer said, linking a datafeed into a screen, showing Catty.

Jill: She would have called for backup, but she didn't.

> "Impossible. The amount of  
force exerted on your hand is enormous. Enough to crush the fist of a Bu-55c boomer."

Rex: Or to punch through it like it was made out of some sort of soft dessert

> "I'm telling you, that little girl crushed my hand. I struck her hard enough to break every rib in her  
body, but she just got up again.

Christina: I'd say she was some kind of killer robot or something, but that's just ridiculous.

> I tried to hit her again, but she stopped my hand as if I were a weak human."

Jill: A puny, pathetic little human.

Rex: The tech's going to back away slowly now.

> "And then?"

> "I let go of that troublemaker,

Mark: Say who was that girl and what was so important about her anyway?

Jill: Not important, moving on

> tried to hit her with my other hand. She caught it. Then, she collapsed  
> my hand with one move, let go of me.

Christina: Meanwhile, thirty seconds ago in this very same fic.

> I asked her what the hell she was, but all she did was look at  
> me with those curious amber eyes of her and smile."

Jill: This is sounding less like the Boomer was surprised and more like she's smitten

> The 33C paused for a second. "Whatever she is, she is neither human nor boomer."

Rex: Maybe she's bigfoot.

> All the time, the biotech had been busy replacing her hand.

Christina: He just keeps spare hands around for this very occasion.

Rex: That... they would be crushed by random people on the street?

Christina: Oh yeah. Happens all the time.

> "There you go. As good as new." The

> 33C flexed her hand. "Thanks. What are you going to do with that one ?" She indicated the crushed  
> hand.

Rex: That's none of your damn business. But if you want to know, I'll write it on a note and you can  
read it while sitting down

> "Send it to another lab. I want to know how much force she did exert."

> Looking at the crushed lump, he was worried.

Rex: That was my reaction when I last tried to cook a roast.

> "And I want to know it fast. Good hunting." The 33C gave a curt nod, then left.

Jill: She's going to put that new hand to good use.

> While walking

> through the halls of the Tower, the tech wondered. What could possibly be as small as a little girl  
> (The 33C had estimated her height at 1.5 meters), and yet be so much stronger than a 55c boomer.

Rex: Maybe she just works out

> He walked into another lab, tapped a tech on his shoulder. "Take a look at this."

Jill: And we're going to see every part of the process in real time

> "What's that ?"

Rex: I don't know, it started as a kind of rash...

> "This was a hand of a 33C boomer.

Christina: [Sighs] Meanwhile, fifteen seconds ago in this very same fic.

> I want to know how much force you need to do this in one motion."

> The other tech squinted at the lump, thought for a second. "In one motion ?"

> "Like this."

> He put one fist in his other hand, then made a crushing motion.

Mark: Ow, my hand.

> "A lot. A helluva lot."

> "Relate to an identifiable factor.

Rex: You know, bigger or smaller then a breadbasket

> Bu-55c."  
> "About five to ten times."  
> "You're kidding me."

Christina: You don't have a better measurement than that?

> "I'm not. I'm making a careful guess.

Rex: Just shooting in the dark, really.

> Want me to test how much exactly ?"  
> "Yes."  
> "Okay. By the way, what did this ? A hydraulic press ?"

Jill: You don't watch the safety training video and that will happen

> "A small girl, one and a half meter tall."  
> "Impossible."

Christina: Also, don't we make concealed killer robots?

> "That's what I said. But sensor data doesn't lie."  
> "I'll get on this. But whatever it is that did this, I'd be mighty careful in approaching it."

Mark: Like if she offers to shake your hand, politely refuse

> Both techs greeted, and parted.

Rex: Hello, goodbye!

Mark: Hello, goodbye!

> Quincy's hacker team had located some useful data.

Rex: And then posted it on the War Thunder forums

> It had taken some effort, but they had something. The pilot's name was Lufy Starleaf.

Jill: The least conspicuous name possible

> She had already proven herself as an undisciplined  
> hotshot capable of smearing a careless 55c boomer all over a street - using her chopper.

Mark: Just assume that this happened at some point and move on

> She also had racked up an impressive property damage report, with over 50 claims in the last two  
> months.

Christina: Wow, that sounds like the kind of action that would better fit a crossover fic than custody  
battles with a boarding school.

> Her record was filled with remarks like 'she is good but she needs discipline' and 'I just wish  
> she would follow orders'.

Jill: And 'well she isn't dead yet like the rest of the squad so I guess she'll do'

> Quincy paced through his office. Added to this, there was the data from the datatags.  
> Lufy had been a combat ace. And a very dangerous one.

Jill: For who? The Fakespani Air Force?

> That record had been filled with the same remarks as her police record.

Mark: Ego writing cheques et cetera

> But her abilities were impressive. Both from the datatag and the ADP  
> files. Deep down, Quincy prayed she wouldn't link up with the Knight Sabers.

Mark: Does he expect that of every random ADP officer?

Jill: I mean, the illegal mercenaries have got to be paying better.

> Her datatag showed she had the guts to rush an enemy battleship with a fighter.

Christina: It occurs to me that some basic fact-checking would shoot huge holes in this story

Rex: It's at that point that Luffy began padding her resume with Iron Eagle footage

> And Quincy guessed a battleship was a

> lot bigger and lot more dangerous than Genom Tower. He was right.

Mark: Only one thing to do. Launch Genom Tower into space.

> The hacker team had resumed working on the identity of the other girl. Somehow, she  
> disappeared from the computer; they couldn't find her anywhere.

Rex: Could it be because she didn't take a public sector job to hide her identity?

Jill: You know, you might be on to something.

> Catty came home from her shopping spree, her arms filled with bags. Linna saw her come in

Jill [Catty]: I had a great day out. I bought so much stuff and nobody will ever find where I hid the  
bodies, beep boop

Christina [Linna]: Well that's great... wait a moment

> and helped her carry the bags to

> the living room, where they both dropped down on the couch. Linna eyed the bags. "Done some  
> decent shopping, have you ?"

Mark: Linna's ability to grasp the obvious is amazing

> "Sort of. This morning, I said I was going out for new clothes, and almost immediately, everyone  
> starts giving me notes with what they want and in which size. So I went all over town to find what  
> everyone wanted."

Rex: Took her a while to find a shop that carried depleted uranium rounds, but she managed

> "Did you succeed ?" Catty nodded.

Jill: Yes, she succeeded at shopping.

> "Mind me taking a look ? Which bag is whose ?"

> Picking up a bag, Catty pointed at the name on it.

Christina: [Linna] Okay, but who is Hoquet?

> Linna smiled, and soon, the both of them were  
> digging into bags, laughing and trying.

Mark: [Catty] Also, what are you doing here?

Christina: [Linna] I'm as confused as you are.

> That evening, when everyone was at home, Catty told what had happened.

Christina: Shockingly enough, without a blow-by-blow recap.

> Shildy shook her head.

> "Not very wise."

> "What else could I do but watch ? Otherwise, that... thing.. would have broken her hand."

Mark: And so Baby Doll was able to escape and continued her crime spree with Killer Croc

> Lufy grinned and winked. "Nice going. That ought to teach them."

Jill: Teach them that somebody else's killer robot is on the loose, that is.

> Catty tipped her head sideways, looked at Lufy. "Maybe this time. But I fear they will be more cautious next time."

Rex: More cautious about whatever they were doing for whatever reason they were doing it, I guess.

> "I'm hungry," Amy cut in. "When do we eat ?"

> "Rather, where do we eat tonight ?", Spea added.

Christina [Spea]: I got a line!

Jill: Quit padding your part, Spea

> Catty smiled. "I found this restaurant a few blocks away. They serve an excellent dish."

Rex: Just a single, nonspecific dish

> Nods around the table. "Let's go then."

Jill [Catty]: Let us go and consume food products for sustenance, fellow humans

> The USSD colonel angrily paced through his office.

Christina: Sorry, which random cranky guy was this? I lost track.

> He had gotten this command after his

> predecessor had to step down because of the laser sattelite scandal.

Mark: It turned out he'd been using an orbital killsat for personal business during office hours

> Now he was in the firing line. Damn Genom, he thought. You can't trust them with anything.

Jill: And if you can't trust the giant evil megacorporation, then who?

> What now ? Hire the Knight Sabers to do his dirty work ? Or start a corporate war against Genom.

Rex: Or ditch all of that and take a holiday to Mauritius?

> Neither would be very wise. The Knight

> Sabers had clearly stated after the Cynthia situation they wouldn't work for USSD again unless

> they were told all the details,

Mark [General]: Anyway, my wife doesn't love me and my kids rarely speak to me anymore, and I have been drinking at work...

Christina [Sylia]: What's this got to do with anything?

Mark [General]: You said you wanted all the details

> and a corporate war against Genom would make sure his base was overrun by Bu-55c boomers.

Rex: And they'd end up nesting in the crawlspaces and pooping on everything

> So all he could do was accept the situation. Oh yes, there also was that UFO report.

Jill: The sort of thing that just slips your mind

> An unidentified object had slipped through the detection net, and had made a successful re-entry  
> into the Earth's atmosphere, crashing into the countryside

Christina: For generous definitions of successful, it seems.

> outside MegaTokyo. Genom had been onto it like a moth drawn to a flame.

Rex: As a member of the international space agency he had nothing to do with it.

> Now the police had confiscated the wreckage, for further study. According to the reports, there  
> had been no survivors. But then, neither had there been any bodies.

Mark: There had not not been any survivors

> Maybe it was worth investigating ..

Christina: Just the greatest discovery in the history of mankind, no biggie.

> it might take the heat off him for losing those two frozen girls to Genom,

Christina: Oh yeah. Second greatest discovery after that.

Jill: No wonder he isn't fussed.

> which wasn't his responsibility anyway – his colleague on the moon was to blame for that

Christina: Oh yeah. Those moon guys are the worst

> - he sent them to Genom, despite several warnings not to trust Quincy's company.

Jill: Cool, and so he... Nope, guess we're not going anywhere with that scene after all.

> Luffy and Priss had driven down to the shoreline again, enjoying the cool breeze blowing in from the  
> sea.

Jill: The toxic fumes from the offshore waste dumping are particularly refreshing today.

> While they were standing there, Priss noted Luffy had tears in her eyes. Placing her hand on  
> her friend's shoulder, she asked what was wrong. "Just memories."

Christina: Memories of the last time we did this scene.

> "That's all ? Must be pretty strong memories."

> "They are. Memories of a place I once called home."

> "Where would that be ?"

Jill: She used to have a place in Brooklyn before it got taken over by hipsters

> Luffy sighed, closed her eyes, squeezing out a few more tears. "Across the galaxy is a star,  
> much like this one. We call it Marsus. About the distance this planet is from yours,

Rex: Marsus is the same distance from Earth as Earth is from Marsus.

Jill: About.

> there is an asteroid belt. Maybe not even that.

Christina: Sources vary.

> That used to be our homeworld."

> "How did that happen ?"

> "Paranoid planet destroyer."

Mark: Great way to explain without actually explaining anything there

> "You mean to say..."

> "Yes. Both sides, we weren't any better than them, fought a war of total destruction. Each and every planet that one colonized, the other destroyed, ultimately resulting in the destruction of both sides' homeworlds."

Jill: War is hell, but it does have cool spaceship battles

Rex: The true lesson of Gall Force

> Priss gasped in amazement.

Christina: She just had a great idea for her band's next track.

> "If it hadn't been for Shildy, Spea, Amy, Catty and me, this solar

> system would not have survived the battle between the Solnoid and the Paranoid."

> Lufy hung her head. "Our leader wanted to finish the war as soon as possible, not caring for the sacrifice needed to accomplish that. So our entire fleet jumped into the 9<sup>th</sup> solar system, this, and engaged the main enemy fleet. However, the fifth planet was actually a disguised System Destroyer

Christina: A legally distinct Death Star

> - a weapon powerful enough to blast a star into Supernova, thus destroying everything in the system.

Rex: Yeah, do we really need a summary of Destruction right now?

> We stopped it. If we hadn't, we might have won the war, but at what cost ?"

Mark: Just think; if not for their intervention we would have never had spray cheese in a can, twerking and the Sony Spider-Verse

> Biting back tears and more memories, she continued. "Both of us had already lost our homeworld then. It was a battle between two dying races, doomed to disappear from the face of the universe. Finally, both main fleets met at the dying star system Sigma Narse.

Rex: Oh, and Stardust, I guess.

> There, we fought our final battle. Which ultimately only had five survivors."

Mark: Intense recap action!

> Then she couldn't hold her tears back anymore and cried. Priss put her arm around Lufy,

Christina: [Priss] I guess this is my job now, or something.

> feeling the need deep down to comfort her best friend,

Jill: Actual friendship assumed.

> someone so much like her.

Mark: They both had amazing eighties hair

> And yet so different. "I've had this feeling before," Luffy commented.

Rex: Last time she had dogey Mexican takeaway

> Seeing Priss' curious look, she continued.

Christina: [Priss] Do I get a line? No, I don't get a line.

> "Back aboard the Sardine, Captain Nebulart's ship.

Jill: Priss is trying hard not to ruin the mood by laughing at the ship's name.

> Then, I just wanted to punch something.

Rex: Just think; if there had been a single stress ball then all of this could have been averted

> But now, I feel more like crying."

> She hesitated. "It's been too long ago since I last cried. Last time I cried, I was deserted  
> in deep space, feeling pretty helpless after seeing the Starleaf jump out." Priss nodded.

Mark: Nothing Priss could do but stand around and look awkward

> She had told her.

Rex: Repeatedly.

> Spea dropped down to the floor, exhausted. "I swear, if you push me any further, I think I'm going to  
> faint." Linna shook her head.

Jill: Spea and Linna in the same scene? My excitement is off the chart

> "C'mon. Just a little working out. What's wrong with that?" Groaning, Spea got up again.

Christina: Can we assume they're both wearing ridiculously colourful workout gear and leg warmers?

Jill: Whatever gets you through this.

> Linna had been driving her hard ever since she had expressed an interest in  
> aerobics. "Guess I have no stamina."

Rex: Need to max your stamina bar. Try taking a long nap

> Amused, Linna looked at her. "Well, then you'd better get training. Up, on your feet. Ready?"  
> Pressing the play button, the music started up again, Linna guiding Spea through the moves of an  
> aerobics session, while she worked out along herself.

Mark: Were they perchance doing a variety of eighties dance moves?

> At the end of the song, Spea signalled for a timeout. Shaking her head, Linna looked at her.  
> "I don't know. You want to do aerobics so bad it hurts but you don't have the stamina for it."

Christina: She's a trained soldier who fought her way through a massive space station, but she  
doesn't have the stamina for a workout

> At least,  
> not yet. If you want some sound advice, go walk or run a few miles every morning or evening. Builds  
> stamina."

Jill: And this is the point where Linna tries to sell her on supplements using her referral code

> Spea nodded. "Everything is better than this right now. I can hardly stand."  
> Laughing, Linna helped her up. "C'mon, let's dig into some food. I know this great restaurant  
> downtown..."

Mark: This has been a crude simulation of human interaction

> Rabby had a headache. Not just from smog or sickness,

Rex: Or her pack a day habit

> but rather from personal problems.

Mark: That personal problem is named Lufy

> Ever since the others had arrived, they had more or less elected her the team leader.

Christina: I'd ask who died and made her boss, but that's actually what happened

> After all, she was highest in rank.

Mark: If I recall, Shildy was an actual captain while Rabby was just a second in command. But that also doesn't suit the fic's narrative, so...

> Next to that, she also had that massive engineering project underway in the equipment bay;

Jill: The washing machine's making a strange rattling noise, and she's going to fix it herself, dammit.

> the building of that heavy assault shuttle and both heavy troopers.

Rex: And she's going to build them entirely out of household goods

> She tried to go to bed early, but invariably, it was around 3 in the morning she finally dropped  
> in bed, getting up at around 8, and starting all over again.

Mark: Her housemates could help her, but they don't.

> Sylia had examined her, and had suggested she take a few days rest before getting back to work.  
> But what then? She had to do something while taking a rest. Sylia had the answer. She could  
> always use someone in the shop as an assistant attendant.

Jill [Sylia]: You need to take a few days off work and get some rest

Christina [Rabby]: What should I do while off work?

Jill [Sylia]: Come work for me

Christina [Rabby]: I see some holes in your logic

> So, when Mackie was working on the shuttle and Sylia was out of town for a few to a fashion  
> show, Rabby was looking after the Silky Doll.

Mark: This wouldn't happen to be why Sylia suggested a break right now, would it?

Rex: Gosh, no! What could possibly make you think that?

> At first, she had to get settled with the shop's operating procedures,

Christina: And learn how money works.

> but she learned quickly. But still, her headache didn't go away.

> One evening, she sat down in the apartment, and went through her mind, step by step. What  
> was worrying her so much?

Rex: The fact that she was building up a massive arsenal in her own home without having any of the equipment, training, knowledge, skills or blueprints to do such?

Mark: At least its not Catty this time

Rex: This is also true

> Sifting through, she found it.

Christina: She just really didn't like Tokyo traffic

> She was worried about Genom.

Jill: She had concerns about the giant evil megacorporation

> Sylia's stories about boomers hadn't really helped to comfort her or ease her mind,

Christina: I imagine Sylia showed no bias in her stories about boomers at all.

> so that was one.

> Another worrisome point was Amy. If those school-goons found her, she'd be in big trouble.

Mark: I'm torn. On one hand, the cartoonishly evil boarding school has nothing to do with anything and really feels like a side plot. On the other hand, it's the closest this fic has had to anything to do so far.

> Finally, there was Lufy. Rabby was afraid Lufy might do something stupid,

Jill [Lufy]: Way ahead of you there

> something that could get them all into deep trouble.

Jill [Lufy]: Once again, already on that

> One by one, she ticked off her troubles. Genom. Just keep quiet. No prob.

Rex: Given Genom's progress so far is to hire some guys to read the police report that their insider already read, I'm sure she's fine on that front.

> Amy. She considered asking Sylia to take the little girl in, at least there she'd be safe

> whenever trouble came.

Jill [Hag]: As the headmistress of an absurdly evil boarding school, I'm taking custody of this child

Christina [Sylia]: As the owner of a local small business, I'm going to stop you

Jill [Hag]: Damn, you have outfoxed me

> Lufy. Nothing she could do about her. Just pray and hope. Oh well, with her

> combat record and reputation, Rabby wasn't really afraid something would happen to her best

> friend. Well, actually Lufy was more than a friend.

Mark: They had known each other for whole minutes

> She fondly remembered the night they had cuddled together in bed, finding comfort in each other.

Rex: If its not accompanied by eighties pop and a dream sequence, is it really character development for her?

> Strange, she thought. She had liked it. She smiled. Her headache was gone.

> "So you are suggesting we should hire out that military force you have assembled ?"

Mark: [Quincy] Didn't you have a specific goal in assembling it?  
Rex: [Executive] I mean, I thought I did, but I guess I forgot or something.

> "Yessir. That way, the blame will never fall on Genom if things go wrong,

Christina: They are setting themselves up so hard

> and there hasn't been any case in which a boomer has been convicted of crimes."

Mark: On the other hand, Genom is drowning in product liability lawsuits

> Quincy nodded. It was a bold plan; make

> the Genom Force a mercenary band, still with close ties to Genom,

Jill: Evil mercenaries are big believers in branding

> then hire them to do the dirty

> work. If it went wrong, the unit would get the blame (if they screwed up, there wouldn't be anything > left, but that was another minor point), and if things went well, no fingers would be pointed to > Genom.

Mark: Barring the fact that you called them the Genom Force

Rex: Details!

> Nodding, the Chairman approved.

Jill: Certainly nobody could trace the legion of unique boomers back to the company that made them.

> "Very well. In that case, I will hire this mercenary band of > yours to convince this wayward Area 17 to sell out to Corporate Genom."

Christina: This all feels like some sort of massive tax write-off

> Quincy paused. "Even if that means we buy a ghost town."

Rex: I believe the proper term is 'historical community'

> "Yes Chairman. I will make preparations right away."

> "How long will it take to take Area 17?"

> "Depends. If we can slip some battlemovers in, a few hours. If we have to fight our way in, one, two > weeks. Maybe longer.

Mark: Just how heavily armed are these locals anyway?

Rex: They have a really mean homeowners association

> The problem is that we have to do this undercover,

Jill: They have to very quietly and discretely deploy their heavily armed war robots

> and preferably at night. If

> this escalates too much, ADP might take notice, and with them, the Army.

Christina: Even though they said that the army and the ADP weren't going to be a problem

Mark: They may have undersold the issue for marketing purposes

> And I have no desire to be on the receiving end of the main gun of an assault tank."

Mark: [Quincy] Right. So remind me again why you're taking part in this instead of leaving it to a boomer pilot?

Rex: [Executive] Hazard pay.

> Quincy smiled. He appreciated a sense of humor.

Jill: Good. If he sees anything funny then he can let us know.

> "Very well. Set things in motion." He paused. "After Area 17, get rid of the Knight Sabers.

> Permanently."

Christina: [Executive] Any uh, leads on how to do that, sir?

Jill: [Quincy] Don't look at me, this is your stupid plan, not mine.

> The exec nodded. "Yessir. It will be done."

Rex: Quincy or Doctor Claw?

Mark: In these fics its hard to tell

> The VTOL Shuttle was nearly finished,

Christina: And remember, she built this with spare parts sourced through a local mechanic.

> all that remained was placing the heavy armor plates over

> the craft, and installing the powerful fusion engines in their bays.

Rex: It was nearly finished except for the most important part

> The weaponry had been put in place, the four struggle suits in the bay at the rear end of the craft.

Mark: And they'd hung the fuzzy dice from the rear-view mirror.

> Luffy had insisted on painting something on one armor plate,

Jill: Something she couldn't repeat in polite company

> and when she had finished, she had smiled broadly. When they put

> the heavy plates onto the craft, Rabby found out why. A large yellow triangle surrounded by a thick

> black border

Rex: So they're Blacktrons?

> cut off at the corners to form an uneven hexagon, with a stylized K and S, in red, in the  
> yellow field.

> Solnoids and Knight Sabers, combined in one force.

Rex: Like that one time they teamed up with Noodles Romanoff

Mark: That's not what the fic meant

Rex: So they're not going to be stopped by Rodger Ramjet and his proton energy pill?

Mark: No

Rex: Wait, what have I been reading all this time?

> They had adopted the insignia on the  
> Struggle Suits, combined with a strong, sharp bright blue and white color scheme suggested by  
> Sylia.

Jill: That the brand was her personal colours was a coincidence, of course

> The troopers, although bearing the same insignia, were painted and overall night blue; they  
> were meant for backup, and nothing more than backup,

Christina: [Rabby] No solo rampages in the heavily armed death machine.

Jill: [Lufy] Awww.

> although Lufy did her best to convince the others they'd make a huge impression on Genom,

Rex: The fic seems to genuinely think they can outgun the international megacorporation that makes killer robots.

> to which Sylia had coolly replied there was a

> difference between making an impression and blowing a crater the size of Genom Tower.

Mark: No kill like overkill

> Since Amy was back home, they decided to give her a position;

Christina: She's been officially designated as 'the load'

> Catty had indicated she could use a second crewmember for flying the Shuttle.

Rex: While Shildy slipped her Catty's kill switch.

> And so, the operator's station was prepared for Amy.

Mark: I really feel like they were just making a job for her benefit

> Priss had a concert over at Hot Legs, having invited the six Solnoid girls over to the club

Christina: And they had no problem getting Amy and Catty in at all.

> as Entertainer's Guests to hear her show.

Jill: While eating away at more of the club's revenue.

> They had to get used to the music and the club at first, but

> soon they were having fun along with the rest of the folks in the club.

Mark: We are having fun

Rex: So much

> After the show, they got backstage, for a breath of fresh air and to meet the star of the  
> evening.

Christina: The person they already know!

> When Priss finally came backstage, she was received with open arms. "You were fantastic!"

> "Are all your shows like this?"

Christina: There wasn't a killer robot rampage this time

Jill [Catty]: I'm right here, you know.

> "Why didn't you invite us earlier?"

> "Great!!"

Mark: That's not an answer

> The whole group set course for the backstage bar, which was reserved for the performers  
> and their roadcrew,

Christina: This seems like a horribly inefficient setup.

> although Entertainer's Guests were also welcome in there.

Rex: As well as any dependants listed for tax purposes

> When they sat down for a drink, Priss dropped flat in her chair. "I'm exhausted.. somebody  
> please carry me home?"  
> "Too tired to drive?"

Rex: Its either that or getting a ride with Linna

Mark: I'd walk

> Eyes half open, Priss nodded. "You can't begin to imagine how much energy such a performance  
> requires." Nods all around the table.  
> "Although I'd like to try if possible." Luffy grinned.  
> "What are you good at ? Singing ?"  
> "Percussion."

Mark: She doesn't mean an instrument. She just means hitting things.

> All eyes turned to Luffy. Rabby smiled. "You never told me you played an instrument."  
> "You never asked. Do you play something ?"  
> "Well.. I used to play guitar a lot .. but that's sooooo long ago..."

Christina: All of her friends have previously undiscovered musical talents. Isn't that nice?

Rex: Now they just need a name like the Dragons of... bad stuff.

> They all laughed. Priss shrugged. "If you want to jam a bit, come over to rehearsal I'd say. If  
> you're good enough and the rest of the crew don't mind, I'll give you a chance on stage." They both  
> nodded. "Well, any other hidden musical talents here?"

Rex: Linna can play the xylophone, but nobody ever asks

> Amy nodded, her ponytail bouncing up and down. "Sorry, you're too young."  
> She sagged her shoulders. "It's not fair."

Jill: Amy said and downed her next shot.

> "Be glad you're not back at the apartment, in bed." Amy opened her mouth to give a stinging  
> response to that, but decided to shut up.

Rex: Catty had volunteered to stay home and look after her, but then Amy was suddenly desperate to  
come.

> After all, such a reply might do more harm than good.

Jill: Shut up Amy if you know what's good for you

> Whistling, Luffy walked from the vehicle bay up to the checkpoint where she had to check in for  
> work. She had enjoyed last night, over at Hot Legs.

Mark: They had such nonspecific fun

> She checked in, a few minutes too late, having  
> overslept herself. The rush that morning to get to work a little bit presentable and on time had  
> been a real challenge.

Jill: Yes, we definitely need to know this.

> "Boss wants to see you. 27th floor, second office at the left."

Rex: Not the one next to that. It's just got the copier that everyone uses for their butt during the office

Christmas party

> "Yeah, I know where that is." Every damage claim that had come in had caused her to be called to  
> that same office, and every time she had managed to convince her boss it wasn't her fault things got  
> wrecked.

Jill [Luffy]: And in conclusion I want to say that anyone could have fired that missile at that busload of  
nuns

Mark [Chief]: Seems entirely above water to me. Case closed.

Jill [Luffy]: The system works

> She checked through her memory, trying to find that one unresolved damage claim she was  
> called up for.

Christina: Something about St. Puppy's Hospital for adorable cancer orphans. It'd come to her.

> Oh well. She'd hear it soon enough. Putting on her most serious face,

Rex: Brightly coloured star tattoo and all.

> she opened the  
> door to her boss' office and entered. Inside, she saw an old woman sit on the sofa at the back of the  
> office,

Rex: Oh please, let this be the old hag from the boarding school.

Mark: Wait, you want her to come back?

Rex: It would be something!

> with her boss busy paging through a thick file. Hers. "Ah, miss Starleaf. There you are. Bit  
> late, but you are here nonetheless."  
> "What have I done this time?"

Rex: The 'this time' is pretty telling

> "You are accused of a most serious incident, for which you need a pretty good explanation. This  
> woman here," he indicated the person on the sofa

Christina: Helen Mirren's greatest role ever.

> "claims you have allowed one of her boarding school students to escape that school."

Jill [Luffy]: I have no idea what you're talking about

Mark [Chief]: It was your plan to invade the school

Jill [Luffy]: Yeah, well you signed off on it.

Mark [Chief]: Good point. Case dismissed.

> Luffy folded her arms. "That's it? Just point a finger at the pilot with the most damage claims  
> to mask your own incompetence in keeping students in?" The Hag gasped for breath. Lieutenant  
> Kenderson continued.

Christina: Whoever they were

> "She was last seen boarding your chopper."

> "When I arrived at the barracks I ushered everyone out. Not a chance I forgot someone."

> "You're sure."

> "Yep."

Rex: Well that all sounds reasonable to me.

> "How did you make sure you didn't forget anyone?"

> "After I told everyone to get off I searched every dark corner of the craft."

Christina: Her plan to stuff Amy in the waste disposal worked perfectly.

> "Good. My apologies for the inconvenience. Get up to the platform and start patrolling. You're  
> already late."

> "Yessir." And she was gone.

Jill: That was a thorough investigation. I see no reason to go further.

> After the door had close, the lieutenant looked at the Hag, who still was shocked by Lufy's stinging  
> words.

Mark: Yes, her disinterested response sure was stinging.

> "What do you think ?"

> "She's as insolent as you described, and then some."

Rex: Any reason the chief is trash-talking his pilots to a random citizen?

> "Yes. She's also my best pilot. She's managed to smear three Bu-55c boomers all over a street  
> already without losing her craft.

Mark: This makes her the most capable ADP officer to date. Which given that Leon is the bar to clear  
really isn't saying much

> Added to that, she's very skilled with small arms as well.

Christina: And makes truly excellent parfaits.

> If I didn't know any better, I'd say she's been a soldier for about as long as she is alive."

Rex: [Chief] But she'd have to come from some kind of militaristic alien civilization for that, and that  
would  
be ridiculous!

> The lieutenant would never know how right he was.

Jill: Since he apparently hired her for the ADP without anything more than the most cursory of  
background checks

> "But that still doesn't solve the disappearance of one of my students."

Mark [Chief]: A wizard did it. Case closed.

> "True. I don't know, but somehow I think she knows more. After all, she did suggest your school as  
> the training area."

Christina: But that was just so she could dig up your ugly barberry bushes.

> "Which leads us to the conclusion she must have been lying."

> "But for what? She has no reason to lie about this."

Rex: She has no reason to lie about a gross overstep of her powers and authority

> "Unless she's involved."

> "Then there'd have to be a connection between her and that missing girl." He picked up the phone.

Jill: Well, they've got both of their addresses on file, so I'm sure there's no way they'll connect the two.

> He wanted to know more about his best pilot.

Christina: He was shocked to find out that she had never won a Nobel Prize, that she had never climbed Everest and wasn't a renowned brain surgeon. After a bit he began to suspect she had been padding her resume

> Shildy was still out of a job,

Mark: She needs to get Sylia to make her a puffed-up resume too

> that is, he had her work together with Catty and Rabby to finish the equipment, but otherwise, she had nothing to do.

Jill: Nothing beyond building a supertech shuttle out of old tin cans, that is.

> She considered joining the police, but a quick look through the police casualty reports over the last year changed her mind.

Rex: The ADP had somehow managed a 110% loss rate

> She sighed. Next to Catty, she was the only one without a fulltime profession.

Christina: Shildy spent all day on the couch and mooched off Lufy's police salary.

> Lufy worked as a pilot, Rabby had a daytime job as shop attendant at Sylia's shop, Spea was busy training for aerobics instructor,

Jill: This is Spea's big moment. Treasure it.

> and Amy was underaged, not allowed to work.

Christina: Amy was making more money than the rest of them put together on Instagram.

> Catty didn't want a job, wanting to stay at alert to be able to launch straight away if needed.

Rex: If she needs money, she'll just mine herself for crypto.

> Shildy sighed. Well, at least one struggle suit would have a pilot in that case.

> Leon was bored, as always when on chopper patrol.

Christina: Silly question, but if Leon's an inspector, why is he on chopper patrol?

> Nothing worth deploying ever happened.

Jill: [Panicked] Oh god, there's a boomer tearing through the shopping centre's food court! There's boba tea and overpriced fried chicken everywhere!

Rex: [Leon] Nothing ever happened.

> Well,

> at least they had a good pilot with them should they run into any trouble. He had to admit he liked this girl,

Jill: Her not slapping him at the first chance made her a winner in his book

> although he knew almost nothing about her. Well, maybe his contacts in Personnel Administration could tell him more.

Christina: Leon's too lazy to stalk his colleagues. He's going to get someone else to stalk his colleague for him.

> After they had landed for a fuel stop and a coffee, Leon walked down to the office and made a  
> short call. By the end of the break, the phone rang. "Leon ... yes ... yes .. what ? Nothing in the  
> computer ? Are you sure ?"

Mark [Leon]: Yes I am going to just keep repeating everything you say. Why do you ask?

> The person on the other side talked for a bit. "I see. Well, let me know if you dig up something.

Rex: That's also what they said to Howard Carter

> Thanks."

Christina: In this chapter, people look up Lufy on a computer!

> He went up to the chopper pad, climbed aboard the waiting craft, which then continued to  
> proceed on the city patrol. Leon had enough food for thought to drive away his boredom.

Jill: He hadn't waved his gun at anything in ages, let alone shot at them.

> The lieutenant had reached the same conclusion as Leon.

Christina: That Cynthia Rothrock was definitely under-rated and had never really been given a chance  
to headline a film

> When he asked how it was possible that  
> her file was not in the computer, the clerk at the other side of the phone replied that the computer  
> had more hiccups; like sudden shift changes for officers and the like.

Rex: Really, the whole system's a mess and we should probably do something about it. Oh, well.

> They would get her file from  
> the archives, he told the lieutenant, who replied they shouldn't look; he had that file on his desk.

Mark: Then why did you even ask us? Such a waste of time...

> After hanging up, Martin Kenderson

Christina: Are we meant to know who that is?

Jill: I have no idea.

> paced angrily through the office. Something was wrong.  
> Very wrong. He had his suspicions who might be behind it, but there never was any proof against  
> Genom. Even if they put up a sign "We have done this, signed Genom", there still wouldn't be any  
> proof. Damn.

Jill: Genom claimed responsibility

Mark: We have no proof

Jill: Damn them!

> One evening they gathered in Sylia's apartment

Christina: Since we're not doing anything at all, have a meeting.

> to discuss new operating procedures and equipment status.

Rex: And how much of it Priss had already broken

> The Solnoid equipment was mostly finished, the struggle suits and shuttle were  
> fully operational, though the troopers needed some final adjustments.

> Sylia also discussed their next assignment;

Mark: They had been hired to mow the lawn. Work had been really slow.

> one of the City areas, area 17 had lately gotten a

> lot of 'attention' (read: boomer rampages) from a certain company.

Rex: The Albanian State Washing Machine Company?

> They were hired to keep an eye

> on matters, with a request to act should this company decide to try and get the area the hard way.

Jill: The hard way, as opposed to Boomer rampages, of course. That's just Genom's way of asking politely

> Luffy and Priss looked at each other, grinning. Finally a chance at boomer-bashing.

Christina: Catty takes offence at that.

Mark: But she's not even a boomer!

Christina: Yeah, but she heard them say "all clankers are like that" and hasn't forgiven them.

> Sylia saw the looks on their faces "I think I should acquaint all of you with Genom's new toy."

Mark: Genom is trying to break into the 'marital aids' market.

> Unfolding some sheets of paper, she showed an 8-meter tall nightmare. "Looks like a Doberman."  
> "Don't be mistaken; compared to this, a Doberman is a sweet little dog."

Rex: That's a great way to summon a hoard of angry redditors

> The codename for these combat boomers is Dragon. A very apt name.

Christina: Because they sleep on huge piles of gold

> Thermal blasters in the arms. Missile launchers in the  
> shoulders. Three heavy laser cannons in the mouth,

Rex: Pez dispenser in the fingers.

> fully flight capable and reasonably manevrable."

Jill: Reasonably as compared to what? An office block?

> Catty tipped her head sideways. "Where did you get all this 'inside' information, if I may be so bold?"

> "Though I don't like Genom, that doesn't stop me from planting spies there."

Mark: Normally she only spies on people she likes

> Some grinning sounded through the room.

Rex: They grinned very loudly

> "But that's not all. For some reason still unclear to

> me, Genom has also built fifteen high powered battlemover suits.

Jill: Gee, I dunno. Why would the giant evil megacorporation want their own army of deadly warbots?

> Again, don't brush these off.

Christina: Although mistaking them for mosquitos is understandable.

> My

> information indicates they were built along the lines of the D.D. , although without the J-1 system."

Mark: In retrospect, packing each 'bot with a self-destruct nuke was probably a bad idea

> Catty appeared distant for a moment, her eyes unfocussed, then bright with insight.

> "I don't know for sure, but I do have a guess why Genom is building those battlemovers and  
> boomers." Heads turned her way. "Genom obviously wants Area 17.

Christina: Thank you Catty, for stating the obvious

> If their boomer rampages don't allow them to buy up the area, they'll just flatten it."

Jill: Silly question, but is there any reason \*why\* they want Area 17.

Mark: Because it's between Area 16 and Area 18.

Jill: Thank you. Thank you so much for that.

> Worry crossed Sylia's face. "If they'd do that, that would mean we're in big trouble. There's no way  
> any hardsuit weapon, no Linna, not even your knuckle bomber,

Rex: So don't even think about it, young lady.

> can penetrate the armor on a Dragon boomer."

> "But the weapons on the Struggle suits can, as those of the Motoroids."

Mark: My, isn't that convenient?

> "Yes, definitely.

Jill: [Sylia] And I certainly haven't copied your advanced alien weapons for my own use at all.

> Although I am not a great proponent of mechanized fighting in an urban, habitated area."

Jill: She built their hardsuits and motoroids for purely peaceful purposes

> "Seems we have no other option. Let's just try to confine the fighting to one spot as to minimize  
> damage and casualties." Nods. A battle plan was prepared.

Christina: Rabby wasn't certain about her designation as "cannon fodder 1."

> They'd move out whenever the chips hit the fan.

> That night, Lufy awoke with a silent scream, feeling ice cold. Nightmare. And a bad one.

Rex: She needed to use the can but Rabby had just wrecked it

> She was floating in space, in a mangled Bronz-X trooper, when she heard air hissing out. Air leak.  
> Slowly she felt she was suffocating, falling prey to the vacuum of space, all the time while she was  
> freezing to death. Then, when she almost was dead from cold and suffocation, an explosion.

Mark: Well, I guess if you've got to go, go out with a bang.

> Lufy sat upright in bed, tears in her eyes. Twice now, she had gone through the anguish of  
> being frozen in space. Once, for ten years, and again, for over two million years.

Jill: Careful or else you'll make a habit of it.

> She tried to comfort herself, noting it had been just a dream. Tossing and turning, she tried to

> sleep.

Rex: Has she stied counting fan jets of something?

> Every time she closed her eyes, the image from her dreams, the eternal starry night  
> appeared in front of her. Finally, swinging her legs over the side of the bed, she decided she couldn't  
> sleep like this.

Christina: She tried sleeping in the fridge to get back to her roots.

> She needed comfort, someone to tell her it really had been just a bad dream.  
> Sneaking into Rabby's room, she saw her friend fast asleep, a smile on her face. She  
> whispered an excuse,

Christina [Lufy]: Hey Rabby, I need to borrow five bucks

> then got into Rabby's bed, snuggling in with her friend. She closed her eyes,  
> expecting the starry night.

Mark: Or at the very least, self-portrait with a bandaged ear

> Nothing.  
> Finally at rest, she went to sleep.

Rex: And then came the colossal Dutch Oven

On that final comment the big screen switched off, converting the world back to prose format. "And that was the series of alien hieroglyphs that comprised second two portions of Bubblegum Force," Mark commented. "In which interesting things actually happened that had nothing at all to do with the actual main plot."

"I admit that I did not expect the whole absurdly evil high school subplot," Jill spoke up. "Mostly because it is incredibly dumb."

"And yet?" Rex asked.

"And yet, it was also the most engaging part of the fic so far," Jill explained. "Because it was so absurdly evil and over-the-top nonsense featuring a character referred to simply as 'the Hag' who somehow has the authority to take legal custody of a child for simply disobeying school rules."

"None of which made any sense at all but also at the same time was far more enjoyable than anything else," Mark replied.

"Exactly," Jill nodded. "Because Shildy and Amy have basically done nothing at all to justify their presence in the fic at all. And yet they get an entire subplot to themselves for no reason at all." She paused and spoke again. "Spea is still on her own."

"Which also means that they did more than Lufy and Rabby, our supposed leads," Mark added. "Who basically at this point are going in circles and achieving nothing at all beyond filling in time and wasting page count."

"Honestly, Lufy's fighting with office politics and HR procedure seems to be her major plot at this point," Christina offered. "And I am not entirely sure how I feel about that."

"While the actual BGC characters seem to be little more than background noise," Rex added. "Because unless there's an actual plot building with Shouting Quincy and Nameless Executive, they're not adding anything at all with the fic."

"What do you think was with the small kid that Boomer was trying to menace?" Jill asked. "Because the fic doesn't seem to care at all about the idea at all."

"I have no idea," Mark admitted. "And I assume it will never be followed up on either."

"Probably not," Jill agreed. "But you have to admit the Boomer crushing on Catty afterwards was a good laugh."

"Again, better than anything else in the fic," Rex nodded and then added, "I think we just found the Voice's two favourite moments."

"And indeed, you did, kids," the Voice crashed into the conversation. "Make of this what you will."

"My own assessment is that this fic is very dull and doesn't have much going on and as such we need to make our own fun," Mark offered.

"You may be on to something there," the Voice replied. "But you never know, it might surprise you with the last part."

"Really?" Rex asked.

"Well, no," the Voice continued. "But there you go."

"Will we see more of the Hag?" Jill asked. "You know she's my favourite character now."

"Maybe," the Voice continued. "But I'm not going to throw down spoilers. That's for you to find out next time."

"So at least we're done for now," Mark confirmed.

"You are," the Voice finished. "So, until next time, toodles."

Jill sighed to herself. "You know what? None of our plans for writing a better fic involved an absurdly evil boarding school, and I don't know how I feel about that."

"That being said, I had another thought on how you could achieve a functional crossover between Bubblegum Crisis and Gall Force," Mark commented. "One that's pretty straightforward."

"And what's that?" Christina asked.

"You make Rhea Gall Force a sequel to Bubblegum Crisis," Mark explained. "Just go the other way and make the MME robots a mix of Solanoid tech and Genom Boomers. And it's easy enough to turn Gorn into some sort of Largo hybrid."

"Because it's BGC fic and Largo has to come back," Rex agreed. "It's the law."

"I see the idea, but you have to admit it's a little bleak," Christina considered.

"It is," Mark agreed. "But consider that the other option is Parasite Dolls."

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Author's notes:

In case you were curious, no, the subplot with the Boomer menacing a small girl is never followed up on. It will never be explained in any way who she is or why the Boomer was trying to kill (or crush or intimidate or whatever else) her and she will never appear or even be mentioned again. Honestly, I have no idea what it has to do with anything beyond giving Catty a chance to show off and leading to some strangely amusing dialogue, so yeah.

For what it's worth it does not appear that there is much in the way of Gall Force fanfic full stop. My own research turned up nothing beyond this fic. There's no Gall Force section on Fanfiction.net and it does not appear that there's any buried within subcategories or the like. This means that this fic might represent a considerable portion of all the English-language Gall Force fanfic there is. Make of that what you will.

Next time, this is Patrick

Bubblegum Crisis created by Artmic/Youmex

Gall Force created by Artmic

Bubblegum Force written by Cpt. C. Nebulart

Rex Brandtiger and Jill Vader created by Rick R.  
Mark Grayson and Christina McCade created by Zogster

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Frozen astronauts? Email us at elmerstudios00 (at) gmail.com and register your Jeff.

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> The Hag was mildly surprised to see ADP choppers land on the big field next to the school.